

## Introduction: The Language of Popular Revolution

We loved those dissonances, those roars, those ringing sounds, those unexpected transitions when we heard them from an orchestra. But if we really loved them, rather than simply letting them tickle our senses while we sat in a fashionable theater after dinner, then we must hear and love these sounds now, when they are pouring out from the orchestra of the world. . . . With your whole body, your whole heart, your whole mind—hear the Revolution.

ALEKSANDR BLOK, 9 January 1918

**M**odern revolutions are exceptionally loquacious events. Words fill public spaces—in newspapers, leaflets, proclamations, letters, posters, and an endless stream of talk—as individuals and groups battle over who should hold power (at the national center, but also in more intimate localities of village, town, neighborhood, and workplace), over who has right on his side, and over how power should be used. Physical action, including force and violence, is certainly essential to struggles for power. But words give these actions shape and substance. Words inspire, encouraging large numbers of people to think that it is important and worth the effort (even vital) to take part in meetings, participate in strikes or demonstrations, choose among new claimants to political leadership, draft various appeals, and even write personally to leading public figures. And words beget words, as individuals and groups deploy new and old political languages and endeavor to make use of words and phrases—especially those made more potent by their association with the revolution—to express their own thoughts and needs, which were until then only half articulated.

The collapse of the tsarist autocracy in Russia in late February 1917 opened a verbal Pandora's box. The American journalist John Reed, who observed the revolution firsthand, was amazed by all "the Talk, beside which Carlyle's 'flood of French speech' was a mere trickle"; by the thousands pouring out of factories into courtyards and streets to listen to "anybody, whatever they had to say, as long as they would talk"; by the ubiquitous and endless meetings and lectures; and by "the spurting up of impromptu debate, everywhere."<sup>1</sup> The editors of the daily newspaper *Russkie vedomosti* (Russian news), writing in September 1917, found words to be the only certainty in 1917: "There is no authority, no legality, and no effective political action in Russia, but there is an abundance of political words."<sup>2</sup> These gatherings for talk ranged from elaborate assemblies of delegates from around the country to meetings in factories and villages and among soldiers to spontaneous discussions in public squares, on street corners, in trams and trains, in homes, and at work. And all this talk was echoed—and roused—by printed words. Newspapers, pamphlets, leaflets, posters, and other publications poured off the presses and filled public and private spaces. Meetings produced a growing mountain of resolutions, appeals, petitions, and instructions. Huge numbers of individuals, too, including many barely literate villagers and workers, put pen or pencil to paper or sat down to type (sometimes writing on mere scraps, for this was all that was available or could be spared) to address letters to institutions and individuals with power or, by asking newspapers to print their letters, to speak to various publics or to the whole nation.

The texts in this collection represent only fragments of the whole body of such writing (see Note on the Documents). They have been chosen, however, to convey some sense of the richness and complexity of the Russian revolution of 1917: not just as a struggle between competing political parties and organizations over power and ideology, but as a human story to be understood from the perspectives of individuals—in particular, relatively unprivileged Russians. In other words, this book is intended as a window onto what the revolution *meant* to ordinary Russians—whose experiences and motivations gave living meaning to the abstractions (democracy, freedom, class polarization, radicalization, socialism) with which we normally describe the history of this landmark event—rather than as another account of what *happened*. Of course, even the best sampling of popular voices can only record what was made public. We do not hear the voices of people who felt deeply alienated from the revolution or voices speaking of private and personal meanings of the revolution. We also hear men more than

women. Still, the texts say a great deal about many of the ideas, values, and desires that gave meaning to the revolution. And though these texts concern mainly politics and social relationships, they speak of these as concerning everything from the most tangible and immediate needs to the most abstract and even philosophical questions.

These texts represent the public voices of people identifying themselves as workers, peasants, or soldiers—categories with which almost all lower-class<sup>3</sup> Russians identified themselves. We see here various types of texts: collective resolutions and appeals from meetings of workers, soldiers, or peasants (ranging from mass assemblies to meetings of committees of representatives to informal gatherings of individuals deciding to write together), letters from individuals, and poetry written by self-taught lower-class authors. These texts were sent either to institutions and individuals in authority or addressed, through the press, to particular social groups or to the whole country. Some documents were mere lists of demands. Many, though, were more fervent, seeking to convince, cajole, beg, and berate those they addressed. Poetry reached even further in trying to voice argument and emotion. Through verse, relatively untutored writers sought to express, in a richer language than formal or declamatory or epistolary prose allowed, their understanding and feelings about the revolution.

The approach to understanding the revolution that has shaped this collection owes much to the directions other scholars have taken in exploring the Russian revolution and its meaning. In the years since these upheavals dramatically changed the shape of modern world history, historians have debated alternative explanations of the main events: the fall of the autocracy, the social conflicts during the months between February and October, the role of different political parties, the Bolsheviks' rise to power. For many years, most of this work sought answers in the study of political leaders and institutions, and in the competing ideologies and personalities of key figures. By the 1960s, however, attention had begun to shift dramatically toward sustained investigations of the movements and motivations of social classes. Soviet historiography, of course, had always taken seriously this social history of the revolution—but Marxist and Leninist dogmas forced a rigid conformity to a certain interpretive model, though Soviet historiography too began to explore alternative formulations in the 1960s and 1970s. These new social historical studies, which proliferated in the 1970s and 1980s, looked beneath the political surface to explore the actions and aspirations of workers, soldiers, and peasants. The major argument to result from this work was important and influential:

“A deep and deepening social polarization between the top and bottom of Russian society undermined the Provisional Government by preventing the consolidation of a political consensus.”<sup>4</sup> This discontent, it was shown, coalesced around the idea of political and social power belonging to lower-class groups alone, an idea that only the Bolsheviks, among the major political parties, were willing to support and put into action.<sup>5</sup>

More recently, influenced in part by wider trends in history and other disciplines, historians of Russia have begun to look more closely and critically at the deeper *cultural* processes in which ideas are formed and articulated: at how words, images, symbols, rituals, myths, and other discursive forms shape the world people see and the actions they take in it. Older social historical writing about the revolution tended to treat language not as itself an object of analysis but as a reflection of largely rational responses to tangible social, economic, and political conditions and possibilities. Thus, questions about whether workers (for example) were skilled or unskilled, young or old, male or female, or employed in small shops or large factories were seen as far more essential to understanding and explaining workers’ mental worlds than were questions about how cultural discourses (language, symbols, myths, and so on) shaped the ways the material world was understood, or structured the ways in which individuals and groups envisioned the possible.<sup>6</sup>

By comparison with the various innovative cultural histories of the French Revolution, the story of 1917 in Russia still needs to be told with greater attention to the vital complexities of language, culture, and meaning. To be sure, the language of the Russian revolution has not been ignored. As early as the 1920s, a Soviet linguist examined the language of 1917 and the years following, though his focus was on structures—vocabulary and usage—rather than on the formation of meaning.<sup>7</sup> Most important, social historians of the role of lower-class groups in the revolution (especially workers) often carefully examined resolutions, strike demands, and instructions to deputies, though mainly to document the patterns of political and social radicalization and the nature of popular discontent and demands.<sup>8</sup> Still, recent reviews of writing on 1917 have justifiably noted the failure of existing work to pay adequate attention to “the discursive construction of the world of the workers, as well as that of peasants, soldiers, or the ‘bourgeoisie,’”<sup>9</sup> and the “depressingly unadventurous” approaches that have dominated writing on the revolution.<sup>10</sup> It is high time, they argue, to take up the intellectual challenge of the “linguis-

tic turn” in the humanities, which has resulted in “a deepening recognition of the ways in which ‘reality’ is produced through language.”<sup>11</sup> Some of the most recent work on the revolution has begun to answer this challenge. Attention to language (and, increasingly, to ritual and symbol) has become more systematic, and historians have become more sensitive to the complexities of the meanings that discourse shapes and conveys. In particular, in some recent articles, a few authors have focused directly on how various groups in 1917 made use of vocabularies of democracy, class, state power, citizenship, and socialism.<sup>12</sup>

### Voices

The texts collected here have been chosen to take readers deeper into this discursive world of the revolution, to encourage readers to ponder the uses and meanings of words and what they reveal about what the revolution signified to the millions of ordinary Russians who experienced it and, in various ways, took part in making it. But we must be honest about the obstacles to such knowledge and recognize the complexity of these voices. Whose voices were these? This is not entirely obvious. We know that these texts were written by people who identified themselves as workers, soldiers, and peasants. But what did this mean? Partly, it can be taken at face value. Many of these authors are identifiable as urban wage laborers, rural villagers, or rank-and-file soldiers who had been drafted from the lower classes. The style and manner of writing in most of these texts provide further evidence of a lack of the education enjoyed by more privileged Russians: awkward use of formal discourse, incorrect word use, corrupted expressions, and odd mixtures of dramatic rhetoric, official language, and popular slang.<sup>13</sup> Some writers clearly had more ability than others. These facts and distinctions only begin to point to the complexity of the answer to the question of whose voices these were.

