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Personal and Political Networks in 1917: Vladimir Zenzinov and the Socialist Revolutionary Party

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Abstract

This article explores the place of individuals, ideologies and personal and political networks in shaping the larger political landscape in revolutionary Russia. The shape and culture of the Socialist Revolutionary Party (PSR) will be at the heart of my analysis of coalition politics. I focus particularly on the personal and political networks surrounding Vladimir Mikhailovich Zenzinov during 1917. This analysis suggests that the shape of coalition politics in 1917 was defined in part by pre-revolutionary social and political networks, and that these to some extent transcended party political affiliations. While the nature of coalition politics necessitated this political fluidity, it is nevertheless worth emphasizing, because the discourse around 1917 is often framed along explicitly party political lines.

Keywords

Socialist Revolutionary Party (PSR) – 1917 – Provisional Government – Vladimir Zenzinov – Revolutionary Russia

Semion Lyandres's recent collection of interviews demonstrates the importance of personal relationships and networks in defining political participation

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during 1917.² This article will explore the personal and political networks of the Socialist Revolutionary Party (PSR) member Vladimir Zenzinov during 1917. The historical discourse that has developed around high politics in 1917 has emphasized ideological divisions and party political considerations. By emphasizing individual backgrounds and networks within the PSR, this study offers us an alternative framework through which to interrogate the politics of 1917.³ This article contributes to our understanding of the revolution in three ways. First, exploring the milieu of the PSR's political elite enables a glimpse into relationships between personal, institutional and political networks. Second, political actors without a strong public face are under-reported in the revolutionary narratives, but they could play vital roles in decision-making. This exploration of personal networks hints at the possible roles of the revolution's 'back room men'. Finally, this study complicates and blurs the party political and ideological lines drawn between the different strands of Russia's revolutionary political elite in 1917.

Vladimir Zenzinov was a lynchpin member of the PSR. He stood in the centre-right of the party, served on the party's Central Committee, and was an active member of its terrorist wing. He was famously exiled to remote Yakutsk province for his revolutionary activities, from whence he repeatedly escaped.⁴ In 1917, he took on multiple roles within the party's upper strata in Petrograd, acting as a party organizer and chief whip, editing the party's newspaper *Delo naroda*, as well as serving on the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. He was close friends with Aleksandr Kerenskii, and acted as an interlocutor in the fractious relations between Kerenskii and the PSR's Central Committee. He was the epitome of the back room man—he was no orator or public figure, but his actions and ideas shaped the PSR's responses to the revolutionary year.

The PSR was Russia's largest and most popular political party in 1917. Its programme was founded on socialisation of land, expropriation of land without compensation, and a federal republic state. Viktor Mikhailovich Chernov, the party's leading theorist, argued that the positive aspects of capitalism, manifested primarily in large-scale production and the co-operative

2 Semion Lyandres, *The fall of Tsarism: Untold stories of the February 1917 Revolution* (Oxford, 2013).

3 James Joll's study of the First World War appealed to historians to look to the common educational backgrounds of the British political elites in shaping their responses to war. (James Joll, "1914: The unspoken assumptions," in *The origins of the First World War*, ed. H. W. Koch (Basingstoke, 1972), 313–16.)

4 He wrote a florid but magnificent memoir of his final Siberian exile; Vladimir Zenzinov, *The road to oblivion* (New York, 1931).

movement, could be realized in Russia without the unmitigated development of capitalism. Chernov aimed to protect peasant interests through the non-capitalist development of agriculture.⁵ In the PSR vision, the peasantry did not have to become an industrial proletariat for socialism to triumph. The PSR expressed itself as an organic part of social democrat-oriented international socialism.⁶ Chernov's attempts to assimilate nascent SR theories with western European socialism waned after 1902, however, when western European socialism came to be associated with reformism, while Chernov preferred to be positioned firmly on the side of 'revolutionaries'.⁷

The PSR's programme offered a 'third way' for Russia in 1917, uniting toilers and intelligentsia to avoid the spectre of out-and-out class war, and instead offering Russia the opportunity to develop its own brand of socialism. Although it adopted Marxist class models, it regarded class as secondary to education and understanding in forming social groups. Working peasants were included in the category of toilers, and their unity of interests with the industrial proletariat was stressed repeatedly in party literature, particularly in 1917.⁸ Rather than playing on the imagery of class war, Chernov preferred to regard the destruction of private property as benefiting exploiters, as well as toilers. Toilers would be freed of 'excessive work and semi-starvation', while the exploiters would be relieved of 'the degeneration of mankind from uselessness and superfluity'.⁹

The PSR was unable to bring its third way politics to the fore in 1917, and has consequently been marginalized in studies of the revolutionary period.

5 Chernov outlined his theoretical stance on the agrarian question in a series of articles published in *Russkoe bogatstvo* in 1900. Chernov, 'Tipy kapitalisticheskoi i agrarnoi evoliutsii', *Russkoe bogatstvo* no. 5 (1900): 48.

6 Chernov, 'Tipy kapitalisticheskoi i agrarnoi evoliutsii', *Russkoe bogatstvo* no. 10 (1900): 251–56; Chernov, 'K voprosu o kapitalisticheskoi i agrarnoi evoliutsii' *Russkoe bogatstvo* no. 11 (1900): 259.

7 See Hannu Immonen, *The Agrarian Program of the Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party, 1900–1914* (Helsinki, 1988): 74; V. Chernov, 'Sotsializatsiia zemli i kooperatsiia v sel'skom khoziaistve', *Revoliutsionnaia Rossiia* 14 (1902).

8 For an elucidation of this, see L. Shishko, *Po programmym voprosam* (Moscow, 1906), 39. Shishko was among the leading theorists of the PSR, participating in the working out of its programme, and a member of the PSR committee abroad. See also Christopher Rice, *Russian workers and the Socialist Revolutionary Party through the revolution of 1905–7* (Basingstoke, 1988).

9 The quotations are drawn from the PSR party programme. (*Politicheskie partii Rossii, konets 19- pervaiia tret' 20 veka. Entsiklopediia*, ed. V. V. Shelokhaev (Moscow, 1996), 139–46.) The superfluous man was a theme of late nineteenth-century literature, perhaps most famously in M. Lermontov, *A Hero of Our Time* (Harmondsworth, 1966).

Michael Melancon has been the party's key chronicler and champion over recent decades in western scholarship, while Mikhail Ivanovich Leonov and Konstantin Nikolaevich Morozov have led scholarship on the PSR from within the Russian Federation.¹⁰ Scholarship on the party is still relatively small, and has tended to focus on its terrorist and agrarian elements, though its leading figures, Aleksandr Fedorovich Kerenskii and Viktor Chernov, have recently been the subject of scholarly biographies.¹¹ Oliver Radkey's 1958 work stands as the only work focusing exclusively on the PSR in 1917. Hannu Immonen's recent biography of Chernov has demonstrated that Radkey's treatment of the SRS is misleading in its treatment both of Chernov and more broadly of SR policies.¹² Radkey's work has been treated here as a primary source in its own right, as it forms a repository for oral testimonies collected by Radkey himself from the

10 Michael Melancon, "Marching together! Left bloc activities in the Russian revolutionary movement, 1900–February 1917," *Slavic Review* no. 2 (1990): 239–52; "Soldiers, peasant-soldiers, and peasant-workers and their organisations in Petrograd: Ground level revolution during the early months of 1917," *Soviet and Post Soviet Review* no. 3 (1996): 161–90; "The SR Party, 1917–1920," in *Critical Companion to the Russian Revolution*, ed. Edward Acton, V. U. Cherniaev, and William G. Rosenberg, *The SR Party, 1917–1920* (London, 1997), 281–90; M. I. Leonov, *PSR v 1907–1914 gg.* (Moscow, 1997); K. N. Morozov, *Partiia sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov v 1907–1914gg.* (Moscow, 1998).

