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“ONE HAND CLAPPING”: Russian Workers and 1917

by
Stephen Kotkin

In 1962, Alfred Cobban delivered a series of soon-to-become influential lectures calling for the restoration of political history to the study of 1789. In questioning the then widely accepted social interpretation, Cobban did not deny a social dimension to the French Revolution. But he did make clear that 1789 was “primarily a political revolution” and that “the supposed social categories of our histories—bourgeois, aristocrats, sans-culottes—are all in fact political ones” (162). Not only has this insight failed to be systematically applied to the social categories of revolutionary Russia, almost the opposite has resulted; social categories have come to be accepted as largely immutable and, in that guise, they have served as the building blocks for a newly dominant social interpretation of 1917, with labor given a privileged place at the center of events.

Indeed, at about the same time Cobban’s call for political history appeared, Leopold Haimson published his seminal article arguing for a shift in the research agenda on the events leading up to 1917 from high politics to social tensions. Haimson asserted that the threat of the Bolsheviks had stemmed not from the solidity of their organization, nor from the success of their efforts at ideological indoctrination, but from the workers’ own “elemental mood of revolt.” For the


1The author gratefully acknowledges the comments and suggestions of Mark von Hagen, Mark Mazower, and Arno Mayer.
3Leopold Haimson, “The Problem of Social Stability in Urban Russia, 1905–1917,” Slavic Review, Part One: 23 (1964, 619–42), Part Two: 24 (1965), 1–22. In the years before October, Haimson claimed, the labor movement was not becoming “reformist” but more revolutionary. Thus, by 1914 Russia’s major urban centers, far from undergoing social stabilization as Ger-
next two and a half decades, a large number of the most talented minds in Russian history investigated the sources of worker radicalism as the key to understanding 1917. Thus, even as a post-'68 generation of neo-Conservatives in France endeavored to supplant the long-reigning orthodoxy of 1789 as a “bourgeois revolution” with the specter of an inherently destructive revolutionary process, a 1960s generation of American left-liberal scholars attacked the notion of a Bolshevik coup d’etat in 1917 and raised the flag of a “workers’ revolution.”

Tim McDaniel, a historical sociologist at the University of California, San Diego, brings this prolific scholarly literature on 1917 to a crescendo in a challenging synthetic work that is at once the most articulate advocacy for the preeminence of labor’s role for understanding 1917 and an unwitting demonstration of the limitations of that view. McDaniel’s book offers an opportunity to reflect upon the past 20 years of scholarship on Russian labor and to glance forward to possible new directions of research.

Shenkron argued, were experiencing “a dangerous process of polarization” between a privileged, educated society and a growing discontented “mass” of industrial workers. Haimson noted a second polarization between educated society and the tsarist regime, a cleavage made more meaningful by the increasingly organized and articulate nature of educated society. In other words, 1917 was not an accident precipitated by war or a wild exploit carried out by a fanatical band, but the outcome of a long conflict arising out of profound social antagonisms that ought to become the main object of research. Significantly, it was the first polarization noted by Haimson—the one involving workers—that came to dominate the scholarly agenda. It seems, however, that the second polarization—that between educated society and the autocracy—played the more important role in opening up the political space that elements of the second polarization sought to fill.

4Francois Furet, *Penser la révolution française* (Paris, 1978). In some ways, Furet’s approach (positing the autonomy of politics and ideology and arguing that ideology alone drove the revolutionary process) resembles the immediate post-war approach in the United States to what was then often called the Bolshevik Revolution. A similar trajectory to that of the thinking on the French Revolution—from a social interpretation to a political one—has been traced by the thinking on seventeenth-century England. As a result, Christopher Hill’s “bourgeois revolution” marking a transition to “modernity” was twice reduced, first to a “mere” civil war and then to just the last in a long line of early modern wars of religion. See Conrad Russell, ed., *The Origins of the English Civil War* (London, 1973), and John Morrill, “The Religious Context of the English Civil War,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, vol. 34, London, 1984, 155–79.

McDaniel sets himself the task of explaining not the origins of the Bolshevik dictatorship, let alone Stalinism, but "the genesis and nature of [a] very rare historical phenomenon, a victorious revolutionary labor movement" (3). In this view, recently discredited historians in the Soviet Union who long maintained that October was a "genuine" proletarian revolution turn out to have been on the mark after all. But is labor the decisive element for explaining the outbreak, character, and course of revolution in the Russian empire? McDaniel acknowledges "the multi-layered character of the Russian Revolution"—given in the singular, merging February and October—only to forego discussion of "the peasant rebellion against the landed elite, the soldier's rebellion against their officers, the national rebellions against Russian dominance, and the 'bourgeois revolution' against the autocracy" in favor of the "thesis" of the hegemony of the proletariat (2). This quixotic notion underlies much of Russian labor history, but while McDaniel has merely articulated a widely held assumption, in so doing he has drawn attention to its dubiousness.