Self-descriptions could mask a great deal. After all, people’s reasons, especially in 1917, for saying that they were workers or soldiers or peasants were as much political as social. For many Russians, these groups defined the *narod*, the common people who were the foundation of the nation, the subalterns who had most suffered from Russia’s inequalities and lack of freedom, and thus the people who were the essential reason and the motive force for democracy in Russia. Thus, that a common laborer, a skilled lathe operator, or a salesclerk might call himself simply a “worker,” or that a “soldier” might be either

a raw peasant recruit or a junior officer who had once been a clerk or a literate proletarian was less an effort to disguise “real” identities than to express an important part of these identities. Still, those more specific identities remained present and important. Even more subtly, broad self-identifications obscured important differences within groups: of gender, age, education, social experience, and ethnicity, not to mention personality.

Collectively written texts were especially likely to blur particularities. We know very little about the actual authors of such texts. Sometimes their names are mentioned. Sometimes we know that they were, for example, junior officers, relatively experienced socialist workers, or peasants who had once lived in the city. Most often, their identities and experiences are obscured behind the screen of collective representation. No less important, we cannot see the complex process of influence and discussion that produced the final text—the efforts by activists to have their ideas prevail, the arguments and exchanges of ideas, the borrowing from newspapers or other texts that lay at hand.

As this suggests, the question of whose voices these were is not just a matter of who wrote the texts or even of who discussed and approved them. More distant voices were present as well. Even when we know that it was a common worker or peasant writing, we must be wary about imagining that finally we have found direct and pure expressions of “authentic” popular mentalities, ideas, and values that are somehow separate from the wider political and cultural world. It had been a long time since the Russian lower classes could be said to have lived in cultural isolation. Especially after the middle of the nineteenth century, ordinary Russians were increasingly exposed to formal and informal education and to a growing flood of magazines, newspapers, and books, including a large body of publications directed at common readers. In 1917, reading, especially of newspapers, was as much a part of the everyday life of the revolution as meetings, demonstrations, and strikes. Reading the press, one worker told the leaders of the Soviet in Petrograd, was no less essential to the common people in 1917 than bread itself.<sup>14</sup> And the influence of the press and other publications on the way workers wrote and even spoke in 1917 was profound. Many petitions and resolutions repeated standard phrases found in the speeches and newspapers of the day or even, as if adapting a template, based their texts on others that had appeared in the press or were circulating among workers, soldiers, and peasants. Indeed, those attending meetings were often simply asked to endorse a resolution adopted by a party or another organization and to send this on in their name.<sup>15</sup>

Most texts, though they did not conform so closely to models, still reveal the influence of, and deliberate efforts to make use of, various authoritative vocabularies (of the Soviet or the Provisional Government, of political leaders and parties, and especially of the press and books).<sup>16</sup> Like other expressions of lower-class culture—indeed, to an even greater degree in such deliberately public expressions, meant for others to understand—these resolutions, appeals, and letters took form through a complex intellectual interchange across social boundaries. The image of the revolution simply lifting the lid off a stifled society and allowing the authentic voices of the people to be heard may have a certain allure for us in our attempts to understand the past, but this image leads us to ignore a great deal of dialogue and interaction—an exchange of voices that was more intense than ever during the revolution.

This said, the social experience of these authors also mattered: it made a difference in how they viewed and described the world around them, how they understood and used language and ideas. Relative inequality and powerlessness affected the meanings and uses of words and ideas, as did material need, fear of hunger, or the looming threat of death or mutilation at the front. In translating for their own use the bookish language of revolutionary politics—including many literally foreign terms, like “democracy,” “republic,” “constitution,” “revolution,” “socialism,” and “bourgeoisie”—people sifted new words together with older ideals; social experiences and needs with new possibilities; and a desire to “speak one’s heart” with a desire to make oneself heard and understood by others. At the same time, to complicate all this still more, the revolution magnified the normal instabilities and ambiguities of language. In the use of language, as in much else, revolutions are luxuriant, even promiscuous, times. They are times of experimentation and daring in which normal routines, orderly hierarchies and relationships, established boundaries and restraints, and even familiar meanings of things are unhitched and destabilized. The intellectual ferment and disorder of revolutionary Russia made these processes of intellectual influence, borrowing, interpretation, and appropriation all the more intense.

A complex subjectivity was at work when lower-class Russians crafted their letters and resolutions: a process of deciding to write, choosing words, articulating a style, and trying to voice ideas that reflected diverse influences and interpretations and served varied purposes. For all the inherent limitations of these documents—the voices we do not hear, the speakers’ deliberate appropriation of discursive

styles that were not their own—the results are astonishing in their richness. At this momentous and trying time, huge numbers of common people were determined to give voice to their needs, values, and ideas—and to their feelings. Though elusive and difficult to interpret, emotion was central to the construction of meaning and argument in 1917. The February revolution evoked exceptionally high emotion, even jubilant and euphoric expectations of dramatic transformation. Later, as many grew disappointed, various combinations of frustration, anger, and despair complicated the emotional terrain of revolutionary discourse. Emotion nevertheless remained central to the way people experienced the revolution.<sup>17</sup> When words were spoken aloud, feeling could be expressed through tone of voice, pace of delivery, and gestures. On paper, style conveyed mood and tone. The emotional style of these texts varied partly according to their form and purpose, but the tendency toward moral fervor and strong emotion was pervasive, and no less essential than form and purpose to understanding the revolution as human experience.

### Freedom: Space and Light

Following the February events, freedom was the watchword of the revolution. The first act of the new government (and, it would turn out, its main practical achievement) was the promulgation of fundamental civil liberties—freedom of speech, assembly, and the press, the end of legal restrictions based on religion, nationality, and class, the abolition of the old police institutions, and amnesty for political prisoners. For diverse social and political groups, the whole meaning of the February revolution was entwined with the notion and the vocabulary of freedom—of the end of “tyranny” and of the opening up of vast new fields of possibility for all citizens. Ordinary Russians (after initial anxiety, especially among peasants, about how they could survive “without a tsar”)<sup>18</sup> were drawn strongly to the language of freedom. More than any other term, “freedom” seemed to capture people’s thoughts and feelings about what the end of the old order could mean. The collapse of tsarist autocracy and the promulgation of civil rights and freedoms by the Provisional Government was treated as a mythic, even mystical, time: as emancipation from slavery bought with blood, as redemption for generations of suffering, as the promise of “happiness” and a “great future,” as a “sacred” moment of “Resurrection” and the source of “infinite feelings” and “Great Joy” (see, for example, Documents 1, 4, 21, 26, 38, 45, 51).<sup>19</sup> In later months, disappointment

tended to replace this early euphoria about freedom. But the emotional tone remained high; then, however, it was expressed more in bitter anger and even hatred against those who had “betrayed,” even “crucified,” freedom (Documents 26, 74, 108, 113).

What was freedom exactly? How was it defined substantively by lower-class Russians? In part, like the widespread image of broken chains, “freedom” represented a negation of a long history of subjugation, lack of rights, and repression. No more, it was said, would workers or peasants or soldiers be beaten or mistreated, denied the right to freely voice their needs and to struggle for them. As many historians of 1917 have argued, for large numbers of lower-class Russians freedom meant being left alone to conduct their lives according to their own volition. In other words, freedom meant “liberty”—in the sense conveyed especially by the Russian word *volia*, which simultaneously connoted “will,” notably popular will, and a lack of restrictions or constraints. Concretely, such a vision of freedom meant, for example, that forest guards should no longer fine and abuse peasants for hunting, collecting berries, or grazing their animals in the wood (Document 38). Taken to the extreme, the implication was that there should be no external authority at all. The peasant-worker and former soldier A. Zemskov, for example, writing in late March, argued that “freedom and state order are incompatible,” for “every state authority (even in democratic states) is founded on coercing its own subjects.” The influence of anarchist ideology would seem strong here, though Zemskov explicitly rejected the anarchist label. And to be sure, his arguments are more practical and immediate than theoretical. Where is freedom, he asked, when “millions of voiceless slaves are still being led like sheep to the cannons and the machine guns and the officer is still treating the slave as if he were a mere thing,” when those who refuse to participate in this senseless and discriminatory slaughter are still punished as before, when force is still used against those who oppose the new order (whether in the name of further political or social progress or in an attempt to return to the past)? Class resentment and distrust as much as anti-authoritarian theory seem to have motivated Zemskov’s constant criticisms of the “bourgeois” intellectuals (both liberal and socialist) who had become the new rulers, and of the “modern economic order and modern culture” that shackled ordinary workers. What do the people most want, he asked, what is the people’s idea of freedom? It is for all elites—“the noble and the merchant and the scholar and the poet and the journalist and the lawyer and the priest”—to “climb off their back” (Document 6).

By the summer of 1917, many lower-class Russians felt not only that this freedom had not been realized but that the freedoms won in February were being eroded and stolen by the same elites (indeed, Zemskov's mixed list of elites was a fairly accurate portrait of the composition of the Provisional Government) and that repression and tyranny were returning. Resolutions and letters chastised the new rulers for antibourgeois acts of restoration: for the death penalty, for harsh punishments for political crimes, for restrictions on meetings, and for censorship (Documents 62, 63, 64, 66). Similarly, after the October revolution, the Bolsheviks' efforts to secure their new authority with a "proletarian dictatorship" led to often passionate cries of outrage at the "destruction and desecration" of the freedoms "we fought and died for" (Documents 106, 114).

