

# On the Russian Revolution: The Petrograd Workers and the Fall of the Old Régime - II - Chapter Three

Friday 5 March 2010, by [MANDEL David](#) (Date first published: 1 June 1983).

**This study is posted online on ESSF in seven parts:**

**First part:** [On the Russian Revolution: The Petrograd Workers and the Fall of the Old Régime - I - Intro to chapter two](#)

**Third part:** [On the Russian Revolution: The Petrograd Workers and the Fall of the Old Régime - III - Chapter Four](#)

**Fourth Part:** [On the Russian Revolution : The Petrograd Workers and the Fall of the Old Régime - IV - Chapter Five](#)

**Fifth Part:** [On the Russian Revolution : The Petrograd Workers and the Fall of the Old Régime - V - Chapter Six](#)

**Sixth Part:** [On the Russian Revolution : The Petrograd Workers and the Fall of the Old Régime - VI - Chapters Seven & Eight](#)

**Seventh Part:** [On the Russian Revolution : The Petrograd Workers and the Fall of the Old Régime - VII - Conclusion & Bibliography](#)

Contents

- [Chapter 3: The Social Composit](#)
- [The Geographical Factor \(...\)](#)

---

## **Chapter 3: The Social Composition of the Industrial Working Class of Petrograd and its Districts**

On 1 January 1917, 392 000 industrial workers were employed in Petrograd, [1] which had a population of 2 412 700. [2] (The category 'industrial worker' includes non-managerial personnel employed in factories, mines and quarries (excluding transport, construction, etc.) with over 10 workers or not less than 10 h.p. mechanical power. Estimates of the total vary slightly. Another figure often cited is 384 000. Since the difference is not very significant, depending on the source, both figures will be used here. In addition, some 24 000 worked outside the capital in factories that

were economically and politically connected to the capital. [3] These 416 000 workers represented 12 per cent of Russia's three and one-half million industrial workers in a total population of 134 million. [4]

Over 60 per cent of Petrograd's workers were employed in metalworking (see Table 3. 1) a fact that left its imprint on the entire course of the labour movement not only in Petrograd but Russia as a whole. By contrast, in the Central Industrial Region (Moscow and five surrounding provinces), metalworkers made up only 18.6 per cent (192 000 of 1 030 000) of the work force. Here textiles dominated – cotton alone employed 42.7 per cent of all workers [5].

Industrial concentration, too, was higher than in the rest of Russia – as much as 40 percent above the average. [6] This congregation of large masses of workers under one roof – 38 plants of over 2000 each accounted for over two-thirds of the total work force [7] – strongly facilitated political education and communication, imparting great strength to collective actions.

**TABLE 3.1**  
**Distribution and average concentration of**  
**Petrograd workers by Industry, 1 January 1917**

Industry	Number of factories	Number of workers	Per cent of all workers	Average number per factory
Metalworking	379	237,369	60.4	626.3
Textiles	100	44,115	11.2	441.2
Chemicals	58	40,087	10.2	691.2
Paper, printing	218	26,481	6.7	121.5
Food processing	70	15,773	4.0	225.3
Woodworking	81	6,754	1.7	83.4
Leather, shoes	50	12,627	3.2	252.5
Mineral processing	32	3,900	1.0	121.8
Others	23	5,722	1.5	248.8
	<b>1011</b>	<b>392,828</b>	<b>99.9</b>	<b>388.5</b>

Source: *Materialy po statistike truda, vyp. I*, p. 10.

**TABLE 3.2**  
**Changes in number of workers employed in Petrograd**  
**by industry, 1 January 1914-1 January 1917**

Industry	Numbers of workers					
	1914		1917		Change 1914-17	
	In 1000s	%	In 1000s	%	In 1000s	%
Metalworking	100.6	41.5	235.9	61.3	+ 135.3	+ 134.5
Chemicals	21.6	8.9	42.9	11.2	+ 21.3	+ 98.6
Textiles	40.1	16.5	36.2	9.4	- 3.9	- 9.7
Food processing	22.7	9.4	15.5	4.0	- 6.8	- 30.5

Printing	23.1	9.5	19.4	5.0	- 3.7	- 16.0
Clothing	10.2	4.2	14.7	3.8	+ 4.5	+ 44.1
Woodworking	5.0	2.1	5.2	1.4	+ 0.2	+ 4.0
Paper	4.4	1.8	3.6	0.9	- 0.8	- 18.2
Other	14.9	6.1	8.6	2.2	--	—
<b>All</b>	<b>242.6</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>384.6</b>	<b>88.2 a</b>	<b>+ 142.0</b>	<b>+ 58.5</b>

a Less than 100 per cent due to rounding.

*Source: Rashin, Formirovanie rabocheho klassa Rossi p. 83.*

Wages in Petrograd were also the highest in Russia, though significantly offset by the higher cost of living. [8]

One-third of Petrograd's workers were employed in state factories, a reflection of the historic dependence of Russia's metalworking industry on the state (and on foreign capital). In all, there were 134 414 workers in 31 state plants, with another 6768 in two large railroad workshops. [9]

In the course of the war, Petrograd's industry underwent tremendous expansion, especially in the war-related branches of metalworking, chemicals and to some degree, the clothing industry (see Table 3-2). Most striking was the growth in metalworking, which alone accounted for 83 per cent of the new jobs. The relative weight of metalworking in the labour force grew from 42 per cent in 1915 to over 60 per cent in 1917.

