At the end of the 1860s, a new voice emerged amid the expanding Russian émigré community in Western Europe. Alexander Serno-Solov'evich is an example of a Russian radical who experienced, in a few years, a lifetime of revolutionary endeavor. He is reminiscent of Belinskii, Dobroliubov, and Pisarev, all of whom made almost fanatical use of the short span of time they had to give themselves to the cause of the antitsarist opposition. He also went far beyond his contemporaries who did not emigrate in that he not only published a body of significant and influential radical journalism but also became an activist in the working-class movement abroad. In addition, Serno-Solov'evich epitomized the growing discontent felt by the "young emigration" toward Herzen's acknowledged position as leader of the Russian opposition. We have already mentioned Serno's attack on Herzen, which was the most severe and most uncompromising of any Russian's of his time. Through this critique of Herzen, Serno established a new theoretical terrain, which irreparably broke apart the reigning political paradigm of the time. Most important, perhaps, as a result of Serno's activities, collective action became a permanent and dominant feature in the life of the Russian radical émigré communities.

Serno was born into aristocracy in 1838. Of his father we know nothing, but his mother was the sister of Andrei Nikolaevich Kirilin, a high military official under Nicholas I. Kirilin frequently spoke to young Serno of Nicholas's court, and he may have been instrumental in helping arrange for the admission of Alexander and his older brother, Nikolai, into the prestigious Aleksandrovsk Lyceum. It is clear from Alexander's early letters that he had
been in revolt against his family for as long as he could remember. He also established a link between his hostility to his family and his later rebellion against Russia. When he was twenty-one, he reflected on these formative years of his "unconscious childhood," which he saw as dominated by "empty phrases, bombastic words." From the battlefield of the family, he moved to the struggle against authority in the lyceum, a world of "moral death and apathy." At the time that he wrote these words in 1859, he was in despair. "I cannot believe in a future order," he wrote, "because activity here for me is a question of life and death." Deeply wounded by the arrest of his closest friend several years before, he seems to have retreated into episodes of morose introspection filled with feelings of alienation and mistrust.

He traveled abroad in 1856 and 1859, partly to relieve his anxiety and partly to study. He had become interested in European progressive thought as a result of a study circle to which he belonged in 1855. The circle, which included himself, his brother, Nikolai, and his lifelong friend A. A. Cherkesov, met at the home of M. V. Trubnikova (daughter of the Decembrist Uvashev), where they read Proudhon, Lassalle, Saint-Simon, and Louis Blanc. During the second trip, he announced in a letter that he was committing himself "to work for the future, for Russia," though he was still uncertain exactly how he would do that. The letters he wrote during this period indicate that he immersed himself in reading on a wide scale, though he appears to have been particularly interested in the work of Robert Owen and "the development of communism" in England.

Serno returned to St. Petersburg at a propitious moment. In 1861 a number of illegal opposition groups were formed which then fused with the student protests of that year. His tendency to brood and his confusion vanished as he threw himself into this ferment. Together with his brother, Nikolai, Alexander quickly became one of the leading activists in the capital. He helped distribute copies of Shelgunov's manifesto "To the Young Generation" and worked personally with Shelgunov. Shelgunov had the highest praise for his collaborator: "The energy of his temperament, the fierce passion of his character, the speed of his intuition, the subtlety and irony of his intelligence, and the dedicated spirit with which he devoted himself to the cause without ever thinking of himself—all these put him in a class of his own." Serno also joined the student movement working to push the dis-
sidents into a more political orientation. In the spring of 1862 he organized with V. I. Kel'siev a system of transporting illegal literature from abroad into Russia. He was, in addition, one of the organizers of Zemlia i Volia, for which he worked exhausting hours around the clock for months. Not surprisingly, he attracted the attention of the police and would surely have been arrested had he not decided to go abroad for reasons of health.

He was physically and emotionally exhausted when he arrived in Switzerland late in the spring of 1862. Soon after his arrival, he learned that his brother, Nikolai, had been seized by the police. At the same time, the Russian government demanded Alexander's return, but he refused and thus officially became an émigré. On 10 December 1864 the Senate deprived Alexander of all civil rights and condemned him to "eternal exile" from Russia. His life now assumed a new dimension. As a survivor of Zemlia i Volia, he bore the burden of responsibility to carry on the radical work of his brother and his former colleagues now jailed and silenced forever.

