

THE RIABUSHINSKY CIRCLE: *BURZHUAZIIA* AND
OBSHCHESTVENNOST' IN LATE IMPERIAL RUSSIA

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ONE OF THE most striking characteristics of social development in Imperial Russia was the historic divorce between the entrepreneurial stratum and educated society. The *kupecheskoe soslovie* (merchant estate) was long excluded from intercourse with polite society by its notoriously low level of culture and by deeply ingrained agrarian and aristocratic prejudices against self-regarding, profit-oriented, entrepreneurial activity. Merchants and industrialists, who operated largely as clients of the autocratic state, were accorded semiprivileged status only through their purchased *soslovie* membership. As with many other groups, however, the *soslovie* structure was little more than a legal fiction that concealed beneath it numerous competing regional oligarchies, themselves further divided by differences of sector, scale, and ethnic identity (see the Owen essay in this volume). Little united these groupings beyond the hostility of the surrounding society and the rituals of a fading *soslovie* order.¹

The Revolution of 1905 profoundly altered these traditional relationships. The eclipse of autocratic power raised hopes among the opponents of the old order that educated society (*obshchestvennost'*) could claim both legitimacy and political power from the faltering autocracy. At the same time, however, a multiplicity of hitherto invisible or inchoate constituencies emerged to make their claims against both the autocracy and educated society, portending the creation of new tensions and divisions in the social and political structure.

The constitutional experiment of the post-1905 period seemed to open the way for the formation of broad new social and political coalitions, and indeed the terminology of class, interest group, and profession emerged alongside the archaic language of *soslovie* and "humble petition." It remained to be seen, however, whether post-1905 social realities would in fact conform to these new concepts. More important, it was still an open question how Russian *obshchestvennost'*, based on a coalition of elite social groups sharing a common dedication to Western, predominantly liberal values, would recognize and accommodate the claims of new groups.

¹ For background on the *kupechestvo*, see Alfred J. Rieber, *Merchants and Entrepreneurs in Imperial Russia* (Chapel Hill, 1982); Thomas J. Owen, *Capitalism and Politics in Russia* (Cambridge, 1981); P. A. Berlin, *Russkaia burzhuaziia v staroe i novoe vremia* (Moscow, 1922).

The *kupechestvo* represented one such challenge. The rapid progress the industrialists and merchants made during 1905 in defining and defending their common interests signaled the emergence of a new and potentially influential force in Russia. Contemporary observers began to speak of the advent in Russia of an industrial *burzhuaziia*.² The possibility was thus raised that the cultural and political sophistication of the entrepreneurs had reached a level sufficient to permit their inclusion in the *obshchestvennost'* coalition.

Although the majority of entrepreneurs eschewed oppositional activity after 1905, new contenders for leadership of the bourgeoisie did emerge to demand a place beside the intelligentsia and gentry in the leadership of the anti-autocratic movement. The compatibility of their ideas with those of the older elites, the unity of the forces they represented, and the degree of acceptance they encountered are all important indicators of the flexibility and cohesiveness of Russian *obshchestvennost'* on the eve of the First World War.

The most vocal and audacious entrepreneurial group in Russia, in terms of both its advocacy of class solidarity and its determination to be taken seriously by *obshchestvennost'*, was the Riabushinsky circle of Moscow. Pavel P. Riabushinsky, his brother Vladimir P. Riabushinsky, and his colleagues Alexander I. Konovalov, Sergei N. Tretiakov, Nikolai D. Morozov, and Sergei I. Chetverikov are best known as the leaders of Russia's liberal entrepreneurs.³ Called by contemporaries the "young" industrialists, or "young group," they became after 1905 the most active proponents of the transformation of the old *kupechestvo* into a modern entrepreneurial *burzhuaziia*. Riabushinsky's ringing assertion "*Kupets idët!*" ("The merchant is on the move!") announced the advent of the progressist movement on the national political stage in 1912. In the ensuing years, he and his colleagues came to personify the effort to create the ideological and organizational basis of a modern entrepreneurial class.⁴

While Riabushinsky's activism was rooted in his desire to lead his *klass* to find "its place in the sun" in Russia, he and his collaborators represented far more than narrow advocates of a single constituency. They seemed painfully aware of the fragility of Russia's nascent civic culture and the brittleness of its

² On the entrepreneurs in 1905, see S. E. Sef, *Burzhuaziia v 1905 godu* (Moscow, 1926); and E. D. Chermensky, *Burzhuaziia i tsarism v pervoi russkoi revoliutsii* (Moscow, 1970).

³ This core group is defined by the participation of its members in a variety of joint activities, extending through the war and revolution to emigre organizations in Paris and elsewhere. To this list might be added D. V. Sirotkin, an Old Believer shipbuilder from Nizhny-Novgorod, Riabushinsky's principal collaborator in schismatic affairs, and lesser figures such as P. A. Buryshkin, A. I. Kuznetsov, S. A. Smirnov, and M. N. Bardygin. Some notion of the extent of their support in Moscow might be gleaned from the list of those who signed the "Protest of the Sixty-Six" in 1911. See *Utro Rossii* (henceforth UR), Feb. 11, 1911, 3.

⁴ On the activities of the Riabushinsky circle, see James L. West, "The Riabushinskij Circle: Russian Industrialists in Search of a Bourgeoisie," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Ost Europas* 32 (1984), Heft 3, 358–77.

evolving social structures. It was their oft-stated intention to foster coherence and collaboration among disparate social and political groupings both within and beyond the entrepreneurial stratum.