In alleging, for example, that the proletariat "constituted the main social base of the Bolsheviks in October" (3), McDaniel must underemphasize the accumulated research on the decisive role in the Bolshevik ascension to power played by soldiers and sailors and the Bolsheviks' subsequent heavy reliance on the army for building a "proletarian" state and a new society. Moreover, in his insistence that October was brought
about by workers, McDaniel mentions yet downplays the importance of the power vacuum opened up by the disintegration of central authority, the elites' exasperation with and their withdrawal of support from the autocracy, the chaos that resulted from the peasants' seizures of land (an event without precedent in the French Revolution), and the Mensheviks' self-assigned marginalization. Nor is the Bolshevik party given its due, for McDaniel, citing Steve Smith, asserts that "it was the organized working class, not the Bolshevik party, which was the great power in society." "

Arguing that "only" the October insurrection was primarily the work of the party leadership, McDaniel claims that "even then the overriding concern [for the party] was the mood of Moscow and Petrograd workers" (3). But since the Bolshevik party was struggling against other parties to win the allegiance of those workers, its close attention to workers' mood is perhaps not surprising. Moreover, that this was the Bolsheviks' overriding concern is not only questionable but irrelevant to a determination of who, if anyone, was the "great power" in society in 1917—a point to which we shall return. Of course, McDaniel could have made


In 1918, the Mensheviks made a strong comeback, regularly winning majorities in elections to local soviets. See Vladimir Brovkin, The Mensheviks After October: Socialist Opposition and the Rise of the Bolshevik Dictatorship (Ithaca, 1987). By way of explanation, Brovkin points not to any supposed rediscovered organizational prowess by the Mensheviks, who were confused and badly divided, but to the workers' almost immediate disillusionment with the Bolsheviks. While the political activities of the Mensheviks have long been the object of intensive study (growing out of the Mensheviks' protracted self-analysis), the study of Russian peasant politics is just now coming into its own in the United States (judging by the number of peasant-related panels at the October 1990 meeting of the AAASS). There were, of course, earlier studies of peasant "mobilization" by Maureen Perrie, "The Russian Peasant Movement in 1905-07," Past and Present, 57 (1972); Teodor Shanin, The Roots of Otherness: Russia's Turn of the Century, 2 vols. (New Haven, 1985-86), originally published in one volume as The Awkward Class in 1972; and John Keep, The Russian Revolution: A Study in Mass Mobilization (New York, 1976). None of the three authors is American.

Steven Smith, Red Petrograd: Revolution in the Factories, 1917–1918 (Cambridge, 1983), p. 259. Smith traces a rising radicalization among Petrograd workers during the course of 1917 in response to their perceptions of the Provisional Government's inability to meet aspirations for direct democracy in the shop, a demand that Smith claims posed a "radical challenge" to class relations in society. Smith's achievement lay in his ability to bring living workers, their language and outlook, into focus. Much the same has been done for Moscow by Diane Koenker, Moscow Workers and the 1917 Revolution (Princeton, 1981). Smith and Koenker are compared in Victoria Bonnell, "Rethinking the Role of Workers in the Revolutions of 1917," International Labor and Working Class History, 26 (Fall 1984, 53–64). See also Rex Wade, Red Guards and Workers' Militias in the Russian Revolution (Stanford, 1984); David Mandel, The Petrograd Workers and the Fall of the Old Regime: From the February Revolution to the July Days, 1917 (London, 1983); and idem., The Petrograd Workers and the Soviet Seizure of Power (London, 1984). Mandel's Marxist approach retains a productionist view of class and a mechanical model of class consciousness, not to say a narrower view than either Smith or Koenker of who constituted the working class.
a case for workers' importance in 1917 without urging their hegemony. But such a formulation would require an assessment of the nature and the legitimacy of 1917 different from the one offered by most practitioners of Russian labor history and accepted by McDaniel, in modified form.12

* * *

Granted labor's important (if not decisive role) in 1917, how does McDaniel characterize and account for Russian labor's militancy? Central to his explication of the genesis of worker radicalism is a structural argument about the development of capitalism in Russia, the same explanation he uses to account for the outbreak of revolution. In this way, he makes the two issues appear to be one.

"Not all social and political institutions are equally propitious for capitalist industrialization, and some may even prevent it altogether," he argues. "The strength and legitimacy of capitalism depend upon a triad of institutions that were poorly developed in Russia because of its autocratic political structure: private property, law, and the contract" (16-17). In other words, not the social structure—that is, the peasantry—but political and legal development were "backward." Late tsarist Russia experienced capitalism without a "suitable political framework" (28), as governing elites adhered to a notion of state primacy that prohibited acceptance of the liberal ideal of a self-regulating society, the presumed sine qua non of capitalism. But, McDaniel argues, capitalist development with its attendant social and political consequences was proceeding apace; something had to give. As it turned out, that something was both capitalism and autocracy. McDaniel's model of "reciprocal subversion" (43), adapted from Trotsky's notion of combined and uneven development, resembles a Greek tragedy with "autocracy and capitalism, in their fateful interdependence, undermin[ing]

12See the comments by Diane Koenker in Daniel H. Kaiser, ed., The Worker's Revolution in Russia, 1917. The View from Below (Cambridge, 1987): "The fundamental question of the legitimacy of the 1917 Revolution—and, one could argue, the present Soviet state—depends on a correct assessment of the social forces at work in 1917" (86). Indeed, the volume aims at demonstrating a "social base" for 1917 and thus legitimizing the Bolshevik ascension of power. By contrast, McDaniel is highly ambivalent about the relationship between workers and the Bolshevik party, as will be discussed below. But his appraisal of 1917 involves unambiguous approval of revolutionary action by workers. For McDaniel, the revolutionary labor movement was "partially independent," meaning that its "victory" remains conceptually separable from that of the Bolsheviks, so that the sanctity of 1917 is preserved.