To describe popular ideas about freedom in a purely negative way, however—as the absence of external authority—obscures a great deal of thinking about the positive meanings of freedom. First, it is clear that lower-class Russians could and did view freedom as an abstract principle, as an absolute good (though this ethic, as will be seen, could exist side by side with its contradictions). The tendency to describe civil liberties formulaically—"freedom of speech, the press, assembly, unions, and strikes and the inviolability of the person" (Documents 40, 126) or as "liberty, equality, and fraternity" (Documents 37, 42, 118)—suggests not just mimicry of an established language of rights, but a belief that these liberties had a fixed and external status, that they existed already as matters of principle. Sometimes this was explicit, as in talk about "the rights of man" or the "absolute principle" of a free press (Document 104).<sup>20</sup> Indeed, for many, freedom was a moral achievement, a mark of dignity and honor: freedom meant that Russians could now "unbend [their] shoulders" (Document 5) and "stand proud and tall" (Document 3).

Most often, the principled and moral nature of freedom was asserted when irresponsible and egoistic uses of liberty were criticized. Soon after February, in much of the nonleftist press, one began to hear a steady critique of lower-class Russians for what was said to be their willful and irresponsible intoxication with liberty (as in the article by V. Shulgín that was the subject of protest in Document 29) or their use of freedom to advance only their own narrow material interests. In response, in many public appeals and resolutions lower-class Russians sought to refute these claims or at least (for they often had to admit that others acted in just such a way) to assert their own readiness to

"sacrifice personal interests" for the sake of freedom, to endure, for example, harsh working conditions and low wages in the factories, or, at the front, suffering and even death, in order to support the new free order and ensure the victory against the Germans that would preserve freedom (Documents 13, 23, 45). Numerous appeals in 1917 criticized other workers, soldiers, or peasants who, it was said, viewed freedom as a time of wild liberty (*volia*) and arbitrary willfulness (*proizvol*) [see Document 72 and note] when there were "no authorities" and people could do what they liked and take what they could: when, for example, they could engage in unrestricted woodcutting in the forests, ignore officers in the army, beat up anyone they didn't like, refuse to work in a regular manner, and get drunk constantly.<sup>21</sup> This was not real freedom, insisted the more "conscious" peasants, soldiers, and workers. Real freedom, as members of an elected soldiers' committee (clearly frustrated by the behavior of their constituents) insisted in a long and rambling appeal to rank-and-file soldiers, required order, responsibility, a sense of duty, and moral self-discipline (Document 77). Real freedom called for sacrifice of personal material interest and self-restraint to curb the willful exercise of liberty (amoral and self-serving *volia*), a self-control that was said to be a matter not just of necessity and survival<sup>22</sup> but of "duty," "honor," "morality," and respect for others.

Other principles supported such arguments that freedom must be grounded in responsibility and restraint. Particularly common were ideas about responsibility before the nation and the people. In numerous resolutions, appeals, and letters, lower-class Russians wrote of freedom as the salvation of the nation as a whole—of Russia, or "Rus" (the emotionally resonant ancient name of the country and its people, especially its Orthodox core), or even "Holy Rus." Repeatedly, writers from the lower classes spoke of the principle of devotion to the *narod* (nation, in the broad sense of the whole Russian people), *rodina* (homeland, land of birth and origin, hence often translated as "motherland"), or *otechestvo* (fatherland). For the sake of this "new free Russia," for the country's "renewal," the selfish pursuit of partisan and particularistic interests must not be allowed to dominate people's behavior or consciousness. In the name of the freedom of the nation, various groups were criticized for forgetting the common good—fellow workers or soldiers, leftist political parties (especially the Bolsheviks), the "bourgeoisie," or "counterrevolutionaries" (Documents 25, 69, 74, 77, 84, 108). It is telling that soldiers offered such public re-

bukes especially often. In serving their country, soldiers were repeatedly told that they were fighting for Russia's freedom, an idealization of their role that they seemed inclined, at least for a time, to believe.<sup>23</sup> Competing (and often combining ambiguously) with this embracing ideal of the "nation" as defining responsible limits to freedom was the more restricted principle of "the people"—the *narod*, a Russian word that combined the meanings of nation and common people. In 1917, though, the emphasis was most often on the common people, or even on the common people *as* the nation. Idealism about the unity of "the people" was rife in the aftermath of the February revolution. In appeals and letters, common people wrote with an almost mystical admiration of the "spontaneous" unity of the *narod*, of how the people were "so closely unified [*druzhu*] and unanimous that no one bothered to sort out who was walking shoulder to shoulder" (Document 26). Abuses of freedom in the pursuit of narrow social or party interests were regularly criticized as violating the high principle of unity of the people. Amid the conflicts and crises of the spring and summer, appeals often spoke of the need for unity among all the "political parties of the proletariat" (Document 54), of devotion to "the interests of the [working] class as a whole," as opposed to the interests of "factions and sects" (Document 57), of the need for disciplined unity around the soldiers' committees and other popular organizations (Document 77), and especially of obedience to the representative will of the common people as expressed in the soviets (Documents 54, 55, 70). Increasingly, organized groups of workers and soldiers reproached their fellows for lacking this spirit of "solidarity" and worried about the spread, dangerous to true freedom, of indiscipline and disorder among the people (Documents 81, 84).

In giving a positive connotation to freedom, lower-class Russians also linked it to a very concrete discourse about social needs and social good. As letters and resolutions stated repeatedly, now that the people were free, they needed food, land, education, and peace (though whether military victory was a precondition for peace was a matter of heated dispute, especially in the early months). More simply, freedom should bring—in the words and phrases used constantly in these texts—"happiness," "joy," "a new life," a "good life." As one group of soldiers (describing themselves as "all peasant farmers, workers, or employees") wrote in early April, freedom must allow "self-betterment" so that "labor" would become not a "shameful and heavy yoke," but something "for the joy and happiness of man" (Document 27). The Petrograd factory worker Maria Kutsko hoped that freedom

for women to work outside the home would afford the opportunity to make "this life more beautiful, pure and bright for ourselves, for our children, and for the whole working class" (Document 20). For a group of peasants in Viatka province, "liberty" (*volia*) meant free education for their children and an end to poverty and dependency ("we are sick and tired of living in debt and slavery"). In an even more plain-spoken but still vivid and complex formulation, "liberty" was defined as "space and light" (Document 40). In peasants' writing, the frequent linkage of "land" and "liberty"—an echo of the famous phrase *zemlia i volia*, which had a long history in peasant thought and in Russian populism—was a terse and resonant expression of an assumed interdependency: without land there could be no liberty; without liberty there could be no land (Document 48). In other words, more land, peasants were certain, would ensure an end to the poverty that prevented them from exercising their own will (*volia*), that blocked the path to a better life; as long as the rich and the powerful controlled the lives of peasants, their desire for land would remain an impotent dream.

As these arguments may suggest, freedom was often viewed in socially specific (some would say parochial) ways, as a good that not all people merited, as a good that must benefit "the people" rather than the rich or the "bourgeoisie." This assumption is illustrated by attitudes toward freedom of the press. Most lower-class Russians, it would seem, did not view press freedom as an "absolute principle," but rather as one that must take account of the interests of the lower classes and the revolution. Thus, already in March and April, workers were beginning to complain about the "foul slander" and lies directed against them in the "bourgeois press" and to echo the proposals of leftist parties for "boycotts" and even closures of "bourgeois" newspapers (Documents 7, 8, 9, 10). By the fall, calls for class censorship had become much more common, especially among urban workers. Some workers and soldiers, like most moderate socialist intellectuals, insisted that true freedom of the press must recognize the rights of even disagreeable and hostile voices (Documents 69, 70), but many more people evidently believed that true freedom necessitated silencing the voices of those who opposed the struggles and demands of workers, soldiers, and peasants and thus threatened the "freedoms" won through the revolution. After the July Days, when a number of leftist (mainly Bolshevik) papers were closed down, it was not unusual to hear demands that combined, in a single sentence, demands for "restoration" of "freedom of the press" and for the "banning of

the counterrevolutionary press" (Documents 66, 71, 87). These complaints against the bourgeois press often struck a moral note, though mixed with political ideas and class hostilities. Freedom of the press, it was often implied, should not include the right to "slander" the people. Even when demands for censorship along class lines were not made, criticisms of censorship by the Provisional Government typically defined press freedom in social terms: as an "inalienable right of the people," as an essential condition of their "struggle for social liberation" and cultural "rebirth" (Document 62). This grounding of freedom in practical and social argument was especially vivid in antiwar letters that began to appear more and more frequently by the summer of 1917. Repeatedly, soldiers and others asked what good freedom was to them if they were dead (Document 67)—an argument quite unlike the declarations, so common in the early spring, that the people were ready to fight to the death for freedom. Deep distrust of social and political elites was a powerful solvent breaking down heroic dedication to freedom in the abstract.