In this wartime expansion, there was a disproportionate growth in the number of women workers (see Table 3.3). Although in absolute terms the increase was about the same for both sexes, the relative increase in the female labour force exceeded that for men by over 50 per cent, bringing the adult female component up to 33.2 per cent from 25.7 per cent in 1914. In metalworking, woodworking and printing, the most skilled industries, despite very significant growth in the number of women workers, men continued to predominate. But in textiles and food-processing, which were mainly unskilled and where women had long since become prominent, they now formed a majority. Both of these industries underwent a decline in the absolute number of male workers, due not only to an overall drop in the work force but also to the widespread movement of men of draft age into defence-related industry in search of military deferments. In leather and shoes and chemicals, the sexes had become more or less evenly balanced, with the former experiencing the largest decline in relative size of the male work force. (Shoe-making still employed a significant proportion of skilled workers, while leather-processing, involving heavy physical work, could not easily be done by women.)

There were four principal sources of recruitment into the labour force during the war:

1. peasants, mainly women, juveniles and men above draft age;
- 2 wives and children of workers, craftsmen, workers from small workshops and other non-industrial working-class occupations;
3. evacuees from factories in Poland and the Baltic provinces; and
4. urban petty bourgeois and bourgeois elements seeking to avoid the draft.

Unfortunately, data on the relative size of these categories are scant and allow only for rough

estimates.

**TABLE 3.3**  
**Changes in number of industrial workers in Petrograd,**  
**by age and sex, 1914-17**

Year	Number of workers					
	Adult men		Adult women		Under 16 years	
	1000	Per cent of workforce	1000	Per cent of workforce	1000	Per cent of workforce
1914	158.4	65.2	61.6	25.4	22.9	9.4
1917	231.2	58.5	129.8	32.8	33.8	8.6
% increase	<b>46.0</b>		<b>110.7</b>		<b>47.6</b>	

*Source: Based on Stepmov, Rabodde Petrograda, pp. 34 and 36.*

The head of the Labour Section of the People's Commissariat of Labour, A. Anikst, reported in 1920 that there had been at least 170 000 'wartime workers' in the factories of Petrograd in 1917, with 150 000 in metalworking and 20 000 in chemicals. [10] A. Antonov, a Petrograd metalworker prominent in industrial management during the civil war, cited similar figures. [11] Two Soviet historians, I. P. Leiberov and O. I. Shkaratan, using archival materials, have calculated that about 70 per cent (116 000) of the male workers of Petrograd were of draft age in 1914. Of these, no more than 15 000-20 000 were actually drafted, the others receiving deferments for war-related work, health or other reasons. Thus, they estimate that 200 000-220 000 or 52-57 per cent of the industrial workers of January 1917 had been in the factories at the start of the war, [12] approximately the same figure given by Anikst and Antonov (about 55 percent).

Among the newcomers, peasants were by far the most numerous category. Novaya zhizn, citing the Commissariat of Labour, reported that about 150 000 workers constituted 'an element in one way or another tied to the village and interested in the factories only in connection with military deferment'. [13] Evidence from individual factories confirms this. At the Sestroretsk Arms Factory, of the 3286 workers that arrived between January 1914 and July 1917, the majority were peasants; among the new male workers alone, 1875 came from the village. [14] A. Smirnov, a worker of the Skorokhod Shoe Factory, wrote that the new workers who came in 1915-16 were 'predominantly women who had come from the village'. [15] The Petrograd Pipe (Trubochnyi) Factory witnessed such an influx of this element, that, according to one of its workers, it became known as a 'peasant factory'. [16] Even at the Phoenix Machine-construction Factory, with a more skilled work force, 20 per cent of the male newcomers were peasants. [17]

Nevertheless, the economic ties to the land among Petrograd's industrial workers were significantly weaker than in the rest of Russia. According to the August 1918 industrial census, 19.5 per cent of those employed in Petrograd when the data were collected had owned land before the October Revolution, and 7.9 per cent had worked it through members of their family. In all of European Russia these figures were 30.0 per cent and 20.9 per cent respectively; in Moscow - 39.8 per cent and 22.8 per cent; and in Ivanovo - Voznesensk, the 'Russian Manchester' - 35.7 per cent and 22.6 per cent. [18]

Data on the other categories of newcomers are even more limited and less reliable. One estimate of the number of industrial evacuees, based upon figures for a 10-day peak period, puts them at 15 000-20 000. [19] The rest consisted of non-industrial elements from the urban poor and the middle

and upper strata of society. At Phoenix about 23 per cent of the newcomers were artisans. [20] In January 1917 33 800 juveniles (under 16 years) were working in Petrograd's factories. There were also significant numbers of janitors, doormen, cabbies, etc., as well as wives of industrial workers. As for the wealthy elements that took on factory work (some arriving at the plant in cabs), a special commission at the Putilov Works reported in the autumn of 1917 that 7 per cent of the (approximately 36 000) workers here were elements 'foreign' to the working class. [21] Other factories, however, appear to have purged these people soon after the February Revolution.