13By reversing the charge of backwardness, McDaniel sidesteps discussion of what many other specialists see as the crucial role in the outbreak of revolution played by the series of failed agrarian reforms, part of a broader reform project, that began in 1861 and culminated in 1906 under Prime Minister Petr Stolypin. Stolypin's much-debated attempt to "Westernize" the rural social structure and bring society into the state ended in 1911 with his assassination.
each other and . . . prepar[ing] the ground for a revolution against both” (16).

To be sure, McDaniel concedes that other factors undermined the autocracy — the importation of Western ideas, the failure of attempted reforms — but he assigns the foundation of responsibility for its downfall to industrialization, evidently because industrialization created the working class. The advent of this new social class presented political leaders with an unavoidable challenge, which to a degree they recognized. But because of their refusal or inability to alter their fundamental beliefs, it was a challenge they proved incapable of meeting and this failure of imagination by the governing elite paved the road to 1917 carved out by industrialization. In this view, the ideologically rigid autocracy replaces the Bolshevik party as revolution’s demiurge. 14

Given the social structure generated by industrialization, then, the autocracy had to go. The question was when and how? Many of the country’s leading industrialists and political figures held out illusions that sooner or later the autocracy would embark on authentic concessions to society out of a sense of self-preservation. By February 1917, these illusions had finally been relinquished. But precisely because the February Revolution was so long in the making, the October Revolution followed, even though the critical catalyst — the autocracy — was already removed, for by the same process a radical labor movement had been brought into existence and, McDaniel argues, that movement was both able and determined to claim power. 15

When he turns to the question posed for the field of Russian labor history by Reginald Zelnik back in 1972 — “how did it come about that within a period of sixty years (from emancipation to revolution), the workers of the most politically and economically ‘backward’ European

1Stressing industrialization and the responses to it by governing elites, McDaniel downplays the constitutional experiment of the first and second Dumas. His account of the causes of revolution in Russia, although challenging, fails somewhat short of matching the achievement for the French Revolution of the important work by William Doyle, Origins of the French Revolution, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1988; first edition 1980).

1McDaniel relies on but also slightly departs from the excellent book of Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, The February Revolution: Petrograd, 1917 (Seattle, 1981). Hasegawa takes up Haimson’s dual polarization conception and offers an extraordinarily detailed narrative account of the February Revolution that acknowledges the place of workers—but not at the expense of other social groups (soldiers, peasants, elites), whose actions were in fact no less consequential—and that places food riots in a position at least equal to strikes when assessing how workers’ power was expressed and felt. Compare Diane Koenker and William Rosenberg, Strikes and Revolution in Russia, 1917 (Princeton, 1990). They argue that the series of strikes in 1917 were decisive in the outbreak of the February Revolution that brought down the autocracy. One question that comes to mind is why the enormous strike waves in 1905–06 and again in 1912–14 did not topple the autocracy. The answer must lie in the final rupture created during the war between the autocracy and business and political elites, who in 1917 finally prevailed upon Nicholas to abdicate.
country were transformed from a small segment of a caste of peasant-serfs into Europe’s most class-conscious proletariat?” — a question that has had its share of answers, none entirely convincing, McDaniel already has a built-in response: the dynamic of autocratic capitalism. To make this argument work, he has to reject explanations of militancy in terms of workers’ “peculiar psychology” stemming from their ambiguous semi-peasant status, or in terms of the “peculiar psychological makeup” of the millenarian revolutionary intelligentsia. Furthermore, although he concedes that without WWI the labor movement “may not have been successful” (i.e., October might not have occurred), he must counter the view that the revolutionary nature of the labor movement was an accident of the war’s interruption of a “natural” tendency toward reformism (40). The workers’ movement, he assures us, was “revolutionary,” although not in the way we might think.

He argues that many workers did consider themselves revolutionary, but even if individual workers were not so inclined, their participation in a movement that had the capacity to threaten the regime and, when the regime was overthrown, to apply pressure for further radical change made them willy-nilly part of a revolutionary labor movement. Thus, with the mass of Russian labor historians deeply engaged in determining whether printers or metal workers were more radical, whether worker radicalism constituted craft or class consciousness, whether the patterns found in one city or factory (or shop) corresponded to those in others, and whether radicalism can be explained at all without reference to community and family life, McDaniel puts forth an explanatory mechanism that flexibly encompasses the heterogeneity of views researchers have uncovered among workers while still purporting to account for a general thrust towards radicalism. With this stratagem, he appears to rescue the search for the wellsprings of radicalism from the complex historiographical debate in which it has become entangled. But the old questions about how to characterize workers’ consciousness persist, and they come back to haunt McDaniel as well.