Their incentive to do this arose from their position as outsiders. Riabushinsky was an Old Believer who worked for the unification of all dissident sects, urging his coreligionists to shed their ancient indifference to secular affairs and join in the struggle for political and religious freedom. As *nouveaux arrivés* in Duma politics, he and his associates bent their efforts to build a broad coalition of liberal forces through their Progressist party. And as strangers to the intellectual salons of Moscow, they mounted a number of initiatives designed to reach out to the liberal intelligentsia, including the Economic Discussions (1909–1912), the Protest of the Sixty-Six (1911), and the Information Committee (1914). Finally, as the owner of a publishing house, Riabushinsky propagated his views to a wide public in such periodicals as *Narodnaia Gazeta* (People's Newspaper, 1906), *Utro Rossii* (The Russian Morn, 1907, 1909–1917), and the Old Believer paper *Tserkov'* (Church, 1908–1914), and the *Velikaia Rossiia* (Great Russia) symposium (1910–1911).⁵

Representatives of the new generation of Moscow industrialists, Riabushinsky and his collaborators were particularly anxious to gain entrée into and acceptance from educated society, not only to assuage their own sense of self-esteem and professional pride but also because they believed they possessed knowledge and experience without which the forces of *obshchestvennost'* could not succeed in their effort to lead the nation. Yet as newcomers to intellectual and political circles, they were by cultural provenance and personal inclination very different people from those with whom they sought to work. They brought to the debates ideas often at variance with the prevailing notions of the educated elites, and while they offered their help to "society," they also undertook to challenge certain of its most cherished beliefs and assumptions. The record of these activities between 1905 and 1914 provides a window into the mental world of men who aspired to become members of Russian *obshchestvennost'*, but whose experience and concerns reached well beyond the charmed circle of nineteenth-century educated society.

The views of the young industrialists evolved from three sources: their private entrepreneurial experience, Riabushinsky's association with Old Belief, and their contacts after 1905 with the liberal professoriate of Moscow. They came of age in the world of merchant Moscow, and they absorbed from this background the slavophile patriotism of the old *kupechestvo*. They inherited its slavophilic animosities toward "bureaucratic" Petersburg as well as the

⁵ On the Progressist party, see *Fraktsiia progressistov v IV gosudarstvennoi dume*, 1–4, St. Petersburg, 1913–1914. See also V. N. Seletskii, "Obrazovanie partii progressistov," *Vestnik Moskovskovo universiteta: Istoriiia* 5 (1970): 32–48. On Riabushinsky's publishing work, see A. P. Bokhanov, "Iz istorii burzhuaznoi pechati," *Istoricheskie zapiski* 97 (1976): 263–89.

Moscow merchants' pretensions of standing closer to the narod than did the denizens of the northern capital.⁶ Their animus toward St. Petersburg was reinforced by the independent economic position they occupied as heads of family textile firms founded by serf and schismatic ancestors and by their commercial contacts with the peasantry of the Great Russian heartland, on which they depended for their market.⁷

While they came of age in the world of *soslovnost'*, the younger generation of entrepreneurs was moving rapidly beyond the factory and warehouse walls that had encompassed the world of their fathers. They gained in professional confidence as they modernized their enterprises, which were among the largest manufacturing operations in the empire. They enjoyed the accumulated wealth of generations of effort and received the best education that wealth could buy, as well as extensive foreign travel. They participated in the vibrant cultural life of Silver-Age Moscow, patronizing the *style moderne* creativity of men like Vrubel and Shekhtel.

The Revolution of 1905 catalyzed these forward-looking impulses into political action. Riabushinsky and his associates took the lead in urging the *kupechestvo* to end its alliance with the autocracy and raise its voice with that of the rest of society in demanding an end to the arbitrary authority of the unreformed tsarist regime. The more cautious business majority reluctantly declared its opposition to the regime, but then it beat a hasty retreat back into the government camp after the October Manifesto. In the post-1905 period, the entrepreneurial establishments of Moscow and St. Petersburg attempted to reach a new *modus vivendi* with the bureaucracy, through the Association of Industry and Trade and the Octobrist party.⁸ The Riabushinsky group, in contrast, persisted in its liberal oppositional stance and gained a following in Moscow as disillusionment set in over the results of this collaborationist effort.

The second pillar of Riabushinsky's outlook was his association with Old Belief, shared by Morozov, and Konovalov. The world of the *starobriadtsy* was even further removed from the main currents of educated society than that of the Russian Orthodox *kupechestvo*. Branded "schismatics" and persecuted for 250 years, the Old Believers had evolved an autonomous religious subculture hermetically sealed off from the Orthodox mainstream. Geographically dis-

⁶ On the nineteenth-century merchant-Slavophile alliance, see Owen, *Capitalism and Politics* chap. 2.

⁷ On the Moscow industrial families, see P. A. Buryshkin, *Moskva kupecheskoe* (New York, 1954); Jo Ann Ruckman, *The Moscow Business Elite, 1840–1905* (DeKalb, 1984). See also the lavish family histories of the Riabushinskys, Konovalovs, and others, published to celebrate the centennials of their firms; for example, *Torgovo-promyshlennoe delo Riabushinskikh* (Moscow, 1913).

