

DIANE P. KOENKER
WILLIAM G. ROSENBERG

Strikes and Revolution in Russia, 1917



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STRIKES AND
REVOLUTION IN
RUSSIA, 1917

Diane P. Koenker

William G. Rosenberg

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY

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Published by Princeton University Press, 41 William Street,
Princeton, New Jersey 08540
In the United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, Guildford, Surrey

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Koenker, Diane, 1947-

Strikes and revolution in Russia, 1917 / Diane P. Koenker, William G. Rosenberg.
p. cm. Bibliography: p. Includes index.

ISBN 0-691-05578-5

1. Strikes and lockouts—Soviet Union—History—20th century.
2. Soviet Union—History—Revolution, 1917-1921. I. Rosenberg, William G. II. Title.
HD5395.K64 1989 331.89'2947'09041—dc20 89-3891

This book has been composed in Linotron Sabon

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Printed in the United States of America by Princeton University Press,
Princeton, New Jersey

Designed by Laury A. Egan

To Virginia and Eugene Pomerance
and
Andy and Bob Adler

CONTENTS



LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	ix
LIST OF FIGURES	xi
LIST OF TABLES	xiii
PREFACE	xv
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xix
Introduction. Understanding Strikes in 1917	3
1. The Ecology of Labor Protest at the End of the Old Regime	23
2. Strikes in 1917: An Overview	61
3. The February Revolution and the Mobilization of Labor	96
4. Management-Labor Relations in the Weeks of Conciliation	129
5. Spring Strikes and the First Coalition	151
6. Collective Action and Social Order	179
7. Perceptions of Strikes and the Nature of Strike Reporting: Social Identities and Moral Valuations	213
8. Labor Activism in Midsummer	239
9. Social Polarization and the Changing Character of Strikes in the Fall	265
10. Strikes and the Revolutionary Process	299
APPENDIX 1. Methodology and Sources	331
APPENDIX 2. Supplementary Statistical Information	347
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	351
INDEX	377

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

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Since photography required some preparation in 1917, very few pictures were taken spontaneously. Many well-known photographs were actually taken by photographers who set up their apparatus in the hope that something interesting would occur, and then waited to see if they were right. Strikes and striking workers were neither predictable nor promising subjects, and the photo archives in Leningrad and Moscow consequently contain very few pictures that directly illustrate labor conflict. Those included here do, however, reveal a good deal about the social context of strike activity.

We are grateful to L. A. Protsai and A. A. Golovina of the Central State Archive of Cinema and Photographic Collections in Leningrad and to V. P. Tarasov of the Main Archival Administration in Moscow for helping us assemble the illustrations.

Illustrations follow page 172.

1. Workers from the Dinamo machine works presenting Red regimental banners to representatives of the Fourteenth Siberian Infantry regiment.
2. Demonstrating restaurant and cafe workers with banners demanding "respect for waiters as human beings" and an end to the practice to tipping.
3. May Day demonstrators with banners reading "Long Live the International Holiday of Labor," "Long Live Socialism," "Long Live the Constituent Assembly," and "Long Live the Democratic Republic."
4. Employees of the Ministry of Labor.
5. "Agitators" urging subscription to the government's Liberty Loan in late May or early June, 1917.
6. Workers' living quarters (early twentieth century).
7. Workers' room in a Petrograd factory dormitory (early twentieth century).
8. Workers' living quarters (early twentieth century).
9. Workers' room in a Petrograd factory dormitory (early twentieth century).

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

10. Kitchen of a workers' apartment (1925).
11. Female workers' quarters in Petrograd.
12. View of the Putilov works (1915).
13. View of the Russian Renault (Reno) plant.

LIST OF FIGURES

1.1	Age and Sex Distribution of Workers, 1914 and 1917	51
1.2	Movement of Wages, 1900–1913	53
1.3	Movement of Wages, 1913–1916	54
2.1	Outcomes of Economic Strikes, 1912–1917	78
2.2	Outcomes for Economic Strikers, 1912–1917	79
2.3	Strikes by Month, 1917	90
2.4	Strikers by Month, 1917	90
5.1	Strikes by Demands, March 3–July 6, 1917	163
5.2	Strikers by Demands, March 3–July 6, 1917	163
9.1	Strikes by Demands, March–July, July–October, 1917	272
9.2	Strikers by Demands, March–July, July–October, 1917	275

LIST OF TABLES

1.1	Industrial Workforce, 1900–1917	30
1.2	Nonfactory Hired Workers, October 1917	31
1.3	Workers under Factory Inspection by Major Industry, 1914 and 1917	32
1.4	Distribution of Industrial Enterprises under Factory Inspection in Petrograd and Moscow, 1917	41
1.5	Strikes and Strikers in Enterprises under Factory Inspection, 1912–1916	58
2.1	Strikes and Strikers in Enterprises under Factory Inspection, March 3–October 25, 1917	67
2.2	Strikes and Strikers in All Enterprises and Sectors, March 3–October 25, 1917	68
2.3	Wartime Economic Strikes and Strikers in Enterprises under Factory Inspection	69
2.4	Wartime Political Strikes and Strikers in Enterprises under Factory Inspection	70
2.5	Strikers by Cause, 1914–1917	75
2.6	Strikes and Strikers by Industry, March 3–October 25, 1917	80
2.7	Strikes and Strikers by Economic Sector, March 3–October 25, 1917	81
2.8	Strike Propensities, 1913–1917	84
2.9	Strikes and Probable Strikers by Region, March 3–October 25, 1917	88
5.1	Strikes and Strikers in the Spring Cluster by Economic Sector	156
5.2	Strikes and Strikers in the Spring Cluster by Industry	157
5.3	Strikes and Strikers in the Spring Cluster by Region	158
5.4	Strikes and Strikers in the Spring Cluster by Demand Group	164
5.5	Economic Demands and Inflation, March–June, 1917	167
6.1	Strikes Challenging Managerial Authority in the Spring Cluster by Industry and Sector	183
6.2	Strikers Challenging Managerial Authority in the Spring Cluster by Industry and Sector	184
7.1	Strike Propensities by Industry, March 3–July 6, 1917	219
8.1	Strikes and Strikers in Midsummer by Industry	247

LIST OF TABLES

8.2	Strikes and Strikers in Midsummer by Demand Group	248
8.3	Strike Demands, Spring and Midsummer Clusters	249
9.1	Strikes and Strikers in the Fall by Industry	270
9.2	Industrial Strike Propensities by Cluster	271
9.3	Economic Demands and Inflation, July–October, 1917	272
9.4	Strike Demands Challenging Managerial Authority by Month	275
10.1	Strike Participants by Skill Level	307
10.2	Distribution of Workers, Strikers, and Strike Propensities by Size of Plant	310
10.3	Strike Intensities by Region	313
10.4	Strike Intensities in Provinces with Intensities Greater than 50 Percent	314
10.5	Strike Propensities by Industry before and after July 6	320
10.6	Strikes and Strike Intensities by Region before and after July 6	321
A.1	Industrial Workers by Region, January 1917	347
A.2	Strikes and Strikers, 1895–1916	348
A.3	Categories and Frequencies of Strike Demands	349

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We soon realized that strikes were far more central to understanding the revolutionary process that we (and others) had thought. Although certainly not the only form of labor activism, strikes and the events around them constituted a primary point of conflict between labor and management, both within the enterprise and in the revolutionary milieu more broadly. Strikes articulated in varying ways the primary interests of these two major contending social groups and reflected the tactics, risks, and consequences each was willing to entertain in the course of economic and political struggle. What began as a modest attempt to systematize the available evidence on strikes soon developed into a major effort to record, to analyze, and most compellingly, to integrate strike phenomena into an understanding of the broader processes of Russia's revolutionary conjuncture.