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16Reginald Zelnik, “Russian Workers and the Revolutionary Movement,” Journal of Social History, 6 (1972), 214–237; quote is from 215–216. Zelnik did not attempt to answer the question directly in the course of his essay. But he did imply that an answer ought not to be sought exclusively in the intelligentsia, but had also to be found in the worldview of Russian workers; specifically, in their part-peasant, part-proletarian status, which enmeshed them simultaneously in two struggles: a democratic struggle against the political constraints on freedom; and a socialist struggle against the authority of their employers. A key contribution of Zelnik’s essay lay in his demonstration that the Russian labor movement “exerted at least as decisive an influence on the character of Russian Marxism as the latter did on the Russian labor movement,” although not in any simple or obvious manner (229). His work is discussed further below.
McDaniel claims to bridge the sociological gap separating structuralists such as Barrington Moore and Moore's student Theda Skocpol, for whom "revolutions are not made; they come," and champions of collective action such as Charles Tilly. To Tilly, McDaniel counters that organization can be explained in terms of a model of structural contradictions; to Moore and Skocpol, that speaking of structures without social actors is reification. Indeed, McDaniel is at his best when examining the attitudes and behavior of the autocracy in the face of what for it was the unwelcome appearance on the historical stage of the proletariat. His three-chapter overview of tsarist labor policy is a tour de force, and by itself makes the book indispensable reading.

Russian government commissions appointed in the 1860s to consider the "labor question" recommended freedom of contract, independent factory inspectors, legalization of worker associations, and other measures designed to address problems and stave off the worst scenarios of worker unrest; some industrialists were also "progressively" inclined. But at first, there was only intermittent worker unrest, meaning no urgency to act, and by the time strikes became widespread in the 1890s, another element had entered the picture: Marxism. This raised the stakes considerably, and reinforced an already deeply ingrained inflexibility among the political leadership. The progressive approach advised by the government's own commissions was rejected in favor of more heavy-handed methods.

But the initial strategy chosen for dealing with workers, state paternalism, proved ineffective: the government could not alleviate all the sources of grievance; when it did intervene, it undermined the authority of industrialists; and in any case, some workers were demanding not only benefits but rights. A far more promising strategy from the state's point of view was "police socialism," or Zubatovism (so named for the Moscow chief of police, Sergei Zubatov), which McDaniel likens to a kind of inverse Leninism—using state-sponsored trade unionism to preempt revolution. But intergovernmental rivalries, the refusal to

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17. This is not to equate the views of Moore and Skocpol, who, although both structuralists, pinpoint different structures and thus present mutually exclusive analyses of the causes of revolution. Barrington Moore, The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy (Boston, 1966); Theda Skocpol, States and Social Revolutions (Cambridge, 1979); Charles Tilly, From Mobilization to Revolution (New York, 1978).


19. McDaniel relies on the important work of Jeremiah Schneiderman, Sergei Zubatov and Revolutionary Marxism. The Struggle for the Working Class in Tsarist Russia (Ithaca, 1976), which he supplements with his own research. Zubatovism as a strategy for dealing with labor unrest survives today, as the striking miners in the Ukrainian and western Siberian coal regions...
modify autocratic traditions, the weakness of native industrial elites, and growing worker aspirations hindered the efforts to achieve this Russian form of corporatism. Then, when revolution broke out in 1905, the political context of the labor question was dramatically altered. 1905 only compounded the state's and elite's failure to develop an adequate labor policy.²⁰ By the time war broke out in 1914, McDaniel contends, tsarist labor policy had reached a dead end.

And yet for a brief moment, it looked as if matters might turn out differently, for in March 1906, real trade unions (rather than Zubatovist ones) were belatedly legalized. Political strikes, however, were expressly forbidden, and even the right to strike for "economic" reasons remained ambiguous. Nonetheless, following Victoria Bonnell, his mentor, McDaniel allows for the possibility of a continuation of this admittedly half-hearted accommodationist policy towards working-class institutions, even though his sobering remarks on the autocracy's intrinsigence evoke an air of inevitability.²¹ In the event, real trade unions were not permitted, with fateful results.²² To illustrate the consequences discovered to their chagrin after the great strike wave of July 1989 when their strike committees were easily infiltrated by regime loyalists and in many cases coopted.

²⁰Several important studies have been carried out on workers in 1905: Laura Engelstein, *Moscow, 1905: Working-Class Organization and Political Conflict* (Stanford, 1982); Henry Reichman, *Railwaymen and Revolution: Russia, 1905* (Berkeley, 1987); Gerald Surh, *1905 in St. Petersburg: Labor, Society, and Revolution* (Stanford, 1989). See also Solomon Schwarz, *The Russian Revolution of 1905: The Workers' Movement and the Formation of Bolshevism and Menshevism*, trans. from the Russian by Gertrude Vakar (Chicago, 1967); and John Bushnell, *Mutiny and Repression: Russian Soldiers in the Revolution of 1905-1906* (Bloomington, 1985). Scholarship on 1905 has been less prone to elevate the role of workers above other social groups, while at the same time it tends to offer more nuanced interpretations of worker political mobilization. No doubt part of the reason lies in the "failure" of 1905 (meaning that "the story" continues), in contrast to the "success" of October (meaning that "the story" ends).