⁸ The best sources on what I have called the "Octobrist compromise" remain: Ruth A. Roosa, "The Association of Industry and Trade" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1967); and Louis Menashe, "Alexander Guchkov and the Origins of the Octobrist Party" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1966).

persed and threatened with imprisonment, torture, and execution by the authorities, they turned in on themselves to become the most energetic and literate element of the Russian peasantry. From their ranks the merchant cadres of Moscow were replenished in the nineteenth century, a process of renewal that was the genesis of industrial "dynasties" to which the "young group" belonged.⁹

The Riabushinskys adhered to the Belokrinitsa hierarchy of Priested Old Believers, the most developed and least seditious of the dissident sects.¹⁰ Yet even this Old Believer elite, classified by the authorities as a "harmful sect," was subject to periodic repressions. Thus when the coercive machinery of church and state was weakened in 1905, Riabushinsky stepped forward with a passion born of persecution to demand an end to religious intolerance and guarantees of freedom of thought, conscience, and speech in religious and civil affairs.

When Riabushinsky succeeded in organizing a massive Old Believer Peasant Congress in 1906, he found that the majority of his coreligionists were even more reluctant to follow his political lead than were the *kuptsy*.¹¹ Yet his activism did provide the nucleus around which a small but dedicated Old Believer intelligentsia could coalesce. With the help of these "Neo-Old Believers," Riabushinsky reanimated the All-Russian Congress of Old Believers and through it worked to unify and politicize the scattered forces of the schismatics. His efforts on behalf of his coreligionists were often frustrating, but Riabushinsky never lost his abiding faith in the narod or his identification with what he believed to be their values and their welfare.¹²

If the liberal impulses of the young industrialists had crystallized in 1905, the revolution had also provided them painful reminders that they were still not taken seriously by the forces of *obshchestvennost'*. In the thick of the struggle, they had been forced to operate in isolation from the Zemstvo Congress, which had rebuffed their offers of cooperation. The Constitutional Democrats also had warned them away, as Kadet leader Miliukov declared that there was no room for "narrow class interests" in his "above-class" party.¹³ As proud as they were of their status as "men of practical experi-

⁹ For the classic source on the Old Believers, see A. S. Prugavin, *Starobriadchestvo vo vtoroi polovine XIX veka* (Moscow, 1904). See also V. P. Riabushinsky, *Starobriadchestvo i russkoe religioznoe chuvstvo* (Joinville-le-pont, 1936). On the schismatic role in economic development, see William L. Blackwell, "Old Believers and the Rise of Private Enterprise in Early Nineteenth Century Russia," *Slavic Review* 24, no. 3 (September 1965): 406–24.

¹⁰ For information on the Belokrinitsa Hierarchy, see J. S. Curtiss, *Church and State in Russia* (New York, 1972).

¹¹ On Riabushinsky's Peasant Congress, see *Vserossiiskii s'ezd krest'ian starobriadtsev: Materialy po voprosam zemelnomu i krest'ianskomu* (Moscow, 1906).

¹² On the Congress of Old Believers, see *Trudy: Vserossiiskii s'ezd starobriadtsev*, nos. 6–12 (Nizhny-Novgorod, 1905–1912).

¹³ TsGIA, f. 150, op. 1, 1. 20; Chermensky, *Burzhuaizii*, 134.

ence," Riabushinsky and his people concluded that they could not continue to function in a vacuum; they sorely needed support and assistance from "men of science" to sharpen and broaden their ideas.

Fortunately for them, the convulsions of 1905–1907 had provoked a reassessment of the attitudes of the intelligentsia among members of the Moscow professoriate. The Right Kadets around Peter B. Struve had come to question the long-standing anticapitalist and antibourgeois prejudices implicit in the radical and liberal traditions. On their way to producing the famous *Vekhi* (Landmarks) symposium, Struve, Berdiaev, Bulgakov, and others were now willing to explore contacts with the liberal industrialists. Riabushinsky and Konovalov established social contact with the Moscow professors by inviting them to "take tea" in their private salons. Thus were born the Economic Discussions, one of the few sustained collaborations between entrepreneurs and intellectuals in Russian history.¹⁴

These gatherings, which lasted from 1909 to 1912, served as a kind of graduate education for the industrialists. While listening to lectures on such technical topics as the role of syndicates and trusts and foreign capital, they were also exposed to Struve's liberal nationalism, Berdiaev's theology, Bulgakov's Orthodox work ethic (see Rosenthal's essay in this volume), and Ozerov's views on labor policy. For their part, the industrialists viewed these symposia as a "nascent political club," a forerunner of new and powerful coalitions they hoped to build in the future.¹⁵

By 1912 they felt confident enough to leave the tutelage of the professors to launch their own "national-liberal" vehicle, the Progressist party. They owed much to the professors and still stood somewhat in awe of their intellectual prowess. But it was on their own convictions that they hung the intellectual structure erected for them by Struve and his associates. As they prepared to enter national politics in their own right, they did not conceal their belief that they were more important to the nation, more in tune with its traditions, and closer to the *narod* than those elites who hitherto comprised Russian *obshchestvennost'*.

The young industrialists existed simultaneously in two worlds, a duality architectonically symbolized by the Shekhtel house of Riabushinsky's brother Stepan: its style moderne living quarters concealed behind them a meticulously recreated Byzantine chapel meant for private worship according to pre-Nikonian rites (see the Brumfield essay in this volume). They admired the advanced cultures of the West, and they embraced the values of science, technology, and reason. At the same time, they also cultivated a nostalgic reverence for the values and rituals of Pre-Petrine Rus. They were determined that

¹⁴ On the Economic Discussions, see Richard Pipes, *Struve: Liberal on the Right* (Cambridge, 1980), 174–86.