As is so often the case, these tasks were more easily conceived than completed. A wide range of problems presented themselves: from data collection to thematic analysis, from determining appropriate statistical methodology to writing with confidence about matters of subjective experience and sentiment that were only dimly evident in the available sources. A project begun almost as an aside thus came to occupy more of our lives and energies than either of us cares to reckon, but with gratifying and we hope worthy results. Instead of our projected article or two, we

PREFACE

have written a volume that, although focusing on Russian strikes, may have some interest for non-Russianists generally interested in the processes of social revolution as well as for our fellow specialists. We have learned a great deal about the complexities of social activism and about the analytic difficulties of discerning and interpreting social realities. And far from least, we have learned of the pleasures of joint research, a mode of scholarship rarely practiced even by historians who write with others. Working together day in and day out by means of linked personal computers has sharpened our analytical faculties, improved our ability to synthesize, and perhaps even bettered our writing. It has also, certainly, helped us to develop new levels of tolerance and to respond positively to constant scrutiny and self-criticism, some of which has been quite withering. *Strikes and Revolution* is a project neither of us could contemplate repeating, but from which each of us has drawn great rewards. Pain and pleasure *are* sometimes related.

The Center for Russian and East European Studies and the Horace Rackham School of Graduate Studies at the University of Michigan provided funding for our work in the form of research assistance, and we are grateful for the support and supportive environment they have provided throughout. Anne Bobroff, David Cohen, Irina Livezeanu, Dennis O'Hearn, Kira Stevens, Ann Peet, and Mary Chaffin helped us gather and record material in the early stages; Steve Coe, Elizabeth Dennison, Anne Gorsuch, Julia Rubin, and Dan Schafer contributed greatly toward the end. Luann Troxel was especially important to us. As some of our readers may know, statistical analysis does not always bring out the best in one's personality, and we want especially to thank Luann for mastering both the Michigan Terminal System and our crankiness as we checked, rechecked, and checked yet again our data.

At the earliest stages of our work we received research support from the Temple University faculty grant-in-aid program. As our project expanded, we were awarded a Research Grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, which provided support for final research and writing at a critical stage of the book's development. We also gratefully acknowledge grants from the International Research and Exchange Board (IREX), provided with funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the United States Information Agency, and from the William and Flora Hewlitt Foundation. None of these organizations, of course, are responsible for the views we express.

Many colleagues and friends generously lent their time and critical faculties to read various drafts and parts of this work. We are especially grateful to James R. Barrett, Laura Engelstein, Moshe Lewin, Don Rowney, Lewis Siegelbaum, Charles Tilly and Reginald Zelnik for their metic-

PREFACE

ulous readings and extensive written comments. Candor is an endangered species. Their critical and constructive observations have postponed its extinction and helped us greatly. Geoff Eley, Albert Feuerwerker, Daniel Field, Heather Hogan, Davis Mandel, Alexander Rabinowitch, William Sewell, S. A. Smith, and Ronald Grigor Suny have also read parts of our manuscript in its various forms and redactions, with varying degrees of scepticism about quantitative history in general and our own enterprise in particular. Each, however, has given us the benefit of great and varied expertise. We feel fortunate to have had such supportive colleagues in the midst of our scholarly struggles, although we hasten to absolve them from any responsibility for the finished product. Julie Marvin at Princeton University Press has done a superb job of editing.

We discovered early on in our work that we shared complementary interests with Leopold Haimson, whose work on prerevolutionary Russian strikes was not familiar to us when we initiated our project, but whose encouragement and support was soon a major stimulation. Seminars arranged by Leo at Columbia's Harriman Institute for Advanced Study of the Soviet Union provided a wonderfully congenial and supportive environment for us to present our findings and test our ideas. Other sessions organized by Leo and supported in part by the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme (Paris) and the Feltrinelli Foundation (Milan), as well as the Harriman Institute, gave us additional opportunities to explore some comparative dimensions of our work and to study labor activism in other historical contexts with colleagues from different countries. We hesitate to contemplate what our work might have looked like without these important opportunities. Leopold Haimson's contribution to scholarship and teaching on the late imperial period has been of singular importance, and each of us has benefitted greatly from his selfless investment of time, energy, and knowledge. It is a pleasure to acknowledge his role and express our deep appreciation.

Finally, the additional if awkward pleasures of thanking each other. For her part, Diane thanks Bill for his remarkable generosity and unfailing good spirits and for his lively communications over the computer mail system, which for several years now have nearly eliminated the necessity (and cost) of real-time exchange. Collaborative work in such an enterprise produces some frustration, as two individuals try to mesh different work styles and especially work schedules. In our case, we each wrote a draft of every chapter and then reworked them into common drafts, and this form of collaboration certainly lengthened the process somewhat. But these frustrations were more than compensated by the spirit of partnership that emerged from our work, by the intellectual challenge of forging a product that reflected a real synthesis both of our research results

PREFACE

and of our individual approaches and interpretations. Diane will miss that interaction as she returns to the more normal solitary path to historical understanding.

Bill also feels very fortunate to have had the chance to work with Diane. Her extraordinary patience as we constructed and reconstructed this volume was matched only by her gifts of intelligence, wit, and understanding. Joint research has its pitfalls, but collaborative writing is a virtual minefield, especially when the original basis of collaboration, one that divided the work on the basis of methodological and interpretative emphasis, soon gave way to a full and genuine mutuality at all levels of research and writing. Bill thanks Diane for insisting on mutual statistical competence, for carefully explaining many of the techniques that underlie much of what follows, and for her patience as he tried to master them. The result was a remarkably enriching collaboration on all levels of analysis and exposition, one whose everyday stimulation will be sorely missed. Working alone may allow us historians to define our pace more easily, but also makes it harder to adopt new approaches, and it rarely provides a comparable level of intellectual excitement. Although happy to bring this project to a close, Bill regrets very much the end of these rewarding interactions.

Both of us also have debts to our families. Diane thanks Roger Koenker for his unflagging support, most importantly moral, but also for his attempts to raise the level of our statistical conceptualizations and for his expert advice on many specific matters. Hannah and Emma have contributed enormously by providing inestimable pleasure and by never using the strike threat too seriously. Bill thanks Roger as well, and returns the phone lines to the Koenker household with gratitude. Elie Rosenberg, too, has tolerated this project with grace and understanding, watching with some professional bemusement the emergence of contradictory passions about computers and modern technology, and reacting with familial compassion when the negative forces occasionally got the upper hand. Her sense of proportion about the relative importance and value of various matters large and small has eased many difficult transitions, including those involved in preparing this book. Peter and Sarah, alas, were never quite in awe over the work, but tolerated their father's enthusiasm with a supportive if sceptical detachment, and with admirable patience. To them, too, open phone lines once again, and once again his thanks.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMO	Moscow Automotive Works
MSFMO	Moscow Society of Factory and Mill Owners
PSFMO	Petrograd Society of Factory and Mill Owners
RTA	Russian Telegraph Agency
SR	Socialist Revolutionary
TSGAOR	Tsentral'nyi Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Oktiabr'skoi Revoliutsii sssr
TSGIA	Tsentral'nyi Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii Arkhiv sssr
TSSU	Tsentral'noe Statisticheskoe Upravlenie
<i>VOSR. Khronika sobytii</i>	<i>Velikaia oktiabr'skaia sotsialisticheskaia revoliutsiia. Khronika sobytii</i>
WIC	War Industries Committee

Strikes and Revolution in Russia, 1917

INTRODUCTION

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UNDERSTANDING STRIKES IN 1917

On Monday, May 1, 1917, by the old calendar, the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet voted in emergency session to send official representatives to the Provisional Government. The margin in favor was 43 to 19.¹ Dual power, formerly shared uneasily between the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet, now became institutionalized in a coalition government, and the attention of national and international political figures focused on Petrograd to see how the new coalition would handle the burden of revolutionary power. Not many noticed another event, in its own way as symbolic as the formation of the coalition. Also on May 1, several thousand Petrograd laundresses in over 100 small and large shops declared a strike against their employers. By the next day, three-quarters of all the city's washerwomen had left their jobs; soon, 5,500 women in nearly 200 firms had joined the strike.

