



MATTHEW RENDLE

DEFENDERS OF THE MOTHERLAND

The Tsarist Elite in Revolutionary Russia

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Notes on the Text

When transliterating Russian, I have used the Library of Congress system throughout to avoid confusion. I have omitted soft signs at the end of words in the text, usually when referring to places or people, but I have retained them in the references and bibliography to aid tracing sources. I have avoided using too many Russian terms, but several translate awkwardly or refer to specific Russian institutions, geographical units, or measurements.

<i>desiatina</i> (pl. <i>desiatiny</i>):	An area equivalent to 2.7 acres
Duma:	The State Duma was the national, elected assembly established in 1906, but towns and cities also had an elected Duma (or council), and had done since 1785
<i>khutorianin</i> (pl. <i>khutoriane</i>):	A peasant farmer who had established a separate farm beyond the village
<i>otrubnik</i> (pl. <i>otrubniki</i>):	A peasant farmer who has enclosed their strips of land, but whose household remained within the village
<i>uezd</i> (pl. <i>uezdy</i>):	A subdivision of a province (<i>guberniia</i>)
Stavka	Military headquarters in Mogileu
<i>volost</i> (pl. <i>volosti</i>):	A subdivision of a <i>uezd</i>
<i>zemstvo</i> (pl. <i>zemstva</i>):	An organ of local self-government created in the 1860s

I have preserved the dates used in Russia at the time. Therefore, all dates prior to 31 January 1918 are given according to the Julian calendar, which in the twentieth century ran thirteen days behind the new-style Gregorian calendar used by Western Europe. The Bolsheviks adopted the Gregorian calendar in February 1918, declaring that the day after 31 January was to become 14 February.

Archival materials are referred to by their *fond* or collection number (f.), the *opis* or section within the collection (op.), the actual file or *delo* number (d.), and the page number or *listok* (l.), or page numbers (ll.). An exception is made for the *Otdel rukopisei* of the Russian State Library, where *karton* (k.) is used instead of *opis*, and *edinitsa khraneniia* (ed. khran.) rather than *delo*. The following abbreviations are used to refer to archives and a frequently cited published collection.

BAR:	Bakhmeteff Archive, Columbia University, New York
GARF:	Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii, Moscow
HIA:	Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University, California
OR RGB:	Otdel rukopisei, Rossiiskaia Gosudarstvennaia Biblioteka
RPG:	R. Browder and A. Kerensky (eds.), <i>The Russian Provisional Government: Documents</i> (3 volumes: Stanford, 1961)
TsIAM:	Tsentral'nyi istoricheskii arkhiv Moskv, Moscow



Map 1. The Provinces and Population of European Russia in 1900

From Martin Gilbert, *The Routledge Atlas of Russian History*. © Martin Gilbert, 2002.



Map 2. Russian Armies at the Front in 1917

From Allan K. Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army*. © 1980 Princeton University Press.

Introduction

The February Revolution ushered in an unprecedented era of change across the Russian empire. The hated elements of Tsarism were abolished, whilst talk of democracy and freedom dominated political discourse. There were, however, numerous, and often contradictory, visions of democracy during 1917. On the one side, there was the rule of law, civil rights and parliament envisaged by the new Provisional Government and much of educated society. On the other side, there was the popular belief of the lower classes that democracy meant political power for ordinary Russians, which was epitomized by the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies in Petrograd, as well as local soviets and committees throughout the empire.¹ Although other variants existed, these interpretations contributed to a clear divide in Russian society between the 'propertied' groups that supported the former view and the 'democratic' lower social classes.

Recent work has enhanced our understanding of the experiences of ordinary Russians,² but there has been much less on the propertied groups. This study rectifies this imbalance by examining how former elite groups under Tsarism, and their organizations, reacted to and experienced the revolution. As popular visions of democracy prevailed, the revolution was often more about the unions, committees and congresses that emerged to represent all types of professions and social groups than the recognizable political parties that claimed to speak in their name. The tsarist elite quickly responded, reviving inactive associations or creating new bodies to mobilize important groups, represent their interests in the new political climate, and promote their own vision of Russia's future. They were encouraged by the government's awareness that it needed the support of *all* political and social forces to achieve its aims of civil liberties, law and order, and elections to a Constituent Assembly. Equally, once nationwide elections were delayed, the few national bodies in 1917—notably the Moscow State Conference and the Democratic Conference—were formed from organizations representing

¹ B. Kolonitskii, 'Democracy as Identification: Towards the Study of Political Consciousness during the February Revolution', in M. Palat (ed.), *Social Identities in Revolutionary Russia* (Basingstoke, 2001), 161–73.

² See S. Badcock, *Politics and the People in Revolutionary Russia* (Cambridge, 2007); A. Retish, *Russia's Peasants in Revolution and Civil War* (Cambridge, 2008); M. Steinberg, *Voices of the Revolution* (New Haven, 2001).

all types of political, social and economic groups, irrespective of their level of popular support.³

Nevertheless, it is reasonable to ask what elites hoped to achieve given their small support base, the anti-bourgeois mood, and mass support for socialist parties and social reform. Most historians have glossed over their activities, seeing them as part of a counter-revolutionary threat that, although emerging briefly in the Kornilov Revolt of August 1917, only became significant during the civil war. Ordinary Russians, though, took the threat of counter-revolution seriously throughout. This study argues that the activities of elites exacerbated the suspicions that divided society and played a crucial role in fuelling fears of counter-revolution, escalating social unrest, and radicalizing popular opinion. This contributed to the political conflict that came to dominate 1917 and signalled the failure of the Provisional Government.

At the same time, I argue that it is misleading to assume that the only policies agreeable to elites were reactive, authoritarian ones, and that elites did not have any hope of influencing policy in 1917. The first part of this book analyses the impact of the First World War, demonstrating the crucial role that it played in alienating elites from Tsar Nicholas II. This led many to question the autocratic system and favour some degree of political change in the hope of fighting the war more effectively, and curbing political and social unrest. Their tentative support for the Provisional Government, albeit partly influenced by the fear of popular unrest, was a major factor in the sudden and comprehensive collapse of Tsarism, whilst their cooperation and participation in it shaped the initial months of the revolution. The Provisional Government could not afford to ignore elites; their expertise was crucial within the government and the military, whilst they were needed to maintain economic stability. Indeed, as this study demonstrates, as the government became more concerned that the popular movement was leading to economic chaos and a humiliating exit from the war, its policies became more sympathetic to the demands of elites. The main problem for elites was not so much that they were marginal to politics in 1917, but that the government proved increasingly unable to enforce its policies, and real power shifted to bodies that represented ordinary Russians.

Viewing elites as inherently 'counter-revolutionary' is counter-productive and suggests a lack of reflection about the term. Theorists of revolutions have long recognized that divisions within elites are vital in the collapse of 'old regimes', but assume that elites are subsequently marginalized.⁴ They then argue that counter-revolution is 'bound to revolution as reaction is bound to action',⁵

³ D. Orlovsky, 'Corporatism or Democracy: The Russian Provisional Government of 1917', in A. Weiner (ed.), *Landscaping the Human Garden: Twentieth Century Population Management in a Comparative Framework* (Stanford, 2003), 67–90.

⁴ For e.g., K. Kumar (ed.), *Revolution: The Theory and Practice of a European Idea* (London, 1971), 48, 51, 69.

⁵ H. Arendt, *On Revolution* (London, 1965), 18.

implying that the main aim of elites is to restore the old regime that they had helped to overthrow. The tsarist elite were not revolutionaries as certain elite groups (especially the military) have been elsewhere.⁶ Equally, they did not anticipate the consequences of February 1917, particularly the popular desire for a radical restructuring of Russian society. Nonetheless, as the central section of this book describes, they rarely wanted a return to the regime of Tsar Nicholas II; for them, counter-revolution (although they did not use the term) was about containing and assuming control over the revolutionary process to defend certain elements of the political and social system that aided their own position and influence. It was not about a return to the past. This contributed to their dilemma by August 1917. Ordinary Russians were moving away from the government towards the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, whilst political and social unrest was increasing. Elites faced a choice: either they continued to pressurize the government to adopt more forceful measures to curb the unrest, or they attempted to replace the government with something else. Some proposed a military dictatorship, an idea which underpinned the Kornilov Revolt. Others remained suspicious of the military's influence and doubted its ability to replace the government. Consequently, there was little active support for the revolt, but it prompted a renewed attack on elites, widespread recriminations and accusations, and hammered the final nail into the government's coffin.

The book finishes with the impact of the Bolsheviks' seizure of power in October. By then, greater numbers within the elite believed that only armed force would suffice, forming the so-called White armies to fight the Bolsheviks and condemning Russia to civil war. Yet, their inability to forge a unified ideology (beyond opposition to the Bolsheviks), or to formulate a coherent political and social programme, as well as internal rivalries, reflected long-standing divisions among elites that had been exacerbated by their experiences of 1917. Meanwhile, others felt that Kornilov's failed revolt had confirmed the futility of resisting popular demands, and instead played a significant role in helping Soviet power to survive, serving as officers in the Red Army or as 'bourgeois specialists' in government or industry. Finally, for the Bolsheviks, the civil war confirmed the persistent threat of counter-revolution, and their attempts to eliminate 'class enemies' in the months after October helped determine the nature of the new Soviet state.

As well as studying the influence of elites on the revolutionary process, this book examines the impact of revolution on elites. The political, military and social elites in tsarist Russia came overwhelmingly from the hereditary nobility, the predominant social estate.⁷ Only two elite groups lay largely outside of the

⁶ E. Trimberger, *Revolution from Above: Military Bureaucrats and Development in Japan, Turkey, Egypt and Peru* (New Brunswick, 1978), 2–3.

⁷ For a concise survey, see D. Lieven, 'The Elites', in D. Lieven (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Russia. Volume II: Imperial Russia, 1689–1917* (Cambridge, 2006), 227–44.

nobility's influence. The Orthodox clergy was a separate estate, with senior clerics coming from the monastic clergy. Similarly, the expanding business elite—major industrialists—were largely non-noble, although some nobles did have significant business interests. The experiences of these two groups during the revolutionary period have been the subject of some perceptive studies;⁸ consequently, this study focuses predominantly on the nobility.

The nobility was becoming increasingly heterogeneous by the early twentieth century. In 1897, there were 885,754 hereditary nobles in the fifty European provinces—about 1% of the population. In addition, another 486,963 'personal' nobles (including their immediate families) made up the noble estate.⁹ Hereditary nobles could pass their noble status to their descendants, but 'personal' nobles had achieved their status through their own endeavours and could not transfer it to descendants. It could, however, place them in a favourable position, whilst both groups enjoyed the same legal privileges. Personal nobility was gained through an award by the Tsar or by reaching a certain rank in the civil or military service (titular counsellor and sub-lieutenant or cornet respectively). Further promotion to actual state counsellor or colonel (or naval captain of the first grade) brought hereditary status, although advancing to these grades was made harder in 1900. In addition, there were more than 830 titled families: 250 princes, 310 counts, 240 barons and a mixture of non-Russian titles. All sons inherited such titles, making them more common than in other countries.¹⁰

As the various routes to noble status suggest, the nobility had always been a diverse social estate, deeply divided by wealth and influence, and the educational and career advantages that these brought.¹¹ There is no doubt, however, that these divisions increased after the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, especially amongst hereditary nobles. Land had always been their economic mainstay, and

⁸ On industrialists, see V. Laverychev, *Po tu storonu barrikad: Iz istorii bor'by Moskovskoi burzhuazii s revoliutsiei* (Moscow, 1967); Z. Galili, 'Commercial-Industrial Circles in Revolution: The Failure of "Industrial Progressivism"', in E. Frankel, J. Frankel, and B. Knei-Paz (eds.), *Revolution in Russia: Reassessments of 1917* (Cambridge, 1992), 188–216; P. Gatrell, 'Big Business and the State in Russia, 1915–1918', in J. Cooper, M. Perrie, and E. Rees (eds.), *Soviet History, 1917–53* (Basingstoke, 1995), 1–21; P. Gatrell, 'Russian Industrialists and Revolution', in E. Acton, V. Cherniaev, and W. Rosenberg (eds.), *Critical Companion to the Russian Revolution, 1914–1921* (1997), 572–83. On the clergy, see M. Babkin (ed.), *Rossiiskoe dukhovenstvo i sverzhenie monarkhii v 1917 godu* (Moscow, 2006); M. Babkin, *Dukhovenstvo Russkoi pravoslavnoi tserkvi i sverzhenie monarkhii (nachalo XXv. – konets 1917 g.)* (Moscow, 2007); S. Firsov, *Russkaia tserkov' nakanune peremen (konets 1890-x – 1918gg.)* (Moscow, 2002).

⁹ *Obshchii svod po imperii rezul'tatov razrabotki dannykh pervoi vseobshchei perepisi naseleniia proizvedennoi 28 ianvaria 1897 goda* (2 volumes: St. Petersburg, 1905), I, iii, 160.

¹⁰ E. Wirtschafter, *Social Identity in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb, 1997), 23–4; S. Becker, *Nobility and Privilege in Late Imperial Russia* (DeKalb, 1985), 18–20, 91–2; A. Korelin, *Dvorianstvo v poreformnoi Rossii 1861–1904gg.* (Moscow, 1979), 31.

¹¹ See E. Barinova, *Vlast' i pomestnoe dvorianstvo Rossii v nachale XX veka* (Samara, 2002); idem, *Rossiiskoe dvorianstvo v nachale XX veka: Ekonomicheskii status i sotsiokul'turnyi oblik* (Moscow, 2008); Becker, *Nobility*; M. Bibin, *Dvorianstvo nakanune padeniia tsarizma v Rossii* (Saransk, 2000); A. Grenzer, *Adel und Landbesitz im ausgehenden Zarenreich* (Stuttgart, 1995); R. Manning, *The Crisis of the Old Order in Russia* (Princeton, 1982).

the ability to rely on free labour had been the main factor in keeping many landed estates economically viable, whilst distinguishing less wealthy nobles from their peasant neighbours. Figures vary but, broadly speaking, the nobility lost a fifth of their holdings under the edict and a further 1% per annum afterwards. By 1905, 61–62% of nobles did not own land, whilst 57% of estates were less than 100 *desiatiny*, not dissimilar from the holdings of rich peasants.¹² A special report in 1897 noted that there were ‘hundreds of [hereditary] noble families consisting of illiterate simple farmers, many of them poorer than peasants’.¹³

Most nobles were forced to look elsewhere to survive. Becker noted that ‘nobles had become almost as diverse in their styles of life as Russian society itself: they were officers, bureaucrats, agrarian entrepreneurs, schoolteachers, doctors, philosophers, revolutionaries, journalists, lawyers, artists, businessmen, scientists, engineers, white- and even blue-collar workers’.¹⁴ He argued that this demonstrated that the social estate of nobility, defined by law and united only by the privileges and institutions that its members shared, was transforming into a number of social classes based on these new occupations. The traditional nobility remained only in the emerging ‘class’ of landowners that was visible by the 1905 revolution.

Yet the persistence of the noble estate should not be underestimated. Hereditary nobles continued to dominate the positions of power. In government, 90% of ministers were hereditary nobles in 1914, as were 80% of deputy ministers and heads of departments, 81% of senators, 97% of provincial governors and, by 1917, 84% of ambassadors and envoys. In many cases, this had declined from almost 100% at the turn of the century and was to decline further during the First World War. Nevertheless, over two-thirds of senior government remained hereditary nobles on the eve of 1917, whilst they had exclusive control over court circles.¹⁵ Locally, as well as the provincial governor, marshals of the nobility at provincial and *uezd* level—the nobility’s own representative—held sway over a range of local issues. Equally, by 1900, 85–90% of land captains (the other powerful local official) were hereditary nobles, with duties ranging from tax and conscription, to migration and famine relief.¹⁶ Finally, V. V. Veselovskii’s study of the *zemstva* in 1909–11 suggested that at least 55% of deputies to *uezd zemstva* and almost 90% of deputies to provincial *zemstva* were nobles. In most provinces, though, the real figures may have been closer to two-thirds of *uezd* deputies and almost all provincial deputies.¹⁷

¹² R. Munting, ‘A Note on Gentry Landownership in European Russia’, *New Zealand Slavonic Journal*, 1 (1978), 26, 30; Becker, *Nobility*, 39.

¹³ Korelin, *Dvorianstvo*, 65.

¹⁴ Becker, *Nobility*, 171.

¹⁵ B. Dubentsov and S. Kulikov, ‘Sotsial’naia evoliutsiia vysshei tsarskoi biurokratii vo vtoroi polovine XIX–nachale XXv’, in B. Anan’ich et al. (eds.), *Problemy sotsial’no-ekonomicheskoi i politicheskoi istorii Rossii XIX–XX vekov* (St Petersburg, 1999), 75–84.

¹⁶ D. Macey, ‘The Land Captains: A Note on their Social Composition, 1889–1913’, *Russian History*, 16, 2–4 (1989), 327–51.

¹⁷ R. Manning, ‘The Zemstvo and Politics, 1864–1914’, in T. Emmons and W. Vucinich (eds.), *The Zemstvo in Russia* (Cambridge, 1982), 142–3.

Even after the changes to the political system after the 1905 revolution, hereditary nobles continued to play a disproportionate, if disunited, role. The reformed State Council took on a more prominent position as one part of the tripartite system of legislative government (along with the Tsar and the Duma). In 1906, 86% of members of the council were hereditary nobles, falling only slightly to 81% by 1917. Most were in the half of the council appointed by the Tsar, but the other half included those chosen by noble societies, whilst 91% of those selected by the *zemstva* were hereditary nobles.¹⁸ Equally, after the electoral changes to the Duma in 1907, hereditary nobles formed 46% of the Third Duma (1907–12) and 55% of the Fourth Duma (1912–17).¹⁹

Furthermore, the institutions representing the nobility appeared to be strengthening. The nobility had been allowed its own *uezd* assemblies since 1775 and provincial assemblies since 1785, but these were localized, with no powers as a body or involvement in politics. At the same time, though, these institutions elected officials (*uezd* and provincial marshals of the nobility) that were crucial parts of the state apparatus. Marshals were required by law to perform certain functions and served on all of the main local committees from land assessments to municipal affairs. At *uezd* level, the marshal was the senior official, required by law to have a seat on all local bodies, including the *zemstvo*. Provincial marshals were second in power only to the governor, whilst many had access to the highest court and government circles through family connections.²⁰ The unrest of 1905, together with the legalization of organizations, provided the impetus for the creation of the United Nobility, which brought representatives from local noble assemblies into a national body to defend and promote the nobility's interests.

At a time, therefore, when the nobility is said to have been disintegrating, its members retained significant influence, whilst its ability to promote its own interests seem to have been increasing. Indeed, as will be seen, an organization formed during 1905 to represent a particular segment of the nobility, landowners, was abandoned in favour of the broader body of the United Nobility. Thus, the transition of the noble 'estate' to professional 'classes', as described by Becker, was far from complete. Nonetheless, it was increasingly difficult to find shared interests among nobles from disparate backgrounds with diverse views and, as Russian historians have demonstrated, the United Nobility reflected these tensions.²¹ Yet their studies invariably stop in February 1917. As I argue, it was not until the revolution, when faced with the rapid emergence of unions

¹⁸ A Borodin, *Gosudarstvennyi sovet Rossii (1906–1917)* (Kirov, 1999), 29, 236.

¹⁹ A. Korelin, 'Ob''edinennoe dvorianstvo kak politicheskaia organizatsiia (1906–1917)', in G. Sevost'ianov (ed.), *Politicheskie partii v Rossiskikh revoliutsiakh v nachale XX veka* (Moscow, 2005), 51.

²⁰ G. Hamburg, 'Portrait of an Elite: Russian Marshals of the Nobility, 1861–1917', *Slavic Review*, 40, 4 (1981), 585–602.

²¹ Barinova, *Pomestnoe*; Bibin, *Dvorianstvo*; Korelin, 'Ob''edinennoe dvorianstvo'.

representing all types of groups, and coming to terms with the virulent 'anti-bourgeois' feeling on the streets, that the nobility finally abandoned its estate organization in favour of 'professional' unions.

These unions upheld aims that were very similar to those always promoted by nobles—for example, legal order and the right to own property—but they were designed to attract a broader social base. This forced a more flexible attitude than before on crucial issues such as land reform. Historians rarely recognize this flexibility, which contributes to the tendency to label these groups as counter-revolutionaries. Even recent studies that do stress the changing nature of conservative thought during this period still equate conservatism with reactionary organizations such as the Union of Russian People and the Union of the Archangel Michael.²² In reality, few nobles were members of these bodies and only a few more sympathized with them. Yet most nobles were conservatives in that they were suspicious of dramatic change, and supported the existing political and social structure to a certain extent. Within this, views varied dramatically. In terms of politics, nobles can be found in the liberal party, the Kadets, as well as in reactionary, monarchist bodies. Most were somewhere in between, in moderate conservative parties such as the Octobrists, or in the more conservative nationalists. The extremes—the far right and the liberals—have been well covered and are generally tangential to this book.²³

It should be noted, though, that it was a short step from the conservative and nationalist beliefs of the vast majority of the elite to the extremes of xenophobia and anti-Semitism that were synonymous with the far right. The far right saw the Jews, for example, as distinct from other nationalities and as a parasitic group that sought to undermine Russia from within. Congresses of monarchists invariably opposed granting equal rights to Jews, voicing concerns that this would harm Russian businesses and the military.²⁴ Yet the prominence of Jews in the revolutionary and student movements encouraged moderate conservatives to share elements of anti-Semitism with right-wing extremists that they otherwise denounced.

Anti-Semitism was rarely visible among elites during the revolution, however. Partly, this was due to the rapid disappearance of the far right as a significant force and, partly, because most elites were probably aware that these views did not project a moderate and attractive image as they searched for a broader base

²² See M. Luk'ianov, *Rossiiskii konservatizm i reforma, 1907–1914* (Stuttgart, 2006); A. Repnikov, *Konservativnye kontseptsii pereustroistva Rossii* (Moscow, 2007).

²³ On the far right, see A. Ivanov, *Poslednie zashchitniki monarkhii: Fraktsiia pravyykh IV gosudarstvennoi dумы v gody pervoi mirovoi voiny* (St Petersburg, 2006); Iu. Kir'ianov, *Pravyye partii v Rossii, 1911–1917* (Moscow, 2001); S. Stepanov, *Chernaia sotnia* (2nd edition: Moscow, 2005). On liberals, see N. Dumova, *Kadetskaia partiia v period pervoi mirovoi voiny i fevral'skaia revoliutsii* (Moscow, 1988); F. Gaida, *Liberalnaia oppozitsiia na putiakh k vlasti (1914–vesna 1917g.)* (Moscow, 2003); W. Rosenberg, *Liberals in the Russian Revolution* (Princeton, 1974).

²⁴ I. Omel'ianchuk, *Chernosotennoe dvizhenie v Rossiiskoi imperii (1901–1914)* (Kiev, 2007), 432–80.

of support for their new organizations. Nevertheless, the manner in which the Bolsheviks were quickly portrayed as Jews during the civil war, and associated with traditional, negative stereotypes of Jews, suggests that these prejudices were forced underground by 1917 rather than removed. Consequently, the blurred boundaries between moderate and extreme forms of conservatism and nationalism are not ignored in this study.

The move towards professional unions is central to this book and, in order to gain a better insight, particular attention is focused on two groups on the edges of the nobility: landowners and officers. Landownership was central to debates within the nobility about their future position and influence but, as noted, by 1905, two-thirds of nobles did not own land, whilst half of noble landowners only owned small estates. As a whole, landowners were coming from increasingly diverse social backgrounds. In 1905, 36% of land in European Russia was privately owned, with 50% of this owned by elites (nobles, bureaucrats, officers and clergy). By 1911, this figure had fallen to 44%, whilst 30% was owned by peasants, 18% by industrialists and merchants, and the rest by tradesmen, workers, 'professionals', and foreigners. The elite's proportion was falling, fuelled by the agrarian unrest of 1905, whilst the shares of peasants and industrialists were increasing.²⁵ Moreover, the chairman of the Council of Ministers from 1906, P. A. Stolypin, launched a series of agrarian reforms to foster a 'class' of peasant landowners, distinct from the peasant commune, with a vested interest in the state's stability. Its success has been questioned,²⁶ but it further diversified landownership. In Saratov province, for example, 6,411 landowners (mainly nobles), the state and the Church still owned half of the land before 1914. But from 1907 to 1915, 97,229 peasant households (28% of the total) left the commune, with 6% consolidating their land into private farms. These peasants also purchased 94% of the land that went on to the market in 1912.²⁷ A class of relatively prosperous peasant landowners was emerging.

Noble landowners welcomed the reforms, but did not consider peasant landowners as potential allies. They recognized that their interests were increasingly distinct from the majority of non-landowning nobles, but when campaigning for a separate union for landowners, they thought only in terms of noble landowners. This attitude changed dramatically in 1917. Previous studies have demonstrated that peasants played a significant role in the landowners' movement during the revolution, and this work builds on these to argue that nobles were far more proactive in seeking this support and in adapting their proposals accordingly.²⁸

²⁵ A. Anfimov, *Krupnoe pomeshchich'e khoziaistvo evropeiskoi Rossii* (Moscow, 1969), 23, 40.

²⁶ See J. Pallot, *Land Reform in Russia, 1906–1917* (Oxford, 1999).

²⁷ D. Raleigh, *Revolution on the Volga: 1917 in Saratov* (Ithaca, 1986), 43.

²⁸ See O. Chaadaeva, *Pomeshchiki i ikh organizatsii v 1917 godu* (Moscow, 1928); J. Channon, 'The Landowners', in R. Service (ed.), *Society and Politics in the Russian Revolution* (Basingstoke, 1992), 120–46; P. Kabytov and N. Kabytova, 'Soiuzy zemel'nykh sobstvennikov povolzh'ia v

This study also focuses on the officer corps. Hereditary nobles continued to dominate, but noble officers tended to see themselves as distinct from the concerns of the noble estate as a whole. In 1912, there were 45,582 officers in the Russian military: roughly one officer for every twenty seven men, a ratio that was significantly worse than any of Russia's European rivals. Just over 51% were from the hereditary nobility, a decline from over 70% at the turn of the century. The majority of generals (87%) and colonels (71%) remained nobles, but among lower ranks the number varied from a low of 40% in the infantry to a high of 75% in the cavalry. Otherwise, 28% of the lower ranks were from the peasantry and working classes, 14% from the middle urban classes, 4% were merchants, and 4% clergy.²⁹ Increasing numbers of officers lacked social status or material wealth, and this number was likely to grow as there were fewer nobles in most forms of military education. It has been estimated, for example, that nobles only formed 9% of the students at the Alekseevsk military school in 1912–13, compared to 43% in 1876–7.³⁰

Officers were split on numerous levels. There were divisions based on social background, material wealth and education. There were also clear distinctions made between the army and navy, and between the different branches of the army, such as the artillery and guards, and between staff and line officers. There were divides based on where officers started their service and where they ended up serving, from the privileged guards officers stationed in Petrograd and Moscow, to the less fortunate officers serving in Russia's remote regions. One final division is worth noting as it fed into the revolutionary period: the distinction made for General Staff officers. The Academy of the General Staff was Russia's attempt to form a professional military elite based entirely on ability. Around 1,500 took its initial exams each year, with 500 progressing to take further exams and under 150 being finally accepted. Out of these, around 100 completed the course and fifty obtained staff positions. Around half were hereditary nobles in 1909.³¹ Graduates dominated the higher reaches of the military by 1914 and their members were among some of the most active defenders of the rights of officers in 1917.

Kenez argues that the term 'officer corps' was not commonly used during this period, precisely because the extent of the divides prevented officers from seeing themselves as part of a common institution.³² Nevertheless, rather than hindering an analysis of the officer corps as a body, these divides are instructive

1917 godu', *Povolzhskii krai*, 10 (1988), 106–19; T. Osipova, 'Vserossiiskii soiuz zemel'nykh sobstvennikov [1917]', *Istoriia SSSR*, 3 (1976), 115–29.

²⁹ P. Kenez, 'A Profile of the Prerevolutionary Officer Corps', *Canadian Slavic Studies*, 7 (1973), 129, 132. Some give lower figures for the percentage of noble officers; S. Volkov, *Russkii ofitseriskii korpus* (Moscow, 1993), 270.

³⁰ M. Mayzel, *Generals and Revolutionaries: The Russian General Staff during the Revolution* (Osnabruck, 1979), 22. Also Kenez, 'Profile', 127–8.

³¹ Kenez, 'Profile', 138–40.

³² Kenez, 'Profile', 131.

when examining the revolutionary period. Take, for example, politics. Officers were traditionally apolitical: they were not permitted to join political parties, whilst an interest in politics was frowned upon in officers' clubs. Instead, the focus was on patriotism, duty, and honour. Many of the new influx of officers from non-noble backgrounds adopted these ideals, but some were more politicized. Moreover, the First World War forced the military to enlist educated individuals with revolutionary backgrounds as officers, usually former socialist agitators. Officers like these had been quick to take advantage of the unrest in 1905 to organize embryonic unions among like-minded officers and were again the first to mobilize in 1917. This time, though, other officers, including noble graduates of the General Staff, responded by organizing rival unions. Coverage of all of these bodies is usually restricted to brief passages in studies of other issues.³³ This book examines them in detail, arguing that they played a crucial role in the development of the revolutionary process in the military.

The revolution of 1917, therefore, saw the nobility disintegrate further into its composite parts. In forming unions of landowners and officers, and by marginalizing the United Nobility, nobles moved further away from thinking and acting as a social estate. This was hardly surprising given the anti-bourgeois chants that filled the streets and the obvious need to find a broader base of support for their ideals. Even the United Nobility, aware of its need to adapt, proposed forming a union of nobles by presenting the nobility as some sort of professional group. Yet elites did not splinter entirely. They were increasingly aware that unity was the best means of combating the popular movement, and links were forged between their various unions throughout 1917. By August, these had formed a broader 'conservative' movement. This built on the disillusionment that engulfed all elite groups by this stage in the revolution, but it also reflected shared ideals – duty, responsibility, and, above all, patriotism. Elites argued that whereas soldiers, workers and peasants saw the revolution in terms of 'class' desires, they always had Russia's interests in mind. Such comments were disingenuous: what was deemed to be in the best interests of the state was usually in the elites' best interests too. Nevertheless, their relationship to Tsarism was influenced by the growing feeling that creating a more liberal state was in Russia's best interests and was crucial for military victory in the First World War. Similarly, cooperation with the Provisional Government was seen in terms of forging a patriotic union across society to ensure that Russia survived the war and avoided

³³ See A. Andreev, *Soldatskie massy garnizonov Russkoi armii v oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii* (Moscow, 1975); A. Drezen, 'Tsentral'nye matrosskie i ofiterskie organizatsii Baltiiskogo flota v 1917 godu', *Krasnaia letopis'*, 3 (30) (1929), 43–104; G. Katkov, *The Kornilov Revolt* (London, 1980); S. Khesin, *Oktiabr'skaia revoliutsiia i flot* (Moscow, 1971); V. Petrash, *Moriaki Baltiiskogo flota v bor'be za pobedu oktiabria* (Moscow, 1966); A. Wildman, 'Officers of the General Staff and the Kornilov Movement', in Frankel, *Revolution in Russia*, 76–101.

potential anarchy. 'Motherland' (*rodina* or *otechestvo*) was a dominant word in speeches, appeals and pamphlets. Elites portrayed themselves as the 'defenders of the motherland'; unfortunately for them, their view of the motherland failed to gather wider support, whilst their actions to defend their vision of Russia's future were ultimately futile.

1

The First World War

By the early twentieth century, elite groups were increasingly disturbed by the growing political and social instability in Russia, and the mounting challenges to their own predominance. There was little unity, however, among elites on how best to defend their interests. The debacle of the Russo-Japanese War in 1904–5 and the revolutionary unrest from 1905 forced elites to react in new ways. First, they had to become more politicized in their outlook and to mobilize more effectively to defend their interests within the new political environment. Secondly, the military defeats and the unrest raised questions about the long-term viability of Tsarism. These questions returned with the onset of the First World War in 1914. This time, though, Russia faced real danger from the war, and the fear of defeat forced elites to contemplate more drastic measures.

THE IMPACT OF 1905

Above all else, the events that surrounded 1905 politicized elites, leading to organizations and mindsets that became important in subsequent years. Officers, for example, traditionally frowned on politics, but the trauma of the Russo-Japanese War saw considerable change, especially in Siberia and Manchuria, which were close to the action. The humiliation of defeat hurt, and many blamed government incompetence. Some officers formed unions to promote various reforms, from improving the rights of soldiers to liberal political demands, or to oppose the use of the military to suppress internal unrest. As Wildman noted, ‘the officer types that were to become so familiar in 1917 [socialists, liberals and conservatives] were at least discernibly present’ after 1905.¹ It was a formative experience for many who played pivotal roles in 1917. General M. V. Alekseev, for example, was deeply affected by the defeats and the extent of the soldiers’ unrest, but his anger was directed as much at the Tsar and his government as the revolutionaries. On 17 October 1905, the Tsar conceded

¹ A. Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army* (2 volumes: Princeton, 1980–7), I, 60. The appeals of several new officers’ unions are reprinted in A. Panov (ed.), *Armiiia i politika: Ofiterskii korpus v politicheskoi istorii Rossii. Dokumenty i materialy* (7 volumes: Moscow-Kaluga, 2002–3), I, 249–51, 302–3, 309–10, 318–21, 396–403.

a new, national elected assembly (the Duma), but Alekseev believed that the regime had reacted too slowly. He argued that reform offered from above, rather than forced from below, was more likely to secure long-term stability when combined with the suppression of revolutionaries.² These convictions returned during the First World War.

Monarchists also mobilized, but in support of the regime. The Russian Assembly (formed in 1901 under Prince D. P. Golitsyn) became active politically, supporting the Tsar, whilst new monarchist groups were formed in spring 1905, including the Russian Monarchist Party (V. A. Gringmut) and the Union of Russian Men (Count P. S. Sheremetev).³ Gringmut argued in 1906 that internal enemies must be attacked: constitutionalists, democrats, socialists, revolutionaries, anarchists, and Jews (in that order).⁴ The Union of Russian People (A. I. Dubrovin) was formed in response to the October Manifesto and aimed to combat what it saw as indecisive government with an active body that could unite society in defence of the throne. Local branches were established, and national and local newspapers published. Monarchist organizations reached a highpoint of 400,000 members in 1908, of which around three-quarters were in the Union of Russian People.⁵ Some prominent monarchists were nobles, but generally nobles only formed a small percentage of the active membership of these groups. In Ufa, for example, only 1.7% of leaders and 2.5% of members were hereditary nobles in 1908–17. More personal nobles were involved—18.3% of leaders and 27.5% of members—suggesting that those who had directly benefited from the regime were its staunchest defenders.⁶ Most members, though, came from the urban lower and middle classes, and had little in common with elites beyond monarchism. Many elites also questioned the tactics of these groups. They were closely linked with the violent monarchist mobs, the Black Hundred, whose numbers reached an additional 250,000 or so, and who were heavily involved in anti-Jewish pogroms.⁷

Elsewhere, agrarian turmoil encouraged prominent landowners from the badly affected Volga provinces to organize several local congresses, which culminated in a national congress in Moscow on 17–20 November 1905 (chaired by Prince A. G. Shcherbatov). Two hundred and twenty-seven landowners attended from thirty-three provinces and formed the All-Russian Union of Landowners, headed by A. A. Chemodurov (marshal of the nobility in Samara province), to help large

² O. Airapetov, 'Revolution and Revolt in the Manchurian armies, as perceived by a future leader of the White movement', in J. Smele and A. Heywood (eds.), *The Russian Revolution of 1905* (London, 2005), 114.

³ For more details, see D. Rawson, *Russian Rightists and the Revolution of 1905* (Cambridge, 1995).

⁴ Iu. Kir'ianov, *Pravye partii v Rossii, 1911–1917* (Moscow, 2001), 4.

⁵ Kir'ianov, *Pravye*, 82.

⁶ K. Maksimov and S. Shalagina, *Konservativno-monarkhicheskoe dvizhenie v Ufimskoi gubernii (1905–1917gg.)* (Ufa, 2007), 179–81.

⁷ S. Stepanov, *Chernaia sotnia* (2nd edition: Moscow, 2005), 134.

noble landowners defend private landownership.⁸ Some estimates suggest that noble landownership fell by 14–19% from 1907–10, in the aftermath of the unrest.⁹ To be sure, most land was sold to other nobles, whilst many owners streamlined or diversified to improve profits. The rising price of land made it sensible to sell or rent out land, especially for large landowners. Many invested in securities and bonds instead and by 1910, 49% of nobles living in St Petersburg were supported by income from these sources.¹⁰ Nevertheless, one noble still wrote in 1908 that ‘a noble without land is not a noble’,¹¹ and proposals for transferring private land rented out to peasants to the peasant commune in an attempt to prevent future unrest further threatened nobles. The union opposed these plans, which were discussed in government circles. Landowners argued that privately owned land was more productive and sold a greater percentage of its yield on the market. The union advocated the growth of private peasant landholding as a means of satisfying land hunger, but it said nothing on how to achieve this and stated that its own members’ land was inviolable. The union helped to distribute the government’s favourable land decree in late 1906, but its membership had declined to fifty-three nationwide by 1908.¹²

Ultimately, large noble landowners were not yet convinced that they needed to defend their interests outside of the noble estate, especially once rural unrest declined. Instead, attention turned to uniting nobles to defend their broader interests. Provincial marshals had held national congresses from 1896 and, led by Prince P. N. Trubetskoi (Moscow province), they met four times in 1905, moderately criticizing the government. A conference of 140 marshals (provincial and *uezd*) from twenty-nine provinces in Moscow on 7–11 January 1906 was more conservative, calling for firm measures to quell the unrest, although accepting the new Duma. By April 1906, the need for a permanent body to represent noble interests was accepted and 114 delegates from twenty-nine provincial noble associations met in St Petersburg on 21 May 1906 (along with twenty-one invited guests). Most were large landowners (71% owned over 1,000 *desiatiny*). Six provinces disapproved, whilst four ignored it (mostly from the borderlands or areas less affected by unrest). The delegates elected a permanent council under Count A. A. Bobrinskoi, which became known as the United Nobility.¹³ Reports from the annual congresses were published and distributed to government figures and the imperial family, whilst key speeches and reports were reprinted as brochures. These served to keep noble associations informed

⁸ Iu. Solov’ev, *Samoderzhavie i dvorianstvo v 1902–1907gg.* (Leningrad, 1981), 199–212.

⁹ E. Kabytova, *Krizis Russkogo dvorianstva* (Samara, 1997), 103.

¹⁰ S. Becker, *Nobility and Privilege in Late Imperial Russia* (DeKalb, 1985), 53.

¹¹ Cited in E. Barinova, *Vlast’ i pomestnoe dvorianstvo Rossii v nachale XX veka* (Samara, 2002), 12.

¹² G. Hosking and R. Manning, ‘What was the United Nobility?’, in L. Haimson (ed.), *The Politics of Rural Russia 1905–1914* (Bloomington, 1979), 148–9.

¹³ A. Korelin, ‘Predislovie’, in *Ob’edinennoe dvorianstvo s’ezdy upolnomochennykh gubernskikh dvorianskikh obshchestv* (3 volumes: Moscow, 2001–2), I, 5–12. Land data is from Hosking and Manning, ‘United Nobility’, 155.

and, whilst its decisions were not binding on members, the congresses provided a platform for their views.

The United Nobility quickly grew in prominence. Its tenth congress in 1914 (two were held in 1906) saw thirty-nine of the forty-one eligible provincial noble associations present. Nevertheless, it did not represent all nobles because it was based on local noble associations that were far from inclusive. After 1896, nobles needed to own a minimum of 15,000 rubles of land (125–475 *desiatiny* depending on local land values) to enjoy full voting rights in local assemblies (or a pension of 900 rubles from military or civil service), although those with less could group together to exercise a vote. By 1905, only 25% nobles had a full vote, with another 45% eligible for an indirect vote. Yet a survey of twenty-six provinces in 1897 suggested that only 21% of eligible nobles actually participated, with 91% having a full vote. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this figure was declining and that *uezd* assemblies often struggled to meet the minimum number for a legal meeting.¹⁴ Lesser nobles saw little point in attending without a proper vote, whilst the largest landowners were usually absent from the area. Middling to large landowners dominated assemblies and, therefore, the United Nobility. They also tended to be conservatives, as liberal nobles were likely to be more active in the local *zemstva*.

Although broadly conservative, the United Nobility was far from united politically, and this reflected sharp differences amongst nobles after 1905. Nobles were prominent in the new system of government, but they were spread across various political parties and groups. In the State Council, 168 members (86%) were hereditary nobles in 1906. Almost half of the Council (ninety-three members) supported the centre group (moderately conservative), including seventy-seven nobles. Other nobles joined the conservative right (forty-three members, including forty nobles) or the liberal left or academic group (twelve, including ten nobles). The remainder were non-party.¹⁵ Thirty-three members of the United Nobility were in the council in 1906 (17%), rising to sixty-two (32%) by 1917. Eleven were on the right (including Bobrinskoi and future leaders, A. P. Strukov and A. D. Samarin), but eighteen were in the centre (including V. I. Gurko and Count D. A. Olsuf'ev), and four were elsewhere (including M. A. Stakhovich on the left).¹⁶ The boundaries between groups were fluid and their members did provide the United Nobility with influence at the highest levels. Bobrinskoi, for example, met the Tsar at least once a year (this became a formal right from 1910). Gurko and A. S. Stishinskii (right group) were briefly in the government. The United Nobility helped to persuade the Tsar to favour Stolypin's proposals to foster private peasant landownership and to defeat

¹⁴ Becker, *Nobility*, 137–41; G. Hamburg, *Politics of the Russian Nobility, 1881–1905* (New Brunswick, 1984), 48.

¹⁵ A. Borodin, *Gosudarstvennyi sovet Rossii (1906–1917)* (Kirov, 1999), 47, 49–50, 74.

¹⁶ Borodin, *Gosudarstvennyi sovet*, 103–4, 107.

later plans to reform local government that would have transferred powers from *uezd* marshals and land captains to centrally appointed figures.¹⁷ Nevertheless, different political affiliations fuelled heated debates within the United Nobility on key issues, such as landownership, which became more virulent as time passed.

These divisions were also reflected in the Duma. In 1913, 229 of the 437 deputies (52%) with known backgrounds were nobles. The majority (sixty-nine deputies) were members of the moderately conservative Octobrist party. They formed 69% of its deputies and were active leaders of local branches, whilst several, including marshals of the nobility, were on its central committees. To the right of this on the political spectrum, twenty-four were members of the conservative Centre group (77% of its deputies), fifty were in the more conservative Nationalist faction (56% of its deputies), whilst twenty-five were in the Right faction (39% of its deputies). Yet, nobles were also in parties to the left of the Octobrists. Nineteen were members of the liberal-conservative Progressist party (42% of its deputies), twenty-four were in the liberal Kadet party (41% of its deputies), whilst a few others were in socialist or national groupings.¹⁸

The nobility, therefore, responded to 1905 in different ways, as critics and supporters of the regime. Events encouraged the creation of the United Nobility, the first national organization to claim to represent nobles. But while nobles were united in their concern over the nature of political, economic and social developments, their proposed solutions were sufficiently diverse to make the United Nobility of limited use. It was not affiliated to a political party or openly involved in politics, but it was not truly independent as its leaders were linked to the regime, and these links were crucial in ensuring its influence. It was dominated by large noble landowners rather than all nobles or all landowners, but this group seemed unwilling to form a specific pressure group. In 1910, N. A. Pavlov, one of the founders of the Union of Landowners in 1905, argued again that landowners would benefit from an economic union as in Germany or France. It would have branches abroad to facilitate trade, whilst improving access to technology and credit. Pavlov's vision was still restricted to large landowners, and even changes in May 1911 to include tenants and managers, and reduce the level of dues, did not foster greater interest. The United Nobility sent copies of the draft laws to marshals to circulate amongst nobles for their comments. By November 1911, only eighteen replies had been received and only four supported the plans without reservations.¹⁹ The United Nobility officially supported Pavlov, but its commission under Count V. P. Orlov-Denisov was reluctant to discuss anything

¹⁷ For details, see Manning, *Crisis*, 325–71.

¹⁸ *Rossia nakanune Pervoi mirovoi voiny (statistiko-dokumental'nyi spravochik)* (Moscow, 2008), 226.

¹⁹ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 310, ll. 1–70 [original proposals], 130–69 [revised regulations], 257–57ob. [survey results].

that would cause 'discord' in 1912 and, consequently, a conference to finalize the laws was repeatedly postponed.²⁰

Generally, elites adopted the methods of post-1905 politics (organizations, meetings, publications, and so on) more quickly than new ideologies.²¹ Popular representation and constitutions were viewed suspiciously, and there was little understanding of political rights. There remained a tendency to equate reform with revolution and a reluctance to abandon traditional loyalties. For most, autocracy was still seen as the only way of maintaining the multinational Russian empire, and the Tsar remained the basic object of loyalty and guidance. At the same time, it was accepted that Russia was changing, even modernizing, and few elites denied the need to adapt in principle. They were not defending the pre-1905 order, but looking to create a new status quo that would safeguard their position which, in turn, they saw as crucial to Russia's continued stability.²²

Few could agree on the form of this new status quo, but elites were united in their discontent by the eve of 1914. On 8 November 1913, the Octobrist leader, A. I. Guchkov (an industrialist), attacked government incompetence, pointing particularly to rising levels of workers' protests. Octobrists, he argued, must safeguard Russia from the growing reactionary tendencies of its own government, which posed more of a threat than revolutionaries. The Duma must only support a government committed to the October Manifesto and to a broad programme of reforms: a progressive government, although not a parliamentary one. This call split the party; some supported Guchkov, whilst others attacked him for going too far or not far enough.²³ Similar comments came from fellow industrialists. P. P. Riabushinskii even tried to forge an alliance with socialist parties to increase the pressure for political change.²⁴

For the far right, Guchkov's statement placed him among the revolutionaries, yet they too were increasingly pessimistic. Their belief in the need for an autocratic state remained strong, but their confidence in the existing Tsar was weakening. The fact that they felt forced to mobilize into parties to support monarchism and to take part in the Duma, which they hated, demonstrated their lack of confidence in the regime. Nicholas was seen as indecisive and weak (as he was by all elites).²⁵ Moreover, the policies pursued by his government seemed to be directing Russia towards a catastrophe. In February 1914, P. N. Durnovo, leader

²⁰ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 325, ll. 3ob–4. On 9 March 1913, Orlov-Denisov reported to the United Nobility's ninth congress that discussions were still ongoing; *Ob"edinennoe dvorianstvo*, III, 212.

²¹ M. Luk'ianov, *Rossiiskii konservatizm i reforma, 1907–1914* (Stuttgart, 2006), 113.

²² Luk'ianov, *Konservatizm*, 21.

²³ M. Brainerd, 'The Octobrists and the Gentry in the Russian Social Crisis of 1913–14', *The Russian Review*, 38, 2 (1979), 160–79.

²⁴ J. West, 'The Rjabusinskij Circle: Russian Industrialists in Search of a Bourgeoisie', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 32, 3 (1984), 371–2.

²⁵ S. Podbolotov, 'Monarchists against their Monarch: The Rightists' Criticism of Tsar Nicholas II', *Russian History*, 31, 1–2 (2004), 105–20.

of the Right faction in the State Council and a former Minister of Internal Affairs, influenced by the deteriorating international situation, wrote a memorandum for Nicholas and other government figures on the implications of war. Famous for its prophetic forecast of the danger of revolution, it represented a scathing attack by a loyal monarchist on the state's foreign and domestic policy since 1905 and, by implication, on Nicholas. Internationally weak and liable to fatal internal social conflict, Durnovo saw Russia and autocracy as vulnerable.²⁶ Most elites agreed with this pessimistic assessment, even if their proposed solutions were very different.

THE IMPACT OF THE WAR

Initially, the outbreak of the First World War on 19 July 1914 seemed to provide an opportunity for unity. Elites acted as defenders of the motherland in a variety of ways—fighting at the front, coordinating the industrial response, ensuring food supplies, and so on. Octobrists adopted a pan-Slavic, jingoistic tone, whilst the Kadets' speeches were imbued with nationalist sentiments—something that endeared the party to previously sceptical conservatives. On 10 March 1915, A. P. Strukov, the president of the United Nobility, opened the organization's first congress since the beginning of the war with a traditional greeting to the Tsar, expressing the nobility's unbounded devotion, its willingness to make sacrifices, and its certainty in a glorious victory for Tsar and the motherland. Similar messages were sent to the Tsarina, Dowager Empress, Commander-in-Chief and Chief of Staff. After each one, the congress erupted into cheers of 'Hurrah! Hurrah!'.²⁷ Noble associations took steps locally to organize financial and medical aid, and to ensure supplies by coordinating with industrialists and others.²⁸ They held annual, national congresses that included noble assemblies not affiliated to the United Nobility. An executive committee, chaired by Prince S. B. Meshcherskii, with K. I. Kozakov as secretary, produced detailed tables of the wealth of each society by the time of the third congress in Moscow on 28–9 August 1916. Each local association would contribute in proportion to its assets.²⁹

Nonetheless, Russia's initial performance was far from encouraging: military defeats at the front were matched by supply and infrastructure problems at the rear. From April 1915, there was a steady retreat from Galicia, leaving large sections of European Russia under enemy occupation and placing the major

²⁶ The memorandum is in F. Golder (ed.), *Documents of Russian History 1914–1917* (Gloucester, MA, 1964), 3–23. See also D. McDonald, 'The Durnovo Memorandum in Context: Official Conservatism and the Crisis of Autocracy', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 44, 4 (1996), 481–502.

²⁷ *Ob'edinennoe dvorianstvo*, III, 420–2.

²⁸ Barinova, *Pomestnoe dvorianstvo*, 284–91.

²⁹ TslAM, f. 4, op. 3, d. 90, ll. 1–7.

cities of Kiev and Riga under threat. For many, this seemed to provide the perfect opportunity to bring state and society together by encouraging a greater role for social organizations, such as the War Industry Committee (WIC) and the Union of *Zemstva* and Towns (Zemgor), alongside greater political representation. Liberals began to see the war as an opportunity to fulfil long-held ambitions to expand the power of the Duma, and even many conservatives increasingly felt that this was vital if Russia's position was to be salvaged. The Duma was the only centre of national authority beyond the discredited government, and it could help to mobilize resources and motivate the population.

The Duma gathered on 26 July 1914, when it gave its full support to the war, and again from 27–9 January 1915, when it patriotically approved the budget. After that, it was prorogued until 19 July 1915, by which time concern over the war had reached fever pitch. It reconvened amidst widely reported discussions over forming a coalition of the major parties, which, it was hoped, could press for greater influence for the Duma. Similar talks had been held before 1914, but the fear of military defeat and questions over the regime's ability to maintain social order made the step more compelling. Most of the parties in the Duma were no longer confident that the Tsar and his government could win the war alone, and their initial desire to fully support the regime's war effort was overcome by the conviction that the regime urgently needed a change of direction. Meetings between representatives of the major parties on 9–12 August 1915, along with discussions within parties, resulted in the formation of the Progressive Bloc, whose programme was signed on 24 August.³⁰ The Bloc aimed to mobilize the empire's resources more effectively, promote unity between government and people, and introduce civil liberties and some social reforms. To do so, it pressed for the formation of a cabinet that had the confidence of the country (a 'ministry of confidence'), and for a lawful, enlightened, and liberal approach to government. A twenty-five man leadership committee was established under S. I. Shidlovskii (an Octobrist).³¹

The Bloc was never a united body, but a loose coalition based on compromise for the sake of the war. Nevertheless, it brought together the majority of the Duma. Chermenskii argued that 236 of the 397 deputies (59%) present at the end of the summer session in 1915 were members of the Bloc, including various factions of the Octobrists (eighty-two deputies) and the Kadets (fifty-four), as well as the Progressists (thirty-eight) and the Centre group (thirty-four). The Bloc also split the main conservative group, the Nationalists, as a group of 'Progressive Nationalists' (twenty-eight deputies) broke away under Count V. A. Bobrinskoi and V. V. Shul'gin to join. Another thirty-two deputies, mainly

³⁰ E. Vishnevskii, 'Progressivnyi Blok', in Iu. Kir'ianov (ed.), *Politicheskie partii i obshchestvo v Rossii, 1914–1917gg.* (Moscow, 2000), 89–117.

³¹ Its programme is in B. Grave (ed.), *Burzhuaziia nakanune fevral'skoi revoliutsii* (Moscow, 1927), 26–9.

national minorities, tended to support the Bloc, ensuring that it could muster two-thirds of the Duma.³² In addition, around 46% of the more conservative State Council supported the Bloc. Support was particularly strong in the elected half of the Council, with 63% in favour in January 1916, rising to 68% a year later, encompassing individuals from all of the political groups.³³ Key figures from the United Nobility—Gurko, Olsuf'ev and Stakhovich (from the State Council), and P. N. Krupenskii and V. N. L'vov (from the Duma)—were on the Bloc's leadership committee. The fact that diverse political groups united to demand greater power was a damning indictment of the regime. It was a new development in tsarist politics that involved a great deal of risk for those involved—Kadets associating with their enemies on the right and vice-versa—demonstrating the extent of the discontent and, as the Bloc argued, their willingness to place Russia's national interests above party concerns.

All participants saw the Bloc as the last chance to save the war effort and the monarchy, but there were disagreements over its policies and tactics, particularly its demand for a 'ministry of confidence'. This equated to a new Council of Ministers consisting of individuals enjoying the support of the Duma and the population, but remaining appointed by and responsible to the Tsar. Each party in the Bloc came up with a list of preferred candidates with the post of Prime Minister variously going to Guchkov (Octobrist and president of WIC), Prince G. E. L'vov (president of Zemgor), M. V. Rodzianko (Octobrist and president of the Duma), and Prince N. B. Shcherbatov (Minister of Internal Affairs). Only a few existing ministers were universally considered acceptable: P. N. Ignat'ev (education), A. V. Krivoshein (agriculture), A. A. Polivanov (war) and S. D. Sazonov (foreign affairs).³⁴ For some within the Bloc, however, Russia needed a 'responsible ministry' [*otvetstvennoe ministerstvo*] not a 'ministry of confidence' [*ministerstvo doveriia*]. The former would be chosen by and accountable to the Duma, relegating the Tsar to a constitutional monarch. The Bloc compromised on the latter demand to appease its conservative members and to gather wider support. With the country at war, most shied away from revolutionary demands. Most of the Bloc's demands were unrealized, whilst divisions also remained over whether the Bloc needed a detailed legislative programme.³⁵ Nevertheless, if a 'ministry of confidence' had been granted, a 'responsible ministry' would have only been a small step away.

The Bloc did exacerbate divisions among ministers. On 6 August 1915, Nicholas, without consultation, had informed Polivanov that he was taking over

³² E. Chermenskii, *IV Gosudarstvennaia дума i sverzhenie tsarizma v Rossii* (Moscow, 1976), 112.

³³ Borodin, *Gosudarstvennyi sovet*, 142, 235.

³⁴ Chermenskii, *IV Gosudarstvennaia*, 97–100. These lists resembled the future Provisional Government.

³⁵ M. Hamm, 'Liberal Politics in Wartime Russia: An Analysis of the Progressive Bloc', *Slavic Review*, 33, 3 (1974), 457–62.

as Commander-in-Chief. Ministers were horrified. A. D. Samarin (Procurator of the Holy Synod and future president of the United Nobility) voiced their fears that further defeats would irreparably damage the authority of the Tsar and threaten the regime's ability to maintain political and social stability. In all, eight of the twelve ministers signed a petition urging the Tsar not to take the post on 21 August, whilst two verbally supported it.³⁶ I. L. Goremykin (chairman of the Council of Ministers) remained the Tsar's resolute supporter, but was isolated from most of his colleagues. The emergence of the Bloc heightened discord. Krivoshein supported it, as did Sazonov, who recognized its patriotism and noted that most of its programme was acceptable. Even Samarin, who saw P. N. Miliukov (the Kadet leader) as a 'revolutionary', felt that informal talks with the Bloc were desirable, as did several other ministers.³⁷ A ministerial delegation met the Bloc's leaders on 27 August. Ministers made it clear that only Nicholas could change the cabinet and sensed that the Bloc was divided, whilst questioning its durability. Nevertheless, they expected a change in the cabinet to appease popular demands.³⁸ Instead, after a meeting with Goremykin, Nicholas prorogued the Duma on 3 September and retained the cabinet for the time being.³⁹ Sazonov apparently shouted in despair that these actions would contribute to the destruction of the motherland.⁴⁰

The decision to prorogue the Duma may have been influenced by the United Nobility. Its permanent council was initially split on developing events. On 27 July 1915, some argued that the liberals had become more responsible, whilst most of the Duma was 'moderate' in its views. Their demands should be given attention, but only after the war. Count V. E. Reiter-Nol'ken (marshal of Kurland province) noted that 'democratization' had spread across Europe, and Russia needed a transparent government, whilst the demands in the Duma and the State Council seemed to reflect public opinion.⁴¹ On 20 August, however, other council members argued that the Kadets, Octobrists and others intended to alter the structure of Russia's government permanently. This would be catastrophic during war and the United Nobility, who needed to speak as conservatives, were being sidelined. Two days later, A. B. Neidgart (a leader of the

³⁶ M. Cherniavsky (ed.), *Prologue to Revolution: Notes of A. N. Iakhontov on the Secret Meetings of the Council of Ministers, 1915* (Englewood Cliffs, 1967), 75–95, 113–16, 139–45, 150–67; Golder, *Documents*, 210–11 (petition).

³⁷ Cherniavsky, *Prologue*, 183–4, 201 (ministers discussed the Bloc's programme on 26 August, 183–204).

³⁸ 'Progressivnyi Blok v 1915–1917gg.', *Krasnyi arkhiv*, 50–51 (1932), 145–50; Cherniavsky, *Prologue*, 209–21.

³⁹ Kulikov has argued that Nicholas's response was rational and that the Bloc failed due to its 'radicalism' rather than Nicholas's intransigence; S. Kulikov, *Biurokraticheskaia elita Rossiiskoi imperii nakanune padeniia starogo poriadka (1914–1917)* (Riazan', 2004), 91–6. His views on the regime's actions and the 'liberalism' of Nicholas are unconvincing. As Sanborn argued in a concise critique, the late tsarist regime cannot be regarded as liberal in any conventional sense of the word; J. Sanborn, 'Liberals and Bureaucrats at War', *Kritika*, 8, 1 (2007), 147–51.

⁴⁰ Cherniavsky, *Prologue*, 242–3.

⁴¹ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 88, ll. 47ob–48.

right in the State Council) argued that the nobility needed to press immediately for a strong government to ensure internal stability.⁴² The widespread belief in the council that the Bloc wanted to introduce 'parliamentarianism' suggests that most members understood the Bloc's demands in terms of a 'responsible ministry', rather than the 'ministry of confidence' actually demanded. In this view, its demands amounted to constitutional change, which council members feared, and which they did not yet consider necessary to solve Russia's problems.

The council resolved to call a congress of nobles for October, but in the meantime an appeal (signed by A. P. Strukov, the president) was sent to Goremykin on 23 August 1915, prior to the Bloc's first public proclamation. Strukov argued that sections of society were taking advantage of the war to demand 'left-wing' ideals that threatened the country's stability. These were a precursor to a new 'time of troubles' that sought to change Russia's state structure. Only the 'unshakeable foundations of the existing order' and a firm, stable, and united government authority would protect the country from internal strife.⁴³ It has been argued that Goremykin discussed this letter with Nicholas and that it helped remove any last doubts about the wisdom of proroguing the Duma, but there is no concrete evidence to support this claim.⁴⁴

The victory of the most conservative elements in the United Nobility's council was part of a broader mobilization of the far right in response to the Bloc. As talks were under way to forge the Bloc, right-wing figures from the State Council and the Duma (including Neidgart) met on 11 August in Durnovo's flat to discuss a rival coalition that would press for a government of strong, conservative figures led by I. G. Shcheglovitov (a former minister of justice). Two days later, an article appeared in the newspaper, *Utro Rossii*, signed by the 'Black Bloc', which encompassed Durnovo and Neidgart, as leaders of the right in the State Council, and N. E. Markov and P. N. Balashev from the Duma. This was not a formal organization and the existence of a permanent 'Black Bloc' was quickly denied by Count A. A. Bobrinskoi and A. I. Mosolov, members of the United Nobility's council who also attended the talks. The talks lost momentum with Durnovo's death in September and Bobrinskoi's rise to lead the right in the State Council.⁴⁵

Attempts were made at the same time to bring together all monarchist groups. On 27–9 August 1915, there was a Congress of Monarchist Organizations in Saratov that focused on the question of unity. A larger congress in Petrograd on 21–3 November 1915 saw around 250 attend, including government figures, former ministers and religious leaders. They discussed the war, Progressive Bloc,

⁴² GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 88, ll. 48ob–49, 50ob–51.

⁴³ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 88, l. 60.

⁴⁴ M. Bibin, *Dvorianstvo nakanune padeniia tsarizma v Rossii* (Saransk, 2000), 65. Avrekh argued that Goremykin's own views and Rasputin were more influential; A. Avrekh, *Tsarizm nakanune sverzheniia* (Moscow, 1989), 208.

⁴⁵ Bibin, *Dvorianstvo*, 57–8; Borodin, *Gosudarstvennyi soviet*, 145.

German influences, inflation, refugees, and how to unify monarchists. But it quickly split into factions. There was disquiet over the domineering attitude of the Union of Russian People, the largest organization, whilst provincial figures felt alienated from those based in the capital. Consequently, another congress in Nizhnii Novgorod on 26–9 November with 100 delegates saw national figures attend, but regional bodies dominated. Monarchists agreed that the Progressive Bloc was part of an international German–Jewish plot against Russia, and that its participants were traitors and revolutionaries, but they were unable to unite effectively.⁴⁶ The Petrograd congress did establish a Council of Monarchist Organizations under Shcheglovitov and then, from June 1916, S. V. Levashev, but initially it only included the far right in the Duma, State Council (including Bobrinskoi and two other United Nobility council members), and the Union of Russian People. It later elected representatives from regional monarchist bodies, but it only met a few times in 1916 and was focused on establishing its own legal foundations.⁴⁷ A congress was required to ratify its laws and form a plan of action, but the government refused permission, leading to its disintegration. Ostensibly, this refusal was due to a ban on ‘political’ congresses during the war, but the regime seems to have doubted that monarchist organizations could foster support for the Tsar rather than simply further exacerbating unrest.⁴⁸ After all, as noted below, the United Nobility was permitted to meet at this time.

Monarchists were facing a crisis that gathered pace in subsequent months. To be sure, evidence suggests that some local organizations were actively responding to the perceived threats, holding more meetings than they had done in previous years.⁴⁹ Equally, new bodies were formed nationally, such as the National Patriotic Union in June 1915 under V. G. Orlov. This was designed to capitalize on wartime patriotism and was deliberately relaxed on the Jewish question. It had eighty-two branches by autumn 1916, but was viciously attacked by existing groups for advocating equal rights for Jews (which it did not), accepting Jewish money, and taking Jews and foreigners as members.⁵⁰ However, membership of monarchist organizations was falling steadily. From a highpoint of 400,000 in 1908, there were only around 45,000 members documented in 1916.⁵¹ The movement was undermined by endemic corruption and vicious infighting.⁵² Individual members helped the war effort, but nationally influence was held

⁴⁶ For the proceedings of the congresses, see *Pravye partii, 1905–1917. Dokumenty i materialy* (2 volumes: Moscow, 1998), II, 443–59 (Saratov), 484–94 (Petrograd), 496–520 (Nizhnii Novgorod). Also Avrekh, *Tsarizm*, 215–25.

⁴⁷ Several meetings are documented in *Pravye partii*, II, 537, 564–5, 576–7. Also O. Platonov (ed.), *Chernaia sotnia: Istoricheskaia entsiklopediia, 1900–1917* (Moscow, 2008), 494–5.

⁴⁸ Stepanov, *Chernaia sotnia*, 422.

⁴⁹ For e.g., in Ufa, see Maksimov and Shalagina, *Konservativno-monarkhicheskoe dvizhenie*, 142.

⁵⁰ Platonov, *Chernaia sotnia*, 374–6.

⁵¹ Kir'ianov, *Pravye*, 82.

⁵² J. Langer, ‘Corruption and Counterrevolution: The Rise and Fall of the Black Hundred’ (unpublished PhD dissertation, Duke University, 2007).

by bodies such as Zemgor and the WIC, neither of which had representatives from the far right, but were dominated by liberals and moderate conservatives. Monarchists in the Duma criticized the Bloc constantly, but even they were divided and increasingly critical of the government.

Nevertheless, the feeling that Strukov's letter influenced the Tsar and formed part of a resurgence of the far right may help to explain the furious reaction it provoked within the United Nobility. Some local noble associations supported it, such as Kursk, Saratov, Tauride, Tula, and Vologda, but over a dozen provincial marshals and their associations condemned it, whilst four—Kostroma, Poltava, Smolensk, and Ufa—left the organization. Kostroma argued in its resignation letter on 10 October 1915 that the permanent council, in protesting against the 'desires of all of the people', had given in to 'the intrigues of untrustworthy people', and acted to the detriment of Russia and the sovereign leader.⁵³ All the dissenters protested that the letter was sent in the name of the entire nobility, but it was purely the council's views. Some societies were split; the marshal of St Petersburg, S. M. Somov, supported the appeal, but a special congress of the province's nobility on 27 September decided that their involvement in the United Nobility needed further discussion, and that, meanwhile, Somov should not participate in its 'harmful activities'.⁵⁴

The most determined opposition came from Moscow nobles. They believed the message that only firm authority would suffice during this difficult time was wrong. They also wanted to preserve the existing order, but argued that only a union between government and society would remove the reasons for popular unrest. They were not uncritical supporters of the Bloc. P. A. Bazilevskii, the provincial marshal, shared conservative fears that the Bloc was hiding a desire for a 'responsible ministry' that would undermine tsarist authority. Nevertheless, Moscow nobles argued that the government had to move closer to 'public elements'—sentiments that equated to support for a 'ministry of confidence'. They sent their own telegram to the Tsar on 22 September 1915 expressing these views. Nonetheless, they deemed it unwise to leave the United Nobility, which was a valuable body. The council had contravened its own laws and this violation must be discussed at the next congress. If Moscow's views were in the minority, they would reconsider their position, but they clearly did not think that this would be the case.⁵⁵

The argument hinged on interpretations of a 'ministry of confidence'. Defending his letter in a newspaper on 29 September, Strukov argued that such a ministry would take power from the Tsar, whilst questioning who exactly had the confidence of the country and the people. Only the Tsar was universally known and

⁵³ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 88, l. 45. Also ll. 44ob–47, 92ob–101ob.

⁵⁴ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 88, ll. 45–45ob, 60ob.

⁵⁵ TsIAM, f. 4, op. 3, d. 83, ll. 2–5. For Bazilevskii's comment, see M. Bibin, 'Sovet ob' edinennogo dvorianstvo i progressivnyi blok v 1915–1916gg.', *Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta: Seriia 8, istoriia*, 1 (1980), 34.

believed in. The Duma was a valuable part of the war effort, but this was an attempt to change the political system, something that was harmful during war.⁵⁶ The trouble was, as Bobrinskoi noted in a meeting of the permanent council on 30 September, the Bloc's demands were ambiguous. What was meant by 'a government based on the confidence of the country'? It could be a parliament certainly, but it could also be a ministry respecting law and social opinion. If it was the latter, surely the council would support it. He recognized that not all of the members of Bloc were united behind the same policies or aimed for the same reforms—it was simply a loose coalition reflecting broad concerns and the demand for change, rather than a united attempt to overthrow the government.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, the Bloc's aggressive speeches and ambiguous demands meant that Bobrinskoi and others remained suspicious, fearing that the Bloc saw change as a means to attack Tsarism, rather than to strengthen it.

The tide of noble opinion was moving towards the Bloc, though, and this gathered pace in 1916 as the expected congress of noble associations was repeatedly delayed. The permanent council argued that the government was discouraging congresses not directly related to the war effort, but the press accused them of fearing that 'left-wing' nobles would gain the upper hand.⁵⁸ Either way, concerned local noble associations, led by Moscow, organized two private meetings on 12 May and 29 August 1916. They agreed that the permanent council needed to be able to react quickly to urgent events, but wanted to change its composition to prevent future conflict. The council was supposed to represent all noble societies, but in practice was composed of nobles living in Petrograd, who were isolated from the mood of provincial nobles. Equally, local associations could not convene a national congress, thereby removing any guarantee that their voices would be heard. These and other issues were raised at a special meeting of the permanent council on 23 October, which agreed in principle to remove these anomalies if accepted by the next congress. Strukov warned, however, that sharp differences in opinion would continue, even with greater local representation at council meetings, because of the nature of the political and social questions that were facing Russia.⁵⁹ Ultimately, the problem for the nobility was twofold. First, as Mosolov noted on 31 May 1916, all conservative bodies were on the back foot, rarely seen as 'correct' or 'relevant', and struggling to combat the activity of 'anti-state' forces. Secondly, unity was vital, but illusive. On 23 October, A. N. Shelashnikov from Samara urged nobles to forget their differences and to unite around a 'general foundation' and 'general language',⁶⁰ but fulfilling this recommendation proved to be very difficult.

⁵⁶ Bibin, *Dvoriantsvo*, 66–7.

⁵⁷ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 88, ll. 54–54ob.

⁵⁸ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 88, l. 73.

⁵⁹ TsIAM, f. 4, op. 3, d. 83, ll. 5–7; GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 88, ll. 79–88 (Strukov's comment is on l.82).

⁶⁰ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 88, ll. 76, 81.

ON THE EVE OF REVOLUTION

After an ineffectual session from 9 February to 20 June 1916, the Duma was in a determined mood when it reconvened on 1 November. Members were worried about growing worker unrest and feared revolution if the government continued its current policies. These concerns brought divisions in the Bloc to a head. The Progressists had not participated in the Bloc's meetings since June 1916 and withdrew in November. They argued that a ministry responsible to the Duma was crucial and became impatient with the Bloc's caution. The Bloc's leaders did not want to force events, fearing that aggressive demands would encourage social unrest, harm national unity, and hasten revolution. By November, though, they recognized that they needed to reassert pressure and a series of critical speeches dominated the Duma's new session. The most famous, of course, was Miliukov's 'stupidity or treason' speech on 1 November, when he questioned whether the extent of the problems within the government could be explained purely by incompetence. The speech reiterated demands for a ministry of confidence.⁶¹ An equally notable attack came from V. M. Purishkevich. He led the monarchist Union of the Archangel Michael, but was discontented with government ineffectiveness and the constant changeover of ministers. On 19 November, he spoke directly about the 'dark forces' at the heart of the regime.⁶² He then left the far right faction in the Duma in protest at its uncritical stance towards the government.

This speech was welcomed across society, prompted the disintegration of the Right faction in the Duma, and indicated a crisis among monarchists. The Union of the Archangel Michael supported their leader in a meeting on 4 December, declaring in a circular to local branches that monarchists must speak the truth to best serve the Tsar and warn him about harmful people and actions. But other monarchists continued to oppose open criticism. Other 'rightists' in the Duma, such as Markov and G. G. Zamyslovskii, accused him of treachery, and even called for the Duma to be disbanded and its electoral laws changed.⁶³ However, Purishkevich had voiced the concerns of the majority over the government's lack of direction and Rasputin's rumoured influence. Various solutions were proposed: some advocated some form of military dictatorship, whilst others proposed to give more powers to provincial governors to quell unrest. Purishkevich believed that the removal of Rasputin might be sufficient and, along with Prince F. F. Iusopov and the Tsar's nephew, Grand Duke

⁶¹ Golder, *Documents*, 154–66. Also S. Lyandres, 'Progressive Bloc Politics on the Eve of the Revolution: Revisiting P. N. Miliukov's "Stupidity or Treason" Speech of November 1, 1916', *Russian History*, 31, 4 (2004), 447–64.

⁶² Golder, *Documents*, 166–75.

⁶³ See A. Ivanov, *Poslednie zashchitniki monarkhii* (St Petersburg, 2006), 128–46; Kir'ianov, *Pravda*, 269–78.

Dmitrii, murdered him on the night of 16–17 December 1916. This achieved nothing beyond highlighting the regime's weakness. By early February 1917, there were new appeals to re-establish a council to unite monarchist organizations across Russia.⁶⁴ This was to be more inclusive than the previous effort, but unity was now impossible. The Nationalist leader in the Duma, P. N. Balashev, also criticized the government, but on 13 January 1917 rejected a union with the far right, arguing that any 'conservative bloc' needed a constructive programme for Russia.⁶⁵

If the far right was paralysed by early 1917, the United Nobility appeared to be finally overcoming its own internal divisions. Its twelfth congress was finally held from 27 November to 3 December 1916, with 126 delegates representing thirty-four provinces (the four who had resigned refused to send representatives and Petrograd did not participate). It was inevitable that political issues would take centre stage, despite some misgivings: twenty-seven provinces wanted the current political situation discussed first, whilst another two placed it high on the agenda. For supporters of the Progressive Bloc, Gurko led the attack on the incompetent government and the influence of Rasputin. He argued that the Bloc was really a 'military bloc' in that its participants were driven by Russia's wartime interests. He dismissed accusations that it was revolutionary: the State Council and the Nationalists in the Duma hardly represented the 'left'. They simply wanted an energetic and talented government. Gurko believed that Strukov's letter had played a 'fatal rôle', encouraging the Tsar to prorogue the Duma, dismiss the last capable ministers, and permit the Church to be undermined by Rasputin's activities. The United Nobility had to correct this mistake and attack the 'dark forces' in government. He noted that the State Council had taken an unprecedented step the previous day (26 November). It had appealed for the removal of 'dark forces' and the creation of a government with a clear programme, enjoying the confidence and goodwill of the people, and capable of working with the Duma and the State Council. In Gurko's view, it was essential for Russia that the nobility supported this resolution.⁶⁶

Gurko's speech started a discussion that lasted three days and involved numerous lengthy and impassioned speeches debating whether Strukov's letter was correct in its analysis, whether he was authorized to send it, whether it was indeed influential, and whether the United Nobility should now take a position alongside the State Council. Initially, there was little consensus. Some argued that the letter was not fatal and that true monarchists could never support the State Council's appeal. Some believed that the letter would have been acceptable in late 1915, but was now out of touch a year later. Others accepted Strukov's right

⁶⁴ GARF, f. 116, op. 1, d. 541, 26–27ob.

⁶⁵ L. Spirin, *Krushenie pomeshchichikh i burzhuaznykh partii v Rossii (nachalo XXv-1920g)* (Moscow, 1977), 211.

⁶⁶ *Ob'edinennoe dvorianstvo*, III, 594–8. The State Council's appeal is noted in R. Pearson, *The Russian Moderates and the Crisis of Tsarism* (London, 1977), 125.

to send such a letter, but believed it was divorced from the reality of events and that nobles had a duty to state the true situation. In the end, P. N. Krupenskii summed up the views of the majority when he opposed the idea of a 'responsible ministry', but argued that the Bloc was a wartime necessity and that 'politics demands the unity of all forces in Russia at the current time'.⁶⁷ In a final vote, twenty-one provinces disagreed with Strukov's letter, eleven supported it, Tambov abstained, and Podol'ia had left the congress by this stage.⁶⁸ Given that five provinces were not present because of the letter, twenty-six had now expressed opposition (or two-thirds of member associations).

After further discussion, nobles opted not to send a delegation to the Tsar expressing their views, but to issue their own resolution. The thirty-three remaining provinces 'unanimously' agreed on a proclamation that upheld monarchical ideals, but highlighted the corrosive influence of 'dark forces', which had sown disunity in the government and removed its popular support. This threatened the motherland during war. Russia needed the removal of these 'dark forces' and the formation of a 'strong government—Russian in thought and feeling—that enjoys the confidence of the people and the ability to work together with legal institutions [the Duma], but that is, however, responsible only to the monarch'.⁶⁹ The United Nobility, therefore, belatedly joined calls for a 'ministry of confidence', admitting that only such a government could win the war. Its position had decisively shifted and this was the first time that a congress of nobles had been openly critical of the government, emphasizing the deep crisis facing the regime.⁷⁰

The congress saw the balance of power shift within the United Nobility. A new fifteen-man permanent council was chosen, and A. D. Samarin, the former Procurator of the Holy Synod and critic of Rasputin, was elected as president. Only six members remained from the previous council and, although some supporters of the letter remained (such as Neidgart), the new council was dominated by moderate conservatives.⁷¹ Some dissent did continue and twenty-five signed a petition in *Russkoe slovo* on 3 December designed to counter-balance the criticism in the official resolution. It restated the nobility's loyalty to the throne and that nobles would do anything to lead the motherland to prosperity.⁷² M. Ia. Govorukho-Otok, a council member from Kursk (the same province as Markov), wrote twice to the Tsar urging him to disband the Duma and change the electoral laws to ensure permanent support for the government.

⁶⁷ The discussion is in *Ob'edinennoe dvorianstvo*, III, 593–686 (Krupenskii's comments are on 668).

⁶⁸ *Ob'edinennoe dvorianstvo*, III, 670.

⁶⁹ *Ob'edinennoe dvorianstvo*, III, 713–15.

⁷⁰ In a letter to Nicholas on 14 December 1916, his wife, Alexandra, described the United Nobility as 'vile' and 'utterly revolutionary'; cited in M. Steinberg and V. Khrustalev, *The Fall of the Romanovs* (New Haven, 1995), 35.

⁷¹ *Ob'edinennoe dvorianstvo*, III, 832–3, 886.

⁷² *Ob'edinennoe dvorianstvo*, III, 833–6; Bibin, *Dvorianstvo*, 208.

He also proposed introducing martial law to Petrograd and Moscow, establishing military control over factories in the defence industry, appointing government representatives to Zemgor and WIC, and giving local authorities greater powers to suppress unrest.⁷³ Nevertheless, the majority of local associations responded favourably to the congress's resolution. At least thirteen provincial nobilities held meetings, with ten supporting the results of the congress and three opposing. The two largest societies, Moscow and Petrograd, both supported it, with around 200 at each meeting. The nobilities of Kursk, Riazan and Ufa provinces opposed the resolution, but not without debate. A special assembly was held in Kursk on 20 January 1917. Newspapers suggest that around 125 attended, although a memoir gives an improbable 800–900. Lieutenant-General L. D. Balychevsev argued that nobles had to speak the truth to the Tsar, but was shouted down by Markov's supporters and unable to finish.⁷⁴ Kursk's resolution of unqualified support for the Tsar was undoubtedly received favourably, but it was not typical.

Although the crisis in the United Nobility was surmounted, nobles had no plan of action. On 10 January 1917, Samarin met with the Tsar to express his concerns, as did Bazilevskii on 9 February, but neither made any impact. The permanent council held two meetings in 1917 prior to the revolution. Both recognized the serious direction of events, but neither suggested that the United Nobility was prepared to intervene further.⁷⁵ The council was preoccupied with practical concerns, such as the 1917 harvest, and cementing the fragile peace that had been re-established after over a year of infighting, although a meeting was scheduled for 9 March to discuss current events.⁷⁶ Similarly, local noble assemblies could only demand the resignation of the hated Minister of Internal Affairs, A. D. Protopopov (Simbirsk, 21–23 January), or express vague hopes that nobles could unify around the throne (Voronezh, 26 January 1917).⁷⁷

The United Nobility's focus on practical issues, particularly agriculture, reflected wider concerns that the government was not placing sufficient value on agriculture's contribution to the war effort. These concerns lay behind the revival of a new All-Russian Union of Landowners on 10 November 1916. The Union aimed to unite all landowners to defend private landownership and agrarian interests within the war economy. It would publish leaflets, open local branches, and hold meetings and lectures. However, full members had to own at least 50 *desiatiny* of land and, although there were other membership categories, the Union was again designed to protect the interests of a minority of

⁷³ Platonov, *Chernaia sotnia*, 147–8.