11 Hannu Immonen, *Mechty o novoi Rossii: Viktor Chernov (1873–1952)* (St. Petersburg, 2015); Vladimir Fediuk, *Kerenskii* (Moscow, 2009). Manfred Hildermeier dominated the German scholarship on the Socialist Revolutionary Party. His major work published in 1978 was published in an English translation in 2000. M. Hildermeier, *Die Sozialrevolutionäre Partei Russlands: Agrarsozialismus und Modernisierung in Zarenreich (1900–1914)* (Köln, 1978); Manfred Hildermeier, *The Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party before the First World War* (Münster, 2000). Studies on the agrarian programme of the PSR include Maureen Perrie, *The agrarian policy of the Socialist Revolutionary Party. From its origins through the revolution of 1905–7* (Cambridge, 1976); Hannu Immonen, *The agrarian programme of the Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party, 1900–1914*. Notable works on the Left Socialist Revolutionaries include Lutz Haefner, "Die Partei der Linken Sozialrevolutionäre in der russischen Revolution von 1917–18" (Doctoral thesis, Köln, 1994), Ronald Kowalski, "Fellow Travellers' or revolutionary dreamers? The left SRS after 1917," *Revolutionary Russia*, no. 2 (1998), pp. 1–31, Scott B. Smith, *Captives of revolution: the socialist revolutionaries and the Bolshevik dictatorship, 1918–1923* (Pittsburgh, Pa, 2011). Other significant works include B. V. Levanov, "Programmnye printsipy partii sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov," *Voprosy Istorii KPSS*, no. 6 (1991), pp. 100–09; Lev G. Protasov, "K istorii bor'bi eserov za armiiu v 1917g," in *Neproletarskii partii Rossii v trekh revoliutsiakh. Sbornik statei*, ed. K. V. Gusev (Moscow, 1989); Nurit Schlieffman, *Undercover Agents in the Russian Revolutionary Movement. The SR Party 1902–1914* (London, 1988).

12 Immonen, *Mechty o novoi Rossii*, see conclusion for analysis of Radkey.

party's luminaries in exile. The person at the heart of this interrogation, Vladimir Mikhailovich Zenzinov, was one of Radkey's most trusted sources.¹³

Vladimir Zenzinov and his milieu

Vladimir Zenzinov was born into an extremely wealthy merchant family. His father was a Moscow merchant, and both his parents came originally from Nerchinsk; his mother was reportedly descended from one of the *strel'tsy* families. Zenzinov's father had developed his trade network through Siberia, and the family retained their links with the region, which was to help Zenzinov when he was later exiled to Siberia. Zenzinov described his family life as stable and loving, with his own adventures the chief source of familial stress and anxiety. He commented that 'no-one at home was interested in social problems or cared for politics.'¹⁴ He was an able student, and the only one of four siblings to attend the gymnasium, where he flourished academically, and developed an enthusiasm for radical politics, unlike his 'rather dissipated' brothers. Zenzinov spent his adolescent weekends composing pamphlets, which he scattered randomly around Moscow's working-class districts. The pamphlets were inspired and shaped by his study of the French revolution. These youthful activities drew the attention of police agents—his first summons to the secret police offices came when he was seventeen years old. The young Zenzinov headed to Europe to attend university, starting in Brussels in 1899, before moving on to study in Berlin and Heidelberg. Zenzinov developed lifelong friendships during his university years, and cemented his commitment to the revolutionary cause. The thriving Russian student community in Berlin provided Zenzinov with a forum to meet like-minded Russian youths. Despite sentimental attachment to Russia, Zenzinov and his ilk felt most at home in Western Europe. When he crossed the border into Western Europe for the first time in 1899, he recalled that:

My new impressions were truly enchanting. As soon as I crossed the Russian frontier, with its customs officials and hateful gendarmes, the new world opened before me. Instead of scattered villages of thatched roofs

13 Oliver H. Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism. Promise and Default of the Russian Socialist Revolutionaries, February to October 1917* (New York, 1958).

14 Bakhmeteff Archive, Butler Library, Rare Book and Manuscript section, Columbia University; 'Vladimir Mikhailovich Zenzinov papers, 1900–1953' (henceforth Zenzinov papers), box 12, 'Our family', p. 21.

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and ragged, bare-foot children, where everything spoke of a wretched, primitive life, I saw densely populated towns, clean houses, iron roofs, well-dressed men and women. Everything seemed different.¹⁵

His hostility towards rural Russian poverty and culture, and the unspoken approval of German 'superiority' in hygiene, town planning, education, agriculture, and so on, spoke volumes about his attitude towards Russia, and Russia's rural people. This more broadly reflected the values of late Imperial educated society. Germans were held up as models of zealous 'un-Russian' cleanliness and efficiency. Russia's nineteenth-century literature is replete with these clichés, as with Goncharov's depiction of Oblomov's strict and businesslike German steward, the references to Germans in Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*, and Tolstoy's representation of Nekhliudov's German steward in his last and great novel *Resurrection*.¹⁶

Zenzinov moved in circles of highly educated, intelligent young Russians, who were from extremely privileged backgrounds. The interconnectedness of Socialist Revolutionary activists had an incestuous feel, with close concentric circles of association. Zenzinov developed deep and enduring friendships with

¹⁵ V. Zenzinov, *Perezhitoe* (New York, 1953), 66.

¹⁶ Ivan Sergeevich Turgenev, *Fathers and Sons*, ed. Rosemary Edmonds (Harmondsworth, 1965), 111; Ivan Aleksandrovich Goncharov, *Oblomov* (London, 1954); Leo Tolstoy, *Resurrection* (Oxford, 1899), book 2, chapter 1.