¹⁵ TsGAOR, f. 4047, op. 1, d. 18. On the views of the professors, see Samuel D. Kassow, *Students, Professors, and the State in Tsarist Russia* (Berkeley, 1989).

Russia's transformation must go forward but not at the expense of national stability, identity, or sovereignty. In a synthesis of seventeenth-century tradition and the institutions of modern capitalism they sought solutions to the problems of the twentieth century.

The oppositional views of the industrialists were deeply felt, for they judged the autocracy to have failed the nation on many counts. For centuries the self-appointed engine of Russia's development, the tsarist state now stood ponderously astride the economy, impeding the emergence of new productive forces with its bureaucratic inertia and police controls. The government had also forfeited its political legitimacy by resisting and undermining the development of democratic forms and by allowing itself to become captive of "the agrarians," powerful landed elites hostile to "all things that were not themselves."¹⁶ Finally, the regime endangered the sovereignty, perhaps even the existence, of the nation by its military incompetence.

The government's difficulty in maintaining control of the country in 1905 and after evidenced the bankruptcy of the ancien régime. Forced on the defensive, the authorities reverted to their oldest and worst expedient: rule by force and coercion.¹⁷ Whatever liberal reforms the government had been compelled to make in 1905, the industrialists feared, it would rescind as soon as the forces of order were strong enough to prevail. This reactionary resurgence, however, would, in Riabushinsky's view, soon call forth "its own 1905" and a new "struggle, coming perhaps tomorrow, between the old and new foundations of Russian life."¹⁸ For this new round of conflict he and his collaborators were constantly preparing.

Legitimacy was now passing to *obshchestvennost'*, to educated society, which possessed the scientific knowledge and the professional expertise to place the institutions of the nation on a firm scientific and technological foundation. The concept of *obshchestvennost'* for the young industrialists was imbued with political meaning: to them the coalition of all educated groups, united to disarm the forces of order and transform the autocracy into a constitutional monarchy, could serve as a unifying symbol without impeding progress. But they insisted that to be successful this alliance would have to include the "serious *obshchestvennyi* force" represented by the "young, energetic bourgeoisie," which alone could provide the "practical experience" and "material power" to impart dynamicism to the nation's economy.¹⁹

The values that educated society had long nurtured would also have to undergo change. The "powerless altruism" and "service idea" of the gentry and the "abstract" outlook of the intelligentsia would have to give way before the virtues of productivity and initiative cultivated by the new "creators of

¹⁶ UR, June 23, 1910, 1; July 5, 1911, 1.

¹⁷ UR, June 6, 1910, 1; Oct. 2, 1911, 2; Feb. 23, 1911, 1.

¹⁸ UR, Jan. 1, 1912; May 18, 1910, 1.

¹⁹ UR, May 23, 1910, 1; Jan. 8, 1911, 3.

material value."²⁰ Society would also have to accept the fundamental premise of the industrialists' activity: that, as Riabushinsky often asserted, "capitalism [is] the only vital and practical system for the conduct of economics."²¹

The young industrialists insisted, against prevailing opinion, that self-sustaining capitalist development in Russia was not only possible, but essential. It was possible because the narod possess the innate capacity to make it so, given adequate freedom, incentive, and leadership. It was necessary because only capitalism could act as the rapid economic accelerator that Russia so desperately needed to keep pace with her Western competitors. Continued reliance on a paternalistic state, they argued, would stunt social development and retard economic growth.

Capitalism was the great "steam engine" needed to drive the economy forward at top speed, and while it would require popular acceptance of competitive mechanisms and self-regarding effort, its Russian variant would be more "enlightened" than in the West. Riabushinsky's motto, "*bogatstvo obiazvaet*" (*richesse oblige*), suggested the kind of moral tone with which the industrialists wished to invest their activities.²² In their capitalist vision, employer and employee would be bound by mutual obligations within a religious and nationalist ethos unique to Russia.

The priority of the moment was the struggle with the autocracy and the retrograde forces it sheltered. Riabushinsky always insisted that "economic freedom is indissolubly linked with political freedom," and hence the immediate task of the bourgeoisie was to bring its "material power" to bear on the side of obshchestvennost'.²³ Even after the political battle had been won, however, the bourgeoisie would remain the prime mover in Russia's transformation. The "service classes," the gentry and intelligentsia, would fade from prominence as vestiges of Russia's preindustrial past, and "those forces capable of demonstrating authority" would supersede them. In place of the "beautiful altruism" of earlier elites, the entrepreneur would emerge animated by a "creative egoism" that would promote "the material construction by each of us of our own personal lives." In postautocratic Russia, the bourgeoisie would claim its rightful place as "the dominant political force."²⁴

Capitalism, in turn, would reshape the social structure of the country. A revolution in economic relations would "speed the collapse of the *soslovie*

²⁰ UR, May 18, 1910, 1.

²¹ From a 1922 speech of Riabushinsky, see "Protokol zasedaniia soveta rossiiskovo finansovo-promyshlenno-torgovogo soiuzia," Columbia University Archive, M. M. Zolotarev Collection, Box 4.

