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Author(s): Yanni Kotsonis

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Arkhangel'sk, 1918: Regionalism and Populism in the Russian Civil War

YANNI KOTSONIS

In August 1918 a group of moderate socialists, liberals, and army officers overthrew the Bolshevik authorities of Arkhangel'sk province and replaced them with the Supreme Administration of the Northern Region (*Verkhovnoe Upravlenie Severnoi Oblasti*). The new authorities intended the North to serve as a foothold from which to remove the Bolsheviks from power in the remainder of Russia. The Administration had many reasons for optimism. Seven of the eight members were populists—Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs) lying on the right of their party and Popular Socialists (NSs) led by Nikolai Chaikovskii¹—and believed they commanded the sympathies of a majority of the population. All were deputies of the disbanded Constituent Assembly and claimed to be the elected, legitimate representatives of the Russian people. Most were drawn from a belt of Northern provinces, including Arkhangel'sk, and professed to understand the needs of the Northern inhabitant.² In contrast to Boris Savinkov's abortive uprising in Iaroslavl' a month earlier, and the Komuch in Samara that fell in November, the Supreme Administration was secure from the Red Army behind a seemingly impenetrable *cordon sanitaire* of Allied troops.

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¹ Chaikovskii, a founder of the NSs, was the leader and namesake of the *Chaikovets* circle of the early 1870s and one of the initiators of the *khozhdenie v narod*.

² The members came from Arkhangel'sk (A. A. Ivanov, the leader of the local SRs), Viatka (Chaikovskii), Vologda (the SR S. S. Maslov, and the Kadet Zubov), Kazan' (the SR G. A. Martiushin), and Novgorod (the SR A. I. Gukovskii). Ia. T. Dedusenko was from Samara, brought in as a representative of the Komuch, while the nonsocialist Startsev, who was from Vologda but not a deputy of the Constituent Assembly, was made Provincial Commissar rather than a cabinet member. I could not determine the geographic origins of M. A. Likhach, who was included as a member of the Constituent Assembly from the front.

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In this light, it seems remarkable that the populist cabinet collapsed within two months with hardly any elements of the local population coming to its defense. As was to occur in virtually all anti-Bolshevik coalitions in 1918, the socialists were succeeded first by liberal and conservative “nonparty activists” and later by a military dictator.³

Historians have yet to explain why such enterprises failed in the North and elsewhere. Western studies of the Civil War tend to portray the moderate socialists as a “democratic alternative” to Bolshevism that commanded the loyalty of a majority of the people, particularly peasants, but fell victim to the intrigue of liberal and conservative politicians, the military might of the Russian officers, and ultimately the ruthlessness of the Bolsheviks.⁴ Only parts of this assessment are accurate. The SR Party was popular. It had the largest faction in the Constituent Assembly, and during the spring of 1918 joined with Mensheviks to challenge the Bolsheviks successfully in numerous elections to soviets outside Moscow and Petrograd, including Arkhangel'sk.⁵ Widespread popular sympathy, however, is not synonymous with a loyal following. To explain the fortunes of the populists during the Civil War, we must determine what it meant to have a majority of votes in conditions of Civil War, and whether popularity could be used to acquire real power.

It is also true that the populists, unlike the Bolsheviks, traditionally looked to the “toiling people” as a whole, rather than only workers and soldiers, for the foundation of their parties. This set them apart as well from their partners in the anti-Bolshevik coalitions who had ceased to be concerned with garnering popular support (liberal and conservative politicians) or had never been concerned with popularity (the vast majority of the officers).⁶ Yet my research on the North suggests that from 1917 to mid-1918 these populist leaders abandoned, at least temporarily, their commitment to popular and elected government. Large segments of the rank and file of their parties continued to aspire to popular regimes, but this was a source of division within the parties, not a mitigating factor.

A related question is the specific character of the regions in which the anti-Bolshevik coalitions functioned. Even if the populist leaders considered the strug-

³ There are two major studies of the Civil War and intervention in the North that deal with diplomatic, political and military events. They include Leonid Strakhovsky's two volumes, based in part on his own experiences, *Origins of the American Intervention in North Russia* (1918) (Princeton, 1937), and *Intervention at Archangel: The Story of the Allied Intervention and Russian Counter-Revolution in North Russia, 1918–1920* (Princeton, 1944); and John Wendell Long's comprehensive “Civil War and Intervention in North Russia, 1918–1920”, (Ph.D. diss. Columbia University, 1974). See also Richard Ullman, *Anglo-Soviet Relations, 1917–1921*, 2 vols. (Princeton, 1961, 1967), and George F. Kennan, *Soviet-American Relations, 1917–1920*, vol. 2 (Princeton, 1958).

⁴ In addition to the works cited in the previous note see Paul Dotsenko, *The Struggle for a Democracy in Siberia, 1917–1920: Eyewitness Account of a Contemporary* (Stanford, 1983). As an exception see William Chamberlin, *The Russian Revolution*, 2 vols. (New York, 1935), where the author doubts the viability of the socialist regimes.

⁵ Vladimir Brovkin, “The Mensheviks' Political Comeback: The Elections to the Provincial City Soviets in Spring 1918,” *Russian Review*, vol. 42, 1983.

⁶ On the evolving attitudes of Kadet party leaders see W. G. Rosenberg, *Liberals in the Russian Revolution* (Princeton, 1974). On the White officers see Peter Kenez, “The Ideology of the White Movement,” *Soviet Studies*, 1980, no. 32.

gle an “All-Russian” cause, their success depended on the responses they evoked in the localities that they occupied. Arkhangel’sk was not a “typical” province, relative to the “norms” derived from our understanding of central Russia, and the experience of populists in the North may not reflect the responses that they elicited in other regions of the Russian Empire. Indeed, anti-Bolshevik forces concentrated in regions that were in some way “atypical.” Like the Baltic region, the Volga provinces, South Russia, Western Siberia, or the Far East, the North had a particular set of historical experiences and social, economic, and environmental specificities—in short, a regional identity—that any aspiring leader had to reckon with.

There is a tendency in the existing historiography of the Civil War in the peripheries to dismiss the local setting as an unfortunate peculiarity, and focus instead on interparty politics and military events.⁷ The peculiarity of the North was its sparse population base, which made it exceedingly difficult to form and supply a large Russian force to fight the Red Army.⁸ Notwithstanding these obstacles, the socialist leaders tried urgently to mobilize the local population, small though it was, and herein lay the most revealing aspect of the history of the socialist regime: its failure was related intimately to its inability to address local issues.

I approach these two sets of questions—regional identity and the relationship between support and power—by focusing on two processes that culminated in the summer and autumn of 1918. The first is the development of the North, including the legacy inherited from the Imperial period, four years of war and revolution, and a succession of three regimes. The second is the evolving outlook of the populist leaders who sought to overthrow the Bolsheviks after the coup d’état of October 1917, beginning with the European North. In essence, I find two separate processes that briefly intersected in the summer of 1918 to bring down the Bolsheviks but never really merged in such a way as to create a lasting movement.