Abram Rafailovich Gots, Ilia Isidorovich Fondaminskii and Nikolai Dmitrievich Avksent'ev, all of whom were central figures in the PSR and in party activity during 1917. Zenzinov was in love with Amaliia Osipovna Gavronsky. Amalia was a Moscow merchant's daughter. Her brother, Dmitrii Osipovich Gavronsky, was a prominent figure in the PSR. Dmitrii Osipovich studied in German universities between 1899 and 1904, and was a Doctor of Philosophy. He joined the PSR in 1904, and was exiled administratively overseas in 1907. He returned to Russia in 1910, but was forced to emigrate again. He returned to Russia through Germany in 1917, became a member of the Moscow Soviet, and was elected to the Constituent Assembly on the PSR list for Simbirsk.¹⁷

Amaliia, like her brother, was entangled with the PSR's upper echelons. When Zenzinov confessed his feelings to Amaliia, she explained that she was secretly engaged to Ilia Fondaminskii. The young Zenzinov suffered great emotional torment as a result, but declared that his love for Amaliia ultimately brought him closer to his dear friend Fondaminskii. Zenzinov's love for Amaliia seemed to endure through his life—his personal photographs are replete with images of the beautiful Amaliia, and he never married.¹⁸ Zenzinov's private photographs of the friends together reveal the wealth and privilege that surrounded this group. They lived well wherever they went, and looked every inch the wealthy merchants' sons and daughters they were, hiking in the Alps, riding good horses in full equipment, taking the air in various spas. All of his intimates came from extremely wealthy and privileged backgrounds, and their life in Europe reflected the pastimes and preoccupations of the extremely wealthy.¹⁹ The Gots family was one of the wealthiest in the Russian Empire, the Fondaminskii family was not far behind, and Zenzinov's father had a fortune of more than a million rubles.²⁰

Avksent'ev, Gots and Fondaminskii were Zenzinov's closest friends and his political allies. The four men had much in common, in terms of their backgrounds, their education, and their carceral experiences. Avksent'ev was a nobleman, and studied in Berlin, where he joined the émigré revolutionary movement. Both Gots and Fondaminskii were merchants' sons, like Zenzinov.

17 Gavronsky emigrated in 1918, and became a professor of Philosophy at Berlin University. (L. G. Protasov, *Liudi Uchreditel'nogo sobraniia: portret v inter'ere epokhi* (Moscow, 2008), 277.)

18 Amaliia died in 1935 from tuberculosis, in Switzerland. Zenzinov contributed to a volume published in her memory in Paris in 1937. Z. N. Gippius, V. V. Nabokov, and V. Zenzinov, *Pamiati Amalii Osipovny Fondaminskoi* (Parizh, 1937).

19 Zenzinov papers, boxes 3, 27, 29, 30.

20 Hildermeier, *The Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party before the First World War*, 254.

They were also both Jewish, and Zenzinov commented that they were his first close association with Jews, whom he described as 'just like him, as members of the Russian intelligentsia', but with distinct and arcane family backgrounds and traditions. Gots and Fondaminskii both had elder brothers who were involved in the Populist revolutionary movement and exiled to Siberia. Matvei Fondaminskii died of tuberculosis in Siberia at the age of 29. Mikhail Gots was exiled to eastern Siberia in 1886, but was amnestied in 1895, and was a leading light of the émigré revolutionary movement in Paris and Geneva until his death in 1906. Both men's younger brothers became intimately involved in the revolutionary movement, and Gots junior had smuggled manuscripts out of Russia when he was only 17 years old.

Like almost all revolutionary activists, the four men shared experiences of arrest, incarceration and exile. The carceral lives of wealthy, well-connected men like Zenzinov and Avksent'ev reflected the particularities of their milieu. Their daily lives in exile were cushioned by their wealth and privilege, and escape from exile was facilitated by money. While very many exiles of all social backgrounds escaped between 1905 and 1917, those who went abroad were disproportionately from wealthy backgrounds.²¹ All four men spent many years of their pre-revolutionary lives in Western Europe. Fondaminskii escaped from



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21 See Sarah Badcock, *A Prison Without Walls? Eastern Siberian Exile in the Last Years of Tsarism* (Oxford, 2016).

Russia in 1906 after being arrested, and stayed in Europe till the 1917 revolution. Avksent'ev escaped from exile in 1907, and based himself in Paris until the revolution. Abraham Gots was arrested and sentenced to seven years hard labour in 1907, followed by exile in Irkutsk province. He returned to Petrograd in April 1917, as did Fondaminskii and Avksent'ev.

The vast majority of the revolutionary movement's leaders shared this history of prison, exile and emigration. Indeed, when we look to the biographies of revolutionaries across the political spectrum, the degree of commonality in their backgrounds and experiences is startling. Zenzinov's social background was typical of the PSR elites, which were dominated by wealthy, young, male intellectuals. Over its existence from 1902 till 1925, the PSR's Central Committee had 74 members.²² Only nine per cent of them (seven) were of working-class (peasant or worker) background, while nearly thirty percent (23) were from the nobility. All but three of the 74 had middle or higher education.²³ Although the PSR had a number of very prominent female members, its leadership was absolutely dominated by men. Only eight percent (six) of the Central Committee were women. The Central Committee of the Left SRS largely shared this background as well, though the proportion of Left SRS who had spent much time abroad was substantially lower. The Left SRS were also in a different demographic group—they tended to be younger than the centre and right SRS.²⁴ Most of the SR leadership represented themselves very self-consciously as part of Russia's intelligentsia.²⁵ They cultivated and supported one another, and perpetuated very particular ideas about revolution and ordinary people. They almost without exception lacked any direct experience of lower-class life in Russia, and their notions of revolution were shaped in abstract ideas, and in the model of the French revolution.

While Zenzinov and his circle came to be advocates of moderate coalition politics in 1917, this proclivity to coalition was not defined by their backgrounds and experiences. Many of those to the left, who were hostile to the Provisional Government and who promulgated radical alternatives to 1917, shared their trajectories. Mark Andreevich Natanson, for example, a founder

22 1925 was the end of the party's activities in the Soviet Union. The party's Central Committee endured abroad until 1939.

23 Data compiled from *Politicheskii partii Rossii, konets 19- pervaiia tret' 20 veka. Entsiklopediia*; Leonov, *PSR v 1907–1914 gg.*

24 Ia. A. Leon'tev, "Personal'nyi sostav Ts.K. partii levykh eserov (problemy rekonstruktsii)," *Otechestvennaya istoriia* no. 2 (2007): 121–39.

25 See Christopher Read, *Culture and Power in Revolutionary Russia: the Intelligentsia and the Transition from Tsarism to Communism* (New York, 1990), 14, 37.

member of the PSR and always a leading light of its left faction, was born of a merchant family. He fled Russia in 1904 after multiple escapes, imprisonments and exiles, and lived in Munich and Lausanne. Boris Davidovich Kamkov, another leader of the Left SRS in 1917, had modest intelligentsia parentage. He fled abroad in 1907, and lived in Germany, France and Italy. He completed his law degree at Heidelberg in 1911. Isaac Nakhmanovich Shteinberg became one of the Left SRS' leading figures, and served briefly as Minister of Justice in the LSR-Bolshevik coalition government. Shteinberg was from a Jewish merchant family. He was a polyglot, and studied law at the universities of Moscow and Heidelberg. He joined the PSR in 1906, and was arrested and exiled in 1907. He fled abroad, then returned to Russia in 1910, and worked in law and publishing till he was again arrested and exiled in 1915. These men shared an affiliation with the PSR, and inhabited the same worlds socially, culturally and geographically. In 1917, however, they were to adopt extremely divergent positions, but in the pre-revolutionary period the revolutionary cliques abroad were difficult to disentangle—they inhabited concentric circles, joined by place, by marriage, by friendship, and by association.

Chernov's biography is a useful illustration of these intersections between personal and political relationships within the party. Chernov, who was to become the titular leader of the PSR, was a little older than Zenzinov, and was not one of his close friends. Born into a family of civil servants in Samara province, Chernov joined the law faculty at Moscow University in 1892. He was first arrested in April 1894 and was imprisoned in the Peter and Paul Fortress for six months, then sent into exile. Chernov went into emigration in 1899, where he remained until April 1917, apart from a brief return to Russia in 1905.²⁶ Chernov married Anastasiia Nikolaevna Sletova, a civil servant's daughter from Tambov, in 1899. Sletova was an important figure in the party in her own right; she was a founder member of the PSR, and was elected to the Constituent Assembly for Tambov. Her brother, Stepan Nikolaevich Sletov, was a significant figure in the PSR. Also a founder member, Sletov moved in and out of Russian underground work, prison and exile, and emigration, and was a key figure in the development of the party's terrorist wing. The PSR elites were connected by social background, by carceral experience, by friendship, and by marriage.