### Political Power: Order and Justice

State power, the formal objective of revolutionary change, was viewed in a similar light. The importance of political power in the minds of a large number of lower-class Russians is evident even superficially in the huge numbers of letters, petitions, appeals, and resolutions directed at individuals and institutions in power. Some of these were individual appeals for help—for intervention in local matters such as the firing of a hated foreman or the expulsion of a corrupt official. Most, however, were general appeals—to the Provisional Government and its leaders, and especially to the soviets, as representatives of the people's interests before the government, to hear the voice of the people and adopt a correct course: to preserve freedom; to promote justice; to suppress counterrevolution; to ensure that people had food, land, peace, and education; and, in general, to ensure the people's "happiness" and secure a "new" and "good" life for the people. By midsummer, as disappointment with the results of the revolution and with the actions of the Provisional Government grew, people began to focus more and more attention on state power itself as holding the answer to their needs and desires. Questions about who should control the government, what policies should be adopted, and what sort of political order should be established by the coming Constituent Assembly became regular topics of discussion.

Strong and unified political authority was for most ordinary Russians a necessity (though there were dissenting voices). For some, this meant the unity of the Provisional Government and the soviets (especially as represented by the Petrograd Soviet and then by the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of Soviets), but for many, and increasingly, this meant "all power to the soviets." Again and again, authors of petitions and resolutions and letters spoke of the necessity for "firm authority" (*tverdaia vlast'*—one of the most ubiquitous phrases in these texts—e.g., Documents 17, 92, 95), for "unitary authority" (*edinaia vlast'*—Document 65), for a state possessing the "necessary fullness of power" (Documents 15, 41). Demands for soviet power were very often framed by this desire for a strong and unified political authority in the country. "Enough talk," it was said; the time had come for a "strong democratic government."<sup>24</sup>

The political-cultural context for these complaints should be kept in mind. After so many years of struggling against autocratic monarchy in Russia, which had viewed government as a paternalistic and authoritarian power responsible for the totality of the nation's life, the liberals who led the Provisional Government de-emphasized the state as the key force in transforming the country and placed their confidence instead in the workings of an active citizenry behaving responsibly in a society based on law. Besides, until new national elections established a properly elected government, their leadership of the state was legally only "provisional," and therefore they felt that they must exercise restraint. Meanwhile, the leaders of the Petrograd Soviet hesitated to exceed what they considered their own limited authority as the representatives only of particular social classes, not of the whole nation.

The idealization of strong state power tended very often to be personalized in the desire for strong and good leaders. Just as many lower-class Russians had once looked to the tsar to care for his people "like a father" (Document 3), many now articulated a new revolutionary "cult of leaders."<sup>25</sup> Numerous appeals and letters addressed various "freedom fighters," Soviet leaders, and socialist ministers—especially Aleksandr Kerensky, the most popular leader in the first months after February—as trusted leaders (*vozhd'i*) and even as saviors who would bring the people happiness: "You are our friends you are our saviors and we trust you and our hope is in you for the salvation of the working population of Russia and our confidence is in you" (Document 94). "Let all the socialist ministers you lead remain at their posts," a telegram to Kerensky read; "be brave and steadfast, be merciless and



stern with enemies of the people—only you can save Russia and lead her out into the light” (Document 99). This inclination to personalize political authority has been explained most often as the persistence of “a monarchic mentality,” an echo of the “traditional authoritarian-patriarchal culture.”<sup>26</sup> More was involved here, however, than simply the persistence of authoritarian tradition or the belief in strong power for its own sake. Strong power, especially when personalized, was understood, like freedom, as a source of justice, as a means to ensure the coming (in words often heard here) of salvation, truth, freedom, and fraternity.<sup>27</sup>

Ideas about strong power were entwined with beliefs about how this power should be used and, no less important, whom it should serve. In part, the desire was for resolute authority to restore order to the country: to suppress banditry and crime, to unite people in a common purpose, and, especially, to revive the collapsing economy. The impotence of the existing government was a constant cause of complaint. And few hesitated to endorse the need for “merciless” measures, “cruelty to enemies” (*zhestokost' k vragam*), and “dictatorship” to ensure such order (Documents 63, 84, 98).<sup>28</sup> Sometimes, lower-class Russians felt that this dictatorial authority needed to be directed against indiscipline among the people themselves—“who don't recognize discipline that isn't welded together with bare knuckles and an iron fist” (Document 92)—and against enemies of the revolution and of Russia on the Left: “to put down strikes by force and get the defense factories going; . . . to introduce iron discipline into the army by force,” to arrest and punish the Bolsheviks (Documents 91, 98).

Most often such strong or even dictatorial authority was classed as a “democratic” power—in other words, one that served the interests of the poor against the rich. The country, it was said, needed a “firm and democratic authority” that “express[ed] the people's will” (Documents 53, 87). Sometimes, appeals for political intervention on behalf of the poor and the subordinate were quite specific and personal. Workers, peasants, and soldiers repeatedly turned to the government, and especially to the Soviet in Petrograd, the “democratic” authority, to act as their advocate in local social conflicts: a railroad worker in the Urals wanted the Petrograd Soviet to “take measures” against a supervisor (Document 12), a peasant in Novgorod Province wanted the Soviet Executive Committee to force the local chief physician out of office (Document 43), and peasants in Poltava Province denounced the local priest and the peasant elder heading the *volost* commune and asked the Soviet authorities to “take measures” against them (Docu-

ment 44). Most often, appeals for strong democratic power more broadly sought “dictatorship aimed against the counterrevolutionary bourgeoisie” (Document 63). This was far from being a vague abstraction or mere slogan. Most writers were quite specific about what they meant in practice: the government should establish a bread monopoly to prevent hunger, should distribute land to the poor, introduce “control” (democratic supervision) over management in industry, control prices, confiscate clothing and shoes from the rich, expropriate “superprofits,” and suppress the bourgeois press, and ultimately should create a strong government “founded on and responsible to the popular masses” (Documents 66, 87, 126).<sup>29</sup> The language of “socialism” in 1917, though less widespread than that of “democracy” or “freedom,” encompassed similar meanings. “Socialism” was a term of exclusion: a vision of political authority by and for the common people. Socialism, it was argued, cannot be reached through a bourgeois republic but only through the power of the workers themselves (Document 6); “socialist” papers are those which address themselves to and serve the interests of the poor (Document 50); socialism means “popular sovereignty” (Document 113). At the same time, socialism was an embodiment of the ideal of a just state. “The socialists are trying to win equality and brotherhood on earth,” a group of peasants wrote the Petrograd Soviet in April, “and that's why they are our comrades” (Document 40).

### Class: Enemies and Friends

Freedom and power both, as should be evident, were often understood in the light of a view of the social and political world as divided between enemies and friends, between others and oneself. Popular distrust and even hatred of the rich and powerful already had a long history by 1917, nurtured by quite tangible social and political inequalities, as well as by decades of radical and socialist agitation and teaching. In 1917, as before, this popular language of class was often much more flexible than the precise notions about social structure that Marxist activists had in mind when speaking of the “class enemy.” Although that class designation was sometimes used in a specifically Marxist sense to identify the social group whose material interests as owners of the means of production put them in direct material conflict with the interests of the propertyless proletariat, more often “class enemy” was a less precise and more flexible designation of otherness: a sweeping social pejorative for all who were richer or more powerful,

a political label criticizing any who opposed the interests of the common people, a moral label rebuking elites for their self-interestedness and egoism.<sup>30</sup> The boundaries in this vocabulary of class were placed differently and were often vague and changeable, but the language of “us” and “others” was pervasive.

Popular talk of “enemies” resumed quite soon after the initial unifying euphoria of the February revolution. In late March, for example, a group of Petrograd workers protested against the “slander that is coming out of our enemies’ camp,” which was attempting to “sow enmity” between workers and soldiers (Document 7). Here and elsewhere, we find in these texts a dualistic vocabulary of enemies and traitors on the one side and friends, comrades, and brothers on the other. The boundaries between sides, however, were far from stable. Different groups could be and were branded as enemies or traitors: the “rich, the kulaks, and the bourgeois” who benefited from the war (Document 40), but also socialists who threatened the people’s freedom by undermining unity or the effort against the Germans (Documents 17, 26). When used to condemn the “bourgeoisie,” this term might include, in those early months, the “upper classes,” the rich, the intelligentsia (including the “bourgeois-socialist intelligentsia”), the nonsocialist press, or simply anyone who was not on the side of the people (Documents 6, 8, 50). Quite often, the identification of enemies was concrete and even personal, as when letters were written denouncing specific individuals (officials, priests, village elders, foremen, officers, and so forth) as bloodsuckers, Black Hundreds, or enemies (Documents 12, 43, 44, 47).

By late summer, as political and social relations became more polarized, this language of difference and opposition, of oppression and subordination, grew even more pervasive and insistent. “Where are the results of the blood and of the lives of our brothers who fell in the revolution? Where is the new life, that heavenly, joyous, fiery-red bird that flew so temptingly over our country and then hid—as if to trick us?” (Document 57). Such questions were typical and often heard, though by late summer the assumption that appeals of this sort might inspire a positive response had been largely replaced by disillusioned and angry accusations of lies and betrayal. Repeatedly, letters and appeals from workers, peasants, and soldiers voiced anger at leaders who “made promises to us while they themselves were sitting on the thrones where the executioners and murderers used to sit” (Document 74), who “have not justified the people’s hopes” (Document 87), who have displayed only political impotence and the inability to fulfill

promises. Before October, this frustration had been directed against the Provisional Government and the “conciliationist” leaders of the Soviet; after October it was often expressed toward the new Bolshevik authorities: “I believed in you because you promised good things for us” (Document 108); “where are the promises you made” (Document 113).