In sum, despite very significant changes in the social composition of the Petrograd working class, it managed to retain a strong urbanised core that had experienced one of the most intense periods of labour activism in Russian history, the upsurge of 1912-14. Thus, revolutionary Petrograd, as an industrial centre, retained those characteristics that had traditionally set it apart from all others in Russia and placed it at the forefront of the labour movement, predominance of metalworking with a large machine-construction component and the most concentrated, urbanised, skilled and best paid work force.

### **The Geographical Factor - Social Composition of the Districts of Petrograd**

It is not always possible to account for the attitudes and moods that predominated in a given factory solely on the basis of the socioeconomic background of its workers or past and present conditions at the plant. Social geography, the sociological nature of the physical environment, also often played a role in shaping attitudes and influencing actions. This, and the fact that much data on working-class consciousness focus on the district level, call for a brief survey of the social make-up of Petrograd's districts.

The geographical factor asserted itself in various ways. For example, the location of most printing shops not in the predominantly industrial and working-class peripheries but in the centre, populated by the more affluent and educated elements, undoubtedly reinforced the ties felt by the printers towards 'society' as well as their perceptions of the power of the propertied classes compared to the workers. By contrast, working in the militant atmosphere of the Vyborg District with its large cadre of skilled metalworkers, its homogeneous proletarian population and revolutionary reputation, the wartime newcomers were more quickly assimilated into the prevailing spirit of working-class radicalism here than elsewhere.

In general, the geographical proximity of a militant skilled work force to one inclined towards passivity by the nature of its social background often had crucial consequences for the latter. The Treugol'nik Rubber Factory in the Narva District, for example, with an overwhelmingly female and unskilled work force, had never struck during its entire pre-1917 history except when 'taken out' by the more active workers from the relatively nearby Putilov Works or some other factory. This was the case even during the mass poisoning at Treugol'nik in 1913. [22] This widespread tactic of 'taking out' (*snyatie*) involved the arrival of a group of already striking workers at a factory, who through shouts and the occasional throwing of stones, breaking down locked gates, and, if it came to that, physical threats, persuaded the timid or reluctant workers to join. Sometimes this was even prearranged, so that the workers could later claim they had struck under threat of violence. The workers of the quiescent Kersten Knitwear Mill, also overwhelmingly female and peasant, were given the name *kolbasniki* (from *kolbasa* - sausage) because of the boss's custom of treating them occasionally to sausage and tea while he kept them over time. Because the few Bolsheviks here were in any event poor orators, reinforcements would be called in for meetings from the neighbouring Vulkan Machine-construction Factory. [23]

In districts where one or two giant factories (over 5000) dominated numerically, they would also often exert a very strong influence on moods and attitudes in the smaller plants, which tended to look to them for guidance. The Putilov Works, to cite the most striking example, enjoyed prestige far beyond the Petergof District and even the capital. Its participation in any collective action, by virtue of its numbers alone, made success so much more certain. In the early February Days, for example, a meeting of the workers of the main workshops of the N.W. Railroad decided to send a delegation to the Putilov workers to see what they were doing before taking action themselves. [24] In the Vyborg District, the workers of the James Beck Textile Mill traditionally sought aid and advice on economic and political matters from the nearby New Lessner Machine-construction Factory. [25]

Distance from the centre also played a certain role in isolating workers from the heated atmosphere and burning issues and made access to left socialist agitators difficult. This was especially important in factories with a relatively unskilled work force which could not supply its own internationalist leadership. In such cases, the local 'intelligentsia' – the clerical and technical personnel, foremen, etc., who were almost invariably defencists – had little trouble, especially in the early period of the revolution, in holding sway over the workers. This was the situation, for example, in the Porokhovskii District with its two large state-owned chemical factories. The delegate from this district to the Bolshevik Petersburg Committee reported in October: 'Till the Kornilov Days, there was a predominance of Mensheviks and SRs. Now the mood is ours... Distance from the centre hurts our cause'. [26] Similarly, the Left SR *Znamya truda* wrote

"The district, thanks to the absence of paths of communication, is in especially unfavourable conditions. It is only with difficulty that we are able to tear lecturers away [from the centre] ... Despite the lack of homogeneity (there are many peasants taken on because of the war) interest in the political life of the country continues to grow.... We especially feel the absence of intellectual forces [favourable to us]. But thanks to this, one notes an extremely gratifying fact: the appearance of agitators and propagandists from among the workers themselves. There is a collegium of orators – 17 workers. In the near future the district will be able to conduct party work by its own forces alone." [27]

This was written in August. The Vyborg District, by contrast, had been supplying not only itself, but other districts of the city and even nearby provincial towns, with agitators and organisers from the start of the revolution.