The laundresses spoke through their trade union, which had been organized in the heady days after the February revolution. They demanded a package of reforms: an eight-hour workday, minimum daily wages of four to six rubles, the introduction of a pay book for accurate calculation of pay, required two-week notice for dismissals, recognition of the union, polite address on the part of employers, more and better quality food, improved sanitary conditions in the shops, two weeks' annual paid vacation, and one month's sick leave with jobs to be held for six additional months.²

Almost immediately after the May 1 walkout, employers began to resort to that "common Western European practice," as *Pravda* described it, the use of scab labor and the formation of an alternative, "yellow" trade union.³ Tempers flared on both sides, and so did the use of force. When two union leaders failed to convince women in one shop to join the strike, they doused the stoves and hot irons with water, virtually forcing the recalcitrant laundresses to join the walkout. Management retaliated:

¹ *Rabochaia Gazeta*, May 2, 1917.

² *Pravda*, May 16, 20, 1917 (n.s.); *Delo Naroda*, May 10, 1917; *Edinstvo*, May 11, 1917.

³ *Pravda*, May 25, 1917 (n.s.).

INTRODUCTION

in this shop, the activists were chased away with hot flatirons. Elsewhere, shop owners poured boiling water on strikers, and reportedly went after the “damned vipers” and “unbelieving filth” with pokers and revolvers.⁴

In the face of this hostility, working-class Petrograd rallied around the laundresses. Contributions to the union strike fund poured in from district soviets and individual factories, amounting by May 21 to nearly 16,000 rubles. The laundresses held mass meetings around the city, where political activists like Alexandra Kollontai encouraged them in their solidarity. Within a week, owners of 40 small laundries had agreed to the strikers’ demands; by May 16, 80 laundries were back to work, with more owners settling each day. On May 28, the strike ended triumphantly for the strikers with an agreement worked out in arbitration.⁵

The Petrograd laundry workers’ strike was one of many in revolutionary Russia involving not muscular proletarians toiling at fiery furnaces but workers in nonindustrial and service occupations, often women previously unorganized and unheard from. In other features, as well, this strike typified the emerging themes of labor protest in the spring of 1917. It reflected the depth of workers’ grievances and their conviction that the revolution would finally right past wrongs. It demonstrated the ways in which even unskilled and politically inactive groups of workers scattered throughout an entire city could mobilize, if they had to, in support of common goals. It also engendered strong expressions of moral and material solidarity from other workers in the metropolis, the experience in arbitration of the dignity of the workers’ cause, and a sense of vindication as employers capitulated even to the demand for pay to be awarded for the time on strike. In its course and aftermath, moreover, the strike also undoubtedly raised consciousness about class position.

Also typical of the strike was the lack of response generated in the non-socialist press and in subsequent recollections of the events of 1917. The fact that most of the city’s laundries had shut down was commented upon only once or twice in liberal or conservative newspapers, whereas socialist papers reported almost daily on the events surrounding the strike. Nikolai Sukhanov recalled this particular strike in his invaluable memoir of

⁴ S. S. Goncharskaia, “Profsoiuz prachek v 1917 goda,” in *V ognie revoliutsionnykh boev (Raiony Petrograda v dvukh revoliutsiakh 1917 goda)* vol. 1, (Moscow, 1967), p. 48; *Edinstvo*, May 11, 1917; *Novaia Zhizn’*, May 12, 1917; *Pravda*, May 25, June 1, 1917 (n.s.); *Rabochaia Gazeta*, May 14, 18, 1917.

⁵ *Pravda*, May 23, 27, 29, 30, June 1, 3, 8, 13, 1917 (n.s.); *Delo Naroda*, May 10, 28, 1917; *Zemlia i Volia*, May 10, 1917; *Izvestiia Petrogradskogo Soveta Rabochikh Deputatov* (hereafter *Izvestiia* (Petrograd)), May 9, 11, 16, 17, 19, 21, 30, 1917; *Novaia Zhizn’*, May 13, 17, 1917; *Rabochaia Gazeta*, May 14, 17, 18, 24, 26, 28, 1917; *Raionnye sovety Petrograda v 1917 godu*, 3 vols. (Moscow and Leningrad, 1964–66), vol. 2, p. 156.

UNDERSTANDING STRIKES IN 1917

the revolution published in 1922: "Notwithstanding the fact that the contingent of strikers was backward, unaccustomed to struggle and dispersed among masses of enterprises, the conflict was distinguished by the utmost persistence and it spun out over several weeks."⁶ But aside from Sukhanov, this and other individual strikes were rarely mentioned by eyewitnesses, even though the press regularly demonstrated how much they had become part of the daily experience of the Russian revolution. Unruly street demonstrations and political strikes such as those of the February Days and the July Days alone seem to have stuck in the memories of participants in 1917. Of strikes, some memoirists recalled only the general phenomenon, "the excessive and increasing demands of the workers,"⁷ or how at the same time as the Petrograd laundresses' strike, the Minister of Trade and Industry, A. I. Konovalov, "was faced with the threat of total stoppage of all Russian industry as a result of the steadily growing demands of the 'proletariat.'"⁸ Alexander Kerensky denied the significance of strikes altogether; once work resumed after the fall of the tsar, "what problems remained were caused not so much by poor relations between workers and management as by the blockade."⁹ In short, strikes and workplace unrest remained for outsiders part of the background hum of revolution, unremarkable in itself and unremarked upon in the historical record.

The indifference of contemporaries has subsequently shaped historical assessments of strikes. With little descriptive evidence on which to draw, both Western and Soviet historical schools have portrayed labor activism in broad generalities, mythologizing strikes without clarifying them as phenomena or analyzing their integration with other aspects of the revolutionary process. Historians have referred to the 570-odd strikes reported by the Factory Inspectorate from March to October 1917 as evidence, simply, of worker unrest and have offered various unsubstantiated interpretations.¹⁰ To most of our Soviet colleagues, reality was close to

⁶ N. Sukhanov, *Zapiski o revoliutsii* (Berlin, 1922–23), vol. 4, p. 143.

⁷ V. D. Nabokov, *V. D. Nabokov and the Russian Provisional Government, 1917*, ed. Virgil D. Medlin and Steven L. Parsons (New Haven, Conn., 1976), pp. 97–98.

⁸ Paul Miliukov, *Political Memoirs, 1905–1917*, ed. Arthur P. Mendel (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1967), p. 463.

⁹ Alexander Kerensky, *Russia and History's Turning Point* (New York, 1965), p. 324.

¹⁰ The aggregate reports of the Factory Inspectorate, collected in TSGAOR SSSR, f. 6935, op. 8, d. 349, were published by K. N. Iakovleva in 1920, and variously reprinted in Soviet document collections. See K. N. Iakovleva, "Zabastovochnoe dvizhenie v Rossii za 1895–1917 gody," in *Materialy po statistike truda*, vyp. 8 (Moscow, 1920), and the six volumes in the series *Velikaia oktiabr'skaia sotsialisticheskaia revoliutsiia. Dokumenty i materialy*, A. L. Sidorov et al, eds. (Moscow, 1957–1962). These are cited by their individual titles, *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Rossii*. . . .