Alexander Serno's letters from abroad reveal one of the problems that would plague him for the rest of his life—his desperate financial situation. He lived with friends because it was cheaper and he ate modestly, but his anxiety over the need to support himself in a foreign environment remained. He tried through his friend M. V. Trubnikova to have translations published pseudonymously in *Birzhevoye vedomosti* and other journals in Russia. With the help of Ogarev and Vasilii Kasatkin, he also attempted to put together a collection of readings on Russian literature for use among the émigré communities as well as in Russia. He hoped this might be lucrative for him if it were successful. Another proposal of Alexander's which, while not designed for self-serving purposes, certainly would have helped him, was to establish a cooperative bank specifically to aid needy Russian émigrés in Europe. None of these efforts seems to have been realized, however, and Alexander continued to seek money from friends in order to survive.

His letters also document his many efforts to reestablish his radicalism in the new émigré context in which he found himself. In the winter of 1862–63 he joined with his friend Cherkesov and other émigrés in an effort to set up a new Russian printing press in Bern, where Bakst, Nozhin, and members of the Heidelberg colony had attempted a similar venture earlier. He was also in
touch with V. I. Kasatkin and M. Elpidin in Geneva in arranging to publish Chernyshevskii’s writings.

Serno’s intentions are not entirely clear at this point. Although he wanted to establish an émigré press in Switzerland, there is evidence to suggest that he was genuinely interested in cooperating with Herzen and Ogarev. He may ultimately have envisioned merging Kolokol with the new press on the Continent to create a unified émigré press with two operational centers. With a growing and increasingly dispersed Russian emigration in Europe, a single, united press would serve as a focal point around which all revolutionary émigré forces could rally in the struggle against the tsarist autocracy. Yet, at the same time, Serno, together with another émigré, Nikolai Utin, was convinced that for this unity to be achieved, Kolokol had to be “reformed” to reflect the ideas of the young émigrés. The content of Kolokol would have to be altered to include the posing of new questions, the proposing of new revolutionary strategies; it was insufficient, Serno argued, to propagate only one side of purely Russian socialism. He wanted greater cooperation with West European socialists, including having their theoretical articles published in Kolokol.12

Herzen, however, refused all suggestions to reorganize Kolokol and saw Serno’s efforts as an attempt to undermine his independence. He rejected the plan to unite Kolokol with a new émigré press in Switzerland, thereby embittering Serno’s attitudes toward him.13 Serno was unable to understand Herzen’s tenacious desire to remain independent politically just as Herzen could not comprehend the idea of a new generation’s need to go beyond the political framework of Kolokol.

Serno was visibly involved at the December 1864–January 1865 meeting of the “young emigration” in Geneva, and there, as we have seen, his opposition to Herzen became more pronounced. Then, in 1867, Serno brought the conflict with Herzen from the obscurity and privacy of the small Geneva meeting out into public view, where it was noted with great interest not only by the Russian emigration in Western Europe but also by both the Third Section and the revolutionaries remaining at large in Russia.14

The first of Serno’s three political brochures in which he openly attacked the editors of Kolokol was provoked by an article on Poland written by Ogarev and published in Kolokol late in 1866.15 The main issue of this article was the recent tsarist decree that punished Polish landowners who had participated in the
1863 uprising by forcing them to sell their land. Instead of condemning this decree, Ogarev saw in it a retreat from the policy of what he called “the religion of property” and entertained the naive hope that if this process were extended to the gentry class as a whole, it could lead to the liquidation of both the landowning aristocracy and Poland's large private estates. Further, Ogarev advised the Russian government to arrange for the transfer of this alienated land to the local Russian and Polish peasantry.