Finally, one should be aware that these districts were not merely administrative units but also, and this is especially true for the working-class districts, social entities. One need only recall the pride taken by Vyborg District workers in their revolutionary reputation. In Buzinov's memoirs, too, one senses the 'Nevskii District patriotism', to the point, in fact, where he almost sees the district as the centre around which the 1905 revolution turned. In 1917, workers took part in demonstrations not only as members of their factory but marched in their district columns. This identity was reinforced by the existence of district soviets and dumas. The districts in 1917 did in fact show characteristic patterns in their political positions and actions.

One can see from the map (p. 51) and Table 3.4 that industry generally ran along the outskirts of the city, while the centre, consisting of the First and Second City Districts, northern Moscow District, east Vasilevskii ostrov and south Petrograd District, had few, if any, large factories.

### ***The Vyborg District*** [28]

The role of the size (absolute and relative) of the industrial working-class population and the predominance of metalworking, especially machine construction, in accounting for this district's militancy and radicalism has already been noted. Another closely related characteristic of the



Vyborg District was the social homogeneity of its population (see Table 3.5). The Menshevik-Internationalist paper *Iskra* referred to Vyborg as 'our exclusively proletarian district, [29] and in this respect it surpassed all others. The sheer size of the working-class population and the strength of the local cadres of proletarian militants and leaders [30] imbued the workers here with a sense of their independent strength, while the 'exclusively proletarian' character of the district and its leadership, the relative isolation from society (across the river) nurtured the aspiration towards 'class separateness'.

### Map, The Districts of Petrograd in 1917

[Not reproduced here.]

**TABLE 3.4**  
**Distribution of industrial workers and metalworkers**  
**by district, 1 January 1917**

District	All industries		Metalworking		
	<i>Number of workers</i>	<i>Per cent of all workers</i>	<i>Number of workers</i>	<i>Per cent of district's workers</i>	<i>Per cent of all metal workers</i>
<b>Vyborg</b>	68 932	17.9	57 978	84.1	24.5
<b>Vasilevskii ostrov</b>	51 876	13.5	37 530	72.3	15.9
<b>Narva</b>	38 784	10.1	6 549	16.9	2.8
<b>Nevskii</b>	38 208	9.9	26 641	69.7	11.3
<b>Petrograd</b>	37 840	9.8	24 444	64.6	10.3
<b>Petergof</b>	36 148	9.4	37 753	93.4	14.3
<b>First City</b>	32 769	8.5	13 299	40.6	5.6
<b>Moscow</b>	21 079	5.5	11 012	52.3	4.7
<b>Polyustrovo-Porokhovskii</b>	18 931	4.9	1 262	6.7	0.5
<b>Kolomna</b>	10 480	2.7	9 237	88.1	3.9
<b>Rozhdestvenskii</b>	10 233	2.7	2 063	20.2	0.9
<b>Lesnoi</b>	6 811	1.8	6 015	88.3	2.5
<b>Admiralty, Kazan', Spasskii</b>	5 660	1.5	1 865	32.9	0.8
<b>Okhta</b>	4 273	1.1	3 110	72.8	1.3
<b>Novaya derevnya</b>	3 083	0.8	1 631	52.9	0.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>385,107</b>	<b>100.1</b>	<b>236,389</b>	<b>--</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Stepanov, *Rabochie Petrograda*, p. 30.

It was also for these reasons, as well as the strength of the skilled metalworking element, that the Vyborg District became a Bolshevik stronghold. Not only did the moderate socialists, standing as they did for an alliance with the liberal society, enjoy the least support here of any district, but even the Internationalist groups standing close to the Bolsheviks but striving to reunite the labour movement found few takers. According to L. Leont'ev, a member of the 'Mezhraionka', a group of

Internationalist Social Democrats formed during the war to work for unity, it had considerable appeal among Petrograd workers, both Menshevik and Bolshevik. 'Only on the Vyborg side did it develop weakly'. [31] It will become clear later that on one level, at least, the socialist unity slogan was an appeal for the restoration of the alliance between the workers and radical intelligentsia that had largely broken down after 1905-7. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Vyborg workers in October were the most active participants in insurrection and gave the initially all-Bolshevik government the most unqualified support, showing little apparent concern over the near total isolation of the working class not only from census society but from the great majority of the socialist intelligentsia as well.

**TABLE 3.5**  
**Industrial workers employed in districts as percentage**  
**of total district population**

District	Number of workers	District population	Workers employed_ as percentage_ of district population
Vyborg	68 932	150 465	45.8
Petergof a	36 148	91 000	39.7
Nevskii	38 208	190 000	20.1
Vasilevskii ostrov	51 876	268 000	19.4
Narva a	38 784	208 900	18.6
Kolomna	10 480	96 000	10.9
Moscow	21 079	194 000	10.8
Petrograd	37 840	360 000	10.5
First City	32 769	414 600	7.9
Okhta	4 273	60 789	7.0
Rozhdestvenskii	10 233	166 000	6.2
Admiralty, Kazan', Spasskii	5 660	311 590	1.8

a Separate figures for Narva and Petergof were not available and were calculated on the basis of the 1915 uchet in Statisticheskii spravochnik po Petrogradu (1921) Table 1.