INTRODUCTION

the cinema images of Sergei Eisenstein's 1925 film, "Strike"—miserable workers, brutal managers, and repression by an unsympathetic, "bourgeois" regime. Trotsky describes a "wave of big strikes and other conflicts" in response to the industrialists' political offensive against the revolution.¹¹ The senior Soviet academician I. I. Mints describes strikes in equally heroic terms: "The strike struggle in May–June contributed to the class-based political education of the proletariat, to its consolidation around the Bolshevik party, to the strengthening of the unity of the working class, to the growth and authority of its vanguard—the proletariat of Piter, Moscow, Kharkov, the Donbass, and the Urals."¹² In the only historical monograph devoted to strikes in 1917, A. M. Lisetskii sees the strike process in terms of the Bolsheviks leading workers toward October.¹³ Others, like the Soviet historian L. S. Gaponenko, regard strikes essentially as the "deepest manifestations" of ongoing class struggle in 1917, a "characteristic of all capitalist societies."¹⁴

Nor have Western accounts offered a substantive alternative, although the general interpretation is far from the Soviet view. Here strikes have signified essentially anarchic impulses among workers: a blind and insatiable lashing out for selfish gains or an irrepressible urge to settle old scores with no regard for consequences. A principal cause of Russia's shattered economy, strikes left economic and social devastation in their wake and paved the way for political extremism. These interpretations

¹¹ Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, trans. Max Eastman, 3 vols. (New York, 1980), vol. 2, p. 266.

¹² I. I. Mints, *Istoriia velikogo oktiabria*, 3 vols. (Moscow, 1967–72), vol. 2, p. 434.

¹³ A. M. Lisetskii, *Bol'sheviki vo glave massovykh stachek (mart-oktiabr' 1917 goda)* (Kishinev, 1974). Lisetskii's study is qualitatively rich, however, and contains a wealth of interesting material, as do his principal articles: "K voprosu o statistike zabastovok v Rossii v period podgotovki velikoi oktiabr'skoi sotsialisticheskoi revoliutsii," *Trudy Kafedry Istorii KPSS, Khar'kovskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta imeni Gor'kogo* 7 (1959), pp. 271–83; "O nekotorykh osobennostiakh zabastovochnoi taktiki bol'shevikov v period podgotovki velikoi oktiabr'skoi sotsialisticheskoi revoliutsii," *Uchenye Zapiski Khar'kovskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta imeni Gor'kogo* 103 (1959), pp. 93–106; "O kharaktere stachechnoi bor'by proletariata Rossii v period podgotovki oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii (mart-oktiabr' 1917 goda)," in *Tezisy dokladov ob'edinennoi nauchnoi sessii instituta istorii AN MSSR* (Kishinev, 1961), pp. 7–13; "O nekotorykh voprosakh kolichestvennoi kharakteristiki zabastovochnogo dvizheniia v Rossii v period podgotovki oktiabria," *Uchenye Zapiski Kishinevskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta* 65 (1963), pp. 3–15; "Ob otnoshenii bloka kontrevoliutsionnykh sil k zabastovochnomu dvizheniiu proletariata Rossii (mart-oktiabr' 1917 goda)," *Uchenye Zapiski Kishinevskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta* 95 (1968), pp. 3–23; "K voprosu o mezhdunarodnom znachenii opyta stachechnoi bor'by proletariata Rossii v period podgotovki velikoi oktiabr'skoi sotsialisticheskoi revoliutsii," *Uchenye Zapiski Kishinevskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta* 104 (1968), pp. 299–309.

¹⁴ L. S. Gaponenko, *Rabochii klass Rossii v 1917 godu* (Moscow, 1970), p. 376.

UNDERSTANDING STRIKES IN 1917

follow from the views of Russian émigrés and Western eyewitnesses like the Englishman R. H. Bruce Lockhart, who wrote, "Wage-earners made exorbitant demands upon their employers and frequently ceased work or interfered arbitrarily in the working of their factories. This behavior, together with the lack of fuel and raw materials, hastened the decline of industrial output."¹⁵ As one historian puts it, "A rampage of strikes swept the country from March 1917. . . . The workers struck over any grievance without hesitation. No one—trade unions, Soviet leaders, or Bolsheviks—could control them."¹⁶ Irrational strikers and irresponsible strikes were thus a principal cause of the Provisional Government's collapse and the onset of Bolshevik authoritarianism.¹⁷

The weaknesses of both Soviet and Western interpretations lie most of all in their failure to recognize the complexity of strikes as a form of collective action, one involving difficult objective tasks of organization and mobilization as well as subjective elements of attitude and consciousness. They also ignore significant differences in strike behavior among different industrial and service sector workers, as well as differences in the possible causes of strikes. They show little recognition of how interactions between workers and management might have affected the strike process or how strikes in turn affected the relations between labor and management and representatives of state or local governments, including the soviets. And they fail in their analysis of 1917 to appreciate either the vast array of strike goals and demands that emerged between March and October or their possible implications in terms of workers' relations to Russia's new order.

Thus, although the months between March and October were in large part a workers' revolution, the nature and import of strike activism in 1917 has largely escaped serious historical scrutiny. Strikes clearly shaped a whole range of attitudes toward the new state order on the part of workers themselves, for plant owners and managers, and for state and soviet officials struggling in various ways to build a democratic regime. They also played a central role in the mobilization of labor and in the ways in which shop owners and managerial associations organized them-

¹⁵ R. H. Bruce Lockhart, *The Two Revolutions: An Eye-Witness Account of Russia, 1917* (Chester Springs, Pa., 1967), p. 83.

¹⁶ Jay B. Sorenson, *The Life and Death of Soviet Trade Unions, 1917–1928* (New York, 1969), p. 36.

¹⁷ See, e.g., William H. Chamberlin, *The Russian Revolution*, 2 vols. (New York, 1935), vol. 1, p. 275; W. S. Woytinsky, *Stormy Passage: A Personal History through Two Russian Revolutions to Democracy and Freedom, 1905–1960* (New York, 1961), p. 260; John M. Thompson, *Revolutionary Russia, 1917* (New York, 1981), pp. 73–74; John L. H. Keep, *The Russian Revolution: A Study in Mass Mobilization* (New York, 1976), pp. 73–75.

INTRODUCTION

selves to resist change. They articulated workers' goals far more comprehensively and clearly than any other activist form, and are thus a way to explore the difficult and important question of workers' "consciousness," of what workers thought they wanted from the new revolutionary order. Strikes were therefore central to Russian politics and society in 1917, far more so than historians and others have appreciated. They constitute a critical point of entry into the complex historical relationships between social activism and political change.

SOME NOTES ABOUT THEORY: STRIKES AS INDICATORS

The image of enraged, anarchic strikers also fails to correspond to the general picture of strikes and strikers in Western Europe and the United States, which suggests that well-paid workers tend to strike more than the miserable and downtrodden; that strikes occur more often in times of economic prosperity than crisis (since workers understand the better opportunities for gain); and that few workers willingly risk their livelihood in conditions under which strikes might shut plants permanently or alternative employment is not readily available. Strikes are most often a consequence of rational calculus rather than blind impulse, a weapon and strategy adopted by workers in the expectation that their efforts will be rewarded and they will end up better off. And contrary to the arguments of most Soviet writers, strikes can sometimes serve the purposes of social stability rather than class conflict, particularly if they are a recognized, legal means of arguing labor grievances, and if there is an effective mediation mechanism available to both parties.¹⁸

