We often say that a man's career has been meteoric, but seldom has the epithet been so applicable as it is to the brief glory of Alexander Feodorovitch Kerensky. Almost in a day he sprang out of obscurity, and almost in a day he fell back into obscurity again; but in the interval he filled the whole political horizon of the world with his light. For a few weeks he was the real ruler of a hundred and seventy million souls, the accepted master of a larger number of human beings than had ever before gladly submitted to the will of a single man. During that period, he seemed to embody in his person all that was best in the Russian Revolution and to give it a multiplied force. His fellow countrymen idolized him; through half the world Press and platform rang with his praises; the leading statesmen of the Allies welcomed him to their midst with eager flattery. No one was more talked about, on no one were higher hopes set. But when his great attempt failed, he was flung aside like an old glove. In Russia he was an outlaw and dare not show his face. To the Allies he was a burst windbag. In the same countries where a few months before no words had been fine enough to laud his qualities, none were forcible enough to condemn his faults.

E. H. Wilcox

Russia's Ruin

Alexander Kerensky and the Democratic Ideal In Revolutionary Russia

By John Hanken

Introduction

Alexander Kerensky stands out as one of the most maligned and misunderstood characters in revolutionary Russian history. The general lack of understanding of his role in the Russian Revolution is unfortunate, given his position at the forefront of opposition to the Tsar before 1917, and the prominent role that he played as leader of the doomed Provisional Government. Blamed for the political paralysis that befell Russia after February, 1917, he has served as a scapegoat for a wide range of historians from Leon Trotsky, who characterized him as a would-be Bonaparte, who "merely hung around the revolution," to Richard Pipes, Baird Professor of History at Harvard University, who treats him largely as a peripheral figure until late in 1917, when the Provisional Government was in a state of precipitous decline.[1]

The focus of this paper, however, is not to evaluate his failures and successes as leader of the Provisional Government. That brief period has been a magnet for historical study; the accounts of Richard Abraham, Marc Ferro, Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, and Alexander Rabinowitch are among the better of the many that are available. Instead, the intent is to provide a perspective; in so many accounts of 1917, Kerensky is a one-dimensional figure dropped by fate into an increasingly hopeless position, taking actions which make us question his good judgement, if not his sanity. It is my hope that familiarity with the experiences and philosophy that Kerensky brought to the first phase of the Revolution will make his actions more comprehensible, and will imbue the reader with a sense of tragedy in his failure.

In focusing on the later period of the Provisional Government, when hopes of liberal/socialist cooperation had essentially vanished, historians have widely neglected the crucial earlier record of Kerensky as an humanitarian idealist, dedicated to democracy, freedom, and more importantly, to the survival of the Russian state. Before February, 1917, Kerensky was already

[1]Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution* (London: Camelot Press, 1934), 201, 663-64.; Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1991), 80.

making significant contributions to the political life of Russia, thus only by including this important part of his political career can the complete evaluation of his character be made. While he was not yet at the very pinnacle of power, he was playing a leading role in a democratic movement that still enjoyed sustainable hopes for success. By examining the earlier Kerensky we get a sense of the depth of his character and can then evaluate his leadership in 1917 from a more intimate perspective. Primarily because they lack this perspective, the less textured accounts of Kerensky's leadership clearly suffer.

When looking at the sources for historical research, Kerensky's own accounts stand out as the most valuable and revealing. Out of an evident compulsion to tell his own story, Kerensky penned no less than five books in defense of his various political roles as well as his early history. These works often straddle the vague line that separates primary from secondary source material. In his first book in 1927, *The Catastrophe: Kerensky's Own Story of the Russian Revolution*, he recognized that he did not seek necessarily to write histories, but "merely sought to add some raw material for history." Add material he did, and Kerensky remains the most prodigious source of information on Kerensky. In 1934, Kerensky delved for the first time into his own pre-revolutionary past, attempting to explain his own philosophy in *The Crucifixion of Liberty*. His last and most comprehensive work, *Russia and History's Turning Point* (1965), combines his personal reflections with more traditional scholarship and research. In addition to his narratives, the collection of Provisional Government document and excerpts from the Petrograd press that Kerensky compiled with William Browder is a gold mine of source material on government policy and the wide range of contemporary public opinion. Kerensky's books, especially *Turning Point*, have been the primary source material for this paper.

Alexander Kerensky: The First Love of the Revolution, by Richard Abraham, the only complete biography, is the one attempt to date to provide the background needed for a textured evaluation of Kerensky. Abraham convincingly puts forth the idea that Kerensky's commitment to justice and democracy and his refusal to use brutal, coercive methods to implement his

programs were decided disadvantages in dealing with the hardened and unscrupulous Bolsheviks. Hard hitting and by no means uncritical, Abraham gives a balanced sense of the qualities that made Kerensky a leading figure in the revolution. Abraham's chapters devoted to the pre-revolutionary period point out that Kerensky's ascendancy after February was no historical accident. Because of his humanity and compassion, his leadership was sought by a nation adrift, and his electrifying oratory and persuasive skills only increased his popularity. He relates how Kerensky's sense of humanity even led him to intervene on behalf of the deposed Tsar, his ministers, and his family. This type of behavior was hardly typical of Russian revolutionaries of 1917.

Abraham's analysis is the most detailed account to date, and it illuminates the objective realities that Kerensky faced in his relations with both the right and the left. Yet in chronicling Kerensky's pre-revolutionary years, Abraham falls victim to the conventional wisdom that perceives Kerensky as having stood in the way of the war. He depicts Kerensky as vacillating between revolution and concerted defense, not fully realizing that for Kerensky, revolution was absolutely necessary to preserve the war effort and achieve a favorable outcome for the people of Russia, if not for the Tsar. He fails to recognize that for Kerensky, the struggle on the battlefield and against the Tsar were one and the same, and that true victory depended on victory in both arenas of battle. Kerensky and the rest of the defensist opposition feared a rapprochement between the Russian and German monarchies as much as they feared military defeat, for both in both instances hopes would be dashed for a democratic Russia, the ultimate goal.[2]

Although Abraham makes extensive use of Kerensky's writings, he often chooses not to take Kerensky at face value when warranted. Naturally, skepticism of his narrative accounts is prudent, given Kerensky's tendency to play down his socialist and revolutionary efforts and to emphasize his patriotism. Kerensky's writings, however, are invaluable in bringing to light the origins of his political views and his concepts of freedom. His narratives are useful both as important interpretations of the events of his tenure, and as telling reflections of his character.

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[2]Richard Abraham, *Alexander Kernesky: The First Love of the Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

Unfortunately, Abraham does not take full advantage of the unique insight that Kerensky's books provide.

By researching party documents and police reports, Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, in *The February Revolution: Petrograd, 1917*, substantiates the argument that Kerensky simultaneously agitated for revolution and promoted the war effort among the workers, a fact that Abraham largely ignores. Hasegawa's research corroborates the claims of Kerensky that he consistently supported the pursuit of military victory, and even incurred a split in his own party in so doing.

While Hasegawa's book does not specifically aim to address the pre-revolutionary Kerensky, he does touch on one other important aspect of his political activity. The masonic movement in Russia, an independent offshoot of the Freemason of France, involved Kerensky and other prominent opposition figures that later became the core of the Provisional Government. George Katkov asserted in 1967 in *Russia 1917: The February Revolution* that the masons were behind several plots for a palace coup. Great secrecy still surrounds the activities and functions of the masons, and Hasegawa points out that any definitive account of the masons and their influence must wait for further evidence to become available.[3]

Some histories cover only 1917 between the two revolutions, yet their subject matter is sufficiently pertinent to the evaluation of Kerensky to mention here. Alexander Rabinowitch, in chronicling the efforts of the Bolsheviks from July to October, illuminates the uphill battle that Kerensky and the Provisional Government faced. His study focuses on the coalition's desperate pursuit of legality and the ruthless manner in which the Bolsheviks exploited this weakness. He argues that the July uprising, which brought about the collapse of the coalition, left Kerensky with the task of rebuilding an already tenuous state authority. Stabilization, rather than a new campaign of vilification, was properly first on his mind. Charges that Lenin and the Bolsheviks were acting as German agents were largely exaggerated by the right, and, regardless of their actual merit, were insufficiently supported by a preponderance of the evidence in July.[4]

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[3]Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *The February Revolution: Petrograd, 1917* (Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1981), 192-93.

One contemporary account, as cited above, relegates Kerensky to an almost peripheral role in the larger view of the Russian Revolution. Pipes, carefully avoiding any admiring appraisal of the man, argues that only through some fault of his own did he fail in his efforts to democratize Russia. In his new comprehensive effort, *The Russian Revolution*, Pipes views the Bolshevik regime as a continuation of authoritarian tradition in Russia. He views the 1917 revolts not as broadly based workers' revolutions but as manifestations of the dissatisfaction of soldiers with the war effort. Nicholas's II inability to cope with this problem opened the doors to an extremely radical and ruthless band to usurp the authoritarian role. In his estimation, the months of Kerensky's leadership were an historic anomaly. He does, however, properly submit that Kerensky's personal failings served the Bolshevik cause.

Carelessly, Pipes entirely misses one of the most important characteristics of Kerensky during his wartime political career; he was both a revolutionary and a patriot. Through opposition to the Tsar, Kerensky hoped to save the Russian nation from the perceived treachery of the Romanovs and the conservative attitudes embodied in the German monarchy. This simple fact is so often obscured by pedantic discussions of his speeches on the subject of war aims. Repeatedly, Pipes confuses the issue by equating opposition to Tsarism to defeatism, two very unrelated political views. The inaccurate and misleading characterization of Kerensky by Pipes points to the much larger problem of how he is generally perceived by historians.

Because Kerensky was a member of the state Duma, or legislature, many of his speeches were officially entered into government archives, and are cited here. Frank Golder, in *Documents of Russian History: 1914-1917,* cites the entire crucial speech given by Kerensky at the first convocation of the Duma after outbreak of World War I, in which Kerensky outlined the position that he would take until the February revolt. Also in Golder is an important testimony of Duma Chairman Mikhail Rodzianko. While Rodzianko's reference to Kerensky is short, it is extremely revealing and shows how Kerensky was seeking pragmatic ways to solve the crisis in war

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[4]Alexander Rabinowitch, *The Bolsheviks come to Power: The Revolution of 1917 in Petrograd* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976), 14-15.

production, even when liberals were taking a principled stand and opposing the government at every turn. The excerpt from Rodzianko's memoirs essentially dispels the misleading portrayals by Abraham and Pipes of Kerensky as an unmitigated obstructionist.