⁷⁴ S. Oloviannikov, 'Provintsiiia 1917g. Narodnaia vlast' v Kurskoi gubernii', in *1917 god v sud'bach Rossii i mira: Fevral'skaia revoliutsiia ot novykh istochnikov k novomu osmysleniiu* (Moscow, 1997), 367–8. On local reactions, see Bibin, *Dvorianstvo*, 245–9; and the report from Moscow nobles in TsiAM, f. 4, op. 3, d. 83, ll. 7–10.

⁷⁵ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 87, ll. 3–13.

⁷⁶ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 7, l. 684.

⁷⁷ Barinova, *Pomestnoe dvorianstvo*, 303–04.

relatively wealthy landowners.⁷⁸ It first met on 9 December 1916 when it had 103 members. P. N. Balashev, the leader of the Nationalists in the Duma, was elected to chair a board that included Count V. P. Orlov-Denisov and other United Nobility figures. Ten members were needed to establish a local branch and only five existed by the end of 1916. Two more were created by 15 February 1917 and another thirty-seven members joined.⁷⁹ Membership was rising by the revolution, but it probably did not exceed 150.

The Union demanded formal recognition of the importance of agriculture to the war effort. It wanted sufficient workers made available, both prisoners of war and through the release of skilled workers from fighting, and more equipment manufactured and imported, as there were insufficient tools and machines. It accused the Ministry of War of leaving large amounts of equipment evacuated from territories taken by the Germans unused and rusting in the open air. The Union devoted most effort to negotiating a contract to supply the army with vegetables and fruit from the forthcoming 1917 harvest. Discussions were lengthy, as befitted a deal worth eight to nine million rubles to its members, but were thwarted by the revolution.⁸⁰

Landownership was not the only area where the position of elites was under threat. The composition of the officer corps was also dramatically changing. The mobilization that started in 1914 increased the number of officers by around three and a half times to roughly 145,000, whilst the number of soldiers had grown over fivefold to 6.6 million. Taking into account losses on the battlefield, 170,000 new officers entered the military during the war, of which only 10,000 or so had previous experience. New schools were established to speed up the graduation of ensigns, the lowest officer rank, but only 5.5% of a sample of 488 who passed through from 1914–17 were nobles, whilst 58.5% were peasants. Overall, ensigns formed 50% of all officers during the war, but only 4% were nobles.⁸¹ Whereas prior to 1914 ensigns were doomed to remain at the lowest rank, they were now rapidly promoted to lieutenant and beyond. These officers were young, literate, socially diverse, and alienated from traditional officers, fuelling radicalism and a sense of injustice. Many had backgrounds as socialist agitators.⁸²

The Life Guards Grenadier Regiment illustrated these trends. It lost a quarter of its seventy-seven officers in its first engagement on 25–7 August 1914, including 40% of colonels and 50% of captains, whilst 45% were injured. These losses were not unusual, but although the regime took steps to preserve

⁷⁸ GARF, f. 1783, op. 2, d. 266, ll. 1–8ob. In 1905, 82% of landowners owned under 50 *desiatiny* and this had increased by 1916; A. Anfimov, *Krupnoe pomeshchich'e khoziaistvo evropeiskoi Rossii* (Moscow, 1969), 29.

⁷⁹ GARF, f. 1783, op. 2, d. 266, ll. 91–91ob.

⁸⁰ GARF, f. 1783, op. 2, d. 266, ll. 26ob–28ob, 51–55, 89ob–90.

⁸¹ P. Kenez, 'A Profile of the Prerevolutionary Officer Corps', *Canadian Slavic Studies*, 7 (1973), 147, 149.

⁸² See the biographies in GARF, f. 4018, op. 1, d. 3 (discussed in Chapter 5).

experienced officers (discouraging brave but suicidal attacks, for example), by the end of the war over two-thirds of the original officers in the regiment had died. Initially, they were replaced by rapid promotion and the early graduation of recruits from traditional routes. By 1915–16, however, officers were arriving from unfamiliar backgrounds and lower social groups. In the Life Grenadiers, these officers led soldiers' soviets, articulated grievances, refused to fight, and attacked other officers in 1917.⁸³

Furthermore, government incompetence seemed to be fuelling discontent among soldiers and sailors, increasing ill-discipline, and harming the war effort. Leading officers already had links with industrialists and the Duma, who were both crucial in providing the supplies and finance that the military needed. Increasingly officers' loyalty to the military and the war led many to turn away from the regime. They were well aware of the accusations and demands made by the Progressive Bloc as well as the immense effort being made by industrialists and Zemgor activists to aid the war effort. Talk of 'dark forces' frightened officers and many increasingly believed that Duma leaders might do a more effective job of running the country.⁸⁴

It has been argued that military leaders were key players in the plots to overthrow the Tsar that were being hatched by late 1916. Traditional accounts chronicle several strands of plotting. Guchkov was the most active and was in contact with officers, such as General A. M. Krymov, as well as plotters in the navy. Other rumours implicate Prince G. E. L'vov, the chair of Zemgor, who was linked to General M. V. Alekseev, the Chief of Staff, and other officers, whilst various grand dukes, Nicholas's relatives, apparently discussed replacing him.⁸⁵ The truth is impossible to disentangle. In short, there was no coup and it is difficult to distinguish between conversations expressing discontent and real plots, but the rumours are instructive in emphasizing the sheer range of groups implicated: politicians, ministers, court figures, officers, industrialists, and grand dukes.⁸⁶ Other elites, such as the clergy, were no less discontented.⁸⁷

Gurko later noted that 'every revolution begins at the top; and our government had succeeded in transforming the most loyal elements of the country into critics.'⁸⁸ On 21 February 1917, N. N. Tikhonovich-Savitskii, leader of the People's Monarchist Party in Astrakhan, wrote to Protopopov, copying his letter

⁸³ D. Jones, 'The Imperial Russian Life Guards Grenadier Regiment, 1906–1917: The Disintegration of an Elite Unit', *Military Affairs*, 33, 2 (1969), 292, 297–300.

⁸⁴ O. Airapetov, *Generaly, liberaly i predprinimateli: Rabota na front i na revoliutsiiu, 1907–1917* (Moscow, 2003).

⁸⁵ S. Mel'gunov, *Na putiakh k dvortsovomu perevorotu* (Moscow, 2003).

⁸⁶ V. Diakin, 'Krizis verkhov v Rossii nakanune fevral'skoi revoliutsii', *Voprosy istorii*, 3 (1982), 70–83.

⁸⁷ G. Freeze, 'Church and Politics in Late Imperial Russia: Crisis and Radicalization of the Clergy', in A. Geifman (ed.), *Russia under the Last Tsar: Opposition and Subversion, 1894–1917* (Oxford, 1999), 270.

⁸⁸ V. Gurko, *Features and Figures of the Past* (Stanford, 1939), 546.

to other ministers and newspapers. 'Where is the government?' he asked. 'What is it doing?' 'Nothing', he answered. The situation was hopeless. Why did the government not ask the Tsar to discharge them if they were incapable of dealing with the unrest?⁸⁹ Monarchists often focused on the government, not the Tsar, but it was impossible to avoid the fact that the Tsar appointed the government. A. N. Rodzianko, the wife of the Duma president, wrote on 1 December 1916 that the Duma, State Council, and United Nobility all agreed that Russia was in danger, but these fears were met with silence. She called the Tsarina a 'mad German', denounced Rasputin's influence, and bemoaned the fact that the Tsar did not listen: 'never has Russia lived through such dark days or seen such unworthy representatives of the monarchy'.⁹⁰

Elites wanted political change and feared for Russia's future without it, but they were frightened of revolution. Reform could quickly turn into revolution, given the level of popular unrest, and could threaten the authority of the state and the war effort, as well as the position of elites. Therefore, elites only felt able to warn and accuse, whilst pressing for the regime to reform itself. Nevertheless, once revolution arrived in February 1917, the level of discontent with the regime was such that few were prepared to defend it. The continued reign of Nicholas was no longer seen as in the best interests of Russia or elites. The revolution provided an opportunity for political change and elites needed to engage with it if they were to influence events. In taking this step, elites played a crucial role in ensuring that Nicholas was quickly removed.

⁸⁹ GARF, f. 116, op. 1, d. 51, ll. 39-39ob. Similar letters by him and others are in *Pravye partii*, II, 604-46.

⁹⁰ 'K istorii poslednikh dnei tsarskogo rezhima (1916-1917 gg.)', *Krasnyi arkhiv*, 14 (1926), 241-2.

2

The February Revolution

The revolution started with widespread street demonstrations in Petrograd marking International Women's Day on 23 February 1917. Over the next few days, the demonstrations grew rapidly, but mass protests were frequent in Russia and the comprehensive collapse of Tsarism by early March cannot be solely attributed to popular unrest. A crucial factor in determining the quick success of the revolution was the rejection of autocracy by elites. Elites feared encouraging a revolution prior to 1917, but once they were convinced that one had arrived, the level of discontent meant that few were prepared to act decisively to defend the regime. Several elite groups directly influenced events, but more became 'revolutionaries' by accepting the new government that emerged. This acceptance may have been motivated by fear or by the fact that they could do little, but elites did not see it this way. They felt that they had contributed to the revolution by accepting it, and rather than being swept away with the old regime as so many historians assume, they joined other Russians in having aspirations. These were very different from those held by the lower classes that had initiated the unrest, but this only became apparent amid the celebrations that greeted the revolution's success.

THE EMERGENCE OF REVOLUTION

As the unrest escalated, cracks quickly appeared in the regime. Indecision and fear led General S. S. Khabalov (Military Commander of the Petrograd region) and A. P. Balk (Mayor of Petrograd) to underplay events initially, as they hoped that they could restore order without informing the Tsar. The Council of Ministers also seemed confident, but already individual ministers were less sure. On the morning of 26 February, N. V. Savich, an Octobrist deputy in the Duma, met N. N. Pokrovskii (Minister of Foreign Affairs) and A. A. Rittikh (Minister of Agriculture). Both were 'exceptionally despondent' and frightened. They recognized the revolutionary nature of the unrest and doubted the reliability of the military. Both spoke of the powerlessness, confusion and lack of will among Khabalov and other authorities. For them, the solution was to transfer authority to a government responsible to the Duma, which they hoped had the energy to restore order and continue the war. In the meantime, they told Savich that

they were still obliged to follow orders.¹ When Nicholas was informed of the disorders, if not of their scale, he ordered their suppression on 26 February. Some troops followed their orders, but unwillingly. Many shot into the air and most were dispirited. Although neither Khabalov nor Balk seemed to recognize it, this tentative response was the beginning of a full-scale mutiny amongst the soldiers in Petrograd.²

Just as frightened ministers automatically turned to the Duma, so too did the crowds, as it was the closest to a democratic body in Russia at this time. Its chairman, M. V. Rodzianko, an Octobrist and sizeable noble landowner, quickly felt that the unrest could be utilized by the Duma to press for the concessions that they had demanded for over a year. On 26 February, in telegrams to General M. V. Alekseev, the Chief of Staff, and, a day later, to the Tsar, Rodzianko observed that the unrest was no longer about bread, but was far more threatening, demonstrating a fundamental distrust of the regime. The slow reaction of the authorities made the government seem paralysed. He recognized that the unrest could easily spread and argued that a 'ministry of confidence' must be formed by a responsible person without delay. He gave the impression that the capital was in a state of anarchy, with troops firing on each other and crowds that were out of control.³ Rodzianko seems to have exaggerated the level of anarchy to try to force the regime to concede greater authority to the Duma, which had not yet responded as a body.

Fearing the Duma's reaction and its popular support, the regime prorogued the Duma on the evening of 26 February. This forced a response and the Duma made several vital decisions on 27 February. First, the Minister of War, General M. A. Beliaev, called Rodzianko to suggest a joint response to the crisis, which Rodzianko refused, noting that the regime could not dismiss the Duma and then immediately ask for its help. Secondly, the Council of Elders met, which comprised the main party leaders in the Duma and other senior figures (perhaps thirty-five in total). Only the far right was absent.⁴ Reports from the meeting are disputed, but the socialists argued for a stronger course of action than conservatives (including Rodzianko) were prepared to accept. There was also a tentative discussion on forming a new government. In the end, the council decided not to dissolve the Duma and that all deputies should remain in Petrograd. It also agreed to participate in the creation of a new power, but only once order had been restored.⁵

¹ N. Savich, *Vospominaniia* (St Petersburg, 1993), 195–7.

² R. Ganelin, 'The Day before the Downfall of the Old Regime: 26 February 1917 in Petrograd', in M. Siefert (ed.), *Extending the Borders of Russian History* (Budapest, 2003), 245–55.

³ 'Fevral'skaia revoliutsiia 1917 goda', *Krasnyi arkhiv*, 21 (1927), 5–7 [hereafter, *FR*].

⁴ A. Nikolaev, *Gosudarstvennaia дума v fevral'skoi revoliutsii: Ocherki istorii* (Riazan', 2002), 24–5.

⁵ *Fevral'skaia revoliutsiia 1917. Sbornik dokumentov i materialov* (Moscow, 1996), 109–12; *RPG*, I, 43.

The central issue was how to restore law and order, and the final important decision of the day was taken at a private assembly in the afternoon to which all Duma members were invited.⁶ It was clear that the government was helpless, but opinions were divided on possible solutions. N. V. Nekrasov (Kadet) suggested investing authority in a suitable general, alongside representatives from the Duma. N. S. Chkheidze (Menshevik) rejected this, demanding a completely new government. P. N. Miliukov (Kadet) also saw Nekrasov's plan as inappropriate. A. F. Kerenskii (Trudovik) wanted to go to the troops and announce that the Duma was united with them. V. V. Shul'gin (Progressive Nationalist) protested: the Duma could not profess solidarity with demands such as an end to the war. V. I. Dziubinskii (Trudovik) proposed that the Duma had no alternative but to create a new authority and Prince S. P. Mansyrev (Kadet) agreed. Savich declared that this was illegal and tantamount to accepting that a mob had handed them authority. The meeting was clearly divided within parties as well as between them. The deputies were aware of the need for urgent action, however, and after a couple of hours a vote was taken. The majority decided to create a special committee, chosen by the Council of Elders, to assume authority in the capital.⁷

A twelve-man temporary committee was created, essentially comprising leaders of the Progressive Bloc and two socialists. It was chaired by Rodzianko (Octobrist) and included I. I. Dmitriukov and S. I. Shidlovskii (both Octobrists); Nekrasov and Miliukov (Kadets); A. I. Konovalov and V. A. Rzhevskii (Progressists); along with Shul'gin (Progressive Nationalist), V. N. L'vov (Centre), M. A. Karaulov (non-party), Kerenskii (Trudovik), and Chkheidze (Menshevik). Colonel B. A. Engel'gardt (Octobrist) joined in the evening of 27 February as head of the military commission.⁸ The committee's initial aims were modest—assuming authority within Petrograd. Savich noted that it simply aimed to take control of the unrest and to agitate amongst ministers for a government responsible to the Duma.⁹ Rodzianko apparently wavered prior to forming the committee, declaring that he was not a revolutionary and had no desire to engineer the collapse of the government, but was persuaded that there was no other course of action.¹⁰ Personal ambitions may have played a role, but the Duma had to act to prevent total anarchy. V. A. Obolenskii, a non-Duma Kadet, later agreed: moral dilemmas over legality were all very well, but who would take

⁶ Recent work has noted that this meeting was planned on 26 February, further indicating Rodzianko's determination to benefit from events; S. Lyandres, 'On the Problem of "Indecisiveness" among the Duma Leaders during the February Revolution: The Imperial Decree of Prorogation and the Decision to Convene the Private Meeting of February 27, 1917', *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review*, 24, 1–2 (1997), 115–27; Nikolaev, *Gosudarstvennaia duma*, 27–8.

⁷ An anonymous account of the meeting is in *RPG*, I, 45–7. Another is in *Fevral'skaia revoliutsiia*, 112–15.

⁸ *RPG*, I, 47.

⁹ Savich, *Vospominaniia*, 200, 204.

¹⁰ V. Shulgin, *Days of the Russian Revolution* (Gulf Breeze, 1990), 124.

control if it were not the Duma?¹¹ This issue gained potency with the emergence of the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies at this time, which threatened to create a rival power with stronger links to the crowds.

Nevertheless, it is questionable whether this was the will of the majority of the Duma or simply of the leaders of the Progressive Bloc. Mansyrev recalled 200 members present at the private meeting, but Balk believed that the true number was less than fifty (out of roughly 420 Duma members). Given transport problems, the war, the sudden nature of the meeting, and the small, unofficial hall in which it was held, it seems unlikely that more than seventy were present. Mansyrev described bewilderment, together with a lack of consultation and information from the leadership, who held a monopoly over the key decisions.¹² Some contemporaries believed that the committee played a forceful role, far beyond its remit of helping to control the unrest and permitting the restoration of order from above.¹³

The committee was in a difficult position as its members were not revolutionaries but had nonetheless received their power from the unrest. Moreover, as government inertia continued, unrest deepened, and the fear of anarchy grew, it clearly had to act in some manner. It held a degree of public representation and offered the best hope of compromise. Its demand for a 'responsible government' was a step further than that made by the Progressive Bloc, but they were not yet demanding the removal of Nicholas. To this end, Duma leaders tried to muster further forces in favour of reform. Rodzianko had contacted Grand Duke Mikhail, the Tsar's brother, on 25 February, to request a meeting to discuss the unrest. On the evening of 27 February, Rodzianko and a delegation from the committee (Nekrasov, Dmitriukov and Savich) met with Mikhail. They stressed the seriousness of events and suggested that power be transferred to the Duma. Rodzianko urged Mikhail to establish a dictatorship in Petrograd and to demand a responsible government from the Tsar. Mikhail wavered and decided to confer with the Council of Ministers.¹⁴ The delegation then met its chairman, Prince N. D. Golitsyn, who agreed that a new government was needed, but stated that he would only transfer his authority on an order from the Tsar. This, of course, was not forthcoming.¹⁵ Mikhail tried to talk to Nicholas at Stavka,

¹¹ V. Obolenskii, *Moia zhizn', moi sovremenniki* (Paris, 1988), 513.

¹² After an exhaustive discussion, Lyandres argued that 60–70 was likely; '“Indecisiveness”', 123–7. Also Nikolaev, *Gosudarstvennaia Duma*, 28. Mansyrev's account of the period is in S. Mansyrev, 'Moi vospominaniia o gosudarstvennoi dume', *Istoriia i Sovremenniki*, 3 (1922), 25–33 (the number of deputies present is on 27).

¹³ For e.g., P. Dolgorukov, *Velikaia razrukha* (Madrid, 1964), 13–14 (the author was a Kadet).

¹⁴ M. Rodzianko, 'Gosudarstvennaia дума i fevral'skaia 1917 goda revoliutsiia', *Arkhiv Russkoi revoliutsii*, 6 (1922), 57. Also E. Burdzhakov, *Russia's Second Revolution: The February 1917 Uprising in Petrograd* (Bloomington, 1987), 202–3; T. Hasegawa, *The February Revolution: Petrograd 1917* (Seattle, 1981), 356–7.

¹⁵ Savich noted that Golitsyn, Mikhail, Duma representatives, and other ministers met together, rather than separately (Savich, *Vospominaniia*, 200–3). Golitsyn had already had his resignation

but could only reach Alekseev. He urged Alekseev to inform the Tsar of the need for a new government, suggesting that Prince G. E. L'vov (president of Zemgor) was a person who enjoyed sufficient respect to head a new council of ministers.¹⁶

Nicholas firmly rejected this suggestion. Although some aides apparently promoted the need for a new government,¹⁷ the Tsar and most of his entourage saw the Duma as revolutionary. They felt that the unrest could be suppressed, as in 1905, and believed reports from Khabalov underplaying its extent.¹⁸ If anything, the entreaties of Mikhail and Rodzianko encouraged Nicholas to send troops from the front to suppress the revolt. Despite qualms about the potential impact of the unrest on these troops, Stavka cooperated. According to General N. I. Ivanov, who headed the troops, Nicholas implied to him that a ministry of confidence would be granted as well.¹⁹ It was not immediately, and no other evidence supports Ivanov's claim.

Nicholas's rejection forced the committee to take a more proactive role, especially as the unrest worsened. The mutiny of the soldiers on 27 February led to the murder of officers and the revolt took on a far more threatening character; even Khabalov recognized this and started using the term 'revolutionaries', rather than rebels.²⁰ The Council of Ministers held its last meeting on the evening of 27 February and formally offered its resignation. P. L. Bark (Minister of Finance) commented that Petrograd 'was in the hands of the revolutionaries'. He and others were arrested and imprisoned on 28 February.²¹ Reading Golitsyn's later account, it is surprising how little he knew about events.²² The best informed were Khabalov and Bark who had direct access to army and police reports but, as the unrest escalated, they became less prepared to act on their own initiative. Unsure which troops were loyal, they became reliant on reinforcements from the front and increasingly despondent. They finally just awaited arrest in the Admiralty.²³

After a prolonged discussion in the early hours of 28 February, the temporary committee agreed to take over as the state authority and to assume executive

refused. Another account stated that Savich and Dmitriukov pressed Mikhail to become regent on Nicholas's abdication, but this seems too radical at this stage compared to the other demands being made; *Fevral'skaia revoliutsiia*, 116.

¹⁶ *RPG*, I, 86.

¹⁷ According to N. A. Bazili at Stavka; S. Lyandres (ed.), '“O dvortsovom perevorote ia pervyi raz uslyshal posle revoliutsii . . .” Stenogramma besedy N. A. Bazili s A. S. Lukomskim (Parizh, 24 Fevralia 1933g.)', *Russian History*, 32, 2 (2005), 252.

¹⁸ V. Voikov, *S tsarem i bez tsaria* (Helsinki, 1936), 195–200.

¹⁹ Hasegawa, *February*, 460–1. Longley argued that Ivanov was not committed to the move: D. Longley, 'What made the Cossack wink? Armies in Revolution: 1789 and 1917', *International Politics*, 33, 4 (1996), 332.

²⁰ *FRI*, I, 15–16, 19–21.

²¹ BAR, P. L. Bark papers, 'Untitled Memoirs', Ch. 27, 1.

²² 'Dopros Kn. N. D. Golitsyna, 21 aprelia 1917g.', in P. Shchegolev (ed.), *Padenie tsarskogo rezhima* (7 volumes: Leningrad, 1924–1927), I, 249–72.

²³ HIA, A. P. Balk papers, 'Poslednie piat' dnei tsarskogo Petrograda, 23–28 fevralia 1917g.: Dnevnik posledniago Petrogradskago gradonachal'nika'.

power.²⁴ It helped establish a revolutionary press, led a commission to control the activities of the soldiers, dealt with food supply, and liaised with the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. It issued appeals to the population and the military for order and calm, and dispatched thirty-eight commissars to take control of various ministries and institutions between 28 February and 3 March. Elites were involved; for example, Savich (Octobrist, War and Naval Ministry), M. L. Kindiakov (Octobrist, Printing Press) and N. N. L'vov (Progressist, Imperial Theatres) later assumed leading roles in the Union of Landowners (as did Dmitriukov, a committee member). The results were mixed: some commissars were inactive, whilst others were unable to gain influence, but the committee was now taking a leading role. It became committed to the revolution as it supervised the arrest of ministers and former prominent figures in the old regime, and created commissions at various levels to investigate accusations and guilt. There is no doubt that the committee was operating independently of the Duma by this stage. Many Duma members disagreed with its actions, but were muted in their criticism. Some who believed that the committee was exceeding its remit even acted as commissars to help prevent the unrest from descending into anarchy.²⁵

OFFICERS AS 'REVOLUTIONARIES'

The other important elite group during this period was the officer corps. Only a minority of officers played an active role, but their actions and opinions highlighted divisions that continued throughout 1917. The soldiers' mutiny on 27 February encouraged lower ranked officers with socialist backgrounds who had joined the military during the war to support the revolution. They led parties of soldiers searching for resistance, headed newly formed soldiers' committees, and acted alongside the soldiers. That evening, fearing a counter-attack by the old regime, the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies established a military commission to organize the defence of the revolution. Initially this was headed by the Socialist Revolutionary (SR), Lieutenant S. D. Mstislavskii, aided by fellow SR, Lieutenant V. N. Filippovskii. Both had been heavily involved in officer movements during 1905–6, with Mstislavskii serving as the deputy chairman of the All-Russian Officers' Union.

The Soviet leadership and officer activists, such as Mstislavskii, believed that it was vital to gather supportive officers to instil some degree of order into the mass of soldiers so that they were able to defend the revolution effectively.

²⁴ *Fevral'skaia revoliutsiia*, 117.

²⁵ Nikolaev discussed all of this in exhaustive detail in *Gosudarstvennaia duma*. For a convenient summary, see A. Nikolaev, 'Dumskoe uchastie v mekhanizme funktsionirovaniia vremennoi vlasti: 27 fevralia—3 marta 1917 goda', *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review*, 24, 1–2 (1997), 129–45.

Mstislavskii's memoirs are a vivid account of how initially they felt overwhelmed by the task that faced them, and how few officers were involved. At one stage, he and Filippovskii were the only commissioned officers and, even as numbers grew, operations were managed by around twenty young and excited socialist officers. Their influence was limited. Mstislavskii recalled that those who received orders from them usually disappeared without trace, whilst those who acted did so without orders, leaving the impression that the commission scattered sheets of orders 'like rose petals into a raging storm'.²⁶

Other officers were swept along by events and their disillusionment with Tsarism. The level of this dissatisfaction became clearer as the revolution progressed and more officers became involved. By 28 February, an uneasy agreement between the Soviet and the temporary committee of the Duma led to Colonel B. A. Engel'gardt, an Octobrist deputy, taking charge of the military commission. Mstislavskii was sidelined, although Filippovskii remained involved. Mstislavskii bitterly described how keen young officers were removed in favour of 'Guards' officers like Engel'gardt, and how revolutionary enthusiasm was replaced by the 'banter' of a Guards' regiment.²⁷ One of those Guards officers, Colonel P. A. Polovtsov, portrayed the chaos described by Mstislavskii differently. Mstislavskii was inspired by the mass movement, if often frustrated, and determined to secure the revolution. Polovtsov, in contrast, was focused on restoring order, and talked of 'mobs', 'drunken proletarians', and the 'scourge' of the Soviet.²⁸

More officers took Polovtsov's view, and whilst Mstislavskii and Filippovskii were naturally orientated towards the Soviet, Engel'gardt, Polovtsev and others found the temporary committee of the Duma more agreeable. They were suspicious of the unrest, sought to calm it and to promote popular support for what they saw as the new legitimate authorities. On 28 February, the commission ordered officers in Petrograd to report for registration and instructions. Officers were warned that not responding would damage the prestige of officers in the eyes of the soldiers, and were reminded that a war still needed to be fought. Those officers who responded declared their support for the temporary committee, pending the formation of a new government. A day later, they issued an appeal to soldiers. Having joined soldiers in shedding their blood on the battlefield, officers condemned the old regime and urged soldiers to refocus on the war and to smash German power in the name of a free Russia. They stressed unity between officers and soldiers for the good of Russia during war.²⁹

²⁶ S. Mstislavskii, *Five Days which transformed Russia* (London, 1988), 28–48, quote from 43.

²⁷ Mstislavskii, *Five Days*, 38–55, especially 51, 54. A similar picture emerges in A. Tarasov-Rodionov, *February 1917* (Westport, 1973), 114–21, 143–5, 153–6. Filippovskii became a member of the executive committee of the Soviet and its liaison committee with the Provisional Government: *RPG*, III, 1212.

²⁸ P. Polovtsoff, *Glory and Downfall* (London, 1935), 148–58.

²⁹ *RPG*, I, 62–3.

Lieutenant A. I. Tarasov-Rodionov even noted that members of Khabalov's staff appeared on the commission after Engel'gardt had taken over.³⁰ As a Bolshevik, Tarasov-Rodionov was sarcastic about anything involving the Duma and moderate socialists, but his basic point—the changing allegiance of tsarist officers—is valid. The tsarist military command of Petrograd is usually seen as incompetent and inactive. However, Longley argued convincingly that discontent with Nicholas had fostered an unwillingness to act. Some officers deliberately did not suppress the unrest from 24 February onwards. Equally, on the crucial day of the soldiers' revolt, 27 February, there was a spate of mysterious illnesses amongst Khabalov's staff. Khabalov remained at his post, but his deputy reported sick and three successive replacements did nothing before also falling 'ill'. This, according to Longley, was deliberate inactivity and tantamount to mutiny.³¹ If true, it was a short step to actually helping the new authorities to restore order.

Mstislavskii and Filippovskii, on the one hand, and Engel'gardt and Polovtsov, on the other, represented the two distinct trends amongst officers who were involved in events in Petrograd in February. A small minority immediately gave their allegiance to the Soviet, whilst a greater number looked towards the Duma. The vast majority of officers, however, were largely apolitical: some were coerced into action through fear, or recognition that they had to support the revolution to maintain their authority; some waited and watched; others were left bemused by the speed of events. These reactions, broadly speaking, continued throughout 1917.

Meanwhile, the Tsar remained in place, refusing concessions. In this respect, the actions and opinions of the military leadership were crucial. First, Nicholas respected their views; secondly, he was based in Stavka—the military headquarters in Mogilev; finally, the generals remained in control of troops at the front that could either support the revolution or be sent to suppress it. The temporary committee was best placed to influence the military leadership's views, given the links between various politicians and generals prior to 1917. By exaggerating the situation on 26 February in his telegram to Stavka, Rodzianko hoped to persuade the generals that reform was the only option. Initially, however, Stavka committed itself to suppressing the unrest, but they were as uncertain as everyone, possibly more so: as General A. E. Evert declared, 'I am a soldier; I have not interfered in politics and I will not.'³² The primary concern was over how the unrest would impact on the war effort (fighting efficiency, infrastructure, and supplies), but only Generals A. A. Brusilov and N. V. Ruzskii initially favoured reform. As Ruzskii noted, the military included all social classes and professions, and it could not remain immune to the unrest for ever.³³ These

³⁰ Tarasov-Rodionov, *February 1917*, 144.

³¹ Longley, 'Cossack', 333–4.

³² Evert to Alekseev, 27/2/17, *FRI*, 8–9.

³³ Ruzskii to the Tsar, 27/2/17, *FRI*, 13. Ruzskii argued that the use of force would aggravate the situation.

fears, though, added to existing dissatisfaction with the regime's record since 1914 and, as the unrest increased, more generals felt that some degree of reform was needed.

The temporary committee of the Duma informed Stavka and the fronts of its formation on 28 February and the generals reacted favourably. First, the escalating situation was becoming clear. The arrests of ministers were followed on 1 March by reports of unrest in Moscow and Kronstadt.³⁴ Clearly the revolution would reach the front if it were not stopped. Secondly, Stavka became increasingly convinced that the committee was gaining control over events and deserved support as a better way of restoring order than military force. The committee quickly stressed that it aimed to restore effective government to Russia to aid the continuation of the war effort. This was true, but as Shul'gin recalled, they deliberately implied that the committee was already in control.³⁵ On 28 February, Alekseev informed commanders of the current position and, whilst he did not comment on political alternatives, his tone conveyed the hopeless position of Nicholas. A day later, General V. N. Klembovskii supported a 'ministry of confidence' in a widely distributed telegram.³⁶ The committee's growing authority seemed to be confirmed by a telegram sent down the railway network by a committee member on 28 February stating that the Duma now had control of the situation. It did throw doubt upon the survival of the Tsar, but it also called for order and was interpreted favourably by the military.³⁷ The military was also influenced by the willingness of the grand dukes to sign a manifesto prepared by Rodzianko demanding that Nicholas establish a new government, a constitution, and review the fundamental laws.³⁸ Therefore, on 1 March, Stavka accepted the idea of a government responsible to the Duma, limiting the powers of the Tsar to prevent the spread of the revolt, and to ensure the continued stability and effectiveness of the military.

Two crucial decisions were then taken by Stavka. First, Ivanov's expedition to suppress the disorder in Petrograd was suspended by Alekseev, initially without the agreement of the Tsar, as Alekseev now believed that the situation was under the control of the Duma.³⁹ Secondly, Ruzskii persuaded the Tsar to appoint a government responsible to the Duma. Once Stavka had decided to press for this option, Ruzskii, as befitted his position at Pskov (where the Tsar's failed attempt to return to the capital had finally ended), was given the responsibility of

³⁴ *FRI*, I, 37, 40. On Stavka's recognition of the widening unrest, see Iu. Danilov, 'Moi vospominaniia ob imperatore Nikolae II-om i vel. kniaze Mikhaile Aleksandroviche', *Arkhiv Russkoi revoliutsii*, 19 (1928), 221.

³⁵ Shulgin, *Days*, 126.

³⁶ *FRI*, 22–4, 40–1.

³⁷ *RPG*, I, 67; *FRI*, 32–4.

³⁸ For a copy of the manifesto, see T. Hasegawa, 'Rodzianko and the Grand Dukes' Manifesto of 1 March 1917', *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 18, 2 (1976), 154–5. Grand Duke Pavel's wife has left an account of the manifesto: Princess Paley, *Memoirs of Russia* (London, 1924), 52–3.

³⁹ *FRI*, 31.

talking to the Tsar, with the support of a telegram from Alekseev. The apparent unity of the military in calling for this course of action finally persuaded the Tsar, although it took several hours.⁴⁰ Some within the Tsar's entourage were indignant at the forceful way that Ruzskii pressed Nicholas for concessions. Others viewed the Duma as 'revolutionaries' and the generals as 'traitors'. Major-General V. N. Voeikov, the Tsar's palace commandant, later accused the generals of acting for the Duma and not for the Tsar or Russia. In forcing events, these 'honourable servants of the tsar' were betraying their country, just as Judas had betrayed Christ.⁴¹

Nevertheless, 1 March 1917 saw the generals achieve what a sizeable proportion of elite society had been moving towards for several years—a 'responsible government'. It was not the end of the monarchy, merely a different type of one, and it was hoped that working with the Duma would appease all groups. Unsurprisingly, though, it was already too late. Events and moods had quickly moved further to the left. The temporary committee of the Duma had considered the potential abdication of Nicholas as early as 28 February, but this issue became urgent as pressure from the crowds and the Soviet increased. On 1 March, the committee became tired of waiting for reforms to be sanctioned by Nicholas and was negotiating with the Soviet on the formation of a new government, with the fate of the Tsar hanging in the balance.⁴²

In the early morning of 2 March, Ruzskii told Rodzianko of the Tsar's decision to grant a new government, only to hear Rodzianko say that this was now insufficient: stronger measures were needed to quell the unrest. Rodzianko stressed that events were evolving: hatred of the Tsar was escalating, as were demands for his removal.⁴³ Rodzianko was starting the process that ended with Nicholas's abdication. Ruzskii seemed surprised—Rodzianko had recently sent a telegram claiming that order was being restored—but he did not reject the possibility outright.⁴⁴ This was, though, more than Stavka had intended, but it had few alternatives. As General A. S. Lukomskii noted later, it quickly became an issue of what price was worth paying to quell the unrest.⁴⁵ This was not an easy decision. Within the Duma, Rodzianko was being pressurized by populist elements and wanted to retain his influence. Moreover, only Nicholas was under threat at this stage and not the monarchy in general. After all, as Shul'gin reasoned, 'surely the transfer of monarchic power from one monarch to another would save Russia.

⁴⁰ *FRI*, I, 53–4 (Alekseev's telegram); Danilov, 'Vospominaniia', 223–4. Also Hasegawa, *February*, 492–5.

⁴¹ Voeikov, *Tsarem*, 207–19. Voeikov noted that Ruzskii accused him of belonging to Rasputin's 'clique' (207).

⁴² *Fevral'skaia revoliutsiia*, 127.

⁴³ *FRI*, 55–9.

⁴⁴ *FRI*, 52 (1/3/17, telegram saying that order was being restored). Ruzskii later claimed that he had always known that a 'responsible ministry' was a compromise, but was afraid to say so; *RPG*, I, 103.

⁴⁵ 'Iz vospominanii Gen. Lukomskago', *Arkhiv Russkoi revoliutsii*, 2 (1922), 22. He was using the term 'old power' by then, *FRI*, 32.

It had many times before.⁴⁶ A new monarch could prove acceptable to society, being disassociated with incompetence, repression, and intrigue. It would also ease the transition of autocracy into a constitutional system with full civil rights. Thus, it was proposed that Grand Duke Mikhail would govern until Aleksei (the heir) came of age. The committee and the military leaders expected that this step—a huge jump for them—would diffuse the crowd's anger.

Events culminated on 2 March. First, the committee, with the agreement of the Soviet, formed a Provisional Government to rule Russia prior to widespread elections. Secondly, the generals united in advising Nicholas to abdicate. Grand Duke Nikolai (the former Commander-in-Chief), Brusilov, Evert, Admiral A. I. Nepenin, and others all sent telegrams to Alekseev, who forwarded them to Nicholas.⁴⁷ All implored the Tsar to abdicate, arguing that there was no other option if Russia was to be saved and the war continued to a glorious conclusion. General V. V. Sakharov believed that Rodzianko's reaction to the Tsar's 'gracious decision' to grant a responsible ministry was 'criminal and shocking', and that the idea of abdication was an 'odious proposal'. Nevertheless, he was 'compelled tearfully' to follow the other generals as it was the best for the country and for the war.⁴⁸ Nicholas submitted and abdicated for himself and his son. Pipes noted that the fact that the abdication manifesto was addressed to Alekseev rather than to the Provisional Government or the country reflected the group that held the most influence over the Tsar.⁴⁹ As Nicholas noted in his diary on 2 March, 'the essence is that in the name of saving Russia and maintaining calm in the army at the front it is necessary to take this step'. Realizing that he could not continue without the support of the key elite groups, he complained that 'all around me is treachery, cowardice, and deceit!'⁵⁰

The crux of the matter for all involved was to halt the unrest. The temporary committee of the Duma was afraid of the revolutionary masses and of social anarchy, and was looking for ways of appeasing and halting the movement. The primary allegiance of Stavka was to the military and to victory in the war, both of which were threatened by events. However, both groups were also aware that the revolution was an opportunity. The Duma had been pressing for more power for years and now had an opportunity to restructure Russia's political system. The generals had been critical of Nicholas's military and political leadership, which could now be changed, and they believed that the enthusiasm for the revolution might rekindle the war effort amid widespread disaffection. The generals wanted a solution that would be favourable to what Grand Duke Nikolai described to Alekseev as their 'biggest problem'—a victorious conclusion to the war.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Shulgin, *Days*, 180–3.

⁴⁷ *FRI*, 72–3.

⁴⁸ Sakharov to Ruzskii, 2/3/17, *FRI*, 74.

⁴⁹ R. Pipes, *The Russian Revolution, 1899–1919* (London, 1990), 316.

⁵⁰ M. Steinberg and V. Khrustalev, *The Fall of the Romanovs* (New Haven, 1995), 107.

⁵¹ 3/3/17, 'Verkhovnoe komandovanie v pervye dni revoliutsii', *Krasnyi arkhiv*, 5 (1924), 219.

At the same time, the new Provisional Government provided a clearer alternative option than the earlier temporary committee. Headed by the non-party liberal, Prince G. E. L'vov, it was dominated by liberals and moderate conservatives, with only one socialist, A. F. Kerenskii. Miliukov became Minister for Foreign Affairs and Guchkov headed the Ministry of War and Navy. As it stated on 3 March, its aim was to create a stable, democratic executive power through introducing civil liberties, political and religious amnesties, the dismantling of the repressive structures of the old regime, and widespread elections to local government. It was provisional because its main task was to organize nationwide elections to a Constituent Assembly, which would determine the future form of government.⁵² There was little in the composition or initial proclamations of the Provisional Government to alienate elites. Its ministers were nationalistic, pro-war, and determined to preserve the unity of Russia. It recognized the need for social reform, but the priority was to restore law and order, and to protect the rights of property owners and individuals. Major reforms would be decided by the Constituent Assembly.⁵³

Yet the revolution had not finished. On 3 March, Rodzianko informed Alekseev that Grand Duke Mikhail's accession to the throne was in doubt because, whilst the crowd might have accepted Aleksei as the nominal tsar, it probably would not accept Mikhail.⁵⁴ Mikhail, facing continued unrest and unable to obtain any guarantees from a largely sceptical government, forestalled any further disputes by refusing to accept the throne. Alekseev was shocked but impotent. He attempted to convene a meeting of other commanders, but some accepted events, some were resigned or unable to leave their localities, whilst others felt that it was pointless. The conference could not be held for several days, by which time it was too late.⁵⁵ Fearing the Soviet and soldiers' movement, the generals could only look to the new authorities to control the unrest and support their own authority. Demands for strong leadership from the new government started to dominate the generals' communications, as did complaints about the interference of the Soviet. On 4 March 1917, Grand Duke Nikolai (appointed Commander-in-Chief by the Tsar before his abdication) ordered the military to swear allegiance to the new government.⁵⁶

Much of this had already occurred before officers at the front heard of events and their surprise took different forms. Some expressed anger at the lack of resistance to the revolution. This grievance was more pronounced in memoirs once subsequent events had been experienced in their entirety. General K. K. Akintievskii questioned the number of troops allocated

⁵² *RPG*, I, 135–6.

⁵³ R. Wade, *The Russian Revolution, 1917* (2 edition: Cambridge, 2005), 58–9 (discussed further in Chapter 3).

⁵⁴ 'Fevral'skaia revoliutsiia 1917 goda', *Krasnyi arkhiv*, 22 (1927), 25–7 [hereafter *FRII*].

⁵⁵ *FRII*, 22–5. ⁵⁶ *FRII*, 45.

to Ivanov to relieve Petrograd, criticized Alekseev's indecisiveness, and disassociated the mass of officers at the front from what he regarded as the 'machinations' of Stavka. Others agreed: a coordinated and decisive show of force at the very beginning would have saved the autocracy.⁵⁷ Some officers resisted passively, delaying or concealing orders and news in the possible hope that something might change, but that was as far as opposition usually went.⁵⁸

Others took a positive stance. One anonymous officer wrote in a letter dated 4 March that there was even 'general rejoicing' amongst officers at the news coming through, even though the abdication had not yet been officially confirmed in his area. He was cautious, though, believing that events could go either way at that stage. The country needed patriotism, intelligence, and talent, but would they get it?⁵⁹ General V. G. Boldyrev (northern front), in his diary on 28 February, questioned the point of sending Ivanov to pacify the capital when there was so much sympathy for the Duma and was himself enthusiastic about the idea of a 'ministry of confidence'. During the next two days, his fear of anarchy and a sense of urgency pushed him towards accepting abdication, but he was clearly worried about its legality and practical implications.⁶⁰ General V. I. Selivachev (south-western front) initially thought that abdication had been forced upon the Tsar, but quickly became resigned to events, happy that the war was continuing and hoping that Russia now had a better chance of success.⁶¹ The situation was complex. General N. A. Epanchin (retired) regretted events, found the actions of the authorities incomprehensible, and faintly condemned Stavka and the Duma for their roles. But he recognized, and sympathized with, the aims that they were working towards in such difficult times—Russia needed a change to succeed militarily and to prevent social unrest. It was just regrettable that the Tsar had to be sacrificed.⁶² Other officers noted that the revolution had swept away the pervading rottenness in the old regime and that reconstruction could now take place.⁶³ Some were simply fearful or ambitious; General M. D. Bonch-Bruевич, who later served the Soviet regime, implied that cooperation was essential, otherwise one risked following the Tsar into the abyss.⁶⁴

⁵⁷ HIA, K.K. Akintievskii papers, 'Memoirs, 1916–1917', 69–73. Also BAR, K.N. Mandrazhi papers, 'Begin at the Beginning', 153; P. Wrangel, *Always with Honour* (New York, 1957), 6.

⁵⁸ A. Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army* (2 volumes: Princeton, 1980–7), I, 218–19.

⁵⁹ 'Iz ofitserskikh pisem s fronta v 1917g.', *Krasnyi arkhiv*, 50–51 (1932), 198.

⁶⁰ Entries on 28/2–3/3/17, 'Iz dnevnika Gen. V. G. Boldyreva', *Krasnyi arkhiv*, 23 (1927), 251–6.

⁶¹ Entries on 3/3–4/3/17, 'Iz dnevnika Gen. V. I. Selivacheva', *Krasnyi arkhiv*, 9 (1925), 108–10.

⁶² N. Epanchin, *Na sluzhbe trekh imperatorov* (Moscow, 1996), 453–8.

⁶³ A. Samoilov, *Dve zhizni* (Moscow, 1958), 172; P. Rodzianko, *Tattered Banners* (London, 1938), 224.

⁶⁴ M. Bonch-Bruевич, *From Tsarist General to Red Army Commander* (Moscow, 1966), 118.

WIDER REACTIONS

Most provincial cities heard about the revolution on 1 March, although news filtered through earlier in some places, whilst others did not hear anything for another couple of days. Events generally echoed Petrograd as local authorities reacted hesitantly. Unrest was common, as were arrests of local officials, but there was very little widespread violence. The naval garrisons were turbulent, as was Tver, but these were the exceptions rather than the norm. Most cities formed some sort of public committee as their first step, which included representatives of all groups, including elites. These committees took control, dismissing governors and police officials. They were usually dominated by liberals, but had much closer links with the newly formed local soviets than the national 'dual power' situation would suggest.⁶⁵

Local noble associations reacted fairly quickly to these developments, holding emergency meetings to discuss events. On 3 March 1917, an assembly of marshals and deputies of the Moscow nobility urged nobles to support the work of the new government in order to quickly restore order, pursue the war to victory, and create a new state structure for Russia.⁶⁶ On 5 March, the liberal newspaper, *Russkiiia vedomosti*, reported that the chairman of the permanent council of the United Nobility, A. D. Samarin, had arrived in Petrograd and was encouraging nobles to support the new government for the sake of the motherland. But, according to the paper, it was not yet possible to determine the mood of the nobility or how they would react officially.⁶⁷ Strictly speaking this was true, but few nobles protested at the formation of the new authorities. Many actually became involved, and this illustrated their unwillingness to support the Tsar. On 9 March, the Petrograd nobility, led by its marshal, Prince V. M. Volkonskii, a known monarchist, sent a message of support to the new government and also sent telegrams across Russia urging local noble associations to follow their lead. The Provisional Government was the 'sole legal authority' in the country and must be supported to achieve a conclusive military victory against the Germans and to renew the country successfully.⁶⁸

Evidence suggests that, if anything, these calls had been pre-empted by spontaneous local actions. On 3 March 1917, representatives from all of the *uezdy* around Tiflis attended a special assembly of nobles in the city. The assembly decided to do whatever was possible to enforce calm in the country and the new state. Two days later, nobles were amongst many in the city who signed a welcoming telegram to the Provisional Government: apparently the new

⁶⁵ Wade, *Russian Revolution*, 49–51. There is more on this in Chapter 3.

⁶⁶ E. Barinova, *Rossiiskoe dvorianstvo v nachale XX veka* (Moscow, 2008), 320.

⁶⁷ *Russkiiia vedomosti*, No. 51, 5 March 1917, a copy is in GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 379, l. 4.

⁶⁸ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 379, l. 5.

government completely satisfied the general mood of the Georgian nobility.⁶⁹ An assembly of *uezd* marshals of the nobility and their deputies in Riazan province on 9 March expressed identical views. The nobility had always honourably served Russia and was prepared to devote all of their forces towards the successful rebirth of their motherland. All nobles, officials and Russians should act to support the new government. A supportive letter was sent to the government and the nobles elected representatives to attend general assemblies in Riazan and to serve on the new provincial executive committee.⁷⁰ Throughout these first weeks after the revolution, assemblies were held across Russia, such as in Nizhnii Novgorod on 9 March, which invariably agreed to support the new government.⁷¹ The only known note of discord came from the nobility in Kazan, which did send greetings to the new government, but hoped that it would be headed by a monarch who could lead Russia to a glorious future.⁷²

The permanent council of the United Nobility held its first post-revolutionary meeting on 9–11 March in Petrograd. Over thirty local representatives were invited to discuss recent events, but many were unable to attend for a variety of reasons, all of which reflected the chaotic nature of this period. The marshal of Kursk province pleaded transport problems; Lifland's marshal feared local unrest and wanted to remain on the spot; Chernigov's marshal had a local meeting of the nobility to attend; Orel's was involved in a new committee of public safety.⁷³ Nevertheless, over twenty managed to attend. The council adopted the same stance as local noble associations. In the meeting on 10 March, Samarin argued that the nobility must not remain passive during current events, but must assist the legal authority, the Provisional Government, in its 'heroic' efforts to restore order. Without order, victory over Germany would be impossible. The council agreed unanimously and urged all Russians to fulfil their duties in order to ease the return of 'normal' conditions. It composed a public appeal, warning that internal unrest only aided the enemy during war and arguing that all Russians, irrespective of their political views, must rally around the Provisional Government as the 'unified legal authority'. The council specifically urged all nobles to recognize the government and to work with it in fulfilling its stated aims. Internal peace was essential to establish a new state structure. This resolution was passed to the new government, disseminated in the press, and distributed locally to all marshals.⁷⁴

Several council members subsequently visited Prince G. E. L'vov, who warmly welcomed their call for marshals of the nobility not to desert their posts. In their report on the visit to the council on 11 March, these members noted

⁶⁹ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 379, l. 82.

⁷⁰ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 379, l. 43.

⁷¹ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 87, l. 14.

⁷² Barinova, *Rossiiskoe dvorianstvo*, 320.

⁷³ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 7, ll. 684–85ob, 692–97.

⁷⁴ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 87, ll. 15–17. The resolution as it appeared in *Russkoe slovo*, No. 56, 11 March 1917, 2, is reprinted in *Revolutsionnoe dvizhenie v Rossii posle sverzheniia samoderzhavii* (Moscow, 1957), 435.

that the government ordered local authorities to continue as normal in so far as this was possible and was about to send out a declaration to this effect. Until the full details of the government's plans for local government were known, the council resolved to urge marshals not to leave their posts. In addition, it encouraged landowners to keep operating their estates, particularly preparations for sowing the land.⁷⁵ A letter sent to provincial marshals was more strongly worded. It not only stressed the need to continue work, but admitted that institutions would change their composition and names. It stated that this must not deter nobles from working to preserve state order and the well-being of the population.⁷⁶

These resolutions can be dismissed as the response of a group that had few other options. By repeatedly stressing that the government was the 'sole' legal authority, nobles demonstrated their fear of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. Nobles did not want further unrest and the Provisional Government offered the best opportunity of restoring law and order. Yet, the fact that several noted the importance of the war and urged support on the basis that the government fulfilled its stated aims, which, ironically, echoed the wording used by the Soviet in its declaration of support, suggests that the new government was not entirely objectionable, and that if it revitalized the war effort, and delivered political reform and civil liberties, many nobles would be genuinely supportive. Sympathetic newspapers, such as *Birzheviia vedomosti*, quickly noted that the United Nobility had been critical of the Tsarist government in December 1916 and that it should not be assumed that nobles would oppose the revolution.⁷⁷

The question of whether the nobility's 'official' reaction to the revolution mattered is best answered by a perceptive article on the resolution in *Nashe slovo*, a socialist newspaper. It noted the exceptional nature of the proclamation, commenting that it never thought it would see the day when the 'reactive' nobility produced such a document. It questioned its sincerity, however. It would be naive to think, the newspaper argued, that reactive 'nests' did not exist within noble circles or that political and class divisions had suddenly disappeared. Yet the immediate implication was that nobles were accepting the new state structure, even referring to the revolution as 'great days'. This was vague, but it meant that nobles were not actively seeking to restore the old regime and were looking to aid the new government. This was a sign that the chaos from which the government had emerged was stabilizing. The article noted that the United Nobility would always be a conservative force, but by

⁷⁵ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 87, ll. 18–21.

⁷⁶ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 379, ll. 24–24ob. The council also sent this letter to nobles in over a dozen provinces that were not affiliated to the United Nobility, emphasizing its importance (ll. 28–31).

⁷⁷ *Birzheviia vedomosti*, No. 13130, 11 March 1917, a copy is in GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 379, l. 6.

recognizing the new government it had reduced the potential conflicts that the new regime would face.⁷⁸ The Soviet's *Izvestiia* used the term 'repentant nobles',⁷⁹ but, either way, just as the inaction of elites had aided the sudden and comprehensive collapse of Tsarism, their acceptance of the new regime removed the possibility of counter-revolution or civil war in the immediate aftermath of February.

Of course, this would only be true if the statements expressed by noble associations reflected the feelings of the majority of the elite. Supporters of the Progressive Bloc in the State Council had issued their own demand for a legislative chamber responsible to the people on 28 February, thereby throwing their lot in with the Duma, albeit without actively participating.⁸⁰ Equally, telegrams supporting the new government arrived from monarchists. On 4 March, S. A. Kel'tsev, president of the Russian Monarchist Society, declared his solidarity with events, welcoming a government that destroyed the dark forces and unified the motherland.⁸¹ V. M. Purishkevich, after his growing criticism of the regime prior to 1917, also welcomed the new government as essential for the motherland. G. G. Zamyslovskii, leader of the far right in the Duma, recognized the new regime's 'legality' and declared that they would obey it.⁸² Members of the imperial family also sent telegrams of support.⁸³ In a controversial and symbolic act, Grand Duke Kirill (the Tsar's first cousin) even marched at the head of his troops to swear loyalty to the new government on 2 March. He argued that his sailors were loyal, but needed strong leadership, and that his actions helped to stifle any unrest.⁸⁴

For many nobles, their first contact with the revolution came in the form of searches, violence, arrests or verbal abuse. This inevitably coloured the way that they viewed events. Princess E. N. Sain-Vitgenshtein, living in Petrograd, wrote a long entry in her diary on 27 February. That day saw the first indication of unrest (no trams, unruly soldiers, shooting, and attacks on officers) and the first rumours of a new government (which varied from Rodzianko forming a responsible government to Protopopov or Alekseev as dictators). She found this 'scary' and 'repulsive' in equal measure. By 2 March, events had turned into a 'scary monster' called revolution; the weakness of the Duma committee was already evident and it seemed clear that nothing better than disorder would emerge. A year later, she reflected on the progression of the revolution in her diary. She argued that she had been relatively liberal in her views and was disgusted by the failures of the Tsar, Rasputin, and events during the war.

⁷⁸ *Nashe slovo*, No. 280, 12 March 1917, a copy is in GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 379, l. 9.

⁷⁹ *Izvestiia*, No. 12, 11 March 1917, 2. ⁸⁰ *FRI*, 18.

⁸¹ *Fevral'skaia revoliutsiia*, 303.

⁸² A. Ivanov, *Poslednie zashchitniki monarkhii* (Moscow, 2006), 154.

⁸³ Six of these are in GARF, f. 337, op. 1, d. 42.

⁸⁴ Grand Duke Cyril, *My Life in Russia's Service* (London, 1939), 207–11.

Her understanding of a revolution, though, clearly went no further than a constitutional monarchy. She admitted that she had been scared by the reality of revolution and her views had evolved in response to this.⁸⁵ Elsewhere, E. I. Lakier described the festival atmosphere in Odessa and, whilst pitying the Tsar and his advisors, enthusiastically supported the Provisional Government. S. P. Rudnev first heard of the revolution when the barrister did not appear in the courtroom in Simbirsk and, although they had no information about the new government, he also described a celebratory mood, whilst clearly unsure whether Russia could survive without a monarchy.⁸⁶

General P. P. Skoropadskii's letters from the south-west front to his wife in Petrograd and her replies illustrate differing and changing views. On 1 March, Skoropadskii wrote that he heard about the disorders and was worried about the consequences for his family. On 7 March, his wife wrote a bitter account of the revolution, noting fear, searches, and arrests. She attacked those who owed their careers and position to the Tsar, but had abandoned the regime or worked against it. She believed that whilst change was expected, the end of the monarchy had not been. His first detailed response on 12 March was more measured. The new government was full of 'sensible' people and Russia should be thankful that they were in power. The end of scoundrels around the Tsar, such as Voeikov, was to be expected. The most likely form of government now was a liberal republic, but this could lead Russia down the path of evolution and a 'thriving' future. He had supported the Tsar, but was now happily supporting the new government and doing his duty for the motherland. He was even considering taking an active role in public life in the future. On 14 March, Skoropadskii was still sympathetic towards the government, but felt that the revolution was still ongoing and was likely to progress to further anarchy—it had not ended as he had hoped. The rapid disintegration of the army and the news in the papers confirmed this and he urged his wife to think about her safety. His wife's thoughts, though, were moving in the other direction. On 18 March, she apologized for her earlier letter and now saw the government as full of 'intelligent' people working 'conscientiously'. The government was focused, however, on the lower classes over officers and elites, whom it should support. She agreed that the revolution was only just starting. By 4 April, Skoropadskii was convinced that the government was doomed. Russia was entering a 'social experiment' that might reap dividends in fifty years' time, but spelled hardship and difficulties for him and his family.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Entries on 27/2-2/3/17, 20/1/18, E. Sain-Vitgenshtein, *Dnevnik 1914–1918* (Paris, 1986), 78–82, 141–50.

⁸⁶ BAR, E.I. Lakier papers, 'Otryvki iz dnevnika, 1917–1920', 1–2; S. Rudnev, *Pri vechernykh ogniaakh: Vospominaniia* (Newtonville, 1978), 34–6.

⁸⁷ '“My poidem po puti vsevozmozhnykh sotsial'nykh eksperimentov”: Fevral'skaia revoliutsiia 1917g. v semeinoi perepiske P. P. Skoropadskogo', *Istoricheskii arkhiv*, 4 (2002), 82–4, and *Istoricheskii arkhiv*, 5 (2002), 140–9.

If a lack of support among elites is crucial in enabling a successful revolution, Russia clearly fulfilled this requirement in February 1917. Tensions had been building for years and reached breaking point during the First World War. Once unrest started, the majority of elites were sufficiently alienated from Nicholas to accept some degree of change. Nevertheless, it is one thing to see splits within the elite as enabling revolution; it is something else to view elites as acting to promote revolution. Lohr argued that Alekseev undertook something close to a *coup d'état* by encouraging the generals to favour abdication on 2 March. The Tsar was willing to resort to suppression, but military leaders hesitated. They saw the Tsar as an obstacle to the effective mobilization of society to fight the war, and 'had come to see the Tsar and the nation as separate, and even in opposition'. A choice existed and the generals chose a programme of civil rights and representative government as offering the best opportunity to rekindle the war effort and preserve national unity. Longley has also argued that officers increasingly saw the regime as preventing progress, but emphasized that their support for the revolution had nothing to do with a desire for democracy per se. Instead, they hoped that democratic change could bring military success, but they acted deliberately and decisively by refusing to defend the regime.⁸⁸

For Pipes, however, elites were reactive. As the unrest gathered momentum, ministers, officers and ordinary nobles were deeply afraid and abandoned the Tsar in an attempt to appease the crowds.⁸⁹ Fear certainly dictated that the main concern of elites was traditional—how best to maintain order. But the answer was new: as the unrest escalated and their fear grew, many actively demanded a 'ministry of confidence', then accepted the abdication of Nicholas, and, finally, became resigned to the end of the monarchy. Pipes saw this fear as a deeply negative feature, paralyzing elite groups such as officers, if not the Duma. This was not strictly true. For many, their fear galvanized them into actions that they had long considered, but not dared to do. The fear of social unrest may have prevented them from acting prior to February, but it now drove them to promote a more democratic Russia. Elites saw the February Revolution as a political revolution and there was a growing recognition that here was the opportunity that many had been waiting for, and they tried make the most of it.

The result appeared to be a government that was acceptable to most elites. Certainly no one was sufficiently angered at events to consider active opposition at this stage. Some noted the immediate power of the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies; others saw dangerous trends in the anarchic violence of the crowd and their disregard for property or person. But neither of these was as

⁸⁸ E. Lohr, 'War and Revolution, 1914–17', in D. Lieven (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Russia. Volume II: Imperial Russia, 1689–1917* (Cambridge, 2006), 658, 664–5; Longley, 'Cossack', 335–6.

⁸⁹ Pipes, *Russian Revolution*, 289.

obvious or as irretrievable in February as they would become later. The Soviet leadership, after all, professed willingness to support and work with the new government, whilst all contemporaries hoped that popular unrest would decrease once the government became established. There was, therefore, a sense of hope and opportunity among elites, as there was among other social group, in the aftermath of the February Revolution.

Elites did not simply accept the revolution, however, but also tried to engage with it over the following months. Initially, this was fuelled by a widespread belief that they had helped to bring it about as much as anyone else. Prince E. N. Trubetskoi (a Kadet) wrote on 5 March that 'everyone has participated in this revolution, everyone has made it: the proletariat, the military, the bourgeoisie, and even the nobility, including the United Nobility'.⁹⁰ Elites did not think that they had been swept away by events, but that their acceptance of the revolution had facilitated its success and they deserved to participate. Equally, their belief that February had ushered in a democratic Russia meant that they were entitled to a role as citizens. These views, however, quickly changed. As political and social instability continued and even increased, it became clear that their vision of Russia's future differed greatly from popular expectations, and their emphasis on order clashed with popular desires for freedom. Ultimately, their belief that February was a political revolution was replaced by the awareness that Russians also saw it as an opportunity to restructure Russian society. Increasingly, the involvement of elites became a matter of necessity rather than desire if they were to defend their interests and position, and combat the growing power and influence of the popular movement.

⁹⁰ *Rech'*, No. 55, 5 March 1917.

3

Nobles

The United Nobility, local noble associations and individual nobles may have rushed to proclaim support for the Provisional Government, but questions quickly surfaced about their role in the new regime. The meeting of the permanent council of the United Nobility on 9–11 March 1917 devoted most of its time to this issue and was broadly positive. At no time did it stop to consider whether the nobility did have a role to play. Instead, the focus was on how nobles could help the new government to restore order and a ‘normal life’ back to Russia—essential during war—and how marshals of the nobility would fit into the new system of commissars, and what could be done to support landowners.¹ This optimism, however, was short lived. By April, a barrage of local reports highlighted a multitude of problems and attention gradually shifted to how the nobility could survive as a social group. The United Nobility became mired in discussions over possible solutions and increasingly ineffective as 1917 progressed. This encouraged many nobles to look away from this estate-based organization towards ‘professional’ unions that sought to gain broader support for key concerns such as landownership and private property.

THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT

At first, however, nobles were confident that they could play a role in the new regime. After its creation on 2 March 1917, the Provisional Government declared that it would build a new state based on civil liberties and the abolition of restrictions based on class, religion, and nationality, and that it would immediately prepare for the convocation of an elected Constituent Assembly that would determine the future form of government. Similar elections would determine the composition of organs of local self-government.² None of this was entirely objectionable to the nobility, although the intention was to abolish their privileges. A political amnesty, alongside concessions to the soldiers in terms of discipline and not removing ‘revolutionary’ units from Petrograd, threatened future social stability, but this was a liberal and democratic political programme that promised to involve all social groups in restructuring the country.

¹ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 87, ll. 15–21.

² *RPG*, I, 135–6.

Furthermore, the government never formally abolished tsarist social estates. For many, the complete abolition of these was a vital part of the revolution and a clear sign that equal rights had been successfully introduced. The newspaper of the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, *Izvestiia*, argued that the mere existence of nobles, peasants and others demonstrated continuity with the past. It viciously attacked the government's continuation of the table of ranks and its practice of referring to appointees by their old imperial titles. Russian democracy, it believed, needed to abolish both estates and the table, just as the French Revolution had done.³ The government responded partially. The table of ranks was discontinued but not abolished on 16 March. Awards and decorations outside of the military were ended, as were restrictions based on religion or nationality. Otherwise, the vast majority of the privileges of the nobility were destroyed by local government and legal reforms as the year progressed.⁴

Nevertheless, officially, social estates remained. In response to queries from nobles about whether the noble estate's self-government would end and their associations' property abolished, the council of the United Nobility assured its members on 10 April that it had been informed that the government did not intend to abolish the nobility completely, whilst nothing had been decided about its property. This issue would be the preserve of the Constituent Assembly.⁵ As social unrest grew and an unfavourable outcome looked likely at the assembly, the council started considering the possibility of abolition from May 1917. Equally, the restructured Provisional Government on 8 July restated its pledge to abolish estates alongside civil ranks and orders as part of implementing civil equality across the country.⁶ Yet a legal commission to investigate liquidating the institutions of estates prior to the Constituent Assembly was only established on 27 July in response to pressure from below.⁷ The nobility continued to exist legally, along with its property, until the October Revolution.

The unwritten ideology that underpinned the new government also encouraged nobles. Of the twelve ministers in the first cabinet, five Kadets sat alongside two Octobrists, a Progressist, a member of the Centre party, two non-party liberals, and just one socialist. This largely mirrored the various ministries of confidence proposed by the Progressive Bloc (eight of the twelve were members of the Fourth Duma). Headed by a non-party, liberal noble, Prince G. E. L'vov, who also became Minister of Internal Affairs, the cabinet's dominant figures were P. N. Miliukov (Kadet and foreign affairs), A. I. Guchkov (Octobrist and war), and A. F. Kerenskii (socialist and justice). The government was nationalistic and committed to the war; it accepted the need for social and economic reforms (including land redistribution), but believed that these could wait until the end

³ *Izvestiia*, No. 13, 12 March 1917, 4, reprinted in *RPG*, I, 210–11.

⁴ *RPG*, I, 166–7, 211–12.

⁵ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 379, ll. 60–60ob.

⁶ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 340, l. 4; *RPG*, III, 1387.

⁷ *RPG*, I, 215.

of the war; and, although promoting civil rights, it desired to maintain the territorial unity of the Russian state. February was seen as a political revolution, achieving a parliamentary political system that needed to be secured rather than pushing ahead with major social change. Any change, when it came, had to take place legally, respecting the right of private property. The emphasis was on restoring social order, and this increased as the weeks passed.⁸

The government saw itself as supporting 'state' interests rather than the class-based policies of the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, which it considered harmful to Russia, especially given the threat posed by the war and the potential for further social unrest. Thus, ministers were able to introduce civil liberties, take measures to improve the economy, and help the country defend itself against external enemies. They could not, however, act in 'party' interests by favouring certain types of economic reform over other types, and so on. Their 'essential task' was to nurture political democracy, not to resolve Russia's future political, economic or social order.⁹ They would not suppress debate, but act as a mediator in an active and contentious political world. These ideals were not always met, and the government was rarely viewed as a beneficial neutral force, but everyday work frequently involved negotiation between the numerous social and professional institutions, unions and other organizations that sprang up after February, as well as entrenched ministerial interests carried over from Tsarism. In doing this, the government became committed to practices that were more corporate than democratic, as one historian has termed it.¹⁰ Inevitably, as 1917 progressed, certain social groups and institutions gained predominance over others, but the basic point remained—the government was convinced that for the new regime to succeed it had to be based on the involvement of *all* political and social groups. This was not misplaced faith in the people,¹¹ but practical politics: lacking electoral legitimacy, the government needed to involve all sectors of society to achieve its goals.

The Provisional Government did not envisage the involvement of absolutely everyone. It may have been keen to limit the extent of social reform, but it still saw itself as a 'revolutionary' government representing a distinct break with Tsarism. As part of this, it moved quickly to investigate the abuses of the old regime. On 4 March, an extraordinary investigative commission was formed to examine the activities of former ministers and senior officials,¹² whilst similar commissions were later established to investigate various threats to the revolution. Former

⁸ R. Wade, *The Russian Revolution, 1917* (2 edition, Cambridge, 2005), 58–9.

⁹ W. Rosenberg, 'Social Mediation and State Construction(s) in Revolutionary Russia', *Social History*, 19, 2 (1994), 175.

¹⁰ D. Orlovsky, 'Corporatism or Democracy: The Russian Provisional Government of 1917', in A. Weiner (ed.), *Landscaping the Human Garden* (Stanford, 2003), 70–1.

¹¹ As implied by L. Schapiro, 'The Political Thought of the First Provisional Government', in R. Pipes (ed.), *Revolutionary Russia* (Cambridge, MA, 1968), 113; and O. Figes, *A People's Tragedy* (London, 1996), 355–7.

¹² *RPG*, I, 193–4.

ministers, police chiefs, and officials were arrested and interrogated. Particular attention was paid to the activities of the far right before February, whilst the activities of monarchist groups were monitored throughout 1917, with numerous reports, press cuttings, and other evidence collected. Members of the Union of Russian People and the Union of the Archangel Michael were particularly susceptible to searches and arrests, with many undergoing lengthy investigations that were inherited by an equally suspicious Bolshevik regime after October.¹³

Monarchism had been in crisis prior to 1917, with widespread criticism of Nicholas, corrupt leaders, and declining public appeal. The enthusiasm for democracy that greeted the revolution discredited it overnight. S. A. Kel'tsev, president of the Russian Monarchist Society, and G. G. Zamyslovskii, leader of the far right in the Duma, had little option but to recognize the new regime. Both were still arrested shortly afterwards, as were many other prominent monarchists, whilst Zamyslovskii's financial links to the tsarist police were subjected to a Duma inquiry.¹⁴ The main far right newspapers, *Golos rusi*, *Russkoe znamia*, and *Zemshchina*, were closed by the Soviet. The conservative *Novoe vremia* only avoided the same fate by expressing support for the Soviet.¹⁵ Desperately seeking to avoid arrest, some monarchists denied their membership of targeted organizations or switched allegiances to the Kadets or non-party groups. Some were genuinely disillusioned, alienated from Nicholas, but with no credible replacement for him.¹⁶ In late July, N. E. Markov, the leader of the Union of Russian People, the largest organization, admitted to interrogators that his union was 'completely destroyed', with its branches burned and its leaders either in hiding or arrested.¹⁷

In some respects, therefore, nobles had few alternatives to the Provisional Government's ideology after February. But there is no doubt that nobles could sympathize with most of the government's programme, especially the continued war effort and defence of private property. Equally, nobles had always viewed themselves as loyal and impartial servants of the motherland, and appreciated the government's insistence that it was above 'class interests' and would only act in the interests of the Russian state. Nevertheless, the revolution had laid down a challenge. Holding the positions of power under Tsarism, nobles were obvious targets in a spontaneous, popular revolution. At the same time, it was impossible to engineer a complete and immediate break with the old ruling apparatus

¹³ GARF, f. 1074, op. 1, d. 18, ll. 1–41; d. 25, ll. 44–55, 61–74.

¹⁴ *Vestnik vremennago pravitel'stva*, No. 12, 18 March 1917, 2.

¹⁵ *Izvestiia*, No. 9, 8 March 1917, 6.

¹⁶ Iu. Kir'ianov, *Pravye partii v Rossii, 1911–1917* (Moscow, 2001), 420–3; K. Maksimov and S. Shalagina, *Konservativno-monarkhicheskoe dvizhenie v Ufimskoi gubernii (1905–1917gg.)* (Ufa, 2007), 147.

¹⁷ 'Dopros N. E. Markova. 24 iuliia 1917 god', in P. Shchegolev (ed.), *Padenie tsarskogo rezhima* (7 volumes: Leningrad, 1924–7), VI, 191.

and nobles could still wield influence. Their fate, the United Nobility argued, depended on whether nobles could retain their official positions nationally and locally, and the body directed its initial efforts in this direction.

On 10 March, the permanent council of the United Nobility urged nobles not to remain passive, but to assist national and local institutions to restore 'normal life' by any means possible. Nobles must be involved as 'true servants and defenders' of the state. Later that day, a delegation visited the Prime Minister, L'vov, who warmly welcomed the council's plans to urge nobles not to desert their posts, from *uezd* marshals of the nobility upwards. There had been changes: governors and other figures from the old regime had been removed and further change was inevitable. This prompted the council to request a new outline of the rights and obligations of marshals of the nobility but, for the time being, government institutions were to continue as before and nobles would remain in post.¹⁸

However, nobles were victims of enthusiastic and opportunistic searches that were part of the revolution in Petrograd and elsewhere. A few were arrested, especially those who had held prominent official positions under the old regime or were well-known reactionaries. Some of these arrests were officially sanctioned, but most were initiated by groups of soldiers or others airing grievances or seeking revenge. P. L. Bark, the last Minister of Finance, was the victim of a drunken search led by an aggrieved former footman who placed a gun to his wife's head. The arrest was not sanctioned, but Bark remained interned for several days for 'his personal safety', joining former ministers such as Prince N. D. Golitsyn, A. D. Protopopov and Prince V. N. Shakhovskoi.¹⁹ Another former Minister of Finance, Count V. N. Kokovtsov, was threatened by searchers looking for firearms, had his cars 'requisitioned', and was then arrested at a bank. An onlooker claimed that Kokovtsov had stolen millions from the state and was now withdrawing it. He was eventually freed and was not alone in trying to find guards to protect his house.²⁰ Most arrests were solely based on the target's membership of a privileged class and position under the old regime, and most victims were quickly released.

All ministers and those of a similar rank in court positions, and military governors, were removed during the February Revolution, but there was continuity in personnel below ministerial level. A survey of 146 deputy ministers, directors of departments, and other high-ranking officials argued that only seventy-eight (53.4%) were removed between February and October and that forty-four (30.1%) were removed during the first month.²¹ The Ministries of Internal Affairs and War saw the largest degree of change as bulwarks

¹⁸ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 87, ll. 15–21.

¹⁹ BAR, P.L. Bark papers, 'Untitled Memoirs', Ch. 27, 4–26.

²⁰ Count Kokovtsov, *Out of My Past* (Stanford, 1935), 481–5.

²¹ S. Kulikov, 'Vremennoe pravitel'stvo i vysshiaia tsarskaia biurokratiia', *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review*, 24, 1–2 (1997), 78.

of the old order, whilst specialized ministries (agriculture, finance, trade, and industry) saw experienced old regime professionals remain. In the Ministry of Internal Affairs, only two deputy heads of department survived. Eleven 'outsiders' were appointed to senior positions from backgrounds in law, local government, the *zemstva*, and the economy. The new Deputy Minister, Prince S. D. Urusov, was a former governor with well known liberal views.²² Many new appointees had been tsarist officials in some capacity as experience and knowledge was highly rated. Otherwise, appointments were based on personal connections and shared career experiences as under Tsarism, with the preferred background now in the *zemstva*, Duma, political parties or War-Industries Committee.²³

Another study noted that twenty of the thirty-eight individuals (52.6%) who held ministerial posts in 1917 were nobles, whilst forty-three of ninety-two deputy ministers (46.7%) were known to be nobles.²⁴ Of course, some were noble only by birth, with long-standing socialist convictions, but many nobles continued in their posts, and some actively desired to work for the Provisional Government. The bureaucratic elite was deeply disillusioned during the last few years of Tsarism and believed that reform was long overdue. As Prince N. D. Zhevakov in the Holy Synod stated, around 90% of all civil servants were 'revolutionaries' in that they supported the criticisms and demands of the Duma, Progressive Bloc, and the press.²⁵ Many sympathized with the ideals of the new government or, at the very least, did not find these ideals sufficiently objectionable to prevent them from serving. In true aristocratic tradition, many saw abandoning their posts as cowardice at a time when Russia was threatened from all sides. It was their 'duty' to serve the motherland, to prevent excesses, and to help fight the war against Germany. Prince M. V. Golitsyn, a Kadet member of Moscow Town Duma, wrote that he served Russia, as everyone should have done, helping to put the country back on track after nearly twenty-five years of Nicholas II.²⁶ More practically, as V. D. Nabokov (head of the Government's Chancellery) observed of the State Council, many needed their salaries!²⁷

²² H. White, 'Civil Rights and the Provisional Government', in O. Crisp and L. Edmondson (eds.), *Civil Rights in Imperial Russia* (Oxford, 1989), 295.

²³ D. Orlovsky, 'Political Clientelism in Russia: The Historical Perspective', in T. Rigby and B. Harasymiw (eds.), *Leadership Selection and Patron-Client Relations in the USSR and Yugoslavia* (London, 1983), 195–6.

²⁴ V. Izmozik and N. Tikhonova, 'Vremennoe pravitel'stvo: Sotsial'no-politicheskaia kharakteristika', *Iz glubiny vremen*, 8 (1997), 8.

²⁵ N. Zhevakov, *Vospominaniia* (2 volumes: Munich, 1923–8), I, 207.

²⁶ HIA, Golitsyn papers, box 3, M. Golitsyn, '1917 god. Fevral'skaia revoliutsiia i vremennoe pravitel'stvo', 4.

²⁷ V. Medlin and S. Parsons (eds.), *V. D. Nabokov and the Russian Provisional Government, 1917* (New Haven and London, 1976), 65–7.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was headed by P. N. Miliukov, with Baron B. E. Nol'de as his deputy. Former senior figures such as S. D. Sazonov and N. V. Charikov offered their services. The latter saw the new regime as patriotic and expected the 'best results' in the war.²⁸ V. K. Korostovets served as a link between the minister and the ministry, commenting that the work was 'particularly interesting'.²⁹ It was easy for nobles to empathize with Miliukov. A liberal critic of the tsarist government, he was a prominent supporter of a monarchy, in favour of the war, and a staunch defender of Russia's national interests. These beliefs convinced Count B. A. Tatishchev to continue heading the chancellery of the ministry despite the 'endless tragedy' of the February Revolution. He knew Korostovets and found the ministry full of familiar faces, representatives of the 'old regime and the nobility', whilst even new appointees were 'typical representatives of tsarist Russia', albeit of a liberal persuasion.³⁰

After the government, the two other influential bodies in tsarist Russia where nobles were prominent, the State Council and the Duma, were left in limbo after February. The State Council instantly lost significance as it had no democratic basis. Its departments were not consulted by the Provisional Government, although a few individuals were involved in specialized areas such as judicial, educational, and diplomatic matters. Meetings of elected members continued periodically until the body was finally abolished in October.³¹ After playing a crucial role in the revolution, the State Duma lost influence as its prominent members gravitated towards the government or the Soviet. Nevertheless, few saw any need to disband it: after all, it remained Russia's only elected national body. The temporary committee, formed during the revolution, directed the Duma's activities, meeting every few days in the first months. Initially, as committee members left to join the new government, only eight were left, but it gradually grew again. By June, it comprised twenty individuals, primarily from conservative and liberal parties. In some areas, it worked in tandem with the government. It dispatched over seventy Duma members as 'commissars' to various ministries and regions to help deal with specific issues throughout March and April, although these then reported back to the government.³² The Duma as a whole met occasionally in March and April, but the growing political and social crisis

²⁸ N. Tcharykow, *Glimpses of High Politics* (London, 1931), 298.

²⁹ V. Korostovetz, *Seed and Harvest* (London, 1931), 278.

³⁰ HIA, A.B. Tatishchev papers, box 4, 'Na rubezhe dvukh mirov: Vospominaniia Borisa Alekseevicha Tatishcheva 1876–1917–1949', 248–52.

³¹ V. Demin, *Verkhniia palata Rossiiskoi imperii 1906–1917* (Moscow, 2006), 120–2.

³² D. Oznobishin, 'Vremennyi komitet gosudarstvennoi dumy i vremennoe pravitel'stvo', *Istoricheskie zapiski*, 75 (1965), 273–94; A. Nikolaev, 'Kommissary vremennogo komiteta gosudarstvennoi dumy v aprele 1917g.: Personal'nyi sostav', *Iz glubiny vremen*, 8 (1997), 26–45; F. Gaida, 'The February Revolution and the Fate of the State Duma', *Russian Studies in History*, 41, 4 (2003), 31–51.

prompted weekly 'private meetings' of members from 22 April. They increasingly saw themselves as elected representatives of the people acting in the interests of the state, rather than specific social groups or parties.³³ After Guchkov and Miliukov resigned in April, they returned to the Duma, which became a forum for growing criticism of the direction of the revolution.