¹⁸ See, e.g., Michael P. Hanagan, *The Logic of Solidarity: Artisans and Industrial Workers in Three French Towns* (Urbana, Ill., 1980); Robert Gray, *The Aristocracy of Labour in Nineteenth-Century Britain, c. 1850–1914* (London, 1981); Michelle Perrot, *Les Ouvriers en grève: France, 1871–1890*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1974); Edward Shorter and Charles Tilly, *Strikes in France, 1830–1968* (Cambridge, 1974); Michael Shalev, "Trade Unionism and Economic Analysis: The Case of Industrial Conflict," *Journal of Labor Research* vol. 1, no. 1 (1980), pp. 133–73; Dick Geary, *European Labour Protest, 1848–1939* (London, 1981); Bryan D. Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, Ontario, 1860–1914* (Montreal, 1979); P. K. Edwards, *Strikes in the United States, 1881–1974* (Oxford, 1981); and P. K. Edwards, *Conflict at Work: A Materialist Analysis of Workplace Relations* (Oxford, 1986), among others. See also Gerald Suhr, "Petersburg Workers in 1905: Strikes, Workplace Democracy, and the Revolution," Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1979; Laura Engelstein, *Moscow, 1905: Working-Class Organization and Political Conflict* (Stanford, Calif., 1982); Victoria E. Bonnell, *Roots of Rebellion: Workers' Politics and Organizations in St. Petersburg and Moscow, 1900–1914* (Berkeley, 1983); Heather Hogan, "Industrial Rationalization and the Roots of Labor Militance in the St. Petersburg Metalworking Industry, 1901–1914," *Russian Review* 42

There is, in fact, a long tradition of historical scholarship and a wide range of theory built around the study of strikes, testimony to their complexity.¹⁹ A basic assumption of this tradition, often more implicit than explicit, is that strikes are best understood as an indicator of other, broader, forms of political and social change, a kind of proxy for larger social relationships. Hence, strikes are often studied in the past and present to test social theories on a broad level and to clarify policy alternatives.

One well-known view sees strikes as part of the broader processes of industrial modernization, an essentially transitional phenomenon reflecting the stresses of technological change and its accompanying social dislocation. Strikes here are regarded as a necessary, even functional, aspect of social development for industrializing societies, a way in which otherwise intolerable strains can work themselves out.²⁰ Another related theory concentrates on the social and technological structures of various work communities, identifying strikes with differences in the ways workers live or work together, the ease with which they can organize, and their relative degree of integration into broader social or political processes. In this analysis, isolation tends to encourage labor militance, provided workers are able to mobilize; integration weakens labor conflict because of various mediating and ameliorating influences, including alternative outlets for unrest.²¹

Still a third view focuses on the relationship between strikes and economic fluctuations, either in terms of the ways workers' wage (or other) demands reflect changing economic circumstances, or the influence broader economic factors might have on the readiness of contending parties to settle disputes in other ways. In one variant, strikes are mistakes, avoidable in most instances by informed and realistic bargaining.²²

(1983), pp. 163–90; and especially Leopold H. Haimson and Ronald Petrusha, "Two Strike Waves in Imperial Russia (1905–07, 1912–14): A Quantitative Analysis," in *Strikes, Wars, and Revolutions in an International Perspective: Strike Waves in the Late Nineteen and Early Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Leopold H. Haimson and Charles Tilly (New York, 1989).

¹⁹ A thorough listing of the literature can be compiled from the bibliographies in E. T. Hiller, *The Strike: A Study in Collective Action* (Chicago, 1928); Richard Hyman, *Strikes* (London, 1972); and Edwards, *Conflict at Work*.

²⁰ See, e.g., Arthur M. Ross and Paul T. Hartman, *Changing Patterns of Industrial Conflict* (New York, 1960); Clark Kerr et al., "The Labour Problem in Economic Development," *International Labour Review* 71 (1955), 232.

²¹ See Clark Kerr and Abraham Siegel, "The Inter-Industry Propensity to Strike," in *Industrial Conflict*, ed. Arthur Kornhauser, Robert Dubin, and Arthur M. Ross (New York, 1954), pp. 189–212; David Lockwood, "Sources of Variation in Working-Class Images of Society," *Sociological Review* 14 (1966), pp. 249–67.

²² See J. R. Hicks, *The Theory of Wages* (New York, 1948). See also the arguments of Orley Ashenfelter and George E. Johnson on the strike as an "equilibrating mechanism" in

INTRODUCTION

Finally, there is the view that strikes are fundamentally political phenomena, occurring as workers mobilize to change the "balance of power" inside the workplace or out, or to express in some demonstrative way otherwise restrained or suppressed political grievances. As Edward Shorter and Charles Tilly put it, strikes are essentially "an instrument of working-class political action. Workers, when they strike, are merely extending into the streets their normal processes of political participation . . . not so much as real tests of economic strength as symbolic displays of political energy and resoluteness."²³

James Cronin has very ably shown, however, that none of these theories fully explains the British experience, and each has its weaknesses when applied in other historical contexts as well, especially when used as a singular mode of explanation.²⁴ Modernization theory fails to explain fluctuations in the level of strike activity over time. It is also limited by a particular teleology, which begs analysis of social and psychological differences between different groups of workers or of the importance of interactions between them. It thus fails to explore the ways in which these differences may be related more to patterns of political control within the workplace itself (or the local community) than to broader socioeconomic formations.

The structuralist approach used by analysts like David Lockwood, Clark Kerr, and Abraham Siegel, however, which stresses the influence of work and community environments on the propensity of workers to strike, fails in its own right as both historical explanation and predictor. As Cronin indicates, one finds almost everywhere a significant variation in interindustry strike propensities over time, which cannot be fully explained by local circumstances. Also, too great an emphasis on local environmental factors precludes consideration of broader, national, or international phenomena that might affect strike propensities, and carries with it the implicit assumption that coal miners or textile workers, isolated in their villages or towns, are essentially impervious to broader economic, political, or even organizational influences. Although structural influences clearly matter, they cannot fully explain strike behavior or serve usefully as a basis for a comprehensive analytical model.

"Bargaining Theory, Trade Unions and Industrial Strike Activity," *American Economic Review* 59 (1969), pp. 35–49. A recent survey of the economic theory of strikes appears in John Kennan, "The Economics of Strikes," in *Handbook of Labor Economics*, ed. Orley Ashenfelter and Richard Layard (Amsterdam, 1986), vol. 1, pp. 1091–134.

²³ Shorter and Tilly, *Strikes in France*, p. 343. See also Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading, Mass., 1978), esp. pp. 159–66; Perrot, *Les Ouvriers*.

²⁴ See James E. Cronin, "Theories of Strikes: Why Can't They Explain the British Experience?" *Journal of Social History* vol. 12, no. 2 (1978–79), pp. 194–218, from which the above categorization of strike theories was largely drawn.

UNDERSTANDING STRIKES IN 1917

Economic and political theories of strikes do have great value in calling attention to broader influences on strike behavior, and both emphasize important truths: that strikes are almost always related to disparities between workers' economic expectations and their real incomes, however great or small, and that all strikes are to some extent struggles for power within or outside the workplace, often reflecting broader efforts in this regard. But just as one needs to account for noneconomic factors such as the availability of resources and the ability to organize in explaining strikes, even over economic issues like wages, the question of power is itself multidimensional. Workers' perceptions of the likelihood of success in strike actions may be as important in determining their course of action as the availability of supporting resources, and this perception might derive as much from an evaluation of management's current state of mind as the workers' own goals and desires. Also, and in some ways more important, strikes can themselves alter the very political context in which they occur, creating new circumstances that subsequent groups of workers will probably take into account in making their own decisions to strike. To say that strikes *are* political events, or that they always reflect some degree of class conflict, is thus not so much explanation as description, useful as a way of conceptualizing important aspects of the strike process but less helpful as a means of understanding their motivation or determining their possible effect.

STRIKES AND REVOLUTION

These conceptual difficulties are especially relevant in attempting to make sense of strikes during moments of political upheaval. French government statisticians actually excluded massive one-day political strikes from their strike reports, on the grounds that these giant protests would overshadow smaller, "normal" strikes and turn strike statistics into an index of political demonstrations.²⁵ Yet our own concern is precisely that of understanding the role of strikes in revolution. How, then, can we frame our questions so as to gain some insight into the complex relationships between strike activity and Russian revolutionary development in 1917?