²¹Victoria Bonnell, *Roots of Rebellion. Workers' Politics and Organizations in St. Petersburg and Moscow, 1900-1914* (Berkeley, 1984). Bonnell, whose analysis of labor organizations demonstrated the existence of a strong reformist tendency in the Russian labor movement, posed the question: "Why the organized labor movement in Russia became a vehicle for revolutionary rather than reformist aims" (3-4). She sought an answer in the immediate post-1905 experience of trade unions, which were technically legalized but subjected to continual harassment. This lesson was not lost on workers, who, made aware of their organizational potential but frustrated by the distrustful regime, soon turned to the more radical methods championed by the Bolsheviks for realizing their aspirations. Bonnell's work does not contradict McDaniel's, but her stress on reformism and contingency contrasts sharply with McDaniel's emphasis on revolution and structure.

²²"From a comparative perspective, the remarkable feature of prerevolutionary Russian labor policy was the inability of the tsarist state to institutionalize any form of worker organization or even stable worker representation," McDaniel concludes, adding: "I am unaware of any parallel inefficiency in any other country with such a significant degree of industrialization over so long a period" (148). But the obvious example that comes to mind, Japan, although contrasted with Russian developments, is not examined by McDaniel in this light. In Japan, whose industrialization resembled Russia's in many key respects, government consideration of trade union legalization began only in the 1920s, and legalization took place only in 1945. See Sheldon Garon, *The State and Labor in Modern Japan* (Berkeley, 1987).
of this policy failure, McDaniel devotes six chapters, the bulk of the book, to a typology of historical actors who made up the labor movement and to a characterization of their collective action.

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For McDaniel, then, what defined the Russian labor movement more than underlying sociological traits or a close relationship with revolutionary intellectuals was its social and political exclusion. Here he claims to marry Tocqueville's insights on the consequences of attempted but insufficient repression to those of Trotsky on the development of Russian capitalism.

McDaniel argues that the shared experience of exclusion provided the Russian labor movement with its extraordinary capacity for solidarity and helped it overcome many of the countervailing tendencies toward fissure and paralysis so characteristic of more institutionalized labor movements elsewhere. Structural exclusion, in McDaniel's view, even

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McDaniel is right that an apparently unified collective subject, the working class or proletariat, came into being as a political force in the period before 1917, but it would seem that this effect cannot be explained primarily as the consequence of structural exclusion. More subtle analyses of what might be called "social control" need to be considered. Be that as it may, the subsequent integration of the Soviet working class under Stalin, a subject yet to be adequately explored, seems all the more remarkable in the light of the tsarist experience. See the provocative though problematic study by Donald Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization: The Formation of Modern Soviet Production Relations, 1928–1941* (Armonk, NY, 1986).

One puzzling aspect of McDaniel's otherwise highly self-conscious study, the absence of reflection on who made up "the workers" and "the working class," becomes more comprehensible in this light. Arguments about who should or should not be included, and on what basis, in the designation workers run through not only the secondary literature McDaniel relies on, but the primary documents. The social democrats' image of a worker did not fit Russia well, where a great many of those employed in industry had recently been (or still were) peasants in dress, custom, juridical status, and outlook. And the semi-peasant nature of workers combined with their relatively small proportion of the population are often cited as cause to doubt the existence of a cohesive working class. But McDaniel's model simply assumes that industrialization created a working class, and so he feels no need to spell out who made it up or how many there were. For the record, according to the calculations of Adol'f Rashin, who worked in various state and government institutions, the number of individuals who hired themselves out rose from 3,960,000 in 1860 to 17,815,000 in 1913. This figure, which includes domestic servants and people employed in agriculture, represents the upper limit for the category worker that one encounters in the secondary literature. If one takes just those employed in industry, mining, and on the railroads in 1913, the figure drops to under 5 million. *Formirovanie rabocheogo klasa Rossii: istoriko-ekonomicheskie ocherki* (Moscow, 1958), table 51, p. 172. Total population for the empire in 1913 was around 150 million.

Thus, in Russia, solidarity was "more rooted in the dynamics of collective action than in the calculations of organizations" (275), a consequence, McDaniel claims, of exclusion. Exclusion has also been an important theme in British history. In *A Life Apart: The English Working Class 1890–1914* (London, 1977), Standish Meacham has argued that extreme hardship and deprivation differentiated working-class existence, giving workers an awareness of common interests and what he calls "a life apart" — a unique and resilient culture centered on home and family life that enabled them to withstand their difficult circumstances and its attendant indignities. Meacham's cultural view of exclusion contrasts sharply with the political one offered by McDaniel, but both see exclusion as a kind of resource.
helps explain the inordinate influence that revolutionaries came to have: without trade unions or a legal workers' press, workers could hardly generate enough of their own leaders of a moderate stripe, as happened in Germany (161). 25