Source: Based on *Vedomosti obshchestvennogo gradonachal'stva Petrograda*, 17 April 1917, cited in Golovanova, 'Raionnye komitety RSDRP (b)', pp. 41-57; and Stepanov, *Rabochie Petrograda*, p. 30.

Note: This is not the actual concentration of workers since not all lived in the same district in which they worked, although the poor state of municipal transport allows one to assume that this was generally the case. These figures also do not include family members not employed in industry. They are, therefore, only relative indicators of social homogeneity.

Certain physical traits of the district also contributed to its characteristic organisation, activism and swift response to the issues of the day. Almost all the factories were relatively large (well over 500 workers) and located along the banks of the Neva or Bol'shaya Nevka Rivers or along the parallel and nearby Bol'shoi Sampson'evskii Prospekt, the district's main thoroughfare, making for easy communications. Secondly, as the map shows, although entirely separated from the 'bourgeois' centre of the city by the river, the district's factories were actually very close to the centre where the



official heart of Russia beat. This proximity made the district readily accessible to all the latest news and rumours, while making the centre especially vulnerable to the direct response of the workers. In all other districts the factories were on the outer peripheries, generally as far as possible from the centre.

### *Petergof and Narva Districts*

The Petergof District stood next only to Vyborg in working-class concentration. It consisted of two sub-districts, one populated mainly by the workers of the Putilov, Til'mans and Langezipen Factories; the other with many small commercial enterprises and a population of small shopkeepers and white-collar employees. As noted, the Putilov Works had a dominant influence here as well as in the Narva District. (In popular usage and party circles, 'Narva District' also included Petergof, and these adjacent districts were usually treated as one.)

Except for a relatively brief period in June and early July 1917, the district did not play a leading role in the political movement. This, in fact, had been the case since the start of the war, something that can be largely explained by the mass influx of peasant and urban non-working-class elements as the factories expanded into ordnance production. The Bolsheviks did not win firm control of the district soviet until after the July Days, though on economic matters they enjoyed considerable support from the very start of the revolution. [32]

The Narva District, to the northeast of Petergof, was much less proletarian in composition and considerably less active. Of its three sub-districts, only one was industrial. The only large metalworking enterprises were the workshops of the Baltic and N.W. Railroads. Narva had the smallest proportion of metalworkers of any industrial or semi-industrial district. The two largest factories were the Trougol'nik Rubber Factory with 15 000 workers (about two-thirds female), about 40 per cent of the district's industrial work force, and the Government Paper Printing Plant (about 8000 workers), one of the most conservative factories in the city. The remainder of the workers were in factories making heavy use of unskilled female labour.

### *Vasilevskii ostrov*

This island in the estuary of the Neva River was the second largest industrial district, though its population was quite variegated. The industrial areas were situated in the port area to the south and on Golodai Island in the north, away from the 'Point', which formed an integral part of the city centre, directly across the bridge from the Winter Palace, the Admiralty, Army Headquarters and other key sites. Here, at the very tip of the island, was the Petrograd Stock Exchange. On the eastern part, along Bol'shoi and Srednyi Prospekts and the intersecting 'lines', lived members of the nobility, merchants and high state officials, whose stately homes built in the 'empire style' can be seen to this day. This was also the capital's centre of higher education, with the Russian Academy of Sciences, the university Institute of Mining, Academy of Arts, Bestuzhev Women's Higher Courses, as well as several gimnazii, a realschule, two commercial schools and a municipal high school. [33]

The district had 16 large factories, with the Petrograd Pipe Factory employing one-third of the entire work force. Like the other large metalworking plant, the Baltic Shipbuilding Factory (8000 workers), it engaged large masses of unskilled workers for the production of shells and other ordnance. Besides several smaller electrotechnical factories, the remainder of the district's industry was varied, with five textile mills, several leather factories, and a few tobacco-processing plants.

Next to the Vyborg District, Vasilevskii ostrov became one of the strongest centres of support for the Bolsheviks, who, in bloc with the Internationalists, won control of the Soviet as early as mid-May. [34] In part, this was a function of the size of the industrial population, making for a stronger

sense of class identity, and also of the significant number of skilled workers here when compared with most of the other districts.

Another important element in the political situation of this district was the presence of a large body of students, the radical elements of which supplied many of the agitators and organisers that the workers themselves were not always able to put forward. According to Golovanova's data, 30.6 per cent of the members of the Bolshevik district committee between February and July 1917 were intellectuals, while 57.6 per cent were workers. This was the highest proportion of intellectuals (and the lowest proportion of workers) of any of the major industrial districts (see Table 3.6).

Another consequence of the presence of radical intellectuals was the relatively strong support the Internationalist groups enjoyed. Leont'ev, cited above, recalled that 'our strongest district was Vasilevskii ostrov', and in 1917 itself this was one of the few districts where the Menshevik-Internationalists were a significant (albeit secondary) force among the workers. (In September, the Menshevik-Internationalist organisation here entered the Bolshevik party, almost en masse.) The issue of the worker-socialist intelligentsia alliance was so prominent here at least in part because of the tradition of contact with and, to a degree, dependence upon, the district's radical students and intellectuals.