Paul Miliukov, leader of the Kadet faction in the Duma, also provides useful raw material in his *Political Memoirs: 1905-1917*. In it, the rivalry that developed between Kerensky and Miliukov for influence in the opposition movement is seen from another perspective. Despite the political rivalries among the opposition groups in the Duma, we learn from Miliukov how grave were the concerns of all opposition Duma delegates about the fitness and reliability of the Tsarist government to pursue the war effort. Miliukov inadvertently justifies the antagonistic stance that Kerensky took from the outset of the war by chronicling the futility of his own proposed truce with the Tsar. Miliukov confirms Kerensky's claim that the Duma leadership feared a Black Block in the government that was striving for a separate peace to save the monarchy, a claim that Abraham ignores.

E. H. Wilcox, the astute correspondent of *The Daily Telegraph*, examines the phenomenon of Alexander Kerensky as a public figure in *Russia's Ruin*. Wilcox, who observed the February Revolution from the perspective of a foreign correspondent, brings to life the electricity surrounding Kerensky's public speeches and his leadership in general. The charisma of Kerensky was perhaps the one quality most responsible for his political stature, and discussions limited to political ideology do not take this important factor into account.

Considering the problematic nature of Kerensky's stance on the war issue, and the evaluations of Kerensky in the generally narrow terms of power politics common in contemporary historical accounts, a more textured sense of his experiences and his philosophy is needed. Only then can his brief period in the world limelight in 1917 be put into focus. An exploration of the sources of his political philosophy has yet to be successfully achieved. One of the chief goals of this paper is to address this problem. The available political narratives, while numerous, generally suffer from a lack of historical perspective, and in some cases, surprisingly sloppy and inaccurate representations. I hope that I may contribute a more three-dimensional portrayal of Alexander

Kerensky in the years before the revolution, so that students of revolutionary Russia will know something of the hopes and aspirations of the leader of Russia's failed democratic experiment of 1917.

I must also add a brief note on the second chapter, in which the early lives of Kerensky is compared with that of Lenin. It is not the intent of this paper to be a psychohistory of Russian revolutionaries, nor is it to present a sustained comparison of the politics of Lenin and Kerensky, for enough is available about Lenin to fill several libraries. The intent is to show in some way the chasm that existed between these two political figures in their moral and ethical motivations, despite their common backgrounds as revolutionaries. The socialism of Kerensky is such a vastly different thing from the political program of Lenin that the label "socialist" becomes nearly meaningless in comparing the two.

I

While to some the Russian Revolution is a point of departure—the beginning of a new Soviet era—it also represents the climax of the distinct period of pre-revolutionary Russian history. Since the reign of Peter the Great (1682-1725), the Russian nation had increasingly chafed under its medieval form of government. While the nature of the patriarchal autocratic leadership remained ostensibly unchanged until 1917, Russian society had over the years evolved into an increasingly cultured and educated body. Intellectuals were seeking new outlets for creative energy, specifically in the area of politics. Tsar Nicholas I (1825-55) and his violent response to the Decembrist uprising of 1825 epitomized the reactionary leadership of the Romanov dynasty. He, and in varying degrees his successors, remained steadfast in their claim to the outmoded and increasingly unmanageable autocratic power that the Tsar had traditionally held.

Since the late eighteenth century, the strength of a nation was no longer simply measured by the size of the army it could muster on the battlefield, as Russia painfully discovered during the Crimean and Japanese wars. For a nation to compete in the European balance of power, a strong industrial economy and a reasonably well educated populace from which to draw were necessary. Under the skillful guidance of Sergei Witte, Minister of Finance under Tsars Alexander III (1881-1894) and Nicholas II (1894-1917), Russia enjoyed an economic spurt unparalleled in its history. Witte based his program on the need for the empire to compete with more developed and economically dynamic nations in international markets, and he focused on heavy industry and rail transport. These efforts were largely state controlled, and tended to increase the overall influence of the Tsar's government in the day to day economic life of the country.

Due to the lack of capital at home, Witte had been forced to seek sizable foreign loans to finance much of the expansion. By doing so, he had invited foreign influence in Russian affairs. Conservative supporters of the autocracy had their fears confirmed when these foreign investors

began to seek liberalization of politics in Russia as a guarantee of political stability, especially after the abortive revolt of 1905. Ironically, the Ministry of Finance was placed in the unlikely position of opposing Tsar Nicholas's fundamental belief in unlimited autocracy. This rift in political thought in the upper echelons of the Russian Empire was indicative of the great strain of rapid modernization under an antiquated regime.[1]

Social change was also accelerating at a rapid pace in the second half of the eighteenth century. The liberation of the serfs in 1861 had left some four million peasants without sufficient land on which to subsist, thus creating a large labor force for the growing industrial sector. This emerging working class endured oppressive conditions in mines and factories, and lived in ghettos with none of the meager comforts of the traditional peasant commune. Often families were split up and workers were forced to live alone in barracks run by their employers. While conditions slowly improved until the outbreak of World War I, the labor force remained largely primitive and ignorant in its enforced poverty.[2]

While some left agriculture, many more stayed to deal with the pressures that rapid industrialization would place on the peasantry. Emancipation had reduced the actual land available to the average peasant by almost one third. Increasingly burdensome taxes to fund industrialization and greater crop expropriations for export by the government increased the demands for production. Due to widespread peasant ignorance of agricultural science and the frequent redistributions, the land was not properly maintained and became less and less productive. The famine that occurred in the winter of 1892 exposed the danger and the precarious nature of this rapid growth. Hunger for new land drove prices out of range for many, and the peasantry became concerned primarily with questions of repartition and the ownership of property, which they associated with the landed gentry of pre-emancipation.[3]

The greatest source of unrest, however, was neither the workers nor the peasants but the

[1]Pipes, 80.

[2]David Mackenzie and Michael Curran, *A History of Russia and the Soviet Union* (Chicago: Dorsey, 1987), 458.

[3]Pipes, 77.; Mackenzie, 448.

rapidly emerging liberal and socialist intelligentsia. Rather than being allowed to work in partnership with the government for the betterment of the nation, this sector of society was relegated to a theoretical and academic role. Fittingly, Pipes likens pre-1917 Russia and its political environment to France before its revolution. Unlike their counterparts in Great Britain and the United States, French intellectuals were excluded from practical policy making by the autocratic establishment. Instead of tempering intellectual theory with practical experience, abstract theory built on prior abstract theory, and discussions of the potential reshaping of humanity in search of perfection took place in academic settings. Pipes continues:

> It is only with the help of this insight that we can understand the seeming paradoxes in the mentality of the genus intelligentsia, and especially its more extreme species, the Russian intelligentsia. Theories and programs, on which Russian intellectuals spent their waking hours, were indeed evaluated in relation not to life but to other theories and programs: the criterion of their validity was consistency and conformity. Live reality was treated as a perversion or caricature of "genuine" reality, believed to lurk invisible behind appearances and waiting to be set free by the Revolution. This attitude would enable the intelligentsia to accept as true propositions at variance with demonstrable fact as well as common sense—for example, that the living standards of European workers in the nineteenth century were steadily declining, that the Russian peasants in 1900 were on the verge of starvation, that it was legitimate, in the name of democracy, to disperse in January 1918 the democratically elected Constituent Assembly, or that, more generally, freedom meant bowing to necessity. To understand the behavior of the intelligentsia it is imperative to keep in mind at all times its deliberate detachment from reality: for while the revolutionaries can be ruthlessly pragmatic in exploiting, for tactical purposes, the people's grievances, their notion of what the people desire is the product of sheer abstraction.[4]

The cause for the isolation of intellectual life in Russia was its tradition of patrimonial Tsarism. Since the time of Peter the Great (1682-1725), the unlimited and autocratic prerogative of the Tsar had been codified in the Military Regulation. While this law was created by a rather forward thinking leader in his time, the vastly expanded responsibilities of government at the turn

[4]Pipes, 131.

of the twentieth century made this political thought archaic. One man simply could not be the source of all laws and reserve for himself the role of arbiter in any but a small fraction of the everyday decisions of the vast Russian Empire. That fact, however, was unfortunately lost upon Nicholas. He said, even as he was considering adding elected representatives to the state council, "I shall never, under any circumstances, agree to a representative form of government because I consider it harmful to the people whom God has entrusted to my care."[5] In a private conversation in 1904 with his Minister of Interior Prince Sviatopolk-Mirsky, Nicholas commented, "I maintain autocracy not for my own pleasure. I act in its spirit only because I am convinced that it is necessary for Russia. If it were for myself, I would gladly be rid of it."[6] After 1905, when he had conceded to a nation in revolt the creation of the Duma, Russia's first national representative body, he felt that he had made the concession under duress and felt little obligation to uphold his commitment. This predisposition would help to poison the relationship between the Tsar and the Duma, which culminated in 1917 with a temporary and informal committee of the Duma demanding and obtaining the Tsar's abdication.

The intractability of the Duma itself was also to blame for its failure to serve as a progressive and evolutionary force in Russian society. The First Duma had been boycotted by the Social Democrats and the Social Revolutionaries, (the party of Kerensky,) and the role of opposition had fallen to the Constitutional Democrats (hereafter referred to as the Kadets) under the leadership of Paul Miliukov. In his memoirs, Miliukov recounts the debate in the Kadet Central Committee on which course of action to take regarding the Duma. He claims that the course was laid out for them by the bad faith of the Tsar:

> ...[O]ne week before the Duma was to meet, Witte's government fell. He was no longer needed—after the government, thanks to him, had managed to float a loan in Paris and after the troops had returned from Manchuria. The government and material forces were now sufficient for the government no longer to fear the Duma. Witte's place was

[5]Sergei Witte, *Vospominaniia* II (Moscow, 1960), 335.

[6]Diary of Sviatopolk-Mirskaia, *Istoricheskie Zapiski* No. 77 (1965), 247. (cited from Pipes, 27.)