Arkhangel’sk province was the largest and most sparsely populated in European Russia. Its 500,000 inhabitants lived mainly in small settlements, the only sizable towns being the capital, Arkhangel’sk, with 50,000 people, and the newly constructed port town of Murmansk, with 15,000 people consisting mainly of sailors and railroad and dock workers.⁹ Unlike other regions of European Russia, the North had no landed nobility. The propertied and educated elite consisted of mer-

⁷ See the sources cited in note 3 and Peter Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia, 1918: The First Year of the Volunteer Army* (Berkeley, 1971); idem, *Civil War in South Russia, 1919–1920: The Defeat of the Whites* (Berkeley, 1977). Political and military questions were important, and Kenez’s study is invaluable in this regard. Orlando Figes’s examination of Volga peasant institutions (*Peasant Russia, Civil War: The Volga Countryside in Revolution* [Oxford, 1989]) is informative and highly original, but I am interested not only in peasant attitudes but also the attitudes of socialist leaders and how the two sides interacted. Moreover, peasants in the North differed substantially from peasants along the Volga, and this produced distinct reactions to specific events.

⁸ Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War* (Boston, 1987), 49–52.

⁹ I. V. Olonev, *Karel’skii krai i ego budushchee v sviazi s postroikoii Murmanskoi zheleznoi dorogi* (Gelsingfors, 1917), 153–54; *Ocherki istorii Karelii*, (Petrozavodsk, 1957), 1:375–79; A. A. Kiselev and Iu. N. Klimov, *Murman v dni revoliutsii i grazhdanskoi voiny* (Murmansk, 1977), 12–23.

chants involved in foreign trade who were aware that in any Western society they would have occupied a prominent place in government and local administration; in prerevolutionary Russia, they were simply non-nobles.¹⁰

The local elite's consciousness of its inferior position spawned two major grievances. The first was that the central government's economic policies ignored their interests. The Arkhangel'sk merchant elite believed it was in economic decline, and expected the Russian government to arrest the process; instead, the government invited foreigners to operate timber and trading concessions along the Arctic and White Sea Coasts.¹¹ A byproduct of the merchants' perception was xenophobia, notwithstanding the fact that many of them depended on their foreign business operations, traced their lineage and names to Germany, Holland, and Britain, and continued to intermarry extensively with foreign merchant families.¹²

Secondly, the merchant leaders faulted the government for its inability to recognize the specific needs of the region on which they depended for their livelihood. Local *intelligenty* shared this view. To them, the North was heir to the Novgorodian tradition of "political and religious freedom" because it had been spared the "retarding" influence of Mongol invasion and occupation, had never known serfdom, and was free from the corrupting influences of autocratic, bureaucratic, and nobiliary Russia. They argued that the nobiliary bureaucracy had imposed authoritarianism and arbitrariness upon Northerners, who otherwise were self-reliant, independent, egalitarian, and uniquely prepared for participation in government.¹³ Merchants and *intelligenty* demanded greater control over local affairs through the establishment of *zemstvos* elected by a broad suffrage, but the State Council repeatedly rejected these petitions on the grounds that the social structure of the province (the absence of a landed nobility) would yield "overly democratic" institutions.¹⁴ The specific position of local educated society produced resentment and suspicion of central authority that lasted into the revolutionary period.

Other strata of the local population were also conscious of the North's specificity. Peasants lived in small and widely dispersed settlements that were isolated from each other during the long winters. The government had little role to play in rural affairs: the land reforms of the 1860s and 1907 were never implemented in the

¹⁰ Mikhail Sidorov was the most active local merchant in the mid-nineteenth century. See his "Pamiati Petra Velikago" in *Sever Rossii* (St. Petersburg, 1870). For the purposes of this study, it is important that the causes championed by activists in the nineteenth century were carried into the twentieth. See A. A. Zhilinskii, *Rossiiia na Severe. (K opisaniiu zhizni i deiatel'nosti M. Sidorova)* (Arkhangel'sk, 1918).

¹¹ B. N. Mironov, "K voprosu o roli russkogo kupechestva vo vneshnei torgovle Peterburga i Arkhangel'ska vo vtoroi polovine XVIII-nachale XIX vv.," *Istoriia SSSR*, 1973, no. 6.

¹² Eugenie Fraser, *House by the Dvina: A Russian Childhood* (Edinburgh, 1984).

¹³ V. V. Andreev, *Raskol i ego znachenie v narodnoi russkoi istorii. Istoricheskii ocherk* (St. Petersburg, 1870), 132–38. Sergei F. Platonov emphasized the qualities of hardiness and self-reliance in explaining why Russian resistance to Poland during the Time of Troubles was concentrated in the North. See Platonov, *Proshloe russkogo severa: Ocherki po istorii kolonizatsii Pomor'ia* (Petrograd, 1923); and idem, *Problema russkogo severa v noveishei istoriografii* (St. Petersburg, 1929).

¹⁴ *Izvestiia Arkhangel'skago Obshchestva Izucheniiia Russkago Severa*, 1 September 1909.

province, largely because agriculture was a minor occupation for most of the population, and acute undergovernment made the proposition impracticable.¹⁵ Merchants, tax collectors, and recruiters made their way to the Northern backwaters, but none of them were welcome. Significantly, travelers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries noted that the Solovetskii uprising of 1668–1676, which combined religious passions with a rejection of an overbearing central authority, was still a popular theme in local folklore.¹⁶

The perception of a foreign danger was also prominent in local folklore. Tales described the exploits of local heroes in battles against the Swedes from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, and the British who raided the North in 1809 and 1811 to force Russia out of the Continental System. During the Crimean War—within living memory for some—British naval squadrons raided the Arctic coast in a secondary but destructive theater of operations.¹⁷ These, too, were elements in the regional outlook, and they would become important in 1918 when foreign troops, most of them British, landed on Northern soil.

The regionalism and xenophobia of many Northerners contradicted the region's almost complete dependence on the outside world. The province produced little more than timber, flax, hemp, fish, and some handicrafts, which it exported in exchange for grain and manufactures. In 1913, local agriculture provided only one-fifth of the grain consumed in the province.¹⁸ When railway transportation broke down during the Great War, the province experienced shortages and occasionally serious hunger. Ironically, the region grew increasingly dependent on the grain and equipment that could be brought from Allied countries.

The February Revolution seemed to provide the answer to some of the long- and short-term needs of the province. The establishment of broadly elected zemstvo and municipal governments finally gave local merchants and public activists a greater role in their own political affairs,¹⁹ cooperatives grew dramatically in response to the deepening supplies crisis,²⁰ and trade unions and manufacturers'

¹⁵ *Istoriia Severnogo krest'ianstva*, vol. 2, *Krest'ianstvo evropeiskogo Severa v period kapitalizma* (Arkhangel'sk, 1985), 36, 40–41, 165–75; *Izvestiia Arkhangel'skago obshchestva*, 15 March 1910.