Increasingly, the failure of authorities to deliver on the presumed promises of the revolution was seen as stemming from an irreconcilable conflict of interests and of values. By midsummer, we hear constant talk about the “counterrevolutionary imperialist bourgeoisie” or the “privileged [*tsenzovye*] elements” conspiring against the freedoms won through the revolution and against the “entire working class” and seeking to restore the old order (Documents 58, 63, 66, 90). As disappointment continued to grow over the results of revolution—over the unfulfilled promises of peace, bread, land, freedom—blame was invariably placed not on circumstances (economic difficulties, the war, the problems of transition) but on counterrevolutionary intent and simple “treason.” For some, especially peasants, it was the Bolsheviks who were the moral and political enemies of the revolution, the “enemies of the fatherland” who needed to be crushed,<sup>31</sup> the “accursed weeds” that needed to be ripped out (Document 123). Some blamed Jews or other outsiders: it was not unusual to hear bigoted exhortations of “Yids” as the most dangerous traitors to the Russian nation, and as the people most to blame for limiting the benefits of the revolution (Document 112).<sup>32</sup>

The main enemy, though, was the rich and privileged—the “enemies of the people” and “traitors and betrayers” of Russia and the revolution who must be “punished” as “contemptible oppressors of the people” for “infringing on the cause of the Revolution and Freedom” (Documents 71, 76, 81). Here, this language of otherness and opposition becomes a language of class, of economic inequalities and subordination. No longer, many soldiers declared, were they willing to shed blood for the “celebration of the bourgeois pocketbook.”<sup>33</sup> The national solution was to end all “compromise” with the “counterrevolutionary bourgeoisie” and to give all power to the soviets, as representing the will of the people. Sometimes, more vividly and ominously, the answer was said to be cleansing the revolution of the “oozing scab” of the bourgeoisie and of the “leeches” who had clung to the body of the country (Document 81), to be “merciless with the enemies of the people,”<sup>34</sup> to save Russia with purifying fire and blood (Documents 52, 102, 131).

"Friends" were less clearly defined than "enemies." Varying and often ambiguous terms of social identification were used to describe the side opposed to the bourgeoisie: the "working people" or "laboring folk" (a category itself designated by a range of terms for people who labored—*trudovoi narod*, *trudiaschbikhstia*, *trudovye*, *truzheniki*, *rabochie*, and so on—each with its own history and nuances), the "working class" (a term that could be used in the Marxist sense of industrial workers or more broadly to include all workers, peasants, and soldiers), the "lower class of workers and peasants," or simply the "poor" (*bednyye*) or the common people (*narod*). These social designations were not synonymous. They variously included and excluded different combinations of workers, peasants, and soldiers, though often the particulars were rather vague. And even when groups were specified, the categories often had uncertain boundaries: migrant workers or "worker aristocrats" might be excluded from the category of "workers"; the richer "kulaks" and the *otrubniki* (peasants who left the commune to farm on their own) might be excluded from "peasants"; men promoted into the lower ranks of officers might be excluded from the category of "soldiers."

The use of "democracy" as a collective identification was especially characteristic of 1917 and illustrative of the tendency to read politics through a socially polarized lens.<sup>35</sup> While liberals wished "democracy" to identify all citizens, they had to admit that the more popular tendency was to exclude the "bourgeoisie." As one political dictionary published in 1917 observed, "Democracy is the whole people, the poor and the rich, men and women, and so on. Presently democracy refers only to the poor, to people without resources, that is, workers and peasants; but this is incorrect."<sup>36</sup> The Soviet and most socialists used "democracy" only in this restrictive manner. And so did most lower-class people who spoke out publicly. In popular usage, "democracy" included those who were not privileged and exploitative and did not conspire against the revolution. It included the working people and intellectuals who defended the interests of the common people—thus the Soviets of Workers', Soldiers', and Peasants' Deputies and their socialist leaders were identified as embodying the will of the "en-tire democracy," of the "revolutionary democracy" that would triumph "over all the dark forces of the country" (Document 19). Similarly, when "democracy" was used in the older sense to describe a political ideal, the tendency was to define it not as equal rights and power for all, but as politics in the interests of the poor. As one group

of soldiers put this quite bluntly in midsummer: "If you defend the poor class, then there will be a democratic republic, but if you defend the interests of the capitalists, then Russia is lost" (Document 73). The language for conveying ideas of nation was treated in the same way. The Russian word *narod* (the people), as already mentioned, can be used to mean either the whole nation or just the common folk. Although the word carried both meanings in the language of 1917, the class-based reading of "the nation" was increasingly dominant in the language of common people. As one officer wrote home to his family in mid-March, describing the "impassable abyss" that divided the thinking of soldiers from that of officers (and, by extension, the thinking of all subalterns from that of all people in authority): "When we talk about the narod, we mean the nation as a whole [*natsial*], but when they talk about it they understand it to mean only the democratic lower classes [*demokraticheskie nizy*]." Class, this young officer recognized sadly, was an inescapable part of how ordinary soldiers viewed social relationships, their country, and the revolution. "Whatever their personal attitudes toward individual officers might be, we remain in their eyes only masters [*barry*]. . . . In their view, what has taken place is not a political but a social revolution, in which, according to them, we are the losers and they the winners. . . . Previously, we ruled; now they themselves want to rule. In them speak the unavenged insults of centuries past. A common language between us cannot be found. This is the cursed legacy of the old order."<sup>37</sup>

In the wake of the October revolution, expressions of both support for and hostility toward Bolshevik power tended to deploy the same categories of enemy and friend. The Bolsheviks, one Petrograd factory worker wrote at the end of 1917, had proved themselves to be the true "friend" of the "working people," whereas both the bourgeoisie and the moderate socialists of the Provisional Government had proved themselves to be "traitors and betrayers of the workers, soldiers, and peasants" and "enemies of the people" (Document 109). By contrast, another Petrograd factory worker wrote that it was the Bolsheviks who had made themselves "enemies of the people" by failing to satisfy the needs of the poor (Document 106). One thing was consistent: the language of moral, social, and political demonization. To blame for most misfortune were "enemies" who, whether Bolsheviks or bourgeois, were branded as profoundly other: as impostors (*samoziantsy*), usurpers, tyrants, betrayers, traitors, bandits, plunderers, and bastards (Documents 108, 109, 113, 118, 121, 127, 128).

## Morality: Honor and Shame, the Sacred and the Profane

For most lower-class Russians, the revolution was a time of great moral significance. The language of moral transformation was ubiquitous in Russia in 1917. The government, the leaders of the Soviet, and the press constantly spoke of the revolution as a time of resurrection and renewal, of good and truth, of the struggle against evil. Lower-class Russians often shared this moral vision of the revolution. The very act of writing by plebeians was presented in a moral framework—as a matter of necessity and truth. Letters from individuals very often included ritualized (though not necessarily insincere) apologies for the poor grammar or style and for the authors' impertinence in troubling their listeners: "Forgive me, an insignificant worker, for being so bold as to address you, a great political figure" (Document 6); "I am addressing the S.R. and S.D. [parties] in my peasant way, simply, for I know no other" (Document 43). At the same time, they insisted on the special moral power and right they had, precisely as untutored common folk, to address those in power: "to express the truth that only a working man capable of speaking the pure truth can feel" (Document 6); to speak "as a genuine son of our dear Russia" (Document 59); to speak from a "consciousness" learned from "suffering";<sup>38</sup> to voice what "the soul yearns to express" (Document 39).

The emotional pathos and fervor with which so many expressed themselves in 1917 was a further sign of moral feeling. To emphasize the great weight, deep truthfulness, and moral necessity of what they had to say, lower-class Russians employed a resonant and emotionally charged language rich with epithets, superlatives, catchphrases, demands, hyperbole, repetition, irony, metaphors, and phrases drawn from the language of the Church and prayer.<sup>39</sup> Occasionally, for extra emphasis, as a further marker of the moral passion they felt, they wrote their whole text out in capital letters or in red ink (Documents 26, 128) or seasoned their letters with curses, violent threats, and profanity. The use of emotional modifiers made clear the moral significance of these momentous times: good actions were heavenly, joyful, shining, resplendent, fiery, and bright, while the work of enemies was bloody, dark, vile, shameful, and despicable. Even ordinary nouns often conveyed a sense of great moment and moral significance: the writers spoke of liberation, joy, glory, happiness, love, light, truth, salvation, oppression, carnage, chaos, destruction, blood, shame, betrayal, and vengeance. The use of metaphors to elevate meaning and mood,

and to indicate moral significance, was especially common. To our ears, these metaphors are mostly clichés; but then they still had, especially for the less educated, fresh emotional force: the sun of freedom, redemptive flight, saviors, heaven, and, standing in moral opposition to these, dark clouds, the abyss, the heavy stone of grief, the bleeding heart, and slavery. Such use of metaphor to express moral intent was especially evident in the branding of adversaries as morally alien, as outcasts beyond the pale of humanity: vermin, jackals, bloodsuckers, and vampires.