The new coalition government of liberals and socialists in May 1917 had little impact on levels of continuity. There were changes in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Nol'de resigned along with Miliukov, whilst Korostovets felt that it was pointless serving a powerless government dominated by 'demagogues' such as Kerenskii.³⁴ Tatishchev was also uncomfortable serving a government and country that was drifting further to the left, and felt less affinity to Miliukov's successor, M. I. Tereshchenko. He saw Tereshchenko as a leading 'revolutionary' on a par with Kerenskii, a term he never used in reference to Miliukov. Nonetheless, Tatishchev felt that it was his duty to continue and he remained until the October Revolution.³⁵ According to Nabokov, many only remained in their posts after May as they recognized that there were few suitable replacements and their departure would only worsen the situation.³⁶ Kerenskii, who replaced L'vov as the head of the government in July 1917, apparently wanted fewer former tsarist figures in government and more 'public figures', but in practice also proved unwilling to dispense with experienced senior officials.³⁷ There had been continuity under him in the Ministry of Justice. N. N. Tagantsev described how only the personnel at the very top changed (for the worse, as they lacked experience and talent). He described his own work in the ministry as 'very interesting' and he ended up working alongside his father.³⁸

The government even seemed to remain committed to former tsarist officials who had been dismissed. On 7 July, after his resignation, L'vov wrote to Kerenskii urging him to fulfil the government's obligation to those officials who had been replaced by others whose views were more in accordance with the new regime, but who had done nothing wrong themselves. The government had promised to honour their pensions, but nothing had been received. The issue was certainly investigated extensively, examining former legislation and debating possible payments for different ministries. The principle appeared fine, but questions were raised over the cost and the practicalities, given that officials

³³ A. Drezen (ed.), *Burzhuaziia i pomeshchiki v 1917 godu: Chastnye soveshchaniia chlenov Gosudarstvennoi Dumi* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1932), iv. This volume covers the meetings from 4 May to 20 August.

³⁴ Korostovetz, *Seed and Harvest*, 278.

³⁵ HIA, Tatishchev papers, box 4, 'Na rubezhe', 255–6.

³⁶ Medlin and Parsons, *Nabokov*, 89.

³⁷ Kulikov, 'Vremennoe pravitel'stvo', 80; Orlovsky, 'Political Clientelism', 196. Socialists and left-leaning liberals did increasingly gain control over important posts; Izmozik and Tikhonova, 'Vremennoe pravitel'stvo', 4.

³⁸ N. Tagantsev, 'Iz moikh vospominanii (detstvo. Iunost')', in *1917 god v sud'bach Rossii i mira. Fevral'skaia revoliutsiia: Ot novykh istochnikov k novomu osmysleniiu* (Moscow, 1997), 246–9.

had been dismissed before they would have normally been eligible for a pension and with differing lengths of service.³⁹

The nobility's bigger problem was the declining influence of bureaucrats. Mostly, nobles were ready to aid the new government, whilst initially it was keen to utilize their experience wherever possible, excepting the obvious need for ministerial change and the removal of outright reactionaries. However, as 1917 progressed, political expediency and the need to appear in tune with popular demands took priority over serious reform, and the influence of the bureaucratic elite declined.⁴⁰ The February Revolution, then, did not see an immediate and decisive break with the past, but heralded a steady erosion of the links between the government and the bureaucratic elite, which undermined noble influence in the long term.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The declining role of the nobility was also apparent in provincial Russia. On 11 March, the permanent council of the United Nobility sent a letter to all provincial marshals of the nobility, even non-members (demonstrating its importance), to distribute amongst nobles in the provinces. It urged nobles to serve the new government and continue their work in order to maintain calm and stability. The letter noted that circumstances were difficult and warned nobles that state and local institutions might change their form, and that local officials might also change, but that nobles must look beyond this and use their experience for the good of the motherland.⁴¹

As news of events in Petrograd filtered through, provincial towns slowly responded. In Samara, the Kadet leaders of the city's Duma instigated a 'Temporary City Committee of Safety' on 1 March to preserve order. They asked public organizations and political parties for representatives, hoping for a public show of unity. On 2 March, delegates from twenty-eight public organizations (including nobles) formed a new committee under Kadet leadership. A local soviet was created, but unlike the centre, where the soviet had remained outside of government, ten of its members joined the committee, which expanded to around 200 individuals. It assumed governmental functions, freeing political prisoners, arresting tsarist administrators (including the governor on 4 March), dissolving the police, and organizing a local militia. Meanwhile, the soviet was independently negotiating with local businesses about workers' demands, such as the eight-hour day and higher wages. As the committee expanded, an executive committee was formed consisting of seven Kadets, five Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, and three Socialist Revolutionaries. A presidium was also formed,

³⁹ GARF, f. 1778, op. 1, d. 28, ll. 1–1ob (L'vov's letter), 4–5ob, 9–31, 55–58 (various reports).

⁴⁰ Kulikov, 'Vremennoe pravitel'stvo', 81–3.

⁴¹ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 379, ll. 24–24ob.

with Kadets holding five of the seven positions. The liberals, then, were dominant, but not exclusively so. The committee and the local soviet remained distinct, often interested in different issues, but their leadership was united in the executive committee to a degree not seen nationally until the coalition government in May. The committee nominated the Kadet, K. N. In'kov, chair of the provincial *zemstvo*, as the new provincial commissar and N. V. Osorgin as his deputy, the Kadet deputy of the *zemstvo*.⁴²

Several points are worth drawing out of this example. Firstly, from the Volga to Siberia to Moscow, this situation was broadly replicated across provincial Russia. The tsarist regime provided little resistance and the same coexistence of committees and soviets emerged.⁴³ In her detailed study of the Volga region, Kabytova outlined similar scenes in Kazan, Simbirsk, Penza, and Saratov, although local conditions did lead to variations.⁴⁴ In Kazan, Saratov, and Simbirsk, local tsarist forces made a greater effort to suppress news of the revolution than in Samara. In Samara, liberals were the first to organize, but socialists were quicker in Kazan and Saratov, whilst liberals were weak in Penza and Simbirsk. Invariably, governors, police, and military commanders were arrested, along with land captains, monarchists, and other prominent elements of the old regime. There were over 300 such arrests in Saratov, for example. Most suffered little physical harm and were gradually released over subsequent months.⁴⁵ There was occasional violence, though, such as that involving two governors, A. F. Girs in Nizhnii Novgorod and N. G. fon Biunting in Tver. The former escaped due to the intervention of local socialists, but the latter was less fortunate. Biunting tried to suppress news of the revolution and threatened repression if his orders were not fulfilled. The news, however, was already on the streets and he inflamed a volatile situation. He was brutally murdered and violence continued until 3 March in one of the most turbulent episodes of the revolution.⁴⁶

The early signs of future instability are also worth emphasizing. Lieutenant-Colonel L. N. Novosil'tsev, a Kadet member of the Duma, was on leave in Kaluga as the revolution started. As news filtered through in the evening of 1 March 1917, the town authorities, the mayor, *uezd* marshals of the nobility, and other

⁴² N. Kabytova, *Vlast' i obshchestvo Rossiiskoi provintsii v revoliutsii 1917 goda* (Samara, 2002), 30–2.

⁴³ See A. Grunt, *Moskva 1917-i: Revoliutsiia i kontrrevoliutsiia* (Moscow, 1976), 46–59; D. Raleigh, *Revolution on the Volga: Saratov in 1917* (Ithaca, 1986), 75–116; M. Shilovskii, *Politicheskie protsessy v Sibiri v period sotsial'nykh kataklizmov, 1917–1920gg.* (Novosibirsk, 2003), 33–8.

⁴⁴ Kabytova, *Vlast'*, 33–9.

⁴⁵ Raleigh, *Revolution on the Volga*, 115. Some received pensions; E. Baranov, 'Gubernskie komissary vremennogo pravitel'stva', *Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta. Seriya XII: Pravo*, 5 (1974), 62.

⁴⁶ R. Robbins, *The Tsar's Viceroy: Russian Provincial Governors in the Last Years of the Empire* (Ithaca, 1987), 234–9; H. Phillips, '“A Bad Business” — The February Revolution in Tver', *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review*, 23, 2 (1996), 130–41.

administrative figures gathered in a meeting. No one knew what to do. On 2 March, the city's Duma gathered, along with representatives of various groups and institutions, and elected a committee to coordinate the town's response. Meanwhile, socialist forces in the city were meeting elsewhere. On 3 March, news of the abdication arrived, the commander of the city's garrison was summarily arrested and replaced, whilst the governor openly stated to Novosil'tsev that he was happy to recognize any authority that restored order and that he feared his own arrest. Novosil'tsev's account demonstrates two identities. As a Kadet, he seemed happy with the new authorities emerging, which initially tried to unite various interest groups, and were dominated by liberals and a liberal sentiment. Yet there was a lack of direction from above and the emergence of soviets was worrying, although he commented mainly on the national version. As an officer, though, he was more concerned. He quickly discerned the implications of the soldiers' mutiny. More will be said about this later, but suffice to say that an 'epidemic of arrests' saw various senior officers in the town arrested, including himself, which he saw as having major implications for the birth of a democratic country.⁴⁷

The final point concerns the composition of new provincial authorities. The committee in Samara anticipated official instructions by recommending the chair of the provincial *zemstvo* as the new provincial commissar. The Provisional Government officially removed governors and vice-governors on 5 March. The chairmen of provincial *zemstva* were to become the provincial commissars of the new government, taking over the duties and powers of the old governors. Similarly, the chairmen of *uezd zemstva* would become *uezd* commissars. On 20 March, the government indicated that it intended to extend these principles further into rural Russia. *Zemstva* would be introduced into the 9,000 or so *volosti*. *Volost* committees would be formed by *uezd* commissars to administer *volosti* until formal elections were held. The government recommended that 'local landowners and all the intellectual forces of the village' should be involved.⁴⁸ Nabokov later argued that existing governors would have provided a better, more experienced alternative than *zemstva* figures. The revolutionary mood forced change, leading to inexperienced and, paradoxically, sometimes more reactionary appointments, which exacerbated social unrest.⁴⁹ It was a hard choice: governors were the Tsar's representatives and as such were incompatible with the revolution, but their replacements were equally unrepresentative and often less capable.

The policy helped nobles retain influence, however. In Samara, In'kov and Osorgin were both *uezd* marshals of the nobility as well as *zemstva* leaders. On 2 March, the provincial marshal of the nobility, S. N. Postnikov, had called a meeting of *uezd* marshals in the province, along with their deputies. In'kov and

⁴⁷ GARF, f. 6422, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 107–14.

⁴⁸ RPG, I, 243–4.

⁴⁹ Medlin and Parsons, *Nabokov*, 61–3. Schapiro argued that change took precedence over order, obedience, and discipline with fatal consequences later: Schapiro, 'Political Thought', 109.

Osorgin attended this meeting on 5 March, which declared its support for the new government in the 'struggle with the obsolete authorities' and the creation of a 'strong and stable Russian state'. On the same day, they formally became officials of the new regime, whilst still part of the 'obsolete' structure of the old regime. Samara nobles also nominated two delegates, including Postnikov, to represent their interests on the new city committee. Most of the province's *uezd* marshals, meanwhile, entered similar committees at *uezd* level.⁵⁰

It has been suggested that the government deliberately extended the powers of the *zemstva*, elevated *zemstva* chairmen, and encouraged noble involvement to gain their support in the localities.⁵¹ If so, the government clearly overestimated the importance of the nobility and misunderstood the popular mood. On 25 March 1917, the permanent council of the United Nobility surveyed its members, requesting information on how nobles were faring in local government, whether local marshals of the nobility could carry out their functions, and whether nobles were actually able to participate in newly formed committees.⁵² The first responses were discussed at the next meeting on 20–1 April 1917 and defy easy categorization.⁵³ Covering all areas of the country, these reports demonstrated that nobles were experiencing just about every set of conditions possible. If there was a typical position, it was probably similar to that described in Tver and Kaluga provinces. According to the provincial marshal, all *uezd* marshals in Tver were fulfilling their existing functions on 6 April, but they had a peripheral role in the new committees; most operated without noble participation.⁵⁴ The provincial marshal in Kaluga also noted that *uezd* marshals had been superseded by new bodies, but painted a more complex picture. By early April in Kaluga, several *uezd* marshals had been removed from their posts, one under threat of arrest. One, however, had become a *uezd* commissar, whilst one had become chair of the local executive committee and another was a member. He also provided a list of the twelve *uezd* commissars as of 4 April that was more positive: eight were nobles, two were peasants, one was a merchant, and one was a bureaucrat. To be sure, only one was a *uezd* marshal as stated, but one was candidate and another had been a marshal.⁵⁵ The list demonstrates that the order of 5 March promoting the chairmen of *uezd zemstva* had largely been implemented in Kaluga. Eight of the twelve chaired their respective *uezd zemstvo*, whilst another two were members (two lack information). And, of

⁵⁰ O. Kurseeva, 'Bor'ba korporativnykh organizatsii dvorianstva protiv krest'ianskogo dvizhenia' in G. Gerasimenko et al. (eds.), *Krest'ianstvo povolzh'ia v oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii i grazhdanskoi voine* (Kuibyshev, 1983), 51–2.

⁵¹ W. Rosenberg, 'The Zemstvo in 1917 and its fate under Bolshevik Rule', in T. Emmons and W. Vucinich (eds.), *The Zemstvo in Russia: An Experiment in Local Self-Government* (Cambridge, 1982), 387.

⁵² GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 379, ll. 37–37ob.

⁵³ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 87, ll. 23–36.

⁵⁴ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 379, ll. 66–67.

⁵⁵ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 379, ll. 61–64ob. By 9 April, two commissars (including a noble) had been arrested; l. 71.

course, the majority of chairs of *zemstva* were nobles, even if they were not nobles who were marshals. This may have been the problem for the provincial marshal in that these nobles were more liberally inclined than marshals. What is clear is that marshals lacked any kind of authority within the new structures of power. The government permitted marshals to remain, but refused to allow the Ministry of Internal Affairs to ratify elected individuals as before, thereby trying to disassociate itself from marshals.⁵⁶ This half-hearted solution must have been designed to appease both the nobility and the people, but resulted in various solutions locally, whilst emphasizing the piecemeal nature of government reforms.

Undoubtedly, the continued presence of tsarist elements in local positions of power fostered popular suspicions and provided a focus for growing popular discontent at the progress of the revolution. On the one hand, many dubious characters slipped through the net. A former land captain, N. N. Davydov, became *uezd* commissar in Kozlovsk (Tambov province) and, according to a *volost* executive committee, ruled tyrannically, showing no interest in the views of society.⁵⁷ Such cases may have been the exception, but popular opinion certainly felt that old elements, mostly represented by *zemstva* figures, were present in sufficient numbers to hold back the revolution.⁵⁸ On the other hand, the major theme of the revolution was democratization. Initially, the government was usually able to enforce its order that *zemstva* chairman should become its representatives locally. But there was some resistance and this gathered pace as the weeks passed and the gulf grew between the mass movement and the government. Ordinary people invariably distrusted appointed officials. On 27 April, the Ministry of Internal Affairs finally recognized that *zemstva* chairmen had 'never enjoyed the confidence of the people' and did not enjoy popular support as commissars. Appointment clashed with popular understandings of democracy and was seen to encroach on new liberties.⁵⁹ As new local committees and soviets emerged, it was hardly surprising that alternative candidates would be elected as commissars. This was first evident in *uezdy*, where government authority was weakest, but quickly transferred to provinces. Within weeks, commissars were replaced by more 'democratic' individuals, usually socialists, who better reflected the popular mood. By late March, only twenty-three of fifty-five provincial commissars and 177 of 439 *uezd* commissars had been *zemstva* chairmen, and in some regions, such as the Volga, there were virtually none.⁶⁰ In Samara, In'kov

⁵⁶ V. Startsev, *Vnutrenniaia politika vremennogo pravitel'stva: Pervogo sostava* (Leningrad, 1980), 212.

⁵⁷ *Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie v Tambovskoi gubernii, 1917–1918: Dokumenty i materialy* (Moscow, 2003), 27.

⁵⁸ See, for e.g., the complaint by the 1st Infantry Regiment on 23 April; *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Rossii v aprele 1917g. (aprel'skii krizis)* (Moscow, 1958), 521.

⁵⁹ *RPG*, I, 247.

⁶⁰ A. Andreev, *Mestnye sovety i organy burzhuaiznoi vlasti (1917g.)* (Moscow, 1983), 110.

was replaced by his deputy Osorgin, who was in turn replaced by a Socialist Revolutionary.⁶¹

Institutions were also democratized, with urban bodies leading the way. On 6 March, Petrograd's City Duma resolved to hold new elections. These were not held until August, but it immediately accepted representatives from the Soviet and political groups, and, in April, from the new district Dumas in the city. On 16 March, Saratov's Duma accepted forty new representatives, whilst Samara permitted sixty new deputies on 21 March. These new deputies ranged from peasants, workers, and soldiers, to industrialists, homeowners, civil servants, doctors, and teachers. Similar moves were made in *uezd* towns.⁶² By 1 July 1917, on the basis of information gathered from twenty-six provinces by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 287 of 414 urban Dumas had altered their composition, five were re-elected, and 122 remained the same. By 2 October, 650 towns of 748 surveyed had held new elections. Invariably, Socialist Revolutionaries and Mensheviks emerged as the dominant forces.⁶³ Some bodies acted to remove tsarist elements. On 18 May, Saratov's provincial *zemstvo* removed all individuals who represented privileged groups rather than having been elected (for example, marshals of the nobility). These individuals were not allowed to participate in future elections as the *zemstvo* tried to reflect the current mood. Samara's provincial assembly simply removed eight marshals of the nobility alongside other remnants of the old regime on 6 June 1917.⁶⁴

This type of democratization was slow and sporadic, but while it left many nobles in positions of authority for months, it signalled the steady eradication of their remaining influence and proved that nobles were unable to play the influential role in revolutionary Russia envisaged by the United Nobility after February. Formal elections from summer onwards provided the final nail in the coffin, especially with regards to the *zemstva*, the nobility's sole, vaguely 'democratic' platform. New elections to local *zemstva* in May and June saw socialist groups wrench control away from liberals. Nobles in Samara only retained an insignificant foothold in two *uezdy* (one of these being Samara itself).⁶⁵ At the same time, *zemstva* elections were met with indifference and often outright hostility from the peasantry who saw the *zemstva* as unnecessary in revolutionary politics.⁶⁶ The government's own organs were also viewed suspiciously, with people preferring local soviets and other popular bodies. The new *volost* committees played second fiddle to existing peasant bodies. In any case, while *volost* committees were supposed to contain representatives from all

⁶¹ Kurseeva, 'Bor'ba korporativnykh', 52–3.

⁶² Startsev, *Vnutrenniaia politika*, 207–8; Kabytova, *Vlast'*, 97–100, 113.

⁶³ Andreev, *Mestnye sovety*, 82, 201. ⁶⁴ Kabytova, *Vlast'*, 117–19.

⁶⁵ Kurseeva, 'Bor'ba korporativnykh', 52–3.

⁶⁶ Around 30–70% did not vote depending on region, reaching as low as 5–7% in some areas, whilst a few areas could not be bothered to organize elections: Andreev, *Mestnye sovety*, 197–202; Rosenberg, 'Zemstvo in 1917', 398–400.

rural groups, they were actually dominated by peasants and only a handful of trusted landowners gained entry.⁶⁷

WAR TO THE PALACES!

Nevertheless, fears about the everyday existence of nobles were steadily taking precedence over concerns about fading political influence. The reports that arrived in response to the permanent council's appeal of 25 March demonstrated the threatening nature of the escalating unrest. The account from Tula was particularly pessimistic. It described the countryside as being in a state of 'anarchy' and 'tyranny', with some nobles living under threat of their lives, and the property of noble organizations being seized. Nobles wanted to work with the government, but could not unless more support was provided.⁶⁸ The marshal in Penza reported that the weakness of the authorities and militia was leading to economic anarchy. He questioned whether it would be possible to sow the fields or gather the harvest.⁶⁹ The marshal in Kaluga warned that *uezd* authorities were ignoring government orders and that agrarian unrest was growing.⁷⁰ These reports dominated the council's meetings on 20–1 April, and further accounts received in time for the meeting on 14–16 May repeated this picture.⁷¹ These meetings saw the United Nobility shift its attention to how to defend the nobility's interests and property against this unrest.

The fundamental problem, as nobles were increasingly aware, was that the February Revolution was not simply a political revolution. For ordinary Russians, the revolution stood for more than a change in government: it represented an opportunity to restructure society. It was a social revolution as well as a political revolution, whilst democracy was something for the lower social classes, rather than all Russians. Outbreaks of violence, unauthorized searches and arrests, and attacks on the wealthy were all apparent from the first days of the revolution. Murders were relatively rare, but nobles sensed the potential for violence among the crowds on the street. Many nobles described violence indirectly, discussing the arrests of relatives and the murder of friends. Rumour and gossip meant that everyone thought that they knew someone, however indirectly, who had been arrested or brutally murdered. This magnified the impact of the revolution. In relation to the lower classes, it has been noted that 'people believed what they heard, not what they read; and interpreted what they read in terms of what they

⁶⁷ For e.g., by September, only 0.5% of the members of 153 *volost* committees in Vologda were landowners; T. Osipova, *Klassovaia bor'ba v derevne v period podgotovki i provedeniia velikoi oktiabr'skoi sotsialisticheskoi revoliutsii* (Moscow, 1974), 60.

⁶⁸ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 379, ll. 59–59ob (dated 28 March).

⁶⁹ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 379, ll. 72–73 (11 April).

⁷⁰ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 379, ll. 61–63 (10 April).

⁷¹ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 340, ll. 21–26ob.

heard'.⁷² This was also applicable to the nobility. In a time of upheaval and change, they tended to believe what respected noble acquaintances told them rather than official reports from 'revolutionaries'. Thus, as one stated, 'rumour multiplied upon rumour and gave rise to hundreds of wild fears'.⁷³

The immediate symbolic challenges to the social and cultural norms of the old regime provided nobles with the first signs of the social implications of the revolution.⁷⁴ For nobles, traditional Russia was composed of values and realities that were expressed through certain vivid symbols, such as the tsar, the police, servants, language, emblems (the double-headed eagle, for example), to name but a few. The revolution saw a conscious effort to expunge this past in order to forge a new future. Stites has used the term 'deromanovization' to describe the eagerness with which the symbols that represented the old regime were removed.⁷⁵ The chief symbol was, of course, the Tsar himself and his fall was compounded by the 'vile tracts', sensationalist lectures, films, and rumours that served to desacralize the monarchy.⁷⁶ The imperial eagle was removed overnight from regimental banners, shops, palaces, uniforms (from soldiers' to school children's), railway stations, and other places. Elsewhere, imperial portraits were torn down, and in some cases even stabbed with bayonets. Law courts and police stations were attacked. Initially, nobles saw such actions as petty acts of revenge that soured the liberal ideals of the revolution, but gradually they recognized them as symbols of a broad attack on privilege and status. Everything was suddenly 'abnormal' and threatening. There were few, if any, trams, sledges or cars on the streets; shops and markets were closed; and the air was full of the sound of crowds, noise, gunfire, and shouting. Crowds took over formerly sedate shopping streets, such as Nevskii Prospekt, and frequent searches meant that there were few places where nobles felt secure.

All of this was reinforced by the new symbols that emerged. The everlasting symbol of the revolution and the wider workers' movement was the colour red. The crowds associated red with liberty and solidarity with the revolution, but nobles equated it with disorder, violence, and mobs. Red was divisive for both groups: it signalled who was for the revolution and who was against it. There was no middle ground. Another practice seen as provocative and defiant was that of singing or chanting. As with red, Russia adopted established revolutionary traditions; the Marseillaise dominated, although Lenin later preferred the

⁷² O. Figes and B. Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution: The Language and Symbols of 1917* (New Haven, 1999), 27.

⁷³ E. Meshcherskaya, *Comrade Princess* (London, 1990), 19.

⁷⁴ For a detailed discussion based on the memoirs and diaries of nobles, see M. Rendle, 'The Symbolic Revolution: The Russian Nobility and February 1917', *Revolutionary Russia*, 18, 1 (2005), 23–46.

⁷⁵ R. Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams* (Oxford, 1989), 65.

⁷⁶ Figes and Kolonitskii, *Interpreting*, Ch. 1; E. Hemenway, 'Nicholas in Hell: Rewriting the Tsarist Narrative in the Revolutionary *Skazki* of 1917', *The Russian Review*, 60, 2 (2001), 185–204.

International.⁷⁷ Singing merged with shouting slogans, which were increasingly vitriolic in their attacks on privilege, class and perceived enemies. As nobles vividly recalled, 'Down with the Tsar!' and 'Down with the War!' morphed into 'Death to the *burzhuazii*!', 'War to the Palaces!' and 'Down with the Bourgeois Bloodsuckers!' as 1917 progressed. Nobles lamented that slogans lacked positive aims: instead of stressing what the revolution should achieve, the crowd pounced on what had to be destroyed, changed, or removed, and on potential enemies and 'counter-revolutionaries'.

Some of the aspects of the 'symbolic revolution' pointed directly at social conflict, such as the new forms of addressing one another. As befitted a rigidly stratified social structure, Russia had a rich tradition of deference, all of which served to reinforce their position in life for nobles. The revolution sought to introduce equality and respect into everyday acknowledgements and forms of address, from the rejection of titles and salutes in the military to peasants refusing to bow or take off their caps. In the cities the use of 'comrades' and 'citizens' was the most obvious change. For N. N. Danilov it was a sign of the outbreak of revolution when the tram stopped and its passengers were addressed in such terms: 'why "citizens, comrades!" and not "gentlemen"? What is happening?'⁷⁸ Generally, the nobility did not seem to understand the significance of such issues. This was clearly the case with respect to the use of the formal word for 'you', which was '*vy*', against the informal '*ty*'. Although expecting to be addressed with '*vy*', in certain trusted circumstances the use of '*ty*' for the nobility illustrated friendship, familiarity, trust, and was 'truly Russian', and not at all humiliating. In this sense it reinforced patriarchal attitudes, particularly with regard to peasants and servants. In contrast '*vy*' was 'foreign, affected and cold'.⁷⁹ Yet, for the lower classes, '*ty*' was indeed familiar: it was condescending and superior, only for use to children and animals, and unsuitable for a democratic society.

All of this translated into real changes in the nobility's relations to other social classes. The impact in the countryside and the military are covered in subsequent chapters, but it is worth highlighting two urban examples. Workers only made fleeting appearances into the world of the nobility. They were mentioned as forming parts of crowds, as striking, and generally as a 'revolutionary' group. The nobility had little day-to-day contact with the workers as most had weak links to industry. The few accounts of noble industrialists that exist confirm that workers were focused on practical concerns: working hours, rates of pay, conditions, and control of the factory. Most animosity was directed towards the manager, as the omnipresent manifestation of authority. Count P. N. Ignat'ev inherited a huge industrial business on the eve of 1917 and noted that the workers, through

⁷⁷ On red and songs, see B. Kolonitskii, *Simboly vlasti i bor'ba vlast'* (St. Petersburg, 2001), 250–303.

⁷⁸ N. Danilov, 'From Officer Cadet to Refugee: Some Memories of Revolutionary Russia', *New Zealand Slavonic Journal*, 1 (1976), 4.

⁷⁹ O. Woronoff, *Upheaval* (New York, 1932), 128.

deputations, presented 'all sorts of demands' over the first few months, but that anger was directed towards the managers. To quote Ignat'ev, 'I must say that I never felt any animosity against me personally.'⁸⁰ For others, such as Prince A. P. Meshcherskii and Baron N. K. fon Mekh, the main problems started after the October Revolution.⁸¹

Domestic servants were a more frequent source of conflict. Domestic service and other jobs around the houses of the privileged (door keepers and chauffeurs, for example) remained one of the biggest sources of employment in urban centres. By 1912, 30% of all working women (together with a sizeable percentage of males) were employed in service in Petrograd and 25% in Moscow (over a million individuals).⁸² Most nobles supplied accommodation and food, looked after servants' families, educated their children, helped during ill health, and provided pensions. In return they expected loyalty and obedience. Bonds were created between generous or kind employers and their staff, many of whom served the same family for decades. Some servants remained staunchly loyal, continuing to help throughout the revolution by preventing searches or carrying letters and supplies between family members. Yet wages could be low, hours long, conditions poor, and job security weak.⁸³

Most servants did not leave their posts immediately after the revolution as they needed their jobs. Instead, they acted to form unions alongside other workers, initially at a local level. Female servants gathered on 5 March in Petrograd to press for fixed hours of work and organize a larger assembly of all servants in the city to elect deputies to the Soviet.⁸⁴ On 11 March, a meeting in Moscow aimed to form a professional union to press for fixed hours, days off, and aid for the elderly, injured or unemployed.⁸⁵ On 15 March in Khar'kov, the first meeting of the local union for servants discussed wages, hours, conditions, and cultural and educational work, as well as other material issues. By 4 July, it was seeking to control all appointments in the city. The local union in Iaroslavl was similarly efficient. A meeting on 27 April elected a seven-person board and decided on membership dues linked to earnings. A week later, basic demands were resolved; a working day from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. (with a two-hour break), shorter days on public holidays, minimum wages and conditions, illness provision, and overtime only if the servant agreed (and at a minimum extra cost).⁸⁶

A nationwide Union of Domestic Servants was soon operating. On 22 June, it recognized that servants, by their nature, had to be flexible, but supported the

⁸⁰ BAR, P. N. Ignatiev, 'Once a Minister in Imperial Russia', 237.

⁸¹ N. Krivosheina, *Chetyre treti nashei zhizni* (Paris, 1984), 23–4; G. von Meck, *As I Remember Them* (London, 1973), 161. These examples are discussed in Chapter 7.

⁸² A. Rustemeyer, *Dienstboten in Petersburg und Moskau, 1861–1917* (Stuttgart, 1996), 91–2.

⁸³ For a balanced assessment of conditions, see B. Engel, *Between the Fields and the City* (Cambridge, 1996), 141–9.

⁸⁴ *Rech'*, No. 56, 7 March 1917, 6.

⁸⁵ *Moskovskiiia vedomosti*, No. 50, 12 March 1917, 3.

⁸⁶ *Khar'kov i Khar'kovskaia guberniia v velikoi oktiabr'skoi sotsialisticheskoi revoliutsii* (Khar'kov, 1957), 29, 116–17; *Golos* [Iaroslavl'], No. 93, 28 April 1917; No. 98, 4 May 1917.

eight-hour day as the 'norm' with one day off per week, time off for statutory holidays, and an annual month paid holiday. A minimum wage, accommodation, and a means of resolving conflicts were also priorities. Female servants also had concerns over kindergartens and crèches. By December 1917, it could boast of at least fifty-four local branches with 113,020 members in Petrograd, Moscow, Khar'kov, Minsk, Kiev, Revel, and elsewhere. Of these, thirty-seven branches (68.5%) had been established from March to June by which time 94,860 (84%) members had joined.⁸⁷

Many servants remained outside of formal unions, either through ignorance or choice, but were still influenced by the revolutionary mood. They now had freedom and individually demanded better pay and conditions, created informal house committees, spent their days in meetings and demonstrations, or stole items that they coveted. Sometimes they sought to lay down rules, reading out new regulations to their employers.⁸⁸ As the year progressed, many disappeared or were released as pressures grew on noble finances. Prior to 1914, the wife of Grand Duke Pavel, Princess O. V. Palei, employed sixty-four servants. Immediately after February (including the impact of the war) this number had fallen to forty-eight, shrinking to twenty-two by October, with only a few remaining by July 1918, and one by December 1918.⁸⁹

These experiences were often part of the 'anti-bourgeois' nature of the revolution. As early as 25 February, well-dressed people were being jeered and abused on the streets of Petrograd. They were addressed as 'bourgeois', '*burzhui*', or another such mutation. Of course, not all 'enemies' addressed as bourgeois were nobles, and the use of the term involved all types of ambiguities. *Burzhui* could be all property owners whether rich and poor, those wearing glasses, those who seemed educated or dressed well, or simply those who found themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time. Soldiers at the front addressed their officers as bourgeois and also viewed soldiers in the rear in the same way, whilst officers retaliated, in response to the excessive demands of soldiers, by accusing them of being bourgeois.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, Steinberg argued that 'ambiguity and ambivalence are no less part of the ways people define their identities and values and compose their opinions than are sharp convictions and strong faiths'.⁹¹ Such enemies seemed eminently real and could easily be seen in everyday life. These feelings were reinforced by thousands of pamphlets and speeches.

⁸⁷ D. Koenker (ed.), *Tret'ya vserossiyskaya konferentsiya professional'nykh soyuzov 3–11 iyulya (20–28 iyunya st. st.) 1917 goda: Stenograficheskii otchet* (London, 1982), xii (numbers), 424, 427 (demands).

⁸⁸ For various accounts, see M. Ignatieff, *The Russian Album* (Harmondsworth, 1987), 116; HIA, M. Kastchenko papers, 'A World Destroyed (Memoirs)', 132–3; Grand Duchess Marie, *Things I Remember* (London, 1931), 302.

⁸⁹ Princess Paley, *Memories of Russia* (London, 1924), 159.

⁹⁰ Figes and Kolonitskii, *Interpreting*, 176–7. Also B. Kolonitskii, 'Antibourgeois Propaganda and Anti-"*Burzhui*" Consciousness in 1917', *The Russian Review*, 53, 2 (1994), 183–96.

⁹¹ M. Steinberg, *Voices of the Revolution, 1917* (New Haven, 2001), 35.

Resentment against wealth, privilege, and intellectualism grew, and 'bourgeois' became an incredibly hostile word, even an expletive, that symbolized every type of persecution that the nobility suffered.

In many respects, of course, noble accounts of conflict reflect general problems. Hasegawa described an 'alarming' increase in the levels of crime that rapidly destroyed social cohesion in Petrograd and to a lesser extent this is true of most major towns and rural areas.⁹² The determination of the Provisional Government to create a liberal, free country played into the hands of criminals. The February unrest led to the release of many prisoners, the death penalty was abolished, and many sentences for remaining prisoners were officially eased or abolished.⁹³ The crowds of soldiers on the streets made obtaining weapons easy, whilst the ability of the authorities to enforce the law disintegrated. The old police force was ineffective by the end of 26 February and attempts to form an effective replacement militia were largely unsuccessful.⁹⁴ For a start, the militia was deliberately decentralized and formed as much from the ground up as from the top down; neither town authorities nor the Ministry of Justice had complete control. This was exacerbated by workers' militias that emerged at the same time to defend working-class districts and factories. These were usually better disciplined and organized, and more effective, but all suffered from shortages in personnel, arms and finances, as well as corruption and a lack of prestige.⁹⁵ The result, unsurprisingly, was that crime rocketed; official records note that thefts rose from an average of just over twenty-eight a day in April to thirty-five a day in October, with a lull in the summer. Violent incidents also became far more common.⁹⁶

Nobles were probably not affected any more than other propertied social groups. In Smolensk, for example, levels of theft in 1917 rose 80% from 1916 figures and burglaries quadrupled; 6% of the reported crimes affected the nobility, with two-thirds involving merchants and shop-keepers.⁹⁷ Yet, the evidence from the nobility suggests that few bothered to report the offences committed against them, either realizing that there was little that could be done or not wishing to attract unwanted attention. For most nobles, crime was part of the revolutionary process. Some noted that 'everyone stole' nowadays. They knew that they were unlikely to gain any sympathy, whilst the breakdown in authority discouraged complaining, since it was unlikely that the perpetrators would be penalized,

⁹² T. Hasegawa, 'Crime and Police in Revolutionary Petrograd, March 1917–March 1918: Social History of the Russian Revolution Revisited', *Acta Slavica Iaponica*, 13 (1995), 2–6.

⁹³ *RPG*, I, 196–200.

⁹⁴ B. Musaev, *Prestupnost' v Petrograde v 1917–1921gg. i bor'ba s nei* (St. Petersburg, 2001), 12.

⁹⁵ Hasegawa, 'Crime and Police', 18–26; Musaev, *Prestupnost'*, Ch. 1.

⁹⁶ Hasegawa, 'Crime and Police', 4.

⁹⁷ M. Hickey, 'Moderate Socialists and the Politics of Crime in Revolutionary Smolensk', *Canadian-American Slavonic Studies*, 35, 2–3 (2001), 199, 202–3.

given that local authorities were either impotent or complicit. On 27 March, a group of individuals apparently from the militia and acting with official orders broke open the doors into Baroness Cherkasova's estate in Myshkinskii *uezd* (Iaroslavl) and stole a number of items. Beyond complaining to the Minister of Internal Affairs, little could be done.⁹⁸ On 20–23 September 1917, crowds of workers, assisted by some soldiers, conducted mass searches of businesses and private flats in Iaroslavl. On the pretence of looking for hidden food reserves as the supply crisis grew, these searches were violent in places, with numerous 'excesses' effectively 'terrorizing' private citizens. Local authorities were unable to halt them for several days.⁹⁹ The nobility appear not to have been affected more than anyone else, but it demonstrated growing tensions, with fears about food supplies and general dissatisfaction merging with popular beliefs that the 'bourgeoisie' were hiding something.

Essentially, the nobility's fears multiplied. There were significant changes, but violence was rare and worries concerning food and fuel shortages, and the hours spent in queues, were common to all Russians. Otherwise, the picture could be positive. Prince F. F. Iusupov noted that life was full of hassle, regulations, and discrimination, but that people still had to live. He described a Petrograd of numerous social gatherings and small parties.¹⁰⁰ Life in provincial towns or the countryside could also carry on as normal. Nobles continued to dine at restaurants, enjoy estates in the summer, and to socialize—not on the same scale as before, but the familiar routine was distinguishable. Young nobles also continued their education, although the revolution had an impact on elite schools. The Institute for Noble Ladies managed by the Moscow nobility continued its traditional programme of religious instruction, needlework, dancing, music, and physical education. Princess E. A. Meshcherskaia, though, remembered the pupils having to cook their own meals once the servants had disappeared.¹⁰¹ The Corps des Pages in Petrograd was forced to change its name to the Petrograd Cadet Corps and tone its uniform down: it was too ornamental and one student had been killed whilst wearing it. Count P. N. Grabbe recalled relaxed discipline and limited study.¹⁰² L. D. Liubimov's class in the Alexander Lycée continued, although some of the higher classes were disbanded and no new ones were enrolled. The head was removed as he was closely associated with the old regime, but old practices continued until it was taken over by the Ministry of Education on 1 August.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ GARF, f. 1791, op. 2, d. 257, l. 3.

⁹⁹ GARF, f. 1791, op. 2, d. 257, ll. 16–19. Similar events occurred in Kursk on 5–6 October: N. Kakurin (ed.), *Razložhenie armii v 1917 godu* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1925), 122–4.

¹⁰⁰ F. Youssouppoff, *Lost Splendour* (London, 1953), 258–9.

¹⁰¹ TsIAM, f. 4, op. 3, d. 82, ll. 69–70 (programme); Meshcherskaya, *Comrade*, 24–5.

¹⁰² P. Grabbe, *Windows on the River Neva* (New York, 1977), 132–3, 136.

¹⁰³ L. Liubimov, *Na chuzhbine: Vospominaniia* (Moscow, 1963), 70–1, 79; S. Pavlova, *Imperatorskii Aleksandrovskii (byvshtii Tsarskosel'skii) Litsei* (St Petersburg, 2002), 214.

THE UNION OF HOMEOWNERS

Nonetheless, the nobility's position was precarious and worsening weekly. Consequently, the permanent council of the United Nobility tacitly recognized in its meetings on 14–16 May 1917 that these growing problems required a rethink of the organization's role. The council was not convinced, however, about exactly what to do. Looking back, one option was for the United Nobility to turn itself into a far more proactive pressure group for noble interests. Certainly, the council saw the need for elements of this. On 14 May, it sent a letter to L'vov protesting about the proposed prohibition of land sales, mortgages, and long-term rental agreements, highlighting the impact of such actions on banks, foreign investors, and the economy.¹⁰⁴ Landownership was a key issue for its members and the council felt that it had a duty to act in their interests.

The council was more tentative when it came to bigger issues. On 16 May, it discussed whether to make a public appeal to the government and society on behalf of the nobility, outlining the deteriorating situation. Some thought that this was essential; others that it was a waste of time and even potentially harmful. No decision was taken and the issue was discussed again on 5 June. This time only four out of the thirty-three present objected to sending an appeal, despite questions over whether the council was legally entitled to speak in the name of all nobles—no doubt with memories of the impact of Strukov's letter in August 1915. The wording was approved on 8 June, but P. A. Bazilevskii, Moscow's marshal of the nobility, had already departed, unable to accept responsibility for such a 'significant' resolution.¹⁰⁵ Of course, as befitted a proclamation from elements of the former elite, it hardly caused an outrage. It merely reiterated the demands for stronger authority that were emerging from other elite groups by this stage, and questioned anti-state forces and the nation's commitment to the war effort. It made no noticeable impact in the press. The council also dithered on other issues, such as whether to hold a congress, and these delays increasingly rendered it ineffective as a voice for nobles.

These dilemmas were inevitable for a body representing a privileged social estate at a time when issues surrounding class and privilege were extremely contentious, and the fear of counter-revolution was rife. Doubters in the council were right to fear a backlash, even if they grossly overestimated the importance of what they wanted to say. Paradoxically, the council itself had already recognized this. After hearing about the growth of social unrest from marshals of nobility across the country at its meeting on 20–21 April 1917, it sent a letter on 26 April to all provincial marshals, urging them to respond to the new, influential organizations

¹⁰⁴ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 340, l. 27.

¹⁰⁵ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 340, ll. 31, 32ob–33, 35ob–36, 37–39ob.

formed by other groups (soviets, committees, and unions) by forming their own body. It avoided using the term 'noble' and instead focused on the immediate threat to the nobility: the attacks on their property, whether urban or rural. The council proposed uniting the 'sizeable' group of large, middle, and small landowners in the countryside with urban property owners of all types. Despite differences in class, religion, and nationality, it believed that there was strong support for the general principle of private ownership that would prove a basis for unity, and that a union of property [real estate] owners would help owners to defend their interests within new local committees and institutions, as well as in forthcoming elections and government policy discussions. Branches would be established at provincial level, before expanding into *uezdy* and *volosti*.¹⁰⁶

The council, therefore, proposed to respond to events in a revolutionary manner, not in terms of the originality of the plan, but in the sense that it was hoping to engage in revolutionary politics in the same way as other social and professional groups by forming a union to advance its interests. There was also an inherent recognition in this proposal that class-based politics would not succeed, especially for the privileged classes, as reflected by the intention to unite all property owners and in the advice given to marshals. The council suggested using a variety of individuals to promote the new union (not simply large landowners or wealthy nobles) and to co-opt respected local figures. It would not be a political organization, but would respond to the policies of all parties. Equally, it did not seek a return to the old regime, but it considered the revolution finished and believed that all should now support the Provisional Government.¹⁰⁷ However, in issuing these plans two months after the revolution, the council lagged behind events: not simply the gathering unrest, as might be expected, but also reactions to it. Landowners had already started organizing into groups and unions to defend their interests against the agrarian movement. The council tried to combat this by amending the proposed rules to incorporate existing groups and arguing for the inclusion of urban property owners, but landowners' organizations continued to develop independently, although often involving local marshals or nobles.¹⁰⁸

It also seems as if similar groups were emerging spontaneously in cities and towns across Russia. As early as 16 March, five representatives of a 'Society of Homeowners' were mentioned as part of forty new deputies introduced to 'democratize' Samara's city Duma. At the same time, representatives of 200 homeowners were included in Vitebsk's city Duma.¹⁰⁹ On 7 April, there was

¹⁰⁶ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 339, ll. 1–1ob, 6.

¹⁰⁷ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 339, ll. 1ob–2ob, 18ob.

¹⁰⁸ This is discussed in depth in Chapter 4.

¹⁰⁹ Kabytova, *Vlast'*, 100; *Velikaia oktiabr'skaia sotsialisticheskaia revoliutsiia v Belorussii* (2 volumes: Minsk, 1957), I, 155. The word used by these groups, *domovladelets*, can also mean landlords, but using 'homeowners' reflects the fact that private homeowners were involved

a meeting of about 200 homeowners in Petrograd in the hall of the city's Duma that was initiated by a 'Society of Homeowners'. The meeting argued that the non-payment of rent and tenants demanding to establish their own rates were impoverishing landlords, and it appealed to the government for support to defend private property. There was discord: some protested that the appeal did not reflect all homeowners or that it was dangerous to defend private interests at the current time. Some even left the hall, but this seemed motivated by fear of repercussions rather than by real disagreements with the substance of the complaints.¹¹⁰ The extent of seizures of palaces and private flats in the capital by various groups even prompted an appeal by the procurator of Petrograd's court to the militia in May for stronger measures to defend owners.¹¹¹

Information on these bodies is scarce, usually limited to brief newspaper reports. Despite the similarity of their titles—societies or unions of homeowners—there was no national body until August. Instead, these organizations appear to have emerged independently of one another, initiated by local figures. As the examples above reflect, sometimes they emerged as part of attempts to represent propertied interests in the reconfigured town authorities after February. Otherwise, they reflected growing concerns about social unrest and its impact. In Smolensk, the union hoped to unite around shared 'socio-economic' interests and appealed on 31 May to anyone interested in securing the property of citizens.¹¹² At the end of July, Moscow's Society of Homeowners sent a delegation to the mayor to establish formal contact between the society and the city authorities. They demanded representation and a vote on commissions related to homeownership. They also wanted improved nocturnal security. The mayor promised to discuss security issues and granted the society the right to participate on relevant commissions. There is no indication, though, whether their representatives did receive a vote.¹¹³

In Iaroslavl, the formation of a union of homeowners started in early June and was prompted by imminent local elections. One district organized a meeting on 6 June to discuss regulations for a union and to draw up a list of candidates for the forthcoming Duma elections. On 11 June, a temporary bureau of the Union of Homeowners invited homeowners from across the city to a meeting to discuss candidates for the elections and other matters.¹¹⁴ In an advertisement on 2 July, the net was spread widely for potential supporters. The union, it proclaimed, as well as representing homeowners, sought to unite all free citizens to defend their rights, including engineers, doctors, lawyers, clerical workers,

and distinguishes these groups from the broad definition of property [*imushchestvo*] used by the United Nobility; these groups, for example, did not include industrialists at this stage.

¹¹⁰ *Golos* [Iaroslavl'], No. 81, 14 April 1917.

¹¹¹ *Rech'*, No. 125, 31 May 1917, 5.

¹¹² A. Il'iukov, *Revoliutsiia 1917 goda na Smolenshchine* (Smolensk, 2007), 94.

¹¹³ *Moskovskiiia vedomosti*, No. 165, 30 July 1917, 2.

¹¹⁴ *Golos* [Iaroslavl'], No. 123, 6 June 1917; No. 126, 9 June 1917.

teachers, soldiers, workers, servants, and others. It was a non-party organization, it stated, and stressed that unity was crucial to achieve good results in the Duma elections.¹¹⁵ Nonetheless, other reports indicate that meetings at district level continued (although this may have been a means of mobilizing support), whilst unity was only really achieved with local business. This was a more obvious choice than many of the examples above, given mutual concern over private property. The deputy chair of the union was also involved in local business circles. On 23 July, homeowners, industrialists, and artisans submitted a joint list of candidates for the elections, and on 28 July held a combined meeting to discuss tactics. The meeting remained resolutely non-political: apparently Kadets who turned up with leaflets were ejected after a debate. This led the local newspaper to insinuate that the union was little better than the monarchist Union of Russian People, interested solely in personal matters rather than those affecting the town and local society.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, the combined list of homeowners and industrialists won 2,200 votes in the Duma elections (6% of the total), which entitled them to six seats. Another group of homeowners also gained enough votes for a single seat, indicating that at least one district remained independent.¹¹⁷ Meetings of both groups continued and suggest that while the initial impetus for unity had been the elections, they then sought to establish themselves formally. The independent group held a meeting on 20 August devoted to electing a chairman and the practicalities of opening a shop and a library in its area. Around 500 members of the main union met on 27 August, also electing a chair, as well as establishing a formal committee to oversee its regulations and operation.¹¹⁸

These electoral results were matched by homeowners across Russia, demonstrating the fact that local unions and societies of homeowners were sufficiently organized and financed to achieve a solid presence in local municipal elections, albeit often in alliance with local trade and industrial groups. It has been estimated that these groups achieved a total of 376 seats or 4.5% of the total from known results. This fell to 2.5% in forty provincial capitals of European Russia, but rose to 6% in ninety other towns. Homeowners and business groups were stronger in smaller towns, probably because there were less workers and soldiers. They obtained only 2.4% of seats in cities with over 100,000 inhabitants (twenty-seven towns), but they gained nearly 14% of seats in towns with less than 10,000 (also twenty-seven towns). In eighteen towns they managed 20% of the vote or more, twice rising above 50%. They received the highest number of seats in seven places and had the second highest number of seats in a further ten towns. In Petrograd and Moscow, homeowners and industrial

¹¹⁵ *Golos* [Iaroslavl'], No. 145, 2 July 1917.

¹¹⁶ *Golos* [Iaroslavl'], No. 162, 23 July 1917; No. 166, 28 July 1917; No. 167, 29 July 1917.

¹¹⁷ *Golos* [Iaroslavl'], No. 169, 1 August 1917.

¹¹⁸ *Golos* [Iaroslavl'], No. 183, 19 August 1917; No. 193, 1 September 1917.

groups performed better in the district elections, receiving 1–3% of seats, but they had little impact in the city Dumas.¹¹⁹ In Saratov in July, homeowners won 3.1% of the vote, despite a poor turnout from this group, which entitled them to four seats, more than Jewish groups and pro-war Marxists, and only one less than the Popular Socialists. In Tsaritsyn in late August, a relatively radical city, homeowners won six seats in the Duma in comparison with two seats achieved by the Kadets. In Samara in August, homeowners were the seventh party of ten, almost on a par with the Mensheviks. Here, despite the backlash against conservative groups after the Kornilov Revolt, they increased their share of the vote from 4.6% in August to 5.8% in re-elections in October, where they became the fourth strongest group after the Kadets, Bolsheviks, and Socialist Revolutionaries, winning six seats.¹²⁰ Clearly, homeowners and industrial groups were usually in the minority, on a par with nationality and Jewish groups, and less popular socialist parties. However, these results suggest that they must have eroded the vote of the main middle-class party, the Kadets, in many places.

The question of their composition and support remains unclear. When analysing groups in Saratov prior to the elections, one newspaper described the Union of Homeowners as a mixture of far-right Black Hundreds and progressive conservatives whilst another, liberal, paper simply noted that it was an organization of former Duma members.¹²¹ Certainly, monarchists were present: V. P. Sokolev, the deputy chair of the main council of the Union of Russian People, headed a district branch of the union in Petrograd.¹²² But the picture was usually broader. In Iaroslavl, the union drew its support from private homeowners, landlords, industrialists, small businessmen, and others likely to lose out through growing urban unrest. A local newspaper in Orel directly attributed moves to create a union of homeowners in the city to several leading figures in local bodies of trade and industry. The author saw the attempts as reflecting the desire of industrialists to broaden and strengthen their base of support prior to the city's elections.¹²³ Indeed, the pattern of events in Orel paralleled those in Iaroslavl. The Union of Homeowners was formally established at a meeting of a hundred homeowners on 11 June to defend common 'economic interests'. Subsequent meetings finalized the union's board, confirmed that it was represented on the local committee of public safety and, on 22 July, started the process of fielding joint candidates with industrialists and businessmen to the city's Duma elections. The list received 7% of the vote, entitling them to

¹¹⁹ W. Rosenberg, 'The Russian Municipal Duma Elections of 1917: A Preliminary Computation of Returns', *Soviet Studies*, 21, 2 (1969–70), 142, 146, 154–5, 157, 160–1.

¹²⁰ Raleigh, *Revolution on the Volga*, 194–5, 251; Kabytova, *Vlast'*, 179–80, 183.

¹²¹ Raleigh, *Revolution on the Volga*, 196.

¹²² O. Platonov (ed.), *Chernaia sotnia: Istoricheskaia entsiklopediia, 1900–1917* (Moscow, 2008), 498.

¹²³ *Golos naroda* [Orel'], No. 23, 21 May 1917.

seven seats in the new 101 person Duma.¹²⁴ In Odessa, Ia. V. Semenenko, the chair of the Union of Homeowners took the one seat in the local Duma that the group had obtained with around 1% of the vote. He was described by the local newspaper as a large property owner (landlord) and a leading figure in the city's credit society, who had stood for election to the Duma in 1907.¹²⁵ Elsewhere, homeowners seemed linked to landowners. In July 1917, the national Union of Landowners called for official links with homeowners, and both groups operated out of the same address in Moscow.¹²⁶

The exact details of the activities of unions of homeowners also remain unclear. Clearly, formal unions were seen as a way of mobilizing propertied groups in electoral campaigns and of promoting their interests to urban authorities. Occasionally, evidence suggests that they represented homeowners' interests in specific disputes. In Odessa, the Union of Homeowners was involved in a long-running dispute with janitors [*dvorniki*] throughout August and September. Janitors went on strike over pay and conditions in early August. In a protest to the government, the union claimed that the strike was causing sanitary problems, as the janitors would not permit anyone else to remove rubbish or clean properties. Moreover, they accused janitors of making violent threats and occupying flats. A few days later, the union urged homeowners to refuse to sign any agreements.¹²⁷ The local authorities became involved, promising to protect homeowners and trying to mediate. A pre-printed form detailing fixed wages and conditions, with gaps for homeowners to fill in their details and sign, suggests that a compromise was reached. The strike ended, but the dispute rumbled on, whilst Semenenko demanded 90,000 rubles from the authorities to compensate homeowners for the alternative arrangements that they had been forced to make during the strike.¹²⁸ Accounts from Moscow indicate that homeowners in the Arbat district had faced a similar problem in late May.¹²⁹ It is unclear, however, whether local unions provided any other sort of support for their members at this stage.

From 23 July, advertisements appeared in the national press calling for representatives from all local societies and unions of homeowners to gather for an All-Russian Congress of Homeowners in Petrograd on 12–16 August 1917.¹³⁰ By this stage, apparently, over 200 of these groups existed and the congress established the All-Russian Union of Homeowners with a national president and organizing body. It also discussed new legislation relating to homeowners. Subsequent months saw demands that the government recognize the new union

¹²⁴ *Golos naroda* [Orel'], No. 44, 16 June 1917; No. 45, 17 June; 74, 22 July; No. 82, 1 August; No. 83, 2 August.

¹²⁵ *Odesskii listok*, No. 195, 8 August 1917, 3; No. 197, 10 August 1917, 2.

¹²⁶ OR RGB, f. 114, k. 2, ed. khran. 35, l. 1ob; GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 339, l. 45.

¹²⁷ *Odesskii listok*, No. 203, 18 August 1917, 2; No. 207, 23 August 1917, 2.

¹²⁸ *Odesskii listok*, No. 215, 1 September 1917, 1; No. 219, 6 September 1917, 2.

¹²⁹ *Moskovskiiia vedomosti*, No. 117, 3 June 1917, 3.

¹³⁰ *Rech'*, No. 171, 23 July 1917, 1.

and grant it representation on all national commissions that covered questions affecting homeowners.¹³¹

THE SOCIETY OF NOBLES

Faced with the independent mobilization of urban homeowners and rural landowners, the United Nobility was forced to abandon plans for a union of urban and rural property owners. Instead, it tried to reinvent class-based politics. On 14 May, A. D. Samarin, the chairman, re-emphasized the nobility's importance as state servants and landowners and admitted, for the first time in 1917, that the nobility's very existence was under threat, along with its institutions and capital.¹³² Local reports supported him. Prince L. I. Dondukov-Iz'edinov, provincial marshal in Kursk, had permitted a public assembly to use the nobility's hall, but delegates had removed plaques and portraits from the walls. The commissar proved powerless to intervene, whilst the chairman of the assembly apologized, but nothing was replaced. It was impossible to evict the assembly, which had, in effect, requisitioned the building.¹³³ Other marshals were less accommodating in the first place, but ended up with the same result. In Khar'kov, the nobility had their building requisitioned by the new authorities, despite the presence of the Red Cross in it. The flat of the provincial marshal had also been seized, as it had been in Tula. The nobility's building in Penza had been taken. In Tver, the marshal was hoping that the presence of a hospital would protect their hall (as was Astrakhan's marshal), but admitted that it was vulnerable. He had removed paintings, deeds, and other documents to the relative safety of the local museum.¹³⁴

The proposed solution was for nobles to form a voluntary union in order to protect their capital and property if the nobility was abolished as a social estate.¹³⁵ A nine-man committee was created on 15–16 May to finalize the details, which, after 'heated' debates, was instructed to work on the principle that all members would be nobles, as proven by genealogical books, and that the union would be a charitable, cultural, and educational body with no wider political or economic aims, although it would have local branches.¹³⁶ Accepting that other unions were now defending rural and urban property, the United Nobility focused on the sizeable property held by the nobility as an estate, which according to estimates in 1916 was worth over 2.9 billion rubles.¹³⁷ It was also attempting to broaden its membership. It had never represented individual nobles, but

¹³¹ GARF, f. 1778, op. 1, d. 348, l. 4. See also Semenenko's account; *Odesskii listok*, No. 207, 23 August 1917, 2.

¹³² GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 340, l. 26ob.

¹³³ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 340, l. I 23ob–24.

¹³⁴ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 340, ll. 23–25ob, 57ob.

¹³⁵ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 340, l. 28.

¹³⁶ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 340, ll. 29ob, 30ob.

¹³⁷ TsIAM, f. 4, op. 3, d. 90, l. 6 (a billion is taken to be 1,000 million).

local noble associations. Thus, on the one hand, it only reflected nobles active in local assemblies whose criteria restricted membership to middling and large landowners. On the other hand, it was based on an organization, the local noble assembly which, as an estate-based organization, would be abolished alongside the nobility, despite owning all of the nobility's property. Not only would the new society be founded on individuals but by using genealogical records as a basis for membership, it could incorporate a greater proportion of nobles, thereby creating a broader organization. It would also re-launch the nobility as a professional group, with its own skills to promote and its own interests to defend. Ownership of the nobility's property would pass to this new society and would be preserved, in theory, if the nobility was abolished, as this was not an estate-based organization like the United Nobility.

In the subsequent months, the realization of these plans moved at a snail's pace. By the next council meeting on 5 June, the committee had met twice to create a set of regulations, but nobles felt trapped. Some were concerned that this new society would not be sufficient to protect their property and capital, and that they were destroying themselves by pre-empting their own abolition. Others argued that if the government abolished the nobility then nobles needed safeguards in place, and that these needed to be well planned and already executed if they were to succeed. It would be more difficult, these nobles argued, for property to be seized from a legal, private society than an abolished social estate.¹³⁸ A month had passed since the initial meeting, but although they examined the proposed regulations on 6 June, nobles had simply reconfirmed the need for a new society. The council informed provincial marshals of the plans, which slowly prompted positive feedback, with requests for further information. Some marshals welcomed the fact that, for once, they could take practical measures to safeguard their interests.¹³⁹ However, the union was only legally recognized by Moscow's courts on 27 September 1917, and its regulations were still awaiting distribution to all provincial marshals on 11 October.¹⁴⁰

The society, therefore, was not in existence by the October Revolution and subsequent events moved too quickly for the nobility. Of course, the nature of revolutions, alongside the ruthlessness of the Bolsheviks in dealing with class enemies, meant that this society would not have safeguarded noble property anyway. That is not really the point, though. Instead, several aspects are worth emphasizing. First, the nobility was disintegrating further as a coherent social group under the pressure of the revolution. By mid 1917, the United Nobility had accepted that noble property would be defended by several bodies (unions of landowners, homeowners, and nobles). Furthermore, as subsequent chapters demonstrate, some sectors of the nobility were creating unions to defend other interests. Secondly, the methodology is worth noting: namely, the formation of

¹³⁸ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 340, ll. 33ob–34.

¹³⁹ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 340, ll. 10–11ob.

¹⁴⁰ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 340, ll. 40–44ob.

unions and societies. This represented an engagement, however unsuccessfully, with revolutionary politics by forming interest groups and pressing for influence. The problem was in trying to establish how exactly the nobility could portray itself in a favourable light rather than as an anachronistic and exploitative social group seeking to retain its privileges.

The most significant point, however, was that the tentative and indecisive nature of the United Nobility's attempts to defend noble interests meant that it became increasingly irrelevant for the majority of nobles. To be sure, council meetings were held monthly throughout 1917 and discussed numerous pertinent issues, especially agricultural policies and finance for landowners. Its resolutions, though, were always vague and its members—the more conservative elements of the nobility—were always unsure of how best to act. Consequently, they delayed, placing the United Nobility at odds with the fast-moving nature of the revolution. In contrast, new unions had a more dynamic, liberal leadership, a clear professional (not estate-based) focus, and promoted their interests widely, from appeals, petitions, and publications, to conferences and lectures. These unions, as they became established nationwide, superseded the United Nobility, causing it further problems. On 11 July, for example, it released several long-standing members of staff due to 'exceptional difficulties' in its finances.¹⁴¹

As the situation deteriorated, local noble organizations also varied in their reactions, and this affected their relevance. Some mirrored the passive picture of their parent body. In Kursk, a provincial assembly of nobles was delayed from July to August due to adverse conditions. Most of the issues for discussion related to the financial problems faced in maintaining hospitals, schools, material support for families of noble war victims, and even the assembly's office. Otherwise, the marshal was concerned about how to preserve the property of the provincial nobility.¹⁴² Few actions, beyond protests to 'impotent' authorities, could be taken. Thus, it is hardly surprising that many beleaguered local noble associations responded with hope to plans for a union of nobles. At least this promised some sort of response.

The picture was more complex in Tambov, however. On the one hand, similar concerns dominated a special noble assembly in Tambov on 12–13 September, whose provincial marshal, Prince N. N. Cholokaev, was a leading member of the United Nobility. The meeting began by paying tribute to a prominent local noble landowner, Prince B. L. Viazemskii, who had been brutally murdered by local peasants. The difficulties of maintaining the nobles' financial contribution to the war were then outlined, even including discussion on re-mortgaging their property. The remainder of the two-day meeting was devoted to agricultural problems with long reports on the illegal activities of local committees, weak authorities, and escalating peasant unrest, but with few possible solutions.¹⁴³ On

¹⁴¹ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 7, ll. 730–730ob.

¹⁴² GARF, f. 117, op. 1, d. 683, ll. 56–57.

¹⁴³ *Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie v Tambovskoi*, 180–4.

the other hand, the long report on the agrarian question given to the meeting was by one of its prominent members, E. A. Zagriazhskii, who was also the chairman of the local branch of the Union of Landowners. The union and the noble association were closely linked in Tambov. Cholokaev and Zagriazhskii used identical language in their complaints to the authorities on agrarian matters. Indeed, Tambov nobles did not appear to share the reservations of the United Nobility about speaking out. The biggest crisis faced by nobles and landowners in Tambov came on 13 September when local authorities agreed to transfer all private land to the control of land committees. Cholokaev was the first to react, protesting to the government in the evening of the same day. The Union of Landowners followed on 15 September, and both groups worked together to get national condemnation of the decree.¹⁴⁴

Generally, however, there is little information available on local noble associations in 1917. Local marshals seemed more willing to protest than the council of the United Nobility, usually on the basis of local events and concerns. Locally, there was also a greater sense that noble interests could not be distinguished easily from the concerns of homeowners, landowners and others, whilst these concerns—termed ‘professional’ concerns—were more likely to gain sympathy from the authorities and support from wider society. Overall, the relationship between various groups was more fluid locally than it was nationally.

The following chapters demonstrate that the ‘professional’ approach was a more fruitful avenue for former elites than estate-based bodies. Nevertheless, the growing impotence of noble associations and the fracturing of the nobility into its composite parts fatally weakened the bulwark of the former tsarist elite. Of course, nobles were hardly strong and united on the eve of 1917. The steady transition of the noble ‘estate’ to professional ‘classes’, as discussed in the introduction, had encouraged nobles to think as landowners, officers, and so on. The revolution quickened and intensified this process, making the rapid emergence of unions for these groups an obvious step. At the same time, the close ties enjoyed by the council members of the United Nobility, and many marshals, to the tsarist regime made them slow to contemplate a place for the nobility outside of the official state structure. This encouraged a belief that the nobility would have an official role to play in 1917. This was mistaken and the nobility’s inability to resist the political and social revolution underpinned the weakness of the ‘right’ in 1917.

¹⁴⁴ *Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie v Tambovskoi*, 186–7, 196. See Chapter 6 for more details.

4

Landowners

Noble landownership may have been steadily declining since 1861, but many nobles remained landowners, especially in the middle and upper echelons of the social estate. Some continued to own a number of estates across various provinces. Consequently, agrarian issues always took a prominent place in the discussions of the permanent council of the United Nobility and in local noble assemblies. The council devoted a large part of its meeting on 10 March 1917 to discussing the revolution's potential impact on agriculture. It noted that the problems caused by the war in terms of manpower and equipment shortages had now merged with the instability of current events and uncertainty about the near future. Some landowners were already questioning the value of sowing the land and investing capital in it, given the danger of losing both land and harvest. The council responded with a patriotic call to landowners to make all possible effort to sow the land, and for all marshals of the nobility to advocate this in their localities: it was the landowners' duty to the motherland and nobles needed to set an example in this area.¹

Landowners were right to fear rural unrest. The peasants' long-standing desire for 'land and freedom' had last exploded in 1905–7, but unrest had been increasing again prior to the First World War. The vast majority of the population were of peasant origin, including most soldiers, so land was always going to be an explosive issue in 1917. At the same time, changes in landownership had added a new dimension to the countryside. Stolypin's reforms after 1905 had attempted to create a class of peasant landowners distinct from the mass of the peasants in the village commune. These reforms had had mixed success, but the number of peasant owners had risen. Equally, industrialists, merchants, and other professionals had bought up estates sold by indebted nobles. Thus, as 1917 arrived, several groups had a vested interest in private landownership.

The fall of Tsarism created a vacuum in the countryside, allowing the peasantry virtually limitless freedom. Initially peasants appeared, on the whole, to take the news calmly. There were cases of peasants acting immediately to settle (sometimes violently) long-term grievances and seize land, but most villages were more likely to hold a celebratory dinner than murder the local landlord.²

¹ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 87, ll. 20–21.

² As in a village in Riazan' province; *Zemlia i volia*, No. 31, 30 April 1917, 4.

There was a lingering fear that Tsarism would reassert itself, as after 1905–07, and caution remained, especially until the remnants of tsarist rural power, the land captains and police, had been removed or had disappeared. Furthermore, although news of the revolution had passed quickly down the telegraph lines to provincial towns, it took weeks to spread across the remote countryside. When the news was accepted, most evidence points towards relative calm: most peasants seemed confident that the Provisional Government and the Constituent Assembly would satisfy their demands for land, and their mood was celebratory and optimistic.

The peasants' patience was finite, however, and limited to the issue of land redistribution. Most peasants, within weeks, started to renegotiate agreements on work, rent, timber, use of meadows, and other everyday activities. Increasingly, peasants stopped working for landowners, paying rent, or negotiating, using newly formed committees to lay down the law. Even if violence against property or individuals was rare at this stage, it was present and was a threat across Russia. On 3 March, the governor of Pskov reported that two estates had already burned down in one *uezd* and that military aid was needed urgently in all *volosti*.³ The new commissar in Kazan requested military assistance on 7 March to control burgeoning disorders.⁴ Shmidt, a landowner in Ufa province, saw his property removed and buildings burned down on 17 March. He 'only just escaped' himself.⁵ Many landlords had mistreated or exploited local peasants prior to 1917 who now sought vengeance, whilst elsewhere violence was a reflection of long-standing frustrations. Destroying an estate physically removed the landlord from the area, whilst the estate itself was often an alien feature in the Russian countryside. It represented a different set of ideals and culture, and was a symbol of political, economic, and social oppression. Violence was unusual, but it dominated communications between the localities and the centre, making the potency of agrarian issues clear from the very beginning.

AGRARIAN POLICIES

It is surprising, therefore, that the Provisional Government responded so slowly to the agrarian question. It did not mention land initially and its first related proclamation was on the practical issue of food supply. On 9 March, a State Committee on Food Supply was established under the Ministry of Agriculture that would consist of representatives from the Duma, Soviet, Zemgor, War-Industry Committee, and other relevant bodies. On 25 March, supply committees were

³ *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Rossii posle sverzheniia samoderzhavii* (Moscow, 1957), 667.

⁴ GARF, f. 1791, op. 2, d. 148, l. 3.

⁵ *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Rossii posle sverzheniia*, 683.

established in provinces, *uezdy* and *volosti*, with the same groups represented.⁶ Peasants directly elected representatives, but landowners did not. The committees regulated the new state monopoly on the purchase of grain, rather than having any remit over agricultural relations, but maintaining food supply could not be divorced from broader agrarian issues.

Piecemeal measures—the nationalization of all lands belonging to the Tsar's family on 16 March and of all cabinet land a day later, for example⁷—were followed by a broad proclamation on land on 19 March, which recognized that the land issue was the most serious 'socio-economic task' facing the country. It declared, however, that the 'land question cannot be resolved by means of any [arbitrary] seizures', and that the collation of information on landownership, types of land, its utilization, and other such material was vital for the legal passage of land reform. The agrarian question, therefore, was firmly on the agenda of the forthcoming Constituent Assembly. Meanwhile, it was the government's task to start preparing the materials that the assembly would need to come to a lawful resolution. To this end, a land committee was formed within the Ministry of Agriculture to start gathering information.⁸

This was a vague proclamation. For landowners, the general message was acceptable, if not ideal. The government was committed to defending private property from unauthorized and arbitrary seizures, and it had stated its opposition to violence in the countryside. Serious land reform would be carried out, but gradually and legally. For landowners, legal reform equated to having a voice in the reform process, maintaining private property, and obtaining compensation for any land that they were forced to relinquish as part of a final settlement. This was the best that they could hope for during a revolution.

However, the proclamation sowed the seeds of future conflict. As *Izvestiia*, the newspaper of the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, noted, the fact that land redistribution would occur was only implied. *Izvestiia* supported orderly and legal reform, but it argued that the government needed to declare openly its position on the extent of the forthcoming reform if it was to reassure the peasantry. It needed to state that land would go to the people without redemption payments or new taxation.⁹ This contravened the government's idea of the legal process, whereby conclusions were reached on the basis of the relevant materials and discussions, rather than deciding the end result and working towards it. The government also feared that progressing too quickly on land reform would disrupt food supply further—fears that landowners quickly played upon. The gradual approach, though, as *Izvestiia* recognized, would see no immediate change, and this would inevitably encourage rural conflict.

Sure enough, growing signs of peasant dissatisfaction by late April forced the government to respond. Further appeals were made to wait until the

⁶ *RPG*, II, 615, 618–21.

⁷ *RPG*, II, 523–4.

⁸ *RPG*, II, 524–5.

⁹ *Izvestiia*, No. 25, 26 March 1917, 2, in *RPG*, II, 526–7.

Constituent Assembly, but the work of the land committee was extended to indicate that the government was active. On 21 April, it was declared that the land committee in the Ministry of Agriculture would be renamed the Main Land Committee, and that it would work in tandem with new land committees formed in provinces, *uezdy* and *volosti* across Russia.¹⁰ These would facilitate gathering materials locally and would project the government's activities into every village. The formation of these committees was slow, however. Only in late summer did committees reach down into *volosti*, but estimates by Soviet historians suggest that 80–85% of *volosti* had a land committee by September–October.¹¹

This was a worrying development for landowners. The Main Land Committee was a large, unwieldy body with around 160 main members and over 200 attending meetings, but even then landowners were not directly represented. Landed interests were defended by individuals sitting as representatives of the Duma or a political party, whilst peasant bodies provided representatives directly. The lack of representation became greater at local levels. The vast majority of *volost* and *uezd* committees were formed from peasants or members of local soviets.¹² Few supported the rights of landowners where it mattered locally.

This was particularly problematic because the duties of the new land committees were not clearly defined. Along with gathering material, committees were charged with executing the government's decisions on land matters, managing state land, and settling disputes by enforcing laws or through mediation. Committees could halt the acts of individuals that led to the depreciation of land or agricultural property if these acts were against the interests of the state and the public. In extreme cases, they could even suggest removing property from such individuals to the Main Land Committee.¹³ This did not give committees the right to redistribute land as the peasants desired, but it did give them the potential for a proactive role in local life. This was particularly important at *volost* level, where committees were close to the action, and likely to be composed of peasants and local socialists seeking to maintain influence in the village by articulating popular demands.

Local land committees added to a myriad of bodies in the countryside with overlapping jurisdictions and obscure hierarchies. Traditional peasant communes and village meetings (*skhody*) were joined by new popular organizations (*volost* executive committees, local soviets, and branches of the Peasants' Union, for example), and new government institutions (commissars, *volost* and food supply committees as well as the new land committees). If there was

¹⁰ *RPG*, II, 528–32.

¹¹ A. Sedov, 'K voprosu o kolichestve volostnykh zemel'nykh komitetov nakanune oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii', in E. Shchagin et al. (eds.), *Velikii oktiabr' i sotsialisticheskie preobrazovaniia v sovetskoi derevne* (Gor'kii, 1983), 14–18.

¹² V. Kostrikin, *Zemel'nye komitety v 1917 godu* (Moscow, 1975), 128–9, 140–3.

¹³ *RPG*, II, 530.

dual power centrally, then power had splintered further locally. It became hard to delineate duties and obligations, and ultimately, for the government to control events and maintain order. Moreover, the new government bodies were seen as being imposed upon the peasants, who preferred their traditional bodies or the new popular committees, further weakening official authority.

By late April, therefore, obvious threats to landowners had emerged. First, whilst the government's official policy on the land question was broadly acceptable, major reform was clearly inevitable and debates were raging in bodies such as the Main Land Committee. Liberals and others defended landowners against the forced expropriation of land and supported the need for compensation. They argued that dividing up the land arbitrarily amongst the peasants would not be in the interests of the state in terms of maintaining production, regardless of landowners' rights, and that state interests took priority. On the other side, socialists wanted to see all land redistributed among the peasants, as they considered that insufficient land was at the root of the agrarian problem. Equality was the key goal and the question was simply to what extent redistribution should be forced and whether compensation should be paid.¹⁴ There was no sign of a solution, but the formation of land committees suggested to landowners that the government was already paying too much attention to popular (socialist) demands, even if they continued to support private landownership publicly. Landowners feared that the new coalition government in May, which included socialists, would see ministers turn further in this direction.

The second main threat, which overshadowed the above debate, was posed by events on the ground. Peasant unrest was gathering pace, especially in the fertile black earth provinces from the Ukraine to the Volga, where pressure on the land was the greatest. Disputes over labour, rent, managers, the use of meadows and rivers, and other issues seriously impacted on landowners. Lower rents and higher wages placed pressure on finances, with most landowners not the rich figures that peasants imagined, whilst the seizure of meadows made it hard to maintain livestock. Prince S. E. Trubetskoi was forbidden from selling any of his estate's products (livestock or harvest), but was told to pay higher wages. He asked where this extra money was going to come from and was told to 'withdraw money from your bank!' In addition, trees were felled and the local committee allowed 'swindlers' to seize land from the edges of the estate. Trubetskoi noted that with all the will in the world it was impossible to run an estate in such conditions.¹⁵ Another landowner complained that he would be lucky to receive

¹⁴ See V. Telitsyn, 'Fevral'skaia revoliutsiia i agrarnyi vopros: Teoriia i praktika', in *1917 god v sud'bakh Rossii i mira: Fevral'skaia revoliutsiia ot novykh istochnikov k novomu osmysleniiu* (Moscow, 1997), 168–81.

¹⁵ S. Trubetskoi, *Minuvshee* (Paris, 1989), 155.

a profit of twenty-five rubles per *desiatina* in 1917, whereas normally he would expect around 300 rubles.¹⁶

Nevertheless, serious incidents remained few. Keep has estimated, on the basis of published reports, that there were only 130 incidents in the province of Voronezh, which contained 1,786 landowners, between April and September, although three-quarters of its *volosti* were affected. There were fifty-six disturbances in Tver province and fifty-nine in Ekaterinoslav, which contained 2,375 and 4,465 landowners respectively.¹⁷ Estimates such as these vary widely depending on what is classed as a 'disturbance', but many landowners did remain optimistic, believing that peaceful pre-revolutionary relations would help them avoid conflict. Many were convinced that class antagonism was overstated: an urban and socialist concept that could be overcome in rural Russia. S. P. Rudnev returned to his estate, as usual, in June 1917. He believed that disturbances would be milder in the countryside, whilst he would be closer to the sources of food. He recognized that a social revolution was taking place and that new relations had to be forged with the peasantry, but that to succeed it needed the participation of both sides. He was prepared for hostility and those who desired violence, but was convinced that mutual interests would prevail. His estate remained calm throughout 1917 and his family 'went about our daily tasks and created a new life'. The summer passed as always: the family and their guests went hunting, picnicking, picked mushrooms, and drank. Using Austrian prisoners of war, they ploughed and sowed as much as usual and enjoyed a very good harvest.¹⁸

Socialists claimed that talk of agrarian disorder was a myth spread by landlords and the liberal press, and that complaints were no more than peasants righting injustices.¹⁹ The accounts of Rudnev and others suggest that socialists had a point, but rural life undoubtedly took place against a background of growing lawlessness and the threat of violence. Few landowners faced serious unrest, but they read and heard about such cases, whilst few estates escaped completely untouched (including Rudnev's), with most surrendering meadows or forests, or renegotiating rent. Count V. N. Kokovtsov noticed that beneath the calm surface on his estate there was an undercurrent of hostility. Fewer peasants came for advice, no one worked for him although no one refused openly to do so, and theft became common.²⁰ Peasants frequently failed to take their caps off, salute, or stand aside to let landlords pass. The balance of power was shifting, and combined with a background of intense debate and growing unrest, it was hardly surprising that landowners started to mobilize to better project their demands within revolutionary politics.

¹⁶ 'Agrarnoe dvizhenie v 1917 godu po dokumentam glavnogo zemel'nogo komiteta', *Krasnyi arkhiv*, 14 (1926), 193.

¹⁷ J. Keep, *The Russian Revolution* (London, 1976), 190–8.

¹⁸ S. Rudnev, *Pri vechernykh ogniakh: Vospominaniia* (Newtonville, 1978), 70–1, 79–80.

¹⁹ *Zemlia i volia*, No. 92, 18 July 1917, 4.

²⁰ Count Kokovtsov, *Out of My Past* (Stanford, 1935), 486.

REFORMING THE UNION OF LANDOWNERS

On the eve of the February Revolution the existing Union of Landowners, re-established in November 1916, was growing, but it was small and dominated by large, noble, and conservative landowners. There is no evidence of its reaction to the revolution, but it still functioned in some capacity. Negotiations that started in 1916 over a contract to supply the military with vegetables and fruit from the 1917 harvest continued. The union was keen to clinch a deal that was worth eight to nine million rubles to its members. It wanted the contract to be sufficiently flexible to cope with the ongoing inflation. The Ministry of Agriculture, vetting the final version of the contract in the immediate aftermath of the revolution, could not afford to agree, and tried to renegotiate. The deteriorating position of landowners undermined the union's position and it was forced to pull out. It cited the ministry's inflexibility, but noted realistically that landowners could no longer guarantee to provide fixed quantities of products.²¹

This decision was communicated to the ministry on 26 April 1917 and was signed by the union's president, P. N. Balashev, but the position of the union was changing significantly by this stage. As was discussed in Chapter 3, the numerous reports of growing agrarian unrest from marshals of the nobility prompted the permanent council of the United Nobility to send a letter to all provincial marshals on 26 April. The council proposed that the 'sizeable' group of large, middle, and small landowners should unite with urban property owners to form a Union of Property Owners to defend private ownership during the revolution.²² This implied that the existing Union of Landowners was not a suitable vehicle to defend landed interests in the new revolutionary climate. For the council, its membership was too small and restricted to large landowners, whilst only a handful of provinces had established branches. The council wanted a broader body, linking rural and urban Russia.

However, as was noted, the council lagged behind events on the ground. Few shared its vision for a Union of Property Owners, preferring to focus on rural or urban issues. Nonetheless, it seems clear that landowners shared the council's doubts about the Union of Landowners. As rural unrest grew, landowners started exploring ways of protesting beyond writing individual complaints to various government officials. Local landowners started to sign joint appeals, sometimes involving a dozen or more individuals, to add weight to their complaints. An appeal from Spasskii *uezd* (Tambov province) on 21 April noted that landowners had started gathering at private homes for informal meetings.²³ In early April, a public gathering of landowners in Penza elected a bureau of eleven individuals.²⁴

²¹ GARF, f. 1783, op. 2, d. 266, ll. 28–28ob, 51–55, 98–98ob, 102–102ob.

²² GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 339, ll. 1–1ob.

²³ GARF, f. 1791, op. 2, d. 237, ll. 16–17ob.