> taken by I. L. Goremykin who was instructed, as we found out later, to dissolve the Duma, if the Duma should desire to pass its agrarian legislation. Together with this, all the preparations for giving the Duma a half-decent reception crumbled. Apparently, it had been decided to conquer the Duma in a war of attrition.[7]

Inspired by the artificial success of the Kadets (they were the only major opposition party officially participating in the First Duma elections), and given the signs of hostile intent by the Tsar, the Central Committee opted for a course of determined opposition. Contrary to Miliukov's wishes, the committee decided to act as though its time of destiny had arrived:

> We have no reason to fear a conflict; the conflict "already exists." The conflict will begin "from the first day," and therefore it follows that we should ignore the government, ignore the laws issued after October 17, ignore the state council and pass all of our legislative program in the form of an "ultimatum" or "declaration." If the government does not give way, then we will turn to the people with an "appeal" for support. If necessary, we "will die for liberty."[8]

The experiment with pseudo-constitutional monarchy from 1905 to 1917 proved to be a failure of great consequence. What should have been a positive step in the political development of Russia proved simply to be an indicator of how far the political situation had deteriorated under Tsarism—there had never developed a spirit of cooperation in government, and now the discontent of those who yearned to be heard increased rather than lessened, while such pleas answered with increasingly resolute refusals by the Tsar.

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[7]Paul Miliukov, *Political Memoirs: 1905-1917* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1967), 92-93.

[8]Miliukov, 94.

II

It was during the years of growing intellectual discontent that Alexander Fyodorovich Kerensky grew up under the strong patriarchal influence of his father, an educator, who climbed the ranks of the Tsarist bureaucracy to become a noted figure in his field. In the rather provincial town of Simbirsk on the river Volga, Fyodor Michailovich Kerensky loyally served the Tsar as director of the Simbirsk Classical Gymnasium. Although his pedagogical views were sometimes at variance with the policies of the Tsar's ministers of education, he shared the view of many liberal bureaucrats of his time; enlightened monarchy was the best and most natural form of government for Russia. He seems to have assumed that economic development and education of the populace would encourage the establishment to modify itself to accommodate modernity.

Alexander grew up in rural Simbirsk and in Turkestan, were he was isolated from the uglier side of modernization. His early memories were of relative social harmony, and he was not exposed to the excesses of the newly rich bourgeois that populated the larger cities. He was, however, exposed at a young age to the readings of Charles Dickens, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Tolstoy, which profoundly affected his views on poverty and oppression in later years. Despite a bout with tuberculosis of the hip at age six, which later kept him from military service and burdened him with a slight handicap, he appears to have had a relatively happy childhood.[1]

In the fall of 1899, the years of Kerensky's relative isolation ended as he began his studies at St. Petersburg University. He had attended secondary school with other young students from the upper classes in Tashkent, the remote capital of Turkestan. While his sheltered life there seems to have kept him, for the most part, blissfully ignorant of social upheaval, he believed that his years there had been advantageous for his political Weltanschauung:

> Years later [after Tashkent], in the course of my political activities, I met a number of

[1]Abraham, 8-9.

> people of my own generation who had participated in the events of 1905 and 1917. It was obvious that their attitudes and ideas had been formed by the social and political dogmas which they had absorbed during their school years in European Russia, and the result was that they looked at Russian reality in the light of obsolete and rigid concepts. With rare exceptions, we who went to school in Tashkent saw life in a less prejudiced way. We had no ready made beliefs imposed upon us, and we were free to draw our own conclusions from events.[2]

Kerensky described a vibrant university life in St. Petersburg, with the student body on the cutting edge of political and social trends. It was for him a time of political awakening:

> The universities, and the higher education institutions generally, were at the time the only outlet to freedom for the political pressure of Russian national life, which was intense, though hidden from the policeman's eye: students were often called "the barometer of public life" in Russia. And it was true. Students were a very sensitive indicator of the slightest change in public feeling, which could not find expression anywhere else.[3]

During his university years, Kerensky became firmly committed to the overthrow of the autocracy. Like the majority of students not firmly committed to any one political camp, he held an ill-defined opinion that the status quo would simply not do. In his second year, he committed his first act of open resistance, an impassioned impromptu speech on the steps of a university building urging resistance and support for the cause of "liberation." Of this act, for which he received a lenient suspension and a short enforced stay with his family in Turkestan, Kerensky was immensely proud.[4] This incident was not entirely without consequence, however, for Kerensky was deeply troubled by his father's reaction. Worried that his son would be branded a conspirator and ostracized by polite society, he managed to extract from Alexander a promise not to participate in political activities until after graduation, when he would have a legal career to fall back on. Alexander, who would always hold his father in high regard, remained true to his promise and focused his energy instead on his legal studies and on developing his own personal

[2]Kerensky, *Turning Point*, 17.

[3]Alexander Kerensky, *The Crucifixion of Liberty* (New York: John Day, 1934), 83.

[4]Kerensky, *Turning Point*, 26.

philosophy.[5]

The philosophy that Kerensky developed at the university defies categorization as representative of the intelligentsia as described in the first chapter by Pipes. Kerensky claimed that "the revolutionary movement in the country did not spring from sociological doctrines. We did not join the ranks of the revolutionaries as a result of a clandestine study of forbidden doctrines. The regime itself forced us into revolutionary activity."[6] While considerable evidence suggests this assessment to have been less than accurate as it applied to the Marxists, it appears to have held true for Kerensky. While pursuing his education in criminal law, he felt drawn to apply his legal skills in the defense of political criminals. In doing so, he denied himself more lucrative career paths in graduate study or through employment in the imperial courts. For his youthful idealism, he, his wife Olga, and his two sons Oleg and Gleb would live in virtual poverty until the revolution.

While at the university, Kerensky sought professors that confirmed in him his own "instinctive feelings about the world." Two of these stand out as having influenced him most in defining his own beliefs; the philosopher Nikolai Lossky and Professor Lev Petrazhitsky, lecturer on the philosophy of law. Significantly, the teachings of these two permitted Kerensky to maintain his personal, loosely Christian, faith. (Kerensky had rejected the doctrinaire Russian Orthodox faith.) Kerensky claimed that "Lossky and Petrazhitsky provided me with a systematic rational framework for my intuitive views."[7]

The *Intuitivism* of Lossky was extremely appealing to the young Kerensky, and was a crucial formative influence on his Weltanschauung, of which political thought was but one component. Intuitivism subordinated abstract ideas to the individual, who was ideally subjected primarily to his own conscience. Doctrine, whether political or religious, was useful only inasmuch as it corresponded to a universal morality and recognized the supreme nature of the individual. To

[5]Kerensky, *Turning Point*, 27.

[6]Kerensky, *Turning Point*, 27.

[7]Kerensky, *Turning Point*, 29, 33.

Lossky, the goal of the individual was to recognize "absolute values, especially moral values, and ...the duty of realizing them in his conduct."[8]

The most important value, according to Intuitivism, is "the absolute fullness of life." This is achieved through cooperation and compromise, and assumes individual agents to respect the subordinate values of love, intuition, and restraint from mutual hostility where possible. It also requires individual freedom to act in all spheres of life as long as those actions are moral.[9] For Kerensky, all of the ingredients for achieving fullness of life were rapidly becoming more and more accessible in Russia at the turn of the century, except for political freedom. This imbalance of freedom in the public life of the country drove politically minded students to distraction:

> It was indeed a Russian Renaissance. We lived in the heyday of scientific thought, in literature, of the arts, an[d] unprecedented economic and technical progress. Tolstoy, Tchekov, Gorky, Merezhovsky, Bunin, Korolenko, the Moscow Arts Theater, the work of Mussorgsky [sic] and his "set" in music, a wholesale splendid company of poets and artists. All this gave a peculiar, uplifting, optimistic tinge to the entire life of the students, and this fine spiritual life was permeated with the desire for freedom, with the longing for a new beginning.[10]

Kerensky continued to attend Lossky's lectures after his first year, when Minister of Education Nikolai Bogolepov forbade students from studying in more than one faculty.[11]

The second influential professor, Petrazhitsky, helped Kerensky to refine and apply some of the ideas of Intuitivism. As a political philosopher, and later, as a Kadet delegate to the first Duma, Petrazhitsky revived the concept of natural law, in which the legislative process was one of discovery. Written law was transitory in nature while natural law was immutable; the idea of written law was to interpret natural law with regard for the current situation. To Petrazhitsky,

[8]Nikolai Onufrievich Lossky, *History of Russian Philosophy* (New York: International Universities Press, 1954), 255.

[9]Lossky, 256.

[10]Kerensky, *Crucifixion*, 108-09.

[11]Kerensky, *Turning Point*, 27, 30.

morality was an individual duty subject to no outside compulsion. Law, an extension of morality, was a codified set of moral duties that an individual expects others to comply with, and to which the element of compulsion is added.

Petrazhitsky also taught that the state was not merely to serve as the source and arbiter of laws, but "must also seek to guide the social and economic struggle that takes place in society." When the public was dissatisfied with laws and the state in general, he saw it as resulting from changing conditions in society. He cited as an example the rise of the working class throughout Europe that forced the adoption of labor legislation. Petrazhitsky saw legal reform as stemming from *generational change*, when a new generation develops a new concept of law to match the new conditions. He firmly rejected the Marxist concept of law as a weapon of the ruling class, whether imperialist, capitalist or proletariat. To him, any such interpretation failed to account for the individual, the protection of whom was the ultimate purpose of law.[12]

In 1917, Kerensky was frequently approached by Petrazhitsky with advice on improving social relations in Russia torn by war and revolution. Kerensky was grateful for the advice, yet, as he said, "...in the conditions of 1917 it was hardly possible to act on his excellent advice."[13]

Kerensky traces to his university years his own rejection of Marxism as repugnant in its treatment of the individual. The writings of Petr Struve, a young Marxist economist, was Kerensky's first exposure to Marxism, and he was not favorably impressed. Struve suggested that "the individual does not exist and is a negligible quantity." His doubts were later confirmed when he read *The Communist Manifesto.* Marx's and Engels's view of morality differed greatly from his own. They did not portray morality generally as a product of individual conscience but as an artificial construct of class. In Marxism, each class had its own morality, which served as a tool in class warfare.[14]

Kerensky did not then find solace in a competing doctrine but rather in the broad and ill-

[12]Kerensky, *Turning Point*, 31-32.

[13]Kerensky, *Turning Point*, 32.