²² V. P. Riabushinsky, "Kupecheskoe moskovskoe," *Den' russkovo rebenka* (San Francisco), 18 (April 1951): 180.

²³ From Riabushinsky's 1922 speech; see note 21. Their views on the political role of the "rising bourgeoisie" were drawn from the political mythology of Britain and France, the countries they most admired.

²⁴ UR, Jan. 1, 1912, 1.

structure" and encourage the creation of modern social classes. The industrialists welcomed the advent of a class society, for they felt the realignment of interests it entailed would end the volatile transitional stage of inchoate resentments and anarchic violence. A period of more conscious and organized social competition would follow. The further this process progressed, the more stable the society would become. Parliamentary democracy would provide the political flexibility necessary to absorb and attenuate social antagonisms, as the rule of law would establish the "legal conditions for the free struggle" of classes, interests, and nationalities. Distinctions between city and country would begin to disappear; society would become culturally and educationally homogeneous; newly created wealth would become more evenly distributed; and the "psychology of the bourgeois" would become universal.²⁵

Social cohesion during this period of transformation would be guaranteed by the cement of nationalism, a force that the industrialists charged obshchestvennost' had abandoned by default to the anti-Semitic, reactionary right in Russia. Borrowing from the professors' "Neo-Slavophile" conceptions, Riabushinsky's group envisioned a "great mission of Slavic unification," a crusade to create a free commonwealth of nations and nationalities capable of demonstrating "the tribal genius of the Slavs."²⁶ The interests of all groups and classes would be subordinated to the goal of building this Slavonic condominium. Labor and enterprise would cease to be exclusively self-regarding; instead, they would be understood as social service in the interests of the nation. The narod, always deeply and instinctively patriotic, according to the Riabushinskys, would be imbued with a "healthy militarism," a "heroic world view" which would galvanize free Russia, its power and identity restored, to face "the ancient oppressors of Slavdom," "the Teutons."²⁷

This transition could not come soon enough, the industrialists argued, for in the arena of great power rivalry, Russia's industrial backwardness and its governing elites' incompetence had already undermined the nation's status and prestige to an alarming degree. Imperial Germany stood ready to exploit internal difficulties and weaknesses, either by military aggression or more insidiously by economic penetration. The autocracy's incapacity to manage military affairs and its inability to mobilize the elites and the narod to meet this threat portended to them an accelerated erosion of Russia's status as a great power, leading to eventual subversion or defeat by the "hand of German imperialism."²⁸

If nationalism were to cement the nation, then the industrialists understood

²⁵ UR, May 30, 1910, 1.

²⁶ UR, Jan. 30, 1910, 1.

²⁷ V. P. Riabushinsky, ed., *Velikaia Rossiia: Sbornik statei po voennym i obshchestvennym voprosam*, Book II (Moscow, 1911), 5; UR, Jan. 30, 1910, 1; Feb. 4, 1911, 1.

²⁸ UR, Jan. 12, 1922, 1.

it had to be recast and reshaped. Nationalist appeals, long the monopoly of the right, had been used to bolster the autocratic and nativistic principles espoused by the forces of order. Liberal Russian nationalism, in Struve's words, was "still in the making."²⁹ The industrialists thus set forth what they saw as a more "authentic" response to the German challenge than the programs of the autocracy or *obshchestvennost'*. They sought to clothe Russia's modernization in "native" costume and to demonstrate that the skills and values necessary for this transformation were implicit in the ancient culture of Rus. Had capitalism triumphed in Russia under the leadership of the Riabushinskys it might well have been draped in the strange vestments of the seventeenth century.

Riabushinsky's unique cultural vantage point enabled him and his Neo-Old Believer collaborators to develop a novel conception of Russia's history and national character. They resurrected slavophile myths of the merchant subculture, infused them with schismatic intensity, and shaped them to sustain their capitalist, democratic, and nationalistic aspirations. These myths formed the emotional subsoil beneath their progressist views on *vlast*, *obshchestvennost'*, and *narod*.

Their point of departure was a classic slavophilic idyl, a mythic vision of "the free and independent Rus" of pre-Petrine, pre-Nikonian time, in which *vlast'* (authority) and *zemlia* (land) existed in separate but not antagonistic spheres. Riabushinsky insisted that the term *samoderzhavie* (autocracy) in its original meaning referred to the sovereignty of the Russian tsars vis-à-vis foreign rulers and implied no autocratic powers over the Russian people.³⁰ The people and the elites shared the same religious culture, and the *narod* exercised indigenous democratic rights, through "*zemskii* self-government" and the *sobornyi* (conciliatory) principle of local election of religious authorities. *Vlast'* defended the *zemlia* and thus upheld the "democratic principle in church and in life." This balance, and the religious culture and rites that sanctified it, "worked out over centuries," "corresponded to the psycho-religious feelings in the soul of the Russian people."³¹

The Church Schism of 1667, however, represented a "great psychological rupture" in the "organic" course of Russian history. In its wake, both church and state adopted new and illegitimate concepts of rulership: arbitrary power was extended over the *zemlia*, the ancient rights of the *narod* were unilaterally abrogated, and the people were enserfed to the authority of the "Moloch state." Patriarch Nikon replaced "free Christian *obshchestvennost'*" with "hierarchical arbitrariness." In turn, the Nikonian church paid for its hubris by being reduced to a "bureaucratic and lifeless mechanism" within the administrative machinery of the Petrine state.³²

²⁹ *UR*, June 1, 1910, 1.

