

Individual Terrorism, Albert Camus

Pisarev, the theoretician of Russian nihilism, declares that the greatest fanatics are children and adolescents. That is also true of nations. Russia, at this period, is an adolescent nation, delivered with forceps, barely a century ago, by a Czar who was still ingenuous enough to cut off the heads of rebels himself. It is not astonishing that she should have pushed Germanic ideology to extremes of sacrifice and destruction which German professors had only been capable of theorizing about. Stendhal noticed an essential difference between Germans and other people in the fact that they are excited by meditation rather than soothed.

That is true, but it is even more true of Russia. In that immature country, completely without philosophic tradition,¹ some very young people, akin to Lautreamont's tragic fellow students, enthusiastically embraced the concepts of German thought and incarnated the consequences in blood. A "proletariat of undergraduates"² then took the lead in the great movement of human emancipation and gave it its most violent aspect. Until the end of the nineteenth century these undergraduates never numbered more than a few thousand. Entirely on their own, however, and in defiance of the most integrated absolutism of the time, they aspired to liberate and provisionally did contribute to the liberation of forty million muzhiks.

¹ Pisarev remarks that civilization, in its ideological aspects, has always been imported into Russia.

² Dostoievsky.

Almost all of them paid for this liberation by suicide, execution, prison, or madness. The entire history of Russian terrorism can be summed up in the struggle of a handful of intellectuals to abolish tyranny, against a background of a silent populace. Their debilitated victory was finally betrayed. But by their sacrifice and even by their most extreme negations they gave substance to a new standard of values, a new virtue, which even today has not ceased to oppose tyranny and to give aid to the cause of true liberation.

The Germanization of nineteenth-century Russia is not an isolated phenomenon. The influence of German ideology at that moment was preponderant, and we are well aware, for example, that the nineteenth century in France, with Michelet and Quinet, is the century of Germanic thought. But in Russia this ideology did not encounter an already established system, while in France it had to contend and compromise with libertarian socialism. In Russia it was on conquered territory.

The first Russian university, the University of Moscow, founded in 1750, is German. The slow colonization of Russia by German teachers, bureaucrats, and soldiers, which began under Peter the Great, was transformed at the instance of Nicholas I into systematic Germanization.

The intelligentsia developed a passion for Schelling (simultaneously with their passion for French writers) in the 1830's, for Hegel in the 1840's, and in the second half of the century for German socialism derived from Hegel.³ Russian youth then proceeded to pour into these abstract thoughts the inordinate violence of its passions and authentically experienced these already moribund ideas. The religion of man already formulated by its German pastors was still missing its apostles and martyrs. Russian Christians, led astray from their original vocation, played this role. For this reason they had to accept life without transcendence and without virtue.

³ Das Kapital was translated in 1872.

The Renunciation of Virtue

In the 1820's among the first Russian revolutionaries, the Decembrists, virtue still existed. Jacobin idealism had not yet been uprooted from the hearts of

these gentlemen. They even practiced conscious virtue: "Our fathers were sybarites, we are Catos," said one of them, Peter Viazem-sky. To this is only added the opinion, which will still be found in Bakunin and the revolutionary socialists of 1905, that suffering regenerates. The Decembrists remind us of the French nobles who allied themselves with the third estate and renounced their privileges.

Patrician idealists, they deliberately chose to sacrifice themselves for the liberation of the people. Despite the fact that their leader, Pestel, was a political and social theorist, their abortive conspiracy had no fixed program; it is not even sure that they believed in the possibility of success. "Yes, we shall die," one of them said on the eve of the insurrection, "but it will be a fine death." It was, in fact, a fine death.

In December 1825 the rebels, arranged in formation, were mown down by cannon fire in the square in front of the Senate at St. Petersburg. The survivors were deported, but not before five had been hanged, and so clumsily that it had to be done twice. It is easy to understand why these ostensibly inefficacious victims have been venerated, with feelings of exaltation and horror, by all of revolutionary Russia. They were exemplary, if not efficacious. They indicated, at the beginning of this chapter of revolutionary history, the ambitions and the greatness of what Hegel ironically called the beautiful soul in relation to which Russian revolutionary ideas were, nevertheless, to be defined.

In this atmosphere of exaltation, German thought came to combat French influence and impose its prestige on minds torn between their desire for vengeance and justice and the realization of their own impotent isolation. It was first received, extolled, and commented upon as though it were revelation itself. The best minds were inflamed with a passion for philosophy. They even went so far as to put Hegel's Logic into verse.

For the most part, Russian intellectuals at first inferred, from the Hegelian system, the justification of a form of social quietism. To be aware of the rationality of the world sufficed; the Spirit would realize itself, in any case, at the end of time. That is the first reaction of Stankevich,⁴ Bakunin, and Bielin-sky, for example. Then the Russian mind recoiled at this factual, if not intentional, complicity with absolutism and, immediately, jumped to the opposite extreme.

4 "The world is ordered by the spirit of reason, this reassures me about everything else."

Nothing is more revealing, in this respect, than the evolution of Bielin-sky, one of the most remarkable and most influential minds of the 1830's and 40's. Beginning with a background of rather vague libertarian idealism, Bielin-sky suddenly discovers Hegel. In his room, at midnight, under the shock of revelation, he bursts into tears like Pascal and suddenly becomes a new man. "Neither chance nor the absolute exists, I have made my adieux to the French." At the same time he is still a conservative and a partisan of social quietism. He writes to that effect without a single hesitation and defends his position, as he perceives it, courageously.

But this essentially kindhearted man then sees himself allied with what is most detestable in this world: injustice. If everything is logical, then everything is justified. One must consent to the whip, to serfdom, to Siberia. To accept the world and its sufferings seemed to him, at one moment, the noble thing to do because he imagined that he would only have to bear his own sufferings and his own contradictions.

But if it also implied consent to the sufferings of others, he suddenly discovered that he had not the heart to continue. He set out again in the opposite direction. If one cannot accept the suffering of others, then something in the world cannot be justified, and history, at one point at least, no longer coincides with reason. But history must be completely reasonable or it is not

reasonable at all.