²⁴ *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Rossii v aprele 1917g. (Aprel'skii krizis)* (Moscow, 1958), 568.

On 16 April, a Union of Farmers of Saratov Province was created, producing detailed regulations. In a deliberate attempt to attract small peasant owners, it stressed that all landowners could join, regardless of gender, class, nationality or religion. It argued that defending landownership was not only protecting private property, but also maintaining the most productive means of working the land.²⁵ On 20–1 April, 1,273 landowners in Ekaterinoslav, claiming to represent 3,470 landowners across the province, formed the Union of Private Landowners of Ekaterinoslav Province to unite owners behind the aims outlined by the Provisional Government. Agrarian issues should be resolved by the Constituent Assembly, with the full participation of owners as free and equal citizens. The right of ownership should be upheld, although some land (such as church land) might go to the landless and war veterans. This did not include buildings, orchards, industry, and other ‘advanced’ additions to estates. The union favoured a republican state as advocated by the Kadets.²⁶ On 1 May, small and large landowners met in Voronezh for several days of talks. They also supported the government, and urged people to do their ‘civic duty’ and maintain order. They elected fifty-five representatives to an organizational committee that would establish a permanent bureau in Voronezh and *uezd* branches across the province to liaise with land committees and deal with local concerns. They discussed food supply, equipment, labour shortages, and other concerns.²⁷

Thus, landowners were not only mobilizing to express their concerns more effectively, but were creating formal unions in line with the multitude of societies and committees that other groups had formed since February. Rudnev became chairman of the Union of Simbirsk Farmers and described its foundation as a direct response to the activities of other social groups.²⁸ What unites all of the examples above, and numerous others, is that there is no mention of the national Union of Landowners that supposedly existed at this stage. These unions were formed by local activists independent of any central direction. They varied in their regulations and activities, but were united in their focus on being more inclusive than the national union had been. To be sure, many were formed by major landowners, probably because they had the finances and feared the threats. Count D. A. Olsuf’ev, a prominent figure in the United Nobility, and M. L. Kindiakov, a noble and Octobrist Duma member, were significant leaders in Saratov.²⁹ In Dankovskii *uezd* (Riazan), Prince M. Dolgorukii noted on 13 April that the idea for an ‘all-class’ *uezd* congress of landowners had emerged from the noble assembly. It wanted a permanent organ to coordinate their concerns and provide a line of contact to the government. Dolgorukii wrote to a member of the Duma urging greater central direction in organizing national and

²⁵ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 339, ll. 15–16.

²⁶ *Rech’*, No. 119, 24 May 1917, 7; *Odesskii listok*, No. 140, 3 June 1917, 3.

²⁷ *Vestnik vremennago pravitel’sтва*, No. 46, 3 May 1917, 4; No. 47, 4 May, 4; No. 50, 7 May, 4.

²⁸ Rudnev, *Pri vechernykh*, 40.

²⁹ *Vestnik vremennago pravitel’sтва*, No. 61, 24 May 1917, 3.

provincial congresses of landowners.³⁰ Nonetheless, the names of many of these new bodies—the Union of Farmers, the Union of Grain Producers and Sowers, and so on—demonstrate that they aimed to embrace a broad sector of the rural population. Once it became apparent that sizeable numbers of peasant owners were turning up to local meetings, most unions abandoned any restrictions based upon size of ownership. In some, members only had 2–3 *desiatiny* of land, whilst others set dues based on the amount of *desiatiny*, ensuring that large landowners paid more.³¹ An initiator of the union in Odessa province, L. G. Reikherth, declared that their chief goal was to mobilize small peasant owners, and noted with satisfaction that the union quickly received expressions of interest from peasants and soldiers after only a few newspaper advertisements in May.³²

Whilst the existing Union of Landowners was clearly ignored, numerous local unions could not represent landed interests nationally. In early May, representatives of landowners from Ekaterinoslav, Khar'kov, Kherson, Kursk, Nizhnii Novgorod, Poltava, Samara, Saratov, Simbirsk, and Tver united to appeal to the government. They said that they were trying to fulfil their duty, and supply food and other goods, but illegal laws imposed by local authorities, unauthorized taxes, seizures, and similar activities were making the 'economic destruction of Russia' inevitable.³³ Notwithstanding the message, which became a familiar refrain of landowners, this appeal suggests that the process of unifying landowners from below had progressed to links between provinces. A new attempt to unite landowners nationally was the next logical step.

It has been suggested that political developments played an important role. The new coalition government of 5 May, which saw the Socialist-Revolutionary leader, V. M. Chernov, take over as Minister of Agriculture, led to fears that he would exacerbate rural unrest, especially when pressured by the first All-Russian Congress of Peasants from 4 May.³⁴ The political landscape was changing for the worse, and on 20 May 1917 the All-Russian Union of Landowners held a 'constituent' congress in Moscow. The term 'constituent' implies that its organizers were deliberately distancing the congress from the existing union, which was either superseded or taken over.

The 'new' Union of Landowners was very different from its previous incarnation. Over 300 delegates participated, including nobles and peasants from thirty-one provinces.³⁵ The congress aimed to unite the numerous new local bodies, as well as establishing branches in unrepresented areas, and to provide

³⁰ *Bor'ba za ustanovlenie i ukreplenie sovetskoi vlasti v Riazanskoi gubernii (1917–20gg.)* (Riazan', 1957), 65.

³¹ *Zemlia i volia*, No. 107, 4 August 1917, 2; *Golos naroda* [Orel'], No. 83, 2 August 1917.

³² *Odesskii listok*, No. 138, 1 June 1917, 4.

³³ *Rech'*, No. 102, 3 May 1917, 5.

³⁴ N. Khitrina, *Agrarnaia politika Vremennogo pravitel'stva v 1917g.* (Nizhnii Novgorod, 2003), 115.

³⁵ *Vestnik vremennago pravitel'stva*, No. 60, 21 May 1917, 4.

a coordinated national strategy. Local independence in everyday activities was fine, but landowners had to demonstrate national strength to wield influence. A new council was established with N. N. L'vov as president, and plans were laid for an All-Russian Congress of Landowners. Meanwhile, six departments were to coordinate the union's objectives: agrarian, judicial, financial, administrative, literature and propaganda, and the elections to the Constituent Assembly.³⁶ The union aimed to provide newsletters, leaflets, and practical help (particularly free legal aid) for individual members and local branches. Leaflets publicized government decrees and tried to attract new members, whilst legal aid became essential as unrest increased and turning to the courts was the only viable response.³⁷ The union also desired representation for landowners on official bodies dealing with agrarian and related issues.³⁸

The council made a concerted effort to foster unity prior to a planned national congress in early July and to encourage local unions to look beyond specific regional issues. Its secretary, K. I. Kozakov, an active member of Moscow's noble assembly, toured various provinces, promoting the council's activities. On 7 June, he visited a gathering of 350 landowners in Riazan, many of them peasants. He outlined the aims and activities of the union, stressing that whilst it respected the views of all parties in the countryside, the right of ownership was crucial. Its chief goal, he said, was to establish local branches and unite existing branches—at that stage, thirteen provinces, including Riazan, were on board. He also emphasized the important role that the council assigned to literature. They believed that agitators were not as effective locally as promotional material and promised to send more to branches. This literature would focus on combatting the socialization and nationalization of land, as well as clarifying the views of all political parties, as the union was non-party. Agitators should be based centrally in the province so that they were capable of attending meetings in *uezdy* and *volosti* when needed, as should experts on legal, agrarian, and industrial issues.³⁹

The leadership of the 'new' national union helped determine this approach. The president, L'vov, was still a large landowner and a former *uezd* marshal of the nobility, but was not active in the United Nobility and was far less conservative than Balashev. He had been a leader of the liberal movement in the early 1900s, a member of the Progressist group in Duma, and had helped form the Progressive Bloc in 1915. On 4 March, he received a short-lived post in the Provisional Government managing state property such as theatres, museums, and palaces. In this post he had urged artists to support a 'free Russia'. He had close links

³⁶ T. Osipova, 'Vserossiiskii soiuz zemel'nykh sobstvennikov [1917]', *Istoriia SSSR*, 3 (1976), 115–29; J. Channon, 'The Landowners', in R. Service (ed.), *Society and Politics in the Russian Revolution* (Basingstoke, 1992), 120–46.

³⁷ OR RGB, f. 114, k. 2, ed. khran. 35, l. 14.

³⁸ *Rech'*, No. 133, 9 June 1917, 1.

³⁹ *Izvestiia Riazanskago gubernskago otdela vserossiiskogo soiuz zemel'nykh sobstvennikov*, No. 1, 10 July 1917, 1.

with industrialists and headed the political section of the All-Russian Union of Trade and Industry.⁴⁰ So, although he was still moderately conservative, he was far more representative of the new government and enjoyed a range of useful connections in the new political system.

The same can be said about all twenty council members.⁴¹ Only one, the former Minister of Agriculture, A. V. Krivoshein, had been in the old union in 1916 and only one, V. I. Gurko, a former Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, was active in the United Nobility. Most were still nobles and large landowners. At least half were hereditary nobles and several (I. P. Kharitonenko, Baron V. V. Meller-Zakomel'skii and Count F. A. Uvarov, for example) were among Russia's largest landowners. Equally, some had held important posts before 1917. As well as Krivoshein and Gurko, Prince B. A. Vasil'chikov had held ministerial rank (agriculture, 1906–08), whilst at least five were in the State Council and three were in the Duma. Yet they cannot be termed 'zealous monarchists', as one Soviet historian described the union's leaders in 1916.⁴² Several had been at the forefront of the criticism levelled at the Tsar. I. I. Dmitriukov, Gurko, Krivoshein and Meller-Zakomel'skii had signed the appeal of the Progressive Bloc on behalf of their respective groups in the State Council and Duma, whilst L'vov had been a long-time advocate of such a bloc. Dmitriukov, L'vov, Vasil'chikov and probably others had aided the new regime as Duma commissars or advisors. There was also a conscious effort to replicate these backgrounds across the union. As well as having lawyers and industrialists on the council, L'vov and others wanted the union's branches to be led by individuals who had practical backgrounds, preferably in the *zemstva*, rather than former land captains or other hated figures.⁴³ Like the government, the new leadership emerged from those politicians (liberal and conservative), nobles, bureaucrats, and industrialists who were deeply disillusioned with the Tsar by 1917.

The reformed union was largely independent of its former sponsor, the United Nobility, although some financial links remained. In July, the United Nobility provided an unspecified amount to the union's branch in Moscow, as well as encouraging nobles and their assemblies across Russia to provide further financial support, and some local branches benefited.⁴⁴ The United Nobility tentatively

⁴⁰ D. Crowe, 'Nikolai Nikolaevich L'vov', in J. Wiczynski (ed.), *The Modern Encyclopaedia of Russian and Soviet History* (58 volumes: Gulf Breeze, 1976–94), xx, 209–13; *RPG*, I, 162; M. Frame, *The St Petersburg Imperial Theatres: Stage and State in Revolutionary Russia, 1900–1920* (Jefferson, 2000), 142–6.

⁴¹ OR RGB, f. 114, k. 2, ed. khran. 35, l. 1 (council members).

⁴² L. Spirin, *Krushenie pomeschchichikh i burzhuaznikh partii v Rossii (nachalo XXv–1920)* (Moscow, 1977), 257.

⁴³ OR RGB, f. 114, k. 2, ed. khran. 35, l. 14.

⁴⁴ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 340, l. 27ob. From April to August, the Saratov branch received 4,000 rubles from the local noble assemblies and 5,000 rubles from the central council of the union: P. Kabytov and N. Kabytova, 'Soiuzy zemel'nykh sobstvennikov povolzh'ia v 1917 godu', *Povolzhskii krai*, 10 (1988), 112.

welcomed the spontaneous rebirth of the union. It recognized that the union had a better chance of success if it was organized independently of noble organizations and it advised nobles to participate 'energetically', but not to initiate or lead local branches. It continued to feel, though, that the focus should be on all property owners rather than just landowners.⁴⁵

Attempts by Soviet historians to assign influence to the United Nobility to emphasize the counter-revolutionary activities of landowners have shifted in recent years, and other stereotypes are equally misleading.⁴⁶ According to Chaadaeva, for example, 'large landowners, blinded by their boundless hatred of the revolution, were not able to see, of course, that their endeavours were ruined and hopeless'.⁴⁷ Yet landowners neither unconditionally hated the revolution, nor felt that their activities were hopeless. Instead, they were changing in response to the new political and social developments. Starting with the congress in May, and reinforced by a larger gathering in early July, the union transformed from a small, elite organization of wealthy noble landowners into a well-organized, broader organization. The move was forced on them, but it was an obvious step to take to help landowners tap into the government's desire to maintain law and order.

FORGING A LANDED 'MOVEMENT'

Nevertheless, the union needed more than a new leadership and a rejuvenated organization if it was to succeed. The crucial issue was membership, and if the union was to increase its support amongst peasant and non-noble landowners, its views on the agrarian future of Russia had to be more inclusive. The union never retreated from its defence of the right to private landownership, but it did compromise in certain areas. Several of its leaders, such as Gurko, Krivoshein, L'vov, and Vasil'chikov, had expressed cautious support for the controlled expropriation of gentry land in the past,⁴⁸ and this issue came to the fore when faced with the popular demands of the peasantry. By April, local unions in turbulent areas, such as the Volga provinces, led the way by supporting the Kadets' plans to expropriate land in return for fair compensation.⁴⁹ At the constituent

⁴⁵ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 340, ll. 24, 29.

⁴⁶ Kabytova's earlier hostile analysis [Kabytov and Kabytova, 'Soiuzy'] has shifted to a more nuanced account [N. Kabytova, *Vlast' i obshchestvo Rossiiskoi provintsii v revoliutsii 1917 goda* (Samara, 2002), 147–62]. Osipova has also moved from seeing the union as 'counter-revolutionary' ['Vserossiiskii soiuz'] to suggesting that it had a 'liberal' spirit [*Rossiiskoe krest'ianstvo v revoliutsii i grazhdanskoi voine* (Moscow, 2001), 30].

⁴⁷ See her introduction to 'Soiuz zemel'nykh sobstvennikov v 1917 godu', *Krasnyi arkhiv*, 21 (1927), 99.

⁴⁸ A. Ascher, *P. A. Stolypin: The Search for Stability in Late Imperial Russia* (Stanford, 2001), Ch. 4; G. Hosking, *The Russian Constitutional Experiment: Government and Duma, 1907–1914* (Cambridge, 1973), 62–6.

⁴⁹ Kabytov and Kabytova, 'Soiuzy', 113.

congress in May, Gurko advocated this position, supported by Olsuf'ev and Uvarov. By redistributing state and crown land first and then accepting a transfer of some private land to the peasantry in return for fair compensation, they hoped to appease peasant demands. For others, such as Count Apraksin and Prince A. A. Krapotkin (a council member), private landownership remained inviolable. The numerous peasant landowners present favoured Gurko's view, probably hoping to benefit, and he won the majority in a vote.⁵⁰

The first national congress of the union in Moscow on 1–8 July 1917, with over 400 delegates from across Russia, reaffirmed this stance, although some still dissented.⁵¹ By this stage, though, the union's agrarian section had developed a detailed programme based on this premise. First, crown, state, and church land should be redistributed and efforts made to encourage new settlements in Siberia and Central Asia, and to use technology to create more productive land. But, if this was insufficient, there should be some expropriation of the arable land of large landholders for a fair level of compensation (not including manor houses, gardens, orchards, estate industries, or 'model' estates). Most importantly, this land should be used to strengthen small peasant owners, rather than become part of the communal pool. This process had to be conducted systematically so that land could be integrated into proper farms, and credit and equipment could be provided to aid fledgling landowners.⁵²

The union's plans were designed to broaden and strengthen private landownership, rather than simply assuaging the peasantry, as well as appealing to the small peasant owners (or aspiring owners) that the union wanted as members. It represented the best possible solution given the circumstances, but it also reflected a genuine belief that the expansion of private ownership, not its abolition, offered the best chance of improving Russia's agricultural productivity.⁵³ It placed the union close to the Kadets as the only major political party still defending the rights of owners, but the two groups disagreed on several issues, especially on the extent of expropriation; it remained a last resort for landowners, but was taken for granted by Kadets. Of course, in hindsight, it seems an uninspired solution that was completely divorced from the demands of the peasants. At the time, though, it marked a significant shift, albeit one forced on it by the gathering unrest.

The emphasis on productivity and state interests formed the basis of a more aggressive approach by landowners. Whereas the May congress concentrated on supporting the government, the July congress saw increasing criticism of

⁵⁰ Khitrina, *Agrarnaia politika*, 116–17.

⁵¹ OR RGB, f. 114, k. 2, ed. khran. 35, ll. 1–10b (summary of the main speeches).

⁵² OR RGB, f. 114, k. 2, ed. khran. 20, ll. 36–37.

⁵³ Statistics broadly support this assertion: landowners enjoyed inherent advantages under Tsarism, but they utilized more new technology and made more of their produce available on the market: A. Anfimov, *Krupnoe pomeshchich'e khoziaistvo evropeiskoi Rossii (konets XIX – nachalo XX veka)* (Moscow, 1969), 216–22.

its ineffectiveness and of Chernov's policies. The congress sent a fifteen-man delegation to Petrograd (ten peasants and five nobles) to meet with key ministers to articulate their concerns and to obtain reassurances about government support for a legal resolution to the agrarian question. They arrived on 3 July amid the popular protests in the capital against the government's war policies. Consequently, Chernov was preoccupied during their meeting. He avoided their questions and seemed divorced from their concerns, merely reiterating the Socialist-Revolutionary party's agrarian policies. This concerned the delegation as they hoped that the government was acting in the state's interests, rather than following party policies. The delegation received a more supportive reaction from Prince G. E. L'vov, the Prime Minister and Minister of Internal Affairs, who promised to take all possible measures to maintain 'normal life' in the countryside. The delegation stressed the non-party nature of the union and the fact that it united small and large landowners to defend their interests prior to the Constituent Assembly. The union also strived to secure food supplies for the military and the rear. Currently, the disruption and destruction in rural Russia was threatening hunger for the country.⁵⁴ L'vov resigned his post within days, however, leaving landowners unsure about the government's level of support. This reinforced their determination to defend their interests more proactively. N. N. L'vov summarized the mood in his concluding speech to the congress in early July: 'I do not see the future as hopeless', he declared, but 'we must go on to the attack.'⁵⁵

The union targeted 'all landowners, irrespective of gender, class, religion, political view, and size of landownership'. It produced various pamphlets, flyers, and propaganda notices, each aimed at a type of landowner. A flyer promoting a congress of landowners in Moscow *uezd* on 14 June was specifically addressed to peasant landowners, extolling the benefits of landownership, especially the ability to benefit from the investment of time, labour, and money in one's own land.⁵⁶ The union published accounts allegedly written by peasants complaining that the revolution was only benefiting 'windbags' and 'bloodsuckers' (lazy peasants), rather than those who worked hard. The union also tried to divide peasants and workers by noting the latter's demands for an eight-hour working day (peasants worked all day) and cheap agricultural products (as compared to expensive or non-existent manufactured goods).⁵⁷

It is impossible to analyse the impact of these pamphlets, but the literature department of the union believed that they were crucial in spreading 'the truth about the land'. It advocated employing all types of literature from brochures and flyers to posters and calendars, including illustrative material. It encouraged branches to organize talks on agrarian and political matters in local schools and

⁵⁴ The Odessa delegate's report on the trip is in *Odesskii listok*, No. 180, 21 July 1917, 2.

⁵⁵ OR RGB, f. 114, k. 2, ed. khran. 35, l. 1.

⁵⁶ OR RGB, f. 114, k. 2, ed. khran. 35, l. 30.

⁵⁷ OR RGB, f. 114, k. 2, ed. khran. 35, ll. 8–13, 16–17.

clubs, even using portable cinematic equipment if possible. It invited members to come to Moscow to attend its course, which would equip them to travel around the provinces promoting the union. It prepared instructions for those members in remote regions who were unable to travel to Moscow. Lectures in provincial and *uezd* towns should coincide with meetings of the local union. The department also urged branches to publish newspapers and to pay due attention to the role that the clergy might play in promoting the union rurally, and to agitate among national groups and peasant soldiers at the front.⁵⁸

The union also provided other practical help. It petitioned on members' behalf; according to the authorities in Penza, the number of complaints from an area significantly increased once a branch of the union was established.⁵⁹ According to critics, 77% of such appeals were unreliable and around half were false,⁶⁰ but incessant complaining does appear to have been a tactic designed to paint a picture of rural chaos to influence authorities at various levels to employ tougher measures against peasant unrest. It is impossible to prove that these tactics worked, but some historians have seen them as a factor in the government's growing determination to regulate the activities of land committees.⁶¹ Finally, the union circulated a range of information for its members, including copies of official decrees on agriculture.⁶²

The union's desire for a regular national newspaper to promote its aims, disseminate information, and answer queries faced practical problems and never materialized. It did help coordinate the creation of local newspapers. The first issue in Riazan on 10 July, for example, was edited by Kozakov and printed in Moscow. Local figures then took over to develop it into a weekly production.⁶³ By late July, Ekaterinoslav and Kaluga had followed suit, whilst a few other provinces were able to print their own literature. Ufa managed to publish in Russian and Tatar.⁶⁴ Local newspapers, though, were plagued by paper shortages, strikes, and sabotage. Lectures, discussions, and exhibitions on economic and political issues were actually held, whilst a small group of enthusiastic council members travelled to various localities and kept up a flow of correspondence providing advice. By increasing dues, the union extended its provision of free legal aid. Instructions were circulated on lodging claims against encroachments

⁵⁸ OR RGB, f. 114, k. 2, ed. khran. 20, ll. 34–5.

⁵⁹ Kabytov and Kabytova, 'Soiuzy', 116.

⁶⁰ T. Osipova, *Klassovaia bor'ba v derevne v period podgotovki i provedeniia velikoi oktiabr'skoi sotsialisticheskoi revoliutsii* (Moscow, 1974), 186.

⁶¹ See, for e.g., R. Manning, 'Bolshevik without the Party: Sychevka in 1917', in D. Raleigh (ed.), *Provincial Landscapes: Local Dimensions of Soviet Power, 1917–1953* (Pittsburgh, 2001), 46–7.

⁶² OR RGB, f. 114, k. 2, ed. khran. 26, l. 10ob. A collection of decrees was also published [*Sbornik iuridicheskogo otdela Vserossiiskogo soiuzna zemel'nykh sobstvennikov: Vyp. 1* (Moscow, 1917)] and a second was prepared.

⁶³ Ten issues were published from 10 July to 16 September. The name changed from the *Izvestiia Riazanskago gubernskago otdela vserossiiskogo soiuzna zemel'nykh sobstvennikov* to the broader *Zemledelets*.

⁶⁴ OR RGB, f. 114, k. 2, ed. khran. 35, l. 29ob; 'Soiuz zemel'nykh sobstvennikov', 100, 102, 106–7.

(the evidence needed and which courts to use) and a standard form to use was even provided.⁶⁵

Landowners were never going to match the peasant movement, given the vast difference in size between the two groups, but they did turn the union into a broad organization. On the eve of February, the old union had around 150 members and half a dozen branches. By autumn 1917, the new version had at least 337 branches in forty-five provinces, 167 *uezdy*, and 125 *volosti*.⁶⁶ There were no membership lists. Spirin's estimate of 50,000 based on attendance at various conferences seems inaccurate.⁶⁷ Congresses included potential members, whilst actual members were often unable or unwilling to attend, given the social turbulence. In some places, the union could attract thousands; in late May, 1,273 landowners attended a conference in Ekaterinoslav, representing 3,470 members, whilst a branch in one *uezd* in Chernigov province had 3,500 members and one in Samara had 4,000 members.⁶⁸ Provincial congresses usually saw 100–400 attendees, whilst around 500 represented several southern provinces in Odessa in June. Most *uezd* congresses struggled to attract more than a hundred—sixty-five attended a congress in Rianenburg (Riazan) in May, whilst eighty attended a meeting in Novokhoperskii *uezd* (Voronezh).⁶⁹ These numbers were dwarfed by the peasant movement. In Podoliia, for example, a congress of landowners held in April saw thirty attend on the same day that 600 peasants attended a congress.⁷⁰ Nonetheless, it still marked a vast improvement.

Similarly, the union broadened its social base, although it is again hard to be precise given the lack of membership lists. Its leaders were still large landowners, but the vast majority of members were undoubtedly small peasant landowners; in July, for example, only twelve of the sixty-six present at a congress in Mokshanskii *uezd* (Penza) were noble landowners, whilst 100 of 150 in Kashinskii *uezd* (Tula) were peasants, as were ninety of 120 in Chernigov.⁷¹ By late July, Penza claimed to have 850 landowners and 10,000 peasants as members—an abnormally high figure. The peasants did not pay dues and the strength of their allegiance was questionable.⁷² Many peasant owners, however, had been the first to suffer from the agrarian movement, and it was hardly surprising that they sympathized with

⁶⁵ OR RGB, f. 114, k. 2, ed. khnan. 20, ll. 28–28ob (dues); ed. khnan. 24, ll. 4–10 (advice and form).

⁶⁶ Osipova, 'Vserossiiskii soiuz', 119–20. Moscow province had the most *uezd* branches at eleven, followed by ten in Penza and Novgorod provinces. Twelve other provinces had between six and eight *uezd* branches.

⁶⁷ Spirin, *Krushenie pomeshchichikh*, 259.

⁶⁸ *Rech'*, No. 119, 24 May 1917, 7; Osipova, 'Vserossiiskii soiuz', 120.

⁶⁹ *Odesskii listok*, No. 156, 22 June 1917, 3; A. Shestakov (ed.), *Sovety krest'ianskikh deputatov i drugie krest'ianskie organizatsii: Tom pervyi, chast' II* (Moscow, 1929), 152; GARF, f. 1791, op. 2, d. 224, l. 55.

⁷⁰ *Podolianin*, No. 1801, 12 April 1917, 2.

⁷¹ *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Rossii v iule 1917g. (Iul'skii krizis)* (Moscow, 1959), 470; Osipova, 'Vserossiiskii soiuz', 121; *Odesskii listok*, No. 170, 9 July 1917, 1.

⁷² 'Soiuz zemel'nykh sobstvennikov', 104.

the union's defence of private landownership. The union emphasized this conflict in its publications; according to its reports, for example, there were 456 violations in Penza prior to 15 September, of which 307 (67%) were conducted against other peasants, perhaps explaining the high membership totals.⁷³ It was in the union's interests to exaggerate to gain further support and to paint an impression of widespread disorder, but there is no doubt that many peasant owners had their lands seized and were refused a vote in local committees. Soviet historians have estimated that 20–44% of rural unrest was directed at these peasants, whilst Figes noted that whereas 27–33% peasants were outside the commune in 1916, only 2% remained in 1922 in most provinces of European Russia.⁷⁴

The union between landowners and peasants was always fated to be an uneasy alliance. There was a lack of real unity and the apparently broad membership of the union was far from solid. There was a history of social division in rural Russia, and some peasant owners united with the village, sensing a chance to augment their holdings by plundering the land and property of larger landowners. The union sometimes resorted to bribing peasant owners to join. In Samara, it offered to forget past offences. In Pskov, it was willing to forgive peasants and to allot them five *desiatiny* per household if they joined. Some branches offered lower rents, material help to buy equipment, and the opportunity to buy cheap land and grain.⁷⁵

Some peasant owners formed their own organizations. Those in Atkarskii *uezd* (Saratov) noted on 14 June that they did not want to become 'unhappy landless peasants' again, but landowners were 'perpetual enemies'.⁷⁶ The demands of these bodies read as a socially orientated version of the Union of Landowners. The Union of Peasant Owners in Tauride supported the principle of private landownership, the right of the Constituent Assembly to decide the land question, and also demanded that state, crown and church land be expropriated first, with loss of other land receiving compensation. But, instead of aiming to strengthen existing peasant owners, they argued that it must go to those with no land or little land, especially participants in the war.⁷⁷ Yet, by summer, they too were calling for greater use of the militia to maintain order.

Equally, there were rival groups of landowners in some areas. One was the Northern Agricultural Society, which tried to unite landowners in Petrograd, Novgorod, Pskov, Tver and Vitebsk provinces. It was formed in early March, with

⁷³ OR RGB, f. 114, k. 2, ed. khran. 23, l. 2.

⁷⁴ O. Figes, 'The Russian Peasant Community in the Agrarian Revolution, 1917–18', in R. Bartlett (ed.), *Land Commune and Peasant Community in Russia* (London, 1990), 239–40. Also A. Maliavskii, *Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie v Rossii v 1917g (mart-oktiabr)* (Moscow, 1981), 323–6.

⁷⁵ 'Soiuz zemel'nykh sobstvennikov', 105; Osipova, *Klassovaia bor'ba*, 103.

⁷⁶ Kabytova, *Vlast'*, 156.

⁷⁷ *Rech'*, No. 158, 8 July 1917, 5. Other examples are in Shestakov, *Sovety krest'ianskikh deputatov*, 181–209.

greater structure emerging from several meetings in April. Its organizers stressed the society's independence from the Union of Landowners as it believed that the union was viewed negatively by many. They emphasized their technological and scientific work to demonstrate that they were promoting the general improvement of agriculture, rather than simply defending private landownership. Nevertheless, its petitions to the government on the impact of the unrest mirrored the union. It attracted a smaller, but broader membership, including managers, agronomists, and institutions, as well as large and small landowners. The statistics available give a figure of 688 members by mid 1917. However, its main congress had still not materialized by September, whilst it struggled to attract enough members to maintain finances. A 'depressing' meeting on 27 June showed that the society was dependent on subsidies from the Ministry of Agriculture, compromising its independence. The help from the ministry suggests that the society's scientific goals made it more acceptable officially than the union but, if anything, the response to the June meeting saw the society move closer to the union. It became more vocal in its opposition to socialist visions of agrarian reform, whilst union leaders, such as Vasil'chikov and Krapotkin, were active within the society. But financial problems persisted and with most banks not interested, and discussions with industrialists ongoing, the society looked to the union for help. The union was receptive, but on its own terms. Ultimately, the society lacked the finances to challenge the union across Russia.⁷⁸

The Union of Landowners was the predominant body representing landed interests, but not the only one, whilst the 'bottom-up' nature of its rebirth was a mixed blessing. It distanced the union from its previous incarnation and provided a dynamic leadership, but it was a continual struggle to unite the numerous local bodies and, in some respects, it remained a union of unions. Even in September, the Union of Landowners of South Russia had its own president and council, and had registered its own regulations at Odessa's regional court. It received directives from the main union, which it debated.⁷⁹ To be sure, most of these local bodies shared the same objectives as the main union, but there were elements of disunity. Landowners in Kherson and Bessarabia, for example, adopted a firmer stance on their relations with political parties, stating that whilst members could participate in any party apart from monarchist parties, landowners' interests were united with the Kadets, in view of the desire of other parties (socialists) for extreme land reform.⁸⁰ This clashed with the main union's attempts to promote itself as a non-party organization. Conflict also continued over the extent of land reform. The acceptance of some expropriation of private land did not specify what a 'fair' level of compensation might be. Again, landowners in Kherson

⁷⁸ The society is the focus of A. Chuloshnikov, 'Agrarnaia reforma i zemel'nye sobstvenniki v 1917 godu', *Krasnaia letopis'*, 6 (33) (1929), 73–90.

⁷⁹ *Odesskii listok*, No. 239, 1 October 1917, 3; No. 243, 6 October 1917, 2.

⁸⁰ *Odesskii listok*, No. 153, 18 June 1917, 3.

and Bessarabia considered that land should be valued as it was during the five years prior to the war.⁸¹ This cost was politically unacceptable and financially impossible. The main union's stance was flatly rejected elsewhere. The president of the Union of Farmers and Sowers in Ufa, P. P. Tolstoi, declared to the Minister of Internal Affairs in July 1917 that no one would voluntarily give up their land and radical reform would lead to a 'bloody catastrophe'.⁸² The unification of landowners, therefore, was an ongoing process in 1917.

THE UNION AND THE GOVERNMENT

Beyond creating a large, representative organization, landowners aimed to influence decision-making within the government or, at least, to be represented in key bodies so that their views were heard. The union had little impact on the main bodies discussing agrarian reform: the Main Land Committee and the League of Agrarian Reform. The Main Land Committee was an unwieldy and expanding body that became dominated by socialists. The committee's council, for example, grew from twenty-two in its first meeting (19–20 May) to thirty-four in its second (1–6 July), and fifty in its third and final meeting (25–9 August). Groups sympathetic to property rights (mainly Kadets) formed 32% of the first council, but only 16% of the last. The new members were all socialists.⁸³ The union requested representation in May, but was only granted three consultative places after a meeting with A. S. Postnikov, the committee's chairman, in July. This number was less than that received by peasant bodies, whilst Postnikov argued that the rules would have to be changed to allow them a full vote.⁸⁴ The union had even less success in the League of Agrarian Reform, which influenced the committee. Formed after February, it was an unofficial body that united members of the Free Economic Society, All-Russian *Zemstvo* Union, and various agricultural and scientific societies. It was dominated by agronomists from the major political parties, and landowners never obtained a direct voice. The Kadets were again the sole defenders of private property, but although they retained a majority in the league, this resulted in it appearing more conservative and out of touch.⁸⁵ In some respects, however, both bodies were irrelevant. According to one participant, the work of the committee was slow and unproductive: too many members spoke incoherently for lengthy periods. Most did not have the level of education or the legal knowledge needed to

⁸¹ *Odesskii listok*, No. 156, 22 June 1917, 3.

⁸² Telitsyn, 'Fevral'skaia revoliutsiia i agrarnyi vopros', 177.

⁸³ P. Pershin, *Agrarnaia revoliutsiia v Rossii* (2 volumes: Moscow, 1966), I, 295.

⁸⁴ *Izvestiia Riazanskago gubernskago otdela vserossiiskogo soiuza zemel'nykh sobstvennikov*, No. 2, 17 July 1917, 3.

⁸⁵ E. Illeritskaia, 'Liga agrarnykh reform i politicheskie partii Rossii', in I. Mints (ed.), *Ne proletarskie partii Rossii v 1917 godu i v gody grazhdanskoi voiny* (Moscow, 1980), 108–16.

produce legislation.⁸⁶ A coherent plan for agrarian reform was almost as far away in autumn as it had been in February: even socialists were divided on how to redistribute the land.

Instead, what was important was how the government actually responded to the growing disorder and whether it listened to landowners' complaints. Immediately after the revolution, conditioned by life under Tsarism, landowners requested troops as soon as they felt threatened, but the new government was not initially prepared to sanction the use of military force. On 9 March 1917, a meeting of the government recognized that agrarian disorders in Kazan had to be suppressed and landowners defended, but considered the use of force undesirable at that time. Local officials and committees who enjoyed popular confidence were urged to use their influence to calm the unrest. Meanwhile, it was resolved that the Ministry of Internal Affairs would work to quickly establish a police force and the Ministry of Justice would seek to prosecute those involved in disorder. This resolution formed the basis of instructions sent to all local officials at this time.⁸⁷ The country needed private landownership defended for economic reasons, if nothing else. As the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, Prince S. D. Urusov, noted on 3 April, it was essential for the food supply to the cities and the military that the best conditions for rural production be maintained, and that workers and equipment be made freely available to landowners.⁸⁸

On 11 April, the government pledged to protect crops through food supply committees and vowed to reimburse owners for any damage incurred to fields under their supervision. As part of this, though, unsown land would be transferred to the control of the committees, which would ensure that the fields were sown—landowners would receive any rent that the committees obtained.⁸⁹ For supporters, this measure was a decisive move to solve food supply problems, whilst for socialists, it was clear evidence of the government's 'gentry' orientation. Landowners were divided. It provided hope that some losses could be recouped, but it was unwelcome interference in their estates. Moreover, many committees used it as an excuse to seize land on the pretext that it was unsown or to seize land designated for non-arable purposes, such as grass for livestock. In Sychevka (Smolensk), some villages responded by seizing land outright, whilst the local committee feared that landowners would retaliate by selling equipment and land. This led to a ruling on 17 June to enact audits of all estates and supervise all land sales.⁹⁰

This step pre-empted a shift in national policy after socialists entered the government in May. Officially, the government remained committed to defending landownership, but the new Minister of Agriculture, Chernov, shared the

⁸⁶ V. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, 'Glavnyi zemel'nyi komitet', *Arkhiv Russkoi revoliutsii*, 12 (1923), 292.

⁸⁷ GARF, f. 1791, op. 2, d. 148, ll. 2–3, 13.

⁸⁸ *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Rossii posle sverzheniia*, 451.

⁹⁰ Manning, 'Bolshevik without the Party', 41–4.

⁸⁹ *RPG*, II, 621–2.

concerns of local committees such as Sychevka. On 17 May, he bypassed the cabinet and asked notaries to withhold confirming land sales, thereby imposing a de facto halt on transactions. The Kadet ministers opposed this move vigorously, whilst Chernov admitted on 15 June that landowners and banks had strongly opposed it, leading to its abolition on 23 June.⁹¹ Nonetheless, Chernov took advantage of the weakened position of the Kadets after a government reshuffle to reinstate it on 12 July. All transactions of land needed to be approved by the provincial land committee and confirmed by the Minister of Agriculture, and this affected all sales after 1 March 1917.⁹² Although this law did not forbid transactions, the views of land committees meant that few permitted sales to proceed. One historian called it the only major move on the land question made by the government.⁹³

It provoked fury on the part of landowners who subjected the government to a barrage of complaints. The Union of Simbirsk Farmers argued that the law breached the 'inalienable rights' of freedom and ownership instigated by the French Revolution, as well as having disastrous economic consequences. The Union of Private Landowners in Beletskii *uezd* (Bessarabia) agreed that it violated human rights and also noted that it was hardly in the state's interests to harm the economy in this way, implying class or party motives behind the law. The union in Saratov pointed out that it would also have an impact on financial institutions and industrial enterprises linked to agriculture, and accused land committees of acting in 'party interests'. The Union of Sowers in Samara developed the financial theme, arguing that landowners' debts could not be paid if they could not utilize their land, whilst such laws were the sole preserve of the Constituent Assembly.⁹⁴ The union's main council sent a long letter of complaint to the new Prime Minister, A. F. Kerenskii, on 24 July questioning the legality of the measure and whether it was necessary. It doubted that land speculation, fictitious transactions, re-mortgaging, and the sale of land to foreigners existed—all reasons given for the introduction of the law. Who would buy and lend money on land given the current rural instability? The union believed it would have been easier to clamp down on individual abuses given their infrequency.⁹⁵

The inevitability of the complaints should not mask the fact that the law did have a major financial impact on landowners. A ban on sales made estates worthless. Mortgages and credit taken on with the estate as collateral were now extremely problematic, with landowners already struggling to honour their debts given the impact of the unrest on their profits. Sizeable amounts of land were involved. It has been calculated that by 1 January 1914, 51.6%

⁹¹ *Ekonomicheskoe polozhenie Rossii nakanune velikoi oktiabr'skoi sotsialisticheskoi revoliutsii: Dokumenty i materialy* (3 volumes: Moscow-Leningrad, 1957–67), III, 225.

⁹² *RPG*, II, 556–7.

⁹³ G. Gill, *Peasants and Government in the Russian Revolution* (London, 1979), 97.

⁹⁴ GARF, f. 1778, op. 1, d. 49, ll. 1, 7–12.

⁹⁵ OR RGB, f. 114, k. 2, ed. khran. 21, ll. 1–7ob.

of privately owned land in European Russia (over 75% in some areas) was mortgaged to noble or private banks to up to 60% of its value. Around 85% of landowners who took out mortgages with the Noble Land Bank between 1906 and 1915 were large landowners (over 500 *desiatiny*); large landowners, in turn, accounted for nearly 84% of all land owned by nobles.⁹⁶ This law, therefore, harmed many landowners, banks, other clients, and shareholders. There was very little, however, that the union could do since the law was popular amongst peasants. In late July, the union's council discussed launching a legal challenge; some felt that it did not have a legal basis, whilst others argued that it was simply a waste of time under the current conditions. In the end, the council resolved to carry on protesting to the government, fired off a protest to the senate, and started to gather information on how many individuals might be affected.⁹⁷

Council members approached the Noble Bank to rearrange the payments of landowners on the basis that many were not receiving rents, had suffered from seizures of land and property, and were now unable to trade their land. The bank agreed to reschedule payments, but concluded that anything further depended upon future government policy. Commercial banks were less favourable, but they too agreed not to conduct any knee-jerk reactions and to permit landowners some leeway. It was in their interests, of course, since many landowners genuinely had no means of paying, and the banks had to attempt to recover something. Dmitriukov also tried to establish lines of new credit. No one was offering credit given the conditions, but it was needed for machines, goods, wages, and transport. Currently, landowners were forced to pay out of their own savings, which many did not have, whilst inflation was affecting the price of goods and labour. Dmitriukov tried to convince banks to set up a scheme and at the end of July reported that they were considering ways of crediting the union, which could then pass money on to those members who needed it the most.⁹⁸ Such an arrangement, though, was complex to establish, practically and financially, and had clearly not happened by October.

Although the law forbidding land transactions was not rescinded, the government did adopt a more forceful approach towards agrarian unrest. By late April, armed regiments were being sent to various provinces to suppress unrest and, as it became clear that officials were often powerless, they were permitted by the government to take 'local conditions' into account in their response. From July,

⁹⁶ Anfimov, *Krupnoe pomeshchich'e*, 321, 326. The figures have been contested: Becker claimed that mortgage debt was 20% of the value of all land in 1914 (S. Becker, *Nobility and Privilege in Late Imperial Russia* [DeKalb, 1985], 49), whereas Anfimov gives 30.3%. Kravchuk stated that 80% of all private land was mortgaged (N. Kravchuk, *Massovoe krest'ianskoe dvizhenie v Rossii nakanune oktiabria* [Moscow, 1971], 29).

⁹⁷ 'Soiuz zemel'nykh sobstvennikov', 112–13.

⁹⁸ 'Soiuz zemel'nykh sobstvennikov', 110–12; OR RGB, f. 114, k. 2, ed. khran. 21, ll. 6–6ob; ed. khran. 28, ll. 1–2.

commissars were told to employ legal and military action to enact policy and maintain order.⁹⁹ On 8 July, the Commander of the south-western front, General L. G. Kornilov, forbade seizures of equipment, livestock, and food supplies in the areas under his control. General A. I. Denikin followed suit on 17 July on the western front. When Kornilov became Commander-in-Chief, he expanded this policy across the 'theatre of war' in western Russia on 31 July 1917, and it was restated by Kerenskii on 8 September, with no mention of being limited to the war zone.¹⁰⁰ Consequently, the number of reported incidents where troops opened fire on peasants rose steadily, from seventeen before June, to thirty-nine in July and August, to 105 in September and October, with confrontations involving thousands.¹⁰¹

This was a drop in the ocean, but landowners had no other means of resisting the unrest. The local militia, if existent, were poorly organized and staffed. The union's judicial department recognized that it was 'almost pointless' complaining; another landowner noted that when the militia was dispatched to sort out disputes, they merely insisted that landowners carried out the committees' orders.¹⁰² Landowners became reliant on troops to defend their property and there were few available. Reports indicate that unrest was quelled by troops only to re-emerge once they departed. Many soldiers were unreliable, often refusing to act, or were vastly outnumbered by the peasants, who were frequently armed. Landowners demanded cavalry troops, which were more reliable, or resorted to taking their own measures. Penza landowners asked for permission on 19 October to form their own armed force to protect members.¹⁰³

When appeals to the local authorities failed to bring results, landowners redirected them to ministers. Most complaints were passed to the Ministry of Internal Affairs who redirected them to provincial commissars with instructions to defend the rights of the complainant. They were then forwarded to *uezd* commissars, who were the people that had been complained to in the first place! *Uezd* commissars were overworked, with few means of maintaining order. They were usually peasants or socialists with relatively radical views in charge of vast areas with, at best, a poorly organized militia and unreliable troops. Meanwhile, the time taken to respond to complaints was growing. The *uezd* commissar took several weeks to respond as time was taken to receive information from *volost* authorities, who were yet more radical. They invariably replied that 'everything was now calm'; either it was, as the original complaint had been made weeks ago,

⁹⁹ GARF, f. 1791, op. 2, d. 148, l. 11 (instructions to Orenburg, 31 May); op. 2, d. 224, l. 112 (to Riazan, 19 July).

¹⁰⁰ *RPG*, II, 567–8 [Kornilov]; K. Kotel'nikov and V. Meller (eds.), *Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie v 1917 godu* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1927), 420–1 [Kerenskii].

¹⁰¹ Maliavskii, *Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie*, 244–5, 353.

¹⁰² OR RGB, f. 114, k. 2, ed. khran. 26, l. 4ob; 'Soiuz zemel'nykh sobstvennikov', 103.

¹⁰³ GARF, f. 1791, op. 2, d. 164, l. 1.

or they viewed peasant actions as justified, or were powerless to act. On 7 June, for example, the Union of Farmers in Kirsanov (Tambov) alleged that *uezd* and *volost* committees had been illegally elected and that they had arbitrarily removed all workers from estates. The Ministry of Internal Affairs informed the provincial commissar who contacted the *uezd* authorities. A month later, on 11 July, the commissar reported back that the chairman of the *uezd* committee had declared that the elections were fair and that all the population had participated. POWs had been removed, but this was being reconsidered. Other workers, though, were free to leave if they wished. He argued that there were no illegal seizures of land or other conflicts in the *uezd*, painting a picture of calm that sharply contrasted with the original complaint.¹⁰⁴ Ultimately, landowners had an idealized view of the authority's ability to enforce its will, and the lack of results underpinned their growing criticism of the government.

Most appeals concerned the new *volost*, land, and food supply committees. Few objected to committees in principle, especially given the intention that landowners would have a role. Land committees, in particular, were supposed to be a calming influence, providing landowners with a body to complain to about illegal activities. In reality, landowners unanimously argued that they were a de-stabilizing factor.¹⁰⁵ Committees incited unrest, imposed illegal dues and requisitions, conducted searches of estates, and arrested landowners. Some committees blatantly moved beyond their economic remit: one landowner in Penza had armchairs, stools, writing tables, bed, lamp, clock, typewriter, inkpot and a blotter, samovar, and cutlery taken by the *volost* committee.¹⁰⁶ At the very least, committees were unhelpful and, if not directly inciting it, they rarely deplored unrest or acted decisively to suppress it. Furthermore, jurisdictions overlapped: Saratov landowners complained in early April that 'village committees issue orders without considering the proclamations of the *volost* committee; the *volost* authorities don't pay any attention to the *uezd* committee, and so on'.¹⁰⁷

Landowners argued that committees acted in party and class interests, not state interests. A congress of the Sychevka branch of the union on 1 August attracted 1,000 landowners who complained about the 'anarchy' of numerous illegal laws and activities. *Uezd* land committees were composed of inexperienced and incompetent individuals with criminal backgrounds. People were needed with local knowledge who worked for the interests of the state. Similarly, *uezd* commissars needed to be independent, above local party discord, and responsible solely to the government. Currently, they followed official orders only insofar as

¹⁰⁴ GARF, f. 1791, op. 2, d. 237, ll. 97–97ob.

¹⁰⁵ OR RGB, f. 114, k. 2, ed. khron. 20, ll. 29–32 (a summary of the complaints compiled by the judicial section of the union in early July, which was later published for wider dissemination [ed. khron. 35, l. 1ob]).

¹⁰⁶ *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Rossii v iiule*, 451.

¹⁰⁷ *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Rossii v aprele*, 613.

they were popular, and they generally enacted the wishes of the local soviet.¹⁰⁸ Landowners failed to comprehend popular ambitions or understandings of democracy, but local committees undoubtedly exacerbated a volatile situation. Even the militia recognized this in their reports.¹⁰⁹ Committees helped peasants seize land and equipment using 'pseudo-legal' means: 'legal' resolutions or forcing landowners to 'agree' to various concessions.¹¹⁰ Unsurprisingly, the union pressed for them to be disbanded, especially at *volost* level.¹¹¹

The main grievance was the non-involvement of landowners. The union argued that it was a politically independent body, representing a sizeable and well-informed portion of rural society that could play an important role on committees.¹¹² It demanded three places on all committees, with no success. Local efforts met with the same result. A Saratov landowner complained on 16 July that 'only those who want to receive land are represented, but those from whom they want to take land are not'. His petition was rejected as being 'unacceptable'.¹¹³ Some landowners had a consultative voice. A. Davydov was allowed to speak unofficially, whilst Rudnev noted that all social groups in his village discussed important economic and political questions, and that his advice was undoubtedly valued.¹¹⁴ Most *volost* land committees, though, were extensions of local village communes, filled with individuals who, if not peasants, sympathized with them. The union argued that members were poorly educated, often with little experience of agriculture and a criminal past. A union member from Ufa province was blunter: the committees were made up of vagrants and hooligans attracted by the wages and benefits the position provided. Few good peasants served as they were too busy working.¹¹⁵ The complaint about criminals was widely echoed, which individuals frequently served on several committees, making it difficult to regulate their activities. The union recommended that all local branches should be provided with copies of the amnesty granted to certain categories of prisoners after the February Revolution to check that individuals had been legally released.¹¹⁶

Increasingly, the union turned to legal action in tandem with military force, and was determined to prosecute offending peasants and committees. Initially, the focus was on the illegal taxes charged by some *volost* land committees but, as the unrest gathered pace, the union encouraged members to take legal measures

¹⁰⁸ GARF, f. 1778, op. 1, d. 49, ll. 24–26ob.

¹⁰⁹ GARF, f. 1791, op. 2, d. 224, ll. 31–31ob (a report by the militia in Tambov on 10 May).

¹¹⁰ S. Badcock, *Politics and the People in Revolutionary Russia* (Cambridge, 2007), 195–8.

¹¹¹ OR RGB, f. 114, k. 2, ed. khran. 23, ll. 1–2ob.

¹¹² OR RGB, f. 114, k. 2, ed. khran. 20, l. 31ob.

¹¹³ D. Raleigh, *Revolution on the Volga: 1917 in Saratov* (Ithaca, 1986), 178–9. Most requests were considered 'absurd'; Kabytova, *Vlast'*, 153.

¹¹⁴ A. Davydoff, *Russian Sketches (Memoirs)* (Tenaflly, 1984), 187–8; Rudnev, *Pri vechernykh*, 81–5.

¹¹⁵ 'Soiuz zemel'nykh sobstvennikov', 107.

¹¹⁶ OR RGB, f. 114, k. 2, ed. khran. 20, l. 3ob.

against all illegal activities, both to reverse them and to reclaim losses. One of the union's main aims was to provide free legal aid to its members and others who needed it, but could not afford it. This aid should be extensive and quick. It should include verbal and written advice, and might involve trips to the provinces. The council was responsible for distributing relevant legal publications and copies of laws, recommending experienced lawyers, and providing opinions on contentious issues. It also aimed to organize congresses of its lawyers in Moscow to share opinions.¹¹⁷

The union succeeded in making legal aid available in provincial centres. There was a reasonable coverage at *uezd* level, but less so in *volosti*, although this increased in August and September as it became a priority. Few were as fortunate as Moscow *uezd*, which drew upon the city's resources and fielded three solicitors with aid available daily, but even remote *uezdy* in Orel advertised daily opening hours when landowners could come for advice.¹¹⁸ By the October Revolution, there had been at least two gatherings of the union's lawyers in Moscow. The first was held on 18–19 August 1917, timed to coincide with the third general congress of lawyers in the city on 20 August.¹¹⁹ Krapotkin was elected to the council of the latter congress, which was attended by around 100 lawyers.¹²⁰

Judicial sections of provincial branches copied this shift to more aggressive legal tactics. In Riazan, for example, the branch's legal advice on 10 July was simply to complain to land committees about illegal seizures, making sure to provide detailed accounts of losses. A fortnight later, however, the advice was far more forceful. It argued that, with the harvest nearly gathered, landowners must not hesitate to turn to legal means to respond to all incidents of seizure. The branch advised them to specify clearly who had been affected, what had been seized, and by whom (individuals or an organization). All those involved were to sign the declaration and copies sent to the provincial food committee (with the April law on preserving grain and compensation in mind) and the union.¹²¹ The branch repeatedly urged landowners to take legal action in subsequent weeks, suggesting that many were unwilling to act, possibly fearing retaliatory attacks from peasants. On 27 August, the Riazan branch again outlined detailed legal steps for landowners, ostensibly responding to a reader's query. The number of prosecutions did increase but, like other union activities, encouraging individual landowners to risk more aggressive measures was an ongoing task.¹²²

¹¹⁷ OR RGB, f. 114, k. 2, ed. kh. 20, ll. 32ob–33.

¹¹⁸ 'Soiuz zemel'nykh sobstvennikov', 103; *Golos naroda* [Orel], No. 75, 23 July 1917.

¹¹⁹ OR RGB, f. 114, k. 2, ed. kh. 23, l. 1ob; ed. kh. 24, l. 1.

¹²⁰ *Moskovskiiia vedomosti*, No. 183, 22 August 1917, 1.

¹²¹ *Izvestiia Riazanskago gubernskago otdela vserossiiskogo soiuzia zemel'nykh sobstvennikov*, No. 1, 10 July 1917, 3. The new advice was in the same newspaper, but renamed *Zemledelets*, No. 3, 24 July 1917, 4.

¹²² *Zemledelets*, No. 7, 27 August 1917, 6. The rising level of prosecutions is discussed further in Chapter 6.

GROWING SOCIAL CONFLICT

By late summer 1917, the level of rural conflict was growing significantly. Peasant impatience and militancy fed into local committees and peasant congresses. More contemplated radical actions such as seizing estates and transferring all land to the control of land committees (that is, to the peasantry) or simply 'liquidating' landownership. As early as 25 March, the executive committee in Ranenburg (Riazan) declared that landowners could only retain the land that they could work themselves without hired labour or prisoners of war.¹²³ The government responded on 5 April, declaring the order to be 'inadmissible' and proposing to replace the *uezd* commissar.¹²⁴ Yet similar incidents quickly followed across Russia. Some resolutions were immensely detailed, with points dealing with all elements of the agrarian economy. This made them seem 'quasi-legal' to peasants. In May, land seizures began in Mokshanskii *uezd* (Penza). In response to complaints, the *uezd* executive committee resolved to sanction these seizures, with some estates transferring to the control of committees and some of the land of peasant owners removed. Complaints to the *uezd* commissar went ignored, because the commissar was also the chairman of the executive committee! A congress of peasants in the province then resolved to transfer all privately owned land and equipment to the working people. The Prime Minister, L'vov, alerted by the local branch of the union, acted promptly. On 9 June 1917, he stated that the congress's resolution was illegal and instructed the provincial commissar to take decisive measures against it. L'vov declared that individuals or organizations committing or permitting such seizures should be prosecuted. L'vov's response was dispatched to other provinces and the union printed off copies for members to use elsewhere.¹²⁵

There is no evidence that L'vov's appeal was successful as similar cases were frequent.¹²⁶ Initially, most peasant congresses resolved that transferring land to the committees was merely desirable, but peasants saw these bodies as embodying democracy, viewed their resolutions as legal, and implemented them. Congresses fuelled expectations and, in turn, influenced local committees to act. Encouraged, congresses started passing resolutions with the intention of enacting them. On 16 July, Chernov encouraged land committees to take over landowners' land if this was necessary to ensure that it was sown and harvested; to mediate in disputes over rent; and to use animals or equipment unused by owners. The

¹²³ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 339, ll. 13–14.

¹²⁴ *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Rossii v aprele*, 304.

¹²⁵ OR RGB, f. 114, k. 2, ed. kh. 35, ll. 1–10b, 24; Telitsyn, 'Fevral'skaia revoliutsiia i agrarnyi vopros', 180. Copies of another letter by L'vov on 17 May, condemning anarchy and illegal taxes, were also made; l. 25.

¹²⁶ See the resolutions from Odessa on 8 June and Timskii *uezd* (Kursk) on 16 June: *Ekonomicheskoe polozhenie Rossii*, III, 280–1, 359–60 (other examples abound in this volume alone).

committees should satisfy the 'just demands' of peasants.¹²⁷ This amounted to an official acceptance of committees' activities and other ministers reacted furiously. I. G. Tsereteli (internal affairs) and A. V. Peshekhonov (food), both socialists, immediately re-emphasized the need for order and denied the right of land committees to take control of the land under any circumstances.¹²⁸ The union welcomed their circulars on 24 July, but noted that land sales remained prohibited and that legality was disintegrating. The government, it implied, must do more.¹²⁹

It was crucial for landowners that the government condemned unauthorized seizures of land, but Tsereteli's intervention did not prevent them. More worryingly, some instances saw local authorities colluding with the peasants. On 13 May in Kazan, the local soviet transferred all land to the committees with the support of the provincial land committee. A. A. Melnikov, the chair of the local branch of the union, quickly protested, along with the provincial commissar. Both argued that it would lead to increased disturbances as peasants took what they wanted. The soviet and provincial land committee believed that, on the contrary, it was the only thing that would help calm the peasantry, demonstrating real action on land reform and enacting the transfer in an orderly manner. Melnikov's complaint indicated that many *uezd* commissars agreed, as he noted only two that followed government orders. For Melnikov, it was these two *uezdy* where conditions were better, but a recent assessment argued that the unrest did dissipate. Either way, Melnikov's later picture of economic crisis by mid June suggests that the government was unable to prevent the transfer.¹³⁰ The role of provincial land committees and *uezd* commissars was a concerning development, as were their arguments that land transfer prior to the Constituent Assembly was the only way to pacify the peasantry. As will be seen, some provincial commissars shared this view by autumn. Not only did this marginalize the role of the Assembly, it presented it with a de facto solution on the land question that was irreversible. It would be impossible to regain land or even to obtain compensation.

The union made a determined effort to attack the principles that lay behind the land seizures. Every issue of the newspaper produced by the Riazan branch had an article on the negative impact that the socialization or nationalization of the land would have on the country, whilst emphasizing that it would not lead to the expected results. The amount of land gained by individuals by redistributing privately owned land would be 'very, very small'.¹³¹ The union, as befitted a non-party body, did largely refrain from supporting any particular

¹²⁷ *RPG*, II, 558–62.

¹²⁸ *RPG*, II, 562–5. Officials in his own ministry and on the Main Land Committee also objected (566–7).

¹²⁹ GARF, f. 1778, op. 1, d. 49, ll. 17–23ob.

¹³⁰ *Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie v Kazanskoi gubernii nakanune velikoi oktiabr'skoi sotsialisticheskoi revoliutsii* (Kazan', 1950), 26–8, 40; Badcock, *Politics and the People*, 203–8.

¹³¹ I examined seven of the ten issues from 10 July–16 September. All include major articles on these issues; see *Izvestiia Riazanskago gubernskago otdela vserossiiskogo soiuza zemel'nykh sobstvennikov*, No. 2, 17 July 1917, 1–2.

party's viewpoint on the agrarian question, but it launched attacks on specific parties. There were sharp words for the Bolsheviks occasionally, but the Socialist Revolutionaries (SR), as the group with overwhelming peasant support and whose views on the need for immediate land redistribution were clear, were the main focus of attacks. Articles in the Riazan newspaper repeatedly targeted their policies and activities; for example, on 24 July, there was an attack on the SR national newspaper, *Zemlia i volia*, on the first two pages followed by a critical analysis of a pamphlet produced by a local SR activist on the inside pages.¹³²

This attention was reciprocated by socialists. Landowners may have been a minority group, but contemporaries did not dismiss them lightly. An examination of *Zemlia i volia* demonstrates that the SR party started to pay more attention to the union from July onwards, with increasing amounts of space devoted to its activities. It noted that as the union was spreading it needed closer examination and it warned peasants to keep an eye on what the union was doing.¹³³ The meetings and newspapers of other socialist groups and local soviets adopted a similar attitude. A plenum meeting of Moscow Bolsheviks on 28–29 June noted that landowners were among those 'energetically organizing counter-revolution' and warned that the union was trying to divide the peasantry by appealing to wealthier elements.¹³⁴ Bolsheviks in Ekaterinoslav agreed: the union was active and dangerous, and must be acted against.¹³⁵ The soviet in Tambov also highlighted the fact that the union was reaching out and stressing unity, but emphasized that there were two cultures in the countryside—gentry and peasant—and that the gentry (namely, landowners) would never have the peasants' interests at heart.¹³⁶

Conflict was inevitable. Prince V. M. Urusov, marshal of the nobility in Ekaterinoslav, recognized in April that gatherings of landowners would always be seen as 'reactionary'. He considered this 'absurd' since landowners unanimously supported the new government.¹³⁷ Yet the union's expanding activities were seen as part of a gathering counter-revolution and local responses often moved beyond verbal denigration. In July, Bolsheviks in Vitebsk intercepted invitations to a congress of the union, whilst members handing out leaflets in Chernigov in August were attacked and arrested.¹³⁸ In Riazan, local commissars voted to take practical measures against the union and tried to tempt peasant owners away by establishing a rival union for small landowners. In one *uezd*, soviet members

¹³² *Zemledelets*, No. 3, 24 July 1917, 1–3.

¹³³ For e.g., *Zemlia i volia*, No. 107, 4 August 1917, 2.

¹³⁴ *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Rossii v mae-i-iune 1917g. (Iiun'skaia demonstratsiia)* (Moscow, 1959), 124.

¹³⁵ Shestakov, *Sovety krest'ianskikh deputatov*, 179–81.

¹³⁶ *Izvestiia Tambovskogo soveta rabochikh, krest'ianskikh i soldatskikh deputatov*, No. 80, 7 July 1917, 3–4.

¹³⁷ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 379, ll. 85–85ob.

¹³⁸ 'Soiuz zemel'nykh sobstvennikov', 101; Kotel'nikov and Meller, *Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie*, 234.

gategashed a union meeting carrying red banners and vigorously attacked the union's aims, persuading three-quarters of the delegates (peasants) to leave.¹³⁹ Across Russia, meetings were prohibited, pamphlets seized, and threats made. Peasants were susceptible to socialist agitation and fears of counter-revolution, and it has been alleged that by autumn this was causing a fall in the union's membership.¹⁴⁰

The union did defend itself. In early June, the Moscow branch held a three-day meeting, prompting Moscow's Soviet of Peasant Deputies to accuse the union of mobilizing reactionary forces against the achievements of the revolution. The branch angrily denied this: it had no political objectives, but was simply assisting the productive forces of the country in the interests of the state. Landownership was an essential part of these forces and it was the union's right and civic duty to participate in the new, free Russia. The union warned the soviet against making unsubstantiated accusations, as other branches were doing elsewhere in Russia by this time, but the hostile attacks continued.¹⁴¹

By August, therefore, two points were clear. First, the union had created a landowners' movement, even if it was dwarfed by the mass peasant movement. The union had a significant presence across European Russia; it had broadened its membership, even if its leaders remained large landowners; it was publishing, advising, and supporting its members; it was alerting the government to the illegal activities of committees and peasants; and it was a factor in persuading the government to take a firmer line on unrest. The union, nationally and locally, had moved from 'requesting' to 'demanding' as 1917 progressed, and the government was listening.¹⁴² The union had become more active in response to an upsurge in the agrarian unrest, but, at the same time, its activities worried peasants and helped fuel further unrest.

The second point that emerged by August was a change in the mood of landowners. In the congress in May, landowners had broadly supported the government. The larger congress in early July was more critical and divided. It did resolve to support the government, but it was worried. Prince S. M. Volkonskii noted that he had never heard so much useful, practical advice, whilst the level of agreement amongst delegates was unprecedented. Yet, the whole proceedings left the impression of a 'hysterical cry of a helpless impulse against elemental forces' and there was a feeling of 'hopeless uselessness' in their work.¹⁴³ L'vov, the union's chairman, did not agree, urging landowners to go on the offensive, but dissatisfaction increased in subsequent weeks. Partly, it stemmed from the unpopular policies instigated by Chernov, but primarily it reflected unease at the growing inability of the government to maintain order. Local

¹³⁹ Osipova, *Klassovaia bor'ba*, 173.

¹⁴⁰ Kabytova, *Vlast'*, 161. No evidence is provided.

¹⁴¹ *Moskovskiiia vedomosti*, No. 135, 25 June 1917, 1.

¹⁴² Maliavskii, *Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie*, 244.

¹⁴³ S. Wolkonsky, *My Reminiscences* (2 volumes: London, 1925), II, 166–7.

branches of the union repeatedly demanded in July that the government employ 'firm' authority in dealing with rural unrest.¹⁴⁴ When union leaders gathered in Moscow on 29–31 July, eighteen council members, thirty-nine chairmen of provincial branches, and eighteen chairmen of *uezd* branches were present. Their reports illustrated that the union's activities had progressed a great deal over the previous months, but it was clear that the peasant movement was becoming unstoppable. L'vov concluded by urging them to continue their work with 'vigour and energy' in the name of 'saving Russia',¹⁴⁵ but they were hamstrung by the government's inability to enforce its will. The union, therefore, faced a dilemma: either it urged the government to enact even more repressive policies or it accepted that the government was far too weak and needed replacing. This dilemma was facing all former elites by August.

¹⁴⁴ For e.g., GARF, f. 1778, op. 1, d. 142, l. 1; d. 196, ll. 10–10ob.

¹⁴⁵ 'Soiuz zemel'nykh sobstvennikov', 121. The minutes of this meeting were later published. An original copy is in GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 77, ll. 50–64ob; this chapter has used the published version, but both appear the same.

5

Officers

Officers were in a more precarious situation after February than other elites. Strict hierarchy and discipline, alongside pressures caused by the First World War, had created tensions within the military that exploded in Petrograd on 27 February and spread rapidly over the following weeks. Soldiers and sailors acted immediately to alter military life, and granting greater rights to troops meant removing powers previously enjoyed by officers. These changes combined with broader attacks on privilege and a constant fear of counter-revolution. Officers posed a threat that other elite groups, such as landowners, did not. If opposition to the revolution materialized, it had to involve the only armed section of the elite, and it was always possible that some soldiers would inadvertently follow their officers. This made social conflict in the military more pervasive than elsewhere; disagreements between officers and men were continual throughout 1917.

The key event was Order No.1, written on 1 March 1917 by a gathering of soldiers and socialists, and published the following day. It declared that soldiers were granted full civil rights and should immediately elect representatives to committees. These new committees, not the officers, should control all arms. Saluting, standing to attention, and old forms of address were abolished.¹ These concerns were already being addressed in many places, but this order gave them an 'official' nature. The troops, however, followed the spirit of the order rather than its content, and its measures were extended in several respects. It was limited to Petrograd's garrison, but was seized upon by troops across Russia. Similarly, it encouraged soldiers to elect officers, even though it said nothing about the issue. Soldiers' suspicions of officers had been exacerbated by officers fleeing their regiments at the first sign of trouble and by cases of individual resistance or genuine misunderstandings. Prior to Order No.1, a socialist pamphlet had proclaimed, 'Don't let the nobles and the officers deceive you—that Romanov pack! Take power into your own hands! Elect your own platoon leaders, company and regimental commanders . . . All officers must be under control of company committees. Only accept those officers who you know to be friends of the people.'²

¹ *RPG*, II, 848–9.

² A. Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army* (2 volumes: Princeton, 1980, 1987), I, 181–2.

The soldiers agreed. On 3 March, for example, soldiers' deputies in 206th Infantry Reserve Regiment arrested Colonel Razvozov because he did not understand the objectives of the revolution and the rights of freedom, and prevented the soldiers from uniting with the new government. He knew nothing about soldiers' lives and regularly abused subordinates, issuing harsh punishments.³ Many officers simply reacted too slowly to events, but there was a feeling that new officers were needed to signify real change, irrespective of views or actions.

The government and the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies in Petrograd tried to correct these misunderstandings. On 3 March, the government confirmed that soldiers would be granted civil rights and freedom from restrictions when not on duty, but stated that strict military discipline would still apply when on duty. On 5 March, Order No. 114 saw the Minister of War, A. I. Guchkov, reaffirm the government's commitment to restructuring relations between officers and soldiers and, a day later, he created a commission with this in mind. Chaired by General A. A. Polivanov, it would revise 'military service procedures' and 'the mode of life in the army', covering conditions of service, promotion, internal order, and the civil rights of all military personnel. On the same day, Order No. 2 was issued jointly by the government and the Soviet, attacking the election of officers and stressing that soldiers must follow orders on military matters.⁴

None of these orders curbed the actions of the troops, and the position of officers was undermined immediately to a much greater extent than other elite groups. This had the effect, on the one hand, of exacerbating existing divisions amongst officers. The war had dramatically increased the size of the officer corps and most junior officers were now from non-noble, even socialist, backgrounds. This trend continued in 1917. If there were 45,000 officers on the eve of 1914 and 145,000 by 1917, this number grew to about 250,000 by October 1917, with over 80% holding the lowest rank of ensign.⁵ This fostered a wide range of views, leading to different reactions to the revolution, even though officers shared similar concerns over the war effort and maintaining the fighting capabilities of the military. On the other hand, the revolution brought politics into the officer corps, which had traditionally rejected such concerns previously. Some officers started to form organizations as a means of defending officers and promoting their views. Yet the divisions made unity impossible, leading to several national bodies with sympathies spread across the political spectrum from socialism to the far right.

³ *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v voennykh okrugakh, mart 1917g.–mart 1918g.* (Moscow, 1988), 18.

⁴ *RPG*, I, 136; II, 851–4.

⁵ A. Kavaradze, *Voennye spetsialisty na sluzhbe respubliki sovetov 1917–1920gg.* (Moscow, 1988), 28.

THE UNION OF REPUBLICAN OFFICERS

The first to act were the socialist officers in Petrograd who had participated in the military commission established by the Soviet on 27 February. In a meeting on 5 March, Captain B. S. Sinani noted that the revolution had been victorious in Petrograd, but was not yet secure across Russia. Thus, officers urgently needed to continue their struggle with the old regime. He proposed establishing a formal union, affiliated to the executive committee of the Soviet.⁶ The Union of Republican Officers would aim to strengthen the social and political achievements of the revolution, and promote the ideals of a democratic republic across the military through publications and its newspaper, *Narodnaia armiiia*. It would form local branches, participate in organizations of officers and soldiers, and help create a People's Guard.⁷

A nine-man leadership committee was elected. Lieutenant V. N. Filippovskii became the chairman, with Lieutenant S. D. Mstislavskii as one of his deputies and editor of the newspaper. Two of the committee were Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs) (Filippovskii and Mstislavskii), three were Mensheviks (including Sinani as secretary), three were non-party socialists, and one was loosely attached to the Bolsheviks (Lieutenant A. I. Tarasov-Rodionov).⁸ The committee met almost daily from 6 March. Filippovskii represented the union on the Soviet's executive committee and was on the Soviet's commission charged with liaising with the government, whilst Tarasov-Rodionov was a delegate on the Soviet's military commission. The union was involved in other commissions, and members later served in the Ministry of War, as commissars at the front, and in other official capacities.⁹ The committee struggled to cope. On 14 March, twelve commissions were created to concentrate on key issues, such as organization, finance, publishing, legal matters, and conditions within the military.¹⁰

The union supported the government insofar as it fulfilled its published intentions and enjoyed the support of the Soviet, which it viewed as the main democratic body. The government had inevitable links to the old regime that the Soviet would regulate, and soviets were needed across Russia to perform the

⁶ A. Tarasov-Rodionov, *February 1917* (Westport, 1973), 214–19; *Narodnaia armiiia*, No. 13, 15 May 1917, reprinted in A. Panov (ed.), *Armiiia i politika: Ofitserskii korpus v politicheskoi istorii Rossii. Dokumenty i materialy* (7 volumes: Moscow-Kaluga, 2002–3), II, 123–4.

⁷ GARF, f. 4018, op. 1, d. 2, l. 5. Its activities were limited by financial constraints; d. 1, ll. 11–11ob.

⁸ Tarasov-Rodionov, *February*, 221.

⁹ Mstislavskii and Tarasov-Rodionov helped the Soviet establish control over the imprisoned Tsar; S. Mstislavskii, *Five Days which transformed Russia* (London, 1988), 81–107; Tarasov-Rodionov, *February*, 229–43.

¹⁰ GARF, f. 4018, op. 1, d. 2, l. 29. One member still complained on 16 March that they were overloaded from work, close to collapse from exhaustion, and had no time to properly evaluate or assess their actions; d. 1, l. 19.

same role locally. The union also accepted the Soviet's lead on the war: peace was the objective, but currently Germany was a real threat to the revolution and the war needed to be 'quickly' and 'energetically' pursued to victory. However, rather than harsh discipline, 'mutual trust', 'united work', 'enlightenment', and 'professionalism' would unite the military. It stressed the role of education and agitation, alongside local publications, lectures, and 'continual personal conversations'. Anything that affected the war effort and hence the security of the revolution—violent seizures of land and the eight-hour working day, for example—was discouraged until the end of the war. But there was an expectation that the Constituent Assembly would transfer the means of production (land and factories) to the working people.¹¹ The union's leaders, therefore, were struggling with their dual identity: as socialists, popularly elected bodies, social reforms, and non-expansionist aims were advocated, but as officers, any measures that hindered the war effort were opposed.

From 12 March, prospective members had to provide either a testimony from their soldiers on their reliability, a reference from a social organization (usually a soviet), or a personal biography proving their 'revolutionary' background.¹² Most applicants were from the lowest officer ranks, ensigns or sub-lieutenants. Most were relatively well-educated with a record of some socialist activism prior to 1917. Ensign S. M. Serebriak, for example, had been educated at Moscow University and was a teacher before being called up in 1914. He had been active in spreading SR propaganda in 1904–7 amongst workers and peasants, and now served on the Soviet's military commission. Sub-Lieutenant N. K. Korovin completed his military service in 1913 and enrolled at Moscow University. After a year, he was called up. He had been arrested in 1902 and was an active social democrat agitator in Moscow after 1905.¹³

The union did establish a presence outside Petrograd, although Filippovskii admitted that there were problems in this area. The committee's frequent requests for information from local branches about their activities and the political affiliation of their members suggest that most emerged independently of the centre.¹⁴ There were branches in the Baltic Fleet by late March (see below). By late April, a branch in Vladivostok was publishing a newspaper and providing lectures, meetings, and readings for officers and soldiers. On 7 April, the branch noted that discipline was essential for the military and confidence in fellow officers fostered better discipline. If officers were better acquainted with social organizations and concerns, they could express intelligent and authoritative opinions, and maintain their position through their 'moral authority'. The branch confirmed the need to continue a non-expansionist war and stated that it was everyone's duty, soldiers and civilians, to provide all possible support towards

¹¹ GARF, f. 4018, op. 1, d. 2, ll. 1–1ob.

¹² GARF, f. 4018, op. 1, d. 1, l. 15.

¹³ GARF, f. 4018, op. 1, d. 3, ll. 41–41ob, 50.

¹⁴ GARF, f. 4018, op. 1, d. 2, ll. 13, 24, 30.

victory.¹⁵ This regional view illustrates again that the union had to balance the practical concerns of officers, especially their collapsing authority, with its socialist ideals.

The union was an uneasy mix of moderate and radical socialists. Tarasov-Rodionov has a tendency to emphasize this tension in his memoirs, highlighting his radicalism in comparison with his colleagues' caution. Nevertheless, some reported conflicts—for example, over Order No. 1—seem convincing. Tarasov-Rodionov was keen on the unofficial proclamation that encouraged soldiers to elect officers, and saw the later Order No. 2 as revoking Order No. 1's achievements. Others disagreed and worked with the Soviet to prevent misunderstandings and to limit its impact on the front. Similarly, Tarasov-Rodionov was concerned about the union and Soviet's support for the war, whilst his colleagues were fearful of German victory. Ultimately, the majority of the union agreed with the Soviet that February was a bourgeois revolution and that their activities were necessarily constrained to ensure the revolution's success.¹⁶

Tarasov-Rodionov described the steady marginalization of the union's moderate socialist leaders in revolutionary politics. He also charted the growing antagonism of members towards him, as a Bolshevik, after the return of Lenin and the publication of the April Theses.¹⁷ The former, at least, seems inaccurate, but other leaders did conclude in April that the union's aims needed to change in line with the progression of the revolution. The original aims of uniting officers to safeguard the revolution and promote a democratic republic across the military had become confusing. The revolution now seemed relatively secure, at least from monarchism, and the goal of a democratic republic was vague at best. People were using the term 'democratic republic' to mean different things and all groups needed to be absolutely clear on where they stood. The majority of the union's members were socialists, generally following the lead of the Soviet. Thus, the union proposed to strengthen its links to the Soviet and to socialist parties, and focus on spreading socialism throughout the military.

Initially, the union still talked of representing all socialist officers—party and non-party—and recommended that Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, and SRs should encourage their members to join. On 16 April, it was noted that this meant creating a core of active socialist officers based around the Soviet who, through their military education and experience, could organize military forces in a future revolutionary moment.¹⁸ The revolution, therefore, was far from finished.

¹⁵ *Izvestiia soiuza ofitserov-respublikantsev. Vladivostok*, No. 1, 23 April 1917, in Panov, *Armia i politika*, II, 85–8.

¹⁶ Tarasov-Rodionov, *February*, 129–31, 223–5, 248–50, 259–60.

¹⁷ Tarasov-Rodionov, *February*, 296–8, 320–3, 353–4. He resigned his position on the board of the Soviet of Officers' Deputies (see below) at this stage (around 19 April) due to its anti-Bolshevik tendencies (351–3).

¹⁸ GARF, f. 4018, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 29–29ob, 31–31ob.

But when these new objectives were confirmed on 26 April, at the end of a general assembly lasting several days, the emphasis had changed to representing all socialists in the military, regardless of rank or position, including soldiers, doctors, and others. To reflect this, the union would be renamed the Union of Socialists of the People's Army.¹⁹ The union was now actively promoting socialism rather than democracy and trying to create an all-military body. Practical work (lectures, publications, and creating regimental libraries, for example) was to proceed towards this end.²⁰

The renamed union continued to receive support from the Soviet. On 11 May, the Soviet agreed to provide a one-off subsidy of 2,000 rubles to the union in addition to the 6,000 it had already paid since February (2,000 per month). A further 5,000 rubles were loaned to maintain the union's newspaper. In return, the Soviet requested that the union coordinate its activities with those of the executive committee. A week later, the Soviet issued the documentation needed to verify the newspaper's desirability to printers' unions.²¹ Rather than an independent body, therefore, the union appears to have become an increasingly important part of the Soviet's mechanism for discussing military issues.

THE SOVIET OF OFFICERS' DEPUTIES

Socialist officers were not the only officers acting to secure the revolution in Petrograd. Colonel B. A. Engel'gardt had taken over the military commission by 1 March in the name of the Duma, which then tried to mobilize officers in the city in support of the government as the legal authority. This was far more agreeable to most officers than socialism. On 1–2 March gatherings of officers took place which stressed that officers were united with the troops in removing the old regime, whilst urging support for the new government and the war effort.²² As the unrest died down, these officers also desired a body to represent their views and to manage their involvement in the revolution. On 11 March, a large assembly of officers met as the Soviet of Officers' Deputies of Petrograd, its surroundings, and the Baltic fleet. They formally elected an executive committee composed of thirty individuals: seventeen from the army (including Engel'gardt and Tarasov-Rodionov), three from the navy, and ten from the support staff (doctors, supplies, and so on). Lieutenant-Colonel A. F. Gushchin (a general staff officer) was elected as chair, with Lieutenant-Colonel A. A. Svechin and

¹⁹ *Narodnaia armiia*, No. 13, 15 May 1917, in Panov, *Armiia i politika*, II, 123–5.

²⁰ GARF, f. 4018, op. 1, d. 2, ll. 27, 37, 48, 58–60, 63, 67.

²¹ *Petrogradskii sovet rabochikh i soldatskikh deputatov v 1917 godu* (4 volumes: Leningrad-Moscow, 1991–2003), III, 44–5, 104. The notes to this volume state that the newspaper stopped publication in mid May for some reason.

²² *RPG*, I, 62–3.