¹⁶ Georg Michels, "The Solovki Uprising: Religion and Revolt in Northern Russia," *Russian Review* 51 (January 1992): 12–15. Regarding the historical memory carried down to the nineteenth century, which is the main issue here, see D. S. Likhachev, "Solovki v istorii russkoi kul'tury," in *Arkhitekturno-khudozhestvennye pamiatniki Solovetskikh ostrovov* (Moscow, 1980); and N. N. Rozov, "Solovetskoe vosstanie, 1668–1676 gg. Istoriia i otrazhenie v russkoi letopisnoi knizhnosti i literature," afterword to Denisov's *Povest' o Solovetskom vosstanii* (Moscow, 1980), 32.

¹⁷ V. Vereshchagin, *Ocherki Arkhangel'skoi gubernii* (St. Petersburg, 1849), 126, 189. During the Crimean War, the British burned the town of Kola, and bombarded Solovetskii monastery. Ian Stone, *Polar Record*, 1983, no. 21.

¹⁸ *Istoriia Severnogo krest'ianstva* 2:72–73, 202–3.

¹⁹ The new town Duma was elected in March 1917 and returned a majority of 70 percent for the Socialist Bloc of SRs, NSs, and Social Democrats. None of the SDs called themselves Bolsheviks. *Perepiska sekretariata Ts.K. RSDRP(b) s mestnymi partiinymi organizatsiiami. Sbornik dokumentov* (Moscow, 1957–70) 2:260–61. The zemstvos were established in June 1917 but barely had the chance to meet before the October coup. See R. P. Browder and A. F. Kerensky, eds., *The Russian Provisional Government, 1917: Documents* (Stanford, 1961), 303–4.

²⁰ By September 1918, eight hundred cooperatives had 127,000 members, which together with family members amounted to almost all the population. Even accounting for overlap of membership this

associations negotiated contracts that averted protracted strikes.²¹ Workers, sailors, and soldiers formed soviets soon after the Revolution, while peasants established a wide array of committees, soviets, assemblies, and congresses.²² Yet the apparent harmony produced by local self-government was mingled with social tensions. By autumn the isolation of the region's employers from their buyers led them to consider closing their plants, a threat they used liberally to counter workers' demands for higher pay and better conditions; in turn, workers threatened to take control of the plants to keep them open.²³ Merchants charged exorbitant prices for essential goods, and the cooperatives declared "battle against the merchant" in an attempt to reduce rampant speculation and their dependence on private trade.²⁴ The Municipal Duma refused to recognize the authority of the town Soviet until it was forced by popular pressure to accept Soviet deputies as voting members.²⁵ The eight thousand sailors of the Arctic Fleet demanded that the Soviet take control of local affairs and bring the revolution "to its next stage."²⁶ And all along, looming large in the local scene, were the worsening supply lines and shortages that the Provisional Government was unable to rectify.²⁷

The overthrow of the Provisional Government in October eclipsed these hopes and tensions. Some local political activists regarded the Bolshevik coup as a clear violation of legality, and the Soviet government as illegitimate. The town Soviet did not recognize Sovnarkom as its government until mid-November, and even then refused to replace the Duma as the municipal authority.²⁸ Instead, the Soviet joined with representatives of the Duma, trade unions, and non-Bolshevik socialist parties to form a Revolutionary Committee aimed at delaying the expansion of Bolshevik power into Arkhangel'sk province.²⁹

It is likely that local sailors, soldiers and some workers and peasants supported the transfer of power to the soviets, but reports from village, factory, fleet and garrison organizations consistently show that these groups supported soviet power, not specifically Bolshevik power.³⁰ Indeed, Bolshevism had few supporters in the region, and the local population almost uniformly perceived Petrograd's and Moscow's rule as "alien" (*chuzhoi*). The provincial Bolshevik organization claimed

was an extremely high proportion. See *The Russian Cooperator: A Journal of Cooperative Unity* (London), January and December 1917, November, December, and August 1918. The vast majority were consumer societies.

²¹ *Bor'ba za ustanovlenie i uprochenie sovetskoï vlasti na Severe. Sbornik dokumentov i materialov (mart 1917-iiul' 1918 gg.)* (Arkhangel'sk, 1959), chap. 1, pt. 3, esp. docs. 34 and 51.

²² *Ibid.*, pt. 2.

²³ *Ibid.*, pt. 4.

²⁴ *Tovarishcheskoe delo* (Arkhangel'sk), 1918, no. 19–20:5.

²⁵ *Bor'ba . . . na Severe*, doc. 18.

²⁶ *Voennye moriaki v bor'be za vlast' sovetov na Severe (1917–1920 gg.)*. *Sbornik dokumentov* (Leningrad, 1982), 53.

²⁷ The sailors' Arctic Fleet Committee went as far as to impound grains that were destined for export (*ibid.*, 42–43).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 75, 79–80.

²⁹ *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States: Russia, 1918* (Washington, 1931) 2:468–69 (hereafter cited as *FRUS*); *Voennye moriaki*, 70–71.

³⁰ *Bor'ba . . . na Severe*, chap. 2, pt. 1; *Voennye moriaki*, chap. 2.

around one hundred members on the eve of the coup in Petrograd, most of them Lettish riflemen from the local garrison who did not speak Russian.³¹ Mensheviks and SRs dominated the town and provincial Soviets, and the local Bolshevik organization bombarded the Secretariat in Petrograd with urgent requests for personnel and armed assistance to help establish their own “Soviet power.”³²

Help began arriving in 1918, but it was not simply to bolster the local party organization. In February, Sovnarkom dispatched a commission to Arkhangel’sk to seize the vast quantities of Allied-supplied war materiel stranded on the docks since 1917 and send them to Soviet territory before the Allies could reclaim them.³³ When the local Soviet refused to cooperate, in part because the Allies warned them that the continued supply of food from abroad depended on the fate of the war materiel, the commission brought in sailors from the Baltic and Arctic fleets.³⁴ In May, Sovnarkom appointed Mikhail Kedrov to head an Inspection Commission and gave him broad powers to “correct defects and wrongdoings” in the local Soviets.³⁵ What followed became known in local society as the “Reign of Terror.” Kedrov imposed martial law to facilitate the removal of the supplies, which by July was completed.³⁶ In June, local supporters of Mensheviks and SRs protested against “the traitors and swindlers in power,” and forced new elections to both the provincial and town Soviets. The local Bolshevik organization firmly believed that it would lose, but Kedrov’s coercion and threats ensured that both elections returned Bolshevik-Left SR majorities.³⁷ The provincial Soviet’s new Executive Committee excluded all other parties from the soviets, claiming that power “should be in the hands of those who achieved the October Revolution.”

The new authorities then implemented the decisions of Sovnarkom that their predecessors had resisted: on the day of the elections, Kedrov disbanded the old town Duma and sent its members to Moscow to stand trial for “counterrevolution”; in July the Soviet banned the last of the non-Bolshevik press, and nationalized all banks, merchant houses and vessels, and deported the proprietors to Central Russia.³⁸ When Sovnarkom ordered that scarce coal and food supplies be sent to central Russia, even the sailors protested. Sovnarkom’s reply, delivered to the sailors by an emissary, was indicative of the attitude of Moscow to the locality:

³¹ *Arkhangel’skaia oblastnaia organizatsiia KPSS v tsifrah, 1917–1981* (Arkhangel’sk, 1982), 15; *Perepiska sekretariata Ts. K. KPSS* 1:483, 2:260–61. Even in August, ten months after the coup, the “Communist Club” could attract no more than four hundred members in the provincial capital (*Bor’ba . . . na Severe*, doc. 2).