This man's solitary protest, quieted for a moment by the idea that everything can be justified, bursts forth again in vehement terms. Bielinsky addresses Hegel himself: "With all the esteem due to your philistine philosophy, I have the honor to inform you that even if I had the opportunity of climbing to the very top of the ladder of evolution, I should still ask you to account for all the victims of life and history. I do not want happiness, even gratuitous happiness, if my mind is not at rest concerning all my blood brothers."

Bielinsky understood that what he wanted was not the absolute of reason but the fullness of life. He refuses to identify them. He wants the immortality of the entire man, clothed in his living body, not the abstract immortality of the species become Spirit. He argues with equal passion against new adversaries, and draws, from this fierce interior debate, conclusions that he owes to Hegel, but which he turns against him.

These are the conclusions of individualism in revolt. The individual cannot accept history as it is. He must destroy reality, not collaborate with it, in order to affirm his own existence. "Negation is my god, as reality formerly was. My heroes are the destroyers of the past: Luther, Voltaire, the Encyclopedists, the Terrorists, Byron in Cain." Thus we rediscover here, simultaneously, all the themes of metaphysical rebellion. Certainly, the French tradition of individualistic socialism always remained alive in Russia. Saint-Simon and Fourier, who were read in the 1830's, and Proudhon, who was imported in the forties, inspired the great concepts of Herzen, and, very much later, those of Pierre Lavrov.

But this system, which remained attached to ethical values, finally succumbed, provisionally at any rate, during its great debate with cynical thought. On the other hand, Bielinsky rediscovers both with and against Hegel the same tendencies to social individualism, but under the aspect of negation, in the rejection of transcendental values. When he dies, in 1848, his thought will moreover be very close to that of Herzen. But when he confronts Hegel, he defines, with precision, an attitude that will be adopted by the nihilists, and at least in part by the terrorists. Thus he furnishes a type of transition between the idealist aristocrats of 1825 and the "noth-ingist" students of 1860.

Three of the Possessed

When Herzen, in making his apology for the nihilist movementâ "only to the extent, it is true, that he sees in it a still greater emancipation from ready-made ideasâ " writes: "The annihilation of the past is the procreation of the future," he is using the language of Bielinsky. Koteiarevsky, speaking of the so-called radicals of the period, defined them as apostles "who thought that the past must be completely renounced and the human personality must be constructed to quite another plan."

Stirner's claim reappears with the total rejection of history and the determination to construct the future, no longer with regard to the historical spirit, but so as to coincide with the man-king. But the man-king cannot raise himself to power unaided. He has need of others and therefore enters into a nihilist contradiction which Pisarev, Bakunin, and Nechaiev will try to resolve by slightly extending the area of destruction and negation, to the point where terrorism finally kills the contradiction itself, in a simultaneous act of sacrifice and murder.

The nihilism of the 1860's began, apparently, with the most radical negation imaginable: the rejection of any action that was not purely egoistic. We know that the very term nihilism was invented by Turgeniev in his novel Fathers and Sons, whose hero, Bazarov, was an exact portrayal of this type of man. Pisarev, when he wrote a criticism of this book, proclaimed that the nihilists recognized Bazarov as their model. "We have nothing," said Bazarov, "to boast about but the sterile knowledge of understanding, up to a certain point, the sterility of what

exists." "Is that," he was asked, "what is called nihilism?" "Yes, that is what is called nihilism." Pisarev praises Bazarov's attitude, which for the sake of clarity he defines thus: "I am a stranger to the order of existing things, I have nothing to do with it." Thus the only value resides in rational egoism.

In denying everything that is not satisfaction of the self, Pisarev declares war on philosophy, on art, which he considers absurd, on erroneous ethics, on religion, and even on customs and on good manners. He constructs a theory of intellectual terrorism which makes one think of the present-day surrealists. Provocation is made into a doctrine, but on a level of which Raskolnikov provides the perfect example. At the height of this fine transport, Pisarev asks himself, without even laughing, whether he is justified in killing his own mother and answers: "And why not, if I want to do so, and if I find it useful?"

From that point on, it is surprising not to find the nihilists engaged in making a fortune or acquiring a title or in cynically taking advantage of every opportunity that offers itself. It is true that there were nihilists to be found in advantageous positions on all levels of society. But they did not construct a theory from their cynicism and preferred on all occasions to pay visible and quite inconsequential homage to virtue.

As for those we are discussing, they contradicted themselves by the defiance they hurled in the face of society, which in itself was the affirmation of a value. They called themselves materialists; their bedside book was Buchner's *Force and Matter*. But one of them confessed: "Every one of us was ready to go to the scaffold and to give his head for Moleschott and Darwin," thus putting doctrine well ahead of matter.

Doctrine, taken seriously to this degree, has an air of religion and fanaticism. For Pisarev, Lamarck was a traitor because Darwin was right. Whoever in this intellectual sphere began talking about the immortality of the soul was immediately excommunicated. Vladimir Veidle is therefore right when he defines nihilism as rationalist obscurantism. Reason among the nihilists, strangely enough, annexed the prejudices of faith; choosing the most popularized forms of science worship for their prototype of reason was not the least of the contradictions accepted by these individualists. They denied everything but the most debatable of values, the values of Flaubert's *Monsieur Homais*.

However, it was by choosing to make reason, in its most limited aspect, into an act of faith that the nihilists provided their successors with a model. They believed in nothing but reason and self-interest. But instead of skepticism, they chose to propagate a doctrine and became socialists. Therein lies their basic contradiction. Like all adolescent minds they simultaneously experienced doubt and the need to believe.

Their personal solution consists in endowing their negation with the intransigence and passion of faith. What, after all, is astonishing about that? Veidle quotes the scornful phrase used by Soloviev, the philosopher, in denouncing this contradiction: "Man is descended from monkeys, therefore let us love one another." Pisarev's truth, however, is to be found in this dilemma.

If man is the image of God, then it does not matter that he is deprived of human love; the day will come when he will be satiated with it. But if he is a blind creature, wandering in the darkness of a cruel and circumscribed condition, he has need of his equals and of their ephemeral love. Where can charity take refuge, after all, if not in the world without God? In the other, grace provides for all, even for the rich. Those who deny everything at least understand that negation is a calamity. They can then open their hearts to the misery of others and finally deny themselves.