Staff Captain S. K. Vrzhosek as deputies. It sent warm greetings to the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, expressing a desire to work together to guarantee a free Russia and to support the government. The officers vowed to take any measures necessary to protect against counter-revolution and the Germans.²³

The Soviet of Officers and the Union of Republican Officers were not mutually exclusive, as the involvement of Tarasov-Rodionov and others indicated. The Soviet aimed to unite all officers in support of the revolution, and their objectives—especially the desire to work with the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies—were not objectionable to socialists. Nonetheless, Tarasov-Rodionov failed to gain greater support for the union within the Soviet. He reported back to the union's leaders on 12 March that the mood was 'exceptionally reactionary'. They were not willing to unite around a political platform, and rejected his arguments that only the Union of Republican Officers could truly unite officers and soldiers.²⁴ What he termed as 'exceptionally reactionary', however, was their refusal to endorse socialist ideas, instead pledging their allegiance to the government. On the whole, the Soviet of Officers was dominated by those—such as Engel'gardt—who had supported the Duma during the revolution. Just as Sinani had argued that the revolution needed officers to organize in support of the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, these officers argued that they needed to take similar steps to support the government.

On 16 March, Gushchin, Svechin, and Vrzhosek visited Prince G. E. L'vov, Guchkov, and M. V. Rodzianko to proclaim their support, noting that officers desired to improve relations with soldiers in the new 'people's army' and recognizing that the soldiers had the full rights of citizens.²⁵ They established ties with reformers in the Ministry of War and tried to mobilize officers to support government policies and the work of the Polivanov Commission. Allegedly, Gushchin hoped too for representation on the executive committee of the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies to marginalize socialist officers.²⁶ Either way, both soviets worked together on soldiers' rights, discipline, and the need to continue the war to defend Russia.

On 18 March, the Soviet of Officers made its views clearer. They supported the government, pointing to the records of L'vov in Zemgor and Guchkov in the war-industries committee as evidence that they could change Russia. Officers, they believed, had an important role to play in the change. First, they must help prepare the military for elections to the Constituent Assembly. Secondly, they must lead in the inevitable restructuring of the military. Unity with the soldiers was essential, and cooperation with the Soviet of Workers' and

²³ *Rech'*, No. 62, 14 March 1917, 4.

²⁴ GARF, f. 4018, op. 1, d. 1, l. 14. He gave a slightly more positive account in *February*, 256–9.

²⁵ *Vestnik vremennago pravitel'stva*, No. 11, 17 March 1917, 3.

²⁶ Tarasov-Rodionov, *February*, 267–70.

Soldiers' Deputies was vital. Officers needed to build new relations with their men to enable a successful conclusion to the war.²⁷

Polivanov's commission expressed similar opinions. It was dominated by young colonels who supported relatively radical change as the best means of securing government control over the troops and the success of the war. One stated that 'flexibility' was the key: they had to explain the revolution to officers, whilst curbing soldiers' radicalism. They were forced to sanction Order No. 1, but tried to restrict the authority of soldiers' committees to non-operational issues.²⁸ Some frontline officers agreed; General M. D. Bonch-Bruevich, who later served under the Bolsheviks, believed that too many moaned about the problems or paid lip-service to events when there was now an opportunity (to be taken carefully) for real reform.²⁹

This outlook, however, satisfied few. Senior generals resented the influence of younger colonels and, along with many other officers at the front, thought that they were 'revolutionaries' and 'careerists' pandering to soldiers' demands, which threatened the military's ability to fight. Soldiers, sailors, and socialists saw the commission as too conservative, unwilling to completely restructure the military. This meant that the government had little success in controlling events in the military. Committees proliferated and many expanded their remit over everyday economic and social life to interfere in disciplinary and operational matters. Officers found that committees essentially usurped their authority, especially once the death penalty was abolished on 12 March. The government and the commission expected officers to be represented on these committees, and discussed various proportions from one officer for every three soldiers to one for every six soldiers, with officers enjoying greater influence at divisional and army level. In reality, estimates suggest that only 7–11% of members were officers.³⁰ Indeed, officers described members as 'criminals' and 'wasters' who lounged around chatting and arguing all day. Officers had to become 'persuaders-in-chief' if they wanted anything done.³¹

The commission's desire for reform led the government to sponsor changes within the officer corps, partly to pacify the troops, but also to ensure that it had sympathetic commanders in key posts. On 2 April, Guchkov declared that senior commanders should be appointed according to merit rather than seniority as had been the practice. Hundreds of officers were affected with around 60% of senior officers released from their posts, including six generals.³² Many observers were furious, but they exaggerated the results: replacements were usually relatively

²⁷ *Rech'*, No. 67, 19 March 1917, 3.

²⁸ P. Polovtsoff, *Glory and Downfall* (London, 1935), 159–76.

²⁹ M. Bonch-Bruevich, *From Tsarist General to Red Army Commander* (Moscow, 1966), 124–7.

³⁰ M. Frenkin, *Russkaia armiiia i revoliutsiia, 1917–1918* (Munich, 1978), 85, 102–3; V. Miller, *Soldatskie komitety Russkoi armii v 1917 godu* (Moscow, 1974), 111, 119.

³¹ For e.g., A. Loukowsky, *Memoirs of the Russian Revolution* (London, 1922), 78–9.

³² *RPG*, II, 875–6; Frenkin, *Russkaia armiiia*, 65.

experienced officers rather than 'scoundrels' or 'demagogues'.³³ The removal of some officers probably saved their lives, as the commission claimed, whilst most were redeployed elsewhere as their services remained valuable as the war continued. Nonetheless, officers felt on trial throughout 1917 and resented the involvement of other officers and the government.

Therefore, the Soviet of Officers was hindered not only by the activities of socialist officers, but by wider differences of opinion among officers, and growing hostility towards those officers involved in the government's reforms. This was clearly seen at the congress of officers held in Petrograd during May, which it organized (see below). Vrzhosek, for example, argued on 10 May that Order No. 1 had been beneficial. The rights and freedoms of soldiers had been repressed prior to 1917 and without such an order, he believed, the situation would have been far worse for officers. As it was, the order served to state clearly to the troops that the revolution had provided concrete achievements.³⁴ Other officers were incensed, whilst discussions of other issues simply emphasized the wide range of views.

The problem of diversity was exacerbated because the Soviet of Officers was not a formal union. Its purpose was to serve as a mouthpiece for officers supporting the government in the Petrograd region. It had an executive committee, which met every couple of days during March and April, discussing policies and events, including foreign affairs and the growing influence of Bolshevism.³⁵ The committee directed relations with the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, and published *Izvestiia soveta ofiterskikh deputatov . . . armii*, which was on its third issue by 21 March. Otherwise, it stood alone. There were soviets of officers' deputies in Baku, Kazan, Moscow, Nizhnii Novgorod, and elsewhere, but there is no evidence that these were subordinate to Petrograd. Officers in Moscow's garrison, for example, formed a soviet on 8 March, earlier than in Petrograd, headed by Major-General Prince S. A. Drutskoi. It had close links with the soldiers and a joint soviet was created, with officers having a third of the thirty-three members. One Soviet historian argued that, by late April, the Soviet of officers was struggling to exert influence across Moscow's garrison, and suffering from sparse attendance and irregular meetings.³⁶ This may be true, but it decided to establish a daily newspaper at this time to promote its goal of improving relations with the soldiers. Funded by donations from officers and industrialists, *Voina i mir* was finally launched in early June.³⁷ Local soviets of officers were independent bodies rather than part of a hierarchical union. This fostered greater diversity, encouraging the Petrograd Soviet to

³³ For e.g., A. Denikin, *The Russian Turmoil* (Westport, 1973), 146–9.

³⁴ *Rech'*, No. 109, 11 May 1917, 6.

³⁵ *Rech'*, No. 69, 22 March 1917, 4; No. 70, 23 March 1917, 4; No. 88, 16 April 1917, 5–6.

³⁶ A. Grunt, *Moskva 1917–i: Revoliutsiia i kontrevoliutsiia* (Moscow, 1976), 85–6.

³⁷ *Moskovskiiia vedomosti*, No. 83, 23 April 1917, 3; No. 94, 6 May 1917, 3; No. 124, 13 June 1917, 1.

claim that its congress in May represented *all* officers, but this diversity also meant, as the congress proved, that it was impossible to achieve unity on key issues.

THE BALTIC FLEET

The bodies discussed above were the brainchild of politicized officers in Petrograd. The reaction of officers across the front was less clear cut. Initially, officers who wanted to become involved with the revolution did so in broader assemblies; for example, the Soviet of Military Deputies in Irkutsk contained twenty-five officers and fifty-seven soldiers on 5 March, with eight officers, seven soldiers, and two doctors on its executive committee.³⁸ Those who wanted to defend their position tended to hold informal meetings, sometimes within the context of the officers' clubs that already existed as the focus of their social lives. Ranging from luxurious premises in Petrograd to huts in the wilds of Siberia, these provided dining facilities, small libraries and lounges, and often billiard tables.³⁹ On 13 March, General V. G. Boldyrev (northern front) noted a meeting of senior officers followed by a meeting of all officers four days later. Maintaining discipline was the central issue.⁴⁰ Other meetings discussed saluting, the legality of committees, whether they were entitled to issue orders, and how to focus the soldiers on victory, rather than on internal conflicts.

This was also the case in the Baltic Fleet, which although abnormally violent, illustrates the nature of the bodies that emerged from these first informal meetings. Despite recognizing the revolution, the Commander of the Fleet, Admiral A. I. Nepenin, was murdered in Kronstadt alongside other senior and junior officers, including Admiral R. N. Viren. One study noted that seventy-six officers were murdered (forty-five at Hel'singfors, twenty-four at Kronstadt, five at Revel, and two in Petrograd), four committed suicide, and eleven deserted. Hundreds were arrested.⁴¹ Rear-Admiral S. N. Timirev described rowdy meetings, aggressive slogans, destructive crowds, the disarming of officers, and brutal murders. Captain G. K. Graf depicted escalating violence: some ships seemed to be akin to a battlefield, with bullets whistling through the walls during vicious armed battles. Cruisers that did not show red flags or lights were threatened with fire from neighbouring ships. Timirev and Graf believed this mob violence to be unprovoked, fuelled by a desire for revenge and social equality.⁴² In reality, it

³⁸ M. Shilovskii, *Politicheskie protsessy v Sibiri v period sotsial'nykh kataklizmov, 1917–1920gg.* (Novosibirsk, 2003), 37.

³⁹ W. Fuller, *Civil-Military Conflict in Imperial Russia, 1881–1914* (Princeton, 1985), 22–3.

⁴⁰ 'Iz dnevnika Gen. V. G. Boldyreva', *Krasnyi arkhiv*, 23 (1927), 260–2.

⁴¹ V. Petrash, *Moriaki Baltiiskogo flota v bor'be za pobedu oktiabria* (Moscow, 1966), 52–3.

⁴² S. Timirev, *Vospominaniia morskogo ofitsera* (New York, 1961), 90–9; H. Graf, *The Russian Navy in War and Revolution* (Munich, 1923), 116–33.

emerged from harsh discipline, literate and politicized sailors, the impact of a prolonged war, the desire to secure the revolution, and the slow response of officers.⁴³

Under these conditions, it was not surprising that naval officers were among the quickest to organize outside Petrograd, but opinions differed on the type of body needed. Hel'singfors was an obvious example: its first officers' organization emerged from a meeting of republican officers on 10 March. Initiated by Captains Prince M. B. Cherkasskii and I. I. Rengarten, and dominated by SR-inclined officers, the regulations for a formal union were completed on 19 March with forty signatures and up to 200 supporters. Its views were the same as the Union of Republican Officers in Petrograd and it vowed to promote socialism.⁴⁴ Yet, on 22 March, a larger assembly of officers in Hel'singfors formed the Union of Republican Officers, Doctors, and Officials of the Army and Fleet of Sveaborg Port. It united officers of various ranks to support a 'democratic republic'. It was independent of party affiliation and supported the government as the executor of the people's will. It believed that the continuation of the war was necessary to protect Russia's freedom, and that the fighting capabilities of the military needed to be maintained and strengthened. The union vowed to carry out educational and cultural work to spread its aims. Chaired by Lieutenant V. N. Demchinskii, its committee included Kadets, conservatives, and senior officers. It enjoyed good relations with socialists and had eighty seats in the local soviet. Despite unfavourable conditions, it published appeals, reports, and educational works, and established libraries, discussion circles, and lectures. It forged links with officers elsewhere in the Baltic (a similar body was formed in Abo) and with the Soviet of Officers in Petrograd. It was more sizeable than Cherkasskii and Rengarten's 'official' union of republican officers, because it defined 'republican' in non-socialist terms, and socialism, as noted, was weak among officers.⁴⁵

The Petrograd Union of Republican Officers also established a branch in Kronstadt on 15 March, but faced a struggle against violent anti-officer feelings; even a Menshevik officer there argued that officers' organizations were superfluous.⁴⁶ Like Hel'singfors, the union's branch at Revel was overshadowed by a rival body. On 24 March, a meeting of about 400 naval officers stationed around Revel adopted a comprehensive set of resolutions and created the Union of Naval

⁴³ The Black Sea Fleet was calmer; Admiral A. V. Kolchak worked closely with new committees and kept the fleet active, unlike the ice-bound Baltic Fleet. See his account (E. Varneck and H. Fisher (eds.), *The Testimony of Kolchak and other Siberian Materials* [Stanford, 1935], 53–84) and his Chief of Staff's (M. Smirnov, 'Admiral Aleksandr Vasil'evich Kolchak vo vremia revoliutsii v chernomorskom flote', *Istoriia i sovremennik*, 4 [1923], 10–27).

⁴⁴ A. Drezen, 'Tsentral'nye matrosskie i ofiterskie organizatsii Baltiiskogo flota v 1917 godu', *Krasnaia letopis'*, 3 (30) (1929), 71–2; Petrash, *Moriaki*, 91–2.

⁴⁵ Petrash, *Moriaki*, 88–91.

⁴⁶ Drezen, 'Ofiterskie organizatsii', 78–9; S. Khesin, *Oktiabr'skaia revoliutsiia i flot* (Moscow, 1971), 184–5.

Officers of Revel (SMOR). As one participant noted, a formal union was the only way that otherwise chaotic gatherings could formulate a plan of action.⁴⁷ The officers vowed to defend Russia against Germany and counter-revolution (defined as the restoration of the overthrown regime). They supported the government and a republic prior to the Constituent Assembly. Their declaration repeatedly stressed that officers also had rights as citizens and that these must be respected. They renounced their right to inflict punishment and accepted soldiers' committees. But they emphasized that soldiers must also fulfil their duties if officers were to be effective in their work, and that officers must retain control over operational matters and the military authorities over appointments. These aims, they believed, should serve as a platform for all officers, and if officers did not recognize them, they should not be allowed to serve in the Baltic fleet.⁴⁸ These views were broadly concurrent with the Soviet of Officers in Petrograd. Indeed, Petrash argued that SMOR was consciously modelled on the Soviet: rather than a general assembly electing the leadership, as with all other officers' bodies, each ship and military section elected two delegates and the resulting assembly of fifty-sixty people elected an executive committee. This ensured comprehensive representation and aided the distribution of SMOR's resolutions. Captain B. P. Dudorov was elected as chairman by a general assembly on 10 April.⁴⁹

Nevertheless, there were disagreements. Captain Baron N. A. Tipol't described how these surfaced in the first meeting and prevented the initial intention to strongly advocate a republic for Russia's future government.⁵⁰ Instead, there was a conservative undercurrent in the declaration that preceded calls that were soon heard across the officer corps: soldiers were entitled to new rights, but they still had duties and obligations—to Russia and the war, for example, but also to respect the rights of officers. SMOR battled with sailors' committees against the election of officers, with Dudorov threatening strike action on the part of the officers on 9 April if it was not stopped.⁵¹ SMOR actively spread its views through publications, meetings, and lectures. It published 2,000 copies of a pro-war brochure, made numerous promotional trips along the coast, and protested against the arrests of officers and the growing influence of Bolshevism. It became a focal point for naval officers, enjoying influence across the region.⁵² Its determination to defend officers' rights forcefully made it a forerunner of similar organizations across the military.

⁴⁷ HIA, F. Golder papers, box 20, 'Dnevnik Russkogo morskogo ofitsera, 1917–1918gg.', 27–32.

⁴⁸ *RPG*, II, 872–4. This version is missing the last few lines. These are printed in a copy in *Izvestiia*, No. 27, 29 March 1917, 5–6, and note that Midshipman Koptelov chaired the congress.

⁴⁹ Drezen, 'Ofiterskie organizatsii', 73–8; Petrash, *Moriaki*, 93–8.

⁵⁰ Cited in Drezen, 'Ofiterskie organizatsii', 74.

⁵¹ Khesin, *Oktiabr'skaia revoliutsiia*, 169.

⁵² Drezen, 'Ofiterskie organizatsii', 75–8, 93.

THE MAY CONGRESSES

By April, sections of the officer corps were mobilizing, but there was nothing that could be called a national body. The Union of Republican Officers had opened a number of branches, but most officers were not socialists in any sense of the word, and it remained restricted to garrisons in towns and radical naval officers. Soviets of officers' deputies were also established in various towns, but they too recruited from politicized officers in the rear desiring to engage with revolutionary developments. They operated as local bodies, as did the various unions emerging across the Baltic Fleet. Most officers, though, were spread out across Russia's various fronts fighting in the war. They did form local assemblies, but they remained an untapped resource that needed to be mobilized if officers were to increase their influence.

On 12 April, the Soviet of Officers' Deputies in Petrograd advertised a congress in the capital for all officers from 8 May, including doctors and other military personnel. Guidance was given on electing representatives.⁵³ This move sparked an unintended reaction. Staff officers at the military headquarters in Mogilev (Stavka), led by Lieutenant-Colonels D. A. Lebedev and V. M. Pronin, met on 15 April and decided to hold a rival congress, starting a day earlier. Lebedev described later how Stavka was receiving daily reports of the disintegration of the military across the front due to the corrosive influence of soldiers' committees and the declining authority of officers. This was harming the war effort and there was a growing feeling that Stavka needed to act. They felt that officers in Petrograd were divorced from events at the front and were not accurately representing the views of frontline officers. Lebedev and Pronin aimed to attract as many officers as possible to establish a formal union to combat the destruction of the military and the officer corps. With this in mind, the meeting created a branch of a new Union of Officers in Stavka and elected a nine-man temporary committee to organize the congress.⁵⁴

The committee's pronouncements over the following weeks emphasized the main strands of their thinking. First, they stressed that Russia was in danger militarily, and they linked the fate of the country directly to the fate of the military. Thus, they claimed to support 'wide democratic reform', but repeatedly noted that strict discipline was essential to maintain the fighting capability of the military and the future of the motherland. Secondly, they proclaimed their complete support for the government as the sole legal authority, but warned officers—in a clear jibe towards the Soviet of Officers—to avoid politics, and urged them instead to join their new, professional officers' union. This union

⁵³ *Rech'*, No. 84, 12 April 1917, 5.

⁵⁴ *Rech'*, No. 89, 17 April 1917, 4; No. 90, 18 April 1917, 4; *Vestnik vremennago pravitel'stva*, No. 35, 20 April 1917, 3. Lebedev's account is in *Delo generala L. G. Kornilova* (2 volumes: Moscow, 2003), II, 415.

would establish branches across the military, issue publications, and mobilize officers to defend their interests. It would not engage in party politics, but would focus on the everyday concerns of frontline officers and represent them to the government. This emphasis on professionalism was a constant presence and, although the union had not been formally created, the organizing committee acted as if it had. It issued appeals in the union's name, urged supporters to agitate, and called for new members.⁵⁵

There were mixed reactions from officers to the news of both congresses. Staff officers on the Romanian front argued that a new union would simply expose political differences among the officers and antagonize the soldiers. A conference was sufficient to discuss pertinent military and political issues.⁵⁶ Others disagreed. Lieutenant-Colonel L. N. Novosil'tsev, for example, was a Kadet member of the fourth Duma. He helped to establish the authority of the new government in Kaluga, but was quickly disillusioned by the radicalism of junior officers. He described the 'terror of the *praporshchiki* [ensigns]' in Kaluga, and he was among several senior officers arrested. His political background made him a likely member of the Soviet of Officers, but these events sowed the seeds of his disillusionment, even though he was quickly released. Returning to the front, he despaired at Order No. 1 and denounced the proliferation of committees as 'an incorrect understanding of freedom'—freedom from duties and obligations. Committees endorsed decisions simply to refute them a day later, dissent increased, and the capability of the military was damaged. He had no sympathy with those who opposed change unconditionally, but he saw socialism as the root of all of the problems, and feared that the officer corps would disintegrate across party lines. His division decided to send delegates to both congresses. He welcomed the idea of a professional union for officers and was duly elected to represent his division in Stavka, although some colleagues thought that the plans were inappropriate. He was not sympathetic to the 'political' aims of the Petrograd congress and did not attend the meeting that chose a delegate. Gushchin's appeal, in his view, showed that some officers wanted to forge careers from the revolution and this could only harm the war effort.⁵⁷

Novosil'tsev was not alone in these opinions. General B. V. Gerua declared that such officers were 'polluted' by the revolution and were 'demagogues' and 'adventurists'.⁵⁸ General Baron P. N. Vrangel, a former acquaintance of Gushchin in the general staff academy, noted that Gushchin had tied his career to the revolution. He described Gushchin's speeches as 'grating', and other observers concurred that Gushchin was overly theatrical, with shouting, exaggerated

⁵⁵ *Rech'*, No. 95, 25 April 1917, 6; No. 103, 4 May 1917, 5.

⁵⁶ *Vestnik Rumynskogo fronta*, No. 1, 3 April 1917, in Panov, *Armia i politika*, II, 81–2.

⁵⁷ GARF, f. 6422, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 112–117ob, 125ob, 135ob–137.

⁵⁸ B. Gerua, *Vospominaniia o moei zhizni* (2 volumes: Paris, 1969–70), II, 199.

gesticulating, dramatic words, and cringing shows of affection towards soldiers.⁵⁹ Even the military leadership came to believe that a new voice was needed to represent officers' interests. Initially, it had concerns about the desirability of a congress specifically for officers at Stavka, but felt that, first, the views of most officers at the front were being misrepresented and, secondly, that it was unjust to forbid officers to unite when the forthcoming declaration of soldiers' rights permitted organizations in the military.⁶⁰

Nonetheless, the All-Russian Congress of Officers' Deputies in Petrograd was the largest when it formally opened on 8 May. There were 749 registered delegates, including 8 generals, 140 colonels and lieutenant-colonels, 516 other officers (including 151 ensigns), seventy-two military officials, twelve soldiers and a priest. Around 64% were from 'active' parts of the military, including the fleet, whilst the rest were from the rear. Not all of these materialized—only 717 had appeared by 16 May—whilst few attended every session and numbers decreased as the congress progressed.⁶¹

Its organizers hoped that the congress would establish a clearer role for officers within the revolutionary process, unify officers in expressing their loyalty to the new regime, and provide them with a forum to express their views. Yet divisions were inevitable and immediately apparent. The executive committee contained liberals alongside socialists,⁶² whilst the preliminary meetings from 5 May saw delegates split into three broad factions. The 'right' supported the government as the sole legal authority in the country prior to the Constituent Assembly. The 'centre' broadly supported existing 'dual power' politics. The 'left' unequivocally supported the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, which sent five representatives, including Filippovskii, after declaring that a congress to unite officers with 'revolutionary democracy' was 'particularly desirable'. Apparently, the distance between the centre and the left was insignificant, but there was an 'impenetrable wall' between these groups and the right.⁶³ The speakers on the first day reaffirmed varying allegiances: Iu. M. Steklov (Menshevik) from the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies; S. I. Shidlovskii (Octobrist) from the Duma; A. I. Shingarev (Kadet), Minister of Finance; P. N. Miliukov (Kadet), recently resigned as Minister of Foreign Affairs; and A. F. Kerenskii (SR), the new Minister of War.⁶⁴

These speakers—all politicians not military figures—illustrated the organizers' desire to clarify the political position of officers. The first item for

⁵⁹ *Vospominaniia generala barona P. N. Vrangelia* (Frankfurt, 1969), 31; D. Fedotoff-White, *Survival through War and Revolution in Russia* (Philadelphia, 1939), 125.

⁶⁰ Denikin, *Russian Turmoil*, 229–30.

⁶¹ V. Polikarpov, *Voennaia kontrrevoliutsiia v Rossii, 1905–1917* (Moscow, 1990), 145, 156.

⁶² GARF, f. 4018, op. 1, d. 5, l. 3.

⁶³ *Narodnaia armia*, No. 13, 15 May 1917, in Panov, *Armia i politika*, II, 125–7; *Petrogradskii sovet*, II, 481; III, 35.

⁶⁴ *Rech'*, No. 107, 9 May 1917, 5.

discussion was officers' relations to the government and the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, followed by the Constituent Assembly, war, land, and workers. Reorganizing the military and improving its fighting capabilities were lower down the agenda.⁶⁵ For many officers, especially from the front, these priorities were baffling. They arrived in Petrograd full of accounts of the deteriorating situation in the military and were shocked to discover that this was not the foremost issue. E. A. Efimovskii, a Kadet, was part of the delegation from Moscow headed by Drutskoi. He noted a 'depressing' atmosphere and the 'confused' and 'servile' views surrounding him. Gushchin's speech, which attacked officers' mindsets, was 'surprising'. In response to talk of removing the privileges of officers, Efimovskii argued in his speech that the only privilege of officers was the right to lead others to their deaths for the motherland, and he invited the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, if it objected to this privilege, to take their place. This reportedly prompted laughter and applause, but such contrasting views made different factions inevitable.⁶⁶

Political arguments spanned the whole congress but were particularly vitriolic from 11–13 May. One officer asserted that 'if you don't recognize the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, then you don't recognize the whole revolution' and was met by derisory shouts of 'Nothing of the sort!' Another argued that it was not fair that only socialists (through the Soviet) had the right to assess the government's performance and that, in any case, officers should not be wasting their time with political meetings when the motherland needed saving: 'we must say in simple soldiers' language that we do not want to be involved in politics and that the key to victory is iron discipline'.⁶⁷ The striking aspect was that all parts of the political spectrum (excepting monarchism) were represented.

On 13 May, a narrow majority approved a resolution favouring the Soviet and dual power (265 votes for, 246 against, with seventy-seven abstained). The new coalition government represented united authority, it stated, and prior to the Constituent Assembly it was responsible to the will of the people as represented by the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. Russian officers would offer a 'brotherly hand' to soldiers and workers to act in unison: a strong army was essential to save the country from anarchy, defend against Germans and counter-revolutionaries, and to strengthen the gains of freedom.⁶⁸ This contravened Gushchin's unconditional support for the government, and he resigned as chairman on 15 May. His deputies, Colonel A. V. Popov and Vrzhosek, refused to replace him, and Captain Glukharev took over by a majority of only two votes. As one delegate noted, a third of the congress had supported

⁶⁵ The agenda was published in *Rech'*, No. 104, 5 May 1917, 5. The only substantial discussion of the congress is Polikarpov, *Voennaia kontrrevoliutsiia*, 144–71. This is based on the official minutes, which I have not studied.

⁶⁶ E. Efimovskii, 'V ofiterskikh pogonakh', *Russkii put'*, 4 (1952), 18–19.

⁶⁷ *Rech'*, No. 110, 12 May 1917, 4.

⁶⁸ *Rech'*, No. 112, 14 May 1917, 5.

the resolution, a third had opposed it (supporting an alternative pro-government declaration), whilst a third did not vote—not a convincing basis for the adopted resolution.⁶⁹

The arguments continued when military issues (especially the war and restructuring the military) were discussed. Generally, the congress was more conservative in these areas. To take two examples: on 17 May, the congress overwhelmingly (210 votes to 63) passed a resolution calling for a military offensive. Officers dismissed the expansionist aims of the tsarist government, but argued that the time had come for actions not words, and that a decisive offensive could best achieve victory. This time, the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies took offence, calling the resolution 'anti-democratic' and withdrawing its representatives on 19 May.⁷⁰ Furthermore, on 26 May, the congress agreed that laws on soldiers following orders needed to be enforced; the role of committees was to be limited to economic, living, and educational matters; and that commanders should control military operations.⁷¹ Most agreed that the fighting capabilities of the military had to be restored and saw these as practical policies, as distinct from political views. All armies were built around hierarchy and discipline, irrespective of the political structure of their countries.

After a couple of weeks, the constant arguments and entrenched position of the factions had angered or alienated many delegates, and fewer attended meetings. The final straw came over whether to create a permanent officers' organization. On 9 May, Popov, the deputy chair of the Soviet of Officers' Deputies, argued that the congress was more inclusive and represented a broader section of the military than its counterpart in Stavka. Its rival was solely focused on creating an officers' union, a corporate organization, rather than on uniting officers, soldiers, and other military personnel.⁷² A loosely organized executive committee was sufficient to represent officers' views. On 25 May, however, Ensign P. M. Viridarskii argued that officers' views would be better expressed by a permanent organizational bureau, formally structured to contain all the factions at the congress. For many, this was too close to the corporate body advocated by Stavka, and would widen the gulf between officers and soldiers. The congress, though, voted for a permanent bureau. This led to the replacement chairman, Glukharev, walking out, causing further turmoil. After several private meetings, Glukharev returned and the resolution was overturned; a permanent body was not formed.⁷³ The next morning, Ensign Andronov condemned this action as an attack on the 'right' and frontline officers. He said that the congress's leaders were unwilling to accept anything they saw as undesirable. Moreover, labelling his group as the 'right' was a 'distortion of the

⁶⁹ *Rech'*, No. 113, 16 May 1917, 4. The alternative resolution is in *Rech'*, No. 111, 13 May 1917, 5.

⁷⁰ *Rech'*, No. 114, 17 May 1917, 4; No. 115, 18 May 1917, 5; *Petrogradskii soviet*, III, 118.

⁷¹ *Rech'*, No. 122, 27 May 1917, 5–6.

⁷² *Rech'*, No. 108, 10 May 1917, 6.

⁷³ *Rech'*, No. 121, 26 May 1917, 5.

truth' and he was angry that their resolutions were constantly presented as an unwillingness to work with the soldiers, thereby increasing distrust. This was particularly true as most officers present spent their time sitting comfortably in the rear. This sparked an outcry and retaliatory insults accusing frontline officers of desiring to attend cosy congresses in the rear. A skirmish forced the congress to break up. It did not finish until the next day, but only fifty to sixty attended that afternoon's session and only a hundred attended the final day.⁷⁴

The chairman closed the congress on 27 May, remarking that it had 'undoubtedly' been useful, but it is hard to agree with this view.⁷⁵ It provided officers with a platform, but the inclusiveness that it championed ended up ripping the congress apart through bitter arguments. Nonetheless, a couple of issues are worth highlighting. First, it demonstrated that officers held all manner of political views that were largely irreconcilable, but that they found it easier to agree on what practical measures were needed to improve the military. Secondly, all officers, regardless of their views, were concerned that the majority of their colleagues remained passive. On 16 May, the Soviet of Officers called for officers to work actively to build bridges to the soldiers, and stated that passivity was a major barrier to cohesion and effective organization within the military. A couple of days later, officers were urged to read newspapers, hold daily discussions with soldiers, and to enlighten them. It was 'exceptionally important' to combat passivity amongst officers.⁷⁶ The vast majority of officers, then, seemed to prefer to keep their heads down. Later accounts suggest that most opposed the new developments, but felt isolated at the front and feared repercussions from soldiers if they demonstrated opposition of any sort. It was easier to accommodate the changes quietly without actively supporting them.

The rival congress of officers at Stavka—the All-Russian Congress of the Union of Officers of the Army and the Fleet—which was formally open from 7–22 May also reflected conflict amongst officers and the desire to combat passivity. The preliminary meetings on 5–6 May gave an immediate indication of the key divisions. One delegate asked why there were two simultaneous congresses of officers: it was 'not normal' and it would be better, he said, to transfer the congress to Petrograd to achieve the complete unity of all officers, particularly linking officers from the front with those from the rear. Another delegate questioned whether, as was happening in Petrograd, soldiers should be represented and, if so, whether they should have a right to vote on issues discussed.⁷⁷ These questions struck straight to the heart of the objectives of the Stavka congress and the composition of the proposed union of officers.

⁷⁴ *Rech'*, No. 122, 27 May 1917, 5–6.

⁷⁵ *Rech'*, No. 123, 28 May 1917, 5.

⁷⁶ *Izvestiia soveta ofiterskikh deputatov* . . . *armii*, No. 11, 16 May 1917; No. 13, 18 May 1917, both in Panov, *Armia i politika*, II, 134, 139.

⁷⁷ GARF, f. 4018, op. 1, d. 4, l. 1.

The organizing committee intended to allow soldiers to attend, but only as observers. One delegate exploded: 'Why is it that whenever officers speak or gather, the question always arises—and what about the soldiers?' The point of the congress was that it was for officers. Others agreed, apparently shouting that it was shameful that all social groups could unite apart from officers. Officers had spilt three years' worth of blood, but could not say what they felt. The chairman, Lebedev, lost control of the meeting and was replaced. In the end, forty-eight of the ninety present (53%) voted to allow soldiers a vote but, after all that, the soldiers refused: they wanted to observe events, but did not want to be associated with any resolutions.⁷⁸ Although this vote was close, revolutionary events forced many to pander to the soldiers. It was, instead, the determination that officers should express their views independently of outside interference, and that a new union could best do this, which dominated the future activities of the congress.

The debate on the first question, on why two congresses were needed, reinforced these aims. Lebedev and others were sceptical that officers' views could be objectively discussed in the politicized atmosphere of Petrograd, although they sent representatives.⁷⁹ Non-military, political bodies were represented and political topics were discussed first. In contrast, Stavka's congress was focused on the war and this showed that it was purely professional, with no political ambitions. Equally, unlike Petrograd, it intended to have a permanent outcome: a professional union for officers. Stavka's location at the centre of the war effort meant that the officers involved would have the knowledge and experience to discuss the questions of immediate importance for maintaining the fighting capabilities of the military.⁸⁰

Ambitions to create a professional union mirrored the actions of landowners, homeowners and others at this time, but the importance of the military made it hard to ignore politics. For the Stavka congress's initiators, assessing how officers could support the revolution seemed futile. Officers were at the sharp end of the unrest and could justifiably ask the revolution to offer them support. The government needed to recognize openly the grave problems in the military, give them priority during the war, and take strong actions. It should acknowledge the vital role that officers played, and how a lack of government support and an erosion of their authority had contributed to the problems facing the military. The congress argued that these were professional demands, not political ones. The new chairman was Novosil'tsev (due to his experience in the Duma), and

⁷⁸ GARF, f. 4018, op. 1, d. 4, ll. 1–10b. This report was written by the soldiers' representatives and is admirably factual beyond noting that some of the attendees became 'hysterical' during the debate!

⁷⁹ GARF, f. 6422, op. 1, d. 1, l. 139. One of the 'agitators', as Novosil'tsev phrased it, was Captain V. S. Khitrovo, who had helped organize Stavka's congress. In Petrograd, he denounced dual power as destroying the country and declared that officers wanted 'firm, united authority'. Officers' first goal, though, was to save the military. He received applause but, as noted, the resolution went the other way; Polikarpov, *Voennaia kontrrevoliutsiia*, 153–4.

⁸⁰ GARF, f. 4018, op. 1, d. 4, ll. 10b–2.

he argued to deep applause that 'political questions are questions of secondary importance. The vital question is about the life of Russia and all of our attention and strength will be devoted to this.' Yet, Ensign Gusev noted that 'military and professional questions were deeply entwined with political ones'. Officers needed 'to establish what kind of government and what kind of voice will lead the country. Then we need to direct our activities towards helping it.' This too received warm applause.⁸¹ Political and professional interests were inseparable for all groups, but by demanding stronger measures in the military, officers appeared to be demanding stronger forms of government, which placed them at odds with the popular mood. Nevertheless, this forceful stance appealed to many officers who were disillusioned with an ineffective government and the political manoeuvrings of officers in Petrograd.

Two hundred and ninety-eight officers attended the congress, with 80% from the front and 20% from the rear (mostly from active regiments). It was implausibly claimed that each officer represented around 350 officers, thereby providing the congress with a mandate from 100,000 officers. In addition, one account suggested that 161 soldiers observed proceedings.⁸² The congress was opened by the Commander-in-Chief, General M. V. Alekseev, followed by the Chief of Staff, Denikin. Alekseev was blunt: Russia was in extreme danger of being dragged over a precipice. The enemy occupied large swathes of Russia and was not using 'utopian phrases' such as peace without territorial or financial gain. The soul of the Russian army was gone and there was no powerful authority to force citizens to do their honourable duty to the motherland. Alekseev asked, 'Where is patriotism? Where is love for the motherland?' There was talk of fraternity, but actions indicated class discord, with a deep gulf between officers and the soldiers. Alekseev disagreed with those who argued that this congress would only widen the gulf. A great deal of difficult work was needed, he said, to restore the unity and discipline needed for victory. This congress was the start of this work, emphasizing that Russians needed to unite around practical not political platforms. Denikin stated that thousands of greedy hands were grasping at power, weakening the foundations of Russia. He agreed with those in Petrograd that unity between officers and the soldiers was the cornerstone of reviving the military, but he clearly envisaged different ways of achieving this, although he left this unspoken.⁸³

Alekseev's speech dismissing popular sentiment as 'utopian' was reprinted in the national press and caused a storm. The Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies held a heated debate and the speech was bitterly attacked in the Soviet's newspaper, *Izvestiia*. It probably played a role in Alekseev's dismissal on 22 May,

⁸¹ GARF, f. 4018, op. 1, d. 4, l. 2.

⁸² *Vestnik glavnago komiteta soiuza ofitserov armii i flota* [hereafter *VGKO*], No. 1, 14 June 1917, 2; No. 5, 24 August 1917, 2.

⁸³ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 71, ll. 49–50.

the day that the congress closed. The speech was also hotly debated in the Petrograd congress. Colonel Fuss defended the speech vigorously, arguing that Alekseev was misquoted and was speaking as a 'soldier, not a politician'. This prompted applause from a section of the audience, but a protest from the Union of Socialists of the People's Army.⁸⁴ The speech was well received at the front as were Denikin's words. Indeed, fuelled by Alekseev's dismissal, Denikin delivered an angrier speech to close the congress on 22 May, which reasserted the need to respect officers.⁸⁵ Copies were circulated across the front and gained much support among officers and educated society. General A. S. Lukomskii declared that it was the talk of Stavka and the only 'ray of light' in troubled times.⁸⁶

In comparison with the Petrograd congress, the absence of political figures was notable. Kerenskii, the new Minister of War, after his speech in Petrograd, embarked on a tour of the front that took him through Stavka. According to Novosil'tsev, the congress did not expect Kerenskii to attend, noting that he was afraid of being seen as insufficiently democratic or even counter-revolutionary. In any case, officers felt that as a civilian socialist he was an inappropriate Minister of War. The suspicion was mutual. Kerenskii opposed plans to create a permanent organization solely for officers, and had only permitted the congress in the name of democracy. By the time he arrived, it was amid rumours of Alekseev's pending dismissal, which most officers opposed, and the congress did not bother to send an invitation. Novosil'tsev was among the group of senior officers that gathered to meet him at the station. It was protocol to meet an incoming minister, but it was also a chance to say a few words about officers' concerns. Novosil'tsev knew Kerenskii slightly as a fellow Duma deputy and spoke about the disintegration of the army and the need for iron discipline, slipping Kerenskii a copy of a resolution from the congress. Kerenskii refuted all of this: the army's condition was encouraging, as were relations between officers and soldiers. Looking at Novosil'tsev, he stressed that there could be no return to the old.⁸⁷

The congress's own assessment of conditions across thirteen plenary meetings was blunt: the army was close to destruction. Its solutions were predictable: restore the chain of command and the authority of officers, and re-establish the means to enforce orders. Committees should be removed from operational matters and there should be greater emphasis on soldiers' duties. Peace was a matter for politicians not the military, whose duty it was to continue the war to an 'honourable peace' (or victory). Russia must regain its lost territories, gain access to straits at Constantinople, and the enemy must pay for damage. Problems were caused by 'thoughtless' and 'unscrupulous' officers (through participation in politics as much as anything else). Thus, educational work was

⁸⁴ *Petrogradskii soviet*, III, 144, 166; *Rech'*, No. 111, 13 May 1917, 5.

⁸⁵ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 71, ll. 51-51ob; Denikin, *Russian Turmoil*, 235-6.

⁸⁶ Loukomsky, *Memoirs*, 80.

⁸⁷ GARF, f. 6422, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 143, 151-152ob.

needed among officers as well as soldiers, alongside officers' courts to enforce duty. Harmful elements—officers who did not understand current pressures or were seeking cheap popularity among the soldiers—needed to be re-educated or removed.⁸⁸

The nearest that the official account comes to a political viewpoint is its brief statement that 'in the name of unity, all orders relating to the military must come from the Provisional Government'.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, the soldiers observing the congress quickly identified divisions that mirrored those in Petrograd. Some officers were determined to form a professional officers' union. Others were 'citizens' who felt that this would serve to push officers away from the soldiers, and that a military union encompassing officers and soldiers would be more productive. Finally, some officers were as yet undecided—neither 'theirs' nor 'ours', as the soldiers phrased it.⁹⁰ Novosil'tsev described how a centre-right bloc was created in order to ensure a majority for supporters of the union. Policies were established in advance and lobbying conducted amongst delegates to win votes.⁹¹ The outcome of the congress—a union for officers—was not supported by all delegates, but the leadership's determination meant that although they agreed to a general military union as well, there was little commitment to it. Leading officers seemed to prolong negotiations deliberately over the balance of officers and soldiers in the working party to establish it.⁹² They felt that a military union was another soviet that would marginalize officers and be subordinate to soldiers' bodies: it was time to assert officers' views.

Taken together, the two congresses in May 1917 graphically illustrated the wide divisions within the officer corps. It is too easy to see the Petrograd and Stavka congresses as representing officers at the rear and front respectively.⁹³ Both had majorities from the front and represented various political sympathies. Equally, although both came to different conclusions, all delegates vociferously expressed their views, and the ensuing arguments were too much for the original chairmen. To be sure, the majority of officers remained passive, but reports suggest that the resolutions of the congresses were widely discussed by officers at the front, prompting similar divisions.⁹⁴ Ultimately, frontline officers were more likely to sympathize with the views emanating from Stavka. The Declaration of Soldiers' Rights, published on 11 May 1917 in the middle of these congresses,

⁸⁸ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 71, ll. 50ob–53. Novosil'tsev described officers who openly supported soldiers' demands as forgetting their self-respect and their honour: GARF, f. 6422, op. 1, d. 1, l. 142.

⁸⁹ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 71, l. 53.

⁹⁰ GARF, f. 4018, op. 1, d. 4, l. 3.

⁹¹ GARF, f. 6422, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 144–44ob.

⁹² GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 71, l. 53ob (agreement); f. 4018, op. 1, d. 4, ll. 4ob–5ob (negotiations on a working party from 11–15 May); f. 6422, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 147–49ob (Novosil'tsev's views).

⁹³ As have contemporaries (Denikin, *Russian Turmoil*, 230, 234–5) and historians (Frenkin, *Russkaia armii*, 150).

⁹⁴ V. Alekseeva-Borel', *Sorok let v riadakh Russkoi imperatorskoi armii: General M. V. Alekseev* (St. Petersburg, 2000), 520.

reinforced the view that too much attention was devoted to soldiers and their rights, with fatal consequences for Russia. The declaration actually introduced little that was new. It stressed military duty and discipline. It also reaffirmed that officers could enact disciplinary measures during military operations, and that officers were appointed from above, not elected from below. But officers at the front reacted bitterly. They saw it as official acceptance of the endless demands of soldiers.⁹⁵ The proposal of the Stavka congress for a declaration of officers' rights, alongside one of soldiers' duties, was welcomed.

By establishing a permanent union, the Stavka congress placed itself in a better position to benefit from this growing discontent, which is what its organizers intended. From its inception, the congress focused on creating an end product. Of course, a union could have been created without the congress and, indeed, as noted above, an embryonic committee was already active. But the congress gave it valuable legitimacy. Not all delegates agreed with it but, because the majority did, the union could claim that it had been endorsed by nearly 300 delegates who represented a greater number of officers across the front. Novosil'tsev stressed that he considered that his job as chairman was to ensure that the congress was productive. He was afraid that socialists would force it to shut, and worked quickly to draw up programmes, establish committees, vote on resolutions, and create a union. He argued that the congress in itself was nothing and that no one would be interested in its views.⁹⁶ Sure enough, the new union built up a sizeable presence in the press and amongst officers over the following months, whereas the Soviet of Officers' Deputies fades from view. This does not mean that the union was more effective, but it played a vital role in bringing the views of conservative and liberal officers to the fore.

THE UNION OF OFFICERS

The Union of Officers of the Army and the Fleet was formed on 21 May. Novosil'tsev was elected as president, with Pronin and Lieutenant-Colonel V. I. Sidorin as deputies, and Captain V. E. Rozhenko as secretary. Alekseev and Denikin were made honorary president and member respectively, cementing the union's links with Stavka. There were thirty-two in the main committee, ranging from ensigns to colonels.⁹⁷ Lieutenant-colonels (eleven members) and captains (also eleven) dominated, whilst there were only four ensigns. The average age where available (from sixteen members) was thirty-four. Although Novosil'tsev (forty-five) was older, his deputies, Pronin and Sidorin (both thirty-five), were not. The army predominated, although a few probably represented the fleet. Of the eleven whose social backgrounds were known, seven were nobles, two were

⁹⁵ *RPG*, II, 880–3.

⁹⁶ GARF, f. 6422, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 144, 146ob–147.

⁹⁷ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 71, l. 34.

peasants, and one each was from clergy and merchant backgrounds. At least seven had graduated from the elite general staff academy.

The backgrounds of Pronin, Sidorin, and a few others—nobles from the general staff academy—support assumptions that the union represented a narrow segment of the officer corps, as do the views of some members. Captain I. A. Rodionov, for example, had been an active member of the monarchist movement prior to 1917, with links to the Russian Assembly and the Union of the Archangel Michael.⁹⁸ Novosil'tsev, though, was a regular officer, if a noble, who had been a Kadet member of the Duma. Other information and the anonymity of many members suggest that a significant number came from less traditional (and harder to trace) backgrounds. Ensign A. V. Ivanov helped organize the Stavka congress and served as one of its secretaries. He had been imprisoned for socialist agitation alongside the Menshevik, I. G. Tsereteli, prior to the war, but now supported a non-political, professional union for officers. Lieutenant-Colonel I. G. Soots was an Estonian who advocated greater independence for national minorities within the Russian empire, against the wishes of many officers.⁹⁹ It may not have been a deliberate tactic, but the committee did represent a range of political and social backgrounds.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that there were divisions. According to Captain S. N. Riasnianskii, a committee member and noble from a general staff background, there were two broad groups. The largest were sharp critics of reform and democratization, favouring decisive action to restrict the activities of committees. Some in this group hoped for a more authoritarian government. The minority recognized that some compromise was needed to preserve stability within the military. They supported the government, but demanded more effective measures to secure the authority of officers.¹⁰⁰ Novosil'tsev believed that Stavka was afraid of the soldiers and bowed to their wishes too easily. Each 'concession' was seen by soldiers as a revolutionary achievement that must be defended, whilst attempts to instil order were 'counter-revolution'.¹⁰¹ Officially, the union was committed to carrying out government orders and military reforms, whilst strongly defending officers' interests and military priorities.¹⁰² There is no doubt that the committee was united in their determination to defend the position of officers, and to maintain and strengthen Russia's fighting capabilities to enable the war to be pursued to a victorious conclusion. They passionately believed that officers had the right to express their views and, moreover, should be free to say whatever concerned them. Their views were no longer to be submerged under the flood of demands from the soldiers.

⁹⁸ O. Platonov (ed.), *Chernaia sotnia: Istoricheskaia entsiklopediia, 1900–1917* (Moscow, 2008), 445–6.

⁹⁹ *Delo generala L. G. Kornilova*, II, 125–6, 322–3.

¹⁰⁰ G. Ioffe, *Semnadtsati god* (Moscow, 1995), 74–5.

¹⁰¹ GARF, f. 6422, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 137ob–138.

¹⁰² GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 71, ll. 40–46 (the union's regulations).

In terms of everyday activities, the union discussed reform proposals and technical issues; it fostered cultural and educational work amongst officers; and it provided practical support for members, including legal aid. It established a newspaper, *Vestnik glavnago komiteta soiuzo ofitserov armii i flota*, which published five issues between 14 June and 24 August.¹⁰³ Every issue had copies of letters that the main committee sent to the authorities protesting at the mistreatment of officers, alongside articles on new developments. The newspaper was supplemented by brochures and appeals. There were also internal reports that defined the union's position on key issues, such as committees, as well as assessments of the military's condition. By late August, the union had improved the educational and cultural resources available for officers. Libraries were organized in several railway stations just behind the front line as convenient transport hubs. An agreement was reached with a group of young teachers in Moscow to supply suitable literature, ranging from material on practical issues (war and the land) to books on state structures, history, workers, cooperatives, and foreign affairs. This material was distributed free of charge. Local branches organized lectures and distributed the union's literature.¹⁰⁴

The union was convinced that a lack of understanding contributed to the 'politicization' of officers and it targeted officers who actively supported revolutionary change, arguing that they were not capable of leading the military. Initially, the union promoted 'comrade courts'—courts controlled and staffed by officers—to cleanse and control officers.¹⁰⁵ However, these courts could not enforce their rulings and the union resorted to blacklists, distributed across the military and published in *Vestnik*. These only contained a few names (for urging peace or spreading socialist propaganda) and provoked as much opposition as support amongst officers.¹⁰⁶

Otherwise, the union concentrated on agitating for reforms that would restore discipline, revive the authority of officers and reduce the influence of soldiers' committees. These received a boost after the ill-fated offensive launched on 18 June. A range of groups across the political spectrum supported the offensive for a variety of reasons: some thought that a signal of intent would strengthen Russia's demands for peace, whilst others argued that it was nothing less than Russia's duty to its allies. Broadly speaking, military leaders were also supportive. Despite damning reports chronicling the problems within the army, Stavka hoped that soldiers and officers would come together in the name of Russia, and that the fighting would make the soldiers too busy to engage in politics and meetings. Officers at the front were less convinced in the face of escalating unrest. The union feared that only a few troops would fight, and it was proved correct.

¹⁰³ Copies are in GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 71.

¹⁰⁴ VGKO, No. 5, 24 August 1917, 4; GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 72, l. 100.

¹⁰⁵ VGKO, No. 2, 22 June 1917, 1.

¹⁰⁶ VGKO, No. 4, 25 July 1917, 4; GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 71, l. 58; d. 72, ll. 45, 102; d. 97, ll. 126–127ob.

Initial victories were wiped out; troops held meetings and frequently refused to carry out orders; and by early July it was clear that the enterprise was a disaster.¹⁰⁷

The majority of officers viewed this as a national humiliation. It validated officers' claims about the level of disintegration within the military, which socialists had dismissed as scaremongering, and it mobilized officers who had previously remained passive. The union's declarations were increasingly critical, acrimonious, and defiant, but they gained growing support from officers; in particular, demands for the restoration of the death penalty and the return of disciplinary authority to officers, unrestricted by 'irresponsible' collective organs.¹⁰⁸ Few officers emerged from the offensive convinced that the innovations of February—committees, commissars, new rights for soldiers—had improved the military. Novosil'tsev suggested that even Gushchin had become disillusioned with events when the two met in Petrograd on 15 July.¹⁰⁹ This mood was visible in the union's newspaper. The initial focus on promoting and defending the union turned to uncompromising attacks on critics, and the final issue emphasized the union's strength and outlined measures that the government *had* to implement to save Russia.

By mid July, the government was listening. The death penalty was reintroduced on 12 July. Attempts were made to limit agitation, and Bolshevik newspapers were prohibited on 15 July. The government took control of the network of military commissars previously controlled by the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies on the same day, and started to prosecute all military crimes (especially not fulfilling duties or orders), imprisoning offenders. Some armies established investigative commissions that prosecuted hundreds of offenders. Officers reasserted their authority, and the influence of committees temporarily waned.¹¹⁰ General V. I. Selivachev noted in his diary on 8 July that, finally, a different approach was apparent.¹¹¹

Military leaders also expressed stronger views than in the past. A conference in Stavka on 16 July, which all of the senior generals attended (apart from General L. G. Kornilov), as well as Kerenskii, saw innumerable complaints aired regarding issues ranging from discipline, committees, and commissars to the declaration of soldiers' rights and Polivanov's commission. The majority, even moderates such as General A. A. Brusilov (the Commander-in-Chief), agreed on a resolution that would return disciplinary authority to officers; remove politics from the military by prohibiting meetings and the membership of political societies; reintroduce

¹⁰⁷ R. Wade, *The Russian Revolution, 1917* (2 edition: Cambridge, 2005), 175–83; L. Heenan, *Russian Democracy's Fatal Blunder: The Summer Offensive of 1917* (New York, 1987), 35–69; R. Feldman, 'The Russian General Staff and the June 1917 Offensive', *Soviet Studies*, 19, 4 (1968), 526–43.

¹⁰⁸ For e.g., GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 72, l. 78.

¹⁰⁹ GARF, f. 6422, op. 1, d. 1, l. 176.

¹¹⁰ One commission had investigated 37 officers and 12,725 soldiers by late August; *Revolutsionnoe dvizhenie v Russkoi armii (27 fevralia–24 oktiabria 1917 goda)* (Moscow, 1968), 376–7; Wildman, *Russian Imperial Army*, II, chs. 4–5.

¹¹¹ 'Iz dnevnika gen. V.I. Selivacheva', *Krasnyi arkhiv*, 10 (1925), 146.

the death penalty in the rear as well as the front; strictly confine the activities of committees to economic and educational concerns; and restrict the rights and duties of commissars.¹¹² The generals did not expect instant improvements, but they did expect government support.

The failure of the offensive saw Brusilov replaced as Commander-in-Chief by Kornilov on 18 July, which seemed to confirm the government's new direction and provided a massive boost to the union and similar organizations. In their memoirs, officers are invariably hostile to Brusilov. They argue that he adopted the values of the revolution, abandoning the interests of officers for soldiers, and thereby facilitated the destruction of the military.¹¹³ Two committee members, Novosil'tsev and Riasnianskii, later recalled that Brusilov's hostility to the union had hampered their activities. Novosil'tsev noted that Brusilov had said that an officers' union was ill timed and that a general union of officers and soldiers would be more effective. Novosil'tsev claimed that he expected the union to be liquidated.¹¹⁴ This antagonism was overstated, no doubt fuelled by Brusilov's later service in the Red Army. Brusilov became honorary chairman of the union like his predecessor, whilst the union's *Vestnik* praised an interview in which he argued that there should be no classes in the military, only 'defenders of the motherland'.¹¹⁵ On 5 June, Brusilov wrote to his wife that he had 'only one aim—to save Russia from disintegration, which is inevitable in the event of losing the war'.¹¹⁶ Brusilov supported the union's objectives, but simply doubted whether the union was the best means of achieving them.

The union took some of the credit for the government's new direction, but the real position is questionable. It did have influence at the highest levels of the military. All three Commanders-in-Chief prior to August (Alekseev, Brusilov, and Kornilov) were honorary chairs and their Chiefs of Staff were honorary members (Denikin and Lukomskii). Stavka provided the headquarters for the union and essential printing facilities for *Vestnik* and other propaganda. The union gained a veneer of officialdom and was seen as a mouthpiece of the high command, especially under Kornilov. On 5 August, Cornet P. A. Kravchenko (a committee member) boasted that the union had very good relations with Stavka that enabled a 'wide range' of possibilities to punish an offending officer.¹¹⁷ Yet the government's own concerns played a greater role. After all, Kerenskii, Prime

¹¹² GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 39, ll. 2–32ob. Excerpts are in *RPG*, II, 989–1010. Pronin served as one of its secretaries.

¹¹³ Alekseev noted on 20 July that Brusilov could talk 'the language of the revolution'; 'Nekotoryia zametki i pis'ma posle moego otchisleniia ot komandovaniia', *Russkoi istoricheskii arkhiv. Sbornik pervyi* (Prague, 1929), 33.

¹¹⁴ GARF, f. 6422, op. 1, d. 1, l. 156ob; S. Riasnianskii, 'Vospominaniia o soiuze ofitserov i Bykhove', *Vestnik pervopokhodnika*, 79–81 (1968), 64.

¹¹⁵ *VGKO*, No. 2, 22 June 1917, 2; *VGKO*, No. 3, 12 July 1917, 1.

¹¹⁶ BAR, A. A. Brusilov papers, 'Pis'ma A. A. Brusilova k ego zhen ot nachalo velikoi voiny do sentiabria 1918 goda', 272.

¹¹⁷ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 72, ll. 88–88ob.

Minister from 8 July, did not favour the union, whilst Captain M. M. Filonenko, the government's commissar at Stavka, was trying (unsuccessfully) to remove the union from Stavka by August.¹¹⁸

Furthermore, although the union gathered more support after the failed offensive, the extent to which this increased membership is unclear, as is the actual size of the union, as there are no membership lists. It was probably considered too dangerous to keep records: a feeling that was justified after the Bolsheviks seized power in October. *Vestnik* was quick to proclaim success. Apparently, 15,000 copies of the first issue were distributed, alongside 8,000 copies of the union's regulations, and these were insufficient. The union hoped to produce 50,000 copies of the second edition of both its regulations and newspaper, and to transform the latter into a daily. That never happened, but the regulations made a third edition on 15 July. Financial contributions came from individuals, regiments, and organizations, ranging from a few rubles to more than 16,000, and 50,000 rubles were quickly in the union's account. Branches were established in all of the armies, and in Petrograd, Moscow, Kiev, Kazan, Odessa, Saratov, Sevastopol, and elsewhere, apparently encompassing tens of thousands of members, including senior officers.¹¹⁹ It gained support from ad hoc 'societies' of officers that had emerged locally after February. As one declared, they sympathized with the union's objectives and welcomed the chance to become part of a broader (and, they hoped, more influential) body.¹²⁰

Numbers of copies do not equate to numbers of members, but the union attracted sizeable interest from an increasingly disillusioned officer corps. The claim that each *Vestnik* attracted a flurry of enquiries and a significant increase in members seems reasonable, explaining why all associations and unions strove to publicize their views as widely as possible.¹²¹ Indeed, local branches produced their own 'bulletins' hoping to replicate this effect.¹²² On one occasion, the main committee agreed to lend 1,000 rubles—a sizeable sum—specifically to enable a branch to establish a newspaper.¹²³ By 9 July, the union had to advertise for a scribe and a typist (without 'harmful political views') to deal with the administrative workload. It was promised that the Commander-in-Chief would transfer the successful candidate to Stavka, demonstrating again the union's influence.¹²⁴ Letters illustrate sizeable support for a professional union that would protect officers, promote their interests, and help those arrested by committees and soldiers.

Other indicators, however, suggest that the union was slower to develop than the image it wished to portray. The Union of Officers was authoritarian in

¹¹⁸ *Delo generala L. G. Kornilova*, II, 346–7.

¹¹⁹ *VGKO*, No. 2, 22 June 1917, 1; GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 71, ll. 60–76; d. 97, ll. 55ob–56.

¹²⁰ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 72, ll. 83–84, 96, 113–113ob.

¹²¹ *VGKO*, No. 5, 24 Aug. 1917, 1–2.

¹²² GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 72, ll. 44–49ob (a branch in the Tenth Army on 29 June).

¹²³ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 73, l. 18.

¹²⁴ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 72, ll. 36–36ob.

that it insisted that the main committee had the decisive say in all matters, and that local branches must follow its lead. Civilian bodies, like the Union of Landowners, permitted greater independence for local branches so that they could respond to local concerns. At the same time, the main committee was relatively detached from the need to organize a union. It assumed initially that officers would simply gather in support. It envisaged officers forming cells in regiments and companies. When enough of these existed, representatives from them would form sub-branches in divisions, staffs, and garrisons. These would then feed into branches at army or regional level. By early July, though, supporters were permitted to create sub-branches without having cells, as long as they had sixteen members. By late August, the union was stressing that only three to five people, a group of friends in effect, were sufficient to create a cell and join an existing branch.¹²⁵ These are technical details, but they prompted fierce debates and suggest that the union struggled to recruit members at the lowest levels in the military, where officers needed to maintain reasonable daily relations with soldiers. Reports from local areas are also mixed. The union in the Third Army had over 500 members in July, but reports from the Black Sea and the Caucasus show that these areas had problems forming branches.¹²⁶ These concerns forced greater central organization by mid July, with membership, judicial, and cultural and educational departments formed.¹²⁷ Comparable unions made this move earlier.

The union also faced cases of resistance from senior officers. Some commanders decided that officers' organizations were pointless or harmful, and prevented their officers from attending the Stavka congress in May or organizing a branch of the union. General Grigor'ev, Commander of Omsk military region, confiscated literature about the union and prohibited attendance. Seventeen officers complained and the union protested to the Ministry of War (which was supportive), stressing officers' rights as citizens. Later issues of *Vestnik* carried substantial attacks on Grigor'ev, but he was not alone. General Tsiurikov prohibited all officer organizations in the Sixth Army to avoid conflict. These actions worried the union and it threatened legal action.¹²⁸ Elsewhere, hierarchical practices were needed to overcome opposition. On 7 June, an assembly of officers in the First Caucasian Rifle Regiment voted on whether to join. A third of the votes were against, but these officers were forced to join as the majority then voted to prohibit officers from remaining in the regiment if they were not members.¹²⁹ It is hardly surprising that such practices led to socialist accusations that officers were being 'lured' into the union.¹³⁰

¹²⁵ VGKO, No. 3, 12 July 1917, 4; GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 71, ll. 57–57ob.

¹²⁶ VGKO, No. 5, 24 Aug. 1917, 3; GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 72, ll. 5–5ob (Black Sea); d. 73, ll. 46–46ob (Caucasus).

¹²⁷ VGKO, No. 4, 25 July 1917, 4.

¹²⁸ VGKO, No. 1, 14 June 1917, 2; No. 2, 22 June 1917, 4; No. 3, 12 July 1917, 3.

¹²⁹ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 72, l. 7.

¹³⁰ *Revolutsionnoe dvizhenie v Russkoi armii*, 142–3.

It is impossible to draw firm conclusions about the level of support enjoyed by the union. It could attract hundreds in some areas, but much depended on the degree of unrest in a particular regiment or locality, and the attitude of local commanders. It is equally difficult to say anything about the social background or political orientation of members. Wildman doubted that the union 'influenced or represented the sentiments of the vast majority of officers'. Instead, he believed that it mobilized 'a network of staff officers of a certain type that fed into the Kornilov movement'.¹³¹ This is true of some of the leaders, but there was greater variety within the main committee, and letters sent to the union indicate a broad range of support. Most officers sympathized with the union's main objectives, but active members tended to be of a conservative mindset, although not necessarily a reactionary one. As the union admitted, most officers remained apathetic and it struggled to mobilize officers throughout 1917.

Finally, some of the union's leaders had a covert agenda from the beginning. Despite denouncing political objectives, Novosil'tsev described how on 23 May, after the congress had finished, Pronin told him that a military dictatorship was the only way to save the army (and, by implication, the country) from destruction. Novosil'tsev agreed to act in that direction, but argued that only a few committee members should be involved to maintain secrecy. The two co-opted Sidorin, Rozhenko, and Kravchenko. They worked to build links between officers and other groups to gather support for political change.¹³² Some links were public. The union hoped to benefit from patriotism arising from the war to bolster its finances and to foster greater political influence, looking towards industrialists and Kadets respectively. Connections already existed from before 1917, but these needed to be extended and strengthened. But Novosil'tsev and Pronin were keen to gauge the political mood among these and other groups. Nevertheless, the union's chief attraction to ordinary officers remained as a professional body to defend their everyday interests. Plans for a military dictatorship in May placed Novosil'tsev and the others in the minority of officers and elites at this time. But by late summer, other elites were favouring a stronger government and this group in the union became steadily more important.

THE MILITARY LEAGUE

Although the most prominent, the Union of Officers was not the only organization established to defend elements of the 'professional' interests of officers: a myriad of minor groups had emerged or were in the process of doing so.

¹³¹ A. Wildman, 'Officers of the General Staff and the Kornilov movement', in E. Frankel, J. Frankel, and B. Knei-Paz (eds.), *Revolution in Russia: Reassessments of 1917* (Cambridge, 1992), 94.

¹³² GARF, f. 6422, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 155ob, 159.

Two bodies are worthy of mention—the Military League and the Union of George Cavaliers—because they were sizeable and noticeably different, offering alternative bases of support that became important by late summer.

The Military League was created in Petrograd on 30 March 1917 in response to the problems caused by fighting a war on an unprecedented scale whilst restructuring the military on democratic foundations. The league aimed to help consolidate and strengthen the fighting capabilities of the military, and prevent the new state from falling to external enemies. It was not political: it would support the state structure that represented the will of the people. It was a professional union focused on improving the material and moral quality of the armed forces by building a productive relationship between officers and soldiers on the basis of mutual confidence and respect, establishing the official position of both groups, promoting discipline as the source of the military's strength, and aiding the development of military technology. It was not an officers' organization: all military personnel could join on the payment of a subscription, whilst civilian members were welcome on the recommendation of two existing members.¹³³ However, officers initiated it, primarily Major-General I. I. Fedorov, who was elected chairman of the main council on 23 April. Another assembly on 14 May finalized the twenty-man council, which consisted primarily of middle-ranking officers and a few civilians. Notable members included Lieutenant-Colonel D. A. Lebedev, an initiator of the Union of Officers; Captain L. L. Malevanov, a prominent member of the Union of George Cavaliers; and Prince S. P. Mansyrev, a Kadet member of the Duma and head of the Society of 1914, a patriotic, pro-war body.¹³⁴

On the surface, the league was another patriotic body seeking to aid the war effort and support the government. It formed local branches and undertook the usual activities: publishing (including a newspaper, *Voennyi listok*), holding lectures, and discussing proposed reforms. It also established a committee to facilitate the involvement of women in the war effort, from manning telegraphs and serving as clerks, to working as electrical technicians, topographers, and medics.¹³⁵ Its language was far more patriotic than the groups discussed above. In calling for Cossack support as the 'flower of the Russian military', the league described itself as emerging 'from the tears of a dying and tortured Russia'.¹³⁶ Elsewhere, the role of the military in defending freedom and the motherland predominated, alongside calls for sacrifices.

Increasingly, though, the emphasis was on one issue: the strict implementation of military discipline. A general assembly on 31 May brought together the league's key themes in this area. Duties, it argued, needed to be reiterated, but discipline was the key to fulfilling duty. The authority of the command structure needed

¹³³ *Voennyi listok*, No. 1, 22 April 1917, 1, in GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 78, l. 11.

¹³⁴ *Voennyi listok*, No. 2, 31 May 1917, 2, in GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 78, l. 12ob.

¹³⁵ L. Stoff, *They Fought for the Motherland: Russia's Women Soldiers in World War and the Revolution* (Lawrence, 2006), 65.

¹³⁶ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 78, l. 1.

to be strengthened and officers appointed, not elected. Disciplinary authority should be restored to commanders. Defeatist propaganda at the front and the rear needed to be curtailed, and deserters punished. The resolution finished by advising an improvement in the food and sanitary conditions at the front—an insubstantial gesture to provide an incentive to soldiers.¹³⁷ The second edition of its newspaper attacked a range of groups seen to be threatening this goal, from those allowing class concerns to obscure the threat to freedom posed by the Germans, to officers wasting time forming numerous congresses to discuss political issues during a war.¹³⁸ Occasionally, stronger views emerged. In one pamphlet, it argued that officers are the leaders of the armed people: ‘without leaders, there is no army, and no nation could exist in the current climate without an army’. Furthermore, it added, dual power inevitably leads to anarchy, which in turn weakens the military. Although a professional body, the league supported a united government (and thus the removal of the harmful soviets).¹³⁹

As with other organizations, it is impossible to gauge membership and influence. The league obtained two places on Polivanov’s commission and thus had an input into proposed military reforms. It was active in raising troops for the offensive. On 8 June, it proposed creating its own voluntary detachments to aid the war. Brusilov approved the idea on 25 June and the government accepted the proposal. They were not to be formed in the Petrograd Military Region, only at the front, and then with the agreement of the front commander. The league started with the northern front for logistical reasons, as it was the closest to Petrograd, and contacted the front commander on 2 July.¹⁴⁰ At the same time, it spread leaflets urging support for the offensive and opposed the anti-war demonstrations planned for 18 June, condemning the harmful influence of the Bolsheviks. This brought the league into conflict with radical socialists and, on 17 June, several members were arrested in the capital as ‘counter-revolutionaries’ and their leaflets were confiscated. They were later reluctantly freed by the executive committee of the Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies.¹⁴¹

The league ran into more trouble over its support for older soldiers to return home to help with the harvest, which placed it in direct opposition to Kerenskii. On 3 July, a delegation consisting of soldiers and members met Kerenskii, who called the suggestion ‘unpatriotic’ and condemned protests against the government’s decisions.¹⁴² Kerenskii had not heard of the league before and was not happy with its role. Rumours circulated, reaching the league on 11 July, that it was about to be closed down by the government for ‘counter-revolutionary activities’ and these which were printed in the press.¹⁴³ A report to the league’s general assembly on 28 July admitted that its leaders had been involved in negotiations

¹³⁷ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 78, l. 8.

¹³⁸ *Voennyi listok*, No. 2, 31 May 1917, 1–2, in GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 78, ll. 12–12ob.

¹³⁹ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 78, l. 39a.

¹⁴⁰ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 78, ll. 24–28.

¹⁴¹ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 78, ll. 9–10.

¹⁴² GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 78, ll. 23–23ob.

¹⁴³ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 78, ll. 44–45.

with the government over its continued existence for most of the month. Its support for older soldiers, the arrests by socialists, and its vocal support for Admiral A. V. Kolchak after his dismissal as Commander of the Black Sea Fleet had raised concerns. The league tried to convince officers in the Ministry of War of its patriotic intentions. Eventually, an officer at the ministry verbally outlined a set of conditions for its continued existence. Essentially, these were dropping its support for older soldiers, coming under greater control of the military authorities, and establishing closer ties with political groups affiliated to the Soviet. The first two seemed acceptable, but the league refused to countenance the final point. Closer political ties contravened its objective to be an apolitical, professional body. One of its council members was apparently a member of the Soviet—surely that was sufficient? The ministry refused to put the conditions in writing and the evidence falls silent at this point.¹⁴⁴ As the league continued to exist throughout August, the government obviously did not fulfil its threat. Nevertheless, the uncertainty and the antagonism in the press led to the resignations of some members.¹⁴⁵

The league was one of the first major conservative organizations formed during 1917 and deliberately sought members beyond officers and the military. Novosil'tsev noted that the league conducted what it called surface activities (those described above) and underground activities, which became focused on promoting an authoritarian government, as will be seen. Suffice to say that Novosil'tsev, hardly a moderate, viewed some league members as dangerous 'hotheads'.¹⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the league was unfortunate to attract so much negative publicity, given that its activities were similar to other officer groups. Probably, given its ill-defined base of support, it was an easier target than a union of officers based at Stavka, but it illustrates the fine line that officers' organizations had to tread in 1917 to avert outright persecution.

THE UNION OF GEORGE CAVALIERS

The final significant 'professional' body was the Union of George Cavaliers. Russia had awarded decorations in the name of St George since 1769 and some of these were united in 1913 to create the St George Cross. Awarded during wartime, there was a hierarchy of four classes, but all awardees became prestigious cavaliers. In January 1916, the Committee of St George was formed to manage the interests of cavaliers, from raising their profile through exhibitions and concerts, to providing material aid such as sanatoriums.¹⁴⁷ After the February Revolution,

¹⁴⁴ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 78, ll. 65–82.

¹⁴⁵ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 78, l. 79.

¹⁴⁶ GARF, f. 6422, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 164ob–165.

¹⁴⁷ M. Stockdale, 'United in Gratitude: Honoring Soldiers and Defining the Nation in Russia's Great War', *Kritika*, 7, 3 (2006), 469–70.

groups of cavaliers in various regiments issued declarations of support for the government and patriotic appeals. Cavaliers were seen, and saw themselves, as the most patriotic and reliable element in the military as they had proven themselves through recognized acts of bravery.

In late April, cavaliers in Odessa's military region created a formal union to support the government, unite the country against the Germans, and foster discipline in the military.¹⁴⁸ It was headed by Captain P. V. Skarzhinskii, but there is no indication that it had branches elsewhere at this stage. Union activity was reported in Petrograd in early June with public demonstrations to gather volunteers for the women's battalion and for the front, but there is no evidence that the union enjoyed a permanent presence in the capital at this stage.¹⁴⁹ A press release from Odessa on 4 June did declare that the union in the city was widening its activities. It already had over 5,000 active and corresponding members, and was receiving daily telegrams of support from across the military. It was now sending out delegates to promote the union, gather financial support, and establish filial branches.¹⁵⁰

This heralded the major step in establishment of the union as a nationwide body. At around this time, Skarzhinskii headed a delegation from Odessa that spent weeks touring cities, towns, and frontline positions across Russia. The result, Skarzhinskii boasted in his report to an executive meeting in Odessa in mid July, was the organization of 118 branches and the creation of the union as a powerful body. He admitted that it had not been easy: their appeals to save the motherland from anarchy and discord had been met with coldness and even hostility in places. The Soviet in Petrograd had initially asked them to leave the city before relenting and permitting the delegation to attend one of its meetings. Their visit to Petrograd coincided with the tumultuous protests on 3–5 July, and they helped to defend the Tauride Palace from protestors, earning the ire of Bolsheviks and anarchists. Nevertheless, Skarzhinskii noted that they had formed a large and influential branch of the union in the capital, although the delegation had been expelled from the militant Kronstadt naval base nearby when it had tried to visit. The delegation had been particularly successful at the front and among the high command, leaving Skarzhinskii to conclude that he was confident about the union's future.¹⁵¹

The available minutes from the meetings of the Petrograd branch, which start on 6 July, support Skarzhinskii's account. Chaired by I. V. Gorshikhin, it met on Tuesdays and Fridays, and was attended by seventeen to thirty-five members. It

¹⁴⁸ *Vestnik vremennago pravitel'stva*, No. 41, 27 April 1917, 4.

¹⁴⁹ *Rech'*, No. 134, 10 June 1917, 1; No. 138, 15 June 1917, 4.

¹⁵⁰ *Odesskii listok*, No. 141, 4 June 1917, 3.

¹⁵¹ *Odesskii listok*, No. 179, 20 July 1917, 2. The delegation was in Moscow in late June, inviting those interested to visit their hotel or attend a meeting on 30 June. The new branch was publicly inaugurated during a ceremony in Red Square on 2 July; *Moskovskiiia vedomosti*, No. 137, 28 June 1917, 1; No. 142, 4 July 1917, 1.

devoted most of July to activities that confirm that it was still being established. It elected members to various committees and posts, including a treasurer, whilst it was building links with senior government and military figures.¹⁵² On 31 July, it organized a general assembly of cavaliers in the Petrograd region, which 5,000 reportedly attended. Speakers stressed the need to defend the motherland from danger, unite against the Germans, and establish order and discipline at the front and the rear. There were delegates from other branches and the George committee. Otherwise, the assembly attracted a high standard of guest speakers—V. M. Chernov, Kerenskii, P. N. Miliukov, M. V. Rodzianko, A. I. Shingarev, and M. I. Skobolev—representing various political positions. The Commander of Petrograd Military Region, Major-General O. P. Vasil'kovskii; the chair of the main Cossack union, Colonel A. I. Dutov; and representatives from British and Serbian military missions also turned up. Most echoed the union's patriotism, but a few warning notes were sounded. Kerenskii spoke out against the monarchy, whilst Vasil'kovskii warned that he would not tolerate counter-revolution within his area of responsibility.¹⁵³ Overall, it seems as if the Petrograd branch acted independently, rather than being clearly subordinate to the central committee.

Meanwhile, there were attempts to forge greater unity through a nationwide conference. On 20 July, the chair of the branch at Stavka, Lieutenant G. M. Kravets, invited two to three representatives from each branch to Mogilev on 1 August to establish greater links between each other, and to discuss objectives and laws. The invitation was sent to only seven branches (Petrograd, Moscow, Kiev, Odessa, Nikolaev, Kherson and Tiflis), which seemed to be all that the author was aware of, as he asked for the appeal to be forwarded to any other branches that recipients knew about. Nikolaev's branch complied, contacting Ekaterinoslav.¹⁵⁴

The 'conference of delegates of the branches of the Union of George Cavaliers' held preliminary meetings on 30–1 July to formulate an agenda and opened officially on 1 August with thirty-six representatives in attendance (numbers fluctuated from thirty-six to forty-five over the week-long conference). Skarzhinskii, as chair, delivered the opening speech. He dismissed malicious attacks that labelled the union as counter-revolutionary, monarchist, or generally harmful, noting again that it had 120 branches. These enjoyed support from a broad segment of society and respect from the Commander-in-Chief, who felt that they had a role to play in re-establishing 'honour' and 'health' in the army. The union supported order as the country prepared for the Constituent Assembly and was fully behind the government in its work for the good of the motherland. It desired to aid the rebirth of the military capabilities of the army through discipline, re-establishing the authority of officers, and building unity

¹⁵² GARF, f. 336, op. 1, d. 26, ll. 1–5.

¹⁵⁴ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 79, ll. 4, 7.

¹⁵³ GARF, f. 336, op. 1, d. 26, ll. 6–7ob.

between officers and soldiers. Finally, it would provide material and spiritual help for George cavaliers and their families. The main objective of the conference was to discuss the creation of a central organ of the union, its rights and duties, its relations with branches and the authorities, and its location. In addition, delegates would discuss the reports of individuals, finances, and aiding the war effort.¹⁵⁵

Debates on unity started on 4 August with a discussion about the union's regulations. One delegate argued that they needed one set of regulations to be truly unified, but others disagreed, believing that there did not need to be a 'sharp party line' on everything. In any case, unified rules would need to be approved by a future congress.¹⁵⁶ The following day saw delegates agree unanimously that a central organ was needed, but its location provoked another debate. Some argued that it should be in Petrograd to be close to political events. Others disagreed: 'Petrograd was a nest of party discord' and it should be in Moscow with sections in Petrograd and Stavka. The final decision settled on Moscow due to 'moral and material' considerations: the branch there was sufficiently well organized to help create a central committee. A seven-man committee was elected chaired by Skarzshinskii. The conference then established commissions to oversee financial, judicial, cultural-educational, and other matters.¹⁵⁷

The expansion of the union into a nationwide body had clearly forced it to rethink its organization and how it could best wield influence. In terms of size, Skarzshinskii's claim that 120 branches existed is questionable. The initial call for the conference went out to only seven, whilst a list of executive committees of local unions that probably originated at the conference covers nineteen. These included cities (Petrograd, Moscow, Odessa, and Kiev), provincial capitals (Ekaterinoslav, Kostroma, and Riazan), and military centres (Mogilev and the 'Western front'), as well as smaller towns near the front (Gomel and Kishinev). There was also a strong presence around the union's origins in the south, with branches in Sevastopol and Simferopol. The list is incomplete: Kherson and Tiflis were not listed, despite being in the original seven, and neither is Orel, which emerged on 12 August, or Saratov, which had 300 members.¹⁵⁸ Nonetheless, Skarzshinskii's figure of 120 must have loosely defined the term 'branch'. This coverage is less comprehensive than the Union of Officers, but a broader range of individuals was actively involved, from the lower officer ranks to Cossacks, sailors, and civilians. Moreover, a congress of supporters of the Moscow branch

¹⁵⁵ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 77, ll. 93–94.

¹⁵⁶ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 77, l. 85.

¹⁵⁷ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 77, ll. 88–90. This decision was noted by the Petrograd branch (f. 336, op. 1, d. 26, l. 11).