He also marshals exclusion as an explanation for one of the intractable issues that has long dogged analysts of the Russian labor movement—its great unevenness. As he puts it, exclusion (and the dearth of legal institutions) exacted a high price, so that "periods of exceptional solidarity and militancy alternated with years of dramatic decline" (163). But to avoid undermining his structural argument, McDaniel must demonstrate the continuity of radicalism over time. He argues that continuity can be seen in people, organizational forms and patterns of leadership, in the canon of thought provided by Marxism, and in the cultivation of a heroic tradition (291–2). While the latter two considerations appear to come from outside his structural argument, the former two seem to contradict the thrust of what he has been saying about exclusion. What is more, having demonstrated at great length that radicalism developed over time and was rooted in the logic of the uninstitutionalized struggle uniquely characteristic of autocratic capitalism, McDaniel beats a partial retreat, admitting that radicalism also "stemmed from events in the larger political context, such as war or general changes of political mood and atmosphere" (285).

In an effort to resolve the apparent contradiction between a continuity rooted in structures (but also maintained by Marxist ideology and traditions) and a sudden explosiveness triggered by conjuncture, he argues that radicalism fed on itself, for "once it passed a certain threshold," worker protest in Russia tended "to become more and more radical" (288). What that threshold was and when and how it was reached, however, remain unclear. Nor is it clear how that threshold relates to the main argument about exclusion. As he provides greater and greater details of the process of radicalization, McDaniel's structural model undergoes more and more qualification, until finally the model begins to seem little more than an ill-fitting backdrop to the other types of explanations he draws on from the secondary literature.

No less confusion grows out of his handling of individual workers' "consciousness." To characterize the thinking of those who took part in militant actions, McDaniel adopts the opposition between the radicalism of "class-conscious" workers and that of "mass" workers, __________

25A similar argument, borrowed from Alexis de Tocqueville, has been advanced to explain the uncompromising maximalism of the intelligentsia. See Martin Malia, _Alexander Herzen and the Birth of Russian Socialism_ (Cambridge, 1961), cited by McDaniel in a chapter on revolutionary intellectuals in which he again relates the Russian specificity of a universal phenomenon to the development of autocratic capitalism.
employing the latter category in the sense put forward by Karl Kautsky and other nineteenth-century social democrats to characterize those workers who took part in class struggle without always “fully” comprehending what they were doing. McDaniel seems aware of the crassly political nature of the category mass, which shades off into lumpen— in that sense it was used by the Mensheviks to account for what they considered as the otherwise inexplicable worker support for Bolshevism—but he perseveres, arguing that empirically speaking, most workers could be seen as informed yet uncommitted troops “available for mobilization.” The proof of their near-conscious status came when some made “the transition to consciousness” (165).

As for conscious workers—arguably no less a political label—they were distinguished by a belief in the possibility of rational action, but, McDaniel writes, although “most would have identified themselves as socialists of one type or another,” they could also be anarchists or monarchists (184). And if consciousness need not have meant socialist, it was not a permanent state either: “The social world could once again become mysterious and unpredictable” (185). Moreover, “becoming conscious did not have to be a gradual process of making contacts, participating in a circle, and socialization into a new world” (199). Some workers, McDaniel writes, “were ‘grabbed by the wave of the movement’” to become conscious (199). Still more confusing is the admission that “consciousness did not correspond to any particular mode of action” (203), for “conscious workers often gave in to the mass mood and did things against their better judgment” (206). In the end, one is left wondering why the distinction between conscious and mass remains necessary.

McDaniel’s awkward psychologizing about large numbers of diverse workers is not helped by the narrowness of the source base, which is comprised almost exclusively of the memoirs of self-designated conscious workers. He might have done better to inquire not who was a mass worker and who a conscious one, but why some workers came to believe in a difference between themselves and their brethren, the masses, and to write about their own lives for a public audience on the basis of this distinction. Moreover, to argue as he does that “under the system of autocratic capitalism, traditional values could be as explosive as modern ones; and with the lack of moderate organizations or fixed leadership, episodes of major protest acquired a revolutionary

dynamic whatever their origins" (39), begs all the key questions. What made late Imperial Russia so extraordinary was the acute sense among different social groups of the possibility of an alternative political system and, within the propensity to question the existing order, the widespread currency of radical conceptions. Where these notions came from and why they enjoyed uncommon popularity still need to be explained.