**TABLE 3.6**  
**Social background of identified Bolshevik district**  
**committee members. March-June 1917**

District	Per cent workers	Per cent intellectuals	Per cent others	Total identified members
<b>Vyborg</b>	89.5	8.8	1.7	57
<b>Narva-Petergof</b>	85.7	10.7	3.6	28
<b>Nevskii</b>	83.4	16.6	0	12
<b>Petrograd</b>	82.1	10.7	7.2	28
<b>Second City</b>	76.7	13.3	10.0	30
<b>Porokhovskii, Liteinyi, Okhta and Railroad</b>	64.3	28.6	7.1	14
<b>Moscow</b>	63.6	18.2	18.2	11
<b>Vasilevskii ostrov</b>	57.6	30.6	11.8	26
<b>First City</b>	50.0	50.0	0	16
<b>Rozhdestvenskii</b>	35.7	28.6	35.7	14
<b>All districts</b>	74.1	18.2	7.7	236

Source: Golovanova, 'Raionnye komitety RSDRP (b)', appendix, Table 7, p. 13

#### *Petrograd District*

The population of this district, which consisted of seven islands sandwiched between the Vyborg District, the centre and Vasilevskii ostrov, resembled the latter in its social heterogeneity, though the working-class element was considerably smaller. (In popular usage Novaya derevnya was sometimes included in this district.) The southwest and central sections were quite well-to-do, while the workers, as usual, inhabited the outlying west and northeast shores. Here were several large factories (averaging 1500 workers [35]), with machine construction represented by the Langezipen,

Vulkan, Shchetinin and Lebedev Factories, as well as a tram depot. But such highly skilled factories far from predominated. There were at least three textile mills, Kersten, James Beck and Leont'iev Bros, the state-owned Factory of Military Medical Preparations (about 3000 workers, two-thirds women [36]), and some of the city's largest printing houses, including the State Printing Plant, Pechatnyi Dvor and the Otto Kirkhner Printing House and Bindery.

As one might expect, the Petrograd District, as a whole, was less radical than the three above: the Bolsheviks won control of the Soviet here only at the start of August, and even so, the Mensheviks and SRs formed a strong opposition right into October, when they were finally dislodged. The political temper of the district was thus uneven, a reflection of the industrial mix of the district, in which highly skilled machine-construction enterprises existed alongside such conservative bastions as the State Factory of Military Medical Preparations and the large printing houses.

#### *Moscow District (Moskovskaya zastava)*

The majority of the eleven large factories here were located at the south central end of Petrograd, where Zabalkanskii Prospekt became the Moscow Highway. The industrial population was about evenly distributed between metalworking and the other branches of industry. Leather was heavily represented by the Skorokhod (6500 – the largest in Russia) and the Nevskii Shoe Factories (1600), together employing close to one-third of the district's industrial work force. [*Moskovskaya zastava v 1917 godu* (L., 1957) p. 128.] Among the electrotechnical plants were Dinamo (2300, of which 1000 were women [37]) and Siemens-Shukert. There were also two wagon-building plants – Rechkin and Artur-Koppel', a tram depot and the Municipal 1886 Power Station. Beyond these to the south were about a dozen small factories and hundreds of workshops employing few or no hired workers. [38]

Workers formed a relatively small part of the district's population, which consisted of a large well-to-do element (to the north) and a larger white-collar and petty bourgeois (shopkeepers, artisans, etc.) stratum. This was one of Petrograd's four SR centres (the others being Nevskii, Okhta and Porokhovskii), and as late as September 1917, the SRs held eight of the twenty seats in the Soviet. The relatively small size of the skilled work force does not seem to have been a major factor in this, since it was precisely the metalworking factories that gave the SRs the strongest support (though it is true that these plants were greatly inflated by unskilled workers during the war). In part, SR sympathies seem to have been related to the semi-rural character of the factory setting and to the effects of small property ownership on the settled skilled elements. This explanation tends to be supported by the fact that the other three SR centres were also in semi-rural outlying areas in the south and east of the city. (Actually these were not even incorporated into the city until June 1917.)

#### *Nevskii (-Obukhovskii) District*

Located in the southeast corner of the capital at a considerable distance from the centre (to reach it one took the train running between Tsarskoe Selo and Nikolaevskii Station), the Nevskii District consisted of two sub-districts, each dominated by a giant mixed metalworking plant – the Nevskii Shipbuilding and Machine-construction Factory and the state Obukhovskii Steel Mill (13 000). The two other large metalworking enterprises were the Aleksandrovskii Locomotive Factory and the repair shops of the Nikolaevskii Railroad. The latter three were state-owned. In addition were four large textile mills, two paper mills, a soap factory, a wax factory, the State China Factory and a number of smaller plants also relying heavily on semi-skilled or unskilled labour.