Zenzinov's connections with the PSR emerged directly from his personal friendship networks. At university, Zenzinov and his friends had run errands for the new party, collecting funds for publications from among the Russian student body, circulating copies of 'Revolutionary Russia', and recruiting new sympathizers. Mikhail Gots and Osip Solomonovich Minor came to Halle in

²⁶ For more detail, see Immonen, *Mechty o novoi Rossii*, chapters 1–4.

1903 to ask Zenzinov, Avksent'ev and Abram Gots to join active party work, but they refused because they wanted to complete their studies, as they believed that their higher education would help them to 'serve the cause'. Zenzinov changed his mind, and set aside his Ph.D. studies to return to Russia and enter full-time revolutionary work in December 1903. This change of heart was not a result of his revolutionary fervor. It came about because of his doomed love for Amalia—immersion in party work gave him a chance to distance himself physically and emotionally from his love triangle. He was summoned to Nice to meet Mikhail Gots, who gave him his mission: to form a party committee in Moscow, and to hand a book to Evno Fischelevich Azef.²⁷ This mission initiated Zenzinov into the party's inner circles, where he was to stay until the end of the PSR's existence.

Vladimir Zenzinov had a romantic attachment to the PSR movement, but there is little indication in his memoirs that he held a strong ideological affinity with Populism. Rather, his social circles defined his political affiliations. There are no indications anywhere in Zenzinov's writings that he had any direct connections with lower-class Russians, or any practical experience of life outside his privileged world. In a revealing anecdote, Zenzinov recalls a meeting in 1906 with his friend Gots, who had disguised himself as a cabby and had gone underground as part of a terrorist plot to kill Ivan Nikolaevich Durnovo, then Minister of the Interior. Zenzinov was astonished by his friend's life experiences as a working man, and recalled that "Abram told me many interesting things about the life of the poor in St Petersburg."²⁸ Russia's lower classes were almost entirely outside Zenzinov's knowledge and experience. After the October revolution, Zenzinov expressed the belief that 'the masses' did support Bolshevism, but that they would 'sober up' when peace and land were shown to be illusory.²⁹ His attitude towards the PSR's constituency was derisory. He had no notion of the party's popular support, or what their support base might be based on. This lack of connection with the party's popular base was a feature of coalition policies as they developed in 1917. The moderates stressed the need to contain and manage popular political attitudes and actions, and to educate ordinary Russians so that they would support the 'correct' political position.³⁰ The political left, on the other hand, though not necessarily more intimately

27 See Zenzinov papers, box 12. Also Zenzinov, *Perezhitoe*, 110.

28 Zenzinov papers, box 13, p. 79; see also *Perezhitoe*, 303.

29 'Upoenie pobedami', *Delo naroda* no. 198, November 3, 1917.

30 For a discussion of this trend within Provisional Government policy more broadly, see Sarah Badcock, "Talking to the People and Shaping Revolution: The Drive for Enlightenment in Revolutionary Russia," *Russian Review* 4 (65) (2006): 617–36.

connected with ordinary Russians, tended to support grassroots political activism, and retained an enthusiasm for popular action.

The PSR in 1917

PSR members were the infamous losers of the revolution in 1917. They apparently wielded popular support but failed to translate it into political power. Of the party's leading figures, only Kerenskii, whose affiliation with the PSR was in fact tenuous at best, and Chernov, the party's leading theorist and Minister of Agriculture for three months in 1917, are names that might spark popular recognition. The party's other luminaries are mostly anonymous in the historical narrative, condemned to grey absence by the failure of their party to command political power relative to their apparent support. The historian Oliver Radkey noted that while Chernov and Kerenskii were outstanding personalities despite their faults, the party's other leading figures 'seem to have been men of rather average ability'.³¹ These average men were revolutionary generals in 1917. They led the revolution's key institutions, and their political decisions were instrumental in shaping the ultimate defeat of moderate socialism. Zenzinov had returned to Moscow in 1915 after having completed his sentence of exile. He arrived in Petrograd in January 1917, and lived there, in the heart of revolutionary politics, until January 1918.

Zenzinov was a back room man, a journalist and party organizer, not an orator or a politician. This means that he was largely occluded from public view in 1917. The only hint that he might ever have taken a more public role was Radkey's suggestion that Zenzinov was considered, but overlooked, for a ministerial post in late summer.³² He was the leading figure in the PSR's centre-right faction, and this faction dominated official PSR policy in 1917. Zenzinov belonged to an exclusive milieu, which largely shared their social background, education, travel, and attitudes towards ordinary people and to revolutionary struggle. Zenzinov's personal networks within the elite political milieu overlapped with political ideologies in shaping his responses to 1917.

The PSR's distinctive vision of united class interests among peasants, workers and intelligentsia dominated PSR propaganda in 1917, and defined their narrative of the 1917 revolution. Zenzinov maintained a robust commitment to this position, and was a staunch defender of the party's centre-right position. While third-way politics should have been relevant to the discours-

³¹ Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism*, 461.

³² *Ibid.*, 316.

es that developed in 1917, the PSR failed to make a substantial impact on the shape of revolutionary discourse, which largely speaking eschewed third-way politics and instead emphasized class struggle and irreconcilable polarization and alienation of different political positions.³³ The Left SR faction emphasized the prioritization of more immediate lower-class gains from the outset, over 'bourgeois' and 'reactionary' political coalition with moderates, and this drew them towards a relationship with the Bolsheviks.

The roles adopted by Zenzinov and his closest associates in 1917 testified to their power and influence in the revolutionary year. When the February revolution engulfed Petrograd, Zenzinov played a leading role in the formation of the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' deputies, though he was not very active within it.³⁴ He energetically pursued the unmasking of former police agents, and oversaw the decommissioning of the tsarist police.³⁵ He was a party organizer and shaper. Zenzinov's closest friends also played leading roles. All were members of the PSR's central committee. Avksent'ev was a member of the executive committee of the Petrograd Soviet and chairman of the All-Russian Soviet of Peasants' Deputies. He was Minister of Internal Affairs in the Provisional Government from the 24 July until the beginning of September, and in October he served as chairman of the Pre-Parliament. Abram Gots was the leader of the SR faction in the Petrograd soviet. He was chairman of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, which was elected by the First All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies in June 1917. Fondaminskii was deputy president of the Soviet of Peasants' Deputies, and Provisional Government's commissar for the Black Sea Fleet.

Zenzinov stood firmly in the centre-right ground of the PSR. This position gained nominal authority over the rest of the party in 1917, and policy statements issued in the name of the PSR during 1917 came from Zenzinov's group. Their commitment to the coalition, and to the war effort, meant that they turned to moderation on the land question, repeating Provisional Government policy that the peasants must wait until the convocation of the Constituent

33 See Smith, *Captives of Revolution: the Socialist Revolutionaries and the Bolshevik Dictatorship, 1918–1923*, xiv–xv.

34 Zenzinov's account of the February Revolution has been well used by historians: V. Zenzinov, "Fevral'skie dni," *Novyi zhurnal* no. 34–35 (1953): 208–40.