One obvious feature of the international context needs to be emphasized at the outset. The First World War had generated enormous pressures in every belligerent society and had rearranged many established institutional relationships. Inflation and full employment fostered by the war effort, as well as longer-term structural changes in industry and the consolidation of working-class communities, produced an explosion of

²⁵ Shorter and Tilly, *Strikes in France*, p. 353.

INTRODUCTION

labor militancy in the years between 1914 and 1920.²⁶ Russian instability must first be seen in this broader context. In the United States, for example, major strikes reverberated throughout the country, often in sharp opposition to national trade union policy and even as the national unions participated in a state-sponsored mediation effort to quell labor militancy.²⁷ In Britain, the paradigmatic emphasis on moderation and reformism of the labor movement masked growing labor militancy and autonomous movements toward direct action; as in the United States, the national labor organizations entered into a partnership with the state for the purposes of the war economy. The unions tended to moderate their position as they gained power but in the process left rank-and-file militants without effective national organizations.²⁸

A similar upheaval in the balance of power took place in Germany; in simplest terms, trade unions made a pact with the state in the name of defense, but at the local level workers engaged in direct action and militant politics that challenged this very order. In Saxony, for example, labor unrest continued even after 1918 to repeat the wartime pattern: food and not just wages sparked protests, and women and youths participated as well as male factory workers.²⁹ In Italy, the requirements of wartime production permitted for the first time the institutionalization of trade unions. The state here also erected structures to mediate working-class discontent. Within the parameters of this shift in power, Italian labor militancy escalated as well, culminating in the Biennio Rosso—Red Years—of 1919–1920, the occupation of the Turin factories, and the radical new settlement that followed.³⁰ In France, too, labor militancy reached un-

²⁶ See James E. Cronin, "Labor Insurgency and Class Formation: Comparative Perspectives on the Crisis of 1917–1920 in Europe," in *Work, Community, and Power: The Experience of Labor in Europe and America, 1900–1925*, ed. James E. Cronin and Carmen Sirianni (Philadelphia, 1983), pp. 20–48.

²⁷ David Montgomery, "New Tendencies in Union Struggles and Strategies in Europe and the United States, 1916–1922," and Melvyn Dubofsky, "Abortive Reform: The Wilson Administration and Organized Labor, 1913–1920," in Cronin and Sirianni, eds., *Work, Community, and Power*, pp. 88–116, 197–220.

²⁸ James E. Cronin, "Industry, Locality, and the State: Patterns of Mobilization in the Postwar Strike Wave in Britain," in *War, Strikes, and Revolution: The Impact of the War Experience on Italy, Germany, France, England, and Russia*, ed. Giulio Sapelli and Leopold H. Haimson (Milan, forthcoming); James Hinton, *The First Shop Stewards' Movement* (London, 1973); Robert Holton, *British Syndicalism, 1900–1914* (London, 1975).

²⁹ Gerald D. Feldman, "Labor Unrest and Strikes in Saxony, 1916–1923," in Sapelli and Haimson, eds., *War, Strikes, and Revolution*; and Gerald D. Feldman, *Army, Industry, and Labor in Germany, 1914–1918* (Princeton, 1966).

³⁰ See Luigi Tomassini, "Industrial Mobilization and State Intervention in Italy during World War I: Effects on Labor Unrest," in Sapelli and Haimson, eds., *War, Strikes, and*

precedented levels, largely outside the leadership of traditional labor organizations.³¹

Common to all of these societies was a political situation of great uncertainty and unpredictability, as well as rapidly changing social and economic conditions. In Russia, the collapse of the old regime intensified these uncertainties. For Russian workers in particular, revolution meant that the “ground rules” of strikes, which had remained more or less stable before the revolution, began in 1917 to dissolve. What is both exciting and analytically troublesome about investigating strikes in these circumstances is that the range of workers’ assumptions about the rules rapidly expanded as events unfolded, changing the very nature of some strikes even as they were occurring. Strikes contributed simultaneously to defining *new* assumptions about the parameters of labor activism itself and about the possibilities of economic, political, and even social change. In other words, the strike process itself helped shape a new range of beliefs, attitudes, and values in 1917, for workers as well as their employers, affecting the limits of political and economic possibility.

More broadly, the dynamics of proletarian activism as a whole structured the contest for power and ultimately gave historical definition to the nature of Lenin’s proletarian dictatorship. Thus the quantitative data and objective relationships described below must ultimately be integrated not only with aspects of a rapidly changing political, social, and economic milieu, but also with complex and analytically quite slippery subjective material, including most particularly the values and perspectives of those who exercised power, those who organized workers and others into contending social groups, and even those who had the more prosaic tasks of recording and reporting strikes themselves.

A study of strikes in revolution thus contrasts both with longitudinal analyses underlying most strike theory, which use a time-series approach to review strikes over substantial periods of time, and with episodic studies, which look in detail at, say, the American Pullman railway car strike in 1894 or the British general strike of 1926, and which form the basis of most descriptive analyses of strikes. By aggregating large amounts of data, longitudinal studies can display significant long-term patterns valuable both to understanding the history of labor protest generally and to theorizing relationships between “waves” of protest and other elements of social development. Episodic studies, while not, of course, based on large quantities of strike data, are especially valuable in displaying the

Revolution; and Paolo Spriano, *The Occupation of the Factories*, trans. Gwyn Williams (London, 1975).

³¹ Jean-Louis Robert, “Les Grèves parisiennes (août 1914–juillet 1919),” in Sapelli and Haimson, eds., *War, Strikes, and Revolution*.

INTRODUCTION

strike process as a rich and complex human experience, a vital element of good social history. In contrast, an analysis of strikes during a particular historical conjuncture must, on one hand, aggregate rather substantial amounts of data within a relatively short time span without particular concern for long-term historical patterns that they might in fact, contradict; and on the other, focus as clearly as possible on the particularities of context, without, however, overemphasizing the details of one or another strike episode. A study such as ours is, in effect, a cross-sectional analysis of what amounts to a single strike wave, but one that has as its primary focus not so much the strike wave itself as the interrelationships between this particular form of labor activism and the historical context in which it occurs.

We must therefore set two distinct but related objectives in exploring strikes in revolutionary Russia. One is to analyze the strike process as a social phenomenon in its own right in 1917, and to understand in this way its relationship to broader and common patterns of labor activism in other times and places. This will require us to explore such elements as the scope, intensity, and degree of organization of strikes in 1917, as well as their duration and outcome, and to explain them, at least in part, in terms of Russian and European labor history generally. The second must be to relate strikes as a specific element of labor activism to the political and socioeconomic evolution of the Russian revolution itself. Here our focus has to be on the ways that elements common to the strike process generally, in Russia before 1917 and elsewhere, both affected and were affected by the particular elements of Russia's revolutionary conjuncture and the fundamental sociopolitical relationships that defined it.

PROBLEMS OF IDENTITIES, PERCEPTIONS, AND INTERPRETATIONS

Defining these sociopolitical relationships is no easy task in the dynamic and fluid context of revolution, and one must recognize some of the conceptual problems involved in identifying the relevant attributes of labor activism in such a period. First among these is what Leopold Haimson has identified as the "problem of social identities": the ways in which an individual's sense of his or her place in Russian society corresponded to political outlook and the nature of collective action in general. As Haimson has argued, all social actors clearly brought multiple identities into the revolutionary period, and those actors most involved in the struggle for change in the years leading up to 1917 are identifiable not by any single characteristic of social position, but by combinations of indices related in each case to the inability of extant institutions and socioeconomic

relations to accommodate their needs.³² As we begin to analyze 1917, however, one central issue clearly relates to the difficult question of social group or class coherence: the degree to which the patterns and pressures of aggregate identities may have come to dominate tendencies toward social differentiation. The revolutionary process as a whole, in fact, may well be correlated in some important ways to the moments when aggregate identities like “worker” or “bourgeois,” “gentry” or “peasant,” began to overwhelm the more particularistic identities of trade or profession, geography, or traditional social status.