³² *Perepiska* 2:260–61; *Voennye moriaki*, 72–74.

³³ *Dekrety sovetskoi vlasti* (Moscow, 1951) 1:570.

³⁴ *FRUS, 1918* 2:470 ff.

³⁵ *Dekrety sovetskoi vlasti* 1:285–86.

³⁶ *Voennye moriaki*, 166, 169; *Perepiska* 3:316–17.

³⁷ *Arkhangel’skaia Pravda*, 17 July 1918; *Perepiska* 3:274–75, 295–96, 311–12.

³⁸ *Bor’ba . . . na Severe*, docs. 123, 134, 150, 172, 176, 178, 180, 181, 187, 220, 227; A. Z. Okorokov, *Oktiabr’ i krakh russkoi burzhuaiznoi pressy* (Moscow, 1970), 343–76.

You are saying here that the center cannot rightly evaluate your local affairs, but . . . you cannot see the situation in which Russia now finds herself, while the center sees it and works on an all-Russian scale.³⁹

In Murmansk, where the Soviet had assumed almost complete control of civilian affairs since the time of the February Revolution, the conflict with Moscow reached the breaking point in the spring and summer of 1918.⁴⁰ The most pressing problem facing the Soviet was food supplies, but a second crisis flared in early 1918 when the skirmishes of the Finnish Civil War spilled into Russian Karelia and the White Sea region, and Finnish Whites urged the Karelians to secede from Russia.⁴¹ By this time it was clear that the central Soviet government could neither defend nor supply the region, and local leaders feared that the Murman would join the list of Russian territories lost to Germany since the Bolsheviks took power. To meet the military danger, the town Soviet invited delegates from the Russian population along the White Sea and Arctic coasts to form the Murman Regional Soviet of Workers' and Peasants' Deputies.⁴² The commanders of the Allied naval squadrons that patrolled the White Sea and Arctic coast offered solutions to both problems facing the region: in return for complete control of the naval facilities in Murmansk, they would land troops and supplies in the city. The Regional Soviet agreed, and asked Sovnarkom for approval.

Commissar of Foreign Affairs Trotsky agreed to the proposal in early March, motivated by the impression that the peace talks with Germany had failed and Soviet Russia was again at war with the Central Powers. The troops landed forthwith, but after the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, Sovnarkom ordered the Regional Soviet to fall in with central government policy, avoid provoking German hostility, ask the troops to withdraw, and reject further offers of assistance. When the Regional Soviet objected that the Allies could provide what Sovnarkom could not, Sovnarkom characterized local organizations as parochial, and again dispatched an Extraordinary Commission to bring the local soviet into line with central policy. The Latvian Chekist S. P. Natsarenus showed a now-familiar disregard for local sensitivities when he encountered protests over his string of orders:

I am an extraordinary commissar and I give the orders [*predpisyvaiu*] . . . I, as extraordinary commissar, have the right to abrogate the decisions of all other organizations, right up to the constitution of your Regional Soviet.⁴³

³⁹ *Voennye moriaki*, 153.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴¹ Olonev, *Karel'skii krai i ego budushchee*; I. Siukaianen, *Karel'skii vopros v sovetsko-finliandskikh otnosheniakh v 1918–1920 godakh* (Petrozavodsk, 1948).

⁴² Georgii Veselago, "Dokumental'naia spravka iz moikh Murmanskikh bumag za 1917 i 1918 gody," December 1918, General Records of the U.S. State Department, Record Group 59, file 861, National Archives of the United States, Washington. Veselago was a former tsarist naval officer advising the Murman Soviet. See also various issues of the *Izvestiia Murmanskago Kraevago Soveta Rabochikh i krest'ianskikh deputatov*.

⁴³ *Voennye moriaki*, 145.

In late June the new commissar for foreign affairs, Georgii Chicherin, informed the chairman of the Regional Soviet, A. M. Iur'ev, that the Allied presence was an "invasion," adding that "you have only yourself to blame" for failing to understand the policy of Soviet Russia. Iur'ev's response touched on the heart of the matter: "It is all very well for you to talk that way, sitting there in Moscow."⁴⁴

Two days later, the Murman Soviet met in joint session with the railway union and sailors' committee, and voted to procure the material and armed assistance of the Allies by written agreement, with or without the approval of Sovnarkom. In the last direct communication between the Murman Soviet and the central government, Chicherin reiterated that the "Anglo-French," like the "Finno-Germans," were "imperialists and class enemies," and that any agreement with them would be "treasonous to the Revolution and Soviet Russia." Iur'ev's response again highlighted how removed the center was from the immediate needs of the region: "Will you give me supplies for the region . . . ? Will you give me real power for the execution of your instructions, [power] that I do not have at the present time?"⁴⁵

Had the Bolsheviks limited themselves to nationalizations and class politics in Arkhangel'sk province, it is possible that a large part of the population would have offered at least benevolent indifference, and perhaps support. After all, Northern regionalism was defined largely in social terms—the "popular" or "democratic" social composition of the province—and could have been used to the advantage of the Bolsheviks. But their indiscriminate interference in local affairs alienated not only the privileged social strata, which was their intention, but workers and peasants, whom they claimed as their social base. The result was to mute social tensions as local society united to defend the region against overbearing central authority.

The plot that finally overthrew the Bolsheviks in the town of Arkhangel'sk was conceived in Moscow. The leaders of the populist parties in the center had witnessed what they understood to be the disintegration of Russian statehood and statesmanship (both denoted by the term *gosudarstvennost'*), and in the disbandment of the Constituent Assembly saw the end to legality and legitimacy as well. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was the final blow to their conception of statehood and state unity.

It was on the basis of these concepts—abstract on the face of it, but very real in their own minds—that the leaders of the major non-Bolshevik political parties gathered in Moscow to formulate a common platform and program for countering Bolshevik rule. In April 1918 parts of the leaderships of the SRs and Kadets, and all of the NS Central Committee, agreed on fundamental principles and strategies which were embodied in the program of the Union of Regeneration of Russia (*Soiuz vozrozhdeniia Rossii*). The founders contended that the Russian people had lost sight of the broader state interests of Russia by succumbing to their short-term demands for bread and peace, thereby permitting the Bolsheviks to seize power.

⁴⁴ Reprinted in Mikhail Kedrov, *Bez bol'shevistskogo rukovodstva (Iz istorii interventsii na Murmane)* (Leningrad, 1930), 119.

⁴⁵ *Izvestiia Murmanskogo Kraevago Soveta*, 10 July 1918.

The results were anarchy and a power vacuum at home, and the sacrifice of Russia's commitments and honor abroad.