The Nevskii District stands out as the most moderate of all the industrial and semi-industrial districts of the capital and the firmest support of the SR defencists. Some of the reasons for this conservatism, which is striking given the relatively large and concentrated worker population and the predominance of metalworking, have already been touched upon. Of the four largest factories,

three were state-owned. The largest, Nevskii and Obukhovskii, were situated well outside the city in the midst of villages. In fact, the address of the Nevskii Factory was selo Smolenskoe. Its work force was to a large extent recruited from the neighbouring villages of Rogatkovo, Lesnozavodskaya and Murzinskaya. [39] Local workers of the Obukhovskii Factory who owned plots and kept cattle were called 'Rybatskie korovniki' (cowherds from the village of Rybatskoe). [40] Although a centre of activism before and during 1905-7, the district had faded into the background during the 1912-14 upsurge, when the labour movement picked up once more but in isolation from 'society'. Only in the spring of 1918, in the opposition movement to the soviets, did the district again become politically active, demanding a more broadly-based government and the convocation of the (all-national) Constituent Assembly.

### *Kolomna (Sub-) District*

Officially a sub-district of the Second City District, Kolomna had its own soviet in 1917 and was treated as a separate district in party circles. This was the only industrial area in the Second City District, location of three large shipbuilding factories – Franko-Russkii (6500 workers), Admiralty and New Admiralty (both state-owned, together with 2500 workers). Franko-Russkii, being private, was the more radical and it dominated the district politically. By mid-May the Soviet, from the start under strong Bolshevik influence, fully supported the demand for soviet power.

### *Second City District*

Consisting of the Admiralty, Kazan and Spasskii (and, officially, Kolomna) sub-districts, this was the very heart of the city, the 'bourgeois' centre, without any large-scale industry. Commercial enterprises, army barracks and state institutions dominated the scene. Here were many of the state ministries, the theatres, museums, palaces, libraries, bank headquarters. This was the 'hostile territory' through which worker demonstrators had to pass on their way down Nevskii Prospekt.

### *First City District*

In the centre of this district was the Nikolaevskii Railroad Station, connecting the capital to the rest of Russia. It was here that Nevskii Prospekt began its route through the city. Occupying about one-quarter of the city's land area (as of February 1917), it consisted of three sections: Liteinyi, with the luxurious homes of the nobility and big bourgeoisie; the Moscow section, with a large number of printing houses; and the Aleksandr-Nevskii section, where workers of the Nikolaevskii Railroad Workshops and the nearby textile mills, Novaya Bumagopryadil'nya, Kozhevnikovskaya and Aleksandr-Nevskaya, and a few other factories lived. The Liteinyi District had two large state-owned ordnance factories – Orudiinyi and a branch of Patronnyi (about 6000 workers together), but the main source of employment in the district was the multitude of commercial enterprises. Accordingly, the basic population consisted of white-collar workers, professionals and property-owning elements.

### *Rozhdestvenskii District*

Large-scale industry in this district, site of the Tauride Palace and Smol'nyi Institute, was limited to two large textile mills – Nevskaya Bumagopryadil'naya and Nevskaya Nitoch'naya (together about 4000) and a tram depot. There were also several small electrical and metal factories, the largest being Ouf, Shpigel' and Opticheskii. The district also had many military units. As one local Bolshevik put it: it was a district of 'petty bourgeois and semi-intelligentsia' with few workers. [41] Golovanova's data show that only about one-third of the district committee members were workers, the lowest proportion for any district. [42] The make-up of the non-census part of the population accounts for the strength of the Menshevik-Defencists in the Soviet until well past July when it began to shift in an internationalist direction.

These adjoining, isolated and semi-rural districts, situated in the east end of the city across the Neva, were the other two centres of SR support in 1917. In Okhta, where there was almost no industry, the great majority of workers were employed in semi-artisanal workshops. [43] The Porokhovskii District, on the other hand, was dominated by two state-owned chemical plants (together about 18 000) employing a very large peasant element.

This completes the outline of the major social and economic influences on working-class consciousness in Petrograd. The picture obtained is, admittedly, not a simple one, but as the following pages are intended to show, it does provide a framework for a coherent analysis of working-class attitudes and behaviour as manifested in the revolution of 1917.

## **David Mandel**

*To be followed...*

---

## **Footnotes**

[1] *Materialy po statistike truda Severnoi oblasti, vyp. I (1918)* p. 18.

[2] *Materialy po statistike Petrograda, vyp. I (1920)* p. 10.

[3] *Materialy po statistike truda, vyp. v, p. 43.*

[4] L. S. Gaponenko, 'Rabochii klass Rossii nakanune velikogo Oktyabrya', *Istoricheskie zapiski*, no. 73 (M., 1963) p. 51.

[5] G. A. Trukan, *Oktyabr'v tsentral'noi Rossii* (M., 1967) pp. 16-17.

[6] Stepanov, *Rabochie Petrograda*, p. 32.

[7] Ibid.

[8] The Bulletin of the Society of Industrialists of the Central Industrial Region noted in 1912 concerning Petrograd: 'That economic motives alone could not play a predominant role is clear if only from the fact that wages of metalworkers in Petrograd Guberniya are much higher than in other industrial guberniyas. The same can be said of the wages of workers in the printing industry. Nevertheless, the strike movement for this period was nowhere as intense in the Russian Empire as in Petrograd'. *Byuleten' obshchestva fabrikantov i zavodchikov Moskovskogo promyshlennogo raiona*, no. 16 (1912).