[14]Kerensky, *Turning Point*, 34.

defined Narodnik, or Populist Movement. He said, "the Narodniki teaching was indistinct, lacking in detailed scientific study, inconsistent and eclectic. But it was the product of national Russian thought, rooted in the native soil; it flowed entirely within the channel of the Russian humanitarian ideals...."[15]

The challenge for the historian is then to ascertain precisely in what way Populism, lacking in definite structure, influenced the politics of Kerensky as a Duma delegate and later as a leader of the provisional government. That can only be done on an incident by incident basis, for a central point of Populism is that no doctrine can be applied to all cases. We can see, however, what Populism *meant* to Kerensky, especially as it compared with Marxism:

> In Marxism, the class has swallowed the human being. Yet without man, without the living human personality and its individual worth, without the liberation of man as the ethical and philosophic aim of the process of history—without these conceptions, there is nothing left of Russian thought: *the whole tradition of our literature must be deleted from memory*. ...The whole history of the Narodniki movement, its entire substance, was inseparably connected with the idea of absolute political freedom, with the idea of democracy, the will of the people. [Emphasis added][16]

Kerensky's political career brought him eventually to blows with another more famous native of Simbirsk, Vladimir Ulyanov, known better as Lenin. The early lives of Kerensky and Lenin, the radical most responsible for dismantling the democratic experiment of 1917, seem to demand comparison. The parallels and marked contrasts are uncanny coincidences. Both were born to families of Tsarist education officials, and would have had access to the same advantages of bureaucratic status, if not for a series of tragedies in the Ulyanov family. The early influences on the two future leaders of Russia cannot wholly account for the differences in their future political outlooks, but a brief comparison sheds light on the clear differences in their psychological makeups.

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[15]Kerensky, *Crucifixion*, 113.

[16]Kerensky, *Crucifixion*, 112-13.

Vladimir's father had been a colleague of Fyodor Kerensky and had established a pioneer network of elementary schools which were handed over to the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church in a fit of conservatism under Alexander III (1881-1894).[17] In 1886, the relative security and happiness of the Ulyanovs was rocked by the death of Vladimir's father. His mother was forced to rent large portions of the family house in Samara to make ends meet, and later began receiving only a moderate pension.[18] Vladimir was then only a year from graduating from secondary school, and was at a very impressionable age; yet, he managed to remain focused on his schoolwork, in which he excelled in all areas.

The following year held more tragedy. Alexander, the eldest son, disillusioned with the failures of moderate efforts of reform, had become involved in 'The Terrorist Section of the Narodnaya Volia, (or People's Will)' nominal heirs to the assassins of Alexander II in 1881, while studying in St. Petersburg. Planning to assassinate the Alexander III on the sixth anniversary of the first slaying, the group was exposed by an anonymous police tip and was arrested. Ulyanov immediately claimed full responsibility for the plot, and was sentenced to death.[19]

Alexander Kerensky, with his characteristic flair for the dramatic, wrote of the great impact that the actions of the elder Ulyanov had on him as a youth:

> Although Alexander Ulyanov entered my life only fleetingly, he left an indelible impression, not as a person but as an ominous threat that played on my childish imagination. The mere mention of his name evoked the picture of a mysterious carriage with drawn green blinds driving through the town at night to take people away into the unknown at the behest of Sonya's stern father. Sonya was the little girl who was occasionally brought to dance with us, and her father was the chief of the gendarmerie of Simbirsk Province.[20]

An interesting story surrounding the Vladimir's graduation from the gymnasium is recounted

[17]Abraham, 7.

[18]Neil Harding, *Lenin's Political Thought* (London: Macmillan, 1977), 11.

[19]Harding, 11-12.

[20]Kerensky, *Turning Point*, 4.

by Neil Harding in *Lenin's Political Thought*. Vladimir, through all of the turmoil, earned a Gold Medal, the top academic honors in his school on the insistence of Fyoder Kerensky, despite public pressure to deny him his due. One gains respect for Lenin's strength in the face of adversity, a character trait that was no doubt useful in later political struggles:

> [Vladimir's] mother, now slighted and shunned by polite society, was away in St. Petersburg pleading with all the influence and persistence she could command for the life of her eldest son and the release of her daughter, [who had done nothing, but was held just in case.] Throughout the examination period, Alexander's trial was in progress and was, obviously, *the* story in the national newspapers. On the morning of his brother's execution, Vladimir was sitting an examination. Meanwhile preparations were made to sell the house and, by the time the oral tests arrived, the family was in the process of selling the furniture from the preparations house in Simbirsk and preparing to remove to outside of Kazan. [Emphasis in the original.][21]

After secondary school, the life of Vladimir Ulyanov again stands in stark contrast to that of Kerensky. Ironically, only through the intervention of Kerensky's father was Vladimir accepted to Kazan University. Close relatives of the political opposition were commonly excluded from higher education and were generally discriminated against by the Tsarist bureaucracy. The elder Kerensky described him as an upstanding and disciplined young man that had never caused trouble with his teachers.[22] In 1887, during his first year, Vladimir participated in a relatively innocent student demonstration against a new university policy. The perpetrators were rounded up by the local police and their student cards were taken away. Vladimir was then expelled from the university and forbidden to reapply. Later investigations uncovered his connection with a circle of Narodnaya Volia sympathizers, and he was placed under permanent police surveillance. At the time of his expulsion, however, his involvement was not known to the authorities, and Harding submits that Lenin was marked by the police for "zealous attention" in the attempt to "impute to

[21]Harding, 14.

[22]Kerensky, *Crucifixion*, 10-11.; Abraham, 7.

his every action the most lurid and extravagant objectives."[23]

In very similar circumstances, Kerensky and Vladimir had their first experiences with rebellious activity. For a similar offenses, Kerensky was treated with kid gloves because of the influence that his father held in St. Petersburg circles, while Vladimir was deprived of a university education purely because of suspicions surrounding the Ulyanov family. While Kerensky finished his education and went on to a legal career, Vladimir was forced to return to his mother's house to spend four idle years. The bitterness and desperation that Lenin felt during this time must have been severe, for he was described as being incommunicative and friendless, and his mother even feared he would commit suicide.[24] Characteristically, however, he turned immediately to researching social issues, and began reading the works of radicals of the late nineteenth century.

Typical of the literature that influenced Lenin during this time is Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?* While the content of Cherneshevsky's political vision of a free love, socialist utopia bears little resemblance to Lenin's envisioned dictatorship of the proletariat, Chernyshevsky's sarcastic, boastful, and utterly uncompromising style certainly influenced him.[25] Aside from this scandalous pseudo-novel, Cherneshevsky was infamous for the nihilist article, *The Aesthetic Relationship of Art to Reality*, in which he argued that art in any form was inferior to real life. In *What Is to Be Done?*, he admits that his own writing style is unpleasant and virtually unreadable—in fact, he boasted, "I do not possess the slightest sign of an artistic talent."[26] Lenin, who is said to have been profoundly affected by the book and who read it carefully in the summer of 1888 as many as five times, shared Cherneshevsky's asceticism and general despise for Russian culture.[27]

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[23]Richard Pipes, "The Origins of Bolshevism", in *Revolutionary Russia: A Symposium*, Richard Pipes, ed. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969), 37-39.; Harding, 14.

[24]Pipes, "Origins", 39.

[25]Harding, 15.; Pipes, "Origins", 40.

[26]Nikolai Chernyshevsky, *A Vital Question: What Is to Be Done?* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1986), trans. Nathanial Dole and S. S. Sidelsky of *Chto Delat'?* , 1886, 10.

[27]Harding, 15.

The attitudes of Lenin and Kerensky toward the arts could not have been more different. Of his first years at the University, Kerensky described himself as having turned into a "young madman who bubbled over with excitement when he talked about the theater, the opera, music, and modern literature...."[28] The respect that Kerensky had for the creative uniqueness of the individual was played out in his political policies as well as his personal philosophy. For him, the literary tradition of Russia, especially of Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, and Pushkin, were elemental to the Russian consciousness, and could not be discounted in favor of cold or foreign doctrines. (See quote on page 19.)

[28]Kerensky, *Turning Point*, 20.

III

In the years as defense counselor (1906-1912), Kerensky gained the respect and admiration of his colleagues as he fought for the protection of the front line revolutionary fighters and other opponents of government in the courts of the Tsar. It was initially difficult for the young and inexperienced Kerensky to gain the confidence of the political lawyers that operated in St. Petersburg, for they were a somewhat elitist group. His bureaucratic background served only to strengthen their suspicions of his professed dedication. Once included, however, he completed a five year internship in the field of law, gradually playing a greater and greater role in the legal profession and the accompanying political movements.

The field of law in the capital at the turn of the century was host to a great deal of liberal thought. The court system was relatively modern, and was judicious and civilized to those accused in criminal and civil cases. In political cases, however, concern for the rule of law, which most liberals in Russia thought was central to civilized society, was only marginally guaranteed. The singularly vehement prosecution of political offenders by the state was a distinct and glaring break with an otherwise liberal tradition.

Kerensky hoped to use his considerable energies defending only in political cases. His first task was to gain entrance to the bar. In 1904, he was still a youthful idealist and had not yet displayed any characteristics of the hardened revolutionary that he would become before 1917. On his application to the bar, he naively included as references three highly placed bureaucrats, including one appellate court prosecutor and one member of the State Council. The Board of Junior Barristers, tasked with evaluating applications, rejected the references as coming from individuals out of touch with the legal profession. Kerensky received a lesson in political tastes of St. Petersburg lawyers and soon found references more acceptable to the board.[1] Ironically,

[1]Kerensky, *Turning Point*, 44.

Kerensky would later become the most outspoken member of the St. Petersburg bar, and would even be prosecuted for a group denunciation of state sponsored anti-semitism regarding the notorious Beilis trial.

Kerensky immediately began work as a volunteer at a legal aid clinic in the People's House, a charitable project of the liberal Countess Sofia Panina, where he worked for two years. His work was not overtly political—the countess had forbidden it—yet it exposed him to "the lowest strata of the urban population, in particular the working class." Kerensky and his wife lived with some financial support from his father, and benefitted from the camaraderie of other young lawyers doing similar work.[2]

While Kerensky was at the legal aid clinic, the unrest over conditions imposed by the Russo-Japanese war (1904-05) came to a climax. On January 9, 1905, a procession of workers was fired on by Imperial Guards regiments as it tried to present the Tsar with a petition for a constituent assembly. The resulting massacre, which has been called Bloody Sunday, was estimated to have claimed 200 lives and injured 800. The procession was led by Father George Gapon, an orthodox priest in charge of a government sponsored forum for workers to vent their frustrations. The idea was to prevent angry workers from coming under the influence of revolutionary parties, and to facilitate the monitoring of their activities. While Gapon was not acting in accordance with government directives in leading the march, the members of the procession had every reason to believe that theirs was a legal, if not entirely patriotic, display of general disapproval. Reaction to the massacre in Russia and abroad was universally one of horror and disgust.[3]

Kerensky, who witnessed the event, was as surprised as he was appalled. In a letter to the officers of the guards, he gave a practical assessment of the consequences. He said, "I reminded them that at a time when the army was fighting for Russia, they at home with all Europe looking on, had shot down defenseless workers and had thereby greatly harmed the country's prestige

[2]Kerensky, *Turning Point*, 44.; Abraham, 25.