¹⁵⁸ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 79, ll. 100–100ob; *Golos naroda* [Orel'], No. 92, 12 August 1917, 1; D. Raleigh, *Revolution on the Volga: 1917 in Saratov* (Ithaca, 1986), 212. The union's expansion was ongoing. The Petrograd branch outlined plans for branches in several towns during August (f. 336, op. 1, d. 26, ll. 10–12ob) and on 21 August, the Moscow branch allocated 5,000 rubles to form a branch in Egor'evsk (f. 1780, op. 1, d. 79, l. 22).

at the same time attracted over 1,500 delegates, numbers that the Union of Officers would have struggled to match.¹⁵⁹

The union distributed numerous brochures and appeals, largely with funding from the George Committee. It developed close links with Major-General N. S. Anosov, the committee's director of affairs, especially the Petrograd branch. The August conference elected several individuals to oversee relations between the two bodies, which the union envisaged as primarily financial.¹⁶⁰ This is confirmed by the committee's own accounts, which indicate that it provided 15,307 rubles to the union between June and August, mainly for publications. Some appeals were published in large quantities with 40–60,000 copies common (costing from 800 to 3,000 rubles), whilst several had runs of 120,000 or even 150,000 copies (with costs nearer 3,000 rubles).¹⁶¹ Given that the Union of Officers considered a proposed run of 50,000 copies of its second newspaper sizeable, these numbers are impressive for a relatively small organization. The committee was wealthy, with access to millions of rubles granted by the Tsar prior to 1917. Its grants, therefore, did not represent a particularly sizeable outlay. It later considered providing sums of 100,000 rubles for other activities, suggesting that it believed that the union could play an important role locally for cavaliers, which the committee could not do.¹⁶²

The publications were a mixture of information about the union and emotive patriotic appeals. Even the former, though, contained more emotion than facts. The George cavaliers, one brochure asserted, aimed to combat the destruction of the military and to demand discipline and duty for the motherland, and to encourage people not to act for personal gain. Like other bodies, the union condemned party discord as underpinning the current conflict. But unlike these groups, the cavaliers felt that they did have moral authority. They were not a union based on class, nationality or parties, or even a profession within the military, but a union based on officers and soldiers who had already demonstrated their devotion to the motherland and willingness to lay down their lives.¹⁶³ Morally, this meant that the union could urge people to further sacrifice for Russia and lead by example. Practically, this made the union harder to undermine than officers' bodies and the Military League: attacking those who had demonstrated acts of bravery during wartime was not easy, even for radical socialists.

The union was determined to back up its words with deeds. The Odessa branch occupied itself with a range of activities. It established a café in the city to raise money for the union, using this and other donations (in one case, money and property was donated by the former monarchist body, the Union of Russian People) to support war invalids. It also participated in municipal

¹⁵⁹ *Odesskii listok*, No. 200, 13 August 1917, 2.

¹⁶⁰ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 77, l. 84.

¹⁶¹ GARF, f. 336, op. 1, d. 28, ll. 59–59ob.

¹⁶² GARF, f. 336, op. 1, d. 28, ll. 42–44; d. 30, l. 23; d. 27, ll. 1–1ob.

¹⁶³ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 77, ll. 131–134ob.

elections, uniting with groups representing invalids and military personnel.¹⁶⁴ Like the Military League, the union hoped to form its own regiments, an aim that was actively supported by Kornilov. By August, it agreed to form regiments of cavaliers in the main military areas (Dvinsk, Kazan, Kiev, Minsk, Moscow, Odessa, Petrograd, and Stavka).¹⁶⁵ For the military command, these would, in theory, be composed of reliable troops whose willingness to defend Russia had been proven, and who could reinforce weak sections of the front or spearhead attacks. Popular opinion was more ambiguous and rumours circulated about how Kornilov intended to use cavaliers. Kapustin, like most Soviet historians, argued that cavaliers became a 'counter-revolutionary guard' or a 'political police' within the military, helping to implement measures designed to suppress the soldiers' movement.¹⁶⁶ This is an exaggeration, but there is no doubt that most observers expected to find some of the most conservative elements of the military, officers and soldiers, among the cavaliers, and that they were expected to play a role in any revolt against the government.

UNITY AND CONFLICT

By August, various officers' organizations existed, some of which included soldiers and civilians. These ranged across the political spectrum from socialists to conservatives. The vast majority of officers remained inactive, but a traditionally apolitical group was becoming politically aware and, more importantly, sufficiently discontented to make their voices heard. At the same time, the fears of Novosil'tsev were realized: revolutionary politics was polarizing the officer corps more than before. The impact is hard to analyse: contemporaries and historians argued that the majority of officers active in revolutionary politics were from the junior ranks, especially ensigns—products of the war, rather than career officers. But this chapter has demonstrated that officers of all ranks were involved in unions. Junior officers were predominant in socialist bodies, but they were also active in the Union of Officers, although senior career officers formed its leadership. Divisions among officers ran deeper than simplistic notions of rank or background.

It is also hard to distinguish differences between the programmes of many groups. All favoured continuing the war to a greater or lesser extent, even socialist officers, and they were all heavy on patriotic phrases, emphasizing the need to defend the motherland. They agreed too on the practical measures needed in the

¹⁶⁴ *Odesskii Listok*, No. 141, 4 June 1917, 3; No. 151, 16 June 1917, 3; No. 180, 21 July 1917, 2.

¹⁶⁵ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 77, l. 95ob.

¹⁶⁶ M. Kapustin, *Zagovor generalov (iz istorii Kornilovshchiny i ee razгром)* (Moscow, 1968), 141–3.

military: discipline, attention to duty, and less interference in operational matters by soldiers' committees. Yet there were sharp differences on how to achieve these goals. For the Union of Officers, it was the government's responsibility to enforce them from above through punishment and legislation. For the Soviet of Officers' Deputies, educational work and bringing soldiers into the process were crucial. For socialist officers, the emphasis should be on the soviets and the soldiers creating a new system of discipline themselves. There were also disagreements on whether officers should become involved in the political process to make their views heard or whether an independent professional group was better.

Nevertheless, the prevailing tendency by August was towards unity. The formation of the various groups outlined above provided avenues for officers of varying viewpoints to unite. But, slowly, moves to unite some of these groups or create relations between them were being made, either informally through individuals with links across groups or through further unions. As early as 23 May, the Professional Union of Officers, Doctors and Officials of the Fleet and Ports of the Baltic Sea (PROMOR) formed a professional, non-political body to bring together all naval officers. It was initiated by officers in Hel'singfors, and its programme adopted the tenants of the conservative Union of Republican Officers in the city on defending Russia, strengthening the fighting capabilities of the military, and supporting the government. Like the Union of Officers, it aimed to regulate the actions of officers through 'comrade courts'. Conservative and liberal officers served on a committee chaired by Captain P. V. Vil'ken. By June, it had around 500 adherents, but it took time to unite naval officers. Talks to affiliate the officers' union in Revel (SMOR) initially failed as SMOR demanded a more conservative programme. Yet PROMOR pressed for a declaration of officers' rights and, after the offensive and popular unrest in July, its attitude hardened and both bodies amalgamated.¹⁶⁷ Meanwhile, on 31 July, a Union of National Defence was proposed in a meeting between representatives of the Military League, the Union of Officers, the Union of George Cavaliers, and nine other military organizations. Nothing materialized, but again the offensive and fear of Bolshevism had prompted action.¹⁶⁸

The growing assertiveness of officers, like other elites, had wider consequences. Soldiers and sailors were suspicious of any attempt to unite officers. Forming a union of republican officers had met with opposition in naval bases despite its socialist views, whilst the proposal to create a union of officers provoked a widespread outburst. Roslavl garrison declared on 30 April that these plans were not in tune with current politics, and would harm stability and unity within the military. There was no need for an independent officers' union. If officers were loyal, then they were able to participate in soldiers' bodies. On 16 May, soldiers in Gomel saw the political threat posed by an officers' union, rather than believing

¹⁶⁷ Petrash, *Moriaki*, 98–100; Khesin, *Oktiabr'skaia revoliutsiia*, 189–90.

¹⁶⁸ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 78, l. 52. These connections are discussed further in Chapter 6.

its professional aspirations. It sent delegates to the Stavka congress to determine the level of the threat. Assessing the congress on 24 May, the committee of the Eighth Army dismissed claims that the union was a 'professional' body. It was focused on 'class aims' and was political. Many simply argued that permitting any kind of representation to officers, even in the form of a general military union, was dangerous for the revolution.¹⁶⁹ By 10 June, the military section of the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies in Petrograd was gathering material on the numerous unions in the military, assessing their relationship to the Soviet. Two days later, its own officers' organization, the Union of Republican Officers, resolved that establishing links with supposedly 'independent' bodies, such as the Military League, would be a 'negative' move.¹⁷⁰

Soldiers also attacked specific proposals made by officers' unions. An assembly in the 14th Engineers' Regiment on 2 June protested at proposals to remove politics from the army. How, soldiers argued, can a democracy be created if the millions in the military were not allowed to participate in politics? Anyway, socialism and military issues were not mutually exclusive.¹⁷¹ The Union of Officers was targeted in the flood of protests that greeted the reintroduction of the death penalty. This was seen as a 'counter-revolutionary' act and it was felt that Kornilov should be removed.¹⁷² On 11 August, Kaluga garrison spoke out violently against the death penalty and state persecution of the Bolsheviks. It then noted that officers' unions were 'counter-revolutionary' and stated that 'every officer who joins these unions should be considered a traitor to the revolution'.¹⁷³

On occasion, suspicion prompted reprisals. In early April, officers in the Eighth Army in Chernovits decided to form their own union with military officials, doctors, and priests. Two earlier assemblies had been closed, but this one went ahead. It openly supported the government and there was nothing subversive in its speeches. Workers were present, applauding loudly. Yet a 'Bolshevik' doctor gave a 'hysterical' speech condemning the assembly and noting the danger of allowing officers to form independent bodies. These must have devious objectives, he claimed, as officers, doctors, and priests could not share the same professional objectives. This speech led much of the audience to leave and demonstrate outside. It became a struggle to maintain calm.¹⁷⁴ Similarly, on 27 May, 314 cavaliers in Izmail met to form a union. Soldiers dispersed them before a word was spoken. The next day, the soldiers' soviet resolved that such unions were 'counter-revolutionary', weakened the front, and should not meet. They called

¹⁶⁹ *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v voennykh*, 83, 105, 135; GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 97, ll. 25–26ob.

¹⁷⁰ *Petrogradskii sovet*, III, 298; GARF, f. 4018, op. 1, d. 1, l. 22.

¹⁷¹ *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Russkoi armii*, 570.

¹⁷² *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Rossii v iule 1917g. (Iul'skii krizis)* (Moscow, 1959), 415–35.

¹⁷³ *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v voennykh*, 210.

¹⁷⁴ K. Oberuchev, *Ofitsery v Russkoi revoliutsii* (New York, 1918), 39–43. The author was a SR commissar.

for the arrest and removal of Rear-Admiral Prince Trubetskoi for permitting the meeting in the first place.¹⁷⁵ When a sub-branch of the Union of Officers in the Second Army tried to publish their own newspaper, *Ofitserskii golos*, using the army's press, workers refused to print it. The union argued that all bodies had the right to express their views freely in the new Russia, but soldiers replied that it was a private body viewed negatively by the Soviet in Petrograd and was not entitled to use the printing facilities (although the union did at Stavka). The sub-branch was forced to turn to a private printer in a neighbouring town.¹⁷⁶ In Petrograd, cavaliers and members of the Military League were beaten up and dispersed when they marched in support of the offensive.¹⁷⁷ Finally, according to Vice-Admiral A. D. Bubnov, fear of the Union of Officers' activities in Sevastopol contributed to the unrest that led to the removal of Kolchak from the Black Sea Fleet.¹⁷⁸

Officers were in a tenuous position and could do little when faced by popular aggression. Few officers could confidently hold debates on 'revolution' or 'democracy', or even distinguish between socialist parties. Their effectiveness as speakers declined steadily as soldiers and sailors became politically aware and the number of political agitators increased. Brusilov despaired that most could be beaten by 'any sort of speaker who had read a socialist pamphlet or two and had the gift of the gab'.¹⁷⁹ Crowds were volatile and it was difficult to talk to large numbers about issues that were clearly going to cause disagreements. He estimated that only 15–20% of officers adapted quickly to the new regime. Denikin believed that fifteen of the forty senior commanders at the front were 'opportunists' who quickly adapted to and supported the 'democratization' of the military. Fourteen opposed it, whilst eleven remained neutral.¹⁸⁰

Most officers resented the disrespect shown to them and felt that they were marginalized by the vocal demands of soldiers and sailors, and the government's pandering to these demands. For officers, the revolution provided an opportunity for everyone to fight for a better Russia and they resented being called 'counter-revolutionary' as they had always supported the new government. Of course, they had to express support to avoid outright persecution and, at the sharp end of the unrest in 1917, officers spearheaded the growing demands of various

¹⁷⁵ *Voiskovye komitety deistvuiushchei armii: Mart 1917g. – mart 1918g.* (Moscow, 1982), 172. An attempt to open a branch in Luga was also prevented by the local soviet; GARF, f. 336, op. 1, d. 26, l. 11.

¹⁷⁶ *Odesskii listok*, No. 169, 8 July 1917, 1–2.

¹⁷⁷ A. Andreev, *Soldatskie massy garnizonov Russkoi armii v oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii* (Moscow, 1975), 166.

¹⁷⁸ *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Rossii v mae–iune 1917g. (Iiun'skaia demonstratsiia)* (Moscow, 1959), 355–6.

¹⁷⁹ A. Brussilov, *A Soldier's Notebook 1914–1918* (London, 1930), 305.

¹⁸⁰ A. Denikin, *Ocherki Russkoi smuty* (3 volumes: Moscow, 2005), I, 311 (Brusilov's views are on 361).

groups for a stronger government. Equally, whereas landowners and other elites genuinely wanted a liberal government to work, many officers were ambivalent. They accepted the February Revolution primarily for the war; when the war effort failed to improve, many were quick to consider alternatives. This laid the foundations for serious conflict with the government.

6

Counter-Revolution

By early August, elites were experiencing a mixed picture. On the one hand, the popular mood was more radical than in February and nobles were losing influence in local affairs, landowners faced growing peasant unrest, and the authority of officers had disintegrated. Socialists had replaced liberals and moderate conservatives in the government, which was in any case powerless in the face of a multitude of popular organizations. Prince V. M. Golitsyn, the former Mayor of Moscow, noted in his diary on 23 July that parties and personalities mattered, not policies or wider social concerns.¹ It was more that liberal policies no longer mattered, but Golitsyn was correct in sensing a partisan and volatile political environment by this stage.

On the other hand, intensifying social and political conflict did provide an opening for elites. New strategies had fostered organizations that were increasingly vocal in articulating their demands, and active in seeking a broad range of support. Socialist ministers, equally fearful of the growing instability and its impact, were listening. In July, in addition to measures described in previous chapters, the government facilitated the prosecution of newspapers inciting the dereliction of military duty and violence, tightened military censorship, strengthened control over the railways, encouraged the arrest of disruptive committees and their members, acted to prevent street meetings in Petrograd, and so on.² These moves were ineffective, but they had an impact on public opinion: most thought that they eroded the revolution's achievements, but elites welcomed them, stepping up their activities to encourage the government further.

The support base of elite groups remained small—especially through elections—but ‘their strength far exceeded any electoral base’.³ Partly, this reflected the continued importance of their political experience, wealth, and education. But it was also desperation at the growing unrest, and its impact on themselves and on the war effort. It was this fear above all else that elites shared with other groups. By August, a ‘conservative movement’ was pressing for a change

¹ V. Golitsyn, *Dnevnik 1917–1918 godov* (Moscow, 2008), 23.

² H. White, ‘Civil Rights and the Provisional Government’, in O. Crisp and L. Edmondson (eds.), *Civil Rights in Imperial Russia* (Oxford, 1989), 310.

³ R. Wade, *The Russian Revolution, 1917* (2nd edition: Cambridge, 2005), 64.

in the direction of the revolution, and a strong government to save Russia from the anarchy threatening it from within and the German threat from outside. Opinions differed, but these sentiments brought together a range of groups from nobles, landowners, and officers, to politicians of various hues, industrialists, religious figures, and others. This fuelled pressures that culminated in the ill-fated revolt by General L. G. Kornilov, the Commander-in-Chief, at the end of August.

There remains a tendency to exaggerate the unity of this movement, however, and to equate demands for strong government with a desire for a dictatorship. This originates largely from the minds of contemporaries. A fear and expectation of counter-revolution had existed since February, influencing the activities of socialists and dominating popular discourse. The events of 1789, 1848, and 1871 suggested that counter-revolution was inevitable and that the 'bourgeoisie' was strong, implacably opposed to the revolution, and ready to act. Kornilov's revolt seemed to justify these fears. Its rapid collapse, though, can be attributed as much to divisions within elites as their weakness in the face of the mass movement. Few had intended to oppose the government; instead, they wanted to better represent their interests and to strengthen the existing government to enable it to implement its new policies effectively. Of course, some were quick to disassociate themselves from a disastrous revolt that they had hitherto supported, whilst others awaited events, withholding their open support until they were sure that Kornilov would succeed. But the majority was engaged in heated debates over Russia's future.

THE 'CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT'

The permanent council of the United Nobility was the first elite body to recognize the need to forge wider alliances when it called unsuccessfully in April for urban and rural property owners to unite. By late May, the revived Union of Landowners renewed these calls. Instructions to local branches told them to accommodate representatives from unions of homeowners, trade and industry, forestry groups, livestock breeders, dacha owners, and other groups with similar aims.⁴ Some links were aided by personal connections. In late June, the All-Russian Congress of Stud-farm Owners, Horse-breeders, and related industries opened in Moscow. It was chaired by I. I. Dmitriukov, a Duma member who was on the main council of the Union of Landowners. Former ministers, N. N. Kutler (agriculture) and Prince N. B. Shcherbatov (internal affairs), were on its presidium. The congress attacked criminality and peasant destruction, promoted an advanced economy, and urged the government to take

⁴ OR RGB, f. 114, k. 2, ed. khran. 35, l. 19.

stronger measures.⁵ The congress selected five members to attend the All-Russian Congress of Landowners at the beginning of July.⁶

Reports to the main council of the Union of Landowners in late July were less positive. The Penza branch had simply contacted local liberals and industrialists. In Stavropol, landowners and industrialists had separated in July, despite having formed a joint union in April. The Novgorod branch noted that homeowners were organizing in *uezd* towns and hoped to make contact, but gave no indication that they had done so.⁷ Most reports did not mention anything. This piecemeal approach was attacked by the president, N. N. L'vov, on 31 July. He argued that they 'must create one great movement in Russian life—a patriotic and national movement, and consolidate all honest and sober-minded forces of Russia in the struggle against the destructive beginnings of socialist currents'. He stated that groups must put aside small differences to unite around issues of civic-mindedness, law, and order. He had started organizing groups of bankers, industrialists, and Kadets, and argued that 'we [landowners and others] must be ready to do anything, to stop at nothing, including risking our lives, but we must win at any cost'.⁸

This speech has been cited to prove that landowners wanted to overthrow the government, but the context suggests that L'vov desired a broad, like-minded coalition for a range of issues. A sympathetic, stronger government was one of these, but so too were the forthcoming elections to the Constituent Assembly. The union repeatedly stressed the importance of the assembly, which would make the key decisions on the agrarian question as well as political issues. It recognized the fact that Russians might not elect an agreeable assembly, but if the assembly followed legal procedure, it would take years to make decisions. By then the political and social situation might be very different. At the very least, landowners would be represented, which was more than they were in most land committees, and could agitate for compensation.

Industrialists were the obvious partners. Landowners' influence in urban areas was weak, as was the industrialists' appeal rurally. Joint campaigns and candidates could prove mutually beneficial, uniting their votes into a significant bloc. Landowners already enjoyed strong links to the Union of Trade and Industry. L'vov headed its political department and was a Progressist, as was P. P. Riabushinskii and other leading industrialists. K. I. Kozakov, the Secretary of the Union of Landowners, was a member of the Union of Trade and Industry, whilst Professor A. E. Vorms worked on legal issues for both unions. Landowners elected three representatives to the second congress of the All-Russian Union of Trade and Industry in Moscow on 3 August 1917.⁹ One of these, V. I. Gurko,

⁵ *Moskovskiiia vedomosti*, No. 137, 28 June 1917, 1.

⁶ OR RGB, f. 114, k. 2, ed. khran. 19, l. 1.

⁷ 'Soiuz zemel'nykh sobstvennikov v 1917 godu', *Krasnyi arkhiv*, 21 (1927), 103–5.

⁸ 'Soiuz zemel'nykh', 119–20.

⁹ 'Soiuz zemel'nykh', 114.

noted later that a council representing various trade and industrial groups, which was headed by Kutler, provided a 'rather substantial subsidy' to the Union of Landowners.¹⁰

More effort went into strengthening bonds with other property-owning groups than it did into maintaining links with traditional allies. Landowners continued to work in tandem with local noble assemblies on agrarian issues, but there was little benefit in strengthening class-based links. There was no effort to establish ties with officers, despite the noble and landed backgrounds of many officers. They both saw the defence of their interests as vital for Russia, and landowners did appeal to military authorities to help maintain order. Otherwise, however, there is no mention of officers' organizations in the publications of landowners at national or local level, whilst the war effort was couched in broad terms. Kornilov's demands were reported, but rarely with the aggressive appeals employed by officers. The need to attract small, peasant owners led to a focus on agrarian issues and a preference for alliances based on shared practical concerns.

This was matched by the absence of rural issues in officers' publications. Indeed, some officers, concerned with motivating soldiers to fight, or originating from non-landed backgrounds, were happy to sacrifice private landownership. V. G. Levshits, a committee member of the Soviet of Officers' Deputies and the socialist Union of Republican Officers, assumed that land would be transferred to the 'toilers' in his report on the agrarian question to the Petrograd congress in May. This did not seem to prompt significant disagreements.¹¹ Instead, officers forged alliances with those close at hand. In early June, the Union of Officers received delegates from the Union of George Cavaliers, whilst Captain V. E. Rozhenko was a leading member of both. Cavaliers were praised for their 'patriotic slogans' supporting a powerful military and a victorious war, and for their honourable actions to save the motherland. The Union of Officers promised its support, placing advertisements for cavaliers in its newspaper, and maintaining close ties.¹² Similar links existed with the Military League. On 28 June, the leaders of both groups met and vowed to formalize relations. The union nominated delegates to attend the league's meetings throughout July. The league also aspired to use the union's *Vestnik* for advertisements.¹³ In addition, the league and the cavaliers had established their own links by late July.¹⁴

These bodies complemented each other. The union was better established among officers, and its *Vestnik* was an invaluable resource, especially as the league stopped publication of *Voennyi listok* after its problems in July. The cavaliers included soldiers and could effectively play the patriotic card, as its

¹⁰ V. Gurko, *Features and Figures of the Past* (Stanford, 1939), 325.

¹¹ V. Polikarpov, *Voennaia kontrrevoliutsiia v Rossii, 1905–1917* (Moscow, 1990), 149.

¹² *Vestnik glavnago komiteta soiuza ofitserov armii i flota* [hereafter *VGKO*], No. 1, 14 June 1917, No. 5, 24 August 1917, 4.

¹³ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 72, ll. 33–34; d. 78, ll. 5, 54.

¹⁴ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 77, l. 6.

members had been decorated for bravery. The league had civilians as members and enjoyed relations with various small groups. On 29 June, it created a committee to help it form volunteer detachments to aid the war effort. These included representatives from the Union of Military Duty, Unity—Honour of the Motherland and Order, Army of Honour, Volunteers of People's Defence, Organization of Prince V. P. Meshcherskii, and others.¹⁵

On 31 July, a meeting of delegates from twelve military organizations met to discuss forming a Union of National Defence (as well as those noted above, it included the cavaliers, Union of Officers, Republican Centre, Volunteer Divisions, Battalions of Freedom, Union to Save the Motherland, and the Society of 1914).¹⁶ This body would facilitate the distribution of publications and help pressurize the government. Most of these groups were minor reactionary bodies. The Union of Officers was less committed, fearing that such associations would tarnish their image. Yet joint meetings, although infrequent, demonstrated the determination of some to bring together all potential support: if most officers remained passive, any activists were valuable.

Nevertheless, relations between these groups did not always run smoothly. Defending itself against accusations of opposing government policy in July, the Military League implied that the Union of Officers also supported its proposals. The union denied this vehemently, declaring that, on the contrary, it always supported the government. It dispatched a letter to the league, copying in government figures, protesting strongly at the unauthorized use of its name. The union, it firmly stated, was committed to legality and always implemented government policies. The league formally apologized on 8 July, claiming that the union had only been mentioned whilst explaining the league's aims.¹⁷ The disagreement demonstrated the union's desire to retain its respectability. In May, Kerenskii had doubted the need for an officers' union, but subsequent months had seen the union develop across the military, actively supported by Stavka. It did not want this threatened, even though some links with the league would continue. On 8 August, the union stated that its Petrograd branch, which had been established by members of the league and was involved in talks about a Union of National Defence, should become independent.¹⁸

The Union of Officers, however, expected to gain support from beyond the officer corps. The first issue of its *Vestnik* declared that 'a large amount of hope was invested in an officers' union by all creative forces in society'. By fostering patriotism, as well as emphasizing the importance of officers for those seeking to restore law and order, the union wanted this hope to translate into

¹⁵ V. Vladimirova, *Kontr-revoliutsiia v 1917 g. (Kornilovshchina)* (Moscow, 1924), 39. Meshcherskii was a reactionary publisher who died in 1914.

¹⁶ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 78, l. 52. The Cossacks and the Women's Committee were also involved (ll. 60–60ob).

¹⁷ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 78, ll. 35–37; *VGKO*, No. 3, 12 July 1917, 3.

¹⁸ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 78, ll. 61–61ob.

practical support.¹⁹ As with landowners, the obvious targets were industrialists because of their finances and a shared interest in the war effort. Industrialists had long-established organizations and newspapers, and influence in the government, with A. I. Guchkov (war), M. I. Tereshchenko (finance), and A. I. Kononov (industry), holding ministerial posts in the first cabinet. They were divided, especially between Moscow and Petrograd, but by summer 1917, all agreed on the need for a strong government that would act against soviets and commissars. They were also seeking alliances to extend their political strength and influence. As well as landowners, the Union of Trade and Industry forged links, often financial, with the Duma, *zemstva*, Orthodox Church, Old Believers, and others. In May, its political section provided 25,000 rubles for the new Union of Officers to establish a newspaper and organize propaganda.²⁰ This was a massive boost. Some officers were suspicious of 'capitalists' but, as one branch noted, all organizations needed money and there was nothing illegal or reprehensible in accepting it from capitalists.²¹ Industrialists were keen to uphold discipline and the rights of officers generally, and provided money to other officers' bodies, including 60,000 rubles to the Soviet of Officers' Deputies in Moscow for their newspaper, *Voina i mir*.²²

Further financial support was forthcoming, but it was increasingly channelled through two organizations founded by industrialists to unite various groups favouring strong government and reduced socialist influence. The first was the Society for the Economic Rebirth of Russia, which emerged in Petrograd in late April. Initiated by the industrialists, Prince A. P. Meshcherskii, A. I. Putilov, and A. I. Vyshnegradskii, it involved various banking and financial figures. After his resignation as Minister of War, Guchkov became its head. It was focused on combating socialist influence at the front and supporting candidates to the Constituent Assembly. Putilov noted that four million rubles were quickly raised. Guchkov spent 500,000 rubles on propaganda, which was largely ineffective. The society was searching for a worthy cause for the remainder.²³

The second body, the Republican Centre, united like-minded bankers, politicians (mainly moderate socialists), and military figures in May to 'throttle' the radical revolutionary movement. Its president was K. N. Nikolaevskii, a Popular Socialist and industrialist. The president of the Siberian Bank, F. A. Lipskii, was involved and the bank donated 150,000 rubles over the next few months.²⁴ The centre's publications attacked the influence of the Soviet and the Bolsheviks. They pressed for a strong government, law and order, victory over the Germans,

¹⁹ *VGKO*, No. 1, 14 June 1917, 1.

²⁰ V. Laverychev, *Po tu storonu barrikad: Iz istorii bor'by Moskovskoi burzhuazii s revoliutsiei* (Moscow, 1967), 192–5. Also Laverychev, 'Vserossiiskii soiuz torgovli i promyshlennosti', *Istoricheskie zapiski*, 70 (1961), 35–60.

²¹ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 72, l. 51.

²² Laverychev, *Barrikad*, 227.

²³ *RPG*, III, 1528.

²⁴ *RPG*, III, 1534–5.

and strict discipline in the military. They stated that key questions would be decided by the Constituent Assembly, which should be rapidly convened. The centre was, using its own words, neither 'for' Tsarism nor socialism: both were too extreme for Russia. Instead, Russia should be a free republican country like America or France. The centre was conservative on the war—peace was not in Russia's interests, but relatively radical on land, which must be transferred to the peasantry as long as all peasants received an equal amount of land, and money was invested to develop it.²⁵

The centre formed a military section, initially headed by Colonel Romanevskii from the General Staff and then, briefly, by Admiral A. V. Kolchak, before coming under another General Staff officer, Colonel L. P. Diusimet'er, an adjutant of Kornilov. It included representatives from the main officers' bodies: Lieutenant-Colonels L. N. Novosil'tsev and V. M. Pronin from the Union of Officers; General I. I. Fedorov from the Military League; Colonel F. V. Vinberg from the Union of Military Duty; officers from the cavaliers, Cossacks, and others; and Colonels Prince G. N. Tumanov and V. L. Baranovskii from the Ministry of War.²⁶ General A. I. Denikin later estimated that the military section could call on the support of 4,000 officers in Petrograd, but this was only an estimate and far fewer officers were actively involved.²⁷

The centre aided small groups that could support its aims. In May, for example, the Union of Military Duty was created under Vinberg, a self-declared monarchist. It wanted to restore to the military the 'gallant spirit' of the past and its ancient traditions. It aimed to create volunteer regiments, foster links between officers and like-minded individuals in the ranks, and facilitate contact between officers' groups. It failed to gain sufficient funds through membership dues to open an office, whilst the government viewed it suspiciously and refused to permit it to form its own regiments. The centre came to the rescue, providing 6,000 rubles to get the union established. Vinberg was worried by the term 'republican', but was reassured by Nikolaevskii that it was only a *nom de guerre*: a banner to unite various people to aid a successful war effort and a forced concession to revolutionary politics. Vinberg claimed that most members of the centre favoured a dictatorship. He admitted that his union lacked influence: its main contribution was uniting 'honourable' officers of similar convictions and opinions. He believed, though, that the centre's activities during the summer demonstrated that it was an important and energetic political force.²⁸ Soviet historians agreed, arguing that by late July it was one of the largest 'counter-revolutionary' organizations in Russia. Apparently, it had cells in large cities and the military that brought together industrialists, financiers, politicians, officers,

²⁵ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 77, ll. 121–22ob.

²⁶ RPG, III, 1535.

²⁷ A. Denikin, *Ocherki Russkoi smuty* (3 volumes: Moscow, 2005), II, 29.

²⁸ F. Vinberg, *V plenu u 'obez'ian'* (*zapiski 'kontr-revoliutsionera'*) (Kiev, 1918), 98–9. Denikin noted the 'elastic' nature of the centre's politics. For some, a republic could also mean a dictatorship; Denikin, *Ocherki*, II, 28.

and landowners.²⁹ In late July, moreover, talks started between it and the Society for the Economic Rebirth of Russia, creating the opportunity to access further financial resources.³⁰

The only potential political ally of any of these groups was the liberal Kadet party, as the only non-socialists retaining influence after February. This influence was waning and the party itself was in flux, with large divisions between its left and right wings over key issues. Many Kadets were calling for a stronger government, although their demands often contradicted their basic ideology (for example, reintroducing the death penalty) and sounded more akin to moderate conservatism. There were also tensions with elites. Landowners and officers blamed the Kadets, as the dominant force in the government immediately after the revolution, for permitting the growth of soviets and popular organizations, setting the foundations for social conflict. There were also disputes over agrarian and military issues, as well as other policies.³¹ Nonetheless, as N. N. L'vov urged in late July, these 'small' differences needed to be put aside in favour of the bigger picture.

Most Kadets were as concerned as elites at the direction that the revolution was taking. They wished, however, to retain their remaining influence and acted cautiously. Small acts of support to like-minded bodies was fine, such as allowing the Smolensk branch of the Union of Landowners to use its printing presses, but cooperating with the provocative plans of the leaders of the Union of Officers was another matter. Novosil'tsev was on the right wing of the Kadet party and, along with Lieutenant-Colonel V. I. Sidorin and Rozhenko, fellow members of the union's committee, he spent much of June to August touring Moscow and Petrograd, meeting politicians, newspaper editors, and others. He gave numerous reports describing the deteriorating military situation and its implications, but he felt that his message—something urgently needed to be done before it was too late—met with indecision. The Kadets were too cautious and divided. He felt that they did not appreciate the extent of the problems, retained a 'naïve' confidence in the soldiers, and were unwilling to 'risk their heads'.³²

The Kadet leader, P. N. Miliukov, later indicated that these reports did have an impact, whilst the conclusions of the May congress at Stavka were a 'frightening summary' of the disintegration of the military. The resolution of the Kadets' ninth congress (23–28 July) talked the same language as officers—saving the motherland, and upholding honour and discipline—which the union welcomed.³³ Officially, the Union of Officers remained unaffiliated to any party,

²⁹ A. Andreev, *Soldatskie massy garnizonov Russkoi armii v oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii* (Moscow, 1975), 152.

³⁰ *RPG*, III, 1536.

³¹ W. Rosenberg, *Liberals in the Russian Revolution* (Princeton, 1974), 154–7, 212–14.

³² GARF, f. 6422, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 159ob–172.

³³ P. Miliukov, *The Russian Revolution* (3 volumes: Gulf Breeze, 1978–87), I, 103–4 (although he does not mention any private meetings with union leaders); GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 75, l. 9.

but locally there are indications that it tried to influence members' votes. On 17 August, the branch at Stavka urged members to 'disregard' politics and vote for the party that seemed the best for Mogilev's economy and interests in the forthcoming elections to the town's Duma, the Kadets, who also had union members standing as candidates. The union's main committee condemned this: members could agitate politically, but this statement of guidance contravened its rules.³⁴ The intentions were clear though, as was the sense that the Kadets gained officers' support by default as the only acceptable party.

STRONG GOVERNMENT VERSUS DICTATORSHIP

By August, therefore, there were strengthening links between elite groups that justified popular belief that a 'conservative movement' was re-emerging. However, whilst there was unity on the problems facing Russia, there were still divisions on specific policies and over what form of government was desirable and realistic, given the political mood. Novosil'tsev's discontent at the indecisiveness of the Kadets stemmed from his belief that only a military dictatorship could solve Russia's problems. This feeling represented the extreme right of the movement and had been present among some officers for months. A group around General Baron P. N. Vrangel and Count A. P. Palen in Petrograd had favoured an authoritarian government since the April Crisis,³⁵ and it was not surprising that these thoughts would resurface at the officers' congress in Stavka in May. Nevertheless, no more than a few within the Union of Officers were active in this direction and even they struggled to agree on a figurehead for a dictatorship. The first choice was General M. V. Alekseev, but some officers distrusted him.³⁶ As Chief of Staff and then Commander-in-Chief, Alekseev had presided over the military during and after the February Revolution, irrespective of his ability to influence events. These officers did not necessarily want a return to Tsarism, but they felt that if Alekseev had acted more decisively in February then the power of the Soviet and the masses could have been curtailed.

Another candidate was Vice-Admiral A. V. Kolchak. As Commander of the Black Sea Fleet, Kolchak had maintained relative calm, whilst remaining distant from politics. He was finally forced out on 6 June; surrounded by sailors, he refused to surrender his arms and threw his sword into the sea. This symbolic act struck a chord with officers obsessed with honour. The Military League sent a telegram of congratulations, whilst a delegation from the Union of Officers presented him with a golden dagger on 1 July for his 'chivalrous honour' in

³⁴ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 72, ll. 115–115ob, 117–117ob.

³⁵ *Vospominaniia generala barona P. N. Vrangelia* (Frankfurt, 1969), 32–4.

³⁶ GARF, f. 6422, op. 1, d. 1, l. 155ob.

refusing to give up his arms.³⁷ At this meeting, according to Novosil'tsev, Kolchak expressed his willingness to participate in 'illegal activities' as long as there were 'serious plans'.³⁸ He also became head of the military section of the Republican Centre at this time. These activities, along with publicity in the conservative press, were viewed suspiciously by the government, and he was dispatched on a mission to America on 27 July that conveniently removed him from Russia.³⁹

By this stage, however, attention had already shifted towards Kornilov. The First World War had propelled him to popular recognition after his escape from an Austrian prisoner-of-war camp, but the revolution made his career. Appointed as Commander of Petrograd military region, it was his job to arrest the Tsarina. Yet, despite his tolerance of some of the changes within the military, such as soldiers' committees, he fell foul of the authorities for his insistence on order and discipline, and his willingness to use force to suppress demonstrations. He was moved to command the Eighth Army at the front and enjoyed one of the few successes of an otherwise disastrous offensive in June, prompting a series of hagiographical biographies.⁴⁰ On 7 July, he took charge of the south-western front, where he was instrumental in the successful campaign to reintroduce the death penalty, and introduced various measures to curb Bolshevik agitation. He also threatened force to quell growing agrarian unrest in the region near the front. This approach brought him to the attention of politicians and confirmed his stature in the eyes of officers. His appointment as Commander-in-Chief on 18 July seems a surprising move for socialist ministers but, in the aftermath of the offensive, there was no disguising the fact that the fighting capability of the military had to be restored. This coincided with a general sense that law and order must be re-established in the whole country at almost any cost. Kornilov fitted the requirements with his history of mixing authority with some acceptance of revolutionary innovations.⁴¹

His appointment galvanized elites. Kornilov's name was associated with strong measures such as the reintroduction of the death penalty, and he presented the government with a list of conditions before accepting the post. He demanded sole control over military decisions and the appointment of officers, the adoption of the resolution produced by the meeting of generals in Stavka on 16 July, and the extension of measures recently approved for the front to those areas of the rear with troops. In addition, there was a curious statement in which he declared that he was responsible only to his conscience and the people for his actions, not the government.⁴² These demands became common knowledge

³⁷ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 78, ll. 73–74; *VGKO*, No. 3, 12 July 1917, 3–4.

³⁸ GARF, f. 6422, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 165–65ob.

³⁹ P. Zyrianov, *Admiral Kolchak* (2 edition: Moscow, 2006), 340–9.

⁴⁰ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 44, ll. 47–47ob; d. 74, ll. 1–1ob; d. 79, ll. 24–47ob.

⁴¹ A. Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army* (2 volumes: Princeton, 1980–7), II, 156–7.

⁴² J. Munck, *The Kornilov Revolt* (Aarhus, 1987), 69.

and were reprinted in the press.⁴³ For officers, elites, and Kornilov himself, his appointment indicated the government's acceptance of these demands and the need for strong policies. Kornilov encouraged officers' bodies that supported his proposals. He met immediately with the committee of the Union of Officers and expressed his complete support for their objectives and activities. Novosil'tsev, Sidorin, and Pronin remained for a private meeting where, according to the former, there was frank discussion of views. The officers declared that a military dictatorship was the only solution to the chaos. Kornilov did not rule it out, but did reject a return to Tsarism. He declared that he would act if necessary, but he was confident that he could enact positive change with the current government.⁴⁴

On 3 August, Kornilov issued further demands to the government, including extending the death penalty to the rear and civilians, attacking the power of civilian military commissars, easing the prosecution of unruly committees, and disbanding 'revolutionary' units in the rear. Over subsequent days he also demanded control over railways, key defence industries, and the Petrograd military region. None were accepted immediately and some not all, but they formed the basis of debate between the government and Kornilov, and again became public knowledge.⁴⁵ On 4 August, the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies' newspaper, *Izvestiia* (followed by others), published a stinging attack, arguing that Kornilov had no intention of democratizing the military. This prompted a furious response from officers. On 6 August, an assembly of Cossacks rejected the right of the Soviet and other such bodies to interfere in military affairs, and argued that their interventions endangered Russia. A day later, the Union of George Cavaliers threatened to march in unity with the Cossacks if the government permitted further slander or discharged Kornilov. On the same day, the Union of Officers sent an appeal to all fronts, armies, and key ministries outlining the 'shameful' attacks on Kornilov. These attacks, they claimed, harmed the military and Russia, and were made by those who did not understand what was in the best interests of the motherland. Kornilov, in their opinion, might be the last chance of a bright future for Russia, and no one should interfere in his activities. On 10 August, the union and the cavaliers, invoking Cossack support, issued a joint declaration along the same lines.⁴⁶

Kornilov was stating what numerous disillusioned officers were thinking. Following their appeal, the union received dozens of supportive letters and telegrams from across the military, from its branches and from 'assemblies' of officers. They echoed the call for Kornilov to be given everyone's full support and confidence. His proposed measures—restoring discipline, limiting

⁴³ For e.g., the Riazan' landowners' newspaper; *Zemledeltsy*, No. 3, 24 July 1917, 3.

⁴⁴ GARF, f. 6422, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 180ob–181.

⁴⁵ Munck, *Kornilov*, 74–87.

⁴⁶ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 74, ll. 58–61.

the influence of committees, and removing their interference in military matters, for example—gained complete agreement. His removal was impermissible. As the branch in 61st Infantry Division believed, the sole aim of the attacks in the revolutionary press was to destroy the one person who had restored some sort of fighting ability to the military. The branch in the 32nd Infantry Division agreed: 'General Kornilov has given us the confidence that the army may yet be saved and with it Russia. His energetic activities have already yielded results and the army is now on the path to revival.'⁴⁷

However, Kornilov, the union, and others should have been careful to not to read too much into these declarations of support. If some were aggressive, railing against the influence of socialists and German money,⁴⁸ others indicated that officers were still only united on what needed to be done to improve the situation within the military. Perhaps taking account of rumours of plots, several stressed that they would only carry out 'legal orders'.⁴⁹ There is no sense that all officers saw the urgent need for forceful measures, or even the vital importance of one individual in delivering these measures, as incompatible with the current government. One or two messages finished by expressing their support for the government, whilst still castigating it for not acting strongly to defend Kornilov.⁵⁰ Widespread support was solely for practical measures; views were mixed on the desirability of further political change.

Similar feelings were seen beyond the military, especially in what Soviet historians described as the political centre of the counter-revolution—the Duma. After February, the Duma continued to exist, but lacked influence and a formal legal role. By April, the unrest prompted leading members to propose re-establishing its legal role, but the government refused.⁵¹ Instead, regular 'private meetings' resumed on 22 April. The Duma, it was argued, remained the only nationally elected body and was entitled to express its opinions. Attendance rarely rose above sixty, but it became a vocal forum for liberals and conservatives (socialists preferred the Soviet). In twelve meetings from 4 May to 20 August, Octobrists gave 42% of the eighty-four speeches recorded, Kadets 19%, whilst just a single socialist spoke.⁵² On 3 May and 16 June, the temporary committee that had led the Duma's activities since February was reorganized. Several figures from the Union of Landowners were now among its twenty members—I. I. Dmitriukov, M. L. Kindiakov, N. N. L'vov, and N. V. Savich

⁴⁷ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 74, ll. 13–13ob, 22–22ob. On 16 August, the union forwarded around a dozen or so of these messages to Kornilov (l. 3).

⁴⁸ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 74, ll. 7, 21.

⁴⁹ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 74, ll. 4, 63–5.

⁵⁰ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 74, ll. 28–30.

⁵¹ D. Orlovskii, 'K voprosu o formakh demokratii nakanune oktiabria 1917 goda', in L. Zakharova et al. (eds.), *P. A. Zaionchkovskii, 1904–1983 gg.: Stat'i, publikatsii i vospominaniia o nem* (Moscow, 1998), 412.

⁵² B. Gal'perina, 'Chastnye soveshchaniia gosudarstvennoi dумы—tsentr splocheniia burzhuznykh partii Rossii', in K. Gusev (ed.), *Neproletarskie partii Rossii v trekh revoliutsiakh* (Moscow, 1989), 112–13.

(the latter two were also in industrialists' unions).⁵³ The Duma still enjoyed free access to the state publishers, with a daily allowance that enabled it to create 200–300,000 copies of its resolutions—far more than private groups could manage.⁵⁴

By summer, debates on the nature of the government had become heated. On 16 June, V. M. Purishkevich (a far-right deputy) argued that the electoral legitimacy of the Duma permitted it to become the predominant governing body, and that it should move to Cossack territory where physical forces could protect its authority. His speech was quickly condemned by M. V. Rodzianko, the president. Purishkevich responded that he did not want a return to the old order, but to secure the freedoms already achieved. Nevertheless, a succession of speakers attacked his views, including landowners' leaders. Russia needed the Duma to be a symbol of unity, not division.⁵⁵ Nonetheless, on 28 June, the Union of Landowners' chairman, L'vov, argued that agrarian violence was 'not created by the revolution, but by the government'. It had failed to define the duties of the new committees, deal with criminality, and act against the destructive activities of socialists. His solution was still moderate, though: free the government from harmful influences and help it take responsibility for national interests, rather than those of particular social or political groups.⁵⁶ On 18 July, A. M. Maslennikov (Progressist) viciously attacked the Soviet and socialists, arguing, to applause, that the Duma should take power. Purishkevich added that he remained a monarchist, but claimed to support anyone who could deal with Russia's problems: the present government could only lead Russia down the path to destruction. There were declarations of support for the government from some members, but they lacked conviction. Rodzianko concluded that the Duma could not take power, but bemoaned the low turn-out in private meetings like the present one. If 360 attended instead of fifty or sixty, he argued, the Duma would be stronger, more influential, and more productive.⁵⁷

This session was popularly condemned, with numerous resolutions demanding the Duma's dispersal. The executive committee of the soviet in Chitinsk argued on 30 July that such private meetings were a gathering of 'counter-revolutionary elements' in an organ of tsarist power defending propertied interests. On 10 August, the Ostrogozhsk soviet of soldiers' deputies called for the arrest of the guilty parties, whilst soldiers in Perm thought that all Duma members should

⁵³ A. Drezen (ed.), *Burzhuazii i pomeshchiki v 1917 godu: Chastnye soveshchaniia chlenov Gosudarstvennoi dумы* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1932), 21–2, 131; D. Oznobishin, 'Vremennyi komitet gosudarstvennoi dумы i vremennoe pravitel'stvo', *Istoricheskie zapiski*, 75 (1965), 274.

⁵⁴ Vladimirova, *Kontr-revoliutsiia*, 72. The temporary committee also published at least thirteen issues of its own newspaper, *Izvestiia Vremennogo komiteta Gosudarstvennoi dумы*, from mid April to 28 August.

⁵⁵ Drezen, *Burzhuazii i pomeshchiki*, 122–31.

⁵⁶ Drezen, *Burzhuazii i pomeshchiki*, 146–9.

⁵⁷ Drezen, *Burzhuazii i pomeshchiki*, 192–230.

be arrested for spreading 'counter-revolutionary ideas'.⁵⁸ The Duma was seen as an institution that did not represent ordinary people and was unnecessary in revolutionary Russia. Even some liberals thought that the Duma had willingly handed power to the government in February, lacked a legal basis, and was no more entitled to a role in government than the Soviet, industrialists, or other groups.⁵⁹ Maslennikov and Purishkevich were unrepentant. Responding to the accusations on 19 July, Maslennikov called the Soviet a 'nest of counter-revolutionaries' itself for its corrosive activities. He argued that he had always supported the need for revolution, but he did not know anyone 'who would unanimously defend the revolution at the current time'. Purishkevich also protested at being called a counter-revolutionary: he was defending the ideals that everyone had fought for during February. By threatening the Duma, the Soviet was suppressing the right to free speech, which was disgraceful and criminal.⁶⁰

Although Purishkevich never advocated a return to monarchism, there was a sporadic revival of far-right activity during the summer of 1917.⁶¹ Major groups such as the Union of Russian People and the Union of the Archangel Michael remained inactive. Membership provoked popular violence and the government searched members' flats for details of their activities.⁶² Nonetheless, newspaper reports, which the government avidly collated, suggest a revival of agitation by minor Black Hundred groups, and renewed street disturbances, as well as monarchists taking part in local elections.⁶³ In Odessa, Black Hundreds agitating for the old regime published a newspaper, *Groza*, which helped foster monarchism among local officers. In Simferopol, Black Hundreds formed a group, *Krasnaia perchatka*, which attacked Jews and opposed the government.⁶⁴ In late June, a new society, Holy Rus, was formed that, whilst not openly monarchist, promoted Russian ethnicity (including Belorussians and Ukrainians), Orthodoxy, and a united Russia.⁶⁵ It was deemed anti-revolutionary and quickly closed. N. E. Markov, the former leader of the Union of Russian People and the far right in the Duma, founded a society devoted to saving the tsarist family, which attracted fellow Duma member, G. G. Zamyslovskii, and a few patriotic officers.⁶⁶ Some national newspapers survived the cull of the monarchist press—most obviously, A. A. Suvorin's *Malen'kaia gazeta*, which had links

⁵⁸ *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v voennykh okrugakh. Mart 1917g.-mart 1918g.* (Moscow, 1988), 204, 209, 213.

⁵⁹ See the article in *Odesskii listok*, No. 181, 22 July 1917, 3.

⁶⁰ Drezen, *Burzhuazii i pomeshchiki*, 231–3.

⁶¹ P. Chkrtishvili, 'Chernosotentsy v 1917 godu', *Voprosy istorii*, 8 (1997), 133–43.

⁶² GARF, f. 1074, op. 1, d. 18.

⁶³ GARF, f. 1074, op. 1, d. 25, ll. 44–55, 61–74.

⁶⁴ *Odesskii listok*, No. 149, 14 June 1917, 3; No. 155, 21 June 1917, 2.

⁶⁵ *Golos nizhegorodtsa*, No. 14, 22 July 1917, 4.

⁶⁶ O. Platonov (ed.), *Chernaia sotnia: Istoricheskaia entsiklopediia, 1900–1917* (Moscow, 2008), 315.

with the Military League and promoted Kolchak prior to his departure to America.⁶⁷

For national politicians, however, it would have been political suicide in 1917 to publicly express a desire for a return to the Tsar. Purishkevich, for example, did not talk the language of monarchism, but of law, order, and strong government—terms that conservatives and liberals used. He mixed these with ‘democratic’ phrases in his speeches, articles, and brochures. In May, he arrived at the officers’ congress in Stavka. Although uninvited and controversial, Novosil’tsev recognized his popularity among sections of the officer corps and permitted him to speak unofficially. He talked about the destruction of the military and the need for discipline, removing politics from the military, and reintroducing the death penalty. He also highlighted Jewish domination of the Soviet. Apparently, he spoke enthusiastically, confirming his reputation as an intelligent and energetic speaker.⁶⁸ Immediately afterwards, he sent an open telegram to Kerenskii, then Minister of War, which was published in various newspapers, outlining the same concerns. He admitted to being a ‘rightist’ by conviction and noted that he would oppose Kerenskii again after the war, but that the current crisis made unity essential.⁶⁹

Purishkevich’s belief that the Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies was dominated by Jews represents a rare occasion during 1917 when anti-Semitism was visible among elites. Purishkevich was more cautious in his writings, but a later piece also rails against the influence of the Soviet before reminding readers that the known names of many socialists were not their real names: G. E. Zinov’ev was Apfel’baum, for example, and L. D. Trotskii was Bronshtein. Purishkevich does not mention that they are Jews, but the inference is unmistakable, as is the intention, given that he talks about ‘internal enemies’.⁷⁰ To be sure, these comments come from a known anti-Semite who was on the margins of the tsarist elite, whilst attacks on Jews during 1917 occurred as part of disturbances sponsored by Black Hundreds of the sort encouraged by Purishkevich before the revolution. There is no hint of anti-Semitism in any of the publications of the unions of homeowners, landowners, officers, and other such bodies. Most elite groups, hoping to broaden their support, and forge alliances with industrialists and property owners with cosmopolitan backgrounds, recognized that anti-Semitism was counterproductive. Liberals and moderate conservatives had attacked it prior to 1917 anyway. Nevertheless, revealing the ‘true’ names of Bolsheviks became a common tactic during the civil war, suggesting that

⁶⁷ B. Kolonitskii, ‘Pravoekstremistskie sily v marte-oktiabre 1917’, in *Natsional’naia pravaia prezhde i teper’: Istoriko-sotsiologicheskie ocherki. Ch. I: Rossiia i Russkoe zarubezh’e* (St Petersburg, 1992), 114.

⁶⁸ GARF, f. 6422, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 150–151.

⁶⁹ *Golos nizhegorodtsa*, No. 4, 14 May 1917, 3.

⁷⁰ V. Purishkevich, *Vpered! Pod dvukhtsvetnym flagom (otkrytoe pis’mo russkomu obshchestvu)* (Petrograd, 1917). Copies are in GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 79, ll. 74–93, and *Moskovskiiia vedomosti*, No. 159, 23 July 1917, 1–3.

anti-Semitism remained present, if hidden, among wider sectors of the elite during 1917.

Elsewhere, though, Purishkevich attacked Lenin and the Bolsheviks for 'intimidating' Russians with 'lies' about the return of the old regime. There were, he said, no defenders of the old regime—such people would be traitors to the motherland in such difficult days. Instead, it was the Bolsheviks who were traitors by undermining the government and democracy, as well as fuelling class conflict. They were lying to the peasants, promising them land but intending to transfer it to the state, encouraging workers' demands that undermined the war effort, and deliberately aiding conflict between officers and soldiers. Peace without compensation or territorial gain did not defend national honour; people needed the money to rebuild and it should not be funded through increased taxes. Equally, without gains, the loss of life had been pointless, whilst not attacking failed to fulfil Russia's commitments to her allies. Purishkevich ended by proclaiming 'Long live the Provisional Government!' as the unified legal authority in Russia prior to a Constituent Assembly, and 'Down with Rasputin's autocracy and Lenin's autocracy!'⁷¹ These arguments endeared him to officers, and he did try to reach out to other elite groups. He argued that nobles, for example, were being subjected to 'trial by the crowd', despite their long-standing contributions to Russia's cultural, social, and political development.⁷²

The crucial problem for potential monarchists was that they lacked an obvious candidate to be monarch. Purishkevich admitted at times to being a monarchist at heart as did, for example, V. V. Shul'gin, a nationalist in the Duma. Yet, Purishkevich had been a vocal critic of Nicholas II before 1917, whilst Shul'gin had travelled to obtain his abdication during the revolution. Neither wanted the return of Nicholas, whilst his son was too young to inspire confidence and his brother had declined the throne. No other family members were obvious candidates. Monarchists were in a quandary and, as the unrest continued, most ignored their beliefs in favour of restoring order, fighting the war, and saving Russia. Shul'gin declared on 4 May that 'if this [new] republican government saves Russia then I will become a republican'. He was even apparently prepared to become a beggar if socialism provided the solution.⁷³ Purishkevich displayed similar sentiments. He met with the famous socialist, G. V. Plekhanov, to urge him to enter government to save the country from anarchy, and pledged support to the Kadets on several occasions.⁷⁴ Increasingly, though, monarchists looked for an individual who could act in place of a monarch; namely, a dictator who could provide strong, central leadership as a counterpart to the dispersal of power in the committees and soviets that they saw as destroying Russia.

⁷¹ *Narodnyi tribun*, No. 1, May 1917: a copy is in GARF, f. 117, op. 1, d. 704, ll. 21–21ob.

⁷² *Moskovskiiia vedomosti*, No. 159, 23 July 1917, 2.

⁷³ Drezen, *Burzhuazii i pomeshchiki*, 15–16.

⁷⁴ Platonov, *Chernaia sotnia*, 429.

Elites agreed that a strong government was vital, and discussed at length how to make the existing government stronger and better able to enact its will. But did they truly believe that this could be achieved? It was a small step from a strong government to an authoritarian one, or even a dictatorship. Novosil'tsev suggested that Rodzianko was sympathetic to plans for a dictatorship, but they could not agree on a candidate.⁷⁵ Once a credible figure emerged for all groups, namely Kornilov by late July, it is easy to see elites moving towards a dictatorship. But the abject failure of his later revolt suggests that the majority did not fully commit themselves. In this respect, a crucial role was played by the meetings in August when various plans were discussed.

THE AUGUST MEETINGS

The first serious discussions about military involvement in government occurred at the first Congress of Public Figures. Initiated by the industrialist, Riabushinskii, it took place in Moscow on 8–10 August and aimed to establish a coherent platform for non-socialist forces. Almost 400 attended, including politicians (such as Miliukov, Rodzianko, and Shul'gin), generals (M. V. Alekseev, A. A. Brusilov, and A. M. Kaledin), industrialists, landowners (L'vov and Savich), clergy, *zemstva* activists, Cossacks, and officers (Novosil'tsev). It was chaired by Rodzianko with Prince E. N. Trubetskoi as his deputy (a Kadet who was active in industrialist and religious bodies). The congress discussed legal order, the military, and other issues, demanding a strong national authority to preserve Russia's unity.⁷⁶ The Union of Officers made a special effort to gather sympathetic officers in Moscow to explain their concerns.⁷⁷ The congress declared its support for Kornilov on 9 August, uniting with officers to resist calls for his dismissal.⁷⁸ Finally, it elected a permanent council under Rodzianko to monitor developments. Kutler, L'vov, Miliukov, Novosil'tsev, Riabushinskii, Savich, and Shul'gin were among its thirty members.⁷⁹

There were also several private meetings. L'vov later denied that plans for an alternative government were discussed,⁸⁰ but the evidence contradicts this, including that from a colleague in the Union of Landowners. Savich described a meeting he attended with Rodzianko on 8 August at the house of the Kadet, N. M. Kishkin. Several Duma members, mostly Kadets, along with military

⁷⁵ GARF, f. 6422, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 166ob–167.

⁷⁶ Polikarpov, *Voennaia kontrrevoliutsiia*, 233–8. This is based on the published account, which I have not examined.

⁷⁷ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 73, l. 26ob.

⁷⁸ *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Rossii v avguste 1917g.* (Moscow, 1959), 360.

⁷⁹ *Moskovskiiia vedomosti*, No. 175, 11 August 1917, 2.

⁸⁰ *Delo generala L. G. Kornilova, August 1917–iun' 1918: Dokumenty* (2 volumes: Moscow, 2003), II, 224.

figures were present, including Novosil'tsev. According to the officers, radical measures were needed to save the military and Russia from collapse. It was impossible for the government to act effectively as it was dependent on the Soviet. The Soviet, moreover, was preparing to demand the removal of Kornilov. If this happened, officers proposed rallying around Kornilov, overthrowing the government, and establishing a dictatorship to suppress the Soviet. They claimed allied support, but a dictatorship required a state apparatus and they needed the support of 'society' to create a new government.⁸¹ The same speeches were given at a meeting on the following day, which Savich also attended, along with Miliukov and a few others.

Savich admitted that 'the bright star of Kornilov burned like a meteor in the night sky', with the promise of greater authority and order. The intentions were good and he sympathized with their goals. However, the practical aspects were 'unexpectedly naïve and rash': nothing about this 'adventure' was thought out. Success was assumed, despite the fact that the activities of the plotters were bound to attract Kerenski's attention. It was the fantasy of chatterboxes, but it would end in blood. According to Savich, Miliukov voiced the general view when he praised the officers' patriotism, but declared that the Duma and the Kadets could only help if the plans gathered support from a wide range of the population. Rodzianko even questioned what practical help the Duma could provide.⁸² The officers were disillusioned with the response, and it fuelled later acrimonious complaints about being abandoned by civilian society.

Savich's account of the proposals was vague. However, an anonymous report, purportedly delivered to the congress, provides more detail.⁸³ It noted how anarchy had descended into civil war in some places, whilst class and personal interests had taken precedence over state concerns. This proved that Russians were unprepared, culturally and politically, for democracy. Therefore, it concluded, plans for a Constituent Assembly should be temporarily abandoned. Elections showed that people voted for 'demagogic' parties without understanding their policies, whilst proportional representation benefited marginal parties. Instead, a military dictatorship was temporarily needed to provide a united focus to regain authority. This, it said, would not be creating a despot: his activities would be controlled. His primary aim would be to establish 'elementary order'. He would secure the safety of the individual and of property under the law. Education, cultural work, and social reform would improve the lives of workers. Greater equality in landownership and the payment of taxes would be introduced, but the state would maintain private property. Once order was re-established, it would be possible to create a national assembly to form a permanent power.

⁸¹ N. Savich, *Vospominaniia* (St Petersburg-Dusseldorf, 1993), 249.

⁸² Savich, *Vospominaniia*, 246–50. S. I. Shidlovskii (Octobrist) expressed similar opinions; *RPG*, III, 1542.

⁸³ GARF, f. 3529, op. 1, d. 31, ll. 1–5. The only evidence that it was delivered at this congress comes from the later details added by an archivist.

The report argued against either socialism or absolute monarchism in the future, seeing a constitutional monarchy as a healthy compromise that would guarantee law, order, and social reform.

The provenance of this report is impossible to verify. It calls for a dictatorship as Savich described, but it is more detailed than his description suggests and says nothing about how the dictatorship would emerge. Nonetheless, some of the officers had extensive political experience. Novosil'tsev had been involved in establishing the new government in Kaluga and was aware of wider concerns. The arguments justifying dictatorship as the only solution for the huge problems facing Russia, along with the stress on its temporary nature, would help to explain the sympathy of individuals like Miliukov and Savich. They were strong believers in the democratic ideals of February and had actively participated in the new government. They were unlikely to favour simply recreating an authoritarian government under the command of the military.

Few left concrete evidence of their views on this contentious subject, either at the time or subsequently. Equally, only a few were actually privy to the discussions: most were simply aware of the numerous contradictory rumours circulating. It is clear that rather than just demanding stronger measures from the government, elites were now discussing replacing it. Participants were sympathetic to the broad objectives, but disagreements remained on the nature of a dictatorship and over the timescale. As early as 18 July, the All-Russian Union of Trade and Industry declared that if dictatorial power was necessary to save Russia, it must be a truly national power above class and party interests.⁸⁴ But what was a 'national power'? On 11 August, the central committee of the Kadet party were divided over a military dictatorship. Some thought that it could be a short-term measure to facilitate forming the Constituent Assembly. Others did not believe that it could be effective without popular support and were wary of ceding too much power to authoritarian generals.⁸⁵ Only a small group of officers around Kornilov conceived of a military dictatorship in its most obvious form. In the end, Miliukov spoke for elites when he postponed the possibility of direct action in a meeting with Kornilov on 13 August. Forming an authoritarian government was on the agenda, but caution prevailed. Nevertheless, agreeing on the need for change consolidated conservative and liberal forces, and the Congress of Public Figures helped forge a 'right wing' bloc prior to the Moscow Conference.

The Moscow Conference (12–15 August) was the government's own attempt to reconcile competing groups within the country and to foster active support for its programme. Instead, the conference openly displayed the divisions within Russian society and politics. The right stood on one side, considering proposals to create a dictatorship. The left stood on the other side, mostly calling for

⁸⁴ V. Laverychev, 'Russkie monopolisty i zagovor Kornilova', *Voprosy istorii*, 4 (1964), 38–9.

⁸⁵ *Protokoly Tsentral'nogo Komiteta i zagranichnykh grupp konstitutsionno-demokraticeskoi partii* (6 volumes: Moscow, 1994–9), III, 384–6.

all power to the Soviet. In the middle, Kerenskii tried to bring the two sides together. His failure was inevitable. Miliukov argued that no one was interested in the programmes of both sides, which were well known, but in the forces that lay behind these programmes. The conference was the first public trial of strength between them. Savich recalled an 'endless' stream of deputies advocating contradictory objectives: it was 'immediately clear that nothing serious could be achieved'. It was 'a strange and completely unnecessary farce'.⁸⁶

Nevertheless, the conference was a perfect demonstration of the corporate nature of democracy in 1917. An immense effort was devoted to its composition, with numerous political, economic, social, and cultural groups represented. Initially, the intention was to invite 400–500 individuals, but demand quickly scaled this figure upwards and around 2,400–2,600 attended.⁸⁷ Elites were present. The Union of Landowners obtained twenty representatives, the Union of Officers and the Soviet of Officers' Deputies both had two, and the Union of George Cavaliers had one. The nobility was not represented as a social estate, but were present as delegates from other groups.⁸⁸ Officers were also represented in staffs of armies and military regions, military schools, and amongst Cossacks. These numbers seem insignificant, but witnesses note that the 'right' was a very vocal minority. Equally, it was not a parliament where the rule of the majority prevailed, but a looser forum in which the Union of Landowners, for example, was officially allocated as many seats as the All-Russian Peasant Union, whilst the Union of Officers had the same number as the All-Russian Military Union which included officers and soldiers. Industrialists also had 100 seats. Indeed, despite Savich's retrospective dismissal, landowners, industrialists, clergy, and civil servants supported the conference at the time as a means of promoting their views. S. N. Tret'iakov, an industrialist, and others pressed for it to become a permanent 'parliament', approving the laws and actions of the government.⁸⁹

Alekseev and Kornilov gave predictable speeches that received rapturous applause from the 'right'. Alekseev was one of the Union of Officers' two representatives and his message barely differed from his opening address to their congress in Stavka in May.⁹⁰ Kornilov attacked anarchy, highlighted the need to improve supplies, and carefully demanded that the activities of the soldiers' committees be curtailed to non-operational issues. He stressed officers' loyalty to the revolution and argued that not only should their authority be

⁸⁶ Miliukov, *Russian Revolution*, II, 100; Savich, *Vospominaniia*, 247, 250–1.

⁸⁷ GARF, f. 3529, op. 1, d. 7, ll. 1–2; *RPG*, III, 1457; A. Nikolaev, 'Istoricheskii opyt Rossiiskogo parlamentarizma gosudarstvennoe soveshchanie 1917 goda', in N. Smirnov (ed.), *Istoriia i revoliutsiia* (St. Petersburg, 1999), 169.

⁸⁸ GARF, f. 3529, op. 1, d. 7, ll. 19, 21. The United Nobility's Prince A. B. Kurakin complained to Rodzianko on 21 July about their absence; O. Chaadaeva, *Pomeshchiki i ikh organizatsii v 1917 godu* (Moscow, 1928), 163.

⁸⁹ Orlovskii, 'K voprosu', 412.

⁹⁰ GARF, f. 3529, op. 1, d. 4, ll. 27–40.

restored, but that their poor material position should be addressed.⁹¹ The most provocative report was delivered by the Cossack General, Kaledin, who listed his solutions bluntly, just as Denikin had done at the July conference of senior commanders: the army must be kept outside of politics; meetings and assemblies should be prohibited; Soviets and committees should largely be abolished, with those remaining concerned only with non-operational issues; the Declaration of Soldiers' Rights should be revised to include duties; and so on. Kaledin angrily attacked the malignant influence of soviets, demanding a sole power in Russia. Unsurprisingly, the 'right' responded enthusiastically, whilst the 'left' frequently shouted 'Counter-revolution!'.⁹²

The conference re-emphasized the continuing divisions among officers. The failure of the offensive brought all but the most left-wing officers together in arguing for greater discipline, authority, and independence for the military and officers. Yet, they remained divided on methods. Captain S. K. Vrzhosek, from the Petrograd Soviet of Officers' Deputies, echoed the Union of Officers when he declared that saving the revolution required saving the motherland, which, in turn, required an effective military. He believed that unity was the key, however, and officers needed to work with the authorized organs of revolutionary democracy (committees and soviets). Democratization and officers were not mutually exclusive. Major-General Prince S. A. Drutskoi, chair of the Soviet of Officers' Deputies in Moscow, repeated Kornilov and Kaledin's calls for the military to move beyond politics and for greater discipline. Military policies were those of the Ministry of War and the government, not committees. But he refuted a military dictatorship. He believed that it would destroy the army, the country, and freedom. Legal order, alongside educational and cultural enlightenment, was the key to reviving discipline.⁹³ Novosil'tsev found these speeches 'strange'—discussing educating when fighting was needed,⁹⁴ but sections of the officer corps were still talking in revolutionary terms, whilst echoing the gathering calls for discipline.

The conference provided elites with the opportunity to promote their views to a wider audience and inevitably provoked opposition. A. A. Melnikov stressed that the Union of Landowners was prepared for sacrifices and only had Russia's interests at heart. He noted the support of a large number of peasant owners for the union and urged everyone to wait for the Constituent Assembly before acting on the agrarian question. He claimed that landowners would accept the results of the assembly even if it called for the complete redistribution of the land. Change will take years, he warned, and premature action was seriously impeding the war effort. All of this received applause from the 'right' and instances of

⁹¹ GARF, f. 3529, op. 1, d. 4, ll. 62–69. Also in *RPG*, III, 1475–8.

⁹² *RPG*, III, 1478–80.

⁹³ GARF, f. 3529, op. 1, d. 4, ll. 40–41; *Rech'*, No. 192, 17 August 1917, 2.

⁹⁴ GARF, f. 6422, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 193ob–194.

dissent from the 'left'. His claim that peasants in Turkestan had refused land unless they had the rights of private owners was met with shouts of 'Untrue!', whilst newspaper reports suggest that the 'left' shouted 'Bravo, Chernov!' when Melnikov complained about the activities of local land committees.⁹⁵

Demands for strong government, greater patriotism, and less focus on partisan class and party interests were expressed in one other national arena at this time—the All-Russian *Sobor* of the Orthodox Church, whose first session ran from 15 August to 9 December 1917. Church leaders had refused to defend Tsarism in February, but quickly faced problems. Popular belief remained, but the institution was discredited, leading to attacks on clergy and church land. The turmoil also fostered demands from within as clergy and laity implemented reforms: reactionary clergy were removed; others elected; parishes gained greater control; and local and national congresses proliferated, displaying a wide range of political views.

Religion polarized opinion and elites rarely attempted to use religious terminology. They preferred neutral patriotic terms—motherland, honour, duty—in their appeals. As conditions deteriorated, however, some looked to the Church. On 9 May, several progressive priests started to tour the frontline at Alekseev's request, preaching discipline, and trying to raise morale. The Church published leaflets in support of the war and appeals for unity.⁹⁶ Others thought more broadly about the Church's potential role. Colonel P. Bulgakov, for example, saw the Church, as a nationwide institution with an existing educational presence, as having a major role to play in the enlightenment of the people, improving popular understandings of democracy.⁹⁷ At the same time, church dissatisfaction with the new government grew over specific issues (including education), as well as concern at the escalating unrest. This brought it close to other elites. At the Moscow Conference, Archbishop Platon made comparisons with the Time of Troubles, hinting that autocratic rule (this time by Kornilov) might be a solution again.⁹⁸

The *sobor* brought religious and secular elites together. It consisted of 564 members. Only ninety-one of 265 clergy were parish priests and most were largely conservative in mindset, whilst the 299 lay members included individuals from a range of elite groups. The chairman of the United Nobility, A. D. Samarin, was present, along with several members of the permanent council (P. P. Mendelev, Count D. A. Olsuf'ev, and S. I. Zubchaninov), and other nobles. N. N. L'vov and S. P. Rudnev from the Union of Landowners were present. Political figures included Rodzianko, Guchkov, Prince I. S. Vasil'chikov (all Octobrists), Trubetskoi (Kadet), and Count V. A. Bobrinskoi (nationalist). Rodzianko and

⁹⁵ GARF, f. 3529, op. 1, d. 4, ll. 1–2, 160–62; *Rech'*, No. 192, 17 August 1917, 3.

⁹⁶ J. Curtiss, *The Russian Church and the Soviet State, 1917–1950* (Gloucester, MA., 1965), 17–18.

⁹⁷ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 97, l. 12.

⁹⁸ Curtiss, *Russian Church*, 30.

Trubetskoi were elected as deputy chairs. There were eleven officers (including Captain A. A. Svechin of the Petrograd Soviet of Officers), nine counts and princes, and eight industrialists.⁹⁹

On 14 August, the day before the *sobor* opened, a branch of the Union of Officers in Minsk sent an appeal to the Archbishop of Grodno and Brest. It stressed the disintegration of the military and the valuable work of the union for the army and Russia. It needed moral support and appealed under a banner of patriotism to the *sobor*.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, the first sessions of the *sobor* saw many elite groups send their greetings—the Duma, the *zemstva*, the Union of Officers, Kornilov as Commander-in-Chief, and industrialists.¹⁰¹ In turn, the *sobor* talked about the ruination of the motherland and the prevalence of false teachings. On 19 August, it sent a message of support to Kornilov, blessing the military and hoping that the Lord would help Russia. Somewhat obliquely, it declared its belief that the *sobor* marked a coming together of the Church, something that would ‘serve as a pledge of the strength and fortitude of Russian Power’. On 24 August, it issued appeals to the military and the people threatening vengeance from above for deserters and promoting unity. Apparently, 500,000 copies were distributed—numbers that no other conservative body could afford or organize.¹⁰²

By mid August, events had reached a critical point. The ‘conservative movement’ was visibly exacerbating social unrest. Protests at the ‘counter-revolutionary’ speeches of Kornilov and Kaledin came from around the country.¹⁰³ Even the officers in the Union of Socialists of the People’s Army declared on 25 August that the Union of Officers and the George Cavaliers displayed an ‘organized counter-revolutionary character’ and should be disbanded.¹⁰⁴ For Russians, growing unity between former elites threatened to provide them with greater influence. Landowners did benefit from the growing willingness of the government to prosecute rural offences and use troops to suppress agrarian disorders, whilst officers’ bodies may have helped persuade the government of the need to reintroduce the death penalty and instigate other forceful measures. It has also been argued that landowners and industrialists united against the grain monopoly, and that their propaganda was sufficient to alienate the population from this policy.¹⁰⁵ Generally, though, official policies reflected concerns about these issues within the government, rather than a desire to satisfy the demands of elites. The fear of counter-revolution, however, was persuasive and had radicalized the popular mood by August.

⁹⁹ Biographies of members are in *Sviashchennyi sobor pravoslavnoi Rossiiskoi tserkvi 1917–1918gg.: Obzor deianii* (3 volumes: Moscow, 2000–2), I, 232–411. See also Curtiss, *Russian Church*, 27.

¹⁰⁰ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 44, l. 16.

¹⁰¹ *Sviashchennyi sobor*, I, 28–9.

¹⁰² Curtiss, *Russian Church*, 27–31; *RPG*, II, 822–3; *Sviashchennyi sobor*, I, 40.

¹⁰³ For e.g., *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Russkoi armii* (Moscow, 1968), 326–7, 359–60.

¹⁰⁴ GARF, f. 4018, op. 1, d. 2, l. 45.

¹⁰⁵ P. Volobuev, *Ekonomicheskaia politika vremennogo pravitel'stva* (Moscow, 1962), 404–21.

Yet furious debates continued within elite circles. On 20 August, Purishkevich argued in the Duma that the Moscow conference proved that it was impossible to work with 'democratic' groups, and that 'order will only be achieved under a dictator from the highest military circles'. Rodzianko quickly declared that the Duma could not support a state revolt and disassociated it from such views. Purishkevich backtracked, explaining that he was not advocating a revolt. L. A. Velikhov (a noble Kadet property owner) thought that a dictatorship would be useless anyway. Election results did not lie, even if the people were misguided. A dictator, even if supported by some kind of council, was hardly likely to be able to solve food and transport problems against the opposition of the masses, never mind bring political stability. To go down such a path, Velikhov believed, would worsen the situation.¹⁰⁶ Most politicians shared these doubts, especially the Kadets. Landowners and industrialists harboured similar doubts. More damningly, despite the majority of officers supporting Kornilov's plans for the military wholeheartedly, only a small minority proved prepared to act against the government.

THE KORNILOV REVOLT

The Kornilov Revolt from 27–31 August was one of the central events of 1917, but it remains a confused episode, given the incomplete and contradictory nature of the evidence. The weeks after the Moscow Conference saw tensions escalate between Kornilov and the government against a background of the advancing Germans (who took Riga on 21 August) and gathering rumours of a planned Bolshevik coup. For Kornilov, the Soviet was at the root of the problems and he became determined to deal with it sooner rather than later, encouraged by misplaced confidence over his level of support. He also favoured a new cabinet, preferably with a leading role for him. The question was whether all this could be achieved with the government's support. Kerenskii was open to suggestions of a new cabinet and moving against the Soviet, but he wanted to retain his power and restrict the Soviet's authority, rather than eradicate it. Both individuals feared the other's ambitions, but a compromise appeared possible. On 23 August, talks between B. V. Savinkov, Deputy Minister of War, and Kornilov seemed to offer a solution. The latter's earlier demands seemed to be accepted, whilst Kerenskii agreed to have more troops in Petrograd to suppress any Bolshevik uprisings. Kornilov acceded to demands that the Union of Officers, which Kerenskii suspected of fostering plots, be transferred away from Stavka to Moscow. However, events exploded on 27 August. A garbled, telex conversation with Kornilov fuelled Kerenskii's fears that Kornilov was planning to replace

¹⁰⁶ Drezen, *Burzhuazii i pomeshchiki*, 280, 282–4.

him. He dismissed Kornilov as Commander-in-Chief. Kornilov did not depart, denouncing the 'betrayal' of the government. Kerenskii's preferred replacements refused to accept the role and troops under General A. M. Krymov moved towards Petrograd. The soviets mobilized, convincing the soldiers that they were being used as part of a counter-revolutionary coup rather than acting to save the government as they had been told. By 31 August, Krymov had committed suicide, the revolt had disintegrated, and Kornilov and a number of his closest associates were arrested.¹⁰⁷

The key issue for this study is the extent to which elites supported and were involved in the revolt. Kornilov was confident that he had support, but elites were still confused about his aims. Soviet historians talk of his 'programme' and its 'exceptionally reactionary' socio-economic and political character. But there are few details beyond his demands, the talk of associates, and what he was assumed to support.¹⁰⁸ During the revolt, Kornilov was forced into broader generalities in an attempt to mobilize popular support. The key theme was patriotism. His first reaction to news of his dismissal on 27 August was to issue an appeal to the 'Russian People' declaring that 'our great motherland' was dying. He implied treachery on the part of the government, which was accepting the demands of Bolsheviks and therefore acting in the interests of the Germans. Appealing to those with a 'Russian heart', Kornilov invoked religion and his own roots as the 'son of a Russian Cossack' to encourage people to give their lives to defend Russia.¹⁰⁹ Short on practical promises—it did give primacy to the Constituent Assembly—it was high on emotion and drama. On 28 August, Kornilov talked more about duty, citizenship, and the motherland, and warned that the government was opening up Russia to 'counter-revolutionary enemies'. He invited ministers to form a government of people's defence with him in Stavka.¹¹⁰ Cooperation was stressed, albeit on his terms.

To the military, though, Kornilov was blunter. On the same day, he issued an order that outlined his version of his relations with the government over the preceding weeks. He assigned the initiative to government figures, who had asked him whether he thought that it was best that Kerenskii remained or that a dictatorship was formed. Kornilov favoured the latter: not as a return to the old regime, he quickly stressed, but as a means of defending the motherland and civil freedoms. Kerenskii and others, he said, would take responsibility for key areas, so that it would not be a sole dictatorship.¹¹¹ This echoed plans outlined at the Congress of Public Figures: a popular dictatorship, if such a thing was possible. Some senior commanders signed up. Kerenskii tried to replace Kornilov with Generals V. N. Klembovskii and A. S. Lukomskii—both refused. Generals

¹⁰⁷ Wade, *Russian Revolution*, 204–07; Wildman, *Russian Imperial Army*, II, 184–223.

¹⁰⁸ For e.g., Chaadaeva, *Pomeschchiki*, 147–55; N. Ivanov, *Kontrrevoliutsiia v Rossii v 1917 godu i ee razgrom* (Moscow, 1977), 84–96.

¹⁰⁹ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 53, l. 23; a copy is in *RPG*, III, 1573.

¹¹⁰ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 53, l. 24.

¹¹¹ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 53, l. 27.

P. S. Baluev, Denikin, Klembovskii, Lukomskii, and D. G. Shcherbachev all expressed open support. For them, the strength of the army clearly equated to the future of Russia, and Kornilov's presence, along with his policies, was essential. Their telegrams were published and distributed in an attempt to mobilize support for the revolt.¹¹² Yet, without soldiers' support, they were unable to provide any practical help.