Honor (*chest'*) was a key notion in the protests and appeals of lower-class Russians in 1917. The English word inadequately conveys the sense of the Russian. The primary meanings of "honor" in most Western European languages bear the imprint of chivalric notions associated with rank and standing: honor as the "high respect, esteem, or reverence, accorded to exalted worth or rank" and as "personal title to high respect or esteem."<sup>40</sup> The Russian *chest'* shares this emphasis on respect and can entail notions of rank and status, but the primary meaning is grounded in notions of respect necessitated by "the inward moral dignity of the person, high personal qualities, integrity, nobility of spirit, and pure moral conscience."<sup>41</sup> Such concerns with moral respect and dignity, and with the insult and injury that affronted these values, were a prominent feature of popular discourse in 1917. These were not new ideas, of course. The concept that all human beings share a natural dignity and the right to respect had occupied a central place in the thinking and arguments of activist workers in Russia since the late nineteenth century. In confronting employers with demands and strikes, for example, workers very often insisted on "polite address" and, more generally, treatment befitting their worth as "human beings."<sup>42</sup> When workers and other relatively literate lower-class Russians voiced their views of the world in print, they often articulated an ethical vision that insisted on every person's inward nature and personality (*lichnost'*, the person, the self), which made every individual naturally deserving of respect and freedom. This ideal emerged out of an ongoing dialogue in the lives of many ordinary Russians between the everyday experience of social subordination and ill treatment and ideas drawn both from traditional notions of honor and from the widespread public discourse about the natural dignity and rights of the human person, which many Russians encountered in reading. Well before 1917, Russian journals, newspapers, and literature, including those read by literate commoners, were filled with such ideas. Reflecting, perhaps, the weight of lived experience in the thinking of ordinary

Russians about the self and its moral meaning, however, the main focus of the concern with honor and dignity was on *violations* of this ideal.<sup>43</sup>

Lower-class Russians were themselves the targets of such criticism. As before 1917, criticism from educated Russians of immorality and ignorance among the lower classes was echoed (and transformed) in a critique by many lower-class Russians themselves of the everyday culture of the majority of ordinary people. The socialist intellectuals on the Executive Committee of the Soviet in Petrograd regularly warned that boorish and crass behavior (for instance, soldiers' coming to blows with sailors over seats on a train or widespread drunkenness) undermined the revolution.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, many outspoken workers, peasants, and soldiers repeatedly insisted that the revolution, as a historic opening to a new world, necessitated the improvement of the individual, especially the plebeian, more than ever before. "Culture" was the notion around which these arguments were constructed. Culture was understood partly in a utilitarian and political way: greater learning and knowledge were essential to ensure that Russia had the sort of "conscious" population that could understand and defend the revolution; but thinking about culture also had a distinct moral logic: people, especially those demanding rights and respect, needed to learn how to live with the honor and dignity they merited as human beings. "Now that everyone is free," a group of soldiers wrote to their new leaders, "we wanted to make use of this freedom in the sense of self-betterment, which we need so much now for our new creative life. . . . We are all peasant farmers, workers, or employees. Our lack of enlightenment and our economic impotence allowed the ever powerful and rich to exploit our labor. This corrupted our whole life. . . . We do not want this kind of life any more, we are tired of constantly thinking about nothing but a crust of bread for the next day" (Document 27). Peasants, especially soldiers returning to their native villages, expressed aloud their dismay at the "horrible ignorance" and "darkness" among the majority of peasants and appealed for the Soviet or the government to send books, newspapers, and teachers (Documents 43, 44, 46, 50, 97). Groups of soldiers appealed to the Soviet in Petrograd to "bring us your slogans, come see us, we are waiting for you, send us your speakers. Sow the seed in our hearts, set us on a pure path we can follow unimpeded" (Document 89). Women appealed to activists to help "honest" working women avoid falling "into a pool of debauchery" (Document 14). Workers complained, as the activists among them had for years, about the "vulgar," "banal," "crass,"

"sideshow" (*zbelto-balaganoe*) culture that still prevailed in workers' districts (Document 61) and spoke of the need for "cultural rebirth" (Document 62). Plebeian poets tried to capture this ideal in grander phrases, writing of "blessed learning. . . / minds inquiring and always searching" (Document 2) and of the constant search for "enlightenment" (Document 5).<sup>45</sup> All made it clear that the persistence of "uncultured" behavior was a matter of personal "shame," as well as political harm, at such a time.

Drunkenness was viewed as one of the most persistent and shameful signs of the people's moral degradation. A wartime prohibition did not eradicate the problem of heavy drinking among the Russian populace. In the factories, activists complained, "men are drinking denatured alcohol, varnish, and other such substitutes. They are drunk on the job, speak out of turn at meetings, shout inappropriate phrases, prevent politically conscious comrades from speaking, and paralyze their organizational work. There is total disarray in the shops. Owing to all the alcoholism, politically conscious workers are suffocating in this kind of atmosphere" (Document 16). After October, the problem persisted, as did moral and political condemnation of it. When, in December, some Petrograd soldiers stormed wine cellars and drank themselves into a stupor, activists castigated their comrades for "this disgrace," which threatened to "drown Freedom and the Revolution in wine." In tsarist times, it was argued, drunkenness was used by the government to "keep the people in ignorance." So, "if drunkenness and of itself is harmful, then right now, when we are only beginning to live a new life, it is doubly dangerous." Are we going to "behave like Judas," they asked, "and betray everything that is precious and holy to us for a bottle of wine?" (Document 119). For a group of activist peasants, commenting on the pervasiveness of home brew in the countryside, alcohol was nothing less than a "diabolical liquid" (Document 124).

Individual behavior in the political arena was of special concern. As we have noted, "conscious" plebeians regularly worried about individuals who abused liberty for selfish ends or engaged in "disorders." They appealed constantly to their fellows for discipline, responsibility, and restraint. And their arguments were almost always colored by moral notions of honor and dignity. A meeting of workers in Novgorod Province in May, for example, expressed "indignation" (*ne-godovaniye*) at the "overt and covert insults aimed at the men the people have chosen to take Power"—the reference is to the socialists who agreed to join the first coalition government as ministers (Document

15). The July Days—when armed soldiers and workers in the streets of Petrograd demanded soviet power, and disorderly riots broke out in the wake of assaults on the crowds by police and Cossacks—were roundly condemned by more moderate soldiers and workers as a disgrace bringing dishonor to the revolution. For workers at a Petrograd printing house, the armed demonstration and the “fratricidal slaughter” of those days was “the most grievous and shameful page in Russian history,” for which they “brand[ed] with shame” and put their “curse” on the radical organizers of this “provocational demonstration” (Document 56).

As discontent with the results of the revolution mounted, so did the disorders, and the moral critique of them. We see this especially in the army, where disobedience and disorder were a particular problem but where, also, the ethic of honor was especially strong. Soldiers deplored the constant disobedience to military orders as “a shameful stain” on the revolutionary people and a “slander” against their interests (Document 70). At the front, soldiers voiced their “indignation” and “curse” against the “disgraceful,” “unseemly and scandalous behavior” (*bezobrazie*) among the many “idle, full-bellied, carousing” soldiers at the rear (Document 84). Many expressed anguish over the social violence and hatred that was becoming increasingly widespread during these months. One group of soldiers, for instance, “branded with shame” soldiers who had dragged speakers they disagreed with off their platform and beat them to death (Document 70). Similarly, in the eyes of an artillery soldier, the lynching of a group of arrested officers and the violent settling of “personal scores,” which had resulted in the deaths of a dozen men, was a “disgrace and a shame” (*pozor i sram*) and stigmatized all soldiers with an “ineradicable stain” (Document 80). Can one achieve a truly “free life,” another soldier asked, by leaving the “true path” to follow the way of “malice, envy, and hatred” (Document 74)? Now, it was said, what was needed was a “pure heart” (Document 77).

When common Russians trained their moral vision on the larger social and political order, as they so often did, notions of honor and dishonor remained central and widespread, though people were far from agreeing on who had the best claims on virtue and who most merited righteous condemnation. Resolutions and letters enumerated virtues and sins: the good that the revolution had been expected to inaugurate and evil yet to be eliminated. Some of these virtues, as we have seen, were generalized social goods: the “dignity” and “honor” of freedom (at least, freedom for the people), the virtues of unity and solidarity (at

least among the common people and on the political Left), a politics of concern for the unprivileged, and the triumph of social justice. Likewise, social and political conflict was typically viewed less as a clash of interests or of different but equal points of view than as a fundamental moral struggle between light and darkness, truth and lies, or virtuous friends and evil, even demonic, enemies.