They prescribed a return to such principles as the rule of law and statesmanlike conduct of political leaders and the people, principles that transcended party politics. Narrow partisanship made Russians lose sight of what was important and enduring. Therefore, the members joined as individuals "standing for the principles of *gosudarstvennost'*."⁴⁶ The conspirators firmly believed that a national "disease" of spiritual weakness afflicted Russia; Bolshevism was a "symptom," brought to power fortuitously by German arms. Chaikovskii thought that the people had been deceived by the "outdated German ideology" of Marxism; through the efforts of the *Soiuz* and similar public organizations, the people could be brought to their senses, reestablish the Eastern Front, and return to law and order.⁴⁷

This was only one of several ideological currents in the populist parties, but it predominated among the party leaders;⁴⁸ these leaders, in turn, organized the overthrow of the Bolsheviks in Arkhangel'sk province. Using the *Soiuz* as their organizational base, they decided to concentrate members in a region where they could remove the Bolsheviks, invite the Allies to land troops, and recruit a Russian army to sweep aside Bolshevism and reenter the Great War on the side of the Allies. That Arkhangel'sk became the primary focus of what was supposed to be an all-Russian struggle was accidental: the White Sea region was the one area where Allied forces could readily land troops and help to solve the pressing food problem.⁴⁹ The plotters had no intention of creating an autonomous region along the lines proposed by local activists; rather, the North would become an integral part of a liberated and reunited Russia.⁵⁰

The members of the *Soiuz* agreed from the start that the socialists would dominate the new regime, since they had won majorities in all elections since February 1917 and were deemed the most capable of bringing workers and peasants into the anti-Bolshevik coalition. The *Soiuz* and the Allies approached members of an underground officers' group in Petrograd to undertake the military aspects of the plot and appointed Georgii Chaplin, a naval captain, to coordinate it.⁵¹

The coup was carried out smoothly on the night of 2 August. As expected, few locals rose to the defense of the Bolsheviks, and many key Soviet officials gave intelligence and direct aid to Chaplin. Even the Arctic sailors failed to defend the Bolsheviks, partly because their commanders were cooperating with the opposi-

⁴⁶ V. A. Miakotin, "Iz nedalekago proshlago," *Na chuzhoi storone*, vol. 2 (1923), 181.

⁴⁷ On the outlook of populist leaders in this period see S. P. Mel'gunov, *N. V. Chaikovskii v gody grazhdanskoi voiny (Materialy dlia istorii russkoi obshchestvennosti, 1917–1925 gg.)* (Paris, 1929), 24–25; Argunov, *Mezhdru dvumia bol'shevikami* (Paris, 1919); and Miakotin, "Iz nedalekago proshlago."

⁴⁸ On the issue of the Great War, in particular, SR leaders and members were bitterly divided since its outbreak. Michael Melancon, *The Socialist Revolutionaries and the Russian Anti-War Movement, 1914–1917* (Columbus, 1990), chap. 2.

⁴⁹ S. N. Gorodetskii, "Obrazovanie Severnoi oblasti," *Beloe delo*, book 1 (August 1927), 7.

⁵⁰ G. E. Chaplin, "Dva perevorota na Severe," *ibid.* (January 1928), 14; Gorodetskii, "Obrazovanie Severnoi oblasti," 7. On Allied food shipments see *FRUS, 1918* 3:123, 130–32.

⁵¹ Chaplin, "Dva perevorota," 13–15.

tion. Within a day the Allies landed their first large force, and the Supreme Administration came into being.⁵²

In its initial proclamation of August 1918 the Supreme Administration advertized itself as a local government, since its members came from a belt of Northern provinces from Novgorod to Viatka. Yet the proclamation was an almost exact replica of the program of the *Soiuz* and bore little relation to local affairs. It called for the reestablishment of a unified all-Russian state, the defense of Russia against Germany and her allies, reincorporation of territories lost through the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, and the restoration of “real” organs of government—a Constituent Assembly, *zemstvos*, and municipal *dumas*. Point six affirmed the right of all toilers to the land, something that was simply not an issue in the North. The last point, added almost as an afterthought, blandly called for “the overcoming of the existing hunger.”⁵³

The immediate task of the new regime was to create a Russian national army. It would first remove Bolshevik power from the remainder of Russia, after which “we will stand face to face with our real and chief enemy, the Germans.”⁵⁴ But by the end of September, no more than seventy locals had answered the call for volunteers. The government decided on partial mobilization, but the apparent apathy of the local population to the imperatives of war was a cause for great concern among socialists. Their anxieties were reflected on the pages of the socialist daily, *Vozrozhdenie Severa*, in which the lead articles were often written by the cabinet members themselves.⁵⁵

“What a happy hour!” declared a lead article soon after conscription was announced; this was the only way for “a great nation” to achieve “respect and recognition . . . The government did what was required by the pressing interests of the state, its honor, and its dignity,” and will “allow citizens to fulfill their duty to their motherland.” “It only remains to be hoped,” the author continued, that the decree will “bring the population out of the apathy” that had permitted the Bolsheviks to seize power in the first place.⁵⁶ Another article blamed the “darkness of the masses” (*temnota naroda*) and its “slavelike fear” (*rabskaia boiazn'*) for the decline of Russia; “rodina” was a distant concept for most of the *narod*, but they must be educated to understand that “military might” was essential for the “national honor” and the reestablishment of “state wholeness.” The “education” of the *narod*, the author concluded, would flow from the “regenerating spirit” of “educated society.”⁵⁷

Socialist leaders may have demanded conscription and blamed the people for

⁵² On the takeover of Arkhangel'sk see *ibid.*, 16–21; Gorodetskii, “Obrazovanie Severnoi oblasti,” 7; *Perepiska* 4:119, 137–38; and *Voennye moriaki*, 180, 182, 198–201. On the complicity of local Soviet authorities see A. Metelev, “Padenie Arkhangel'ska,” *Proletarskaia Revoliutsiia*, vol. 3, no. 50 (1926).

⁵³ Reprinted in full in Mel'gunov, *Chaikovskii*, 74–76.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁵⁵ The newspaper was not the official publication of the directorate, but seven of the directorate's eight members were regular contributors. It expressed partisan views not printed in the official *Vestnik Verkhovnago Upravleniia*.

⁵⁶ *Vozrozhdenie Severa*, 28 August 1918.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 30 August 1918.

their “apathy” and “darkness,” but a different picture emerges from the regular column in the same newspaper entitled “From the Countryside.” This section included the minutes and resolutions of district and *volost'* congresses, citizens' assemblies, soviets, and village *skhody*. They all expressed loyalty to the Supreme Administration and its goals, acceptance of the need for a Russian army, but almost uniform opposition to conscription. At one peasant meeting the delegates adopted the language of the socialist leaders but used it to arrive at a different conclusion. “The masses” were indeed “dark,” they agreed, and had been “demoralized by the International [*sic*], which destroys love of country,” but they concluded that a conscripted army formed of this apathetic mass would produce apathetic soldiers and must be avoided.⁵⁸ Another assembly not only rejected conscription but also demanded “the cessation of Civil War, which has disrupted the whole supply system.”⁵⁹

These declarations suggest that what the socialists termed “apathy,” “darkness” and “crudeness” among the masses were euphemisms for conflict of interests. There is little doubt that the peasants sympathized with the populist parties, but they did so on their own, clearly defined terms. They expressed no interest in *gosudarstvennost'*, legality, and national honor as understood in the provincial capital, and they certainly had no desire to pursue the war against Germany and Bolshevism. Far from being apathetic, peasants used meetings to discuss the administration's policies, but they were either indifferent to the goals defined by the populist leaders, or opposed categorically the means needed to achieve them. After all, it was the peasants themselves who would do the fighting.