To take the most important point, in the Russian empire, whose society juridically remained one of estates, the politically explosive concept of class came to be taken for granted as a way to look at the world and a basis on which to act to change that world. What explains class's coming to have such plausibility and resonance? What were the preconditions for the receptivity of the notion of class, and what were its effects? Where did workers get notions of political rights and class struggle? How did class categories relate to people's senses of justice, dignity, and respectability, and what does this imply about the source of values? No amount of structural argumentation can replace the importance of an analysis of subjectivity, of attempts to define and categorize, of individual and social identities, of mentalité. 27

When McDaniel turns to his concluding section on the "urban revolution" in 1917, the Bolsheviks, who had been relegated to a single chapter on the historical type of the revolutionary, come back to the center of the story. One wonders, could workers have so threatened the regime without such a caste of revolutionaries? What if the state had conducted more extensive repression of the revolutionaries, as was done to great effect in Japan? In short, who was the great power in society in 1917? Before 1917 there would have been no mass Bolshevik

27The need to examine these questions has long been forcefully argued by Reginald Zelnik, whose work grew out of a strong dissatisfaction with the notion that Marxist intellectuals "gave" workers their vocabulary and world view. Zelnik's individualistic approach to worker consciousness turned out to offer better possibilities for broader analysis than more sociologically oriented studies precisely because he did not take social categories, language, and identity for granted, but showed them in formation. See his "Passivity and Protest in Germany and Russia: Barrington Moore's Conception of Working-Class Responses to Injustice," Journal of Social History, 15 (1982), 485–512, especially 500–04; and his introduction to the Kananichkov memoir, cited in note 26, where he stresses religion as one of the most important sources for values that has heretofore been ignored (something, he might have added, that is particularly regrettable given the strong Messianic streak in Eastern christianity when compared with Roman catholicism). One forthcoming study by a Zelnik student that attempts to analyze the mental universe of printers by making use of the concept of moral economy is Mark Steinberg, The Culture of Class Relations in Russia: Workers and Employers in the Printing Industry (Berkeley, 1991). A stark contrast is provided by Heather Hogan, "Industrial Rationalization and the Roots of Labor Militance in the St. Petersburg Metalworking Industry, 1901–1914," Russian Review, 42 (1983), 163–90. Hogan places emphasis on the changing nature of the factory regime through rationalization as the chief cause of metalworkers' protest.
party without the existence of an urban work force, but there would have been no "October" without the Bolsheviks—no matter how large or radical the working class was. McDaniel argues that "by early fall [1917] little worker enthusiasm could be found anywhere for any program other than the demand for soviet power" (350). True enough, but did support for soviet power mean support for the Bolshevik party? On the basis of the secondary literature, he answers with an unqualified yes, claiming that in 1917 workers consciously sided with the Bolsheviks, rather than the Mensheviks or SRs, because the Bolsheviks' class interpretations of events corresponded with workers' own thinking (304). At the same time, McDaniel calls the worker-Bolshevik linkage in 1917 "an ephemeral unity" (398). All the more strange, then, that his book ends in 1917.

If one of the great strengths of McDaniel's analysis of worker radicalism in 1917 lies in his extension of the time frame not only back to 1905 but well before, the book's major weakness is this sudden and unjustified cutoff point. Had he carried the argument for the victory of a successful labor movement even a bit further into the future, say 1919, then he would have had to confront elements of a "workers' revolution" against the self-proclaimed workers' state. As it is, he offers only the cryptic and enigmatic words of the poet Aleksandr Blok, who early on called workers and their representatives "secretly hostile camps." But what, after all, does it mean that the labor movement was "successful"? Or, to put it another way, in what sense can 1917 be seen as an outcome?

At the most basic level, 1917 witnessed the fall of the autocracy and the short-lived Provisional Government and the rise of new authorities with a commitment to what they called "socialism." But this was in many ways just the beginning, for socialism had not existed anywhere previously and what it was and how it would be brought about remained unclear and in great dispute. What was clear and beyond questioning, however, was the commitment to bringing about socialism and the assumption that whatever socialism turned out to be, it should not

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28 Though it would seem beyond question, this point is still resisted by some scholars. See Richard Pipes, The Russian Revolution (New York, 1990). Except for a few cryptic asides about certain scholars' "naive populism," Pipes refrains from referring to virtually all of the secondary literature reviewed in this essay.

29 The experience of Poland's Solidarity, which brought about a revolution with a far greater proportion of worker participation than there had been in Russia in 1917, shows that workers' movements can be "successful" in alliance with intellectuals. But the aftermath of the change of power poignantly reveals the often tragic difference between opposition to an old order and the construction of a new: the very workers who made Solidarity and the revolution stand to suffer the most when their factories come up against the logic of the market system.
resemble capitalism. 1917 and its aftermath become incomprehensible without this consideration.

The Bolsheviks admitted that they organized and carried out a coup d'état, although they claimed that power was seized in the name of the workers (and peasants and soldiers). Whether as a result the party can be said to have "represented" the interests of these constituencies remains a complex question, and one that certainly cannot be answered by confining discussion to the events of 1917. In any case, the party's authority derived not simply from a perception that workers had ostensibly risen in its name (they had risen at least as much in the name of the soviets); the party's rule was supposed to embody the movement of history and thus to guarantee the coming about of what everyone was said to desire: socialism. The Bolshevik party claimed it alone knew what socialism was, and it proved to be prepared to do whatever seemed necessary to enforce that claim.