[9] Stepanov, *Rabochie Petrograda*, pp. 31 and 42.

[10] A. Anikst, *Organizatsiya raspredeleniya rabochei sily* (M., 1920) p. 51. cited in O. I. Shkaratan, 'Izmeneniya v sotsial'nom sostave rabochikh Leningrada 1917-1928', *Istoriya SSSR*, no. 5 (1959) p. 25.

- [11] N. Antonov, *Dva goda diktatury proletariata v metallopromyshlennosti Petrograda* (1920) p. 15, cited in Shkaratan, 'Izmeneniya v sostave'.
- [12] I. P. Leiberov and O. I. Shkaratan, 'K voprosu o sostave petrogradskikh promyshlennykh rabochikh v 1917 g.', *Voprosy istorii*, no.1(1961) p. 52 and pp. 42, 58, *passim*.
- [13] *Novaya zhizn'* (27 Dec, 1917).
- [14] V. A. Tsybul'skii, 'Rabochie Sestroretskogo zavoda v 1917', *Istoriya SSR*, no. 4 (1959) p. 143.
- [15] A. Smirnov, *Poslednie dni Utemanov* (M: L., 1935) p. 8.
- [16] A. Arbuzova, 'Oktyabr' 1917 g. na Petrogradskom trubochnom zavode', *Krasnaya letopis'*, no. 6 (1923) p. 175.
- [17] Stepanov, *Rabochie Petrograda*, p. 42.
- [18] Rashin, *Formirovanie rabocheho*, p. 575, Table 143.
- [19] Leiberov and Shkaratan, 'K voprosu', p. 51.
- [20] Stepanov, *Rabochie Petrograda*, p. 43 and Ek. Pol. vol. 1, p. 43.
- [21] Leiberov and Shkaratan, 'K voprosu'.
- [22] Krasnyi Treugol'nik na putyakh Oktyabrya (L., 1927) p. 9.
- [23] Suknovalov et al., *Fabrika 'Krasnoe znamya'*, p. 7.
- [24] I. M. Frantishev, *Leningradskie krasnostroiteli* (L., 1962) p. 59.
- [25] *Vyborgskaya storna* (L., 1957) p. 181.
- [26] Peka, p. 315.
- [27] *Znamya truda* (24 Aug 1917).
- [28] In common usage 'Vyborg District' usually also included Novaya derevnya and Polyustrovo. Some of the general sources for this section are: *Raionnye sovety Petrograda v 1917 g.*, 3 vols (M. L., 1966-8); Golovanova, 'Raionnye komitety'; *Vogne revolyutsionnykh boev*; and Stepanov, *Rabochie Petrograda*.
- [29] *Iskra* (3 Oct 1917).
- [30] According to Golovanova, 51 one of the 56 (89.5 per cent) members of the Bolshevik Vyborg district committee between February and July 1917 were workers. The average for all districts was 74.1 per cent (Golovanova, 'Raionnye komitety', appendix, Table 7). A report by the Vyborg district committee in September 1917 on its first five months of legal activity noted that 'the esteemed task of being the initiator of the revolution fell upon the Vyborg District. But this task also carried many obligations: for lack of an organised central apparatus, the Petrograd



Committee, it had to meet the very numerous requests for agitators and organisers not only in Petrograd but also in the provinces'. As for the role of the district committee itself, after the first few months of the revolution, 'many factories are managing on their own, and often a day will go by without a request [for speakers]. Only the army units totally rely on the agitational collegium. This... speaks of the tact that here new capable workers have arisen who manage without outside help. And life required more than a few of them. We needed representatives to the local Soviets, central Soviet, local and central dumas. And the district was able to give'. *Revolutsionnoe dvizhenie v Rossi v avguste 1917g.* (M., 1967) pp. 94-6.

[31] L. Leont'ev, 'V ryadakh "Mezhraionki" ' *Krasnaya letopis'*, no. 11 (1924) p. 131.

[32] *Raionnye sovety Petrograda v 1917 godu*, vol. II (L., 1967) p. 91 (henceforth cited as Raisovety).

[33] *V ogre revolyutsionnykh boev*, vol. II, p. 102.

[34] *Raisovety*, vol. I, p. 123.

[35] Stepanov, *Rabochie Petrograda*, p. 33.

[36] *Bol'sheviki Petrograda v Oktyabr'skoi revolyutsii* (L., 1957) p. 33.

[37] Stepanov, *Rabochie Petrograda*, p. 35.

[38] *Vogne revolyutsionnykh boev*, vol. II, p. 217.

[39] *V boyakh za oktyabr'* (L., 1932) p. 27.

[40] M. Rozanov, *Obukhovtsy* (L., 1938) p. 354.

[41] Peka, p. 194.

[42] Golovanova, 'Raionnye komitety', appendix, Table 1.

[43] *Derevoobdelochnik*, no. 20 (Mar 1908).