Pisarev did not shrink from the idea of murdering his mother, and yet he managed to find the exact words to describe injustice. He wanted to enjoy life egoistically, but he suffered imprisonment and finally went mad. Such an ostentatious display of cynicism finally led him to an understanding of love, to

be exiled from it and to suffer from it to the point of suicide, thus revealing, in place of the man-god he wanted to create, the unhappy, suffering old man whose greatness illuminates the pages of history.

Bakunin embodies, but in a manner spectacular in a different way, the very same contradictions. He died on the eve of the terrorist epic, in 1876. Moreover, he rejected in advance individual outrages and denounced "the Brutuses of the period." He had a certain respect for them, however, since he reproached Herzen for having openly criticized Karakosov for his abortive attempt to assassinate Alexander II in 1866. This feeling of respect had its reasons. Bakunin influenced the course of events in the same manner as Bielinzky and the nihilists and directed them into the channel of individual revolt. But he contributed something more: a germ of political cynicism, which will congeal, with Nechaiev, into a doctrine and will drive the revolutionary movement to extremes.

Bakunin had hardly emerged from adolescence when he was overwhelmed and uprooted by Hegelian philosophy, as if by a gigantic earthquake. He buries himself in it day and night "to the point of madness," he says, and adds: "I saw absolutely nothing but Hegel's categories." When he emerges from this initiation, it is with the exaltation of a neophyte. "My personal self is dead forever, my life is the true life. It is in some way identified with the absolute life." He required very little time to see the dangers of that comfortable position. He who has understood reality does not rebel against it, but rejoices in it; in other words, he becomes a conformist.

Nothing in Bakunin's character predestined him to that watchdog philosophy. It is possible, also, that his travels in Germany, and the unfortunate opinion he formed of the Germans, may have ill-prepared him to agree with the aged Hegel that the Prussian State was the privileged depository of the final fruits of the mind. More Russian than the Czar himself, despite his dreams of universality, he could in no event subscribe to the apology of Prussia when it was founded on a logic brash enough to assert: "The will of other peoples has no rights, for it is the people who represent the will [of the Spirit] who dominate the world."

In the 1840's, moreover, Bakunin discovered French socialism and anarchism, from which he appropriated a few tendencies. Bakunin rejects, with a magnificent gesture, any part of German ideology. He approached the absolute in the same way as he approached total destruction, with the same passionate emotion, and with the blind enthusiasm for the "All or Nothing" which we again find in him in its purest form.

After having extolled absolute Unity, Bakunin enthusiastically embraces the most elementary form of Manichaeism. What he wants, of course, is once and for all "the universal and authentically democratic Church of Freedom." That is his religion; he belongs to his times. It is not sure, however, that his faith on this point had been perfect. In his Confession to Czar Nicholas I, he seems to be sincere when he says that he has never been able to believe in the final revolution "except with a supernatural and painful effort to stifle forcibly the interior voice which whispered to me that my hopes were absurd." His theory of immorality, on the other hand, is much more firmly based and he is often to be seen plunging about in it with the ease and pleasure of a mettlesome horse.

History is governed by only two principles: the State and social revolution, revolution and counterrevolution, which can never be reconciled, and which are engaged in a death struggle. The State is the incarnation of crime. "The smallest and most inoffensive State is still criminal in its dreams." Therefore revolution is the incarnation of good. This struggle, which surpasses politics, is also the struggle of Luciferian principles against the divine principle. Bakunin explicitly reintroduces into rebellious action one of the themes of romantic rebellion. Proudhon had already decreed that God is Evil and exclaimed: "Come, Satan, victim of the calumnies of kings and of the petty-minded!"

Bakunin also gives a glimpse of the broader implications of an apparently

political rebellion: "Evil is satanic rebellion against divine authority, a rebellion in which we see, nevertheless, the fruitful seed of every form of human emancipation." Like the Fraticelli of fourteenth-century Bohemia, revolutionary socialists today use this phrase as a password: "In the name of him to whom a great wrong has been done."

The struggle against creation will therefore be without mercy and without ethics, and the only salvation lies in extermination. "The passion for destruction is a creative passion." Bakunin's burning words on the subject of the revolution of 1848 in his Confession vehemently proclaim this pleasure in destruction. "A feast without beginning and without end," he says. In fact, for him as for all who are oppressed, the revolution is a feast, in the religious sense of the word. Here we are reminded of the French anarchist Caeurderoy, who, in his book Hurrah, or the Cossack Revolution, summoned the hordes of the north to lay waste to the whole world.

He also wanted to "apply the torch to my father's house" and proclaimed that the only hope lay in the human deluge and in chaos. Rebellion is grasped, throughout these manifestations, in its pure state, in its biological truth. That is why Bakunin with exceptional perspicacity was the only one of his period to declare war on science, the idol of his contemporaries. Against every abstract idea he pleaded the cause of the complete man, completely identified with his rebellion.

If he glorifies the brigand leader of the peasant rising, if he chooses to model himself on Stenka Razin and Pugachev, it is because these men fought, without either doctrine or principle, for an ideal of pure freedom. Bakunin introduces into the midst of revolution the naked principle of rebellion. "The tempest and life, that is what we need. A new world, without laws, and consequently free."

But is a world without laws a free world? That is the question posed by every rebellion. If the question were to be asked of Bakunin, the answer would not be in doubt. Despite the fact that he was opposed in all circumstances, and with the most extreme lucidity, to authoritarian socialism, yet from the moment when he himself begins to define the society of the future, he does so without being at all concerned about the contradiction in terms of a dictatorship. The statutes of the International Fraternity (1864-7), which he edited himself, already establish the absolute subordination of the individual to the central committee, during the period of action.

It is the same for the period that will follow the revolution. He hopes to see in liberated Russia "a strong dictatorial power ... a power supported by partisans, enlightened by their advice, fortified by their free collaboration, but which would be limited by nothing and by no one." Bakunin contributed as much as his enemy Marx to Leninist doctrine. The dream of the revolutionary Slav empire, moreover, as Bakunin conjures it up before the Czar, is exactly the same, down to the last detail of its frontiers, as that realized by Stalin. Coming from a man who was wise enough to say that the essential driving-force of Czarist Russia was fear and who rejected the Marxist theory of party dictatorship, these conceptions may seem contradictory. But this contradiction demonstrates that the origins of authoritarian doctrines are partially nihilistic.