For their part, in 1917 and after, large numbers of workers tried to assume the role of a "universal class." But efforts to make class hegemony operational on railroads, in factories, or in trade unions and soviets collided with the practical problems of the organization of industry and the construction of a new state, and with the Bolshevik party's decoupling of class analysis from any necessary attachment to living members of a real class. Class was never merely a sociological category but always a language of politics and thus a political weapon. But after the revolution the language of class was appropriated by and incorporated into the incipient state structures, which retained the right "in the last analysis" to determine what or who went into the category. In an important sense October was a workers revolution, but not because workers participated in it and saw it as their own (peasants, soldiers, national minorities, and others did the same). It was a workers' revolution because notions of class and workers were institutionalized and became the basis for conceiving and justifying the new state's

30The tension between class consciousness as the consciousness of members of the working class and class consciousness as the correct understanding of history and politics that escaped many people who were workers comes across vividly in Trotsky's The History of the Russian Revolution. The seriousness and, at the same time, utter naivete of workers who tried to apply class analysis to real-life problems emerges with clarity in an unpublished essay by Diane Koenker, "Workers at the Press: The Case of Printers," paper prepared for the Conference on the Making of the Soviet Working Class, East Lansing, Michigan, 9-11 November 1990.

31One key group that seems to have laid claim to the revolution as an expression of their social interests was white-collar workers, notwithstanding the revolution's anti-petty-bourgeois rhetoric. See Daniel Orlovsky, "State Building in the Civil War Era: The Role of the Lower-Middle Strata," in Diane Koenker and William Rosenberg, eds., Party, State and Society in the Russian Civil War: Explorations in Social History, 180-209.
policies—even when those policies were abruptly changed, or class principles radically reinterpreted.

Thus, in the way that after 1789 "the nation" became more than a label signifying a particular group of people, after 1917 "class" became a structural dimension of the new order, although in doing so, class, like the nation, remained an important arena of conflict. An examination of the political history of class as a category stretching across both sides of the 1917 "divide" is long overdue. The same can be said for "workers," "the working class," "the proletariat," "class consciousness," "revolutionary" and "reformist." Such analyses have important political implications.

In Russian labor history workers are generally portrayed as heroes before 1917, but as victims thereafter. For those who study workers, notions of class in themselves are never seen as a contributing factor to the post-1917 workers' tragedy, only the expropriation of class analysis by the state. But notwithstanding its powerful mobilizing potential, class operates to exclude as much as to include. The supposed universality of class contrasts with its exclusions not simply of certain individuals, but of other organizing principles that could be used to define and thus alter lived experience. McDaniel is not alone in his neglect of the exclusions of the concept of class and of the imposition of class notions by workers on each other. But by adopting such an analytical posture, he has reproduced the very exclusions that were built into the revolutionary process and that he ought to be laying bare.22

To take one example, the notion of class renders sexual difference—and thus discrimination on that basis—invisible. That family life has been "brought into the discussion" of the working class as an extension of the social terrain of male workers' experience—rather than as evidence of the gendered nature of class visions of society founded on the subordination of women—is symptomatic of the general failure to examine the history of the categories with which "analysis" proceeds. Joan W. Scott, "On Language, Gender, and Working-Class History," International Labor and Working-Class History, 31 (Spring 1987), 1-13. Nor is the gendered dimension of accepted social categories (and thus political possibilities) confronted by an examination of women workers, however refreshing and enlightening such an examination is. By upholding the overriding significance of class, social scientists, including those who claim to retain an oppositional political orientation, perpetuate relations of power that the category of class puts into play and legitimizes. This is by no means a rejection of the need to study women workers. In that regard, a pioneer is Rose Glickman, Russian Factory Women: Workplace and Society, 1880-1914 (Berkeley, 1984). Glickman provides a detailed analysis of women's lives and the merciless exploitation to which they were subjected as workers and as women, and seeks to explain their "failure" to mobilize. Part of her answer—women's absence from trade unions and the failure of social democracy to confront their specific problems and concerns—can be read as an important criticism of most of Russian labor history as currently written.

Attempts to use class to transcend nationality are no less political. With the singular exception of Ronald Suny, however, nationality remains a giant blank spot in the labor history of the Russian empire and its successor, the Soviet Union. Suny affirms the supposed universality of class even as he exposes the particularity of nationality. Ronald Grigor Suny, The Baku Commune, 1917-1918: Class and Nationality in the Russian Revolution (Princeton, 1972).
Tim McDaniel has written an ambitious book, one that will serve for many years as an important guide to Russian workers and to the enormously productive field of Russian labor history. Many of the book’s shortcomings can be traced to the large secondary literature upon which the author relies and whose implications he helps to bring out more fully. In that literature, not only has the political been displaced by the social; within the social, workers—examined with the same lenses worn by contemporaries—have largely displaced other groups, from peasants and soldiers to white-collar workers and revolutionaries. But political possibilities are not reducible to the play of social forces. The modalities for expressing political preferences and the techniques of political battle—from language and ritual to personnel appointments and the use of terror—have dynamics of their own.33 As Russian labor history moves forward, it is to be hoped that the categories of social analysis will also become the objects of critical reflection and research, that the place of labor in the revolution will be analyzed rather than either passionately asserted or no less passionately denied, and that political history, informed by social and cultural considerations, will return to the study of 1917.

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33As has been shown for the French Revolution by, among others, Lynn Hunt, Politics, Class, and Culture in the French Revolution (Berkeley, 1984).