35 Zenzinov does not refer to these activities in his memoirs. Sukhanov mentions Zenzinov's role in identifying former spies; N. N. Sukhanov and Joel Carmichael, *The Russian Revolution, 1917: A Personal Record* (Princeton, N. J.; Guildford, 1984), 196–97. For other treatments of the dismantling of the police system, see Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, "Crime, police and mob justice in Petrograd during the Russian revolutions of 1917," in *Revolutionary Russia: New Approaches*, ed. Rex A. Wade, Crime, police and mob justice (New York, 2004), 46–72.

Assembly for the reallocation of land. The PSR's high levels of popular support was closely associated with its slogan "Zemlia i volia" (Land and Freedom), a pithy cry that encapsulated a general drive to seize privately held land (let the land belong to those who work it), and an inchoate notion of freedom from obligation and constraint. This slogan was an attractive sentiment, but its application in 1917 was to prove deeply challenging, not least because there was no clear explanation either of how land could be transferred to peasant communities, or what freedom was to mean. The interpretation of this slogan and agreeing on a timetable for its implementation, were questions at the heart of many of the divisions that emerged in the PSR during 1917, at national, regional, and local levels. The All Russian Soviet of Peasants' Deputies was dominated by right-centrist elements, and it echoed Provisional Government policy on the land question—they sought to postpone land reform until the Constituent Assembly was convened, and saw the government's role as 'purely protective'.³⁶ This cautious approach was not mirrored by the actions of peasants in regions across Russia, who transgressed the norms of private land-ownership throughout 1917.³⁷

There were profound and multiple disagreements within the party structures at every level. This disunity was a central part of what it was to be a member of the PSR. As early as 1901, Chernov spelt out the heterogeneity that the PSR embraced:

Every vital developing social movement which comprehends reality according to local conditions of strength cannot expand without certain programmatic and tactical disagreements. Moreover, these disagreements may rightly be called the moving force to develop a party programme. A party must be able to guarantee to its members in each given moment freedom of opinion, full freedom of speech in defining their tactics [while] uniting with this full discipline to act in the completion of those tasks accepted by majority decision. The party must be organised democratically.³⁸

Chernov's enthusiasm for democracy and disagreement within the party placed him in stark contrast with the party philosophy developed by his

36 Vladimir Zenzinov, "Podzhigateli," *Delo naroda* no. 125, August 12, 1917.

37 See for example Sarah Badcock, *Politics and the people in revolutionary Russia: A Provincial History* (Cambridge, 2007), ch. 7.

38 Viktor Chernov [under pseudonym O.], 'Bibliografii', *Nakanune. Sotsial'no-revoliutsionnoe obozrenie. Ezhemesiachnyi zhurnal* 3(28) (1901): 343–44.

counterpart in the Bolshevik party, Lenin.³⁹ There was a programmatic commitment to the profound discord and disunity that was to tear the party apart in 1917. Dissent within the party was so widespread that it was the norm, rather than the exception; almost no single element of party programme was unanimously supported. In the elections to the Central Committee in 1907, candidates were selected from separate lists representing the left, the centre and the right of the party.⁴⁰ These categories operated only as indicators of broader trends within the party. Zenzinov fought throughout 1917 to retain the unity of the party, in the face of increasingly obvious splits. This is evident in his activities on the party's Central Committee.⁴¹ The party's splits formalized in the summer of 1917. By the time of the Democratic Conference (14–22 September), Zenzinov authorized 'freedom of action' for all three currents within the party, as in fact the different factions had almost nothing in common with one another. By the beginning of October, Zenzinov was forced to admit that the PSR as single entity no longer existed.⁴²

These divisions within the party were entirely to be expected. The range of political opinion among self-professed SRs was bewildering, from the staunch defencists and moderates on the right like Mark Veniaminovich Vishniak and Ekaterina Konstantinovna Breshko-Breshkovskaia, to the extreme left headed by Natanson and Maria Aleksandrovna Spiridonova. Zenzinov retained a romantic conception of the PSR as a united movement, in the face of growing evidence that challenged his position. Zenzinov was appalled by the distinctions different groups drew for themselves. He recalled that at the fiercely factional PSR Party Congress at the end of May, he tore down the labels that the different factions had pasted on their meeting room doors, and declared that there was only one type of SR.⁴³ In fact, the evidence from the practice of politics in 1917 indicates that the PSR was an umbrella organisation that encapsulated a broad range of individuals, who shared a putative commitment to social and political revolution in a neo-Populist framework, but whose allegiances shattered when faced with the pressure of governance in 1917.

39 See Robert Service, *Lenin: A Biography* (Basingstoke, 2000), 138–46, on the genesis of 'What Is To Be done?', Lenin's thesis on the necessary organization of the revolutionary party. See also Lars T. Lih and Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, *Lenin rediscovered: What Is To Be Done? in Context* (Boston, 2006).

40 Haefner, "Die Partei der Linken Sozialrevolutionäre," 65–66. G. Anoprieva and N. Erofeev discuss three trends of thought within the party, with significant differences of opinion in each (*Politicheskie partii Rossii, konets 19- pervaja tret' 20 veka. Entsiklopediia*, 440).

41 See Zenzinov papers, box 43, 'Minutes of the PSR Central Committee, 1917–1918'.

42 *Partiinnye izvestiia* no. 2, October 5, 1917.

43 Interview with Zenzinov in Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism*, 195.

Zenzinov's central SR group and the Menshevik leadership formed a coherent and effective bloc for much of 1917. How was it that in 1917, when political ideologies were apparently so prominent, these politicians with such apparently diverse ideological backgrounds shared so much common ground? In fact, many of the power networks that we see in 1917 cut across party lines—a centre SR had more in common with a Menshevik than with a Left SR, and Left SRs travelled with the Bolsheviks rather than with the right of their own party. In the coalition, personal networks counted for more than party political affiliations in 1917. Both Avksent'ev and Gots were close friends with Menshevik leaders. They had shared experiences and world perspectives, personally, in émigré politics and in exile. Gots and Tsereteli had both been in exile in eastern Siberia before the revolution, and they travelled back to European Russia together. The world of Siberian exile was an important space for the forging of strong relationships and solidarities. There was strong support for a united front of socialists among some Siberian exiles.⁴⁴ Fedor Il'ich Dan and Vasiliï Gavrilovich Archangel'skii actually called for the unification of Mensheviks and SRs before they left Irkutsk for the capital in March 1917.⁴⁵ While the divisions and distinctions between SD and SR ideologies have always been emphasized, 1917 demonstrates emphatically that the moderates and extremists of both groups crossed party political divides.