Pisarev justifies Bakunin. Certainly, the latter wanted total freedom; but he hoped to realize it through total destruction. To destroy everything is to pledge oneself to building without foundations, and then to holding up the walls with one's hands. He who rejects the entire past, without keeping any part of it which could serve to breathe life into the revolution, condemns himself to finding justification only in the future and, in the meantime, to entrusting the police with the task of justifying the provisional state of affairs. Bakunin proclaims dictatorship, not despite his desire for destruction, but in accordance with it.

Nothing, in fact, could turn him from this path since his ethical values had

also been dissolved in the crucible of total negation. In his openly obsequious Confession to the Czar, which he wrote in order to gain his freedom, he spectacularly introduces the double game into revolutionary politics. With his Catechism of a Revolutionary, which he probably drafted in Switzerland, with the help of Nechaiev, he voices, even though he denies it later, the political cynicism that will never cease to weigh on the revolutionary movement and which Nechaiev himself has so provocatively illustrated.

A less well-known figure than Bakunin, still more mysterious, but more significant for our purpose, Nechaiev pushed nihilism to the farthest coherent point. His thought presents practically no contradiction. He appeared, about 1866, in revolutionary intellectual circles, and died, obscurely, in January 1882. In this short space of time he never ceased to suborn the students around him, Bakunin himself, the revolutionary refugees, and finally the guards in his prison, whom he succeeded in persuading to take part in a crazy conspiracy. When he first appears, he is already quite sure of what he thinks.

If Bakunin was fascinated by him to the point of consenting to entrust him with imaginary authority, it is because he recognized in that implacable figure the type of human being that he recommended and what he himself, in a certain manner, would have been if he had been able to silence his heart. Nechaiev was not content with saying that one must unite with "the savage world of bandits, the true and unique revolutionary environment of Russia," nor with writing once more, like Bakunin, that henceforth politics would be religion and religion politics. He made himself the cruel high priest of a desperate revolution; his most recurrent dream was to found a homicidal order that would permit him to propagate and finally enthrone the sinister divinity that he had decided to serve.

He not only gave dissertations on universal destruction; his originality lay in coldly claiming, for those who dedicate themselves to the revolution, an "Everything is permitted" and in actually permitting himself everything. "The revolutionary is a man condemned in advance. He must have neither romantic relationships nor objects to engage his feelings. He should even cast off his own name. Every part of him should be concentrated in one single passion: the revolution." If history is, in fact, independent of all principles and composed only of a struggle between revolution and counterrevolution, there is no way out but to espouse wholeheartedly one of the two and either die or be resurrected. Nechaiev pursues this logic to the bitter end. With him, for the first time, revolution is going to be explicitly separated from love and friendship.

The consequences of arbitrary psychology set in motion by Hegel's method can be seen, for the first time, in Nechaiev. Hegel had allowed that the mutual recognition of minds could be accomplished in love.⁵ He would not, however, give a place in the foreground of his analysis to this "phenomenon," which, according to him, he found "had not the strength, the patience, nor the application of the negative."

He had chosen to demonstrate human minds in blind combat, dimly groping on the sands, like crabs that finally come to grips in a fight to the death, and voluntarily abandoned the equally legitimate image of beams of light painfully searching for one another in the night and finally focusing together in a blaze of illumination. Those who love, friends or lovers, know that love is not only a blinding flash, but also a long and painful struggle in the darkness for the realization of definitive recognition and reconciliation.

After all, if virtue in the course of history is recognized by the extent to which it gives proof of patience, real love is as patient as hatred. Moreover, the demand for justice is not the only justification throughout the centuries for revolutionary passion, which is sustained by a painful insistence on universal friendship, even and above all "in defiance of an inimical heaven. Those who die for justice, throughout history, have always been called "brothers." Violence, for every one of them, is directed only against the enemy, in the service of the community of the oppressed. But if the revolution is the

only positive value, it has a right to claim everything even the denunciation and therefore the sacrifice of the friend.

Henceforth, violence will be directed against one and all, in the service of an abstract idea. The accession to power of the possessed had to take place so that it could be said, once and for all, that the revolution, in itself, was more important than the people it wanted to save, and that friendship, which until then had transformed defeats into the semblance of victories, must be sacrificed and postponed until the still invisible day of victory.

5 It could also be brought about by the kind of admiration in which the word master assumes its fullest meaning: he who creates without destroying.

Nechaiev's originality thus lies in justifying the violence done to one's brothers. He decided, with Bakunin, on the terms of the Catechism. But once the latter, in a fit of mental aberration, had given him the mission of representing in Russia a European Revolutionary Union, which existed only in his imagination, Nechaiev in effect came to Russia, founded his Society of the Ax, and himself defined its regulations. There we find again the secret central committee, necessary no doubt to any military or political action, to whom everyone must swear absolute allegiance. But Nechaiev does more than militarize the revolution from the moment when he admits that the leaders, in order to govern their subordinates, have the right to employ violence and lies.

Nechaiev lies, to begin with, when he claims to be a delegate of a central committee that is still nonexistent and when, to enlist certain skeptics in the action that he proposes to undertake, he describes the committee as disposing of unlimited resources. He goes still farther by distinguishing between categories of revolutionaries, with those of the first category (by which he means the leaders) reserving the right to consider the rest as "expendable capital."

All the leaders in history may have thought in these terms, but they never said so. Until Nechaiev, at any rate, no revolutionary leader had dared to make this the guiding principle of his conduct. Up to his time no revolution had put at the head of its table of laws the concept that man could be a chattel. Traditionally, recruiting relied on its appeal to courage and to the spirit of self-sacrifice.

Nechaiev decided that the skeptics could be terrorized or blackmailed and the believers deceived. Even pseudo-revolutionaries could still be used, if they were urged on systematically to perform the most dangerous deeds. As for the oppressed, since they were going to be saved once and for all, they could be oppressed still more. What they would lose, the oppressed of the future would gain. Nechaiev states, in principle, that governments must be driven to take repressive measures, that the official representatives most hated by the population must never be touched, and that finally the secret society

must employ all its resources to increase the suffering and misery of the masses.