³⁰ Riabushinsky quoted in *Golos staroobriadchestva* (Feb. 19, 1906), no. 11, p. 1.

³¹ *Tserkov'* (henceforth *Ts*) (Oct. 19, 1914; Dec. 20, 1909).

³² *UR*, June 19, 1911, 2; *Ts* (Aug. 28, 1911; Feb. 2, 1914).

"The epoch of the destruction of the rights of the *zemlia* corresponded to the so-called *raskol*." For Riabushinsky, the centuries-long resistance of the Old Believers represented a popular struggle against this subjugation, carried on by "the most highly developed part of the Russian people." The issue at stake was one of not only rites and vestments but also freedom to live a cherished way of life. Indeed, *Tserkov'* argued that to call the Old Believers *raskolniki* was a misnomer, for the Old Believers did not break with the church; rather, the church and state broke faith with the people and their culture. The follower of the old rites intuitively understood that the new bureaucracy and "religious police" of the tsarist regime were "not organic" but "alien to the Russian spirit."³³ They saw that the autocratic state was erected "at the expense of all that was local, individual and personal" in the ancient traditions of the *narod* and entailed "the renunciation of our freedom and our culture."³⁴ They thus fled beyond the state's control and cultivated their way of life in the face of its "savage persecution."

Old Belief represented for Riabushinsky the ideology of Russia's dispossessed and disinherited masses. It rejected a process of state building based on alien models, carried on by elite to the exclusion of the *narod*, and built at the cost of suppressing its indigenous freedom and cultural identity. Deprived of its national essence, the Russian people "stood before the western peoples in the pitiful rags of a Holy Fool," their true creativity and productivity concealed under the weight of autocracy, serfdom, and poverty.³⁵

Authentic Russia withdrew into the remote schismatic communities of the far north and Siberia. There the "followers of the ancient piety," who "retained the religious faith, national appearance and characteristic way of life," of Old Russia "in the secrecy of their souls . . . preserved the memory of the past ancient free Rus."³⁶ For all their inquisitional efforts, the authorities could not stamp out this heresy. Indeed, Old Belief spread among the common people and even penetrated into the elites through the "native" *kupechstvo*.

The surviving schismatics, the most "deprived, beaten and forgotten part of the *narod*," represented for Riabushinsky the best and truest representatives of "great masses of the indigenous Russian people."³⁷ Unlike the Nikonian Orthodox peasantry, whose spiritual and economic independence was crushed by the weight of authority, the dissidents "held firmly to the path which ancient Rus had followed."³⁸ They embodied in their culture the traditions of *zemskii* self-government and *sobornyi* democracy long since extinguished in the general population. The schismatics also demonstrated the true economic

³³ *Ts* (Feb. 2, 1914; March 28, 1910).

³⁴ *UR*, June 19, 1911, 2.

³⁵ *Ts* (Aug. 17, 1914).

³⁶ *Ts* (Feb. 6, 1911; Oct. 3, 1910).

³⁷ *Ts* (Feb. 1, 1909; Aug. 23, 1909).

³⁸ *Ts* (Oct. 19, 1914).

capacities of the narod: they were “harder, more energetic” than others and displayed their “love of work and sobriety” in all their endeavors.³⁹ Within Old Belief, it was argued, “there are no class divisions,” for believers of all stations were united by their work ethic and shared reverence for “the ancient piety.”⁴⁰

To Riabushinsky, the Revolution of 1905 represented an extension to the whole population of the ancient anti-autocratic struggle for freedom of the Old Believers. It had been violent and anarchic because the narod struck out blindly and instinctively against authority. At this stage in their development, the people lacked both the class and national identities that would organize and focus their resistance in the future. For all its incoherence, however, the revolution signaled “the end of the Petersburg period of Russian history,” of building the state by autocratic means, and it opened the way for the “recovery of all that was lost.” Henceforth, Moscow, “the city of the Russian bourgeoisie” would “speak in the name of the Russian *zemlia*.”⁴¹

The industrialists clearly understood that there was no going back, no possibility of a return to the forest communes of the schismatic past. Rapid modernization of the state and society was the order of the day. Even while the country moved forward, however, the liberation of this hidden Russia would make possible the “renunciation of alien principles” of bureaucracy, police, and arbitrary authority and the “rediscovery of our own indigenous way of life.”⁴² The fall of autocracy would mean the end of “*Nikonianstvo*,” for under conditions of true religious freedom, the Neo-Old Believers hinted, the Nikonian church would collapse of its own bureaucratic weight. Old Belief would once again become “a living popular cause”; the ethos of its 10 to 20 million followers would spread to the rest of the population through mass reconversion.⁴³ In this way the narod would regain its true cultural identity.

The defeat of autocracy would represent “the victory of self-government over absolutism, and the destruction of the absolutist principle in the popular consciousness.” The centralized bureaucratic apparatus of autocracy would be dismantled, and the rights of the *zemlia* would be restored under the auspices of a “strong, sovereign (*derzhavnyi*) parliament,” while cultural diversity and economic decentralization would be protected and encouraged.⁴⁴

Postautocratic Russia would be built by new men, “able to demonstrate

³⁹ *Ts* (Feb. 6, 1911; April 1, 1912).

⁴⁰ *Ts* (March 23, 1914).

⁴¹ *UR*, April 3, 1911, 5; June 19, 1911, 2.