In terms of Russian labor, the question of how or why these unifying identities may have come to dominate particularistic ones cannot be separated from the changing nature and form of labor activism, especially strikes. In other words, the question of identities cannot be divorced from the actual experience of conflict. Strike activism in 1917 must thus be analyzed, at least in part, in terms of the ways in which it might have contributed to the complex process of class formation.

Second, one must also recognize the centrality here of social interactions themselves: those between labor and management that emerged in the course of specific conflicts, but also the triangular patterns of interaction between workers, employers, and both official and unofficial agencies of the regime (including, in some instances, the soviets). This dimension of the problem is very much complicated by variations among localities and industries, but everywhere in 1917, at the center or on the periphery, it was the nature of these interactions themselves rather than slogans or more elaborate forms of ideology that gave many workers (and others) a sense of who they were, or at least of who they were *not*, with equally significant consequences.

Finally, there are the closely related and extremely complex problems of representation and perception: the ways in which various social groups and political formations presented themselves to others and were perceived by them, and the ways, further, in which activist behavior actually signified values or other elements of sentiment and belief (consciousness) that may have underlaid political inclinations. These issues, too, are complex, but also central to our understanding of the revolutionary period both in the ways they affected expectations and judgments and in the manner they contributed to the formation of both class and political outlooks. To approach them, and to understand in particular their relation to strikes, we must consequently explore what might be called the language of strikes, expressed in both formal and informal demands, and

³² Leopold H. Haimson, “The Problem of Social Identities in Early Twentieth Century Russia,” *Slavic Review* 47, no. 1 (1988), pp. 1–20.

INTRODUCTION

determine as well as we can the ways in which language may have reflected underlying commitments. And to evaluate the degree of complementarity in perceptions and outlooks between different social groups and political contenders, it is also essential to examine carefully the ways in which strikes were reported and represented in the press.

In this respect, the most fundamental labels concerning strikes must be carefully understood and even more carefully qualified. Strikes in Russia, whether before, during, or after 1917, are conventionally dichotomized as "economic" or "political." Before 1917 there was a clear distinction in law and practice between economic and political strikes in Russia. Economic strikes related directly to the workplace. Strictly speaking, they were legal, although "fomenting," "instigating" or "organizing" them was illegal.³³ Political strikes were always against the law, but took place frequently anyway. These were generally demonstrative strikes, occurring massively in the 1905 revolution and recurring on the anniversaries of important events like Bloody Sunday (the firing by troops outside the Winter Palace on demonstrating workers in January 1905) or the 1912 massacre of Lena gold field workers. Political strikes were thus a substitute for demonstrations and other forms of mass politics. They were carefully monitored by tsarist police, and during the war years in particular they were brutally repressed. In August 1915, for example, over 25,000 textile workers struck in Ivanovo-Voznesensk to protest the war. A crowd advancing on the city square was repeatedly fired upon by police, leaving 25 dead and more than 30 wounded.³⁴

In recording strike statistics both before the revolution and after, factory inspectors always distinguished between the two categories. Strikes were recorded as either political or economic, depending on the overt object of protest. As we have already suggested, however, at one level all strikes were (and are) struggles over power, whether inside the factory or out. Hence in one sense, the distinction between political and economic has little meaning.

But the distinction nonetheless has descriptive merit. Despite the vital,

³³ Law of December 2, 1905, *Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii*, sobranie 3, vol. 25, no. 1 (1905), pp. 850–52. N. N. Polianskii, "*Russkoe ugovnoe zakonodatel'stvo o stachkakh*" i drugia stat'i po ugovnomu pravu (Moscow, 1912), pp. 1–130, and M. I. Tugan-Baranovsky, *The Russian Factory in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Arthur and Claora S. Levin (Homewood, Ill., 1970), pp. 327–31, elaborate on this law and 1886 legislation on strikes. In practical terms, the distinction was impossible to enforce. Strike leaders were frequently arrested.

³⁴ M. G. Fleer, ed., *Rabochee dvizhenie v gody voiny* (Moscow, 1925), pp. 89, 214–15; K. F. Sidorov, "Rabochee dvizhenie v Rossii v gody imperialisticheskoi voiny," in *Ocherki po istorii oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii*, ed. M. N. Pokrovskii (Moscow and Leningrad, 1927), vol. 1, pp. 283–85.

UNDERSTANDING STRIKES IN 1917

dialectical relationship between strikes and the process of revolutionary change in 1917, one cannot assume there is always an overt link between any given strike and the broader political process. Strikers themselves often acted without reference to politics, and much of their behavior is only comprehensible in these terms. Life in the factory had its own momentum, its own timetable, its own issues and agendas, even in 1917. Despite appearances to the contrary, strikes occurring even in the midst of major political events like the April demonstrations or the July Days sometimes had nothing directly to do with these external occurrences.

Hence it is important to understand strikes over workplace issues in 1917 as fundamentally economic in character, continuing the Factory Inspectorate's distinction. Doing so will enable us to look as closely as possible at those structural elements of labor activism that might have had a direct and independent effect on strikes: who struck; what they believed they were striking for; how strikers mobilized in support of their goals; the strike process itself, from organizational meetings to demonstrations and walkouts; the particularities of labor-management negotiations; and the nature of settlements and their impact on subsequent labor unrest. It is here that we need to concentrate our effort to understand Russian strikes in 1917 as events in themselves.

In terms of interpretation, however, we must put these economic strikes back into the political context of 1917. No strike in Russia between March and October was merely economic. Overt political strikes occurred, of course, especially around the July Days and the Kornilov mutiny, and we must pay attention to these in due fashion, distinguishing them by their specific political content. But even ordinary economic strikes were themselves conditioned in some ways by the political context in which they occurred. Few workers leaving their shops or factories in the course of 1917 could fail to develop some awareness of how their actions might relate to broader political events around them. Regardless of goals, in other words, the act of striking was itself a part of the process of developing political consciousness in 1917, in ways it is essential to explore.

Economic strikes must also be considered carefully within the context of political relationships within enterprises themselves. Some workplace issues are quite central to issues of power and political relations. They touch directly the question of who (or which groups) will control whom, who will have what power to manage the processes of production. Here, of course, the Factory Inspectorate's bipolar schema of strikes breaks down. In order to realize our objective of understanding both the overt and subliminal political implications of strikes in revolutionary Russia, we therefore need to replace the economic-political dichotomy with new

INTRODUCTION

categories that distinguish strikes over wages or conditions from those that challenge managerial authority, and that distinguish both of these from political strikes whose target is the state rather than the enterprise.

By challenges to managerial authority we have in mind strikes that indicate a rejection of managerial prerogatives normally associated with a free-enterprise economy. Strikes over workers' rights to have a role in hiring and firing, for example, directly challenge managerial authority in the workplace in ways quite different from, say, strikes over higher wages, in which the right of management itself to *set* wages is not specifically in question. Similarly, strikes in which workers demand that plant owners share profits, guarantee a certain number of work days per month regardless of actual production, cancel cutbacks in production, or replace foreign directors also indicate a clear challenge to the power of management to control production, even if the challenge appears in less explicit fashion.

Strikes that test the good faith of management by demanding that past agreements be honored are also political challenges, since what is at stake is the viability of legal forms like contracts or court orders. These might be thought of as "secondary" strikes, since workers are demanding not that their primary demands be granted, but that promises to grant them be upheld. The outcome of such strikes might thus have a direct bearing on the ways in which workers think about political issues or the possibility of alternative political structures.