Although these beautiful thoughts have realized their full meaning today, Nechaiev did not live to see the triumph of his principles. He tried to apply them, at all events, at the time of the student Ivanov's murder, which so struck the popular imagination of the time that Dostoievsky made it one of the themes of *The Possessed*.

Ivanov, whose only fault seems to have been that he had doubts about the central committee of which Nechaiev claimed to be a delegate, was considered an enemy of the revolution because he was opposed to the man who was identified with the revolution. Therefore he must die. "What right have we to take a man's life?" asks Uspen-sky, one of Nechaiev's comrades. "It is not a question of right, but of our duty to eliminate everything that may harm our cause."

When revolution is the sole value, there are, in fact, no more rights, there are

only duties. But by an immediate inversion, every right is assumed in the name of duty. For the sake of the cause, Nechaiev, who has never made an attempt on the life of any tyrant, ambushes and kills Ivanov. Then he leaves Russia and returns to Bakunin, who turns his back on him and condemns his "repugnant tactics."

"He has gradually come," writes Bakunin, "to the conclusion that to found an indestructible society it must be based on the politics of Machiavelli and the methods of the Jesuits: for the body, only violence; for the soul, deception." That is well said. But in the name of what value is it possible to decide that this tactic is repugnant if the revolution, as Bakunin believed, is the only good? Nechaiev is really in the service of the revolution; it is not his own ends that he serves, but the cause.

Extradited, he yields not an inch to his judges. Condemned to twenty-five years in jail, he still reigns over the prisons, organizes the jailers into a secret society, plans the assassination of the Czar, and is again brought up for trial. Death in the dungeon of a fortress, after twelve years' confinement, brings an end to the life of this rebel who is the first of the contemptuous aristocrats of the revolution.

At this period, in the bosom of the revolution, every thing is really permitted and murder can be elevated into a principle. It was thought, however, with the renewal of Populism in 1870, that this revolutionary movement, sprung from the ethical and religious tendencies to be found in the Decembrists, and in the socialism of Lavrov and Herzen, would put a check on the evolution toward political cynicism that Nechaiev had illustrated. This movement appealed to "living souls," prompted them to turn to the people and educate them so that they would march forward to their own liberation. "Repentant noblemen" left their families, dressed like the poor, and went into the villages to preach to the peasants.

But the peasants were suspicious and held their peace. When they did not hold their peace, they denounced the apostle to the police. This check to the noble souls had the result of throwing back the movement on the cynicism of a Nechaiev or, at any rate, on violence. In so far as the intelligentsia was unable to reclaim the allegiance of the people, it felt itself once more alone, face to face with autocracy; once more the world appeared to it in the aspect of master and slave.

The group known as the People's Will was then to elevate individual terrorism into a principle and inaugurate the series of murders which continued until 1905 with the Socialist Revolutionary Party. This is the point at which the terrorists were born, disillusioned with love, united against the crimes of their masters, but alone in their despair, and face to face with their contradictions, which they could resolve only in the double sacrifice of their innocence and their life.

The Fastidious Assassins

In the year 1878 Russian terrorism was born. A very young girl, Vera Zassulich, on the day following the trial of one hundred and eighty-three Populists, the 24th of January, shot down General Trepov, the Governor of St. Petersburg. At her trial she was acquitted and then succeeded in escaping the police of the Czar. This revolver-shot unleashed a whole series of repressive actions and attempted assassinations, which kept pace with one another and which, it was already evident, could only be terminated by mutual exhaustion.

The same year a member of the People's Will Party, Kravchinsky, stated the principles of terror in his pamphlet *Death for Death*. Consequences always follow principles. In Europe, attempts were made on the lives of the Emperor of Germany, the King of Italy, and the King of Spain. Again in 1878 Alexander II created, in the shape of the Okhrana, the most efficient weapon of State terrorism the world has ever seen. From then on, the nineteenth century abounds

in murders, both in Russia and in the West.

In 1879 there is a new attack on the King of Spain and an abortive attempt on the life of the Czar. In 1881 the Czar is murdered by terrorist members of the People's Will. Sofia Perovskaia, Jeliabov, and their friends are hanged. In 1883 takes place the attempt on the life of the Emperor of Germany, whose assailant is beheaded with an ax. In 1887 there are the executions of the Chicago martyrs and the congress of Spanish anarchists at Valencia, where they issue the terrorist proclamation: "If society does not capitulate, vice and evil must perish, even if we must all perish with them." In France the 1890's mark the culminating-point of what is called propaganda by action.

The exploits of Ravachol, Vaillant, and Henry are the prelude to Carnot's assassination. In the year 1892 alone there are more than a thousand dynamite outrages in Europe, and in America almost five hundred. In 1898 the Empress Elisabeth of Austria is murdered. In 1901 the President of the United States, McKinley, is assassinated.

In Russia, where the series of attempts against the lives of minor representatives of the regime had not ceased, the Organization for Combat of the Socialist Revolutionary Party comes into being in 1903 and unites the most outstanding personalities of Russian terrorism. The murders of Plehve by Sazonov and of the Grand Duke Sergei by Kaliayev, in 1905, mark the culminating-point of the thirty years' apostolate of blood and terminate, for revolutionary religion, the age of martyrs.

Nihilism, intimately involved with a frustrated religious movement, thus culminates in terrorism. In the universe of total negation, these young disciples try, with bombs, and revolvers and also with the courage with which they walk to the gallows, to escape from contradiction and to create the values they lack.

Until their time, men died for what they knew, or for what they thought they knew. From their time on, it became the rather more difficult habit to sacrifice oneself for something about which one knew nothing, except that it was necessary to die so that it might exist. Until then, those who had to die put themselves in the hand of God in defiance of the justice of man.

But on reading the declarations of the condemned victims of that period, we are amazed to see that all, without exception, entrusted themselves, in defiance of their judges, to the justice of other men who were not yet born. These men of the future remained, in the absence of supreme values, their last recourse.