A good example of these cross-party, back room power networks is in the leadership of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. The first all-Russian Soviet conference cemented an alliance between the PSR and Mensheviks at the end of March, and there was very little conflict between Mensheviks and SRs until the alliance finally foundered at the end of September. While the PSR remained in coalition with the Mensheviks, as they did for most of 1917, they retained joint control of both Moscow and Petrograd city Soviets. The Bolsheviks gained control of the Petersburg Soviet only when the alliance between the SRs and Mensheviks collapsed. Zenzinov and Gots were the party's figureheads in the Soviet. The SR bloc in the Petrograd Soviet was huge, and was responsible for the Soviet's key decisions—at over 1000 delegates, they were numerous enough to hold sway even when the SR/Menshevik bloc collapsed. The Soviet's key decisions were shaped not through force of numbers, but through personal and informal associations in the presidium of the Soviet's Executive Committee, nicknamed 'the Star Chamber.'⁴⁶ Mensheviks

44 See for example Skobelev's interview in Lyandres, *The Fall of Tsarism*, 199.

45 *Delo naroda* no. 4, March 18, 1917.

46 Rex A. Wade, *The Russian Search for Peace, February–October 1917* (Stanford, 1969), 22; Sukhanov and Carmichael, *The Russian Revolution*, 359.

dominated the Star Chamber—its members included the Mensheviks Nikolai Semenovich Chkheidze, Matvei Ivanovich Skobelev and Irakli Georgievich Tsereteli. Gots was the only SR involved. Zenzinov was a member of the Soviet Executive Committee, but, in practice, he did not participate much in the Soviet, concentrating instead on his work with *Delo naroda* and with party organization. His political activities took place largely away from public forums.

In contrast to Zenzinov, Kerenskii was the archetypal frontman of the Provisional Government period, and one of the best-known figures of 1917. He also became 'the personification of the inadequacies and short-sightedness of the men of March 1917'.⁴⁷ During the war, Zenzinov developed a close friendship with Kerenskii which was to endure until Zenzinov's death. The two men exchanged regular letters, and the tone of their correspondence is testament to the warmth and intimacy of their friendship.⁴⁸ Kerenskii gave a long and moving oration at the commemoration of Zenzinov a year after his death.⁴⁹ In 1917, Zenzinov was one of Kerenskii's key advisors and confidantes. Kerenskii shared some aspects of Zenzinov's background and milieu as a full-fledged member of the Russian intelligentsia. His personal experience, however, differed significantly from Zenzinov's.

While Zenzinov and his close circle had spent the pre-revolutionary years in exile, in émigré life, and in the underground, Kerenskii was an influential participant in Russian public life. Kerenskii had his interest in radical politics awakened as a student at Petersburg University at the end of the nineteenth century. He qualified in law, and initially worked in a legal aid office for the underprivileged in a People's House (*Narodnyi Dom*) organised by Countess Sofia Vladimirovna Panina, before defending in a number of important revolutionary cases, including the repression of Latvian socialists in 1906, and the massacre of Siberian miners at Lena in 1912. These very public cases enhanced his reputation as a front-line radical. He was elected to the fourth Duma in 1912, and aligned himself with the Trudovik group, a labour group associated with the PSR. Kerenskii made a number of radical and doom-laden speeches attacking the regime which frequently got him banned from the chamber, and his speeches were edited in the Duma records. It was in this period that he joined the freemasonry, which was to provide him with valuable cross-party contacts in the years to come. He was very active in the organisation of the PSR, particularly in the period 1915–16, as his police records show, though his relations with the party in 1917 were decidedly distant.

47 Robert P. Browder, "Kerenskii Revisited," *Harvard Slavic Studies* 4 (1957): 421.

48 Zenzinov papers, box 1, letters between Kerenskii and Zenzinov, 1942–1946.

49 Zenzinov papers, box 43, clipping from *Novoe russkoe slovo*, October 21, 1954.

Kerenskii's signature policy was his absolute commitment to coalition government. No great theoriser or political philosopher, he strongly believed in coalition for the greater good, namely the successful prosecution of the war. From his earliest days as a Duma politician, he had been willing to cooperate with politicians from all sides of the political spectrum, on the condition that they were working for the greater good, that is, with progressive intentions.⁵⁰ His participation in autocratic government, even as a revolutionary voice, set him apart from the PSR centre, and offered him a clearer rationale under which to function in 1917.

The first Petrograd city PSR Conference, in which Zenzinov played a prominent role, gave Kerenskii the party's mandate to join the Provisional Government. This was in a backdrop of wider unease and resistance to participation in the Provisional Government, both from the PSR and the Petrograd Soviet.⁵¹ The PSR centre sought to gloss over the massive conflicts within the party over participation in the coalition.⁵² Zenzinov's personal friendship with Kerenskii made him an important element in enabling Kerenskii to get involved in the Provisional Government with (limited) party support. Nikolai Nikolaevich Sukhanov described Zenzinov's relationship with Kerenskii in typically caustic terms, as 'his mouthpiece, an energetic (backstage) assistant, and faithful squire.'⁵³

Zenzinov's support for Kerenskii became conditional by the summer. In an editorial on 30 July, Zenzinov demanded that Kerenskii needed to lead the Provisional Government to be a revolutionary government, enacting revolutionary policy.⁵⁴ This push to the left was defined by rising fears of a conspiracy from the right, in which Boris Savinkov was suspected. When these fears were realized in the Kornilov affair, *Delo naroda* strongly opposed to Lavr Georgievich Kornilov, and refused to brook any compromises.⁵⁵ The Central Committee did not make radical demands of Kerenskii until 24 October, when they called for transfer of land to land committees, an armistice, and a more rapid convocation of the Constituent Assembly, but they were ignored.⁵⁶ The left of the

50 See Richard Abraham, *Alexander Kerensky: The First Love of the Revolution* (London, 1987), 61.

51 Skobelev's account of Kerenskii's intervention to win his support from the Soviet is very vivid (Lyandres, *The fall of Tsarism*, 184–86).

52 This is evident in *Delo naroda* editorials through the year.

53 Sukhanov and Carmichael, *The Russian Revolution*, 137.

54 'Strannye protivorechiia', *Delo naroda* no. 14, July 30, 1917.

55 *Delo naroda* no. 140, August 29 1917; *Delo naroda* no. 151, September 10, 1917.

56 Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism*, 452.

party was able to press these demands from much earlier in 1917, because of its distance from the coalition.

The party centre was alienated by Chernov's attempts to enact land reform in his stint as Minister of Agriculture. Chernov's involvement in the government as Minister of Agriculture raised popular expectations, as Chernov had a strong national reputation as protector of peasants' interests. As Minister for Agriculture, Chernov worked to turn the draft land law the PSR had presented to the State Duma in 1907 into a workable proposal for the Constituent Assembly, which he anticipated would convene in September 1917. His attempts to prohibit all land transactions provided a legal fundament for the genuinely revolutionary abolition of land as privately owned property, and unsurprisingly faced concerted resistance from the Kadet majority in the Provisional Government.⁵⁷ This exposed a fundamental problem for PSR participation in the coalition; where changes were proposed that called for fundamental alterations of society, the more conservative elements resisted. Radkey presented Chernov as a lousy politician, who failed to take his ministerial responsibilities seriously:

Sometimes Tsereteli would nudge him and say, "Please listen Victor Mikhailovich; this is important," to which Chernov would answer, "The editorial must be written, and, anyhow, I shall vote the way you do."⁵⁸

This anecdote should not obscure that Chernov's inability to effect change from within the Provisional Government was a reflection of his political isolation rather than his personal failings. Did the centre and right of the SRs effectively give up on social revolution in 1917, and become more natural bedfellows for the Kadets? Land socialisation was the central plank of their programme, yet in 1917 the centre of the party treated it as a distant ideal rather than an immediate prospect. Those on the right of the party seem to have accepted the coalition as an end and not just a means, and had concomitantly postponed the idea of a social revolution that would come about by the reapportioning of land. Many others within the PSR remained committed to the principle of social revolution and the fulfilment of a radical land policy. The divisions within the party between left and centre congealed over the immediacy of reform—the left embraced the need for immediate land reform, and this was one of the factors that pushed them away from allegiance to the Provisional Government.