[3]Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, 24-25.

abroad." This expressed concern for Russia's image in the world arena was typical for Kerensky, as was his patriotic reference to the army. For the government to drive a wedge between the army and the people during wartime was, for him, sheer folly.[4]

Kerensky stepped up his volunteer work in the wake of Bloody Sunday and began visiting workers' houses to counsel relatives and friends of the victims. He also became involved with the Party of Socialist Revolutionaries. Although he claimed to identify politically with them, he would always remain detached from any official dogma, and rejected theorizing in favor of broad ideas of freedom and the sanctity of human rights.

In a fit of what he later called "revolutionary romanticism," he also affiliated himself with a group called the Organization for Armed Rebellion, admittedly by Kerensky a misnomer. It was not organized, had virtually no membership, and certainly did not plan to lead an armed revolt, for it had no arms. Significantly, however, Kerensky claims that at this time he became convinced that anti-state terrorism was an acceptable form of political expression, considering the barbaric nature of Nicholas' II regime and the countless lives already lost in the battle for free political expression.[5]

In December, 1905, after general revolt in the capital had forced Nicholas II to concede the October Manifesto and the creation of the Duma, Kerensky was forced to face the consequences of his own political activity. On suspicion for an unrelated charge, his apartment was searched by police and outdated and forgotten leaflets for the Organization of Armed Rebellion were found. Since their printing, much of what they called for had been nominally granted in the October Manifesto. As a result of this scandal, he was held at Kresty prison in St. Petersburg for four months, in which times his love for conspiratorial work was cemented. The prisoners at Kresty were primarily political offenders. They had an elaborate means of communication similar to Morse code, and employed sympathetic guards to transmit written communications to the outside world.

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[4]Kerensky, *Turning Point*, 49-50.

[5]Kerensky, *Turning Point*, 62.

When the two week period in which the authorities were bound to notify prisoners of the charges against them went by without official word, Kerensky went on a hunger strike. Seven days later he won; he was formally charged with belonging to an organization aiming to overthrow the regime. After his release in April, his legal contacts helped him get an audience with the director of the police department, who offered only to banish Kerensky from the capital. Refusing to accept this, Kerensky asked to be taken back to prison instead. He pleaded that he must be allowed to remain in St. Petersburg and continue his legal work, and surprisingly found himself facing merely another short enforced stay with his family in Tashkent.[6] Of his experience in prison, Kerensky wrote:

> Looking back on it, I have always been grateful for the absurd chance that resulted in my imprisonment. ...[T]his four months' seclusion at government expense broadened my views and contributed to my understanding of what was going on in the country. Now entirely free of my youthful romanticism, I knew that Russia would never achieve genuine democracy unless her people consciously strove for unity in pursuit of the common goal. I made up my mind that one I was free again, I would devote all of my efforts to the cause of unifying all democratic parties in Russia.[7]

The 1905 revolt was a watershed for political prosecution in Russian courts. For almost a year after the revolts, most of Russia was under a state of martial law, under which civil rights were suspended. Political assassinations and plots of assassinations were occurring all over Russia, and were increasing at an alarming rate. On August 12, 1906, a bomb assassination of Prime Minister Peter Stolypin was attempted by three Maximalists, (a terrorist subsidiary of the Socialist Revolutionaries,) in which twenty-seven bystanders were killed and thirty-two injured. No government could possibly tolerate such anarchy, and Stolypin responded by introducing courts martial for civilians just one week after the bombing. Harsh justice was to be meted out by five military officers, appointed by local commanders. Defendants could not have a lawyer present but were allowed to cross-examine witnesses. Verdicts were to be reached in forty-eight

[6]Abraham, 33.; Kerensky, *Turning Point*, 64-68.; Kerensky, *Crucifixion*, 128-30.

[7]Kerensky, *Turning Point*, 68.

hours or less, and sentences were to be carried out within twenty-four hours. Pipes estimates that as many a 1,000 people were summarily hung by "Stolypin's necktie" over the span of the eight months that the law was in effect, while Kerensky puts the figure at 1,144.[8]

Despite the success of the military tribunals in restoring order to Russia, the public was almost universally horrified by the barbarism of summary executions. Leo Tolstoy responded to what was termed "judicial murder" in 1908 with *I Cannot Keep Silent!*, in which he addressed the issue of the death penalty and the horrors of government violence. Tolstoy reflected the general distaste for the death penalty in Russia, which had been abolished for years prior to the 1905 revolt. He also argued that abolishing private property was the surest way to end the violence of revolutionary terrorism, which was not nearly as reprehensible as state terrorism.[9]

Kerensky often refers to his personal devotion to the ideals of Tolstoy. *I Cannot Keep Silent!* made quite a splash in educated circles, and Kerensky likely had this essay in mind when he spoke of the literary tradition of Russia as a guide to a more moral and just form of government. Kerensky was repulsed by the death penalty and in 1917 resisted strong efforts by military leaders to institute it in the rear of the battlefield. It must also be mentioned that the sanctity of private property, defended in capitalist countries with an almost religious zeal, was not yet a developed concept in Russia. Indeed, the moderate first Provisional Government wanted the issue of enforced land redistribution to be high on the agenda of the proposed constituent assembly. Kerensky, like much of the political left, saw the Russian peasant cooperative as the basis for democracy, and did not see intrinsic value in a system of independent yeoman farmers. Private land ownership connoted oppression and exploitation to most socialists, Kerensky included.[10]

On the opposite end of the spectrum on the question of agrarian reform was Prime Minister Stolypin, who saw privatization as the key to addressing the needs of the peasants. The policies of Stolypin evoked varied judgements from historians; Abraham called him a "notorious hardliner,"

[8]Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, 169-71.; Kerensky, *Crucifixion*, 121.

[9]Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, 171.

[10]Kerensky, *Crucifixion*, 121-22. Robert Paul Browder and Alexander Kerensky, *The Russian Provisional Government, 1917: Documents* v II (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), 524-25.

while Pipes, who attributed his policies to the "ideals of liberal bureaucracy," said that "[he] was arguably the most outstanding statesman of Imperial Russia." In vastly expanding the Peasant Land Bank in 1906, Stolypin drew on his experiences as Marshall of the Nobility in rural Kovno, where peasants held most of the land and where their economic situation was significantly better than elsewhere in Russia. He was not above expropriating land for redistribution, and instituted a massive relocation program to match peasants with newly available land. Stolypin wanted to increase agricultural output and gradually wean the peasants from the commune by setting up attractive examples of privatized peasant farms. His actions were certainly guided by classical liberal thought, and he had a running feud with socialists, especially the Social Democrats, over the whole issue of private property.[11]

During Alexander and Olga Kerensky's Tashkent exile, the strains in the relationship with his father troubled them deeply. Understandably, Kerensky wrote little about the subject, yet the break between father and son was clearly irreparable by this time. Abraham cites the only evidence available on the subject of Alexander's arrest, a letter from Fyoder Kerensky to his son's wife, Olga. In it, he accused her of leading his son to ruin and predicted that she would ruin his grandson as well. She recalled that the elder Kerensky was so upset over the seemingly certain destruction of his son's career that his normal good manners deserted him, and she would always remember their summer in Tashkent with bitterness.[12]

Kerensky returned from his exile in Tashkent just in time for the assassination attempt on Stolypin, and just after the first Duma had been dissolved in July. Russia was embarking on a period of reaction, which depressed him. In consolation, he found that his prestige in revolutionary circles and amongst his legal colleagues had increased tremendously. The group of political lawyers in the capital was an exclusive club, and a certain amount of political reliability was needed to gain admission. Kerensky claimed that his prison and exile had given him the necessary revolutionary spurs. "The stigma of 'bureaucratic descent' was removed under the

[11]Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, 166-67, 171-174.; Abraham, 39.

[12]Abraham, 34. Taken from a conversation between Abraham and Olga Kerensky.

shower-bath of the common wash-house in prison. I was now 'one of them' in the radical and socialist circles. The road to the fellowship of political lawyers was open."[13]

Kerensky received his first political case in October, 1906, on a lucky break. Nikolai Sokolov, a leading Social Democrat lawyer, was needed in Kronstadt to defend the prominent revolutionary Bunakov-Fundaminsky, and asked Kerensky to defend a group of rebellious Estonian peasants in Reval (Talinn). He was to serve as lead counsel, although he had not yet even assisted in an actual political case. Despite his inexperience, he displayed confidence and discretion, and convinced the court to acquit most of the accused and to give lenient sentences to those found guilty. After this resounding success, Kerensky was never without a trial brief until his election to the Duma in 1912.[14]

The defense of political offenders was a springboard for Kerensky into the world of politics. His travels around Russia put him in intimate contact with the social and economic conditions in the countryside. While many revolutionary theorists such as Lenin spent years in exile in Switzerland, Kerensky was gaining extensive firsthand experience. In 1934, he wrote:

> We political lawyers got to know the social and political tissues of the nation almost as a medical student knows the human body. Censorship cases, terrorism, party persecutions, agrarian cases, armed rebellions, "expropriations," peasant fraternities, workers' organizations, anarchist societies, seditious propaganda in the army and navy—every secret of Russian politics was laid bare before us.[15]

He defended famous revolutionaries of all parties, and in his most active revolutionary days yet to come, enjoyed the benefits of their gratitude. His skills as an orator were becoming widely known, and he soon became the most sought after of the political defense clique. He was during this time conscious of taking part in a revolution, by definition an illegal act. Yet his ultimate goal was victory for the rule of law. He explained this apparent contradiction by arguing that absolute

[13]Kerensky, *Crucifixion*, 131.

[14]Kerensky, *Turning Point*, 74-76.