The future is the only transcendental value for men without God. The terrorists no doubt wanted first of all to destroy "to make absolutism totter under the shock of exploding bombs. But by their death, at any rate, they aimed at re-creating a community founded on love and justice, and thus to resume a mission that the Church had betrayed.

The terrorists' real mission is to create a Church from whence will one day spring the new God. But is that all? If their voluntary assumption of guilt and death gave rise to nothing but the promise of a value still to come, the history of the world today would justify us in saying, for the moment at any rate, that they have died in vain and that they never have ceased to be nihilists. A value to come is, moreover, a contradiction in terms, since it can neither explain an action nor furnish a principle of choice as long as it has not been formulated. But the men of 1905, tortured by contradictions, really did give birth, by their very negation and death, to a value that will henceforth be imperative, which they brought to light in the belief that they were only announcing its advent.

They ostensibly placed, above themselves and their executioners, that supreme and painful good which we have already found at the origins of rebellion. Let us stop and consider this value, at the moment when the spirit of rebellion encounters, for the last time in our history, the spirit of compassion.

"How can we speak of terrorist activity without taking part in it?" exclaims the student Kaliayev. His companions, united ever since 1903, in the Organization for Combat of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, under the direction of Aze and later of Boris Savinkov, all live up to the standard of this admirable statement. They are men of the highest principles: the last, in the history of rebellion, to refuse no part of their condition or their drama.

If their lives were dedicated to the terror, "if they had faith in it," as Pokotilov says, they never ceased to be torn asunder by it. History offers few examples of fanatics who have suffered from scruples, even in action. But the men of 1905 were always prey to doubts. The greatest homage we can pay them is to say that we would not be able, in 1950, to ask them one question that they themselves had not already asked and that, in their life or by their death, they had not partially answered.

They quickly passed into the realms of history, however. When Kaliayev, for example, in 1903, decided to take part with Savinkov in terrorist activity, he was twenty-six years old. Two years later the "Poet," as he was called, was hanged.

It was a short career. But to anyone who examines with a little feeling the history of that period, Kaliayev, in his breathtaking career, displays the most significant aspect of terrorism. Sazonov, Schweitzer, Pokotilov, Voinarovsky, and most of the other anarchists likewise burst upon the scene of Russian history and poised there for a moment, dedicated to destruction, as the swift and unforgettable witnesses to an increasingly agonized protest.

Almost all are atheists. "I remember," wrote Boris Voinarovsky, who died in throwing a bomb at Admiral Dubassov, "that even before going to high school I preached atheism to one of my childhood friends. Only one question embarrassed me. Where did my ideas come from? For I had not the least conception of eternity." Kaliayev himself believed in God. A few moments before an attempted assassination, which failed, Savinkov saw him in the street, standing in front of an ikon, holding the bomb in one hand and making the sign of the cross with the other. But he repudiated religion. In his cell, before his execution, he refused its consolations.

The need for secrecy compelled them to live in solitude. They did not know, except perhaps in the abstract, the profound joy experienced by the man of action in contact with a large section of humanity. But the bond that united them replaced every other attachment in their minds. "Chivalry!" writes Sazonov, and comments on it thus: "Our chivalry was permeated with such a degree of feeling that the word brother in no way conveyed with sufficient clarity the essence of our relations with one another."

From prison Sazonov writes to his friends: "For my part, the indispensable condition of happiness is to keep forever the knowledge of my perfect solidarity with you." As for Voinarovsky, he confesses that to a woman he loved who wished to detain him he made the following remark, which he recognizes as "slightly comic" but which, according to him, proves his state of mind: "I should curse you if I arrived late for my comrades."

This little group of men and women, lost among the Russian masses, bound only to one another, chose the role of executioner, to which they were in no way destined. They lived in the same paradox, combining in themselves respect for human life in general and contempt for their own livesâ to the point of nostalgia for the supreme sacrifice. For Dora Brilliant, the anarchist program was of no importance; terrorist action was primarily embellished by the sacrifice it demanded from the terrorist. "But," says Savinkov, "terror weighed on her like a cross."

Kaliayev himself is ready to sacrifice his life at any moment. "Even better than that, he passionately desired to make this sacrifice." During the preparations

for the attempt on Plehve, he stated his intention of throwing himself under the horses' hoofs and perishing with the Minister. With Voinarovsky also the desire for sacrifice coincides with the attraction of death. After his arrest he writes to his parents: "How many times during my adolescence the idea came to me to kill myself! . . ."

At the same time, these executioners who risked their own lives so completely, made attempts on the lives of others only after the most scrupulous examination of conscience. The first attempt on the Grand Duke Sergei failed because Kaliayev, with the full approval of his comrades, refused to kill the children who were riding in the Grand Duke's carriage. Of Rachel Louriee, another terrorist, Savinkov writes: "She had faith in terrorist action, she considered it an honor and a duty to take part in it, but blood upset her no less than it did Dora."

The same Savinkov was opposed to an attempt on Admiral Dubassov in the Petersburg-Moscow express because "if there were the least mistake, the explosion could take place in the car and kill strangers." Later Savinkov, "in the name of terrorist conscience," will deny with indignation having made a child of sixteen take part in an attempted assassination.

At the moment of escaping from a Czarist prison, he decides to shoot any officers who might attempt to prevent his flight, but to kill himself rather than turn his revolver on an ordinary soldier. It is the same with Voinarovsky, who does not hesitate to kill men, but who confesses that he has never hunted, "finding the occupation barbarous," and who declares in his turn: "If Dubassov is accompanied by his wife, I shall not throw the bomb."

Such a degree of self-abnegation, accompanied by such profound consideration for the lives of others, allows the supposition that these fastidious assassins lived out the rebel destiny in its most contradictory form. It is possible to believe that they too, while recognizing the inevitability of violence, nevertheless admitted to themselves that it is unjustifiable. Necessary and inexcusable—that is how murder appeared to them. Mediocre minds, confronted with this terrible problem, can take refuge by ignoring one of the terms of the dilemma.

They are content, in the name of formal principles, to find all direct violence inexcusable and then to sanction that diffuse form of violence which takes place on the scale of world history. Or they will console themselves, in the name of history, with the thought that violence is necessary, and will add murder to murder, to the point of making of history nothing but a continuous violation of everything in man which protests against injustice. This defines the two aspects of contemporary nihilism, the bourgeois and the revolutionary.