Enthusiastic support also came from the leadership of the military organizations. Individuals from the Union of Officers, George Cavaliers, Military League, and the Republican Centre were deeply involved in attempts to mobilize officers.¹¹³ On 12 August, Kornilov had issued orders building up the strength of the George battalions around Stavka in Mogilev. The cavaliers were to organize and command them. Instructions specially emphasized the need for troops to obey commands without question.¹¹⁴ On 24 August, Stavka requested more recipients of George awards to further strengthen these troops, and some were sent.¹¹⁵ This was not a sizeable force, whilst the speed at which the revolt developed meant that plans were insufficiently advanced. Equally, whilst the officers of the battalions were reliable, according to one member of the Union of Officers, their soldiers remained distinctly 'unreliable'.¹¹⁶

The Union of Officers' role in these events was mixed. Its deputy presidents, Pronin and Sidorin, and to a lesser extent, the president, Novosil'tsev, along with officers in other bodies, were more determined supporters of a dictatorship than Kornilov himself, who was prepared to compromise with the government if his demands were met. Miliukov, who had meetings with the officers and Kornilov, felt that the officers were driving the revolt.¹¹⁷ Pronin and the union's secretary, Rozhenko, were deeply involved with Kornilov's plans at Stavka, whilst Sidorin was entrusted with mobilizing officers in Petrograd. On 22 August, Stavka requested several officers from each division to travel to Mogilev, ostensibly to receive training in new technology. Instead, Rozhenko redirected them to Petrograd to contact the union and the Republican Centre.¹¹⁸ Estimates range from a hundred to several thousand officers in the capital, but only a handful responded to Stavka's request. All were invisible when it came to the crunch, including Sidorin and Diusimet'er, the centre's representative. Novosil'tsev was less involved. He was looking for premises in Moscow in preparation for the union's impending move when the revolt broke out. He felt that they were 'not

¹¹² GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 53, l. 26; d. 56, l. 1.

¹¹³ This is a point that Soviet historians emphasized; see, for e.g., Ivanov, *Kontrrevoliutsiia*, 112–19; M. Kapustin, *Zagovor generalov* (Moscow, 1968), 148–9, 181–98.

¹¹⁴ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 77, ll. 13–14ob.

¹¹⁵ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 44, ll. 114–16, 119.

¹¹⁶ S. Riasnianskii, 'Vospominaniia o souze ofitserov i Bykhove', *Vestnik pervopokhodnika*, 79–81 (1968), 65.

¹¹⁷ Miliukov, *Russian Revolution*, II, 137–43.

¹¹⁸ *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Rossii v avguste*, 420, 452–3.

ready': 'public figures' would not commit and existing preparations would be ruined. He returned to Stavka on 28 August, but could do little.¹¹⁹

On 28 August, the union printed 10,000 copies of an appeal arguing that Kornilov was rebuilding the military effectively, but that the government had reneged on an agreement to share power to create a strong state structure in the face of the German and Bolshevik threat. It stated that the government had shown weakness, provocation, and evidence of Bolshevik influence. It could not be trusted and must go. Officers, it said, needed to unite to save the military and Russia from internal and external enemies.¹²⁰ This appeal seemed to indicate that the entire main committee of the union was involved in the revolt. Unsurprisingly, its members denied participating in a plot when they were interrogated in early September, arguing that they had little choice but to support Kornilov. Rumours had started circulating on 27 August that Kornilov had been dismissed. When the available members of the committee met in the morning of 28 August (accounts vary, but probably no more than a dozen), they were 'completely bewildered'. The government had been supporting Kornilov, but now had apparently dismissed him. There was no replacement, whilst Kornilov's appeals sounded sincere. They decided to support Kornilov. Pronin gave the first draft of the appeal to Rozhenko, who thought that someone else close to Kornilov had written it. Rozhenko presented it to a second meeting of the committee in the afternoon, which approved it unanimously after making several alterations. Novosil'tsev then signed it.¹²¹

None saw it as 'counter-revolutionary'. Indeed, Colonel L. I. Sazonov, a legal expert at Stavka who was on the union's judicial committee, only attended the afternoon meeting, but was certain that there was nothing criminal about the text as they were not calling for an overthrow of the government, merely supporting Kornilov in the absence of a clear successor or plan for the military.¹²² This was disingenuous: the union was essentially supporting a change of government. But the vehement denials of 'plots' by most committee members are more convincing: most are clearly responding to events rather than instigating them. The backgrounds of some make them unlikely participants; for example, Ensign A. V. Ivanov (socialist) and Lieutenant-Colonel I. G. Soots (Estonian nationalist). Soots denied that he would jeopardize the revolution and freedoms gained by national minorities, although he admitted that he might have been excluded from political discussions because of these views. These committee members and others stressed that they were only active in defending the *professional* interests of officers.¹²³ They were aware that Novosil'tsev and others travelled to Moscow and Petrograd to obtain financial support; beyond that, they were

¹¹⁹ GARF, f. 6422, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 202–04.

¹²⁰ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 44, l. 50.

¹²¹ This account is composed from the testimonies of eight committee members; *Delo generala L. G. Kornilova*, II, 29–31, 125–7, 275–83, 296–8, 313–16, 322–4.

¹²² *Delo generala L. G. Kornilova*, II, 315–16.

¹²³ *Delo generala L. G. Kornilova*, II, 125–6, 322–3.

occupied with their own duties in the union and unaware of plans for political change.

Indeed, the reaction from all officers was mixed. The support for Kornilov was based on his policies for the military and personal authority, rather than a belief that a revolt was a good move. For every officer that responded favourably, there was one who did not, and hundreds more who kept their heads down, irrespective of what they thought. Kornilov did gain support from some officers who had previously worked with the revolution; one of these, General P. A. Polovtsov, noted that all 'true patriots' put their faith in Kornilov.¹²⁴ Lieutenant-Colonel Kapel, in the name of the Union of Officer's branch at the south-west front, argued that the power and future of the military and the country were dependent on Kornilov remaining in position. However, Colonel Kurilko of Khar'kov garrison called for the immediate arrest and prosecution of Kornilov and his followers. Kerenskii and the government needed support to preserve democracy in Russia.¹²⁵ Most were confused, such as Captain I. I. Rengarten from the Union of Republican Officers in Hel'singfors. He recognized the need for Kornilov's measures, but feared a return to the old regime. He was not sure who to believe now that there were two commanders-in-chief. In the end, faced with a crisis of power and fearing civil war, he and his fellow naval officers supported the government, but he was far from convinced.¹²⁶ General B. V. Gerua recalled how a telegram from Kerenskii calling Kornilov a traitor arrived at the same time as one from Kornilov alleging that Kerenskii was a 'German mercenary'.¹²⁷ As Wildman noted, the revolt simply demonstrated the powerlessness of the officers, irrespective of their sympathies, and that the 'hard-core support' for Kornilov was 'exceedingly slight'.¹²⁸

Other elite groups reacted in the same way. Any support for a revolt was fuelled as much from desperation and opposition to the current government as from deeply-rooted conviction. They felt that Kornilov embodied actions rather than words. Prince M. V. Golitsyn, a liberal serving in the government, was one of many doubting that the ideals of the February Revolution would ever be realized. He denied that Kornilov represented 'dictatorship', and said that he was 'undoubtedly necessary at that time in Russia' to provide order and discipline. Count B. A. Tatishchev, also in the government, wrote that Kornilov temporarily 'restored hope in a better future'. The daughter of a former governor recalled that Kornilov 'stood for integrity, determination and successes at the front', and

¹²⁴ P. Polovtsoff, *Glory and Downfall* (London, 1935), 130.

¹²⁵ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 54, l. 1; d. 77, l. 124.

¹²⁶ 'Baltiiskii flot nakanune oktiabria (iz dnevnika I. I. Rengartena)', *Krasnyi arkhiv*, 35 (1929), 12–16.

¹²⁷ B. Gerua, *Vospominaniia o moei zhizni* (2 volumes: Paris, 1969–70), II, 212.

¹²⁸ A. Wildman, 'Officers of the General Staff and the Kornilov movement', in E. Frankel, J. Frankel, and B. Knei-Paz (eds.), *Revolution in Russia: Reassessments of 1917* (Cambridge, 1992), 98.

bitter disappointment greeted his failure.¹²⁹ Few expressed open support during the revolt itself, however. The council of the Congress of Public Figures met in special meeting on 24 August and proposed a strong government that would incorporate all groups who actively supported it. This led to accusations that the council was organizing a new 'Progressive Bloc' against the existing government. But whilst an appeal published on 27 August publicly supported an attack on the Bolsheviks, the following days saw sceptical questions raised about the possible composition of a government emerging from the revolt.¹³⁰ The Church *sobor*, which was apparently full of expectation, almost came out in public support, but decided to bide its time as reports arrived indicating that the revolt was faltering.¹³¹

Industrialists found themselves in the most ambiguous position. They later admitted to providing sizeable funds, but denied that they were financing an open revolt. Putilov described how the Society for the Economic Rebirth of Russia had around 3.5 million rubles remaining from the 4 million initially collected, whilst up to 10 million could be raised quickly. He claimed that he and his fellow leaders, Vyshnegradskii and Meshcherskii, thought that Kornilov was planning to quash the Soviet and the Bolsheviks, and that the government approved of these actions. Hence, they were 'ready to make any sacrifices' to help restore order and end dual power in favour of the government. Putilov tried to enlist aid from Moscow industrialists, but Tret'iakov apparently refused to take part in 'adventures'. In the end, according to Putilov, despite providing 800,000 rubles, and almost giving a further 1.2 million, the venture failed due to the poor organization of officers.¹³² The Republican Centre provided 500,000 rubles. P. N. Finisov, one of its leaders, also claimed that the revolt was against the Soviet. He admitted that they expected the government's composition to change and that Kornilov would assume dictatorial powers, but within a cabinet that was to include Kerenskii (as Minister of Justice) and others.¹³³

In an interrogation on 24 September, N. N. L'vov, president of the Union of Landowners, sympathized with the need for change, but denied that he had been willing to openly act against the government. Apparently, on 20 August, his brother, V. N. L'vov, told him that Kerenskii wanted to talk to 'public figures' about forming a new coalition government. L'vov welcomed this as a step towards integrating moderate conservatives back into a stronger government to struggle against the Soviet and the Bolsheviks. L'vov was surprised that Kerenskii was proposing this step, but he trusted the other names mentioned—Riabushinskii,

¹²⁹ HIA, Golitsyn family papers, box 3, M. V. Golitsyn, '1917 god. Fevral'skaia revoliutsiia i Vremennoe pravitel'stvo', 21–2; HIA, A. B. Tatishchev papers, box 4, 'Na rubezhe dykh mirov: Vospominaniia Borisa Alekseevicha Tatishcheva, 1876–1917–1949', 258; E. Fen, *Remember Russia* (London, 1973), 81.

¹³⁰ Kapustin, *Zagovor*, 72–3; Laverychev, 'Russkie monopolisty', 42–4.

¹³¹ *RPG*, II, 824–5; Curtiss, *Russian Church*, 30–1.

¹³² *RPG*, III, 1529–34.

¹³³ *RPG*, III, 1536–42.

Rodzianko, and Tret'iakov. On 27 August, he received a telegram dated 25 August asking him and other 'public figures' to go to Stavka to talk about these plans.¹³⁴ L'vov noted that he would have left for Stavka had he received it earlier, but his brother had misled him, hoping that such figures could instead bolster Kornilov's image. By the time L'vov received his invitation, Kornilov's intentions were clear. L'vov did not get involved in the 'intrigues' and neither did the other 'public figures'. He did not want power, only to rebuild the military and Russia, and plots, he felt, would only damage these aims. He described his brother as 'unstable' and 'impetuous' in his involvement.¹³⁵

The revolt demonstrated elite discontent with the ineffectiveness of the government, the growing influence of the Soviet (and of radical elements within it), and the general direction of the revolution. Kornilov genuinely believed that he acted in Russia's best interests. He always denied plotting against the government, but admitted that he wanted to remove the Soviet's influence to save the motherland. He was not personally ambitious, but arrogant in his belief that he was the person best suited to become the figurehead of a new, strong government. Although some hoped that this marked a return to the old regime, it was not intended to be. But it was a definite move for change, with the elite's interests—victory in the war, securing property, and maintaining order—in mind. Elites applauded his practical measures, agreed that the Soviet needed suppressing, accepted the need for a new government, and seemed to think genuinely that their interests were the same as Russia's. But they were afraid: partly of failure, but also of a military dictatorship, which might place too much power into the hands of officers, removing the influence of liberals, landowners, and industrialists. This fear led to fatal hesitation, and the opportunity for favourable change, if it had existed, quickly passed.

POST-KORNILOV: THE OFFICERS

Thirty officers were arrested for participating in the revolt and imprisoned, including Kornilov, Lukomskii, and Denikin, and thirteen committee members of the Union of Officers, including Novosil'tsev and Pronin. On 28 August, General A. I. Verkhovskii, the Commander of Moscow military district and a supporter of the government, ordered searches of the Moscow branches of the Union of Officers and the George Cavaliers, as well as the latter's central committee, for evidence of links to Kornilov's plot. The cavaliers were caught burning papers and the respective chairmen were arrested, including Captain P. V. Skarzhinskii, although he was released a week later. The Soviet conducted a search of the Military League's headquarters under the leadership of Lieutenant

¹³⁴ *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Rossii v avguste*, 432.

¹³⁵ *Delo generala L. G. Kornilova*, II, 223–4.

V. N. Filippovskii, a member of the Union of Socialists of the People's Army. The league's leader, Fedorov, was arrested and numerous documents confiscated.¹³⁶ Investigations tried to identify other conspirators; commissars asked for lists of officers who were in Stavka from 26 August and explanations of their activities. The personnel at Stavka were changed and officers were told not to contact former staff or fulfil previous orders.¹³⁷ Few arrests were made, though. In the Second Army, for example, five officers were arrested: two for 'agitating'; one for preparing to go to Kornilov's aid, and two for spreading propaganda supporting Kornilov. The first three were quickly released and few cases were pursued for long.¹³⁸

Instead, unofficial action proved to be more damaging for officers. Arrests of officers by committees and soldiers returned to the high levels seen after the February Revolution, whilst there were also cases of officers being summarily lynched.¹³⁹ The government tried to stem the flood by declaring that it would change the personnel at Stavka, prosecute those involved, and remove any officers who were not committed to the revolution. It argued that punishment had to be conducted legally.¹⁴⁰ But numerous telegrams pressed for drastic action. Many demanded the liquidation of the Union of Officers as a 'nest of counter-revolutionaries' as well as, to a lesser extent, the Military League and cavaliers. Some argued that Kornilov and his conspirators, as traitors, were prime candidates for the restored death penalty. Some desired a complete 'cleansing' of the command structure. Others demanded an obligation for officers to officially declare that they had never been members of the Union of Officers and would not take part in counter-revolution. Officers should not be allowed to form their own unions and even their canteens should close. Power must be transferred to the soviets and radical reforms introduced.¹⁴¹ These demands were echoed by workers and peasants across Russia.¹⁴²

Some soviets implemented new measures. In Sevastopol, the soviet decided to boycott 'reactionary newspapers' (*Russkoe slovo*, *Utro Rossii*, and others); started its own investigations into the activities of the local branch of the cavaliers; examined the telegraph communications conducted between commanders, committees, and cavaliers; and placed its own commissar at the telegraph offices. In Helsingfors, all officers were forced to sign a document stating their willingness to struggle against Kornilov and their loyalty to the government. Several protested that it

¹³⁶ *Delo generala L. G. Kornilova*, II, 423–4; *Rech'*, No. 205, 1 September 1917, 4; No. 207, 3 September 1917, 3; No. 210, 7 September 1917, 2; *Petrogradskii soviet rabochikh i soldatskikh deputatov v 1917 godu* (4 volumes: Leningrad-Moscow, 1991–2003), IV, 233.

¹³⁷ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 62, ll. 19, 39.

¹³⁸ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 44, l. 123.

¹³⁹ For e.g., murders in Hel'singfors and Vyborg reported in *Moskovskiiia vedomosti*, No. 195, 5 September 1917, 2.

¹⁴⁰ *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Rossii v sentiabre 1917g.* (Moscow, 1961), 222–3.

¹⁴¹ For e.g., see the resolutions passed in the fortnight after the revolt reprinted in *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Rossii v sentiabre*, 394–427. Also *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Russkoi armii*, 362–3, 383–5, 397–400.

¹⁴² GARF, f. 1778, op. 1, d. 238.

impinging upon their honour, whilst the government declared that it was happy with their loyalty, but several were shot for refusing to comply.¹⁴³ The deep gulf between officers and soldiers, as General I. P. Sytin noted on 10 September, was now a chasm, and pressure to elect all officers returned.¹⁴⁴ Officers were back at square one: their position had deteriorated further and they had less chance to make their voices heard.

The Union of Officers was not actually banned. Kornilov's initial replacement, Alekseev, believed that the union could not close as it was the last hope of the officer corps to defend its rights. He agreed that the main committee should move away from Stavka, but believed that taking action against committee members would serve as a signal for unauthorized attacks on officers across the military.¹⁴⁵ After his dismissal, Alekseev wrote a letter to Miliukov on 12 September demanding that he help prevent the thirty imprisoned officers from standing trial. Alekseev also requested Miliukov to ask industrialists to contribute 300,000 rubles to help support the families of the arrested. After all, industrialists had been heavily involved in the pre-Kornilov meetings and Alekseev threatened to make this public.¹⁴⁶ Nevertheless, with its members targeted and forced to keep their heads down, the union ceased activity. Many officers were quick to distance themselves from it, whilst some of its branches were quick to disassociate themselves from Kornilov. Its sub-branch in the Staff of the Ninth Army Corps, for example, wrote on 2 September to its commissar and executive committee that it had not received any appeals to unite with Kornilov and that it completely agreed with the government.¹⁴⁷

In the Second Army, the commissar, K. Grodskii, distributed two telegrams on 9–10 September designed to rehabilitate officers. He expressed confidence in officers, arguing that the majority believed in the government and only a small number of staff officers had supported Kornilov. He noted that the guilty parties had been affiliated to the Union of Officers and accepted that this involvement had led soldiers to equate the union with the actions of individuals at Stavka. Grodskii, however, thought that most officers had joined the union as a professional body and had nothing to do with these political activities. On the contrary, the union was seen as a way of protecting officers from the politics that had invaded the military and in which they had been unwilling participants. Grodskii noted that he had received messages from sub-branches disclaiming all knowledge of the revolt and disassociating themselves from it. Equally, he knew that some officers had resigned as members over it. Therefore, he wanted officers to gather together

¹⁴³ S. Khesin, *Oktiabr'skaia revoliutsiia i flot* (Moscow, 1971), 351, 358–9. Rengarten described 'repulsive' and 'disturbing' events, and a deep suspicion of officers; 'Baltiiskii flot nakanune oktiabria', 17–21.

¹⁴⁴ *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Russkoi armii*, 406.

¹⁴⁵ V. Alekseeva-Borel, *Sorok let v riadakh Russkoi imperatorskoi armii: General M. V. Alekseev* (St. Petersburg, 2000), 595.

¹⁴⁶ *RPG*, III, 1604–6.

¹⁴⁷ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 44, l. 129.

and to reply with their frank opinions of the union. This would, he hoped, stop a few individuals placing the whole organization under suspicion.¹⁴⁸

Grodskii was providing officers with a loophole to disavow Kornilov, the revolt, and the union. Nonetheless, by the time replies started returning a fortnight later, the immediate backlash from the revolt had died down and many felt able to express honest opinions. Some assemblies did assert that they had refused to join the union, suspicious of its political objectives, the leaderships' authoritarian stance, and its divisive impact.¹⁴⁹ Some merely noted that they had considered the union to be a purely professional organization.¹⁵⁰ The majority, though, were resolute in their continued support for the original published objectives of the union—improving the fighting capabilities of the military, promoting patriotism, and supporting officers. The main committee, they argued, in becoming involved in political intrigue, had followed a path against the wishes of many members who should not be held responsible. Several argued that they, as members of a professional group (officers), continued to support the need for a union to represent their interests in a 'democratic' Russia. Disbanding the union would only strengthen and justify the misguided suspicions of the backward soldiers.¹⁵¹ Grodskii appears to have expected a greater attack on the union. He forwarded one report to the Commander-in-Chief and Minister of War on 4 October where officers condemned the misguided and ineffectual nature of the union, declaring that they were disbanding their branch, whilst its leaders should be prosecuted.¹⁵² There is no evidence that he forwarded the other messages.

Novosil'tsev noted that the union was in limbo after the revolt, with many local branches inactive or closed. He was unsure what to do after his release on 22 October.¹⁵³ Some continued to conspire ineffectively. Twenty-five to thirty people attended a meeting in Vinberg's flat in early October to discuss an armed uprising, for example. These included Sidorin, the only leader of the union not arrested, and other former members. Nothing was decided, but only individuals were involved.¹⁵⁴ Officers reverted to the local meetings that had served them after February. Reports suggest, however, that these now had a heavy presence of soldiers observing events and were keen to stress that officers could work with committees and soviets, although discipline and duty were still stressed.¹⁵⁵ Nationally, the Soviet of Officers' Deputies still existed. It had echoed calls for firm discipline to save Russia in the face of the German advance, but supported the government during the revolt. Socialists highlighted this to soldiers and

¹⁴⁸ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 62, ll. 75–76, 91–91ob.

¹⁴⁹ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 62, ll. 96–96ob, 99, 121, 127, 138–38ob.

¹⁵⁰ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 62, ll. 107, 113, 118, 122.

¹⁵¹ GARF, f. 1780, op. 1, d. 62, ll. 97–97ob, 100–102ob, 109, 123, 125–25ob, 128, 131, 133–135ob.

¹⁵² N. Kakurin (ed.), *Razlozhenie armii v 1917 godu* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1925), 114–15.

¹⁵³ GARF, f. 6422, op. 1, d. 1, l. 223.

¹⁵⁴ GARF, f. 336, op. 1, d. 277, l. 95ob.

¹⁵⁵ For e.g., see the report on an assembly of officers in the Third Army on 27 September; *Izvestiia Berdianskogo soveta rabochikh, soldatskikh i krest'ianskikh deputatov*, No. 67, 1 October 1917.

urged them not to confuse it with the Union of Officers.¹⁵⁶ In mid-October, the soviet painted a bleak picture of the position of officers: violence and punishment continued, despite government support, whilst there was renewed interference in appointments and dismissals. It questioned the level of financial support provided to officers and the lack of support for victims' families.¹⁵⁷

The Union of George Cavaliers also remained active. On 15 September, two members visited the main George committee requesting 100,000 rubles to help the union's central committee to function. The George committee agreed, but only on receipt of a declaration stating government approval of the union and a detailed description of how the money would be spent.¹⁵⁸ The fear of reprisals remained high, perhaps unsurprisingly given that the government remained suspicious and ordered the union to appoint commissars to liaise with ministers and Stavka.¹⁵⁹ Popular suspicions lay behind other problems facing the union in Petrograd. It was unable to send representatives to some regiments as soldiers resolved that 'the union does not go hand-in-hand with the working people'.¹⁶⁰ Furthermore, a breakaway assembly of cavaliers on 17 September established the Union of Socialist George Cavaliers. This was formed by junior officers from the Petrograd Soviet and attacked the old union as a 'counter-revolutionary' organization, forcing the latter to defend itself through the courts.¹⁶¹ Similar accusations were made by local soviets and committees in an orchestrated attack on the Odessa branch during September.¹⁶² Nonetheless, the union continued its activities; fostering support, organizing educational resources, campaigning for the release of arrested officers, petitioning for permission to form its own army of cavaliers (rather than just regiments), and agitating against Bolshevism. In Odessa, the union opened a cooperative shop on 1 October selling goods to members at the price of production. Cavaliers were also involved in 'protecting' the city from anticipated disorders.¹⁶³

POST-KORNILOV: THE LANDOWNERS

The Kornilov Revolt had less impact on the activities of landowners, although it did tarnish their image and foster suspicion. The Union of Landowners continued its activities, whilst its demands were now completely in tandem

¹⁵⁶ *Rech'*, No. 200, 26 August 1917, 5; No. 205, 1 September 1917, 4; *Petrogradskii sovet*, IV, 249.

¹⁵⁷ *Narodnaia svoboda*, No. 117, 19 October 1917, reprinted in A. Panov (ed.), *Armiia i politika: Ofiterskii korpus v politicheskoi istorii Rossii. Dokumenty i materialy* (7 volumes: Moscow-Kaluga, 2002–03), II, 199–200.

¹⁵⁸ GARF, f. 336, op. 1, d. 27, ll. 1–10b.

¹⁵⁹ *Odesskii listok*, No. 231, 22 September 1917, 4.

¹⁶⁰ GARF, f. 336, op. 1, d. 26, l. 19

¹⁶¹ GARF, f. 336, op. 1, d. 26, ll. 22, 24, 26.

¹⁶² *Odesskii listok*, No. 231, 22 September 1917, 4.

¹⁶³ *Odesskii listok*, No. 240, 3 October 1917, 2.

with the government's determination to suppress rural disorder. The number of prosecutions increased sharply: over 2,000 members of land committees were arrested in July and August, whilst in El'ninskii *uezd* (Smolensk), seventy people were arrested from fourteen of the seventeen *volost* land committees in the *uezd*.¹⁶⁴ The union itself was less positive. A meeting of representatives from twenty-five provinces on 1 October demanded much greater use of military force.¹⁶⁵ Similarly, whilst branches reported 'some legal successes' and the union's council had replied to 'hundreds' of enquiries and given 150 consultations by October,¹⁶⁶ the second congress of the union's lawyers in Moscow on 21 October was dissatisfied. Legal action by branches 'frequently had not achieved its aims' and successful results had 'drowned' in a 'sea of triumphant illegality'.¹⁶⁷ Decisions rarely had an impact in the face of angry peasant protests. On two occasions in Kaluga prior to the end of July, for example, lawyers were surrounded by peasants who dictated the 'correct' judgement.¹⁶⁸

Nevertheless, the congress provided the most detailed set of instructions thus far for members. It emphasized the need for concrete evidence and provided a detailed explanation of the legal system, outlining the various courts that dealt with different types of complaints. It also described the legal process: what warranted legal action, the information required, the formal process of lodging complaints, the costs, how the complaint would be judged, the timescale, and the grounds for appealing against the decision. It noted the importance of witnesses and the need to get people in positions of authority, wherever possible, to support legal action. It even provided an empty booklet with set headings under which to note events, and a standard letter of complaint with gaps for the relevant details.¹⁶⁹

The union's main problem was the scale of the unrest. A prime example was Tambov province, where tensions exploded in late August, sparking violence that spread to adjoining areas. On 23 August, months of petty conflict over rents and pastures between the Usmanskii *uezd* marshal of the nobility, Prince B. L. Viazemskii, and local peasants erupted when he tried to destroy a bridge that peasants used to transport cattle to 'his' meadows. On 24 August, 5,000 peasants occupied his estate. Troops sent to suppress them changed sides, Viazemskii was murdered, his manor destroyed, and equipment shared out. A neighbouring landowner was also affected. The *uezd* commissar urgently requested more troops from his provincial counterpart and repeated these demands to ministers a few days later, alongside appeals by the union.¹⁷⁰ On the night of 6–7 September,

¹⁶⁴ A. Maliavskii, *Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie v Rossii v 1917g (mart-oktiabr)* (Moscow, 1981), 245–6.

¹⁶⁵ GARF, f. 1791, op. 2, d. 164, ll. 19–20.

¹⁶⁶ OR RGB, f. 114, k. 2, ed. khran. 26, l. 11ob.

¹⁶⁷ OR RGB, f. 114, k. 2, ed. khran. 25, l. 1.

¹⁶⁸ 'Soiuz zemel'nykh', 102.

¹⁶⁹ OR RGB, f. 114, k. 2, ed. khran. 24, ll. 4–10ob.

¹⁷⁰ *Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie v Tambovskoi gubernii, 1917–1918. Dokumenty i materialy* (Moscow, 2003), 164–5; GARF, f. 1791, op. 2, d. 237, ll. 141–43; E. Luts'kii, 'Krest'ianskoe vosstanie v Tambovskoi gubernii v sentiabre 1917g.', *Istoricheskie zapiski*, 2 (1938), 63–5.

violence broke out in Koslovskii *uezd*. A *khutorianin*, Romanov, shot at local peasants who he believed were stealing his property, understandably given that one report to the government on 3 September claimed that the lands of eighty *khutoriane* had been seized and redistributed in previous weeks in the *uezd*. Two peasants were killed and the village retaliated by murdering him.¹⁷¹ These incidents sparked off attacks on dozens of landowners over the next few days across the province. According to the union, twenty-four estates were burned in Kozlovskii *uezd* alone over the space of three days.¹⁷²

The authorities did send more troops. Some arrests were made, but the troops were unreliable and violence escalated. The Tambov branch of the union pleaded with the government to enforce its laws on preserving harvests (from April) and controlling the activities of land committees (from July), and to clamp down on the illegal reduction of rents, unauthorized taxes, and land seizures.¹⁷³ However, on 13 September, the provincial executive, land, and food committees, along with the provincial commissar, signed 'Order No. 3'. They deplored the violence, but argued that the solution was to act immediately on the land question. Since they believed that the Constituent Assembly would transfer all land into the hands of the working people and abolish private ownership of land, then delaying merely granted influence to agitators. Therefore, Order No. 3 sanctioned the transfer of all privately owned land to the control of land and food committees after a detailed inventory had been taken.¹⁷⁴ The order attempted to undermine peasant anger by addressing its root causes, whilst imposing order on the transfer.

Landowners wasted no time in protesting. The provincial marshal of the nobility, Prince N. N. Cholokaev fired off a letter to Kerenskii and the Main Land Committee on the same day. Stressing its illegality and how it contradicted official policy, he immediately recognized the fatal blow that Order No. 3 would strike to landowners. He believed that it would exacerbate unrest and pressed urgently for the government to abolish it. The Tambov branch of the union acted on 15 September, writing to the Main Land Committee re-emphasizing Cholokaev's warnings verbatim, suggesting collaboration. There were also local protests from landowners and *uezd* union branches. Some landowners asked local courts to explain the order; others prosecuted land committees and officials in civil and criminal court cases.¹⁷⁵

These protests had an impact. On 17 September, the provincial land committee was forced to justify the order in response to queries from the government. Further protests by the union led to telegrams from officials in the Ministry of Internal Affairs asking the provincial commissar to act against the unrest prompted by the order. On 4 October, the ministry questioned the legality of Order No.3 as

¹⁷¹ C. Read, *From Tsar to Soviets: The Russian People and their Revolution, 1917–21* (London, 1996), 108–9.

¹⁷² GARF, f. 1791, op. 2, d. 237, l. 163.

¹⁷³ GARF, f. 1791, op. 2, d. 237, ll. 186–7.

¹⁷⁴ *Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie v Tambovskoi*, 184–6. It was later amended slightly, 188–9.

¹⁷⁵ *Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie v Tambovskoi*, 186–7, 196, 213–14.

it was unauthorized and contradicted current legislation. Finally, on 7 October, the ministry wrote a detailed letter to the provincial commissar upholding the complaints made by the union and accusing the commissar of exceeding his authority in signing the order (as had the committees).¹⁷⁶ It took a large injection of troops—up to 1,000 Cossacks and Junkers were sent, arresting 1,500 peasants—to actually quell the violence. But it was largely a pyrrhic victory for landowners. Unrest in the province continued into October, prompting more demands from the union for troops in Tambov and neighbouring Riazan. Viazemskii's murderers had still not been arrested by 18 October due to peasant opposition.¹⁷⁷

Furthermore, as the union's judicial department noted, Order No.3 was only exceptional for the attention it received because of the involvement of the local authorities. Similar orders from local committees were frequent across Russia, especially at *volost* or *uezd* level.¹⁷⁸ They were also gaining support at increasingly higher levels of government. Whilst the Main Land Committee advised the government to restrict Order No. 3 to rented land on 20 September, it supported the motives behind the order. It argued that landowners were blinded by political and class interests, not realizing that 'their stubborn and complete unwillingness to accept land committees' invited further destruction from 'embittered' peasants. Abolishing Order No. 3, it thought, would exacerbate unrest, not calm it as landowners argued.¹⁷⁹ Similarly, in Nizhegorod province, the commissar, M. E. Sumgin, advocated an orderly transfer of land on 15 September to calm unrest and implemented it on 23 October to demonstrate to the peasants that the revolution had brought significant achievements, although he continued to use troops to quell disorders.¹⁸⁰ By October, similar moves were being prepared elsewhere.

Two points are worth highlighting. First, despite ever stronger measures used against the agrarian movement, their ineffectiveness remained constant. Initially, troops were demanded and then more 'reliable' Cossacks or cavalry. On 28 September, the government created special committees to deal with disorders in specific provinces. They were to help local commissars utilize all the means at their disposal—government, local, and public organizations—to target unauthorized activities. They would also pave the way for martial law, if necessary, as they would represent all important groups.¹⁸¹ Yet, at the same time, the Ministry of Agriculture was finalizing plans to transfer all land normally worked by peasants to land committees. Rents would still be paid, but would

¹⁷⁶ *Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie v Tambovskoi*, 198–200, 223, 227, 240–1.

¹⁷⁷ GARF, f. 1791, op. 2, d. 224, l. 178; d. 237, ll. 190, 226.

¹⁷⁸ OR RGB, f. 114, k. 2, ed. khran. 23, ll. 1–1ob.

¹⁷⁹ GARF, f. 1778, op. 1, d. 344, ll. 1–2.

¹⁸⁰ *Pobeda oktiabr'skoi sotsialisticheskoi revoliutsii v Nizhegorodskoi gubernii* (Gor'kii, 1957), 310–11; S. Badcock, *Politics and the People in Revolutionary Russia* (Cambridge, 2007), 203.

¹⁸¹ 'Bor'ba za zemliu v 1917g. (po Kazanskoi gub.), *Krasnyi arkhiv*, 78 (1936), 96–7.

reach landowners through the committees, removing landowners' control over their land.¹⁸² These plans were too radical for liberals and had not been approved before the Bolsheviks seized power, but government policy was changing.

The union had mixed feelings about martial law. In a report on 21 October 1917, I. P. Kupchinov noted that the desperate need to secure the food supply for military and civil reasons, coupled with the widespread destruction of property and threat to life, seemed to justify martial law in some areas. It would permit the authorities to restrict population movement, take military action, and deal with many offences (the destruction of property and arson, for example) in military courts. Yet, he had reservations. If the commander of an area was not given sufficient authority, it would not work, and if these powers were given to the wrong individuals then the 'crowds of armed thugs' wandering around provinces would increase. In Kozlov, the commander who had authority in the *uezd* passed certain powers to a leader of a detachment who departed, passing his authority to an individual who was part of the local soviet. Kupchinov believed that this scenario would become common, and concluded that martial law was 'unlikely' to provide the answer to the current problems. Most of the main committee of the union seemed to disagree, however, viewing it as a possibility for volatile areas for a limited period.¹⁸³

The second point worth noting about the Tambov example is the continued activity of nobles. The Union of Landowners was quick to react to Order No. 3 and its perseverance played a large role in gaining the government's eventual condemnation. The union was regarded as a 'public' organization and was represented at meetings of important groups in the province.¹⁸⁴ The alarm was first raised, however, by the provincial marshal of the nobility. Meetings of the province's nobility were continuing in September. Concerns about noble finances and material hardship, the war effort, and the nobility's position within local bodies (almost non-existent) were all on the agenda, as they were elsewhere at this stage.¹⁸⁵ On 30 September, the marshal of the nobility in Kursk urged the government to intercede on the behalf of nobles with banks to lessen their demands. The Union of Landowners of South Russia even had advanced plans to establish its own bank by spring 1918 to provide credit and help develop trade.¹⁸⁶ By increasingly focusing on agrarian-related issues, local noble assemblies worked in conjunction with the union to press the government on contentious issues.

Landowners also signed protests with clergy and industrialists, demonstrating the fact that like-minded groups continued to work together, despite the post-Kornilov backlash. And their attitude remained aggressive. In Riazan, for example, the newspaper of the local union published articles attacking peasant greed in

¹⁸² *RPG*, II, 577–9.

¹⁸³ OR RGB, f. 114, k. 2, ed. khran. 25, l. 1ob; ed. khran 27, ll. 1–2.

¹⁸⁴ See, for e.g., a meeting in Lipetsk on 16 October; *Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie v Tambovskoi*, 247–53.

¹⁸⁵ *Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie v Tambovskoi*, 180–4.

¹⁸⁶ GARF, f. 1791, op. 2, d. 164, ll. 95–95ob; *Odesskii listok*, No. 248, 12 October 1917, 4.

thinking of their own needs rather than the state's (one was entitled 'Feasting in a Time of Pestilence'), particularly given the German advance. It also published an article by Shul'gin that broadly supported Kornilov and strong government, although distancing himself from a military dictatorship.¹⁸⁷ In response, socialist papers kept up their attacks on the union across Russia, with the ascendant Bolshevik press taking the lead.¹⁸⁸

ON THE EVE OF OCTOBER

Soviet historians argued that the conservative movement steadily revived in September and October in what they called a second *Kornilovshchina*. Gathering economic problems (growing unemployment, falling production, supply problems, and inflation), attacks on the Bolsheviks, and continued calls for a strong government masked plans for another revolt.¹⁸⁹ The failure to deal properly with the Kornilov revolt (only thirty were officially arrested) left most conservative forces intact. There is some justification in this accusation. Officers' unions were not banned, although many fell inactive. Landowners and nobles continued as before, albeit fighting a losing battle. Homeowners were active, although they also struggled. In Orel, a council meeting of the local Union of Homeowners discussed the tax imposed by the town Duma for providing security for private homes against crime and other threats. It was illegal and backdated to the beginning of the year. The militia rarely fulfilled its duty (and were often not at their posts), and there were limited numbers of night guards, leaving some flats unguarded. Yet, the only action that the union could take was to gather more evidence of the problems.¹⁹⁰ In Odessa, infighting in the aftermath of a contentious settlement with janitors led to resignations from the council of the local union.¹⁹¹ Some conservatives even increased their activities. Purishkevich was imprisoned after the revolt, but on his release he launched a daily version of his newspaper, *Narodnyi tribun*, which had hitherto appeared in a one-off edition in May. Forty-two editions were printed from 5 September to 24 October, edited by his brother.¹⁹² He also founded the innocuously named Society of Russian State Maps, ostensibly a non-political organization, but which contained a mixture of officers, Junkers, students, and monarchists who hatched

¹⁸⁷ *Zemledelets*, No. 10, 16 September 1917, 2.

¹⁸⁸ For e.g., *Derevnaia pravda*, No. 4, 12 October 1917.

¹⁸⁹ Ivanov, *Kontrevoliutsiia*, 214–32; G. Zhuravlev, 'K voprosy o vtorom kontrrevoliutsionnom voennom zagovore nakanune velikoi oktiabr'skoi sotsialisticheskoi revoliutsii', *Istoricheskie zapiski*, 56 (1956), 278–94.

¹⁹⁰ *Golos naroda* [Orel'], No. 118, 16 September 1917.

¹⁹¹ *Odesskii listok*, No. 222, 10 September 1917, 3.

¹⁹² I. Rozental', 'Purishkevich — izvestnyi i neizvestnyi (k voprosu ob evoliutsii pravogo radikalizma v Rossii)', in *Problemy politicheskoi i ekonomicheskoi istorii Rossii* (Moscow, 1998), 294.

plans for future revolts. Purishkevich boasted that it could call on the support of 2,000 officers in Petrograd and 7,000 across the front, but this seems widely inaccurate for such a minor body.¹⁹³

Nevertheless, there was less scope nationally for elites to discuss their views. On 14–19 September, socialist parties, soviets, locally elected bodies, trade unions, cooperatives, and other ‘popular’ bodies met in the Democratic Conference. There was no place for liberals and conservatives. Even though the conference produced little beyond acrimonious debates, it was the first time that elites had been excluded from the corporate democracy of 1917. The Kadets retained members in the new coalition government that emerged, but few had much confidence in it. Similarly, a belated concession to popular demands saw the abolition of the Duma on 6 October, removing a vocal forum for elites.¹⁹⁴

Elites were better served in the subsequent Provisional Council of the Russian Republic or ‘Preparliament’ that formed in Petrograd on 7 October and lasted until 25 October. It had the same aim as the Moscow Conference; namely, to strengthen a weak government by bringing groups of various political hues together. To avoid the ‘right wing’ that enjoyed such an audible presence in August, ‘bourgeois’ elements were only granted 167 of the 555 seats (30%). Of these, fifty-five went to the Kadets, thirty-four to representatives of trade and industry, twenty-two to Cossacks, and fifteen to the Congress of Public Figures. The rest were shared out among smaller organizations. The Union of Landowners did well to gain seven (but less than the twenty it had received in August), especially since its members were also represented elsewhere (for example, Savich sat as a public figure). Officers were the main losers, with only the Soviet of Officers’ Deputies receiving a place. Rodzianko and Shul’gin were refused entry, despite Rodzianko’s position as the president of the council of the Congress of Public Figures.¹⁹⁵ Other property-owning groups were assumed to be represented by the Kadets, which aroused the ire of the Union of Homeowners. The union protested vehemently that it deserved twenty places to compare with the number received by industrialists.¹⁹⁶ Overall, though, the Preparliament followed the Democratic Conference in failing to agree on anything worthwhile.

The best indication of the mood of elites by this stage was the second Congress of Public Figures in Moscow on 12–14 October. Its composition was similar to August’s, although the military was less visible in the aftermath of Kornilov. Rodzianko continued as chairman and, in his opening speech, clearly outlined the country’s continuing slide, but he drew hope from the growing consensus on the dangers between the congress and moderate socialists. Yet, the rest was more of the same: continuing the war to victory, combating the disintegration of the

¹⁹³ S. Stepanov, *Chernaia sotnia* (2 edition: Moscow, 2005), 461.

¹⁹⁴ *RPG*, III, 1724.

¹⁹⁵ S. Rudneva, *Predparlament: Oktjabr’ 1917g.* (Moscow, 2006), 93–5, 101.

¹⁹⁶ GARF, f. 1778, op. 1, d. 348, ll. 1–5.

military, limiting the influence of soviets and committees, and maintaining law and order.¹⁹⁷

The congress only proposed one constructive measure. It argued that the groups present should participate in the Constituent Assembly elections on a 'national statesmanlike platform' and, rather than competing against each other, they should merge lists of candidates wherever possible, even with like-minded socialists. This issue had been discussed in a meeting of the council of the congress on 28 September, which had formed an eight-man commission to oversee its coordination. This was headed by S. M. Leont'ev, a former Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs in 1917, and included representatives from landowners (L'vov), the Church (Rudnev, who was also in the Union of Landowners), Kadets, industrialists, and others. It then contacted officers and other 'bourgeois' figures, continuing its work after the October Revolution.¹⁹⁸

This coordination was already apparent. The Union of Landowners had been focused on the elections since the summer, and its strategy was finalized in early July based on plans by G. A. Blank from Tambov. The union would appoint three to four people in each *volost* who would be provided with a list of all landowners obtained from the *zemstvo*. They would verify that list, establish the number of people in each household, and canvas them to ascertain voting intentions. They would create lists of *khutoriane* and *otrubniki* who were likely to sympathize with the union's aims and vote for them. They would then distribute lists of candidates.¹⁹⁹ This sense of purpose may have convinced other groups to support them. Marshals of the nobility in Saratov on 16 September decided to support the union's energetic campaign since their interests coincided. They would donate up to 20,000 rubles and urged all landowners to join the union.²⁰⁰ Elsewhere, K. I. Kozakov, the secretary to the main council of the union, and a member of the Union of Trade and Industry, visited numerous cities to discuss the elections with industrialists. If the itinerary agreed with industrialists was fulfilled, in October 1917 (prior to the revolution) he travelled around the provinces of Tula, Orel, Kursk, and Voronezh, speaking at provincial and *uezd* towns. A leaflet promoting his talk by the Maloarkhangel'sk trade and industry committee (between the cities of Orel and Kursk) encouraged all members to attend given the 'importance of this report [on the assembly] in the current situation.'²⁰¹

Some problems did remain. The Kadets, for example, had been experiencing weakening political influence throughout 1917 and were keen to reverse this trend. Consequently, some elites found a cautious reception when they suggested collaboration. The Union of Landowners of South Russia was aware that the

¹⁹⁷ RPG, III, 1745–53; *Rech'*, No. 242, 14 October 1917, 4; No. 243, 15 October 1917, 3.

¹⁹⁸ RPG, III, 1752; Laverychev, *Barrikad*, 228–30.

¹⁹⁹ OR RGB, f. 114, k. 2, ed. khnan. 20, ll. 3ob–4, 41–42.

²⁰⁰ E. Barinova, *Rossiiskoe dvorianstvo v nachale XX veka* (Moscow, 2008), 322.

²⁰¹ OR RGB, f. 114, k. 6, ed. khnan. 9, ll. 1, 3.

main council of the Union of Landowners wanted branches to remain true to the union's aims rather than seek short-term success, but members were convinced that they needed an alliance with a political party to achieve any electoral success. The Kadet party was the only option, but was focused on selecting the most popular candidates. Thus, the party was happy to select peasant owners, since these were well known in the villages and could connect with voters' aspirations, but it would not consider large landowners. Moreover, in this region at least, the Kadets were unhappy with an alliance with what they still saw as a 'class-based' body. Both continued to hold talks, but the Kadets' hesitation fuelled the union's own doubts about uniting with a party that did not entirely share its views.²⁰²

These types of conflict reflect the fact that there is little evidence to suggest that liberals and conservatives were preparing another 'plot' against the government. The 'conservative movement' did continue after Kornilov's failure and there were still calls for strong government, but as many of these came from socialists as conservatives. Equally, elites were still working and complaining together, but the over-riding impression is of futility. Few had faith in the government in any case and, instead, elites began to share popular expectations of imminent political change, either the long-awaited Constituent Assembly or a strongly-rumoured Bolshevik coup. As October progressed, they and other groups increasingly found themselves passively awaiting further political developments.

²⁰² *Odesskii listok*, No. 243, 6 October 1917, 2. Some elites also carefully selected candidates; the Union of Homeowners in Iaroslavl vetted potential candidates against certain, unspecified criteria; *Golos* [Iaroslavl], No. 215, 1 October 1917.

The October Revolution

The October Revolution was over in Petrograd before most Russians had realized what was happening. Rumours of impending Bolshevik action may have been circulating for weeks, whilst discussions by Bolsheviks about the desirability of seizing power were hardly secret, but events exploded suddenly. On 24 October, the Prime Minister, A. F. Kerenskii, decided to reassert government control, closing down the printing presses of two Bolshevik newspapers, whilst unusual troop movements around the capital revived popular suspicions. The Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets was due to open the following day and was expected to vote to transfer all power to the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, which by this stage was dominated by the Bolsheviks. But even if fears that Kerenskii was intending to move against the Soviet and not just the Bolsheviks were true, it quickly became clear that the government was unable to muster sufficient numbers of reliable troops, especially in comparison with the swift support given to the Soviet. On 25 October, the realization that the government was much weaker than expected and the arrival of Lenin galvanized the Bolsheviks. By midday, they had proclaimed Soviet power and Kerenskii fled in search of reliable troops.

The action was largely limited to the corridors of power. Princess N. A. Meshcherskaia, for example, went to the opera on the evening of 25 October. Apart from trouble with the lights and a noticeably strange atmosphere, it passed normally. As she left, she was confronted by the sound of machine guns. The tram was full of armed sailors and she could see crowds gathered around bonfires outside the Winter Palace. She was glad to reach home safely, albeit with the sound of gunfire still echoing around.¹ No one knew what was happening, including ministers, who were arrested in the palace on 26 October. Arguments in the Congress of Soviets over the next two days ensured that an all-Bolshevik government emerged on 27 October. Whilst other socialists opposed Bolshevik aggression, they too were unwilling to support the government, hoping instead for a coalition socialist government.²

Military leaders at Stavka had discussed what could be done to suppress an uprising, but ended up doing nothing. It was unlikely that many soldiers could

¹ N. Krivosheina, *Chetyre treti nashei zhizni* (Paris, 1984), 73–8.

² R. Wade, *The Russian Revolution, 1917* (2 edition: Cambridge, 2005), 235–47.

have been mobilized against the Bolsheviks, but there was a lack of purpose among a leadership that had been decimated after the Kornilov revolt. General N. N. Dukhonin, the Commander-in-Chief, feared destroying the officer corps, and irreparably harming the army and the war effort, whilst several key officers remained neutral or pro-Bolshevik. General M. D. Bonch-Bruевич, commander of the garrison at Mogilev, was pro-Bolshevik, whilst General A. V. Cheremisov, Commander of the Northern Front (the closest to Petrograd) refused to act. He argued on 27 October that it was a political struggle: the army should focus on the war, and maintaining discipline and fighting effectiveness. His front was in an exceptionally difficult position regarding agitation and he threatened to resign rather than risk further unrest—inevitable given that the soldiers were pro-Bolshevik. Stavka viewed Cheremisov's actions as treacherous, but could do nothing.³

After fleeing the capital, Kerenskii only managed to muster a small Cossack force under General P. N. Krasnov, who only offered half-hearted support. At the time, Krasnov noted that freedom needed defending, and that anarchy threatened the Constituent Assembly and Russia.⁴ Later, he recognized that Kerenskii distrusted him as an old-regime general and that Cheremisov was right to wonder whether the Bolsheviks would be any worse. He had not acted for Kerenskii, who he detested, but 'for the motherland', which appeared to be 'with' Kerenskii and had not found anyone more capable.⁵ But Russia was not 'with' Kerenskii and Krasnov's effort failed from a lack of support. His advance was defeated by 30 October and, facing a counter-attack, he reached an agreement with the Bolsheviks. In the city, small groups of Junkers and officers led by Colonel G. P. Polkovnikov seized the telephone exchange and other strategic points on 29 October, hoping to link up with Krasnov, but this revolt did not last a day. Outbreaks of vicious fighting claimed around 200 lives, but resistance proved futile.⁶

The spread of Bolshevik power across Russia took weeks depending on the composition of the local soviet, the presence of troops, and the determination of local leaders. In some places, a favourable soviet permitted local Bolsheviks to declare soviet power on 26–27 October and enforce it through loyal soldiers. In larger, diverse cities, there was active resistance. Moscow, for example, saw sustained fighting. Local Bolsheviks had been unprepared for events; their leaders were at the Congress of Soviets in Petrograd, supporting troops were not mobilized, and their opponents had mustered 10,000 men. These were soon dwarfed by pro-soviet forces, but the fighting lasted until 28 October, claiming hundreds of lives. By 2 November, after a week in power, the Bolsheviks had

³ 'Oktiabr' na fronte', *Krasnyi arkhiv*, 23 (1927), 176, 179; 'Oktiabr' na fronte', *Krasnyi arkhiv*, 24 (1927), 95–7.

⁴ *Oktiabr'skoe vooryzhennoe vosstanie v Petrograde* (Moscow, 1957), 593–4.

⁵ P. Krasnov, 'Na vnutrennem fronte', *Arkhiv Russkoi revoliutsii*, 1 (1922), 149.

⁶ *Oktiabr'skoe vooryzhennoe*, 816–43.

nominal control of large cities and major towns across Russia, as well as support from soldiers across the front. Subsequent weeks and months saw them extend this into rural Russia, but the process was slow. Provisional Government officials remained in post in many places well into November and the situation fluctuated widely.⁷

The lack of sustained resistance seems surprising given the ferocity of the later civil war, but it reflected widespread sentiments at the time. Elites were united in their disillusionment with the Provisional Government. By October, they blamed their problems on its incompetence, earlier idealism, and socialist ministers, and believed that there was little hope of improvement under Kerenskii. The Bolsheviks were less agreeable, but few Russians expected them to hold on to power for long. At worst, the elections to the Constituent Assembly would force them out; at best, their government would collapse in days. Meanwhile, they had forced change upon an ineffective, yet surprisingly persistent government. Elites hoped that further political turmoil would force politicians (even socialists) to unite behind their demands for strong government, even a dictatorship. However, the Bolsheviks survived the first shaky weeks and began to consolidate. This posed a massive threat. Elites were under no illusions: the Bolsheviks opposed their ideals, position within society, and even their existence.

BOLSHEVISM IN PRACTICE

The key factor was the aggressiveness of Bolshevik views on elites and the extent to which they were prepared to implement them. The Bolsheviks exemplified the intolerant idealism of many revolutionaries, seeing the world as forming two camps—friends and enemies—which were largely determined by social class. This placed the tsarist elite firmly in opposition, unlike before, when definitions of who was ‘for’ and who was ‘against’ the revolution were far more fluid. Moreover, as early as 1905, Lenin argued that only a ‘full-scale civil war’ would completely destroy the apparatus of bourgeois state power. This war needed to be ruthless and wide-ranging.⁸ Thus, whilst other socialists feared the destructiveness of civil war, Lenin felt that it was inevitable and the only means of completely destroying the class enemy, securing the transfer of land and property to the labouring classes. Class war, like all warfare, would require violence and sacrifice to emerge victorious. Violence was far from unique in Russian history: state violence, secret police, censorship, surveillance, and terrorism had existed under Tsarism, whilst the Provisional Government had resorted to violence to control social unrest. The Bolsheviks, however, substantially extended these activities.

⁷ Wade, *Russian Revolution*, 251–7.

⁸ I. Getzler, ‘Lenin’s Conception of Revolution as Civil War’, in I. Thatcher (ed.), *Regime and Society in Twentieth-Century Russia* (Basingstoke, 1999), 107–17.

In their hands, violence became 'a tool for fashioning an idealized image of a better, purer society' and a way of weeding out socially harmful elements.⁹ The Bolsheviks were not interested in pacifying or suppressing discontent as their predecessors had been; they wanted to eliminate those involved. They ensured that class warfare was something that Russians could embrace, participate in, and benefit from. The massive seizure of property from elites, for example, tapped into personal greed as well as widespread popular hatred of the wealth and privileges of former elites.

The Bolsheviks did not waste time. On 26 October 1917, decrees on land and peace were issued. The former removed privately owned land, whilst the latter renounced the war aims of officers. A day later, a decree on the press formed the basis for reintroducing censorship. Subsequent decrees established workers' control over factories (14 November), nationalized all banks (14 December), and abolished ranks within the military, introducing the election of officers (16 December).¹⁰ These took time to have an impact, but they undermined the position of elites, and attacked their income and savings. Furthermore, on 11 November, the Bolsheviks did what the Provisional Government had conspicuously failed to do: they abolished all classes and class-based privileges, distinctions, and institutions, alongside all civil ranks.¹¹

The impact of these decrees on specific elite groups is discussed below, but elites became known in popular discourse as 'former people' [*byvshie liudi*], attacked due to their privileged positions under the tsarist regime. In July 1918, all 'non-toiling' social groups were denied the right to vote by the new constitution (or disenfranchised [*lishentsy*]). This included those who employed hired labour for profit, those living from unearned income (investments), private traders, employees or agents of the former police, members of the ruling house, priests, and others. There was nothing worth voting for, but *lishentsy* were discriminated against in everyday life: they were more likely to lose access to jobs, rations, housing, and education, and paid higher taxes. They were arrested, imprisoned, exiled, and subjected to forced labour. Amendments to the constitution in 1924 and 1926 targeted not only those who were currently living from hired labour or unearned income, but those who had done so prior to the revolution to address the fact that many former people had since been forced into 'toiling' occupations.¹²

⁹ P. Holquist, 'State Violence as Technique: The Logic of Violence in Soviet Totalitarianism', in A. Weiner (ed.), *Landscaping the Human Garden* (Stanford, 2003), 20.

¹⁰ R. Wade (ed.), *Documents of Soviet History. Vol. I: The Triumph of Bolshevism, 1917–19* (Gulf Breeze, 1991), 6–13, 67–9.

¹¹ J. Bunyan and H. Fisher, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917–1918* (Stanford, 1961), 279–80.

¹² See A. Dobkin, 'Lishentsy: 1918–1936', in *Zven'ia: Istoricheskii al'manakh* (2 volumes: Moscow, 1992), II, 600–28; T. Smirnova, 'Byvshie liudi' Sovetskoi Rossii: Strategii vyzhivaniia i puti integratsii. 1917–1936 gody (Moscow, 2003).

The justice system was restructured to enforce these measures. 'Revolutionary people's courts', 'investigative commissions', and other bodies emerged in working-class areas in major cities by November 1917. These were self-consciously 'proletarian', dispensing 'revolutionary' justice, rather than the oppressive laws of the old regime. Judges were elected and lacked legal training, there was public participation in the process from delivering prosecuting speeches to suggesting punishment, and judgements were based on 'revolutionary legality'.¹³ The Bolsheviks tried to centralize these developments on 24 November, issuing a decree formally abolishing the old justice system and establishing new people's courts. These were based on the principles above, but relied on old laws where they had not been annulled by the new regime or did not contradict revolutionary ideals.¹⁴

This decree also encouraged soviets to establish revolutionary tribunals to deal with counter-revolutionary threats, profiteering, speculation, sabotage, and other 'political' acts. The tribunal under the Petrograd Soviet was established on 3 December, Moscow followed on 5 December, and many other towns had a tribunal by early 1918. Penalties initially ranged from four years' imprisonment with forced labour to fines or public censure.¹⁵ The chairman of the first tribunal in Petrograd, I. P. Zhukov, drew direct comparisons with the tribunals of the French Revolution and promised it would be the 'strictest appraiser and defender of the rights and customs of the Russian Revolution' and that it would 'strictly judge all those who act against the will of the people' but would be a 'firm defender' of the innocent.¹⁶ Tribunals were outside the confines of the normal legal system and the definition of counter-revolution was left deliberately vague, encompassing intention as much as action. It could be any thought or action that attacked the achievements and goals of the revolution, from political plots to economic sabotage.

Further decrees extended the regime's ability to deal with counter-revolution. On 7 December 1917, an All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for the Struggle with Counter-Revolution and Sabotage (Cheka) was created, essentially reviving the old political police. Under the command of F. E. Dzerzhinskii, it was to conduct preliminary investigations into all acts of counter-revolution and sabotage before bringing them before a revolutionary tribunal. It was envisaged as the proactive arm of the tribunals, preventing counter-revolution from occurring and infiltrating those groups involved. Inspired by ongoing resistance to the new regime from civil servants, its preamble initiated the registration of all wealthy residents (the natural source of resistance) with house committees, who

¹³ M. Kozhevnikov, *Istoriia sovetskogo suda 1917–1956 gody* (Moscow, 1957), 15–18; S. Kucherov, *The Organs of Soviet Administration of Justice: Their History and Operation* (Leiden, 1970), 18.

¹⁴ Wade, *Documents*, 52–3. Wade gives the date incorrectly as 22 November.

¹⁵ E. Gorodetskii, *Rozhdenie sovetskogo gosudarstva, 1917–1918* (Moscow, 1987), 204.

¹⁶ GARF, f. 1074, op. 1, d. 10, l. 20.

would forward their details to the state. A tribunal for the press was created on 18 December 1917, which targeted the printing of 'false' reports, whilst the following day saw the publication of detailed instructions on the jurisdiction, composition, powers, and processes of all revolutionary tribunals.¹⁷

The first investigations focused on those who had resisted the October Revolution on the streets of Petrograd. There was also an effort to penalize acts of 'sabotage' carried out in various ministries as officials passively resisted the new authorities. Fear of sabotage and the dereliction of duty spread to the military, where the Bolsheviks struggled to establish control over the military leadership. Elites were obvious targets, from former ministers and officials to nobles and officers, and the issue of class comes through strongly.

On 10 December 1917, Countess S. V. Panina, Deputy Minister of Education in the last Provisional Government, became the first case heard by the main tribunal in Petrograd. Panina admitted to refusing to hand over 93,000 rubles when the Bolsheviks took over the ministry in November, declaring that it was only accessible to the legal authority, the forthcoming Constituent Assembly. This was criminal sabotage according to the tribunal.¹⁸ Yet, there were numerous cases of sabotage, so why was Panina selected for the first trial? Soviet historians emphasized the sums involved and that this money was desperately needed. This is partly true, but Panina's membership of the central committee of the Kadet party must have been important, along with her class background.¹⁹ Coinciding with a concerted effort by the Bolsheviks to suppress the Kadets ahead of the Constituent Assembly, and coming soon after the abolition of social classes, Panina represented several of the regime's enemies. Nevertheless, the court struggled to find individuals willing to testify against Panina: as a couple of witnesses favourably noted, she had a long history of charitable work and she had not actually stolen the money for herself. When an attack emerged, it focused on her social background. Her accuser urged the court not to see her as an individual, but as a representative of a class and a party. The court must act as this trial symbolized the wider struggle against opposition to the October Revolution. The ideals of the working classes must be supported. The verdict saw Panina publicly censored and ordered to remain in prison until she had returned the money. She refused, but supporters raised the sum by 19 December and she was freed.²⁰

The Bolsheviks also targeted anti-soviet organizations. Initial focus was on extreme right-wing groups, and they took over existing investigations into the

¹⁷ Wade, *Documents*, 62–4, 72–5.

¹⁸ GARF, f. 1074, op. 1, d. 10, ll. 1–1ob.

¹⁹ Contrast the explanation of E. Finn ('Pervyi revoliutsionnyi tribunal', *Sovetskaia iustitsiia*, 8 [1977], 18) with È. Ershova ('Pervyi protsess Petrogradskogo revtribunala v 1917 godu', in *Neizvestnye stranitsy istorii Verkhnevolzh'ia* [Tver', 1994], 91) and A. Lindenmeyr ('The First Soviet Political Trial: Countess Sofia Panina before the Petrograd Revolutionary Tribunal', *The Russian Review*, 60, 4 [2001], 513–14).

²⁰ GARF, f. 1074, op. 1, d. 10, ll. 20–6.

Union of Russian People and Black Hundreds. These groups no longer existed in any meaningful sense and the Bolsheviks largely swept up individuals. Several minor but aggressive newspapers persisted. One of these, *Malen'kaia gazeta*, had been repeatedly closed by Kerenskii, but reopened as *Rus, Novaiia rus* and, after October, *Piter*. Its leader on 17 December simply asked, 'When will the Bolsheviks leave?', whilst every edition attacked the new decrees and the deteriorating economic situation.²¹ Closing the paper again was considered pointless, so its editors were arrested and tried by the tribunal.²²

The regime took the threat from monarchists seriously, despite their lack of popular support. V. M. Purishkevich's right-wing newspaper, *Narodnyi tribun*, was suppressed on 26–7 October. He and other associates were arrested with fourteen of them standing trial on 28 December for plotting to overthrow the Bolsheviks. He was accused of heading an organization that held meetings prior to the October Revolution discussing the need for a strong government, preferably some kind of monarchy. It had plotted against the Bolsheviks, taking part in the Junkers' revolt in Petrograd on 28–9 October. After its failure, Purishkevich had communicated with General A. M. Kaledin and the Don Cossacks on 3 November, stockpiling weapons in the hope of uniting with Kaledin at some stage against the Bolsheviks.²³

The extent to which there was an organized plot against the Bolsheviks is questionable. As Purishkevich noted, the only evidence that the authorities had was the letter to Kaledin, a few arms, and an address book.²⁴ In addition, each of the fourteen defendants was only accused of a specific aspect of the plot. Purishkevich had created and financed the organization, but not participated in the revolt. Others had participated in the revolt, but were not members of his organization. Some had only acquired arms for the plot or hosted meetings. The accused did not deny that an organization existed, but they denied being members or knowing anything other than vague rumours about it. Colonel F. V. Vinberg noted that a committee had been elected by the meetings, although he claimed not to know who was on it.²⁵ In his later memoirs, he vehemently denied that an organization had existed and argued that the trial had been cobbled together. The meetings were informal affairs in late September–early October, discussing the Provisional Government not the Bolsheviks. He had not met most of the others since and, whilst they were all monarchists, they held different visions of the future, from restoring Nicholas II to a constitutional monarchy or a dictatorship. Vinberg believed that one of the defendants was a provocateur who had denounced them, whilst one of the lesser figures was a

²¹ *Piter*, No. 5, 17 December 1917, 1 [a copy is in GARF, f. 337, op. 1, d. 20, ll. 4–5ob].

²² GARF, f. 337, op. 1, d. 23, l. 3.

²³ GARF, f. 336, op. 1, d. 277, ll. 1–3ob.

²⁴ '“27-go fevralia my mogli stat' grazhdanami”: Tiuremnye zapiski V. M. Purishkevicha. Dekabr' 1917–mart 1918g.', *Istoricheskiu arkhiv*, 5–6 (1996), 133. He saw the court as a political tool (122).

²⁵ GARF, f. 336, op. 1, d. 277, l. 68ob.

speculator and petty criminal who had been included solely to discredit them in front of the court.²⁶ Vinberg's account is problematic, but this trial was an early example of Bolshevik expectations of 'plots', 'conspiracies', and networks, rather than individual resistance—practices that spiralled out of control in the 1930s. A few defendants had participated in the Junkers' revolt of their own accord but, facing growing resistance, the Bolsheviks expected organized plots. Tribunals investigated friends, family, acquaintances, and other links, however innocent.

The investigations were exhaustive, but the trials were often chaotic. Officials had no legal experience and did not act according to legal 'norms': no accusations were filed, documents were often unsigned, copies were used instead of originals, and they were handwritten and often illegible. Defendants frequently mingled together in prison. The tribunals were intended to be public events so that people could become involved in the process of upholding justice. But there were no scripts, unlike later trials, and the public behaved erratically. Bolsheviks complained that observers were dominated by 'bourgeois' sympathizers of the defendants, but speeches of support could come from ordinary workers, as in Panina's case. It was also not clear whether Panina was on trial, her social class, the Kadets, or the former government. The Kadets saw the result as a triumph. Purishkevich's trial saw several lengthy, pro-monarchist speeches. Consequently, the regime felt compelled to hold most subsequent tribunals behind closed doors.

Furthermore, judges rarely delivered the harsh sentences that many expected. Panina was publicly censored and quickly freed. On 3 January 1918, Purishkevich received the maximum four years' forced labour in prison, whilst Vinberg and two others received three years. All could seek early release after a year, conditional on good behaviour. Several fellow defendants received a few months, two were released immediately into the custody of their parents on account of their young age, one was freed, and another was committed to hospital due to poor health.²⁷ Vinberg felt that his sentence was harsh, but no defendant actually served more than a few months. Purishkevich's wife and son sent several appeals, testifying to the poor health of his son. On 17 April 1918, in response to Purishkevich's desire to spend time with his seriously ill son, he was visited by a deputation that included Dzerzhinskii. Purishkevich promised not to participate in political life and it was recommended that he be released.²⁸ Several other defendants also appealed on health grounds. A couple of weeks later, Purishkevich benefited from a general amnesty announced on 1 May 1918 by the Petrograd Soviet that freed minor criminals and political prisoners, whilst halving the sentences for serious crimes.²⁹ This amnesty was part of the annual May Day celebrations. Numerous

²⁶ F. Vinberg, *V plenu u 'obez'ian' (zapiski 'kontr-revoliutsionera')* (Kiev, 1918), 14–17, 60–1, 65.

²⁷ GARF, f. 336, op. 1, d. 277, ll. 6–6ob.

²⁸ GARF, f. 336, op. 1, d. 277, ll. 43–44ob.

²⁹ A. Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks in Power* (Bloomington and Indiana, 2007), 222.

prisoners appealed and most were freed; a pre-printed release form with gaps for their names was used to ease the process.³⁰

Soviet commentators have seen these sentences as evidence of the 'humane' nature of revolutionary justice or the 'inexperience' of the courts. At the time, though, leading Bolsheviks were unhappy and tried to improve their effectiveness. There were too many tribunals and they were bogged down with mundane cases. Prior to March 1918, for example, only 3% of cases investigated by the provincial tribunal in Ufa involved 'counter-revolutionary crimes', whilst nearly 22% concerned illicit brewing. On 17 May 1918, tribunals were limited to large towns, industrial centres, and major railway junctions. Mundane crimes were transferred to the people's courts. On 29 May, a special tribunal for serious cases was established under the All-Russian Executive Committee of the Soviet in Petrograd. Tribunals were streamlined and given a strict timetable under which to investigate cases, hold trials, and enact sentences. On 16 June, tribunals were given the right to impose the death penalty.³¹

The special tribunal immediately stated its intent in the case of the Commander of the Baltic Fleet, Captain A. M. Shchastnyi. Arrested on 27 May 1918 after growing conflict with the Minister of War, L. D. Trotskii, he was accused of conspiring against soviet power. His trial on 20–21 June was manipulated so that Trotskii was the only witness. He was duly convicted and, to the surprise of all involved, received the death penalty.³² Nevertheless, statistics suggest that this was more of a grand statement than a sizeable policy change. Across thirty-two tribunals in Russia in 1918, 73% of 4,483 cases resulted in convictions; 37% of sentences involved a prison term and forced labour; 33% a fine; and only 0.3% of cases (fourteen) pronounced the death penalty. The first half of 1919 saw an increase to 14% of sentences resulting in executions, but it declined again in subsequent years. Meanwhile, 46% of prison terms in 1919–20 were for less than a year (sometimes only a couple of days).³³

As the civil war intensified, Bolsheviks increasingly looked elsewhere for rapid and brutal justice, and more power was handed to the Cheka. It formed local branches from March 1918, spread across frontier zones and railway junctions throughout the summer, and then into *uezdy*, and post and telegraph stations. This culminated in September 1918, when an attempt on Lenin's life and the murder of a leading Cheka official, M. S. Uritskii, led to the so-called Red Terror when the Cheka was given the right to shoot opponents summarily from 5 September.³⁴ As the pressures of civil war increased, violence grew. A local Cheka official in Morshanskii *uezd* (Tambov province) promised on 22 September that

³⁰ For e.g., GARF, f. 336, op. 1, d. 73, l. 1ob; d. 75, l. 1.

³¹ N. Krylenko, *Sudoustroistvo RSFSR* (Moscow, 1923), 298–301; Kozhevnikov, *Sovetskogo suda*, 43–7.

³² A. Rabinowitch, 'The Shchastny File: Trotsky and the Case of the Hero of the Baltic Fleet', *The Russian Review*, 58, 4 (1999), 615–34.

³³ Kozhevnikov, *Sovetskogo suda*, 86.

³⁴ Wade, *Documents*, 214–15.

'if they [the bourgeoisie] strike us on one cheek, we will return it a hundred times over across their entire body' and 'we must answer each blow with one ten times stronger'.³⁵ September saw searches, arrests, and occasional murders turn into sustained repression. On 1 November 1918, in an echo of the arguments used against Panina, M. Ia. Latsis, a Cheka leader, argued that:

Already, we are not fighting individuals, we are exterminating the bourgeoisie as a class . . . Do not look for evidence that the accused acted against Soviet power in deed or word. Firstly, you should ask him: to what class does he belong, what are his origins, what is his education and profession. It is these questions that should determine the fate of the accused. This is the meaning and essence of the Red Terror.³⁶

Nevertheless, the Bolsheviks could not create a workers' state overnight and had no intention of doing so. Lenin envisaged mobilizing existing institutions and personnel—this is why sabotage and passive resistance were such a concern. Most workers and peasants remained illiterate, inexperienced, or both, and the regime needed skilled individuals to fulfil the demands of a rapidly expanding bureaucracy. Former tsarist elites were the obvious choice, and the Bolsheviks needed to find a balance between removing any remaining political threats, whilst utilizing the experiences and skills of elites. They did this primarily by attacking what unity remained among elites, whether in the form of their political parties (the Kadets by this stage), their organizations (various unions), or class-based institutions (noble assemblies).

NOBLES

Noble associations were in disarray by October, although some areas fared worse than others. In Tambov, the noble assembly was active right up to the October Revolution, vocally opposing the peasant movement alongside the Union of Landowners. Even so, its meetings highlighted the struggle that noble associations faced in retaining their property and continuing other activities, such as aid work.³⁷ In Kursk, nobles were already contemplating life without the assembly in late August. They proposed to transfer its property to individuals as a better way of defending it from confiscation.³⁸ This was an issue that the United Nobility had discussed since May, but its attempts to establish the noble estate as a legal society, and thereby, they hoped, protect its property, were still ongoing

³⁵ *Ezhenedel'nik VChK*, No. 1, 22 September 1918. This newspaper was published by the Cheka and is reprinted in its entirety, along with others, in *VChK upolnomochena soobshchit . . . 1918g.* (Moscow, 2004), 79.

³⁶ *Krasnyi terror*, No. 1, 1 November 1917, in *VChK upolnomochena soobshchit*, 275–6.

³⁷ *Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie v Tambovskoi gubernii (1917–1918). Dokumenty i materialy* (Moscow, 2003), 180–1.

³⁸ GARF, f. 117, op. 1, d. 683, ll. 56–7.

in October.³⁹ The abolition of the nobility on 11 November, along with their associations, property, and even titles (princes and the like), was the final blow. The property of noble associations was to be handed over to the *zemstva*, but these bodies were themselves being superseded by local soviets. Local authorities reiterated this decree over the following weeks and some, such as the executive committee of the western region, permitted greater leeway in seizing property by vaguely noting that it should be transferred to 'local authorities'.⁴⁰

It is hard to chart the impact on the ground, but nobles could do little in response.⁴¹ According to Countess O. G. Sheremeteva, for example, the Moscow nobility heard about the decree three days later and hastily arranged a special assembly on 15 November. Her husband, Count B. B. Sheremetev, attended, but the assembly was dispersed by Bolsheviks.⁴² Generally, the decree accelerated a process that had already started. Property belonging to local noble associations had been seized throughout 1917 and the decree was the final straw: most noble buildings were being used by government bodies by 1918. Elite schools were slowly closed or transformed to take in non-noble pupils, whilst the size and central location of much noble property meant that it was in demand. In Petrograd, for example, the government received a request from the World Christian Union of Young People on 11 December to use the noble assembly building for a central club. It was already being used by the city's garrison, however, and the government advised the union to discuss it with them.⁴³ In Samara, nobles assembled on 30 December 1917 and discussed the fate of their museum, which they still controlled. Hoping that the regime would soon collapse, they decided to transfer it temporarily to the town museum to preserve it from 'uncultured elements'.⁴⁴ In this case, nobles were still meeting and managing some of their property, but this was probably abnormal. Most local noble associations seem to have ceased functioning once the Bolsheviks had consolidated their authority, which happened in provincial towns from late 1917 into early 1918. Any continued activity was strongly stamped down on. In Moscow, for example, rumours of the Tsar's murder led to a funeral service in the church next to the noble assembly on 21 July 1918, which was attended by many nobles. Conversations were dominated by politics and the

³⁹ GARF, f. 434, op. 1, d. 340, ll. 40–44ob.

⁴⁰ *Velikaia oktiabr'skaia sotsialisticheskaia revoliutsiia v Belorussii* (2 volumes: Minsk, 1957), II, 640.

⁴¹ This was particularly true since nobles became hated figures in popular culture; S. Chuikina, *Dvorian skaia pamiat': 'Byushie' v sovetskom gorode (Leningrad, 1920–30e gody)* (St Petersburg, 2006), 42–6.

⁴² O. Sheremeteva, *Dnevnik i vospominaniia* (Moscow, 2005), 27.

⁴³ *Protokoly zasedanii Soveta Narodnykh Komissarov RSFSR. Noiabr' 1917–mart 1918gg.* (Moscow, 2006), 101.

⁴⁴ O. Kurseeva, 'Bor'ba korporativnykh organizatsii dvorianstva protiv krest'ianskogo divzheniia', in G. Gerasimenko (ed), *Krest'ianstvo povolzh'ia v oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii i grazhdanskoi voine* (Kuibyshev, 1983), 53–4.

regime quickly acted, arresting the officiating priest, and searching the flat of A. D. Samarin, the president of the United Nobility. The priest was shot, whilst Samarin fled.⁴⁵

The spread of Bolshevik power also accelerated the removal of nobles from positions of authority. There were not many left in the Provisional Government, but fourteen of the fifteen ministers of the last cabinet were arrested on 26 October (only Kerenskii escaped), along with other senior officials. One deputy minister, Prince G. N. Tumanov, was killed. Most of them were freed by March 1918,⁴⁶ but former ministers remained prominent targets. On 12 March 1918, Prince G. E. L'vov was arrested in Tiumen, and accused (along with several other nobles) of having links to anti-Bolshevik groups in Moscow and organizing counter-revolution. L'vov denied this and was released in July.⁴⁷ Others were less fortunate. On 25 July 1918, I. G. Shcheglovitov (Minister of Justice, 1906–1915) was found guilty of suppressing revolutionary parties, aiding the secret police, enacting excessively strict repression, indulging monarchist groups, and failing to suppress anti-Jewish pogroms.⁴⁸ He was executed on 5 September by the Cheka as the Red Terror started. Also shot that day were A. N. Khvostov (Minister of Internal Affairs, 1915–16) and S. P. Beletskii, a former director of the tsarist secret police.⁴⁹

Some nobles remained as government commissars or in the *zemstva*. The former were slowly eradicated throughout November 1917 as Bolshevik power spread across rural Russia. The latter struggled on for several months, but eventually met with the same fate. The *zemstva* faced a complete collapse of support after October, but the Bolsheviks initially tolerated them as the best means of providing services. However, January and February 1918 saw a rapid growth in the number of rural soviets, which steadily took over and around 85% of *volost zemstva* had been dissolved by the end of February, when they were formally abolished. The Union of *Zemstva* in Moscow had already been attacked as a counter-revolutionary organization in December 1917 and its funds seized.⁵⁰ But the fact that around 98% of *volost zemstva* had their affairs transferred 'without opposition' to the new soviets suggests that many simply changed names. The expertise and experience of many *zemstva* employees (including some nobles) was desperately needed and they were retained in the new soviets.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Sheremeteva, *Dnevnik*, 58–60, 80.

⁴⁶ V. Izmozik, 'Vremennoe pravitel'stvo. Liudi i sud'by', *Voprosy istorii*, 6 (1994), 165–8.

⁴⁷ 'Kniaz' G. E. L'vov v Ekaterinburgskoi tiur'me', *Istoricheskii arkhiv*, 3 (2002), 140–70.

⁴⁸ GARF, f. 543, op. 1, d. 10, ll. 20–21ob.

⁴⁹ G. Leggett, *The Cheka: Lenin's Political Police* (revised edition: Oxford, 1986), 111–12.

⁵⁰ W. Rosenberg, 'The Zemstvo in 1917 and its fate under Bolshevik rule', in T. Emmons and W. Vucinich (eds.), *The Zemstvo in Russia: An Experiment in Local Self-Government* (Cambridge, 1982), 403–9.

⁵¹ J. Channon, '"Peasant Revolution" and "Land Reform": Land Redistribution in European Russia, October 1917–1920' (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Birmingham, 1983), 101–3.

The same was true in central government. The ministers (commissars) and their deputies were new, but below them there was a strong element of continuity. In late 1918, 97.5% of the civil servants in the Commissariat of Finance had been in post before October, as had 88% of Post and Telegraph, 80% of State Control, 60% of Supplies, and 59% of Agriculture.⁵² The numbers were smaller in other commissariats, but still significant, although they fell over time. Nonetheless, a report in 1920 suggested that 20% of bureaucrats and technical personnel across the state were ex-tsarist officials, landowners, priests, and other remnants from the old regime.⁵³ Of course, not all were nobles and it is hard to distinguish them from other 'bourgeois' elements. In 1924, 35% of the sixty-six senior figures in the Commissariat of Agriculture were nobles, seven of whom had been landowners, and more were in lower-level posts.⁵⁴ Many nobles noted how easy it was to work for the state: some were forced from their estates as 'exploiters' simply to obtain jobs immediately with the local authorities.⁵⁵

The regime also had an ambiguous relationship with noble industrialists. 'Smashing' the bourgeois state sounded good, but it threatened production and workers' welfare. Thus, Lenin advocated 'state capitalism' as the best means of moving from capitalism to socialism: the capitalist structure was not exploitative if workers were in control. Similarly, whilst industrialists had mixed views on whether to 'collaborate' with the regime, working-class unrest and the threat of arbitrary nationalization seemed to leave little choice. Some hoped that the Bolsheviks could provide the firm authority that was absent under the Provisional Government.