As before 1917, peasants, workers, and soldiers continued to voice resentment at everyday insults they suffered at the hands of elites, at the pervasiveness of “humiliation and insult” (*umizhenie i oskorblenie*) for those living at the lower depths of an inegalitarian and unfree society. “Justice,” a ubiquitous notion, was often linked to questions of personal dignity, respect, and honor. In the army, widespread anger at the rudeness of officers toward rank-and-file soldiers, including the degrading use of the informal “you” (*ty*), were embodied in the Petrograd Soviet’s Order No. 1, which banned that form of address, along with all “rudeness” to soldiers, as insulting to their dignity.<sup>46</sup> Among urban workers, as Diane Koenker and William Rosenberg have documented, the presentation of demands and sometimes the outbreak of strikes “over issues of dignity and personal respect”—especially polite forms of address and humane working conditions—were frequent, especially among clerical and service workers (industrial workers had already fought and often won those battles before the war).<sup>47</sup> Similarly, many lower-class Russians, when they appealed to the government or the Soviet or to the conscience and commitment of the public, spoke of the need to end “humiliation and insult”—as when soldiers publicly rebuked their officers for calling them “bastards” and threatening to shoot them (Document 24), or female workers described poor working-class women treated without “pity,” as if they were not also people,<sup>48</sup> or forced by their poverty onto the “shameful path” of “debauchery” (Document 14). Subordination and oppression, quite typically, were narrated as a moral story of “insult” and “mockery” (*izdevatel'stvo*) (Documents 3, 26, 74, 88).

Much more frequently than before 1917, the concerns of ordinary Russians with social honor and insult were generalized and politicized beyond the immediate injuries of class into broader questions of state policy and social power. As such, concern with direct “insult” as the main violation of honor (and thus with actions that might be corrected) gave way to concern with social “shame” (and with deeper and more essential wrongs that had to be reprovved, punished, and eradicated). Arguments in support of the war, for example, were often framed as questions of honor and shame: “The free Russian people

must not dishonor themselves with a shameful peace" (Document 23); it was wrong to make any "degrading" (*urizitel'nyye*) deals (Document 25) or sign a "shameful, dishonorable, separate peace" (Document 26). Some writers, like a group of injured and sick soldiers (who noted that they were all workers and peasants and supporters of the revolution), condemned the Soviet and the leaders of the Social Democratic party as "traitors" to the Russian people who took "pleasure" in the people's "torments" and "humiliations" and whose own political actions were "hellish," "filthy, base, and vile," made still worse morally by their "hiding behind various masks" (Document 26). More often, of course, it was the political and social powers that be who were judged to be the most stained by dishonor. For many, like the workers representing small enterprises in a district of Petrograd, the war was nothing but "bloody carnage," and the continued political concessions by the Soviet a "shameful retreat" before "enemies" (Document 58).

Behind bad political policies, it was felt, must stand bad social groups. Above all, the rich and the "bourgeoisie" were blamed for the failure of the revolution to fulfill its promise. Notions of "honor" and "shame" were so central to this language of social criticism that it is often difficult to untangle the relation between class hostility and moral outrage. The two helped shape and give meaning to each other. Unfulfilled promises were often interpreted, as we have seen, through a moral narrative of deliberate harm by the rich and powerful. These moral and social judgments were not identical, though. The suggestions of class determinism (what else, the gist of their assertions seemed to be, could one expect from the "bourgeoisie"?) did not eliminate the quite different logic of moral choice and hence shame. The government's crackdown on radicalism and disorder in the aftermath of the July Days—in particular, the many arrests and searches, the restoration of censorship and old punitive laws, and the threats of violence against the people—were branded as "shameful" (*pozornyyi*) (Documents 58, 62). The restoration of the death penalty especially was targeted as "barbaric" and "shameful," the "disgrace of mankind" (Documents 58, 62, 71, 100). Adding insult to moral injury, the bourgeoisie (though its press, especially) was often said to be guilty of "slander" (*kleveta*) and "defamation" (*travlia*) (Documents 7, 29, 36, 66, 83, 87, 117). More generally, and with a potent and familiar mixture of social and moral antagonism, the bourgeoisie and the rich were berated for their egoistic materialism, for earning property and wealth not through their own labor—the only legitimate moral claim to property, it was argued—but through "various amorous escapades" and

"sly and devious behavior" (Document 40). The new rulers were tarred with the same social and moral brush: they were accused of enjoying the same "stuffed, greasy, gluttonous living" as the old rulers, while the people remained "enslaved," "mocked," and "naked" (Document 74).

After October, such moral criticism reached a peak of intensity. For supporters of the Bolshevik-led overturn of the Provisional Government, opponents, especially fellow socialists and plebeians, were dismissed as enemies of the people and chastised with the people's "contempt and curse" (Document 120). But the strongest language of moral condemnation and demonization was directed against the now powerful Bolsheviks. The peace negotiations with the Germans were condemned as a mark of "inradicable shame" (Document 104). The closing of the Constituent Assembly and the shooting of demonstrators in early January 1918 was said to be the work of impostors, butchers, and tyrants who betrayed their promises, were "killing off everything holy," had "put blinders on the workers' eyes," and deserved to die "on a pillar of shame" (Documents 112, 113, 128). More generally, the Bolsheviks were regularly anathematized and demonized as moral aliens. They were said to be hooligans (a term that in Russia had acquired the sense of insolent assault on civilized values and culture),<sup>49</sup> villains, bandits, butchers, murderers, and "dark forces" whose actions "degraded" and "shamed" the people and the revolution. They were even categorized as class enemies, though in the same moral sense that the bourgeoisie was defined: as "rich and corrupt," "robbers of the poor," "enemies of the people."<sup>50</sup>

For some lower-class Russians, certainly, their anger grew from a particularly deep sense of betrayal: the Bolsheviks, the presumed friends of the people, had been the most consistent enemy of the bourgeoisie and thus, for many, the object of greatest hope. Throughout the revolution, betrayal by friends was a greater sin, a greater cause for moral outrage, than the abuses of overt enemies. In the eyes of many Russians, the failure of the new revolutionary government to bring peace, bread, and land to the people, and especially the failure of the Soviet leadership to challenge the government, was the first major betrayal. "Disappointment" is an accurate but feeble description of the deep anger and outrage often felt. Disappointment with the Bolsheviks, often seen as the last hope, was even more intense. As a "former Bolshevik" wrote to Lenin in December, "At first I believed in you because you promised good things for us—real peace, bread and freedom. . . . But instead of what you promised, you sold Russia out, gave

us no bread, and established a Nicholas II kind of freedom. . . . I curse you and all your comrades in the Council of Usurpers and Betrayers of our native land" (Document 108). The deep moral outrage at this betrayal was evident in the emotional and censorious tone of many of these texts—the seething anger, the pronouncing of curses, the verbal spitting into "shameless eyes" (Document 128), and the vigorous profanity (Document 122). It was conspicuous also in the analogies and metaphors deployed: "with your oprichniki [Ivan the Terrible's notorious personal force] you are like King Herod who would not spare fourteen thousand infants just to exterminate the Great Socialist Jesus Christ among them. You are like Judas who sold Christ for thirty pieces of silver." Indeed, the Bolsheviks suffered in the comparison: "Herod took only baby boys from their mothers, whereas you are taking everyone," and "Judas at least felt guilty and hanged himself" (Document 128).

The pervasive use of religious metaphor and language—including phrases from the Bible and from Old Church Slavic, the language of the church and of prayer—was a potent means to intensify the emotional weight of words and to emphasize their universal and ethical significance. Socialists had long used religious metaphor, vocabulary, and narratives in their appeals to lower-class Russians. And as a number of historians have observed, in 1917, as before, the language of revolution and of socialist democracy appealed to large number of ordinary Russians precisely because it resonated so strongly with Christian values and ideals.<sup>51</sup> For many, the sacred meaning of the revolution was literal—the perceived triumph of specifically Christian values. Thus, for example, when appealing for an end to the war, soldiers argued that it was wrong to kill men who "are not our enemies but are our brothers in the cross and in the divine commandments" (Document 30). Peasants continued to insist that all the land must belong to those who work it, for "the land belongs to almighty God, as His creation, and to all the sons of man, as His heirs in equal part," as long as they shall work it (Document 97). For some, the revolution was "blessed" by God (Document 2) and even was God's will, a "Great Joy" for which He should be thanked (Document 38).

In much of this writing, however, religion and the sacred were present less as a literal expression of Christian belief than as a metaphorical and symbolic language—and, entwined with these functions, as an emotional language. The distinction, of course, was not absolute. The emotional and moral power of religious language and imagery was often due, in the minds of most lower-class Russians, precisely to its res-

onant source in Christian tradition. For whatever reason, it is clear that many Russians, plebeians as well as the more educated and privileged, found in religious language a more satisfactory means of articulating their feelings about the revolution than in any political or other idiom. Religious language, as deeply emotional, universalizing, and ethical, possessed a quality of mystery and destiny that was an important part of the way many lower-class Russians understood the revolution. As a leading Russian historian of the revolution has written, "From the Revolution was often expected not only concrete social and political changes but a Miracle—rapid and universal purification and 'resurrection.'"<sup>52</sup> This hope was often quite explicit. Letters and appeals spoke of the revolution as the "unexpected resurrection of the Russian people" (Document 26), or as the triumph of "the ideas of the International, which has been resurrected in the streams of Blood of the World War" (Document 62), or as a time of new life for every person "who in the chains of slavery saw his death and in the sunlight of freedom saw his resurrection" (Document 77). Above all, the revolution and its purposes were sacred, holy (*sviatoi*). This was a "holy revolution" (Document 59), which championed "the precious and holy slogans of liberty, equality, and fraternity" (Document 81). Freedom, in particular, was a "sacred" thing, a "holy temple," a "sacred site" (Documents 4, 5, 131). And speaking the truth to those in power was a "sacred duty" (Document 98). Of course, different individuals and groups defined the boundaries of sacred and profane, of good and evil, differently. This was especially noticeable after October, when the Bolsheviks were said by some to be trampling on "everything holy" (Document 113) and by others to be engaging in "Holy work" (Document 118).