[15]Kerensky, *Crucifixion*, 133.

rule, as envisioned by Nicholas II and his conservative supporters, was the negation of the rule of law:

> *Terror* lies in proclaiming openly that the arbitrary will of the government *is* the only law. ...If the law—any law, the worst of all laws—is entirely abolished, then life becomes a nightmare! Human will is paralyzed, man becomes an animated robot. To live in a country where the government "relies directly on violence," is to feel yourself locked in a cell with a violent lunatic.[16]

As respect for him in revolutionary circles increased, Kerensky enjoyed the confidence of the active revolutionaries that he defended. One incident in which he defended a group of young Bolsheviks accused of stealing from a treasury in the Southern Urals may have helped him to develop his general disdain for the methods and the hypocrisy of the Bolsheviks. "Expropriations," as they were called, were denounced by the Bolshevik central committee as a petit bourgeois practice. The young Bolshevik Alexeyev explained to him how they could justify such actions:

> "It's quite simple," he replied. "We have a special arrangement about them in the Party. Before an expropriation is carried out—about two weeks before hand—we resign from the Party saying that we disagree with its policy. Then we are free to go ahead with an expropriation. The money is channeled to Maxim Gorky in Capri, who finances his school with it. Two weeks later we apply for readmission to the Party ranks, 'deploring' our errors, and we are immediately readmitted."[17]

His legal career reached its peak with his work for the victims of the Lena Massacre of 1912, when 176 gold miners were killed by Tsarist police during a general strike. The investigation that ensued was a rare example of peaceful coexistence, if not cooperation, between the Tsarist State Council and the Duma. Kerensky was appointed by the Duma opposition to head commission of inquiry into the violence, a testimony to his status in the legal field. Senator

[16]Kerensky, *Crucifixion*, 134.

[17]Kerensky, *Turning Point*, 78.

Manukhin, a former minister of justice in Witte's cabinet, lead a concurrent investigation. Bureaucrats generally shared the opposition's antipathy to the Lenzoto Company, operator of the mine and notorious exploiter of its workers. The pretext for the strike had been bad meat in the workers' rations, but Lenzoto had been paying workers in arrears, and often only in credits in the company owned shops.[18]

Working together and with the help of the local governor, Manukhin and Kerensky managed to reach an outcome favorable for the miners. Wage contracts were renegotiated, and the company agreed to spend more on workers' welfare. For his efforts, Manukhin won the disfavor of the Tsar, but mitigated some of the popular outrage directed against the government. The legal victory was to be Kerensky's last, for after the investigation he retired to the countryside to prepare for the upcoming elections to the Duma.

In 1912, Kerensky graduated to participation in the Fourth Duma. As the only candidate of the Trudovik party, (a cover organization for the banned Social Revolutionaries,) that was not disqualified by Prime Minister Stolypin's strict electoral law, he was elected by the rural province of Saratov. Very few socialists were elected and the Kadets, who had been displaced by the more conservative Octobrists in the Third Duma, continued to decline in the Fourth. Miliukov, who had been a leader in the Kadet delegation in the first and second convocation of the Duma, and who had lost a great deal of influence as a result of the new laws, called Stolypin's actions in limiting the franchise a "coup d' etat."[19] Kerensky, however, proved to be an extremely vocal advocate of social causes, and despite Stolypin, the Fourth Duma served as a forum for the opposition.

Bernard Pares, a liaison officer of the British foreign service in Russia during the war, recognized the popularity and influence that Kerensky gained early in his Duma career. He noted that, "in the Fourth Duma, the S. R.'s had a remarkable orator in Alexander Kerensky, an attractive young man with a great gift of speech, who made a mark as champion of the strikers in

[18]Kerensky, *Turning Point*, 82-83.; Abraham, 54-55.

[19]Miliukov, 158.

the Lena goldfield...."[20]

Early in his career as a Duma deputy, Kerensky confirmed his role as an enemy of the establishment with his role in the defense of Mendel Beilis in what was known as the Russian Dreyfus Affair. As an attorney and a member of the St. Petersburg Bar, he was obligated to take a stand for justice, and he took part in a resolution condemning institutional anti-semitism. For his participation, he was sentenced to eight months in prison and forbidden to take part in future elections. The fairly innocuous nature of the resolution show us how far the definition of slander was stretched by the Tsarist authorities in pursuing any opposition activity:

> The plenary meeting of the members of the bar of the District of St. Petersburg considers it a professional and civic duty to raise its voice in protest against the distortion of the very fundamentals of justice reflected in the instigation of the Beylis trial, against the slanderous attacks on the Jewish people launched within the framework of judicial order and condemned by all civilized society, and the imposition upon the court of a task that is alien to it, namely the propagation of racial hatred and national hostility.
>
> This outrage against the fundamentals of the community of man humiliates and disgraces Russia before the world, and we raise our voices in defense of the honor and dignity of Russia.[21]

Kerensky's strong sense of patriotism was one quality that set him apart from the rank and file of the socialists. This was evident in the tone of his statement about the Beilis Affair and in other appeals for justice and democracy. In September, 1915, his chief rival Lenin labelled him a "social chauvinist" for departing from the internationalist orientation of Bolshevist socialism.[22] Kerensky frequently made passionate reference to the greatness of Russia and its culture in his speeches before the assembled Duma, and he assigned to himself and the members of the left the role of protector of Russia from the failings of the autocracy. Lenin and his Bolsheviks, on the other hand, had little use for Russia other than as a potential starting place for world revolution.

[20]Bernard Pares, *My Russian Memiors*, (New York: AMS Press, 1969), 173.

[21]Kerensky, *Turning Point*, 85-87.

[22]Vladimir Lenin, *Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1966), v. 36. 354.

In 1914, according to the historical interpretation of Kerensky, the battle between the crown and the Duma was coming to a critical juncture. Alexander Guchkov, the leader of the centrist Octobrists, had become resigned to opposing the Tsar, and a political entente with the Kadets and other left representatives seemed imminent.[23] In July, however, this picture changed when Germany declared war on the Russian Empire and the European continent became submersed in a war that would forever change the nature of the Russian state.

[23]Kerensky, *Turning Point*, 110-12.

IV

In July, 1914, Tsar Nicholas II and the Council of Ministers embarked on a two front war. The first and most obvious front was against the German and Austrian armies. The other, more problematic battle was with, in the words of Interior Minister Nikolai Maklakov, the "internal enemy." The political war in Russia was no less of a concern to both monarchists and republicans than was the German front. No one doubted seriously that after the war, some form of Russian state would continue to exist, yet the question of what form the post-war Russian state would take was without doubt the issue of the day. The irreconcilability of the government with the aspirations of democracy can be seen in Maklakov's letters to the Tsar:

> "I am struggling against the tendency which is irrepressibly growing in everyone, to forget the tsar and to consider public opinion as the beginning and the end of everything... The Duma and the Unions are without doubt inciting a part of the population to temporary disorders... the authorities must be certain of victory over the internal enemy, which has long been more dangerous and fierce and brazen than the external enemy."[1]

The battle between the government, meaning the Tsar and his ministers, and the opposition, primarily in the Duma, was for the hearts and minds of the Russian public; both sides claimed to represent the interests of a strong and unified Russia, and both had very different methods by which they hoped to reach their aims. The war with the central powers was the pivotal issue that the opposition and the Tsar used in attempts to discredit the other, both sides claiming the greater patriotism and concern for the Russian population.

From the outset of the war, Kerensky was firmly in the revolutionary camp, and expected control of the war effort to soon be transferred to democratic institutions. He and other proponents of democratic control were only considered revolutionaries inasmuch as the Tsar refused to uphold

[1]Miliukov, 315-16.

the October Manifesto of 1905 in spirit, as well as in fact. At first, Kerensky merely called for the Tsar to fulfill the promises of 1905, and considered the outbreak of the war to be a prime chance for the monarchy to repair the political fabric of the nation.[2] This, however, did not occur. The restrictions placed on both the voter franchise and on voluntary organization remained. Censorship of the media continued and even increased. Incongruously, the Duma members, enjoying political immunity, were free to voice the most scandalous criticisms of the government. The stress of wartime had finally made the failings of the psuedoconstitutional monarchy intolerable, and strong forces began pulling both to the left and to the right. Some hoped for a return to traditional autocracy, and for the eradication of the anomalous Duma. Many more, however, hoped that true democracy would finally come to Russia.

Kerensky was the first of the Duma deputies to fire a shot in the war with the Tsarist government. In early summer, before the outbreak of war, he hosted a rather sparsely attended conference on the imminent European conflict, in which Kerensky claims to have decided on a defensist position.[3] As the war progressed the more moderate politicians, initially critical of his attacks, gradually chimed in and shared in his vision for Russia's political future. In the words of one observer, Kerensky "defined in advance the form of the Revolution."[4] On July 26, 1914, in a historic sitting of the Duma, Kerensky outlined the position that he would take for the remainder of the war:

> We are absolutely convinced that the great elemental and innate force of Russian democracy, together with all the other forces of the Russian people, will rebuff the aggressors and defend the homeland and cultural heritage created by the blood and sweat of generations. We believe that the brotherhood of all Russian people will be strengthened by suffering on the battlefields and that there will be born the single aim of freeing the country from its terrible shackles.
>
> However, the authorities refuse to halt internal strife, even at this fearful hour; they do

[2]Kerensky, "Why the Russian Monarchy Fell", *Slavonic Review*, (1930), vol. VIII, no. 24, 496-513.

[3]Kerensky, *Turning Point*, 126.

[4]Wilcox, 193.

not wish to grant amnesty to those who have struggled for the freedom and happiness of our land, nor do they wish to come to terms with the non-Russian minorities, who have forgiven all and are fighting hard beside us for Russia. Instead of easing the burden of the working classes, the authorities are forcing them to bear the brunt of war expenditures by increasing the burden of indirect taxation.

Peasants, workers, all of you who desire the happiness and well-being of the country, steel yourselves for the great trials ahead of us, gather your strength, and, *having defended the country, you will free it....*[5] (emphasis in the original.)