Prince A. P. Meshcherskii initiated talks with the government in January 1918 after warning the previous November that his factories would close if pricing and supply issues, along with workers' unrest, did not improve. He proposed creating a joint capitalist and state-owned metallurgical enterprise, encompassing numerous firms in Russia's central industrial region. Yet the Bolsheviks wanted more than the third share offered. German firms already owned shares in many of the companies involved; workers' unions complained of a lack of consultation from Meshcherskii; and some Bolsheviks objected to dealing with capitalists under any conditions. Meshcherskii ended negotiations in April, despite offering all the shares to the government on the condition that former owners would regain a fifth should the state dispose of them in the future.⁵⁶ Elsewhere, similar talks led to agreements to form trusts in the sugar, textile, and leather industries,

⁵² E. Gimpel'son, *Sovetskie upravlenitsy 1917–1920gg.* (Moscow, 1998), 116.

⁵³ W. Chase, *Workers, Society, and the Soviet State* (Urbana, 1990), 122.

⁵⁴ J. Heinzen, *Inventing a Soviet Countryside: State Power and the Transformation of Rural Russia, 1917–1929* (Pittsburgh, 2004), 255.

⁵⁵ S. Raevskii, *Piat' vekov Raevskikh* (Moscow, 2005), 169.

⁵⁶ P. Volobuev and V. Drobizhev, 'Iz istorii goskapitalizma v nachal'nyi period sotsialisticheskogo stroitel'stva v SSSR', *Voprosy istorii*, 9 (1957), 107–22; H. Ray Buchanan, 'Lenin and Bukharin on the Transition from Capitalism to Socialism: The Meshchersky Controversy, 1918', *Soviet Studies*, 28, 1 (1976), 66–82.

but it was clear who was in control. These agreements were only short-term solutions, especially given the steady 'nationalization' of individual factories by workers or local soviets. On 28 June 1918, a decree nationalizing industry officially established the regime's control over this process.⁵⁷ Meshcherskii's main factory (the Sormovo-Kolomna metal works) was seized and he was arrested. His daughter retained control over his other factories. Meshcherskii was freed in October, but his other factories were taken in November.⁵⁸ By 1920, 61% of factories employing more than 31 workers (4,877 out of 7,998) had been formally nationalized.⁵⁹

Urban property owners, many of whom were nobles, also suffered major financial losses, whilst all nobles suffered in the 'housing revolution' that followed October. Sales were forbidden nationally on 16 December 1917. Otherwise, local initiatives saw buildings, palaces, and flats arbitrarily seized by soviets and other bodies. In Moscow, the soviet municipalized all buildings worth more than 9,000 rubles or containing more than twenty flats on 12 December.⁶⁰ In Petrograd, confiscations took on a mass character in 1918, with at least 2,342 flats officially affected between February and July alone. Across 1918–1919, no less than 65,000 working class families were resettled in the city.⁶¹ At the very least, the housing shortage forced residents to share their living space. As 'former people', nobles were at risk of eviction and could do little but keep their heads down and accept that their flats had to be shared.

Residential buildings had to elect a house committee, which controlled everything from repairs and hygiene, to allocating duties and registering residents. Some rules specified that the former owners or former people could not be elected.⁶² A few nobles overcame this restriction, giving them valuable influence, but most struggled to retain a foothold in their homes. Many shared space with friends and relatives, creating a safer environment and enabling the pooling of resources. Princess S. A. Volkonskaia lived in a house of six nobles, sharing food and tasks such as cooking, and fetching water and fuel, whilst Prince K. N. Golitsyn lived in a 'colony' of eleven Golitsyns, six Trubetskoi, and seven Bobrinskoi.⁶³ Limited space and poor conditions fuelled denunciations

⁵⁷ Wade, *Documents*, 174–7.

⁵⁸ Krivosheina, *Chetyre*, 23–8.

⁵⁹ V. Selunskia (ed.), *Izmeneniia sotsial'noi struktury sovetskogo obshchestva, oktiabr' 1917–1920* (Moscow, 1976), 179.

⁶⁰ K. Kharchenko, *Vlast'–Imushchestvo–Chelovek: Peredel sobstvennosti v bol'shevistskoi Rossii 1917–nachala 1921gg.* (Moscow, 2000), 102.

⁶¹ M. Potekhin, 'Pereselenie Petrogradskikh rabochikh v kvartiry burzhuzii [oktiabr'] 1917–1919 gg.', *Istoriia SSSR*, 5 (1977), 142, 144. Provincially, there was less pressure, but 16.2% of properties in Saratov were municipalized and 6–12% were affected across the province; D. Raleigh, *Experiencing Russia's Civil War: Politics, Society and Revolutionary Culture in Saratov, 1917–1922* (Princeton, 2002), 195.

⁶² *Khar'kov i Khar'kovskaia guberniia v velikoi oktiabr'skoi sotsialisticheskoi revoliutsii* (Khar'kov, 1957), 451.

⁶³ P. Wolkonosky, *The Way of Bitterness* (London, 1931), 88, 104–5; K. Golitsyn, *Zapiski kniazia Kirilla Nikolaevicha Golitsyna* (Moscow, 1997), 129–31. For more details, see M. Rendle,

and arrests for everyone, but nobles were particularly vulnerable. They hid their backgrounds and changed lifestyles, but their past could catch up with them. Princess V. G. Urusova even faced censure in February 1918 by the Union of Domestic Servants, which stated that two of her former servants were owed money, including compensation for 'patriarchal relations' and their 'lost youth'. She argued that their conditions were good, whilst they had stolen from her. The union dropped one charge after investigating, but continued the other.⁶⁴

There is no evidence that the Union of Homeowners remained active nationally or even in Petrograd or Moscow, but some local branches continued after October. In Odessa, for example, the union was still regrouping after a split caused by a contentious settlement with janitors. General L. V. Tomashevich, who had pioneered the agreement, took over from Ia. E. Semenenko as chairman in mid-November and a new council was elected. The union had 3,000 members. Some of the debates reflected the difficult position faced by homeowners, discussing the new laws and growing financial problems. Other plans were positive. A judicial bureau was proposed to help homeowners combat encroachments, as was establishing a bank to provide cheap credit to homeowners and tenants, alongside a cooperative to organize repairs to houses and a coordinated approach to removing rubbish. A library and reading hall were due to open, whilst a children's park and excursions to the nearby countryside would follow in spring 1918. Other suggestions included organizing doctors and educational institutions. Tomashevich was keen to overcome the split and confirm the union as the sole body representing homeowners.⁶⁵ The union benefited from its distance from the centre of Russia, but the belief that its activities remained worthwhile was indicative of the weakness of Bolshevik power during these first months and the widespread expectation that its collapse was imminent.

A recent study argued that nobles responded to the October Revolution in four ways—emigration, protest, loyalty, and apathy—depending on their resources, location, status, age, family connections, beliefs, and characters.⁶⁶ Many certainly emigrated throughout the civil war. Estimates of the total number of Russian émigrés range from 500,000 to three million, and all social classes were involved.⁶⁷ Suggestions that nobles made up only 0.5–2% of this number seem too conservative. An otherwise comprehensive analysis of Russian émigrés in Yugoslavia during the 1920s was unable to shed much light on their social origins, but nobles fitted into the majority as they were well educated,

'Family, Kinship and Revolution: The Russian Nobility, 1917–1924', *Family and Community History*, 8, 1 (2005), 35–47.

⁶⁴ N. Tyrras (ed.), *Letters of Life in an Aristocratic Russian Household before and after the Revolution: Amy Coles and Princess Vera Urusov* (Lewiston, 2000), 322, 326, 362, 365–6.

⁶⁵ *Odesskii listok*, No. 285, 25 November 1917, 2, 6; No. 286, 26 November 1917, 2–3.

⁶⁶ Chuikina, *Dvorianskaia pamiat'*, 39.

⁶⁷ R. Johnston, *New Mecca, New Babylon: Paris and the Russian Exiles, 1920–1945* (Kingston, 1988), 11.

orthodox believers, struggling financially, knew several languages, and often had a military background.⁶⁸ Most nobles settled in Europe, primarily France and Germany, but destinations ranged from the Far East to Africa and the Americas.

The majority of nobles, however, did not emigrate and had to tolerate the Bolsheviks to survive. Few were enthusiastic supporters or even recognized Soviet power as legal, but very few categorically refused to work for the new regime or actively opposed it. Equally, few became careerists, enthusiastically taking advantage of new opportunities. Most nobles were apathetic or saw service in terms of serving Russia rather than the regime. Employment provided the wages and rations needed to live and eased access to housing. Furthermore, by persecuting former nobles for their non-toiling, exploitative past, the regime encouraged them to think that work would integrate them into the new society. Nobles quickly promoted themselves as 'workers' and resented discrimination based upon their past. One former marshal of the nobility protested in 1918 about being classified as a bourgeois counter-revolutionary, arguing that he was now a 'worker'.⁶⁹ They realized that they had skills that the regime valued: they were well-educated, spoke foreign languages, and had experience of military and civil service. They even had cultural skills (music, dancing, riding) that new elites wanted.

Nobles did not feel that they were members of an obsolete class, but conditions prevented them from building stable lives. The regime encouraged a popular war against former elites, with numerous cases of unauthorized searches, arbitrary taxes (often running into millions of rubles), requisitions, confiscations, and arrests carried out by individuals and local soviets. The escalating crime rate facilitated such activities, especially in Petrograd, and nobles were obvious targets, even if all Russians were affected. Official suspicions also persisted. In March 1918, Prince D. N. Shakhovskoi was investigated for organizing a plot from within the Trade and Industry Bank. In August 1918, M. D. Diukova, a noble landowner, was charged with not recognizing Soviet power. In November 1918, Prince Eristov was accused of gathering money to form a counter-revolutionary partisan detachment.⁷⁰ The regime was unwilling to trust nobles: as the Cheka stated in 1918 to Count V. P. Zubov, the director of the Institute of the History of Art, 'it is true that you work for us, but all the same you're not really with us'.⁷¹

This attitude was even displayed towards those with obvious value to the regime. Count N. K. fon Mekh, president of the board of the Moscow-Kazan railroad, was repeatedly targeted. On 1 June 1918, the Cheka searched his apartment in Moscow, removed books and papers, and arrested him. The regime believed that he had links to the Whites in the Don, which he denied. His arrest

⁶⁸ *Rossia v izgnanii: Sud'by Rossiiskikh emigrantov za rubezhom* (Moscow, 1999), 320–48.

⁶⁹ Smirnova, *Byushie*, 40.

⁷⁰ GARF, f. 336, op. 1, d. 75 (Diukova); d. 347 (Shakhovskoi); d. 358 (Eristov).

⁷¹ V. Zubov, *Stradnye gody Rossii: Vospominaniia o revoliutsii (1917–1925)* (Munich, 1968), 67–8.

prompted a general meeting of workers at the railway on 3 June. Around 400 signed a petition demanding his release, whilst fellow directors and the political commissar to the railroad also appealed. All argued that Mekh, with 35 years of experience in the company, was essential to its effective operation, which was crucial given the supply crisis engulfing the country. He was released on 16 July, but only after 150,000 rubles had been paid. He was rearrested several times in 1918–19 before the regime admitted his expertise and offered him a post in 1920.⁷²

Everyday life became harder after nobles were disenfranchised in July 1918, with access to fewer rations and problems obtaining flats and jobs. On 5 October 1918, labour books were introduced for *lishentsy*, forcing them to register their work once a month or face forced labour.⁷³ Many nobles still managed to avoid the authorities, but these measures made it harder. Nobles only formed a small proportion of *lishentsy*, who in turn were only a minority of the population (1–10% at various times).⁷⁴ *Lishentsy* could appeal and thousands did, with 25–50% of appeals succeeding. But definitions of a rich peasant or trader were ambiguous and could be challenged: it was harder to contest social origins.⁷⁵ The regime never eradicated nobles as individuals, but it prevented them from existing as a recognizable social group.⁷⁶

LANDOWNERS

The crucial act for landowners was the decree on land on 26 October. Despite attempts to transfer privately owned land to the control of land committees and other unauthorized seizures, without state support these remained localized, and the majority of privately owned land had not been taken prior to the October Revolution. The decree, however, propelled the agrarian movement into a dramatic new phase. Landownership was abolished immediately, with no compensation for landowners. All estates (along with livestock, equipment, and buildings) were placed under the control of *volost* land committees and *uezd* soviets of peasants' deputies prior to the Constituent Assembly. Detailed inventories were to be taken of everything subject to confiscation. Anyone

⁷² GARF, f. 543, op. 1, d. 7, ll. 2, 5, 11–18ob, 22. His daughter recalled how the stress contributed to heart attacks for her father and mother; G. von Meck, *As I Remember Them* (London, 1973), 161–70, 181–3, 187–8.

⁷³ M. Matthews, *The Passport Society: Controlling Movement in Russia and the USSR* (Boulder, 1993), 17–18.

⁷⁴ 'Former people', including nobles, peaked in the mid 1920s as 30% of all *lishentsy* before declining to 2–4% (Dobkin, 'Lishentsy', 606). The regime did not distinguish nobles separately.

⁷⁵ G. Alexopoulos, *Stalin's Outcasts: Aliens, Citizens, and the Soviet State, 1926–1936* (Ithaca, 2003), 36–7.

⁷⁶ See M. Rendle, 'The Problems of 'Becoming Soviet': Former Nobles in Soviet Society, 1917–1941', *European History Quarterly*, 38, 1 (2008), 7–33.

damaging property or abusing the law would be prosecuted. On 27 January 1918, the Bolsheviks reconfirmed this decree, adding more details about future land use.⁷⁷ Essentially, the Bolsheviks adopted an earlier mandate on the land produced by the All-Russian Soviet of Peasant Deputies in May based on 242 responses from local peasant bodies. Thus, as intended, the decree was greeted enthusiastically by peasants. Furthermore, on 25 November 1917, noble and peasant land banks were abolished, removing a sympathetic source of finance for all owners.⁷⁸

This was devastating for landowners. L. D. Liubimov described how, a few days after the decree was published, peasants on his aunt's estate came to discuss its implications. The peasants were courteous and sympathetic, but firm: the estate was theirs, and the family soon departed.⁷⁹ By articulating peasant desires so bluntly, the decree emboldened an already restless peasantry. The Union of Landowners was powerless. It argued that the decree was illegal, and urged the prosecution of the government and Lenin. But by 15 November, it admitted that the decree was being implemented and instead highlighted several lines of defence in its advice to landowners. First, it stressed the decree's emphasis on order: estates must be transferred to the relevant authorities, not directly to the peasants. Landowners were entitled to resist any demands from the latter and to expect official support in doing so. Secondly, detailed inventories must be taken and signed by both parties. The union hoped that the Bolsheviks would not be capable of holding onto power and that inventories could provide a means of regaining property. Thirdly, the union emphasized that only property associated with the landed economy of the estate should be confiscated. Domestic orchards and vegetable gardens, domestic livestock (especially horses) and property (clothes, furniture, and so on), and the owner's home, should not be seized. Barns were liable, but mills, factories, and their equipment were not as they were not needed to cultivate the land. The union also picked up on a point in the original peasant mandate from May that stated that 'model' estates—those with advanced methods of cultivation or production—should remain intact, even if removed from the direct control of their owners.⁸⁰

In early December, another letter to local branches reiterated these points and promised legal aid to support landowners carrying out their vital, 'tireless' struggle against the decree. The union also advised landowners to retain a foothold on their estates at all costs. It pointed out that the decree did not state that former owners had to be evicted from their estates. Indeed, the original mandate clearly noted that the right to *use* the land was to be accorded to all citizens (male and female) who could cultivate it with their own labour (not hired labour), family

⁷⁷ Wade, *Documents*, 8–11, 98–100.

⁷⁸ *Agrarnaia politika sovetskoi vlasti (1917–1918). Dokumenty i materialy* (Moscow, 1954), 128.

⁷⁹ L. Liubimov, *Na chuzhbine: Vospominaniia* (Moscow, 1963), 77–8.

⁸⁰ OR RGB, f. 114, k. 2, ed. khran. 29, ll. 1–3ob.

labour, or as part of a collective. It was to be distributed on an equal basis, and the union advised landowners to request a share of the land to support their needs.⁸¹

Many landowners did heed this advice and, on the whole, peasants accepted those who were prepared to live equally alongside them. Over 79% of communal peasants in Moscow province in October 1917, for example, believed that landlords deserved a share of the land as long as they worked it themselves, whilst 92% of *otrubniki* and *khutoriane* did.⁸² Many landowners received above-average plots, and kept their tools and seeds, whilst some manors without 'breadwinners' (males) received additional help, as was the peasant tradition. In spring 1918, G. M. Osorgin, the youngest son on his family's estate near Kaluga, demanded the 'working norm' and was granted 15 *desiatiny* of the better land. He was also given three horses, two cows, seeds, and equipment. He and his three sisters worked the land themselves from dawn to dusk. Peasants still came for medical help and other advice. The family hoped that Bolshevik rule would collapse, but in the meantime they had to survive.⁸³ S. P. Rudnev, a local union leader in Samara, diffused growing tensions on his estate by encouraging the village to take over the estate as a whole after Christmas 1917, rather than split it up. This averted violence and preserved productivity. Rudnev's family retained the manor and he remained as manager. M. F. Meiendorf's mother handed their land near Kiev to the local committee, including some horses, but kept meadows, gardens, orchards, some *desiatiny*, and livestock. In return, there was relative calm.⁸⁴

Of course, some landowners were not willing to concede land or equipment; others were unwilling to coexist. Elsewhere, local peasants were less accommodating, preferring aggression as justice for past grievances or as a better guarantee that the old regime would never return. The above accounts, though, along with others, suggest that the Bolsheviks played the decisive role. Coexistence was possible in the relative hiatus of official power in the provinces that followed October. As Bolshevik control strengthened, most landowners reported growing problems. Bolsheviks from Kaluga arrested Osorgin's father for failing to 'contribute' to their finances. The peasants apparently raised the bail needed to free him, but in autumn 1918 the authorities gave the family three days to evacuate the estate. Rudnev believed that the Bolsheviks instilled a feeling of power and greed in the local peasants, who increasingly viewed his family as irritants. In August 1918, villagers forced him to sell his good harvest to them at a reduced

⁸¹ OR RGB, f. 114, k. 2, ed. khran. 29, ll. 8–11.

⁸² O. Figes, 'Peasant Farmers and the Minority Groups of Rural Society: Peasant Egalitarianism and Village Social Relations during the Russian Revolution', in E. Kingston-Mann and T. Mixer (eds.), *Peasant Economy, Culture and Politics of European Russia, 1800–1921* (Princeton, 1991), 381.

⁸³ G. Trubetskoi, *Gody smut i nadezhd 1917–1919* (Montreal, 1981), 60–7.

⁸⁴ S. Rudnev, *Pri vechernykh ogniakh: Vospominaniia* (Newtonville, 1978), 91–8; M. Meiendorf, *Vospominaniia* (Valley Cottage, 1990), 202–12.

price, although some helped him gather it. Bolshevik troops finally forced them to flee. Rudnev admits that the villagers did not protest: some were stealing belongings and shaking apple trees as they left. Meiendorf's estate came under attack as soon as Bolsheviks established control of the local town. Searches and arrests forced her family to leave in mid 1919.⁸⁵

Soviet historians were also keen to highlight the impact of the Bolsheviks, charting how the spread of their power 'democratized' land committees and introduced order. Inventories were taken and property protected rather than the enthusiastic seizures that followed the decree's publication. Exhaustive studies on numerous localities suggest differences between industrial and agricultural regions, and among border regions, but generally the process of confiscation matched the spread of Soviet power locally. Some estates were inventoried and seized immediately after 26 October, but the majority were assessed in November–January (over 60%), with the process almost complete (80–90%) by spring 1918.⁸⁶ Of course, what constituted the establishment of Soviet power in a locality is difficult to ascertain, whilst the assumption that taking an inventory of an estate's contents equated to seizure was not always true. Inventories could precede seizure by weeks or did not lead to further action. Equally, neighbouring estates could be affected at different times. Thus, it has been argued that peasants led the movement and they were merely encouraged or radicalized by the decree.⁸⁷ Yet the broad assertion that the onset of Bolshevik power saw a sustained attack on landowners seems correct. Peasants were capable of seizing estates, but as the above accounts and others suggest, landowners' survival was under greater threat once the Bolsheviks took control of local authorities. Still it was a drawn out process. Landlords had lost most of their land by spring 1918, but many were not forced from their manors until autumn 1918 or into 1919.

Indeed, one estimate suggests that 11–12% of former landowners remained on parts of their estates until the mid 1920s, with some even hiring labour. Most were small landowners, but larger ones also survived. From 279 landowners retaining land in seven *uezdy* in Kursk province in 1925–6, 177 were nobles; 111 had owned 20–100 *desiatiny* prior to 1917; 145 had owned 101–500; and twenty-three had owned over 500.⁸⁸ Some authorities admitted ignoring smaller estates in 1918 (those under 30–50 *desiatiny*), whilst some slipped through the net. Otherwise, practices varied widely. Some *uezdy* in Smolensk province

⁸⁵ Trubetskoi, *Gody*, 67–8; Rudnev, *Vechernykh*, 114–40; Meiendorf, *Vospominaniia*, 214–35.

⁸⁶ P. Pershin, *Agrarnaia revoliutsiia v Rossii* (2 volumes: Moscow, 1966), II, 106–220. On localities; I. Mints (ed.), *Leninskii dekret o zemle v deistvii* (Moscow, 1979). A concise summary is in Channon, 'Peasant Revolution', Ch. 2.

⁸⁷ O. Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War: The Volga Countryside in Revolution (1917–1920)* (Oxford, 1989), 62–4.

⁸⁸ J. Channon, 'Tsarist Landowners after the Revolution: Former *Pomeshchiki* in Rural Russia during the NEP', *Soviet Studies*, 34, 4 (1987), 580–1.

saw all land redistributed, whilst others ignored estates under 150 *desiatiny*.⁸⁹ Some landowners transferred their land to 'state' ownership and stayed on as 'managers', or fictional 'collectives' were created to conceal their presence. The state did try to use the experience of landowners to manage model estates, but decreed in August 1919 that they should not remain on estates they had owned or in the same locality.⁹⁰

Nevertheless, these amounts were small in comparison with landholdings before 1917. Most land changed hands and it did so by the end of 1918. The largest landowners were the first targets. In Sychevka (Smolensk), the sixty-seven major local landowners were arrested after the local soviet was reorganized at the end of November. Some were accused of stealing equipment, produce, and livestock from their estates, which were now the property of the people. Most were quickly released, but not before some had undertaken forced labour, either timber-cutting or cleaning streets.⁹¹ Landowners who remained usually only enjoyed access to a fragment of their former lands. In seven *uezdy* in Tver, for example, 178 of 1,572 owners before 1917 remained on their estates in 1925 (11%), with 173 receiving land, but in one *uezd* they had only retained 7% of their former land. In the case of twenty-four seized estates in Mtsenskii *uezd* (Orel), landowners retained only 2% of their land after 1918, with 83% passing to the peasantry and 15% to state-run farms.⁹² Those who survived lived on a par with the peasantry. Z. A. Bashkirova's formerly wealthy family returned to her father's estate after 1917. They were considered 'social pariahs', but were helped with labour and food, granted land, and remained for a time in part of their old manor house. Their position deteriorated every year. By 1922, when Bashkirova emigrated, the family lived in the old priest's house and worked several *desiatiny*. Her father had married a former peasant servant and they were indistinguishable from the local peasants.⁹³

The Union of Landowners continued its activities into 1918, but became increasingly ineffective. Initially, as with other conservative and liberal groups, it pinned its hopes on the Constituent Assembly. Its supporters faced widespread intimidation and violence, whilst the results demonstrated that only their core support—middle and large landowners—remained after October. The union fielded candidates in twenty-five provinces and received 191,109 votes, or 0.4%

⁸⁹ M. Hickey, 'Peasant Autonomy, Soviet Power and Land Redistribution in Smolensk Province, November 1917–May 1918', *Revolutionary Russia*, 9, 1 (1996), 23–4.

⁹⁰ Channon, 'Tsarist Landowners', 576–80; Selunskaja, *Izmeneniia sotsial'noi struktury*, 201–2. On the long-term fate of estates, see *Dvorianskaia i kupecheskaia sel'skaia usad'ba v Rossii XVI–XXvv.* (Moscow, 2001), 560–647.

⁹¹ R. Manning, 'Bolshevik without the Party: Sychevka in 1917', in D. Raleigh (ed.), *Provincial Landscapes*, (Pittsburgh, 2001), 57.

⁹² N. Zhuravleva, 'Konfiskatsiia pomeshchich'ikh imenii v Tverskoi gubernii v 1917–1918gg.', *Istoricheskie zapiski*, 29 (1949), 58–9; A. Dolgoplov, 'Likvidatsiia pomeshchich'ego zemlevladieniia v 1917–1918gg. v Orlovskoi gubernii', *Istoricheskie nauki*, 3 (1960), 40.

⁹³ Z. Bashkiroff, *The Sickie and the Harvest* (London, 1960).

of the total. This was more than industrial groups, but less than liberals, religious groups, or those on the extreme right.⁹⁴ Usually it gained 1–2% of the vote (its lower national total reflected its absence in many provinces), which was sufficient to elect candidates in a couple of areas, although members were represented in other lists as well. The union enjoyed an average of 2.5% of the vote in provincial towns, perhaps indicating that many landowners had already left their estates.⁹⁵ Cooperation between elites meant that landowners wielded more influence than these numbers suggest. In Orel, for example, landowners were united with Kadets and industrialists, but the electoral results listed them separately. Landowners gained 6.4% of the vote, alongside 29% for the Kadets and 4.6% for industrialists.⁹⁶ Together, they would have formed an influential group in the city had the results been honoured.

After the dispersal of the Constituent Assembly, the union could do little. Despite its stress on procedure, the Bolsheviks had no intention of enforcing it, and the union failed to gain support in its appeals for law and order. On 13 November, the union asked for further leniency from banks for noble landowners repaying loans, arguing that committees should now be liable as they controlled the land. The state should fill any shortfall since its policies had led to the situation. The union feared that any property (even personal) remaining with indebted landowners was liable. It also called on banks to support abolishing the decree, pointing to their losses from the disruption.⁹⁷ But there was little that banks could do. The nobility had just been abolished, its main bank was abolished a fortnight later, and all banks were nationalized on 14 December, taking the matter back into state hands.

Nonetheless, the union continued to fight its losing battle. It published a newspaper, *Golos zemli*, in Moscow from January to March 1918, which it had not been able to do in 1917. It collected details of seizures, presumably hoping that the Bolsheviks would collapse and property could be reclaimed. It also maintained a defiant stance. On 30 January 1918, Professor A. E. Vorms from its judicial department appealed to landowners to 'wreck the socialist regime'. In March 1918, the main committee openly condemned the Brest–Litovsk peace treaty and rallied all 'true' Russian patriots against the regime.⁹⁸ Some

⁹⁴ L. Protasov, 'The All-Russian Constituent Assembly and the Democratic Alternative', in R. Wade (ed.), *Revolutionary Russia: New Approaches* (London, 2004), 258. Spirin provides a higher figure, 239,333 votes (0.5%); L. Spirin, *Krushenie pomeschichikh i burzhuanikh partii v Rossii (nachalo XXv. – 1920g.)* (Moscow, 1977), 346.

⁹⁵ The most detailed figures on the union are in Spirin, *Krushenie pomeschichikh*, 262–4, 345–6. Radkey dismisses Spirin's calculations as inaccurate, but his own on the union paint a similar picture; O. Radkey, *Russia Goes to the Polls: The Election to the All-Russian Constituent Assembly, 1917* (Ithaca, 1989), 26–32, 111.

⁹⁶ *Golos naroda* [Orel], No. 165, 11 November 1917; No. 168, 15 November 1917.

⁹⁷ OR RGB, f. 114, k. 2, ed. khran. 28, ll. 1–2.

⁹⁸ T. Osipova, 'Vserossiiskii soiuz zemel'nykh sobstvennikov [1917]', *Istoriia SSSR*, 3 (1976), 128.

provincial branches remained active. In Odessa, the Union of Landowners of South Russia was advertising free legal advice on agrarian and civil matters in late November 1917, and was planning a general assembly for January.⁹⁹ In Tambov, a Union of Rural and Urban Owners defending the principle of private ownership acted alongside the Union of Landowners in 1918 before its president, E. A. Zagriazhskii, a landowner and homeowner, and formerly a leading member of the provincial noble assembly, was shot for his involvement in an 'anti-soviet' revolt in Tambov on 17–19 June 1918.¹⁰⁰

By this stage, pressure was mounting on the union. The soviet in Mogilev ordered the arrest of union members on 16 January 1918.¹⁰¹ In a report to the Commissariat of Agriculture on 19 February, local officials in Smolensk described the union as an 'underground organization', but implied that its continued existence indicated that the decree on land had not yet been fully implemented.¹⁰² On 16 March, the union's premises in Moscow were taken over. On 9 July, the Cheka launched an investigation into its activities and it was finally liquidated on 16 July.¹⁰³ It operated in areas held by the Whites during the civil war, promoting the same message and occasionally managing to wield some influence.¹⁰⁴ But those landowners remaining within Soviet Russia were now fighting an isolated and losing battle.

OFFICERS

Officers underpinned resistance during the October Revolution in Petrograd and were involved in any opposition that materialized elsewhere, so it was hardly surprising that the Bolsheviks treated them suspiciously. Antagonism was fuelled by conflict over the war effort. The decree on peace on 26 October 1917 signalled the new regime's intention to end the war immediately, something that was unacceptable to patriotic officers. On 8 November, Lenin instructed the Commander-in-Chief, Dukhonin, to contact the Germans to offer the cessation of hostilities in order to open up peace talks. Dukhonin refused and was replaced by the Bolshevik, Ensign N. V. Krylenko, on 9 November.¹⁰⁵ All areas were

⁹⁹ *Odesskii listok*, No. 285, 25 November 1917, 3; No. 304, 20 December 1917, 2.

¹⁰⁰ *Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie v Tambovskoi*, 311–12, 393.

¹⁰¹ *Velikaia oktiabr'skaia sotsialisticheskaia revoliutsiia v Belorussii*, II, 784–5, 829–30.

¹⁰² 'K istorii provedeniia v zhizn' Leninskogo dekreta o zemle', *Krasnyi arkhiv*, 89–90 (1938), 50.

¹⁰³ I. Mints, *Istoriia velikogo oktiabriia* (3 volumes: Moscow, 1967–73), III, 909–10.

¹⁰⁴ The union aided the election of General P. P. Skoropadskii as Hetman in the Ukraine: T. Hunczak, 'The Ukraine under Hetman Pavlo Skoropadskii', in Hunczak (ed.), *The Ukraine, 1917–1921: A Study in Revolution* (Cambridge, MA., 1977), 65–6; J. Reshetar, *The Ukrainian Revolution, 1917–1920* (Princeton, 1952), 130–1.

¹⁰⁵ A. Wildman, *The End of the Russian Imperial Army* (2 volumes: Princeton, 1980–7), II, 380–1.

then instructed to arrange their own ceasefires. Krylenko departed for Stavka to assert the regime's authority, but met with indifference on the part of most senior commanders. On 11 November, he arrived at Pskov and asked to see the Commander of the Northern Front, Cheremisov, apparently to discuss his 'socio-political views'. Cheremisov refused, despite his actions during the October Revolution. He later claimed illness, but Krylenko believed him to be perfectly healthy and an 'intriguer'. He was placed under house arrest and transferred to a Petrograd prison.¹⁰⁶ Krylenko met with a similar response in Dvinsk, where the local commander, General V. G. Boldyrev, also refused to cooperate and was arrested.¹⁰⁷ On 20 November, Krylenko reached Stavka. Dukhonin was prepared to surrender, but was lynched by soldiers angered by his delay in negotiating peace and the news that he had permitted Kornilov to escape.¹⁰⁸ Krylenko declared a 'revolutionary Stavka' and appointed the pro-Soviet, General M. D. Bonch-Bruевич, as his Chief of Staff.

The final measure designed to break any remaining resistance from officers came on 16 December, when all ranks and titles were abolished in the military, and soldiers and sailors were permitted to elect their officers.¹⁰⁹ Even Bonch-Bruевич was 'horrified' and 'stunned'. If officers could be elected and dismissed at will, he reasoned, why would anyone follow their orders, especially into battle? Obedience and discipline was the foundation of the military and this decree would destroy any remaining fighting capability.¹¹⁰ Sure enough, hundreds of officers were removed amid minor or unsubstantiated accusations. On 22 November, seventeen officers of a Finnish regiment at Mogilev were accused of 'counter-revolutionary activities' and arrested by the soldiers' soviet. The case found its way to the revolutionary tribunal in Petrograd. Yet the vague accusations were never explained and, one by one, investigators found 'no basis or evidence' to support them, and the officers were freed. The last were released on 20 March 1918, but none were permitted to return to their original posts, vividly demonstrating the lengthy and destructive process of the tribunals.¹¹¹

Thus, it is hardly surprising that many officers fled their posts and opposed the regime. Many felt that they had little choice, given the atrocities committed against officers and their encouragement by the regime. For others, it was obvious that Bolshevism was an evil that needed to be destroyed to save Russia. Others cited the peace talks with Germany and patriotism as their main motivations. After the last hope of the Constituent Assembly had been extinguished, the only

¹⁰⁶ GARF, f. 336, op. 1, d. 339, ll. 1, 30–30ob, 45–45ob. He was released on 28 July 1918 under the May amnesty.

¹⁰⁷ He received three years in prison on 13 December, but was also released in 1918; Gorodetskii, *Rozhdenie*, 207.

¹⁰⁸ Wildman, *Russian Imperial Army*, II, 400–1.

¹⁰⁹ Wade, *Documents*, 68–9.

¹¹⁰ M. Bonch-Bruевич, *From Tsarist General to Red Army Commander* (Moscow, 1966), 222–3.

¹¹¹ GARF, f. 336, op. 1, d. 19.

way to combat the Bolsheviks was through force, and possibilities for doing so quickly emerged. General M. V. Alekseev fled south, hoping to find shelter among the Don Cossacks. He started to organize a Volunteer Army to oppose the Bolsheviks after his arrival on 2 November 1917. On 19 November, as Stavka was about to fall to the Bolsheviks, Dukhonin permitted the 'escape' of Generals L. G. Kornilov and A. I. Denikin, and others imprisoned after Kornilov's revolt. They also fled south, and over the next few months others followed, either through fear or implacable opposition to Bolshevism.¹¹²

Elsewhere, officers became involved in all types of anti-Bolshevik opposition, from political groups to a dozen or more shadowy officers' organizations. Estimates of numbers range from 7,000 to 16,000, but most organizations were undoubtedly ad hoc bodies formed by small groups of conspirators. They were capable of isolated revolts in provincial cities and within the military, especially during 1918, but, as small underground bodies, they lacked wider impact.¹¹³ The Bolsheviks, through tribunals and the Cheka, actively targeted these groups, and the fact that the major pre-October officer organizations were not active reinforces the sense of isolated resistance on the part of a minority of officers. The leaders of the Union of Officers, arrested after the Kornilov revolt, were released in September–October 1917. But as its president, Lieutenant-Colonel L. N. Novosil'tsev, made clear, they were unsure as to the best plan of action. He travelled south to join Alekseev, and most leading members followed. The union existed effectively until January 1918 in the Volunteer Army, but it was not active there or anywhere else in Russia.¹¹⁴ Leading socialist officers also opposed the Bolsheviks. The first president of the Union of Republican Officers, Lieutenant V. N. Filippovskii, chaired the Union for the Defence of the Constituent Assembly in Petrograd and served in the Socialist–Revolutionary government in the Volga (Komuch). Captain B. S. Sinani, the union's secretary, was in the All-Russian Committee to Save the Motherland and Revolution that united moderate socialists against the regime. Only Lieutenant A. I. Tarasov-Rodionov, a Bolshevik sympathizer from the start, served the regime as an investigator for the revolutionary tribunal in Petrograd.¹¹⁵

Nonetheless, past association with such organizations was sufficient to leave an individual open to accusations. The Military League, for example, also appears to have been inactive after Kornilov's revolt, but past membership was treated seriously, and in one case turned a simple denunciation into an extensive investigation. Cornet N. I. Pokrovskii was placed in charge of the Winter Palace after the October Revolution, but was then accused of stealing from its collections. The subsequent investigation examined his past activities

¹¹² See P. Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia, 1918* (Berkeley, 1971), 45–67.

¹¹³ S. Volkov, *Tragediia Russkogo ofitserstva* (Moscow, 1999), 213–27.

¹¹⁴ GARF, f. 6422, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 226–27ob, 235–35ob.

¹¹⁵ D. Golinkov, *Krushenie antisovetskogo podpol'ia v SSSR* (2 edition; 2 volumes: Moscow, 1978), I, 15, 19.

and, among other things, accused of him being a former member of the league. The Petrograd Soviet sent the Cheka membership evidence gathered during the arrest of General I. I. Federov, the league's president, after the Kornilov revolt. Eventually, Pokrovskii was judged to have joined when the league was 'fully legal', the other evidence was insubstantial, and he was freed on 24 May 1918 under the terms of the May amnesty.¹¹⁶

The Union of George Cavaliers remained active immediately after October against all odds. On the eve of the October Revolution, the Petrograd Soviet's newspaper, *Izvestiia*, subjected it to a withering attack as a counter-revolutionary body, urging cavaliers to join the newly formed, socialist alternative, the Union of Socialist George Cavaliers. The latter offered greater cultural and educational possibilities for soldiers, and was organizing cooperatives, cheap canteens, and other aid.¹¹⁷ *Izvestiia's* warnings seemed justified as some leading members of the union fought against the Bolsheviks in Petrograd during the revolution itself. On 14 December 1917, the executive committee of the Moscow branch condemned the 'counter-revolutionary' activities of cavaliers in Petrograd during the Bolsheviks' seizure of power. The Petrograd branch protested, but the central committee agreed that cavaliers had acted without authorization against the will of the people. Although the branch had been fortunate enough not to suffer any harmful consequences, the central committee said that it must reorganize and that the next congress should include a delegate from the new government.¹¹⁸ The union had been fortunate. On 29 November, the entire council of the Union of Cossacks was arrested, accused of actively supporting Kornilov in August, aiding the suppression of soldiers' committees, resisting the Bolshevik takeover, and collaborating with anti-Bolshevik forces. It had published an anti-worker newspaper and participated in a revolt in Kiev on 21–28 November.¹¹⁹ The council was freed on 12 January 1918, but the cavaliers were guilty of similar activities.

The Cossacks, of course, were a traditionally conservative force and their territories were the source of emerging opposition to the Bolsheviks. The cavaliers, in contrast, seemed to see a future in Soviet Russia, in part by expanding their everyday activities to compete with the Union of Socialist George Cavaliers. The original union now proposed to provide aid to injured soldiers, create medical establishments and schools, run technical courses (such as in agronomy), engage widely in cultural work, and help former soldiers find employment. According to the chairman of the Petrograd branch, A. S. Os'minin, their schools would teach 'socialist ideals' not 'bourgeois science' to make people more employable. This would help solve the country's problems

¹¹⁶ GARF, f. 336, op. 1, d. 271, ll. 5–5ob, 18–18ob, 76, 113–113ob.

¹¹⁷ *Izvestiia*, No. 206, 25 October 1917, 5.

¹¹⁸ GARF, f. 336, op. 1, d. 31, ll. 50–50ob. There were at least twenty-five branches at this stage.

¹¹⁹ GARF, f. 336, op. 1, d. 21, ll. 5, 7–8.

and undermine the foundations of counter-revolution.¹²⁰ Some of these activities had started in September, suggesting that the new approach began as an attempt to rehabilitate cavaliers after the Kornilov revolt, but their appeals at that stage still maintained an aggressive patriotism that disappeared after October. Instead, the Petrograd branch, for example, concerned itself with the activities of its socialist rivals, maintaining strong links with local branches, and preparing for a general congress that would renew the official union.¹²¹ The latter goal was also pursued by the central committee under General Zaionchkovskii by finalizing regulations and promoting itself as an integral part of the work of the main George Committee.¹²² The union promoted itself as politically neutral. The union's branch in Odessa, for example, rejected an offer to participate in the Ukrainian government (Rada) unless its position was confirmed by the Constituent Assembly. It would compromise their non-party status.¹²³

The Bolsheviks, however, were as suspicious of neutrality as opposition. Shots fired at Lenin's car on 1 January 1918 and rumours of further plots by officers revived suspicions. Soldiers searched the union's premises in Petrograd on 4–5 January, seizing documents and supplies, and arresting a member. The union sent a delegation to the government to explain its objectives and activities, and to protest against the search.¹²⁴ But, on 1 March, the Petrograd Soviet complained about the cavaliers in a letter to the Cheka. It believed that they were planning a series of revolts and fermenting discord in the new Red Army.¹²⁵ The results are unknown, but it is hard to believe that the Cheka ignored the complaint. The George Committee was disbanded on 21 August 1918, although there were no arrests, partly due to the May amnesty.¹²⁶

It would be misleading to suggest that all officers opposed the Bolsheviks. The Volunteer Army grew rapidly and was supplemented by forces in the east, north, and west of Russia, but not all officers joined. Kavtaradze argued that of the 250,000 officers on the eve of October, only 40% (100,000) fought in the White armies in 1918–20, with a further 30% (75,000) emigrating or returning to civilian life. The remaining 30% served in the new Red Army.¹²⁷ As the civil war intensified, the regime recognized the need for an old-style army. Their initial proclamation on 15 January 1918 announced a new worker and peasant army, and appealed for volunteers. This failed to produce the required results, and conscription and formal training were reintroduced. The military leadership was reformed in late February under Bonch-Bruевич and

¹²⁰ GARF, f. 336, op. 1, d. 31, ll. 130–30ob.

¹²¹ GARF, f. 336, op. 1, d. 26, ll. 48–61ob.

¹²² GARF, f. 336, op. 1, d. 27, ll. 6–6ob. This may have been General A. M. Zaionchkovskii, one of the first generals to support the new government. Either way, he resigned in December 1917 (d. 31, ll. 48–48ob).

¹²³ *Odesskii listok*, No. 290, 1 December 1917, 4.

¹²⁴ GARF, f. 336, op. 1, d. 26, ll. 63, 65.

¹²⁵ GARF, f. 336, op. 1, d. 34a, l. 2.

¹²⁶ GARF, f. 336, op. 1, d. 25, l. 1.

¹²⁷ A. Kavtaradze, *Voennye spetsialisty na sluzhbe respubliki sovetov 1917–1920gg.* (Moscow, 1988), 176–7. Volkov argued that 55–58,000 served (20%), but does not use archival evidence; *Tragediia*, 306.

the importance of experienced officers was vigorously promoted by Trotskii. Their plans required 55,000 officers, but only 1,773 lower-class officers had been trained by spring. Former officers were desperately needed, and 8,000 volunteered between January and May 1918, with another thousand in the following month. This is comparable with the 5,500 officers who had joined the Whites by February.¹²⁸ From mid 1918, ex-tsarist officers were conscripted as 'military specialists'. To ensure loyalty, they were placed alongside a political commissar who countersigned all orders, whilst their families and relatives were de facto hostages should the officer desert or otherwise betray the regime.

There is no doubt that these officers played a crucial role in the Red Army. They formed the vast majority of its leadership, and its administrative and training staff. Kavtaradze noted that 775 former generals served, as did 980 colonels and 746 lieutenant-colonels. Military specialists formed 85% of commanders of fronts, 82% of commanders of armies, and 70% of commanders of divisions. They dominated the staffs of armies and divisions.¹²⁹ Some of these had always been socialists or were young officers from non-traditional backgrounds who had been rapidly promoted during 1917. Nevertheless, the fact that many were prominent generals suggests that officers faced real choices after October. Recruits included former Ministers for War, A. A. Polivanov, D. S. Shuvaev (both under the tsar), and General A. I. Verkhovskii (in the Provisional Government); as well as notable generals (Bonch-Bruevich, A. A. Ignat'ev, A. A. Samoilov, B. M. Shaposhnikov, and A. A. Brusilov). The sustained opposition to military specialists from many Bolsheviks meant that they often faced resistance. This was not an easy option.

There was a difference, of course, between volunteers and those who were conscripted, but only a minority served through ideological conviction. Some were careerists, since high-level posts were easily achievable for military specialists, in contrast to bourgeois specialists elsewhere in government. The February Revolution had facilitated rapid advancement for ambitious officers and the creation of the Red Army provided similar opportunities for those who felt that the old regime had hindered their careers. Some pointed to the level of popular support that the new regime seemed to enjoy; others argued that the post-October transition was no different from coming to terms with the fall of Tsarism in February.¹³⁰ The vast majority, however, knew no other career and probably transferred from the ashes of the old army without much thought. They needed the pay and rations provided by their posts. Some officers later defected to the Whites or supplied them with information, although they were often received suspiciously and occasionally executed. In Cheliabinsk in May

¹²⁸ Kavtaradze, *Voennye spetsialisty*, 35–7, 70, 95–8.

¹²⁹ Kavtaradze, *Voennye spetsialisty*, 178, 210. Again, Volkov has offered lower figures; *Tragediia*, 246–8.

¹³⁰ Bonch-Bruyevich, *From Tsarist General*, 200; A. Ignat'ev, *Piat' desiat let v stroiu* (2 volumes: Moscow, 1950), II, 279–84, 317; A. Samoilov, *Dve zhizni* (Moscow, 1958), 177, 205.

1918, 112 out of 120 officers passed over to the Whites.¹³¹ But as Lenin noted on 9 July 1919, whilst hundreds betrayed the Bolsheviks, thousands and even tens of thousands served them loyally.¹³² In many cases, renewed comradeship with former colleagues, and a sense of professionalism and honour, committed them to the Red Army as effectively as Bolshevik threats. The regime was careful, though, to suppress the officer corps as an institution or a 'profession' that could organize to promote its interests and demands.

The motivations of officers who served the Soviet regime were actually similar to those who opposed it. Patriotism and the role of officers as defenders of the motherland remained. In 1917, most officers came to agree that the military needed discipline, officers required authority, and the war must be continued, but they disagreed on how best to achieve these aims. In 1918, most believed that Russia was seriously threatened by anarchy and needed a strong government, but still disagreed on the form of that government. Those in the White armies felt passionately that saving Russia meant destroying Bolshevism at any cost, even to the extent that some were prepared to accept assistance from their former enemies, the Germans. Those in the Red Army argued that, correctly or incorrectly, Russians supported socialism and the Bolsheviks promised a strong government that could impose order.¹³³ Opposing popular demands was pointless.

Moreover, many officers volunteered for the Red Army in early 1918 as peace talks failed and the Germans launched a new offensive that seriously threatened Petrograd. Lieutenant-General A. V. fon Shvarts made a conscious decision to serve at this time after remaining neutral. Others joined him, although some left as the threat receded.¹³⁴ There was also a surge in numbers as a series of skirmishes with Poland in 1919 turned into a full-scale war in 1920. This prompted the Bolsheviks' most famous recruit, Brusilov, to enrol. His name headed an appeal published in *Pravda* on 30 May 1920 that highlighted the critical moment that Russia was experiencing, and urged all officers to demonstrate their love for the motherland.¹³⁵ Brusilov stressed that he was serving Russia not Trotskii. Although he had favoured the February Revolution, he was initially unreceptive to Bolshevism. He was imprisoned, interrogated, and threatened by the Cheka, but refused to cooperate, just as he would not have anything to do with the Whites. His main aim in 1917 had been to save Russia from disintegration: to serve one's country when it was threatened was the only action for any patriot. In

¹³¹ V. Voinov, 'Ofiterskii korpus belykh armii na vostoke strany (1918–1920gg.)', *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, 6 (1994), 53.

¹³² V. Lenin, *Selected Works* (2 volumes: London, 1947), II, 512.

¹³³ The feeling that if socialism was inevitable the Bolsheviks represented the best chance for a strong government was present among some nobles as well; see the family debate in January 1918 in Sheremeteva, *Dnevnik*, 34–5.

¹³⁴ HIA, A. V. Shvarts papers, box 1, 'Revoliutsii', 27–39.

¹³⁵ A. Panov (ed.), *Armiiia i politika: Ofiterskii korpus v politicheskoi istorii Rossii. Dokumenty i materialy* (7 volumes: Moscow–Kaluga, 2002–3), III, 88.

1920 he believed this again. In addition, he noted prosaically the persistence of Bolshevism. Nonetheless, despite the reassuring presence of other tsarist officers, he claimed to have 'never made such a hard decision'.¹³⁶

THE EMERGENCE OF CIVIL WAR

By spring 1918, therefore, three trends were visible. First, the country was descending into a brutal civil war as opposition to the Bolsheviks had emerged in various parts of Russia, from a range of political and social groups. Secondly, it was clear that the divisions among elites that had been present throughout 1917 were worsening as they began to play crucial roles on both sides in the civil war. Finally, the prominence of officers was assured. Whereas in August 1917, many elites had questioned the wisdom of allowing officers the leading role in some future form of government, by 1918 the Bolsheviks' opponents had no choice. The civil war ensured that officers were vital to achieve victory, and there were few alternatives to a military government. Elites would not achieve popular support for their defence of private ownership and introducing law and order, and had not emerged victorious from the Constituent Assembly elections. The involvement of officers at some level was a feature of every revolt against Soviet power. Yet the fact that there were so many revolts sent out mixed messages. It seemed to demonstrate the weakness of the regime and the possibility of its collapse. Almost every *uezd* town in Saratov province, for example, suffered some type of revolt in the first half of 1918 and this situation was replicated across Russia.¹³⁷ But all of these were isolated incidents, undertaken by different, local groups, and easy for the regime to suppress.

The national organizations that emerged to resist the new regime were more marginal and divided than elite bodies before October. The council of the Congress of Public Figures resumed meeting in Petrograd during February–March 1918, chaired by D. M. Shchepkin (Kadet) as M. V. Rodzianko had fled to the south. It included V. I. Gurko and Baron V. V. Meller-Zakomel'skii from the Union of Landowners, and favoured a constitutional monarchy for Russia. But it was restricted to theoretical discussions, rather than practical action. At the same time, a new organization, the Right Centre, united conservatives, including public figures, liberals, industrialists, and some monarchists. A prominent role was played by the former tsarist minister, A. V. Krivoshein (also in the Union of Landowners), and Professor P. I. Novgorodtsev (Kadet), whilst a leadership group contained representatives from landowners, industrialists, and Kadets. The Right Centre contained a range of opinions on Russia's future, but generally favoured enlisting German help to restore the monarchy. The emphasis

¹³⁶ BAR, A. A. Brusilov papers, 'Vospominaniia', 17–19, 30–45, 60, 70.

¹³⁷ Raleigh, *Experiencing Russia's Civil War*, 39.

on German aid was contentious, given the background of the war. In May, a splinter group formed the National Centre to agitate for British, French, and American help to create a constitutional monarchy, although it did accept the temporary need for a military dictatorship. Also in May, the Union for the Regeneration of Russia represented the non-monarchist solution, whilst maintaining an anti-German stance, attracting some liberals and numerous moderate socialists. The other side of the spectrum, the Council of the Monarchist Bloc met under the protection of a German-controlled Ukraine.¹³⁸

Liberals and industrialists connected all these groups, but they were deeply divided on the future; even monarchists wavered between a constitutional monarchy and restoring Nicholas II. The Right Centre was the most organized, having branches in Petrograd and Moscow, and apparently using local branches of the Union of Landowners to disseminate material in spring 1918.¹³⁹ But these bodies, and others, spent most of their time talking not acting, cultivating loose links to officers fighting in the south and other areas, and shadowy connections to the more sizeable revolts in Moscow, Iaroslavl, and elsewhere. By summer 1918, it was clear that these groups, at best, would play a tangential role to the main White armies.

Yet the White armies faced the same divisions. The Volunteer Army in the south was underpinned by discussions in prison among the military leaders who were arrested after the Kornilov revolt. A commission had been formed under Denikin to work on Kornilov's new 'programme'. It talked of national and local government independent from 'irresponsible' bodies (soviets), continuing the war against the Germans, creating a disciplined army, re-establishing order in the rear, and delaying fundamental issues until the Constituent Assembly, but in doing so it merely reiterated the failed ideals behind the revolt.¹⁴⁰ By late 1917, military leaders were still advocating some form of military dictatorship to defeat the Bolsheviks and restore order to the country, at least in the short term. They tried to focus on immediate military needs, burying divisive political issues under claims that first and foremost the Bolsheviks had to be defeated on the battlefield. But broader issues of government could not be ignored indefinitely, whilst the migration of political figures to the south as well as officers raised the question of their role and level of influence. Similar debates raged over whether to seek help from the Germans. In short, simple opposition to the Bolsheviks and vague promises for the future were insufficient to forge unity and this had profound consequences for the civil war.

¹³⁸ The best introduction to these groups remains a two-volume work produced by the Cheka in 1920–2 that has been reprinted; *Krasnaia kniga VChK* (2 volumes: Moscow, 1990), II, 18–214. Otherwise, see G. Ioffe, *Krakh Rossiiskoi monarkhicheskoi kontrrevoliutsii* (Moscow, 1977), 100–19.

¹³⁹ Golinkov, *Krushenie antisovetskogo podpol'ia*, I, 106–7.

¹⁴⁰ A. Denikin, *Ocherki Russkoi smuty* (3 volumes: Moscow, 2005), II, 98–9.

Conclusion

This study has examined the tsarist elite from the dilemmas posed by the First World War, through the turmoil of the revolutions in 1917, before finishing with the growing desperation of the first six months of Bolshevik power. It has focused on nobles, who formed the core of the elite, and on landowners and officers. The traditional view of their fates is simple. The February Revolution destroyed an outdated regime and swept away those groups, primarily elites, who were its natural supporters and beneficiaries. After a short hiatus, elites re-emerged to form the foundation of the White opposition to Bolshevism during the civil war. Ultimately, though, they were doomed as their social background and privileged policies failed to gain popular support, despite the growing unpopularity of the Bolsheviks. The debate among historians, therefore, has tended to focus on the role of elites during the later years of Tsarism: the extent to which they were in decline or adapting to the new challenges caused by economic modernization, and the impact that this had on the regime's ability to govern effectively. After February, elites became irrelevant: an inert force in comparison with the dynamism of workers, soldiers, peasants, and revolutionaries, and incapable of influencing events.

Yet in his comparative study of European aristocracies, Dominic Lieven offered a thought-provoking challenge to this image of an obsolete group swept away by the inexorable forces of change. He does not doubt that a traditional aristocracy—hereditary, legally privileged, and socially dominant—was doomed, but argues that aristocracies could have traditions and values that were suited to the modern world. The English aristocracy remained the model that other European aristocracies aspired to emulate and, untroubled by revolution and victorious in two world wars, they enjoyed unparalleled opportunities to adapt. But Lieven believed that many aspects of the Russian aristocracy were perfectly suited to the modern industrial world. Public service and cultural leadership were, for example, key roles for the Russian aristocracy in the late tsarist period and could easily be transferred to a different political and social system. By the early twentieth century, mobility into and out of the Russian aristocracy was greater than was the case in England. The economic challenges posed by the abolition of serfdom in 1861 meant that aristocrats owned a smaller percentage of Russia's land than they did in England. The creation of wealth was becoming more diverse and making use of modern sources such as business or finance. After

1906, the State Council was envisaged as a Russian House of Lords, but remained partly elected and more diverse than its counterpart, and far from an untouchable bastion of aristocratic power. To be sure, the nobility retained certain privileges as a social group, but these were increasingly of less importance than family ties and patronage networks in securing careers and fortunes—factors that are present to some extent in all societies. The Russian aristocracy, Lieven concluded, was in many ways the aristocracy whose traditions and values ‘offered the fewest challenges to modernity and was the most likely to survive’.¹

In focusing on the aristocracy, Lieven was discussing a relatively small group of very rich and privileged Russians, usually born into old, respected families. Their wealth and connections were sufficient to shield them from many of the challenges facing most nobles and would help them prosper in any society. The same was not true of all nobles, but the growing diversity of the nobility does support his argument, albeit in a different manner. The fact that nobles were occupied in all sorts of activities from farming to business, from the civil service to law, from education to the military, and that these occupations increasingly became the focus of their identity, indicates a social group in transition. ‘Traditional’ nobles were a small group, capable of extracting profits from landed estates, whilst continuing to dominate the higher reaches of the civil and military services. Nevertheless, even key parts of the ‘traditional’ nobility, such as landowners and officers, were becoming increasingly distinct in their concerns and activities, as this study has demonstrated. To a certain extent this was always true of career officers, who saw themselves as removed from civilians and whose concerns were dominated by military issues. Increasingly, though, many landowners felt that they needed a voice that was independent of the nobility, and debates over this dominated the years prior to 1914. Studies that focus purely on the percentage of nobles in positions of power or levels of landownership are, therefore, missing a more complex process of change. Russian society was altering on the eve of the First World War, but there is no suggestion that elites would not have a long-term role to play.

This study has argued that the reaction of elites to the political and social impact of war and revolution exacerbated these trends. The regime’s incompetent handling of the war fostered the feeling that Nicholas II was harming the interests of elites. This feeling had not spread across all elites, whilst a significant number continued to support retaining some kind of monarchy. Few envisaged or supported political change to the extent that it finally materialized in February 1917. Yet, overwhelmingly, elites were moving slowly towards the idea of greater political democracy. This can be seen in the heated debates that plagued the United Nobility between 1915 and 1917, and hardly indicate a group steadfastly opposing change. This move was fuelled by the pressing need to secure military victory and the growing conviction that the existing regime threatened this goal.

¹ D. Lieven, *The Aristocracy in Europe, 1815–1914* (Basingstoke, 1992), 247–8.

Most elites, for example, recognized that the regime's unwillingness to accept the mobilization of 'public forces' (*zemstva*, urban organizations, industrialists, and liberals) was harming Russia unnecessarily. Some were also thinking about the post-war position. Russia's outdated autocracy was hindering her in terms of fighting a war against states with greater levels of democracy, and the war provided an opportunity to enforce some degree of change to help recover her fading status as a European power. Change also promised to provide an answer to the escalating social unrest that had plagued Russia over the previous decades.

Elites were thinking purely in terms of political change, however, and did not envisage anything other than basic social reforms. Nevertheless, their reaction to the social and economic challenges posed by the war exacerbated the growing distinctions between various occupational interests among elites. This was obvious within the nobility, where the war provided the impetus for the revival of a union of landowners that had briefly existed during the agrarian unrest of 1905–7 and was proposed again in 1910. This was still envisaged in terms of rich, aristocratic landowners, and discussed under the auspices of the United Nobility, but it created a vehicle to defend landed interests that could easily be adapted to serve other purposes in the future.

This growing recognition of the need for change helps explain why elites engaged with a revolution that ultimately attacked their political power, social status, economic base, and cultural values. Far from being swept away as an inert group, large sections of the elite were more active during 1917 than they had been before. The new Provisional Government was heavily reliant on elements from the old regime to govern, both nationally and locally, and sizeable numbers responded. Some continued passively in their previous posts, whilst others were motivated by the practical need to work or by a sense of duty during a period of war. Many others, though, subscribed to the political ideals that underpinned the activities of the moderate conservatives and liberals who dominated the government in the first months of the revolution. This was the type of political change that they saw as benefiting Russia, domestically and internationally. It utilized 'public forces', whilst prioritizing civil freedoms, legality, and the right of ownership. It also promised a continued influential role for elites.

Elites acted quickly to defend and promote their interests just as numerous other social and professional groups did: unions of homeowners, landowners, and officers were formed. These unions have been viewed by historians as reactive forces during the revolution, but this too is misleading. Lieven noted that the issues that nobles defended with venom prior to 1914 were essentially 'bourgeois', not feudal—the right to private landownership, for example.² The same was true in 1917. The dominant calls were to defend private property, law and order, and the rights of individuals. Of course, these calls were motivated by self-interest, as historians have pointed out, but the point is that elite demands, whether due

² Lieven, *Aristocracy*, 248.

to necessity or genuine commitment, were the type of demands that underpin modern states, and could gain support from a broad and diverse section of Russian society. Elites argued repeatedly that these were 'national' policies rather than 'class' policies, which has an element of truth, although the demands of other groups were far from being determined solely by 'class' concerns, as elites liked to claim.

Moreover, the numerous unions established to better defend and promote these ideals abandoned the policies of class discrimination that characterized similar organizations before 1917. These new bodies were professional unions on paper at least, designed to appeal to all Russians. Their success is unclear, given the lack of evidence on membership. Elites continued to dominate their national leadership, but the local picture was more diverse. Local branches of the Union of Landowners, for example, often retained prominent figures as leaders, but their meetings were dominated by peasant owners. It is clear that the revolution and the scale of the mass movement forced elites to take the final steps from class-based activities to focusing on professional or occupational interests. The nobility, in particular, saw a steady disintegration into its composite parts gather pace rapidly during 1917.

All of this suggests a need to reassess the evolving nature of conservatism—the ideology that underpinned the tsarist elite—during this period. Russian historians have devoted much effort to this area in recent years, but there is still a tendency to equate conservatism with reaction (a desire to return to some sort of mythical past), and to dismiss its relevance to Russia's changing society. Instead, historians need to take seriously the refusal of the majority of elites to call for a return to Nicholas II, even when the unfavourable direction of the revolution was leading to desperation by summer 1917. Elites recognized that there could be no return to the past given the popular mood, and that it would be counterproductive to advocate it. Many remained monarchists in some sense of the word, often favouring a constitutional monarchy to provide a degree of continuity to counterbalance the dramatic change. However, few actually desired the return of Nicholas or, indeed, an autocratic tsar. Elites did contemplate a military dictator as a quasi-monarch in August, but, broadly speaking, conservatism developed during 1917 on the basis of the 'bourgeois' ideals noted above. It offered an alternative future for Russia: one that still encompassed progress, but much less so than socialism.

The intransigent, reactionary wing of the elites remained, of course. The anti-Semitic propaganda and pogroms, xenophobia, and other traits of some monarchist groups prior to 1917 have become synonymous with elites, even though only a minority were involved. Whilst the February Revolution saw the disintegration of these groups, subjected to popular and official attacks, there was a sporadic revival as the revolutionary unrest deepened. The unions that this work focuses on, the individuals involved in these, and the majority of elites never openly resorted to anti-Semitism or monarchism in 1917, beyond

favouring a constitutional monarchy. But undoubtedly the minority remained subdued solely because of the prevailing mood of the masses. As a 'conservative movement' gathered pace in the summer, so extremism re-emerged. It formed part of broader enthusiasm for a military dictatorship, Black Hundred agitation increased, and prominent monarchists like Purishkevich started slipping anti-Semitic insinuations into their speeches. This became widespread during the civil war. Nevertheless, it is worth reiterating that most elites did not publicly subscribe to these sorts of activities before or during 1917, although occasional anti-Semitic comments may have been more common. Publicly and privately, more moderate views dominated.

Ultimately, elites were fighting a losing battle: the mass movement was growing in size and conservatism offered Russians little in terms of immediate, material improvements. Instead, popular opinion became increasingly radical, even abandoning moderate socialism as the revolution failed to bring the level of change that most Russians had expected. The desperate struggle to combat this movement split elites further, with divisions growing over the viability of various forms of future government, agrarian reform, and other issues. There is no doubt that the initial support for the political ideals of February (or at least toleration of them) was overtaken by concern, and then outright opposition, to the direction of events. The democracy that elites envisaged, which saw all Russians working together, had long been rejected by the population, leaving elites searching for alternatives, appealing in the name of Russia for order and stability. It is possible to argue endlessly about how far elites would have supported an authoritarian government had it been established, but few actively supported Kornilov's revolt in August. Undoubtedly, some were inactive because they were afraid of failure and a popular backlash (which happened), but others were sufficiently disillusioned with the authoritarian regime that they had helped displace in February to be wary of aiding the formation of another.

This uncertainty among elites was crucial. It ensured the failure of the revolt, although it is hard to see that elites could have mustered sufficient force even if they had been united. It also played a significant role in the civil war that emerged by the end of the year. As well as fuelling suspicions between moderate socialists and the rest of the anti-Bolshevik opposition, it drove a wedge between officers and other elites. The former felt betrayed by the latter's verbal support for Kornilov's aims, but unwillingness to act to enforce them. It encouraged officers to feel that the civil war should be dominated by the military to avoid similar vacillations, whilst civilian elites continued to accuse officers of acting without a true understanding of the political, economic, and social issues that were central to the revolution.

This study finishes by demonstrating how the Bolsheviks clamped down on elites and their organizations prior to the main civil war. The anti-Bolshevik opposition and the civil war were crucial parts of the revolution as it saw the Bolsheviks finally establish a secure hold on the country, but it is a vast topic that

has been extensively covered by Russian historians in recent years.³ It also only represents one of four responses taken by elites in the aftermath of the October Revolution. The stereotype has nobles fleeing Russia to scrape together a living as taxi drivers in Paris or elsewhere, and certainly many members of the elite did flee as their property was seized, and to avoid the violence meted out to 'class enemies'. Others tried to keep their heads down, concentrating on everyday survival and avoiding the attention of the regime. Sizeable numbers, especially officers, did fight the Bolsheviks on the battlefield or in the administration of the White armies scattered around Russia's periphery. But equal numbers, again including many officers, served or fought for the new soviet state, either in order to earn a living or because they had accepted that the people had chosen Russia's future.

Even those who formed the backbone of the White armies were unable to resolve the divisions that had emerged in 1917. Essentially, the Whites were unable to forge a coherent and attractive political programme, something that has long been noted by historians and is at the forefront of any explanation for their defeat. In terms of the state structure, the only thing that the liberals, conservatives, monarchists, and moderate socialists who made up the Whites could agree on was the need to re-establish law and order, and the belief in strong central authority to combat the dispersal of power to innumerable soviets and committees, and the localism that this encouraged. The power of the state must be enhanced, but the actual form of this state was hotly debated, just as it had been for months. For officers, the political manoeuvring of 1917 and its impact on the military confirmed their traditional belief that politics was harmful. They viewed the civil war as a military conflict, failing to pay attention in the first few months to wider concerns. Instead, they emphasized national unity and defending Russia, which came to be symbolized in the slogan, 'Great Russia, one and indivisible!' As Kenez noted, this made some sense initially when the concern was to unite as many disparate forces as possible against the Bolsheviks. It enabled all types of groups and individuals to join the White cause, united only by their hatred of Bolshevism, but able to believe that the Whites could offer something better.⁴

As the war progressed, these vague goals did not motivate the wider population, and disunity within the Whites became ever more apparent. The slogan mentioned above was a natural extension of the patriotic feelings of elites and their appeals of previous years, but it had not fostered wider support then, and it did not during the civil war. It alienated national minorities pressing for greater autonomy, and offered nothing that would improve the daily lives of ordinary Russians. Civilian elites, therefore, were increasingly insistent that the

³ See the updated bibliography in E. Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War* (new edition: Edinburgh, 2000).

⁴ P. Kenez, *The Civil War in South Russia, 1918* (Berkeley, 1971), 280.

White movement had to pay more attention to non-military matters. The first vague programme in 1918 promised that the Whites would form a Constituent Assembly that would decide Russia's future. But such an assembly had been easily disbanded by the Bolsheviks in January 1918 without much in the way of popular protests and hence was unlikely to inspire the people. As General A. S. Lukomskii pointed out on 27 May 1918 in a letter to General A. I. Denikin, the future commander in the south, it was unclear as to whether they meant to re-establish that particular assembly or elect another. If the latter, would elections be conducted on the basis of universal suffrage and direct representation or be restricted to propertied elements, or skewed as with the tsarist Duma?⁵ After the turmoil of 1917, a restricted option appealed to many officers. This was demonstrated by events in Ufa in late 1918. Remnants of the original assembly had formed an opposition government there, which was abruptly taken over by conservative officers.

This lack of clarity enabled the Bolsheviks to categorize the Whites as reactionaries and monarchists. This was untrue, but the fact that the latter were a relatively well-organized and increasingly vocal faction within the Whites did little to combat such accusations. Indeed, faced by the chaos and violence of civil war, many elites moved further towards authoritarianism, feeding assumptions that they had only tolerated the Provisional Government out of necessity. But other evidence suggests deep disillusionment over the failure of their vision of democracy in 1917. Countess O. G. Sheremeteva describes family debates about the relative benefits of the Bolsheviks or the Germans in the first half of 1918. The talk was of strong government and who could best ensure stability and order. On 5 July 1918, she despaired that 'good government' seemed to have to be despotic, and questioned whether democratic principles were pointless and social conscience nonsense. Events from her perspective suggested an affirmative answer, but it was not one that she wished and many elites would have agreed.⁶ Many had genuinely hoped for change in 1917 and were now disillusioned supporters of an authoritarian government, whether in the form of a White military dictatorship or Bolshevism.

More damningly, there was no attempt to instigate any type of agrarian policy to combat the Bolsheviks' popular decree on land. Policies in the east under Admiral A. V. Kolchak and under Denikin in the south restored the rights of landlords prior to the Constituent Assembly or mooted similarly conservative policies. To be sure, this appealed many landowners, who reoccupied their estates as the Whites advanced, whilst the conservative policies reflected the preponderance of landowners within the decision-making bodies of the Whites. For the peasants, it proved that the Whites offered nothing beyond a return to

⁵ The letter is reprinted in V. Polikarpov, *Voennaia kontrrevoliutsiia v Rossii, 1905–1917* (Moscow, 1990), 372–3.

⁶ O. Sheremeteva, *Dnevnik i vospominaniia* (Moscow, 2005), 51.

the old regime, and peasant support was crucial if the Whites were to emerge victorious. This was recognized belatedly by Denikin's successor, General P. N. Wrangel, who employed A. V. Krivoshein, a former tsarist minister of agriculture and council member of the Union of Landowners, as prime minister to pay more attention to social and economic issues. By 1920, a relatively moderate set of policies emerged, giving birth to the oft-repeated phrase, 'leftist policies in rightist hands'. Even then, the agrarian policies, which were based on Stolypin's post-1905 reforms like the union's proposals in 1917, were regressive when compared with the decree on land.⁷

It was a classic case of too little, too late. Lieutenant-General M. K. Diterikhs, the leader of an isolated opposition army in Russia's Far East in 1922, noted on 5 November 1922 that the predominance of hatred over brotherhood had undermined the Whites. They had fought because of anger, not for some 'great idea', and consequently focused on expunging the enemy rather than the need for creativity. Arguments, accusations, and competition dominated. The Whites were motivated too often by personal honour and heroic deeds—earthly glory, as Diterikhs termed it—rather than seeking glory from God and displaying Christian feelings and fraternity.⁸ Diterikh's explanation was infused with a quasi-mystical stance that is present elsewhere among those elites for whom religion was important. The Bolsheviks were the anti-Christ, representing the onset of the apocalypse, and the Whites were fighting to reclaim Russia from the Devil. Hatred can have a role during a civil war, and it is noticeable how one of the Whites' more effective strategies was based on the anti-Semitism prevalent among some elites. Propaganda linked Communists with Jews, thereby playing on popular hatred of Jews, provoking numerous instances of anti-Jewish violence.⁹ Yet, this merely obscured the real issue: ultimately, the Whites were unable to say what would happen to Russia if they took power and this was something that remained unresolved even during their long years in exile.¹⁰

These problems were the logical result of the trajectories taken by elites over the years of war and revolution. If the fundamental 'world view' of the Whites was founded in the military schools and regiments of Imperial Russia, as argued by Kenez,¹¹ then why did officers of similar social and political backgrounds react to the revolutions of 1917 in different ways, resulting in more remaining neutral or aiding the Bolsheviks than actively opposing them? The

⁷ D. Treadgold, 'The Ideology of the White Movement: Wrangel's "Leftist Policy from Rightist Hands"', in H. McLean, M. Malia, and G. Fischer (eds.), *Russian Thought and Politics* (Cambridge, MA, 1957), 481–97.

⁸ V. Butt et al. (eds.), *The Russian Civil War: Documents from the Soviet Archives* (Basingstoke, 1996), 196–9.

⁹ P. Kenez, 'Pogroms and White Ideology in the Russian Civil War', in J. Klier and S. Lambroza (eds.), *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History* (Cambridge, 1992), 293–313.

¹⁰ See P. Robinson, *The White Russian Army in Exile, 1920–1941* (Oxford, 2002), 165–83.

¹¹ P. Kenez, 'The Ideology of the White Movement', *Soviet Studies*, 32, 1 (1980), 58–83.

same applies to other elites, if in a different context. Kenez sees the dramatic changes in the composition of the officer corps during the First World War as providing the answer for officers, placing most new recruits into the categories of officers that remained outside of the White armies, whilst the Whites' leadership was drawn from career officers. The point about the leadership is fair, but otherwise things are not that simple. In the end it was down to individuals. The desire for a strong state may have been universal across the elite, but how individuals experienced and interpreted the war and revolution led to different conclusions about what constituted a strong state. In this sense, the roots of the Whites' failure lay in 1917, and even in the disagreements that plagued elites after 1914.

This study, therefore, has provided a more complex and complete account of the activities and thoughts of the tsarist elite during the revolutionary period than the traditional picture allows. But as well as examining the impact of revolution on elites, it also argues that elites influenced the revolutionary process, challenging the usual ways of examining 1917. Understandably, historians have focused on ordinary Russians—workers, soldiers, and peasants—as providing the dynamic for the revolutionary process. Their understanding of events, aspirations for the future, and involvement in the new soviets and committees that sprung up across Russia were crucial to the revolution, as was their interaction with the different socialist parties, particularly their relations with moderate socialists, such as Socialist Revolutionaries and Mensheviks.

They were, of course, primarily motivated by their own interests and aspirations, but all groups were also aware of the activities of their opponents and feared them, and this was true of the popular movement. The fear of counter-revolution was pervasive in 1917. The difficulty of pinning down what counter-revolution actually entailed only exacerbated its potency. Socialists accused conservatives of counter-revolution for trying to restore law and order. Conservatives accused liberals of counter-revolution as their idealism helped encourage social unrest. Almost everyone accused the Bolsheviks of counter-revolution for deliberately destabilizing politics and the military, thereby harming Russia's war effort. Counter-revolution was another one of those words, along with bourgeois and democracy, which was ever-present in 1917, even if different groups understood it in different ways. What was clear was that counter-revolution was a potent threat, and that historical experience, particularly the French Revolution, suggested that it was inevitable and needed to be guarded against and stamped down on where discovered.

In the popular imagination, tsarist elites were the most likely source of counter-revolution and the obvious targets of suspicion given that the ideals that they advocated—maintaining private ownership, law and order, and the authority of officers, for example—directly countered the aspirations of most Russians. Therefore, popular opinion feared elites to a greater extent than most historians have admitted: as Wade noted, it was a matter of fact for socialists that

the 'bourgeoisie' was present, strong, and threatening.¹² Yet it still comes as a surprise how far newspapers, particularly locally, devoted space to the activities of local unions of homeowners, landowners, and officers. Greater research in local archives will undoubtedly add to existing evidence of how meetings of these groups were disturbed and disbanded, their publications seized, and their supporters hassled and assaulted. On the one hand, this provides indirect evidence of the extent of elite groups and their activities. On the other hand, it demonstrates that these activities were worrying politically active members of the local population, and must have influenced how they thought and acted.

Ultimately, these activities helped to radicalize the popular mood during 1917. Ordinary Russians were increasingly discontented with a government that seemed unable to understand and respond to their demands, and which, despite the advent of socialists to important positions from May, still seemed to be full of tsarist-era officials favouring industrialists, landowners, and others. The continued existence of social classes and outdated institutions—most obviously, the Duma and State Council—fuelled their suspicions. Even locally, where the popular mood had a far greater impact, the removal of nobles from positions of authority was an ongoing process through the first half of 1917, as was the marginalization of the base of their power, the *zemstva*. Most Russians saw democracy as something that should solely benefit the lower social classes, rather than everyone. Consequently, arguments that elites were entitled to speak out and to form their own organizations fell on unsympathetic ears. This distrust increased once it became clear that unions of landowners were targeting peasants, unions of homeowners were appealing to various urban elements, and so on. The growth of these groups in the summer of 1917 coincided with a growing willingness on the part of the government to use forceful legal or military methods to suppress social unrest, and to introduce authoritarian measures to restore discipline into the military. It is hardly surprising that popular opinion accredited these unions with greater influence than they actually enjoyed. Despite the introduction of socialist ministers, the government appeared to be moving backwards and radical solutions were the obvious option for disillusioned Russians.

The tensions climaxed in August. For weeks, elites, especially officers, had been blunt in their condemnation of the current situation in the country, advocating a strong government as the only solution. Popular opinion wrongly assigned a greater degree of unity to elite groups than actually existed, believing that the 'right' had revived, were united and influential, and were plotting the end of the revolution. Kornilov's revolt proved this in people's minds, validating fears of counter-revolution. Elites never recovered, whilst the revolt also reduced the chances of a moderate end to the revolution, restoring the Bolsheviks to national prominence and providing them with greater credibility. They were the sole major party not associated with the government and were the true defenders of

¹² R. Wade, *The Russian Revolution, 1917* (2 edition: Cambridge, 2005), 64.

the revolution. When combined with their simple, but direct slogans—peace, bread, and land—they promised concrete benefits for ordinary Russians, rather than obtuse discussions of liberty, elections, and national interests.

Nevertheless, after the Bolsheviks seized power in October, they quickly discovered that they could not build a new state without the participation of elements of the old regime, including elites. Indeed, Lenin had always realized this in respect to the governmental apparatus, whilst Trotskii quickly came to similar conclusions with regards to the military. Nonetheless, the debate over the value and use of ‘bourgeois specialists’ continued for years, forming part of the attack on engineers and other specialists in the late 1920s and the purge of the military high command in 1937. The Bolsheviks were well aware whilst fighting the civil war, and whilst recovering in the 1920s, that many ‘class enemies’ survived and prospered within the state apparatus. This fuelled their determination to root out enemies across Russia, encouraging the emergence of the violent and repressive Soviet state.

In terms of 1917 itself, the activities of elites add credence to recent research on the nature of democracy after February. The Provisional Government was an amalgamation of the old (in terms of personnel, for example) and the self-consciously new, with a truly revolutionary vision of civil liberties, rule of law, electoral rights, and self-government, all in the name of democracy. Yet, faced with innumerable interest groups, professional associations, and ‘public’ or ‘social’ bodies, alongside continuing institutional rivalry within the bureaucracy (a legacy from Tsarism) and its own electoral illegitimacy, the government had no choice but to listen to, and involve, all of these groups in the exercise of power. It is particularly notable that when the government was growing weaker, its attempts to bolster its support through the Moscow Conference, Democratic Assembly, and Preparliament involved complex negotiations to ensure that all key groups were represented. As Orlovsky has persuasively argued, the Provisional Government was actually more corporate than democratic, and the viability of alternative forms of democracy to western-style parliamentary institutions should be considered when assessing 1917.¹³

In the end, the government struggled between the ideology that fuelled its conception—namely, to prioritize state or national interests rather than specific programmes—and popular expectations that it would introduce policies to benefit ordinary Russians. These expectations increased after socialists entered the government in May, but even they believed that the government should pursue non-partisan interests wherever possible prior to the formation of the Constituent Assembly. Elites supported the idea that the Provisional Government

¹³ D. Orlovsky, ‘Corporatism or Democracy: The Russian Provisional Government of 1917’, in A. Weiner (ed.), *Landscaping the Human Garden* (Stanford, 2003), 67–90. Rosenberg outlines similar views, emphasizing the mediating role of the government rather than it being the sole decision-making body; W. Rosenberg, ‘Social Mediation and State Construction(s) in Revolutionary Russia’, *Social History*, 19, 2 (1994), 169–88.

should protect national interests rather than class or party interests, of course. They always saw themselves as acting in the national interest throughout the years of war, revolution, and civil war, and styled themselves as the true 'defenders of the motherland'. Yet, just as the government failed to live up to its ideal, so too did elites. The unions they formed to defend these interests were no different from those created by other social and professional groups. In short, defending the motherland depended on how a particular group conceived of the motherland: all groups saw satisfying their own interests as benefiting the country as a whole. The fatal problem for elites was that despite their best efforts to try to represent something bigger than themselves, whether Russia or simply all property owners, they could not disguise the fact that they formed a small minority of the population. The masses do not always emerge out of revolutions victorious, and it is questionable whether they did so in this case given the nature of the subsequent Soviet regime, but it is clear that elites were always fighting a losing battle to influence events in 1917. This did not mean that they quietly submitted: instead, they were another active group contributing to political and social conflict during this period, and to the lasting significance of the Russian Revolution.

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