But the extremists, with whom we are concerned, forgot nothing. From their earliest days they were incapable of justifying what they nevertheless found necessary, and conceived the idea of offering themselves as a justification and of replying by personal sacrifice to the question they asked themselves. For them, as for all rebels before them, murder is identified with suicide. A life is paid for by another life, and from these two sacrifices springs the promise of a value. Kaliayev, Voinarovsky, and the others believe in the equal value of human lives.

Therefore they do not value any idea above human life, though they kill for the sake of ideas. To be precise, they live on the plane of their idea. They justify it, finally, by incarnating it to the point of death. We are again confronted with a concept of rebellion which, if not religious, is at least metaphysical. Other men to come, consumed with the same devouring faith as these, will find their methods sentimental and refuse to admit that any one life is the equivalent of any other.

They will then put an abstract idea above human life, even if they call it history, to which they themselves have submitted in advance and to which they

will also decide, quite arbitrarily, to submit everyone else. The problem of rebellion will no longer be resolved by arithmetic, but by estimating probabilities. Confronted with the possibility that the idea may be realized in the future, human life can be everything or nothing. The greater the faith that the estimator places in this final realization, the less the value of human life. At the ultimate limit, it is no longer worth anything at all.

We shall have occasion to examine this limitâ—that is, the period of State terrorism and of the philosophical executioners. But meanwhile the rebels of 1905, at the frontier on which they stand united, teach us, to the sound of exploding bombs, that rebellion cannot lead, without ceasing to be rebellion, to consolation and to the comforts of dogma. Their only evident victory is to triumph at least over solitude and negation.

In the midst of a world which they deny and which rejects them, they try, man after man, like all the great-hearted ones, to reconstruct a brotherhood of man. The love they bear for one another, which brings them happiness even in the desert of a prison, which extends to the great mass of their enslaved and silent fellow men, gives the measure of their distress and of their hopes. To serve this love, they must first kill; to inaugurate the reign of innocence, they must accept a certain culpability. This contradiction will be resolved for them only at the very last moment.

Solitude and chivalry, renunciation and hope will only be surmounted by the willing acceptance of death. Already Jeliabov, who organized the attempt on Alexander II in 1881 and was arrested forty-eight hours before the murder, had asked to be executed at the same time as the real perpetrator of the attempt. "Only the cowardice of the government," he said, "could account for the erection of one gallows instead of two."

Five were erected, one of which was for the woman he loved. But Jeliabov died smiling, while Ryssakov, who had broken down during his interrogations, was dragged to the scaffold, half-mad with fear. Jeliabov did this because of a sort of guilt which he did not want to accept and from which he knew he would suffer, like Ryssakov, if he remained alone after having committed or been the cause of a murder. At the foot of the gallows, Sofia Perovskaia kissed the man she loved and her two other friends, but turned away from Ryssakov, who died solitary and damned by the new religion.

For Jeliabov, death in the midst of his comrades coincided with his justification. He who kills is guilty only if he consents to go on living or if, to remain alive, he betrays his comrades. To die, on the other hand, cancels out both the guilt and the crime itself. Thus Charlotte Corday shouts at Fouquier-Tinville: "Oh, the monster, he takes me for an assassin!"

It is the agonizing and fugitive discovery of a human value that stands halfway between innocence and guilt, between reason and irrationality, between history and eternity. At the moment of this discovery, but only then, these desperate people experience a strange feeling of peace, the peace of definitive victory. In his cell, Poli-vanov says that it would have been "easy and sweet" for him to die. Voinarovsky writes that he has conquered the fear of death. "Without a single muscle in my face twitching, without saying a word, I shall climb on the scaffold. . . .

And this will not be an act of violence perpetrated on myself, it will be the perfectly natural result of all that I have lived through." Very much later Lieutenant Schmidt will write before being shot: "My death will consummate everything, and my cause, crowned by my death, will emerge irreproachable and perfect." Kaliayev, condemned to the gallows after having stood as prosecutor before the tribunal, declares firmly: "I consider my death as a supreme protest against a world of blood and tears," and again writes: "From the moment when I found myself behind bars, I never for one moment wanted to stay alive in any way whatsoever."

His wish is granted. On May 10, at two o'clock in the morning, he walks toward the only justification he recognizes. Entirely dressed in black, without an overcoat, and wearing a felt hat, he climbs the scaffold. To Father Florinsky, who offers him the crucifix, the condemned man, turning from the figure of Christ, only answers: "I have already told you that I have finished with life and that I am prepared for death."

Yes, the ancient value lives once more, at the culmination of nihilism, at the very foot of the gallows. It is the reflection, historic on this occasion, of the "we are" which we found at the termination of our analysis of the rebel mind. It is privation and at the same time enlightened conviction. It is this that shone with such mortal radiance on the agonized countenance of Dora Brilliant at the thought of him who died for himself and for tireless friendship; it is this that drives Sazonov to suicide in prison as a protest and "to earn respect for his comrades"; and this, again, which exonerates even Nechaiev on the day when he is asked to denounce his comrades by a general, whom he knocks to the ground with a single blow. By means of this, the terrorists, while simultaneously affirming the world of men, place themselves above this world, thus demonstrating for the last time in our history that real rebellion is a creator of values.

Thanks to them, 1905 marks the highest peak of revolutionary momentum. But from then on, a decline sets in. Martyrs do not build Churches; they are the mortar, or the alibi. Then come the priests and the bigots. The revolutionaries who follow will not demand an exchange of lives. They accept the risk of death, but will also agree to preserve themselves as far as they can for the sake of serving the revolution. Thus they will accept complete culpability for themselves. Acquiescence in humiliation⁶ that is the true characteristic of twentieth-century revolutionaries, who place the revolution and the Church of man above themselves. Kaliayev proves, on the contrary, that though the revolution is a necessary means, it is not a sufficient end. In this way he elevates man instead of degrading him.