The issue of local self-government highlighted similar tensions between the socialist politicians and the people they claimed to represent. On the day that the Supreme Administration came into existence, it ordered the disbandment of soviets at every level of administration. The soviets, according to the cabinet, were organs which by their class exclusiveness isolated workers and peasants from the salutary influence of “society” and lent themselves to the demagoguery and subversion of extremists. The “legitimate” organs were the *zemstvos* and municipal *dumas*, which were forums for “above-class” cooperation. They were also less of a break with tradition, since they had existed in Imperial Russia, and following the February Revolution were elected by a broad suffrage.⁶⁰

Pointing out that the soviets had been abused and usurped by the Bolsheviks was one thing, but banning them was quite another. Part of the problem was the strong connection, in the minds of the populist leaders, between Bolshevism and soviets. To be sure, the boundaries between the two were rapidly disappearing on Soviet territory. However, at the very time that the Administration was dismantling soviet institutions, peasant assemblies were informing it of the reestablishment of their local soviets—free of Bolshevik coercion—along with assemblies, congresses,

⁵⁸ *Vozrozhdenie Severa*, 24, 28, and 30 August, 1 September 1918.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 30 August 1918.

⁶⁰ Local *zemstvo* activists argued that the *zemstvos* had precedents in the “Republic of Novgorod,” from which the North Russian peasantry descended. See Union of North Russian *Zemstvos* and Towns, London Committee, *North Russian Zemstvos and Municipalities* (London, 1919), 15.

and *skhody*. Apparently, peasants felt little need to distinguish between these different labels; they simply indicated a preference for their own grass-roots organizations. For example, the Onega District Congress of Peasants met in mid-August and established the District People's Soviet, while a neighboring *volost'* meeting declared that it stood for "popular meetings and assemblies" as the preferred form of government.⁶¹

Not surprisingly, there is no mention of peasants reestablishing zemstvos. Zemstvos had been established in Arkhangel'sk for the first time in the summer of 1917. Even local socialists complained that the zemstvos lacked money, authority, and, indeed, a purpose.⁶² The most pressing problem of the time was food supply, and in this domain the cooperatives were already in control.⁶³ The populist leaders were abolishing the existing institutions of local government without providing an alternative that could link them with the local population.

The categorical abolition of soviets without regard to local conditions had serious consequences for the relations between the Administration and the Murman Soviet. This was the soviet that had invited the Allies to land in the North—the first Allied landing in the Civil War—and it was this landing that prolonged the Allied military presence until the coup in the provincial capital could be planned and executed. The Regional Soviet had rebelled against the Bolshevik authorities, not the idea of local self-government through the soviets. Even the officers advising the Regional Soviet expected that the Soviet would continue to function after the fall of the Bolsheviks in the province, only without an arbitrary central authority.⁶⁴

Indeed, the Regional Soviet greeted the coup in Arkhangel'sk as a sequence to its own policies that legitimized its break with Sovnarkom. The soviet's *Izvestiia* declared "ARKHANGEL'SK IS WITH US" and announced that the soviet had already dispatched delegates to participate in the formation of the new cabinet. On 6 August it recognized the Supreme Administration as the government authority in the North.⁶⁵

It was a shock, therefore, when Chaikovskii informed the representatives from Murmansk that the Regional Soviet would be dissolved and replaced by a commissar from the Supreme Administration until zemstvo elections could be held. The representatives protested that the Regional Soviet was an elected body, and its dissolution would be unpopular with its constituents. It made little sense, they insisted, to replace a local body possessing knowledge of local conditions with

⁶¹ *Vozrozhdenie Severa*, 24 and 28 August, 1 September 1918. Figes, *Russian Peasants, Civil War*, 168–69, argues that peasants under the Komuch knew the zemstvos well from the old regime and rejected them in favor of the soviets. It seems to me that the issue is not the label but whether the peasants themselves or outsiders established them.

⁶² *Vozrozhdenie Severa*, 4 September 1918.

⁶³ See *FRUS*, 1918 3:123, 130–32; the issues of *Russian Cooperator* for May, July, August, October, and December 1918, and January and February 1920; and, for similar activities on the Murman, *Izvestiia Murmanskago Kraevago Soveta*, 10 July, 30 September, and 7 October; and *FRUS*, 1918 3:154.

⁶⁴ This according to Veselago (*Dokumental'naiia spravka*, 124).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 144–46, 161–65.

centralized administration from Arkhangel'sk. The soviet even attempted to avoid dissolution by reforming itself to resemble the zemstvos more closely.⁶⁶

There were other pressures that reinforced the resolve of the populist leaders to dissolve the Murman Soviet. The cabinet was confronted by the active hostility of both the Russian officers and the Allied commanders who, among other things, demanded the abolition of the Murman Soviet as the last "Bolshevik" vestige in the province, "this little mob of *intelligent*" that had collaborated with the Soviet government for too long before defying it.⁶⁷ These tensions culminated on the night of 5–6 September, when Chaplin rounded up the socialists and dispatched them to Solovetskii Island on the White Sea.⁶⁸

The long-term effects of the coup were irreparably damaging to the socialists, since it highlighted their powerlessness and isolation from their partners in the Northern regime. Local society believed that the Allied military had a hand in the coup, which was true, and that the Allied diplomats tacitly approved of it, which was never proven.⁶⁹ The impression of broad Allied complicity was deep and enduring. It did not help that American troops operated the tramway during the strike, a clear case of strike-breaking by virtually any standards, nor that the British commander threatened the strikers with courts-martial.⁷⁰ The workers had mistrusted Allied intentions from the day they landed in Arkhangel'sk, and had offered support to the regime "only to the extent" that it addressed the needs of the workers.⁷¹ The events surrounding the coup seemed to justify their reservations.⁷² Relations between employers and employees also worsened during the strike, reigniting a period of industrial labor conflict that would continue until the fall of the Northern Region to the Red Army.⁷³

The attempted coup made the cabinet more sensitive to merchants and conservative activists in the provincial capital; this, combined with Chaikovskii's initial resolve to disband all soviets, led the cabinet to its decree of 14 September abolishing the Regional Soviet.⁷⁴ The final order sent to Murmansk demanded "order and tranquility. . . . No opposition, no violence. We expect from the local activists firm

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 144–45, 161–65.

⁶⁷ *Otechestvo. Ezhednevnaia bezpartiinaia obshchestvenno-politicheskaia gazeta*, 29 September 1918.

⁶⁸ I do not dwell on these events because they have been covered well in the existing literature. See Strakhovsky, *Intervention at Archangel*, 42–88; Chaplin, "Dva perevorota," 18–25; *Otechestvo*, issues from September and October; and David Francis, *Russia from the American Embassy, April 1916–November 1918*, 273–88.