⁵⁷ Immonen, *Mechty o novoi Rossii*, chapter 13.

⁵⁸ Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism*, 333–34. This anecdote is the product of an interview Radkey had with Tsereteli in 1949.

Zenzinov seems not to have been highly sensitized to the broader political shift to the left that occurred in Russia by summer 1917.⁵⁹ Despite the rise of the party's left faction, he continued to berate them and to resort to party discipline, including threats of expulsion, in attempts to keep them in check. He was always a stickler for party discipline and unity, even in the face of a collapsing party. The left faction of the PSR officially split from the PSR at the end of October 1917, when those who supported Lenin's new government were expelled from the party. The Central Committee of the Left SRs was elected at the end of November 1917. The left had existed as a clear and distinct entity from the beginning of the revolution. There were two distinct PSR groups from the outset within the Soviet Executive Committee. Zenzinov led the 'intellectual group', and the worker and Left SR Piotr Aleksandrovich led a small worker group.⁶⁰ The enrollment of large numbers of workers and the leadership of Kamkov ensured that the Petrograd PSR moved hard left in the course of 1917.⁶¹

The crucial policy distinctions between the left faction and the party's Central Committee in 1917 were on war and power.⁶² By the summer of 1917, a Left SR programmatic position had crystallized that was distinct from the dominant centre-right position. By the middle of 1917, the leftists were condemning the Provisional Government; pressed the party's Central Committee to withdraw support for Avksent'ev and Chernov, the two party representatives in government. The crisis of early July 1917 in Petrograd increased tensions between the Left SRs and the party leadership. While the PSR leadership regarded the popular demonstrations and unrest of early July as a Bolshevik-inspired event that required state suppression, the Left SRs saw the July crisis as an elemental mass movement. After July the Left SRs faced two clear alternatives—either to support their party leaders and risk becoming 'traitors of the revolution', or breaking with the party and holding true to their revolutionary ideals.⁶³ They took the latter course.

Once in power, the left used the same discourses of the need for education and popular restraint and sacrifice that the moderates had used in coalition. This can be illustrated by the political activity of Andrei Lukich Kolegaev, also

59 *Delo naroda* no. 135, August 24, 1917.

60 Piotr Aleksandrovich, whose real name was Viacheslav Aleksandrovich Dmitrievskii, was an internationalist during the war, and one of the Left SR's leading figures. He was executed in July 1918 after he participated in the so-called 'Left SR rising'. Kerensky mentions that he drafted leaflets in March calling on soldiers not to obey the Duma (Lyandres, *The fall of Tsarism Revolution*, 243, n. 33).

61 Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism*, 141.

62 See Ia. A. Leon'tev, "Persona"nyi sostav Ts.K. partii levykh eserov," 121–39.

63 Haefner, "Die Partei der Linken Sozialrevolutionare," 73–74.

known as Aleksandr Kolegaev, in Kazan'. Kolegaev was the son of political exiles. He had studied at university in Khar'kiv, but did not complete his studies. He spent a year in prison and was exiled to Archangel'sk, after which he lived in Paris until 1917.⁶⁴ Kolegaev was a leading figure in the Left SR movement, and worked for much of in Kazan', which was home to one of Russia's strongest Left SR groups. He drafted the Kazan Soviet of Peasants' deputies land decree in May 1917, which overruled the Provisional Government, and authorized the transfer of privately held land into the hands of the land committees.⁶⁵ He was one of the most vociferous critics of the region's provisions committees, which moved towards the use of force in grain requisitioning by July 1917, in the face of a recalcitrant rural population.⁶⁶ A coalition of Left SRs took over the regional provisions administration in September. They were initially confident that they would be able to resolve the provisions crisis through reasoned discussion with producers. This proved not to be the case, and Kolegaev himself was forced to support punitive measures in the countryside.⁶⁷

Results for the elections of the Constituent Assembly demonstrated that the PSR's popular support endured the fissures and compromises of 1917.⁶⁸ Multiplicity of opinion within regional party organizations enabled a broad swathe of voters to identify with the party. Did the PSR support internationalism, an end to the war, and radical land policies, or did it support the Provisional Government unconditionally, along with continuation of the war and other increasingly unpopular policies? Voters could identify with the policies they preferred from the PSR's political programme. Support for the PSR from a particular group within the population did not imply anything about their approval of central party policy, but only approval of the PSR policy selected by them, as presented by their local activists.

The PSR and the First World War

Russia's involvement in the First World War was the most important feature defining attitudes to governance. Those on the right and centre ground of the

64 Protasov, *Liudi Uchreditel'nogo sobraniia*, 314. Kolegaev was a major contributor to the Soviet decree on socialization of land.

65 Badcock, *Politics and the people in revolutionary Russia*, 203–06.

66 Ibid, 234.

67 Ibid, 230, 235.

68 See Oliver H. Radkey, *Russia Goes to the Polls—the Election to the all Russian Constituent Assembly, 1917*, ed. J. S. Berliner, S. Bialer, and Sheila Fitzpatrick (London and Ithaca, 1977); L. G. Protasov, *Vserossiiskoe Uchreditel'noe sobranie. Istoriia rozhdeniia i gibeli* (Moscow, 1997).

PSR placed successful prosecution of the war, and thus defence of the revolution, as front and centre of their objectives. This emphasis on the war meant that the land question was subsumed by the need to maintain social order and provisions networks during wartime. The war certainly exposed divisions in the party like no other issue. Many of the far left favoured more extreme internationalism, that is, that the working people of all nations should unite, and reject the war effort outright. They saw the war in essentially class terms, as the wealthy capitalists of all nations abusing the toiling masses. This view was essentially irreconcilable with those of the centre and the right of the party, where views ranged from patriotic defencism to moderate international defencism, which accepted the involvement of the class issue, but maintained the need to defend Russian soil. 1917 saw a desperate struggle on the part of the party apparatus to keep these conflicts under wraps, and to prevent an open party split. The struggle within the leadership on this question was mainly between internationalism and defencism, positions that were not actually that far apart. The prevailing opinion favoured a restoration of the International, the soviet peace formula, and defence of the homeland. The left of the party was ultimately driven towards the Bolsheviks by the war question—they proposed a standstill at the front, whereas the centre position, which Zenzinov held, was willing to support Kerenskii's position of occasional offensives to retain morale. Despite this, however, Zenzinov's writing confirms that he was a genuine defencist, and not a warmonger. He stressed the need to renounce secret treaties, and subsequently embraced the Soviet formula of 'peace without annexations or indemnities, on the basis of the self-determination of peoples'.⁶⁹

The February Revolution caused a dramatic retrenching of Chernov's position on the war. He was the leader of the party's internationalist wing from 1914. He attended the First Conference of Inter-Allied Socialist Parties held in London in February 1915, and the First Zimmerwald conference, held in Zimmerwald in September 1915. The platform adopted by Chernov at these events was that war was evil, and that it was founded on imperialist aims. At these events he stood alongside Mark Natanson, who was to become one of the Left SR leaders. After the February Revolution Chernov changed tack, arguing that revolutionary defencism and a broad united front were necessary to protect the gains of the February revolution. Hannu Immonen argues that this shift in position was in fact consistent with his pre-revolutionary philosophy, which sought to unite a broad coalition of liberals and socialists against the autocracy.⁷⁰

69 *Delo naroda* no. 9, March 25, 1917.