As radically revolutionary as Kerensky's address may seem, it was actually a fairly moderate stance among the socialists. Despite what he called "the anti-popular and obstructionist policy of the government," Kerensky had reached an agreement with Nikolai Chkheidze, the Menshevik spokesperson in the Duma, to make a joint statement on July 26 outlining the determination of the socialists to defend the country from the Germans. On a false rumor that the German Social Democratic Party had opposed the war, Chkheidze backed out at the last moment, claiming the need for solidarity with the Mensheviks' German comrades. Indeed, the Mensheviks walked out of the Duma, leaving Kerensky in a very depressed state.[6]

Kerensky's first failure in his goal of bringing the opposition parties together was one of many, and all were thwarted either by Internationalist radicalism or police *agents provocateurs*. In fact, kinship between police agents and internationalists may not be as ridiculous a proposal as it sounds. After the revolution, Kerensky uncovered a document from the Petrograd police that spelled out one plan to divide the opposition:

In view of the extreme gravity of the plan [to unite the parties] and the desirability of thwarting it, the Police Department feels obliged to advise all security section heads to impress upon agents in their charge that when attending any party meetings they should persistently advocate and convincingly defend the idea of the utter impossibility of any organized merging of these currents of opinion, especially between the Bolsheviks and

[5]Kerensky, 132-33.; Frank. Golder, *Documents of Russian History: 1914-1917*, (New York: Century, 1927), 33-35.

[6]Kerensky, *Turning Point*, 131-32.; Abraham, 78.

Mensheviks.[7]

Police activity was by no means the sole cause of the divisions among socialist during the war. Party affiliation among the Russian socialists soon became blurred and lost much of the significance that it had held before 1914. Sentiments over whether to support the war effort became the major issue, and divisions on this issue among the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries caused new factions to emerge. The differing interpretations were often quite subtle, yet significant enough to create new rivalries in the already divided socialist camp. Kerensky's role in this struggle has been obscured by two factors; the Bolshevik suppression of pertinent evidence that would allow him to share in the credit for the revolution, and Kerensky's post-war interpretations of his own actions and views from 1914-17, which de-emphasize his revolutionary work.

In the summer of 1915, a international conference of socialists was held in Zimmerwald, Switzerland, to address the collapse of the Second International and the dormancy of the internationalist spirit of European socialism in general. The Social Democratic Party of Germany had succumbed to nationalist sentiments and had unanimously voted for war credits in the Reichstag, the German parliament. The German socialists had carefully nurtured a certain respectability since the time of Bismarck, and for them to have opposed the war would have been political suicide.[8]

Rather than serving as a display of world socialist solidarity, the Zimmerwald conference and the similar conference in Kienthal in 1916 showed how internationalism had become an bankrupt idea. Lamenting the death of internationalism, Lenin called for active defeatism, but was rebuffed, and the statements issued merely called for neutrality in an "imperialist war." At Zimmerwald, Lenin and Trotsky derisively labelled Kerensky a 'patriot,' and called for Russian

[7]Kerensky, *Turning Point*, 134.

[8]Harding, v. II, 6-7.

workers to oppose his efforts to increase defense production.[9]

While the radical left suffered divisions over the war question, the liberals made somewhat more successful attempts at unity. On July 26, the same day as Kerensky' appeal for opposition unity, Paul Miliukov of the Kadet party displayed a less pessimistic and somewhat less acute understanding of the deteriorated state of the Russian political climate. In a gesture of political goodwill, Miliukov outlined the Kadet intention to establish a *union sacrée*, or sacred union, between the Tsar and the opposition parties. The speech was much more statesmanlike than Kerensky's, and that its offer was rejected by the Council of Ministers shows something of permanence of the political rift:

> In this struggle we are all as one; we present no conditions or demands; we simply throw upon the scales of battle our firm determination to overcome the violator. ...Whatever our attitudes towards the internal policies of the Government may be, our first duty remains to preserve our country, one and inseparable, and to maintain for it that position in the ranks of the world powers which is being contested by our foes.[10]

Miliukov was hopeful that the similar appeal for unity, made by the Tsar on that same day, would mean a new era of cooperation and political advancement. His hopes were soon dashed when he learned that the Duma, only scheduled to meet for one day, would not be reconvened until August of 1915. Maklakov had engineered the extended recess to consolidate his ministry's hold on internal political affairs. Despite the Duma charter, which required sessions at least once a year, Prime Minister Goremykin refused to hear appeals, but was eventually forced to concede a session to convene in January, 1915. The session was to last only three days, and was to deal strictly with the issue of passing the budget.[11]

While the events of July 26 present one view of the political division between the socialists and the liberals, one other set of events has the political tables of Kerensky and Miliukov turned.

[9]Harding, v II, 18-21.; Abraham, 98.

[10]Golder, 35-36.

[11]Miliukov, 305-307.

In the spring of 1915, Duma Chairman Mikhail Rodzianko was attempting to get the support of all parties in the Duma for a special council of legislators, industrialists, and military staff personnel to aid in the supply of boots and artillery shells to the front. Miliukov, by then opposed to cooperation, stated that he could not take part in any scheme that involved the ministry of defense. Rodzianko noted in his memoirs that Kerensky bitterly attacked Miliukov's absurd point of view. The eclectic, pragmatic, and nondogmatic nature of Kerensky's politics is evident in his defense of military supply efforts. Rodzianko quoted Kerensky as follows:

> "The Cadets always start with a theory and fall into an abstraction, rejecting every proposal that does not fit with their theory, even though the proposal is good in itself. I am a political opponent of the President of the Duma, but I can see that he is greatly disturbed by our failures and is doing his very best to find a remedy for some of the shocking defects in our military organization. We, Laborites, appreciate and approve what has been done, and will support him."[12]

Despite Kerensky's decision to collaborate in forming the special commission, which became the Central War Industries Council, he had every reason to be suspicious of a "Black Block" working in the government to distance the Tsar from the realities of war and to pursue a disgraceful separate peace. The source of the alleged plots was Rasputin, the mystical peasant monk that had essentially taken over Tsarskoye Selo, the home of the Tsarina Alexandra because of his supposed ability to stop the heir's hemophilia.

The first act of treason attributed by the opposition to the Council of Ministers involved Maklakov and Minister of Justice Shcheglovitov. Miliukov reported a rumor that the ministers had given a note to the Tsar pleading for an immediate halt to the war, considering the similarity of the systems of government between Germany and Russia and the danger to Russia of close association with her democratic allies. There was no independent confirmation of the rumor, but when confronted, the two sat with embarrassed smiles and said nothing.[13] One can imagine the

[12]Golder, 90.

[13]Miliukov, 306.

horror of the Duma delegates upon hearing of this incident, regardless of its factuality.

In February, before the two were confronted about their plans, Kerensky was already clearly concerned with their activities and wrote a letter to Rodzianko. He said, 'The Russian public knows quite well in which ministries sit the patrons of hope, still lively here, of coming to an understanding with the Berlin Government as quickly as possible, and thus restoring the firmest and indispensable support of internal reaction."[14]

During 1915 and 1916, all of Russian society was under a sort of spy-mania. While liberals and radicals feared the Black Block, general headquarters in Mogilev claimed evidence of German agents in the Petrograd workers, inciting strikes and passing military information to Berlin. Complete control over the war effort continued to be the goal of the Tsar's ministers, and Kerensky reported how acute Okhrana paranoia had become in 1916 of a potential liberal block that embraced defensism. There was a rash of illegal conferences broken up by the police, in which the defeatist agitators had been allowed to escape, while the defensist speakers were imprisoned. Such had been the policy of the Okhrana in 1915, only now it was pursued more vigorously. According to Kerensky, "this incomprehensible behavior lent veracity to the rumors that were spreading among the workers about 'treason at the top.'"[15]

One curious activity was Kerensky's involvement with the political masons. Illegal since the 1822 Decembrist revolt, the Freemasons had continued to operate through 1905, when the granting of a constitution answered many of the masons demands. A unique and independent group of political masons revived the secret lodges when Nicholas' reform failed to meet the expectations of liberals. The new masons included members of all political parties from the Bolsheviks to the conservative Octobrists. In 1912 upon his election to the Duma, Kerensky was asked to join, and must have found the mystical and secretive nature of the mason to be irresistible. Kerensky characterized the function of the masons as a supraparty forum for the exchange of information and ideas for all opposition parties, certainly his membership coincided with his

[14]Wilcox, 191.

[15]Kerensky, *Turning Point*, 174.

expressed desire to unite the opposition. The political masonry adopted an adamantly defensist posture during the war and certain of its members participated in attempted palace revolutions.[16]

The study of masonry's role in sparking the February revolt and influencing the policies of the Provisional Government has not yet "come of age," according to historian Nathan Smith. A lack of source material and conflicting claims in the limited first-hand accounts make any definitive statements about the role of masonry risky, while the wide range of political views held by its members suggests that any well defined political program would have been impossible. More plausible is the assertion that the very makeup of the first Provisional Government was determined by masonic affiliation, for at least six of ministers were masons, and perhaps as many as nine.[17]

Although the content of Kerensky's political activity during the war is interesting and important to understanding his vision for Russia, another key aspect of Kerensky's activity during the war was the manner in which he pursued his goals. Of all Kerensky's contributions to the cause of the opposition in the Duma, his oratorical skills were of the most value. The speech of July 26 is but one example of the impassioned and scandalous speeches that Kerensky would deliver during the war. He considered himself a soldier in a war as real as the one occurring on the front, and his unique persuasiveness was his greatest weapon. The relative freedom to speak that he enjoyed as a Duma deputy allowed him to travel unhampered around Russia. Many with whom he consorted were not so lucky, and were often investigated or imprisoned by the Okhrana, the Tsarist secret police. Since the Duma was prorogued for much of the time during the war, his opportunities to speak in various forums were numerous.

The war noticeably increased the level of emotional intensity that Kerensky brought to his oratory. A certain Nemirovitch-Danchenko, described as an old and hardened journalist, became rapturous when hearing his speeches:

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[16]Barbara Norton, "Russian Political Masonry and the February Revolution of 1917," *International Review of Social History*, v. XXVIII, (1983), 249-252.; Kerensky, *Turning Point*, 87-89.

[17]Nathan Smith, "Political Freemasonry in Russia, 1906-1918: A Discussion of the Sources," *The Russian Review*, v. XXXXIV, (1985), 157-62.; Norton, 255-56; Hasegawa, 192-196.