⁶⁹ *FRUS, 1918* 2:521–23.

⁷⁰ Francis, *Russia*, 267–68.

⁷¹ Gorodetskii, "Obrazovanie Severnoi oblasti," 12.

⁷² When the Allied troops landed at the port on 2 August and paraded along the main street of the town, the American chargé d'affaires, Felix Cole, observed that "the working class was patently absent" (*FRUS, 1918* 2:527–30).

⁷³ *Vozrozhdenie Severa*, 31 August 1918; Mel'gunov, *Chaikovskii*, 81 ff; Alexander Berkman, *The Bolshevik Myth: Diary, 1921–1922* (London, 1925). Berkman and Goldman visited the region soon after the fall of the anti-Bolshevik regime and collected data on the local labor movement in the years 1918–1919.

⁷⁴ Veselago, *Dokumental'naia spravka*, 165.

awareness of their obligations as citizens and unconditional obedience to the temporary supreme Russian power.”⁷⁵

The most interesting response of the Soviet was its recommendation to the local population. It used the last editions of its newspaper to call on workers to form unions as the only remaining means to protect their interests and advised them on how to go about organizing and operating them. In these articles the Soviet struck a note of urgency, since the Soviet had become the focus of local activity and the labor unions had become secondary or defunct. Elections for the zemstvos were not scheduled to begin until December; in the meantime, the Murman would be controlled by appointed “chinovniki” and the Allied command.⁷⁶

By the time conscription and the dissolution of soviets were fully implemented, the political crisis in the provincial capital had been resolved. At the end of September all but Chaikovskii resigned, and he yielded to pressures from the right and from the Allied diplomats to create a more “business-like” administration.⁷⁷ The local Trade and Industry Union had been arguing for a month that “only the bourgeoisie can bring about calm and lead us out of the impasse.” Of the five new cabinet members appointed, two were nonparty activists recommended by the Trade and Industry Union (N. V. Mefodiev and S. N. Gorodetskii, both of them ultra-conservatives), while the other three were the Kadet Zubov, the former Octobrist Prince I. A. Kurakin, and Colonel D. A. Durov.⁷⁸ The new cabinet’s proclamation was even more statist than the one of early August. It declared its primary task to be the creation of an army, and it admonished the local population to “forego local and class interests” and focus on cooperation between “the Allies, Russian officers and soldiery, trade and industry circles and all the *demokratii*.”⁷⁹ In short, it asked the population to abandon the social aspects of the revolution altogether.

It is arguable that the supplanting of the socialist cabinet by a conservative one sealed the fate of the Northern Region, for it destroyed any pretense of representative or at least popular government. But the two most important measures of the Northern regime, conscription and the banning of soviets, were legacies of the socialist cabinet. The conservatives merely perpetuated these policies, albeit willingly.

By winter, the ramifications of these measures became apparent. Conscription brought in almost two thousand recruits by the end of October, and they were placed under the Russian officers and Allied commanders. Chaplin, who came back to active duty after the attempted coup, recalled that he and his fellow officers had to function in a town “in which none of us had ever been, in which none of us knew anyone, and in which the situation and the mood of the population was completely

⁷⁵ *Izvestiia Murmanskago Kraevago Soveta*, 17 October 1918; Veselago, *Dokumental’naia spravka*, 165–66.

⁷⁶ *Izvestiia Murmanskago Kraevago Soveta*, 30 September, 3, 7, 10 October 1918.

⁷⁷ Francis explicitly demanded a higher “bourgeois content” in the government, believing that they would be more authoritative (or perhaps simply authoritarian) than the socialists (Francis, *Russia*, 280–81).

⁷⁸ *Otechestvo*, 6 October 1918.

⁷⁹ Reprinted in *Beloe delo*, vol. 4 (January 1929).

unknown to us.”⁸⁰ On 29 October the army experienced the first of what would be several major mutinies, including mass desertions to the Bolsheviks and massacres of Russian and foreign officers. The most common grievance of the troops was being placed under officers of the old regime, and—more serious in a region noted for its xenophobia—domination by Allied commanders. British officers created a new Anglo-Russian regiment, meant to be an elite force to fight the Red Army, but this, too, mutinied with substantial loss of life.⁸¹

Equally ominous were the events following the replacement of soviets with zemstvos. Soon after assuming control in August the Administration had ordered the arrest of all members of soviet executive committees on the grounds that they had collaborated with the Bolsheviks.⁸² Apparently the military authorities extended the order to include all those associated with the soviets at any time after the Bolshevik coup in Petrograd, which included many anti-Bolshevik socialists who had served in the zemstvos but transferred to the soviets to try to influence events. When the provincial zemstvo assembly reconvened in late August 1918, with the socialists still dominating the cabinet, almost half of its thirty-three members were in prison.⁸³ The socialists in the cabinet were well aware of these developments—some of the accounts were published in their own newspaper—but dismissed them as imperatives of war. Following the abolition of the Murman Soviet, the new military authorities rounded up the members of the Executive and sent them to the newly built Arctic prison camps; many of them died there, while a few, including Iur'ev, survived until the collapse of the Northern Region, only to be kept in the camps by the Bolsheviks.⁸⁴

In the year that followed the dissolution of the Murman Soviet a wave of popular protests swept the region. Sabotage had been reported along the Murman railway as early as July 1918, but with the removal of the only avenue of institutional appeal it escalated into a broader movement with overtly subversive objectives.⁸⁵ In early 1919, Allied commanders uncovered a plot among railway and dock workers to overthrow the appointed officials. Simultaneous demonstrations were held in Kandalaksha, Kem', and Soroka, where the participants protested against “English imperialism.”⁸⁶ When zemstvo elections were held in January, they attracted as little as 40 percent of the electorate.⁸⁷

In elections on 13 October to the municipal дума of Arkhangel'sk, which local socialists termed a “test of the civil maturity of the Arkhangel'sk populace” and a “holiday of civil society,” only 40 percent of the eligible voters cast ballots, and even

⁸⁰ “Dva perevorota,” 14–16.

⁸¹ See the memoirs of the commander of the Allied forces, Field Marshall Lord Edmund Ironside, *Archangel, 1918–1919* (London, 1953), 45–46, 84, 118–19, 126–27, 157–59, 161. See also *FRUS, 1918* 2:568; and *FRUS, 1919* :651.

⁸² *Beloe delo*, vol. 4 (January 1928): 34.

⁸³ *Vozrozhdenie Severa*, 24 August 1918.

⁸⁴ Strakhovsky, *Intervention at Archangel*, 82; idem, “The Liquidation of the Murmansk Regional Soviet,” *Slavonic and East European Review* 21 (November 1943).

⁸⁵ *Izvestiia Murmanskago Kraevago Soveta*, 3, 7, 10 July 1918.

⁸⁶ Charles Maynard, *The Murmansk Venture* (London, 1928), 57, 61–62, 199–201.