⁴² *UR*, June 19, 1911, 2; *Ts* (Oct. 19, 1914).

⁴³ *Ts* (Jan. 11, 1910). The idea of mass conversions may not have been as outlandish as it seems. Gregory Freeze documents the abiding fear of church officials of mass defections to the “schismatic wolves.” See Gregory L. Freeze, *The Parish Clergy in Nineteenth-Century Russia* (Princeton, 1983).

⁴⁴ *UR*, Sept. 18, 1911; March 11, 1910, 2.

authority” and dedicated to the principle of “cultural freedom,” the concept at Riabushinsky identified as “the bourgeois idea.”⁴⁵ The “native” bourgeoisie, “linked by a thousand unseen threads” to the narod, would act simultaneously as agent of change and guardian of national values. In this it would also win popular support that no other elite could hope to muster. The Old Believer masses, already in their “work habits and sobriety thoroughly bourgeois,” would “follow their bourgeoisie” toward building a free and more productive society.⁴⁶

Old Belief, in its origins an act of negation, would now reemerge as a force of affirmation. Together the “native bourgeoisie” and the “followers of the ancient piety” would constitute “the independent living nucleus” of an awakening nation, based on native traditions of democracy, labor, and “free Christian community (*obshchestvennost*).”⁴⁷ Russian capitalism would be infused with “the principles of the enlightened *raskol*,” and worker and employer would come to realize that they were, in Riabushinsky’s words, “laboring in a single cause, linked by common aims” of “raising the productive forces of the nation.” In contrast to the “abstract chaos” of the West, free Russia would be guided by “the religious-ethical ideas of the native Russian people.”⁴⁸ Industry would be harnessed to national ends and religious values, and the class conflict and exploitation so characteristic of Western capitalism would be attenuated by a shared consciousness that “workers and employers are parts of the same body.”⁴⁹

Riabushinsky’s nostalgic modernism, with its evocations of aggressive capitalism and schismatic piety, demonstrates vividly his desire to mediate between the indigenous and foreign streams of Russian historical experience. His Neo-Old Believer and the Progressist appeals were, to be sure, broadcast through different organs—*Tserkov’* and *Utro Rossii*, respectively—to different constituencies. But the voice and inspiration of Riabushinsky and his colleagues echo authentically in both.⁵⁰ Essentially they created two social myths, one of a utopian religious past and the other of a visionary capitalist future. When juxtaposed, these elements constitute a world view laced with contradictions: “creative egoism” versus a longing for community; devotion to science and technology versus mystical piety; admiration for the West versus assertion of Slavic exceptionalism; exuberant liberalism versus incipient nativism.

⁴⁵ *UR*, May 18, 1910, 1.

⁴⁶ *Ts* (May 24, 1909).

⁴⁷ *Ts* (Aug. 28, 1911).

⁴⁸ *Ts* (Dec. 20, 1909).

⁴⁹ *UR*, May 10, 1912, 1.

⁵⁰ Riabushinsky’s writings in emigration and his service as a “pillar” of Old Belief in France, related in interviews with descendants, together suggest that he retained his beliefs and affiliations until his death in 1924.

The key to reconciling these apparent contradictions was an unshakable faith in the narod, to which the industrialists felt bound by ties of blood and culture. They tended to look beyond the workers, about whom they said surprisingly little (as if not to waken the sleeping dragon), to the peasant masses from which their ancestors had come. V. P. Riabushinsky retrospectively observed that the industrialists considered themselves "nothing more than enterprising peasants, the highest stratum of Russian trading peasants."⁵¹

Unlike those before them who had looked to the peasantry, the industrialists did not wish to preserve the rural way of life; they actively applauded the triumph of individual values over collective ones in the countryside. They did, however, wish to retain the moral community and self-reliance of the schismatic commune, even while capitalism dismantled the peasant culture as a whole. Because they considered themselves "of the people," the Riabushinskys seemed convinced that the masses could replicate their own experience and be brought into the modern secular world without losing their "national face."

To their credit, the young industrialists seem to have been sincerely committed to liberal values: democratic freedoms, the rule of law, civil rights, and cultural pluralism. Nowhere in their action or rhetoric does one discern the kind of anti-modern resentments, cultural and political intolerance, anti-Semitism, or predilection for violence that were the precursors of the fascist movements to come.⁵² Yet in their haste to make democracy, capitalism, and nationhood comprehensible to the masses, they verged close to those appeals to "blood and soil," national community, and heroic vitalism that elsewhere were being used to undermine the liberal faith.

Riabushinsky thought he had discovered what might be called a usable past, one independent of and antithetical to the traditions of the autocracy. Old Belief for him was a cultural template through which modern skills and values could be recast as ancient and indigenous, the primordial components of a hidden cultural heritage. The capacity of the people for self-government and productive labor had not been tested for centuries. Freedom would bring that test, and the industrialists were confident the narod, if properly tutored and led, would pass it. For this reason, they were less disturbed by the possibility of popular revolution than by the prospect of continued stagnation and decline under the senescent ancien régime.

⁵¹ V. P. Riabushinsky, "Kupechestvo moskovskoe," 189. The Riabushinskys may well have tended to glide over the differences between peasant and worker because he gave preference in hiring in the family's enterprises to their coreligionists. Interview with M. I. Chuvanov, apprentice in the *Tipografia br. Riabushinskikh*, Moscow, 1978.