70 Immonen, *Mechty o novoi Rossii*, chapter 12.

Chernov's failure to vote against the death penalty, which was reintroduced by the Provisional Government on 12 July, is explicable in the context of his newfound determination to continue the war, but it was a final blow to party unity. Zenzinov avoided confrontation over this issue that so inflamed party divisions. *Delo naroda* did not even discuss the reintroduction of the death penalty ~~issue~~, which had caused consternation amongst the Petrograd Soviet and a broad swathe of SRS. By failing to vote against it as party supporters might have expected, Chernov directly implicated the PSR in the reintroduction of the death penalty.⁷¹ This pushed the Left SRS closer to the Bolsheviks. The Left SR faction eschewed party discipline, and enabled the Bolsheviks to take control of the Petrograd Soviet on 9 September.

One of the PSR's most notorious public figures in 1917 was Boris Viktorovich Savinkov, whose political position in 1917 was determined by his strong commitment to the war effort. Savinkov was an enigmatic and polarizing character, who to some extent defies classification in the elite networks of power.⁷² Savinkov was born in 1879 to a noble family. He studied law at St Petersburg University in 1897, but was expelled in 1899. After various brushes with the secret police, in 1903 he escaped abroad where he was a key participant in the PSR's terrorist wing. He was co-opted onto the PSR Central Committee in 1905, and took over the leadership of the party's terrorist wing after Azef's fall in 1908. Zenzinov became acquainted with him in 1904 through the PSR's terrorist wing, in which both men were active. Savinkov made a strong impression on Zenzinov:

(Savinkov) impressed me as being very unlike most revolutionists. He was a distinct individualist, very aloof, carefully and even smartly dressed, a brilliant conversationalist and a poet. A few months before the attack on von Plehve Savinkov arrived in Petersburg with an English passport. His clean-shaven face and haughty air made him look exactly like an Englishman ...⁷³

As well as being a terrorist, Savinkov was a writer, a journalist, and a publicist. He adopted a strong patriotic position at the outbreak of the war, and

71 Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism*, 381–83.

72 Savinkov's memoirs give a sense of his complex life. Boris V. Savinkov, *Memoirs of a Terrorist*, ed. J. Shaplen (New York, 1931). See also R. B. Spence, "The Terrorist and the Master Spy: the Political Partnership of Boris Savinkov and Sidney Reilly, 1918–1924," *Revolutionary Russia* vol. 4, no. 1 (1991): 111–31; S. W. Palmer, "A Crisis of Faith: Boris Savinkov and the Fighting Organisation (1903–1912)," *Scottish Slavonic Review* vol. 18 (1992): 35–53.

73 Zenzinov papers, box 13, p. 25, Zenzinov, *Perezhitoe*, 134.

proposed that all revolutionary parties suspend hostilities with the Tsarist regime and the bourgeoisie for the duration of the war. His response to the February revolution was joyful, but emphasized that the revolution would enable the successful prosecution of the war. 'Russia is free, and victory over the Germans is now certain'.⁷⁴ This attitude towards February resonated with the positions taken by Zenzinov and especially Kerenskii, but personal animosities between Savinkov and the PSR leadership meant that the Central Committee asked Zenzinov in summer 1917 to ensure that Savinkov not be given a ministerial post.⁷⁵ Zenzinov himself had a difficult personal relationship with Savinkov. He admits that he had recommended Savinkov to Kerenskii in 1917, and, in a rare aside, said that he regretted having done so.⁷⁶ Kerenskii ignored misgivings about Savinkov and selected him to serve in the Provisional Government. Savinkov was appointed the Provisional Government's commissar in the eighth army, and on 28 June 1917 he was made commissar of the southwestern front. He was made assistant minister of war on 19 July 1917, and was instrumental in the appointment of Lavr Kornilov as commander in chief. He became thoroughly entangled in the Kornilov affair, and subsequently declared that he supported Kornilov's aims, but not his methods. Savinkov was appointed military governor-general of St. Petersburg on 28 August in the immediate aftermath of Kornilov's apparent attempt to seize power. He was expelled from the PSR on 9 October because he refused to provide the Central Committee with clarification of his political position, in the face of his apparent complicity in the Kornilov affair. Savinkov was a revolutionary maverick, and he defied the conventions of both his party and his personal associations to pursue his own political agenda in 1917. His case is a useful reminder that while personal networks and associations can go some way towards understanding political decisions in 1917, they can never provide definitive answers.



This article has sought to map the personal networks within the PSR onto the structures of power in 1917. I argue that these personal relationships and networks can help us understand the ways in which political power, alliances, and relationships developed during the revolutionary year. This focus on Zenzinov offers us some insights into the PSR leadership's decision-making process in

74 N. Erofeev, 'Boris Viktorovich Savinkov' in *Politicheskii partii Rossii, konets 19- pervaiia tret' 20 veka. Entsiklopediia*, 544.

75 *Delo naroda* no. 164, September 26, 1917, 'Otvét D. V. Filosofovu'.

76 Zenzinov papers, box 10, pp. 6–7.

1917. Much of what Zenzinov represented was what the PSR was subsequently criticized for. Despite his impassioned socialist rhetoric, he was not a 'man of the people.' He did not often mention in his writing working-class or peasant demands and desires. He was a classic distant revolutionary, who came from and stayed in his own milieu his whole life.⁷⁷ The pre-revolutionary informal networks of power shaped the ways in which elite power was constructed and responded to challenges in 1917. The strength of these networks to some extent shaped and defined elite responses. Zenzinov's clique failed to engage with or show respect for the party's mass constituency of ordinary Russians, and they failed to engage with political realities. The factions contributed to a myopia that bedeviled the operation of revolutionary politics in 1917.

The outcomes of this study are in no way definitive. I cannot and do not argue that the nature of politics, or the radicalism of positions, was defined by these milieux and their apparent isolation from everyday Russian life. Social background did not determine political positions in 1917, and the PSR did not fail in 1917 because its membership was posh and remote from daily Russian life. The majority of the revolutionary leadership, Social Democrats and Socialist Revolutionaries of all shades, shared their experience of émigré life, cushioned exile, and a total isolation from everyday Russians and their lives. This seems to have had no impact on their political success (Lenin) or failure (Chernov). The shape of political power in 1917, however, was shaped by these intersections at least as much as, if not more than, the lines drawn in the sand by party political affiliation.

77 The disconnect of Russia's elites from the concerns and agendas of ordinary people, and their reluctance to credit ordinary people with agency, is an ongoing theme in the literature on late Imperial Russia. See for example Yanni Kotsonis, *Making Peasants Backward: Agricultural co-operatives and the agrarian question in Russia, 1861–1914* (New York, 1999).

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