"Listening to him, you feel that all your nerves are drawn towards him and bound together with his nerves in one nexus. It seems that you yourself are speaking; that on the platform it is not Kerenski but you who are facing the crowd, and dominating its thoughts and feelings; that it and you have only one heart, wide as the world and as beautiful. Kerenski has spoken and gone. You ask yourself how long he has spoken—an hour or three minutes? On your honor you cannot say." "...All impediments between himself and his audience are intolerable to him. He wants to be all before you, from head to foot, so that the only thing between you and him is the air, completely impregnated by his and your mutual radiations of invisible but mighty currents. For that reason, he will hear nothing of rostra, pulpits, tables. He leaves the rostrum, jumps on the table; and when he stretches his hand to you—nervous, supple, fiery, all quivering with the enthusiasm of prayer which seizes him—you feel that he touches you, grasps you with those hands, and irresistibly draws you to himself."[18]

While there is little doubt that the manner in which he delivered his speeches, many questions remain concerning what to do with the content. The debate over what exactly Kerensky stood for in terms of the war effort has been raging for years amongst historians, and much of the debate has been unnecessary. Kerensky's voluminous writings have been cited by many to suggest that he opposed the war effort, while others have found in them evidence to the contrary. The seeming contradictions stem from a failure to distinguish between the brand of patriotism that favored the vigorous defense of Russian soil during wartime, and the patriotism that implied support for the Tsarist ministers and the autocratic system in general.

Truly, Kerensky loathed war on principle, not an intrinsically radical or revolutionary thing, and truly he loathed the monarchs of Russia, Germany, and Austria, whom he rightfully blamed for unleashing organized violence on a level unprecedented in the civilized world. But from the earliest days of the war, Kerensky made vehement statements imploring workers to aid in the war effort and to defend Russia from the Kaiser, the "epitome of reaction."

Sources that have influenced the prevailing view of Kerensky's war stance are numerous and almost always hostile and detrimental to his character. The files of the Okhrana paint a sordid

[18]Wilcox, 197.

picture of Kerensky as the lead agitator for strikes in the working class and generally opposed to the war effort. They were certainly correct in their assessment of his ulterior motive; to undermine the authority and respect for the Tsarist government in order to bring about a constituent assembly. Yet they were exactly wrong in their accusations that he was fomenting strikes or that he generally opposed the war effort. The Okhrana, as will become apparent, was much more concerned with fighting the defensist opposition than the defeatists, and in many cases helped to spread the later's propaganda to discredit the radical left.

Pipes, in *The Russian Revolution*, gives at best a cursory glance into the pre-1917 activity of Kerensky, in which he claims that "Kerensky worked for the overthrow of the tsarist regime and the sabotaging of the war effort. In the fall [of 1915] he agitated against worker participation in the joint committees established to improve defence production...."[19] A more detailed investigation, however, reveals that Kerensky initially questioned the wisdom of participating in any programs sponsored by the tsar, and later, satisfied that the Workers' Group would have sufficient freedom of action, campaigned vigorously for worker participation.

According to Abraham and Hasegawa, when Kerensky's influence was at a high peak in the summer of 1915, he used it to encourage the Menshevik sponsored Workers' Group designed to aid the Central War Industries Committee. The Okhrana took a very dim view of the situation, considering only the affect that it would have on Tsarist authority. The following is taken from the Okhrana file:

> "To ensure the success of their demands, Kerenski has recommended the workmen to improvise factory groups for the formation of councils of worker's and soldier's delegates on the model of 1905, with the object of impelling the movement in a definite direction, at the given moment, with the cry for a Constituent Assembly, which should take into its hands the defence of the country."[20]

As mentioned above, during the war the radical left in Russia underwent a dramatic

[19]Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, 224.

[20]Wilcox, 192.

realignment over defeatism and defensism. A group of Social Revolutionary Internationalists deserted to the Bolsheviks when Kerensky, their most significant mouthpiece, came out publicly for the committee. In their appeal to the Bolsheviks, they rejected all efforts to work with bourgeois parties. Most Social Revolutionaries, however, tentatively accepted Kerensky's view and worked with other defensists, especially the Mensheviks.[21]

Surprisingly, Abraham describes Kerensky as wavering on the issue of support for the war effort. Attempting to show that he was repulsed by the general militarism that sprung up in Russia, Abraham cites a passage in which Kerensky bemoaned a "peculiar kind of atavism" that came over Russia, causing society to slither "into a sort of trench of social and state Muscovitism."[22] This statement is meant to recall the Moscow princes, (one of whom was the hopelessly paranoid Ivan the Terrible, possibly an allusion to Nicholas II), who had a negligible regard for the freedom of any Russians, from the lowest of serfs to the highest of the nobility. Here Kerensky was clearly referring to the tendency among other delegates in the Duma and society in general to abandon the struggle for social justice in favor of unrestrained and chauvinistic nationalism.

Considering the dire needs of the army, Kerensky felt that it was his duty as a respected leader of the working class to quell strikes and spread the faith of patriotic opposition. He pleaded with workers in Petrograd to channel their hatred of autocracy into efforts to defend Russia from the monarchy of Germany. The files of the Okhrana suggest that Kerensky had the future revolution in mind when he pleaded with the workers for restraint. In September of 1915, when Kerensky had been selected as leader of the Trudovik party in the Duma, he admonished his fellow party members in how to appeal to the workers. "[Tell them] not to not to strike, not to waste their efforts on an aimless offensive but to maintain them for a general revolutionary offensive in the near future under better conditions."

[21]*Tsentral'nyi Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii Arkhiv SSSR* (Leningrad), fond 1405, opis' 530, delo 1059, listy 79, 91-93. Cited from Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, *The February Revolution: Petrograd, 1917* (Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1981), 136.

[22]Abraham, 77.

Conclusion

Since the Bolshevik Revolution and the establishment of the Soviet state, evaluations of Kerensky's leadership from historians of all persuasions have been fraught with charges of incompetence and vacillation. Typical of these is from Ariadna Tyrkova-Williams, who, while respecting Kerensky's tremendous courage and selflessness, wrote in 1919 that "he exhibited the meagerness of his political outlook and the instability and levity of his character...[He] lacked what seems to be the primary and absolutely necessary quality—the intellect of a statesman."[1]

Undeniably, Kerensky exhibited limitations as a statesman. He was no Bismarck, nor was he a Robespierre. They were both, in their own way, the antithesis of Kerensky. While admirable in a humanitarian sense, his political philosophy based on moral values did not serve him well in the role he was forced to play. He was not entirely without the skills of a statesman, yet the moral restraints that Kerensky placed on himself limited his effectiveness at a time when a stronger hand was needed. To him, a state built on any other ideological foundation than the fundamental respect for the sanctity of the individual was simply not worth building. After 1917, he was to join the harshest critics of the new Russian government, lamenting its lack of regard for human rights. What Kerensky may have lacked in political acumen does not diminish his contribution of a vision for Russia's future that was an extremely attractive alternative to the absolute monarchy of Nicholas II, and the brutal regime of the Bolsheviks.

In the months of Kerensky's ascendancy after the February revolt, he remained faithful to his vision of Russia as a free and democratic state dedicated to the rights of the individual. While the historical debate rages on over whether Russia was ready for such a vision, or if Kerensky was forceful enough to achieve his goals, some definitive statements can be made.

Kerensky, who served as minister of justice, minister of war, and eventually prime minister,

[1]Ariadna Tyrkova-Williams, *From Liberty to Brest-Litovsk* (Westport, CN: Hyperian, 1919), 30-31.

commanded a ship of state that began sinking immediately upon its commission. He was immensely popular initially and enjoyed the unique honor of both heading the government and serving as nominal vice-president of the Soviet, the council of socialists that had formed spontaneously in February to rival the government. Although his role in the Soviet was limited, his participation in both bodies points to an almost universal support for Kerensky's leadership in the revolution. The Bolsheviks, who had generally taken a defeatist stance to the war before the revolution, worked diligently against his government and encouraged tensions that eventually destroyed his coalition. While the Bolsheviks seemed to fight against Russia at every turn, he worked tirelessly to keep the Russian state together.

In the later period for which he is most often criticized, he was ironically least able to effect positive change. The euphoric spirit of cooperation of February had fallen victim to the combined pressures of war and political polarization, while the very qualities that had made his leadership desirable to the partisans of freedom and democracy disqualified him from effectively controlling the situation at hand. The Soviet was the most significant structural obstacle to consolidation of government power. Because of his socialist orientation, Kerensky was reluctant to deal severely with Soviet, of which he was nominally vice-president.

Particularly troublesome for Kerensky were the Bolsheviks. While he disliked their methods, he shared with them a revolutionary kinship, and he was forced by political realities to be lenient with them. While Kerensky enjoyed the nominal support of a wide range of political groups, his political power base was essentially among the moderate socialists, who vigorously opposed any measures to limit political freedom and revive Tsarist oppression. In this sense, the Bolsheviks were viewed by the socialist mainstream merely as misguided and overzeolous ideological cousins.

Conversely, the need for coalition building and the demands of the military effort undercut Kerensky's position vis-à-vis the conservative and liberal factions. Although the liberal parties, especially the Kadets, under the leadership of Paul Miliukov, refused to participate, he never ceased trying to bring them into a coalition. The conservatives, who were seeking an opportunity to

reassert some control over the restless urban industrial laborers and rural peasants with their ever present land grievances, held the keys to the war industries and had to be appeased.

To destroy a system of government, especially one under construction, is a relatively easy task, given sufficient brute force. The Bolsheviks sufficiently proved this in October, 1917. To construct one, however, is an entirely different matter, and it was precisely this task that devolved on Kerensky. Pioneering a new course of democratic government that depends inherently on good faith and political cooperation is especially difficult. He clearly did not have the good faith of the Bolsheviks, nor could he fully trust the conservative factions. The fierce political debate in Russia in 1917, centering on the divergent visions of Russia's political future and the war (particularly war aims, military discipline, and the role of the officer corps) all complicated Kerensky's task. The unpredictability of the aroused and heavily politicized masses made measures to strengthen the state dangerous. The failure of the moderate elements, particularly the Kadets, to lend support to the interim regime came at a critical juncture in the war effort when the army was literally falling apart for lack of effective leadership. Just when a strong coalition was needed, the moderate members of the Russian political scene abandoned the joint cause, and left Kerensky to fend for himself.

In spite of the challenges he faced, Kerensky was the only figure with the passion, commitment, and renown to serve in the capacity that he did. His fiery oratory was invaluable in continuing the defense from German attack. His ability to compromise held together the war effort and mediated for the feuding political factions in Petrograd. In the end, he failed to reconcile political forces that may ultimately have been irreconcilable. Yet his efforts to bring his vision of democracy to Russia should not be ignored.

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