⁸⁷ *North Russian Zemstvos*, 21.

fewer in working-class neighborhoods.⁸⁸ In 1917 the socialists received 70 percent of the vote in the Municipal Duma elections, but in 1918 they received 55 percent, largely due to the massive abstention.⁸⁹

The socialists maintained their majority, but they perceived the outcome as a severe blow to their previously unquestioned popularity. And from this time they began calling themselves “sotsialisty gosudarstvenniki” (statesmanlike or statist socialists), those who understood the exigencies of statehood even if the electorate did not. The editorial of their daily newspaper readily accepted that their loss of popularity was the price of their turn to “politics of state” and concluded:

The SRs and NSs of Russia, under the impact of specific circumstances, became the carriers of the idea of statesmanship . . . and stood at the head of the national rebirth of Russia. But the particular mass of voters, . . . as the most recent elections demonstrated, is not politically conscious and active. The sharp lowering of turnout in the working-class neighborhoods . . . and the strengthened mobilization for List no. 3 [the conservative coalition] clearly shows the specificity of the popular [*demokraticheskii*] voter.⁹⁰

Nothing could more clearly illustrate the distance that the populist leaders had traveled since early 1917, for the statement amounted to at least a temporary abandonment of their trust in those who elected them.

It was exceedingly difficult to convince peasants to fight beyond their districts and accept that each village was a part of a greater whole. This was a reality of the Russian Civil War that was particularly damaging to populists who claimed peasants as their natural constituents. But in 1918 the frame of mind of the populist leaders precluded mobilizing a sympathetic population to active support, the only thing that might have reduced their dependence on overtly hostile Russian officers and Allied troops. In this light, we should reassess the viability of the populists’ “democratic alternative” to the Bolsheviks and the Whites: by late 1918 they were not democrats in the political sense that historians use the term, and they had lost many of the characteristics that distinguished them from their partners in the anti-Bolshevik coalitions.

The policies of the socialist cabinet in the North during the autumn of 1918 reflected inherent weaknesses in the socialist parties and went well beyond high politics and their abilities as military organizers. As other historians have observed with regard to earlier periods of the Russian Revolution, it was a crisis of ideology and values that arose in 1917 and early 1918. Oliver Radkey was the first Western historian to trace the growing alienation of the leaders of the SR Party from their constituents after the February Revolution, as popular demands for an end to the war and immediate settlement of the land question clashed with their conceptions

⁸⁸ *Vozrozhdenie Severa*, 8 and 13 October 1918.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 16 October 1918; *Otechestvo*, 16 October 1918.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 19 October 1918. “Demokraticheskii” is here used as a social category (e.g., peasants and workers).

of legality.⁹¹ Donald Raleigh reached similar conclusions in the local setting of Saratov province in 1917, contending that the leaders of the moderate socialist parties abandoned their own revolutionary programs in the pursuit of compromise, legality, and the interests of the Russian state, while their constituents became increasingly radicalized.⁹² Ziva Galili argues convincingly that these developments were not limited to the populist parties: Menshevik party leaders in 1917 used complex and abstract analyses to understand a crisis that was immediate and material, with the result that they became thoroughly alienated from those who had originally elected them.⁹³

These treatments of the main socialist parties in 1917 highlight a broad contradiction in the thinking of their leaders: they faced a choice between convincing broad segments of the population of the need for moderation, foresight, and sacrifice in times of extreme crisis (which they were unable to do), and leading these social groups by supporting programs radically different from their own (which they were unwilling to do). As socialists they were determined to redress the Russian social divide, but offered abstract diagnoses and legalistic prescriptions that seemed to circumvent the demands of their constituents. In later months socialist leaders were perplexed by the passivity of the people in the face of events that they considered to be turning points in the Revolution: the Bolshevik coup, the disbandment of the Constituent Assembly, and the surrender of vast territories to the Central Powers without resistance.

The contradiction was only accentuated in the autumn of 1918. Socialist leaders arrived in the North convinced that the “popular masses” were easily deceived by propaganda and incapable of understanding the broader interests of Russian statehood, and they offered policies that were statist, centrist, and irrelevant to local conditions. Every failure to rally support for their policies reinforced their conviction that the *narod* was “dark” and “crude”—words that permeate the writings of populists in this period. By October 1918 socialist leaders were disenchanted with the electoral process and keenly aware that electoral majorities did not ensure that they could mobilize support for specific measures. The result was an estrangement from the local population, and the lack of a popular base and institutionalized links created a dependence on foreign troops in a region with a long history of foreign war and xenophobia.

These conclusions apply to the socialist leaders in the North, but research on other regions in the same period may reveal similar developments. The same organization that plotted the coup in Arkhangel'sk, the *Soiuz vozrozhdeniia Rossii*, joined with another nonparty organization to establish the Omsk Directory in Siberia—even more known for its regionalist movement. Socialists such as

⁹¹ Radkey, *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism: Promise and Default of the Russian Socialist Revolutionaries, February-October 1917* (New York, 1958); idem, *The Sickle under the Hammer: The Russian Socialist Revolutionaries in the First Months of Soviet Rule* (New York, 1961).

⁹² Raleigh, *Revolution on the Volga: 1917 in Saratov* (Ithaca, 1986).

⁹³ Galili, *The Menshevik Leaders in the Russian Revolution: Social Realities and Political Strategies* (Princeton, 1989).

Chaikovskii left the North in 1919 and made their way to the southern front of the Civil War as advisers to the White Army.

My evidence suggests that these attitudes were specific to the leaders of the populist parties and that the rank and file was dubious of the statism espoused by their leaders. The information and articles printed on the back pages of the socialist daily often contradicted lead articles written by the socialist members of the cabinet. This observation does not detract from the conclusion that the leaders were alienated from other strata of the population; rather, it reminds us that there was more than one type of SR, NS, or Menshevik, and adds another dimension to the estrangement by implying the existence of splits within the parties themselves.

Workers and peasants, for their part, offered support on a conditional basis. They declared their opposition to Bolshevism, preference for “legitimate authority” in the form of the Supreme Administration, and voted for the socialists overwhelmingly during elections. At the same time, they reserved the right to reject specific policies that the Administration enacted. They refused to take to the battlefield under the command of officers they were all too familiar with from four years of war, take orders from British officers who did not even speak their language, and abandon their institutions of local self-government for bodies imposed from the outside. They participated actively in their institutions—that some were called soviets was incidental to the fact that they were their institutions—rejected the zemstvos, and undertook to address their own material needs through voluntary cooperatives. If the socialists needed more evidence that this was not apathy but diverging interests, they found it in the bloody and repeated mutinies in the conscripted army and in sabotage in the Murman region after the abolition of the Soviet.

One anonymous writer in the socialist daily understood that these clashes represented a gap between political activists leading the parties and the groups they intended to lead. Referring to the tendency of socialists to attribute the failure of their cabinet to the “ignorance” of the masses, particularly peasants, he observed:

It is all fine that all sorts of people write about the village, people who are alien to it [*chuzhie ei*], people who came from the outside and are little acquainted with its psychology. Rarely does the village speak in its own language[;] others speak for it, others for whom words come more easily. . . . It is as if they are afraid of the village, and prefer to sit in the enlightened [*kul'turnyi*] city and from there write about the horrors of its darkness.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ *Vozrozhdenie Severa*, 29 September 1918.