SOME NOTES ABOUT METHODOLOGY

These conceptual difficulties obviously create some methodological problems. How one thinks about a strike determines how it will be recorded and shapes the body of data from which analysis is drawn. The very definition of a strike in 1917 can vary considerably, depending on whether one pays attention to individual shops or factories, broader industrywide or citywide strikes, or the broadest forms of political demonstration like those sweeping Petrograd in February, April, and July of 1917, and accompanying the gathering of national leaders to the Moscow Conference in early August.

We define a strike according to the common practice in 1917 as a work stoppage with common goals. The unit on strike might range from a workshop within a factory to several enterprises striking at once for a single set of demands, or to an entire industry or several industries striking throughout a town or region. We think this is a sensible calculus. It reflects popular perceptions of strikes at the time, and it allows us to analyze important changes in the patterns of strikes over time (by contrast-

UNDERSTANDING STRIKES IN 1917

ing, for example, the number of strikes in individual enterprises to strikes involving more than one enterprise). We therefore count as a single strike a work stoppage involving dozens of plants and tens of thousands of workers if it was initiated and implemented as a common action.

Our study is based on several sources. We began by collecting strike reports from a variety of materials but concentrating on contemporary newspapers and document collections. The result was a data set containing information on 930 strikes that began in Russia between March 3 and October 25 (inclusively). To these we were able to add data on some 458 of the 576 strikes recorded by the Factory Inspectorate, some 136 of which we had not recorded from our newspaper or documents sources. These data came from the Central State Historical Archive in Leningrad.³⁵ Our analysis is consequently built on information on 1,019 discrete strikes obtained primarily from contemporary public records, partly from Soviet archival material, and partly from subsequent documentary and other sources.

For each strike, we have recorded separately information we consider “objective,” or relatively insensitive to bias, and “subjective” data more likely to be biased by the perceptions of the reporter. Objective data include such facts as factory location, industry and branch of industry, the date a strike began, and whether it was confined to a single enterprise or extended to more than one production unit. Subjective data include information on the number of strikers, whether white-collar employees (*sluzhashchie*) or other groups struck along with workers (or in some instances, against them), information on the participation of trade unions and factory committees, and the roles of specially formed strike committees. We also include here reports on whether violence occurred, the nature of mediation efforts, and strike outcomes. Most important is a listing of strikers’ demands. We have been able to record up to 14 demands reported by any source about a particular strike, and have listed them both in 40 major categories and a drastically collapsed set of five categories: wages, hours and conditions, issues of control, issues touching workers’ dignity, and politics.

In addition to this basic data set, we have also constructed a file of data organized by province. Here we have aggregated basic strike material for each of Russia’s 1917 provincial units, calculating strike propensities (described below), the distribution of strikes over time and according to demands, length of strikes, outcome, and degree of organization. We have combined this with aggregate socioeconomic data for each province, extracted from tsarist statistical reports and early Soviet censuses. Included

³⁵ See appendix 1.

INTRODUCTION

here is information on wages (nominal and real), productivity, age, gender ratios, literacy rates, and whether or not workers had ties to land. We include as well information about provincial level votes for the Constituent Assembly elections as a way of presenting general information about the relative mix of political affiliations in different regions. This aggregated data file is the source for the bivariate and multivariate statistical regressions that we use when we think such techniques are appropriate. Additional information on this can be found in appendix 1.

As with any body of historical evidence of this sort, there are several problems with our strike data set. It is obviously not complete, although we are confident it is more than sufficient to indicate major trends and relationships, our primary objective. Also, available strike records are surely biased against smaller strikes, especially among nonfactory workers, which factory inspectors ignored and which sometimes went unreported in other sources as well. On some important questions like the number of women strikers, we have relatively little information. Although women workers accounted for some 40 percent of the factory labor force in 1917, reports of strikes rarely distinguish the gender of strikers. For other questions, like the number of workers on strike, our data are necessarily imprecise, partly because of the turmoil of the time, and partly because such information is intrinsically difficult to come by. Factory employment statistics fall into this area, as do figures about wage levels, change in wages over time, and productivity.

The fact that we are dealing with a period of rapid change raises further problems about using constant figures across even a six- or seven-month span. Many provincial employment statistics, for example, are given as of January 1917, the base month for most Central Statistical Administration data. Obviously, changes had occurred in many places by August or September. This clearly leads to some distortion. When possible, we have taken steps to reduce probable error. In the case of probable strikers, we use consistent estimates based partly on what we know about the numbers of employed workers, and partly on the mean estimate of multiple reports. Hence we think that these and similar problems are surmountable, especially if we present our findings judiciously and with ample allowance for error.

This concern has largely dictated the nature of our statistical methodology. For the most part we use simple descriptive statistical tools; frequency distributions, rates, and measures of central tendencies (means and medians) furnish much of our quantitative insight. But in order to illuminate the powerful subjective aspects of strike protests that are so important for proper understanding, we rely also on case histories, and on what we think are sensible deductions from aggregate information on

UNDERSTANDING STRIKES IN 1917

demands, outcomes, and particular components of the strike process itself, such as its mode of organization, tactics, or the degree of violence involved.

Our greatest concern has been to portray fairly trends and relationships by means of statistics but at the same time to avoid conveying through statistics a misleading aura of precision where none is warranted. We wish therefore to alert the reader to the conventions of our statistical presentation. It should be understood that "precise" numerical figures are always necessarily approximate, even though they are based on careful sifting of all available evidence. In those few cases for which the quantitative data are less reliable, we qualify our arguments directly in the text.

TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING OF STRIKES IN REVOLUTION

The conceptual tension between economic and political strikes, between structure and events, is reflected in the organization of our book. We have chosen to structure our analysis chronologically, as a narrative of strikes in the course of the events of 1917. Yet such an approach risks obscuring a consideration of longer-term processes and nonchronological themes. We have therefore tried to weave thematic material, such as a consideration of the issue of strike demands, the role of management, and the questions of perceptions and leadership together with the broader narrative framework. The first chapter places labor unrest in 1917 in the broader picture of Russian strike activity before the revolution. Chapter 2 provides a quantitative and comparative overview of our data on strikes, linking the broad patterns of 1917 with strike patterns of the preceding years. Chapter 3 begins the story of strikes in 1917, which continues, with necessary thematic excursions, through to the conclusion of our study, on the eve of the October revolution itself. A certain amount of technical and explanatory information has been reserved for two appendices at the end of the book.

We thus proceed pragmatically, guided both by theoretical perspectives and by the empirical evidence that our methods supply. Our statistical methodology is straightforward. We can only plot what we believe are the most important lines of enquiry, charting the effects of organization, economic conditions, labor-management relations, political sympathies, and such elements as strike outcomes on the nature of strikes themselves in 1917, as well as on the course of Russian society at large from March to October. And while analyzing our data statistically, we need to stay especially alert to changes in attitudes about strikes as tactical weapons, to changing patterns in outcomes and their effects on workers' outlooks,

INTRODUCTION

to elements of violence, to changing images of strikes and strikers in the public record, and, also important, to a changing sense of the role non-revolutionary instruments of strike mediation might play in resolving grievances—in brief, to the whole panoply of essentially subjective phenomena that accompany strikes everywhere, but are not readily treated statistically, and have particular importance in an historical context in which the very nature of the strike itself, as a weapon of social protest, may be changing.

Our application of theory is equally cautious. The conceptual issues we raise cannot be neatly systematized into a model of social revolution. But they do constitute building blocks toward some future model that might better account for the explosive power of labor activism in 1917 than do explanations based primarily on ideology and politics. By examining strikes within this broader framework, we hope to bring our understanding of labor activism as a whole into sharper relief. Perhaps our conceptual approach will contribute as well to a better understanding of the special nature of strikes in revolutionary situations throughout the industrial world.