⁵² Police reports, as well as published editorials, confirm an absence of anti-Semitic bias in the industrialists' thinking. On the contrary, they consistently demanded full civil rights for Jews, along with all other nationalities. See ROBIL, f. 4047, op. 1, d. 15; TsGAOR, f. DPOO, d. 343, op. 4, 1915, ll. 120-23; f. D-4, d. 42 1911, l. 22; *Ts* (Oct. 20, 1913).

The industrialists also had faith in themselves, in their own moral superiority, charismatic personalities, and ability to address the narod and command its respect. Yet their rhetoric consistently outran their organizational capacities. The Old Believers and the bourgeoisie they evoked were more myth than substance. In reality, in the prewar period both groups showed clearly accelerated fragmentation rather than the "crystallization" the industrialists sought. The religious community, historically fractured by theological disputes as arcane as they were numerous, was spawning still more splinter sects over the issue of how to respond to the new freedoms offered it in 1905.⁵³ Similarly, the merchants and manufacturers of many localities were frenetically organizing themselves but doing so in such a haphazard fashion as to threaten, according to *Utro Rossii*, "the total disorganization of the commercial-industrial class."⁵⁴ One can only conclude that these constituencies were experiencing severe difficulty in negotiating the transition from *soslovie* and sectarian identity to more modern forms. In a moment of rare candor, *Utro Rossii* was compelled to concede: "The *soslovnyi* structure, despite all supports, is collapsing rather than consolidating, yet class groupings are just beginning to form; [they] still exist more as theoretical constructs than as living reality."⁵⁵

The Riabushinsky group may actually have contributed to these centrifugal forces. Its tendency to demand cooperation on its own terms suggests a thinly veiled contempt for its opponents within as well as outside its constituencies. The group members insisted that the way to unify Old Belief was to subsume all sects under their own, and their arrogation of entrepreneurial leadership to the "native Moscow bourgeoisie" left little scope for the largely non-Russian entrepreneurs who controlled the industries of St. Petersburg and the periphery of the empire. Beneath their liberal rhetoric, one senses only a weakly developed capacity for cooperation and compromise, skills essential to a well-functioning democratic order.⁵⁶

It is difficult to conclude that the activities of the young industrialists before the war strengthened the forces of *obshchestvennost'*. On the face of it, the arrival of such articulate and active figures, professing a sincere desire to help, would seem to promise the awakening of the heretofore somnolent Russian entrepreneurial stratum. But it is also possible that their strange vision and their determination to realize that vision, represented a disruptive force. Their

⁵³ There were indications in *Tserkov'*, for example, that among the priestless Old Believers a schism arose over the issue of whether to register communities as the new law permitted. The resulting factions were called *obshchinki* and *protivoobshchinki*. Other issues of compliance with new civil regulations were causing similar disagreements. See *Ts* (June 21, 1909).

⁵⁴ *UR*, Feb. 10, 1911, 1; Sept. 23, 1911, 1.

⁵⁵ *UR*, March 11, 1910, 1.

⁵⁶ *Utro Rossii* often spoke in disparaging terms of the tendencies toward compromise with the government among its opponents. See *UR*, Jan. 9, 1911, 2.

assertive self-certainty and their combative style may well have undermined and weakened the very forces they sought to consolidate.

The industrialists mounted a formidable challenge to the principles of *obshchestvennost'*. They demanded a broader criteria for membership in elite society, an end to the monopoly of those with education and culture, and the inclusion of "productive" groups formerly excluded. They persistently pointed out the weaknesses and vulnerabilities of educated society—its foreign cultural orientation, its isolation from the popular culture, its indifference to economic questions. They demanded that the elites end their fixation with the struggle between *vlast'* and *obshchestvennost'* and turn instead to face the *narod* beneath them. When they did this, the industrialists seemed to warn, they had best have something to say. Finally, they even questioned the future role of the gentry and intelligentsia in building postautocratic Russia. In the age of classes and class interests, they predicted, the "above-class" and "service" traditions of *obshchestvennost'* would rapidly become obsolete.

It is hardly surprising that these "new men" encountered resistance; even those willing to collaborate with them had difficulty concealing their distaste for these "creative egoists." And the feeling seemed mutual. The industrialists' own attitude toward *obshchestvennost'* was colored by their disdain for those who either had "a poor idea of work" or were "organically incapable of experiencing patriotism," code words for denatured state of Russia's educated elites.⁵⁷

In a deeper sense, the Riabushinsky group questioned the very foundations on which both *obshchestvennost'* and the autocratic state had been built. They offered nothing less than an alternative path of national development, one that rejected the Petrine tradition of state-centered modernization managed by a Westernized service elite. Despite the modernism of their educational and professional background, the industrialists represented in a very literal sense a schismatic force aggressively seeking entry into the culturally homogeneous ranks of *obshchestvennost'*.

In its essence, the activism of the Riabushinsky circle represented perhaps the last of many efforts on the part of elements claiming to embody "native" values to wrest control of the nation's future from both the autocracy and the Westernized elites. Although they saw themselves as pioneers of Russia's capitalist revolution, they were actually carrying on a cultural struggle that began in the seventeenth century. The injection of these ancient and bitter disputes into the volatile prewar atmosphere only created new tensions in the already fragile coalition of Russian *obshchestvennost'*.

⁵⁷ *UR*, Aug. 17, 1910, 1; March 6, 1911, 2.