The revolution, for many, was a struggle for sacred "truth"—for *istina* and especially for *pravda*. In Russian, *istina* is the truth that is real, authentic, and good, as opposed to that which is false, deceitful, and bad. And *istina* is sacred truth: in the Russian Bible, it is the divine truth of which the Old Testament prophets spoke and the truth that Christ said will save those who know it and "set [them] free."<sup>53</sup> *Pravda*, by contrast, means moral truth: the truth that stands for justice, righteousness, honesty, and goodness. And it is no less sacred. In the words of the Russian Psalter, "Pravda comes down from the heavens" (*Pravda s nebes priniche*).<sup>54</sup> Thus the worker Zemskov wrote that he was speaking the "truth [*istina*] that only a working man capable of speaking the pure truth [*pravda*] can feel" (Document 6). Before the revolution, argued a group of peasants, the people were beaten and



suffered “for every word of truth [*pravdivoe slovo*], and for reading books in which the truth [*pravda*] was written” (Document 40). Now, it was said, the revolution must oppose “foul lies” with “holy truth” (*sviataia istina*) (Document 6), must champion the cause of “truth and equality on earth” (Document 27), and must fight against those who, as one group of peasant-soldiers put it, were “trying to shove a stick into the wheel of our cart, which is traveling along the road of truth [*pravda*]” (Document 68).

For many, to travel along this “path of truth” (*put' pravdy* or *pravdivyi put'*) was the most essential meaning and purpose of the revolution (Documents 71, 74). Sometimes sacred truths were named differently. The worker-poet Pyotr Oreshin alluded to these as sacred words that the common people knew better than others: “Was it not in our own crowded hovels / That the tablets of Christ safe were kept?” (Document 102). Another worker-poet, Ivan Loginov, dreamed of “a new free temple [*khram*]” (Document 103). Or, for a group of Novgorod peasants, the revolution was about “life, salvation, and the kingdom of heaven on earth for the people” (Document 94). At times, especially when poetry was the form of expression, such idealism about the truth of the revolutionary cause drew upon mythic traditions that were not solely Christian. We see, for example, especially in poetry, human flight symbolizing transcendence and freedom: “Off with my caftan . . . Across fields I'm flying / On the wings of time” (Document 52), “I walk through the gates flung wide . . . On the wings of flight eternal” (Document 130). The widespread allusions to blood as cleansing, purifying, and saving, and to the sun as a symbol of purity and salvation, were similarly powerful images that drew widely from Christian and other mythic beliefs and stories: “The blood they sacrificed has bought / This sacred freedom to our nation” (Document 4); “the time will come . . . when a bloody storm will pass over the world” (Document 25); “the Firebird” has “embraced vast Rus in her bloody wing” (Document 52); in the “sunlight of freedom” is “resurrection” (Document 77); “you bear the Sun of the New Life” (Document 131). Notions and images of “saviors” who would lead people to the realm of truth and justice had similarly ambiguous sources. For some, the living men now ruling Russia, or heading the Soviet, were “saviors” (Document 94). But others looked still to the future: “[N]ow another Savior of the world must be born, to save the people from all the calamities happening here on earth and to put an end to these bloody days” (Document 74).

We clearly see a number of salient themes and patterns in the public

statements of lower-class Russians in 1917: the high value placed on the idea of freedom (though this was often viewed more as a collective than as an individual good), a strong love of nation (though construed in multiple ways), a constant and typically concrete discourse of social needs and values that often translated liberty into a “democratic” freedom that must serve the interests of the poor, a view of state power as favoring the common people over (and often against) the privileged, a ubiquitous perception of the world as divided between enemies and friends, and a strongly moral vision of politics and social relations that was shaped by notions of dignity and insult, honor and shame, truth and falsehood. Readers will no doubt find other themes and patterns.

We must not overstate the consistency and cohesion of this alleged popular social vision, however. First and most obviously, great differences existed among people. There were concrete political disagreements: Should the war be supported? Are the demands for greater local power by workers in their factories, by soldiers in their regiments, and by peasants in their struggles over land signs of progress for the revolution or harmful acts of disunity and selfish particularism? Should the Soviet maintain its coalition with the Provisional Government or take all power into its own hands and away from the “bourgeoisie”? Very often disputes over policy were translated into larger and even more consequential questions: Who is the enemy? Who shames the people and the revolution? Who are the real champions of freedom and truth? Answers varied and opinions changed.

We must also notice what we do not hear. Not everyone wrote to the government or the Soviet or the press in 1917. Those who did tended to feel a connection with politics. Most supported the revolution in some way and wished to voice enthusiasm or express disappointment. These views do not exhaust what the revolution meant to ordinary Russians, though. We do not hear the voices of people who might have still longed for the tsar, for example, or—probably even more widespread—those of people who were cynical about politics. We do not hear much about women. This is partly because most Russians writing resolutions or letters to people in authority were men—not only because men were more likely to be literate, but also because the public sphere was still seen by most Russians as a masculine domain. However, even when women wrote to the Soviet or to the government or to the public in 1917, they tended either not to speak specifically about women and their needs or to represent women's place in politics in traditional terms. Very often, women presented themselves in conventional images as sorrowing mothers or as weaker citizens needing pro-

tection (Documents 13, 14, 46, 126), though sometimes they openly challenged these traditional ideas about women's nature and place. (Document 20). In many ways, gender is implicit in these writings: in images of women as mourning mothers and wives and of men as public actors whose virtues were heroism and courage (*muzhestvo*, in Russian a word linguistically very close to *muzheskii*, which means "masculine"). We do not hear much about personal life, either. The public discourse of the revolution was mainly about public matters. The revolution certainly meant more than this to many people—it affected relationships with family and friends, feelings about oneself as an individual, anxieties about the meaning or sense of life. Talk about insult and morality pointed to the private implications of public relationships and behaviors, but much else remained unspoken. The revolution also meant less to many Russians than one might imagine from reading these documents: a good deal of everyday life continued to be ordinary or momentous quite regardless of the course of the revolution. Politics was not everything, even in 1917. This too has to be seen as part of the meaning of the revolution, and as part of what we do not hear in these texts.

Finally, we must recognize how uncertain many people were about the revolution and how ambivalent and contradictory people's world-views often were. The frequent descriptions in writings by lower-class Russians of themselves and especially of other workers, soldiers, or peasants as "horribly ignorant," "illiterate," and "unenlightened" were not merely rhetorical flourishes. The frequent requests for newspapers, books, and teachers—above all, for someone to explain the unfamiliar and confusing vocabularies and rhetoric of the day and the Babel of political ideologies—reflected real uncertainties and confusion. "I beg you to send provocateurs [*sic*] here because . . . I don't know what's going on there in Petrograd because the newspapers do not reach here from Petrograd" (Document 44). "All of us positional [frontline] troops ask you as our comrades to explain to us who these Bolsheviks are and what party they belong to because we don't know them or their opinion" (Document 75). That this request came from a group of soldiers who insisted that they were "lirtle by lirtle going over entirely to the side of the Bolsheviks" is rather telling. No less important, as the documents collected here vividly remind us (though scholars of social attitudes sometimes tend to forget), individuals can view their world, and judge it, in contradictory ways. The universal language of human dignity and rights, for example, can coexist and become mixed with deep hatred for people classed as "others" or as ene-

mies. Optimistic visions of justice and freedom do not preclude doubt and despair. It would be a mistake to reconcile such contradictions too neatly. Ambiguity and ambivalence are no less part of the ways people define their identities and values and compose their opinions than are sharp convictions and strong faith. For the ordinary Russian, fragmentation of opinion and uncertainty of knowledge were no less part of the intellectual world of 1917 than were revolutionary certainties.

When the Bolsheviks came to power in Russia in October 1917, they could draw considerable support from popular opinion—from deeply felt notions about class difference, from wide popular disappointment with the failures of the moderate socialists who had compromised with and even joined the "bourgeois" government, from a belief in the need for strong state authority. However, the new Bolshevik rulers also had to contend with popular ideas that were much less suited to their purposes and values—ideas about liberty, morality, and nationhood that often clashed with the Leninist vision and methods, suspicion of all who held power, an impatient and unforgiving insistence that the state serve the immediate and concrete interests of the laboring classes. No less troubling to the Bolsheviks, they had to contend with silence and uncertainty, with a population whose views remained divided, distracted, and unstable.