It is Kaliayev and his Russian and German comrades who, in the history of the world, really oppose Hegel,⁶ who first recognizes universal recognition as necessary and then as insufficient. Appearances did not suffice for him. When the whole world would have been willing to recognize him, a doubt would still have remained in Kaliayev's mind: he needed his own form of acquiescence, and the approbation of the whole world would not have sufficed to silence the doubt that a hundred enthusiastic acclamations give rise to in the mind of any honest man. Kaliayev doubted to the end, but this doubt did not prevent him from acting; it is for that reason that he is the purest image of rebellion.

He who accepts death, to pay for a life with a life, no matter what his negations may be, affirms, by doing so, a value that surpasses him in his aspect of an individual in the historical sense. Kaliayev dedicates himself to history until death and, at the moment of dying, places himself above history. In a certain way, it is true, he prefers himself to history. But what should his preference be? Himself, whom he kills without hesitation, or the value he incarnates and makes immortal? The answer is not difficult to guess. Kaliayev and his comrades triumphed over nihilism.

⁶ Two different species of men. One kills only once and pays with his life. The other justifies thousands of crimes and consents to be rewarded with honors.

The Path of Chigalev

But this triumph is to be short-lived: it coincides with death. Nihilism, provisionally, survives its victors. In the very bosom of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, political cynicism continues to wend its way to victory. The party leader who sends Kaliayev to his death, Azev, plays a double game and denounces the revolutionaries to the Okhrana while planning the deaths of ministers and grand dukes. The concept of provocation reinstates the "Everything is permitted," and again identifies history and absolute values.

This particular form of nihilism, after having influenced individualistic socialism, goes on to contaminate so-called scientific socialism, which appears in Russia during the 1880's.⁷ The joint legacy of Nechaiev and Marx will give birth to the totalitarian revolution of the twentieth century. While individual terrorism hunted down the last representatives of divine right, State terrorism was getting ready to destroy divine right definitively, at the very root of human society. The technique of the seizure of power for the realization of ultimate ends takes the first step toward the exemplary affirmation of these ends.

⁷ The first Social Democratic group, Plekhanov's, began in 1883.

Lenin, in fact, borrows from Tkachev, a friend and spiritual brother of Nechaiev, a concept of the seizure of power that he found "majestic" and that he himself recapitulated thus: "absolute secrecy, meticulous care in the choice of members, creation of professional revolutionaries." Tkachev, who died insane, makes the transition from nihilism to military socialism. He claimed to have created a Russian Jacobinism and yet only borrowed from the Jacobins their technique of action, since he, too, denied every principle and every virtue. An enemy of art and ethics, he reconciles the rational and the irrational only in tactics.

His aim is to achieve human equality by seizure of the power of the State. Secret organizations, revolutionary alliances, dictatorial powers for revolutionary leaders these were the themes that defined the concept, if not the realization, of "the apparatus" which was to enjoy so great and efficacious a success. As for the method itself, it is possible to form a fair idea of it when one learns that Tkachev proposed to suppress and eliminate all Russians over the age of twenty-five as incapable of assimilating the new ideas.

A really inspired method, and one that was to prevail in the techniques of the modern super-State, where the fanatical education of children is carried on in the midst of a terrorized adult population. Caesarian socialism undoubtedly condemns individual terrorism to the extent that it revives values incompatible with the domination of historic reason. But it will restore terror on the level of the State "with the creation of an ultimately deified humanity as its sole justification.

We have come full circle here, and rebellion, cut off from its real roots, unfaithful to man in having surrendered to history, now contemplates the subjection of the entire universe. It is at this point that the era of Chigalevism begins "proclaimed, in *The Possessed*, by Verkhovensky, the nihilist who claims the right to choose dishonor. His is an unhappy and implacable mind⁸ and he chooses the will to power, which, in fact, alone is capable of reigning over a history that has no other significance but itself. Chigalev, the philanthropist, is his guarantor; love of mankind will henceforth justify the enslavement of man.

⁸ "He represented himself as man after his fashion, and then he gave up his idea."

Possessed by the idea of equality,⁹ Chigalev, after long consideration, arrived at the despairing conclusion that only one system is possible even though it is a system of despair. "Beginning with the premise of unlimited freedom, I arrive at unlimited despotism." Complete freedom, which is the negation of everything, can only exist and justify itself by the creation of new values identified with the entire human race. If the creation of these values is postponed, humanity will tear itself to pieces. The shortest route to these new standards passes by way of total dictatorship. "One tenth of humanity will have the right to individuality and will exercise unlimited authority over the other nine tenths.

The latter will lose their individuality and will become like a flock of sheep; compelled to passive obedience, they will be led back to original innocence and,

so to speak, to the primitive paradise, where, nevertheless, they must work." It is the government by philosophers of which the Utopians dream; philosophers of this type, quite simply, believe in nothing. The kingdom has come, but it negates real rebellion, and is only concerned with the reign of "the Christs of violence," to use the expression of an enthusiastic writer extolling the life and death of Ravachol. "The pope on high," says Verkhovensky bitterly, "with us around him, and beneath us Chigalevism."

9 "Slander and assassination in extreme cases, but especially equality."

The totalitarian theocrats of the twentieth century and State terrorism are thus announced. The new aristocracy and the grand inquisitors reign today, by making use of the rebellion of the oppressed, over one part of our history. Their reign is cruel, but they excuse their cruelty, like the Satan of the romantics, by claiming that it is hard for them to bear. "We reserve desire and suffering for ourselves; for the slaves there is Chigalevism." A new and somewhat hideous race of martyrs is now born.

Their martyrdom consists in consenting to inflict suffering on others; they become the slaves of their own domination. For man to become god, the victim must abase himself to the point of becoming the executioner. That is why both victim and executioner are equally despairing. Neither slavery nor power will any longer coincide with happiness; the masters will be morose and the slaves sullen. Saint-Just was right: it is a terrible thing to torment the people.

But how can one avoid tormenting men if one has decided to make them gods? Just as Kirilov, who kills himself in order to become God, accepts seeing his suicide made use of by Verkhovensky's "conspiracy," so man's deification by man breaks the bounds which rebellion, nevertheless, reveals, and thereby irrevocably commits itself to the labyrinth of tactics and terror from which history has not yet emerged.

The end