Serno's attack began in the title of his article: “Question polonaise: Protestation d’un Russe contre Le Kolokol.” His primary argument was that a systematic transfer of land along the lines suggested by Ogarev would inevitably lead to the “Russification of the entire area,” and that such a policy was in direct contradiction to Kolokol's previous commitment to the right of every nationality to self-determination. “I was silent for so long,” Serno writes, “because I passionately loved and deeply respected Messrs. Herzen and Ogarev.” Alluding to the Geneva meeting and other efforts at rapprochement, Serno argues that the intransigence of the editors of Kolokol has led to a political schism in the émigré movement. He had tried to make his objection known to Herzen and Ogarev regarding this article when he first saw it prior to publication. Specifically, he had asked Ogarev to remove the term “our Polish brothers,” which he considered hypocritical, and raised a number of theoretical objections. Mockingly and with obvious resentment and bitterness, Serno continues: “I sent this protest in Russian to the free Russian journal Kolokol; the free journal refused to publish it. . . . ‘O liberté! Que peu d’hommes savant te comprendre et surtout t’aimer,’ I say to the editors of Kolokol.”

On the surface, Serno's objections to Ogarev's article had to do with serious differences over the Polish Question. According to Serno, there were three tacit implications in Ogarev's position: (1) the Russian government would be dictating policy to Poland and thus determining its future; (2) the Russian opposition movement would be absorbing, co-opting, and perhaps stifling an autonomous Polish resistance movement. Here Serno believed strongly that only after the Polish movement had made significant advances toward the goal of national independence could relations with Russia be conducted on a level of genuine parity; (3) finally, there was the threat of “the Russian peasantry colonizing Poland” through the acquisition of land seized from dissident Polish landowners, land that ultimately belonged to the Polish people.
Beneath the surface, however, Serno was arguing for something larger than personal political differences between two émigrés. He claimed to be speaking not solely for himself; “I am convinced that the Russian young generation will stand with me on this question, and not with Kolokol. . . . Kolokol can no longer serve as the representative of the generation of Russian youth, since it is now only the expression of the personal views of Messrs. Herzen and Ogarev.” He closed his article by introducing the theme that was to dominate his next and more celebrated brochure—the irreconcilable opposition between “the mighty words of the genius Chernyshevskii” and the archaic politics of the editors of Kolokol.

Serno’s second essay in this series of attacks on Herzen, Nashi domashnie dela, was a response to Herzen’s article “Poriadok torzhestvuet.” In his article, Herzen had discussed his relationship to Chernyshevskii in terms of their political world views. He considered himself a representative of an authentic Russian socialism with direct roots “in the land and in the peasant milieu.” Chernyshevskii, in Herzen’s opinion, represented “a purely Western socialism” that was oriented more toward the urban, university sector of Russian society, which consisted “exclusively of workers of the intellectual movement, the proletariat of the intelligentsia.” However, rather than seeing his own socialist ideas as competitive with or in opposition to Chernyshevskii’s, Herzen preferred to see the two of them serving as “the mutual complement of one another.”

Herzen’s portrait of Chernyshevskii as a bookish man, removed from the realities of Russian life and espousing an abstract, theoretical form of propaganda, was completely unacceptable to Serno. To alter this interpretation of Chernyshevskii, Serno had first to combat Herzen. He did this with a venom that no one within the Russian opposition movement had ever before dared put into print. “You are a poet, a painter, an artist, a raconteur, a novelist, you are everything that you wish to be, but you are not a political activist and still less a theoretician or the founder of a school of thought.” He reminded Herzen of the time he had left Herzen’s home after a meeting with a friend who had previously been an admirer of Herzen and a member of Zemlia i Volia. Speaking of the 1863 Polish uprising, the friend had told Serno: “Herzen’s only use now would be to get himself killed on the barricades, but he’ll never go near them anyway.” Serno claimed that Herzen had himself brought about this disenchantment on the part of the younger generation. So many Russians had come to Herzen begging for help, for work, for
inspiration, “and you turned them away.” Continuing, Serno castigated Herzen for discussing socialism over champagne and caviar while “all around you, Russian émigrés were not eating week after week.”

Concerning Herzen’s conceptualization of Chernyshevskii and himself as “mutually complementing one another,” Serno had this to say: “Between you and Chernyshevskii there was not, nor could there ever be, anything in common. You are two contradictory elements that cannot coexist, friend beside friend. You are representatives of two conflicting natures, not complementing but destroying one another.” Whereas “you [Herzen] are a specialist in enthusiasm, Chernyshevskii is a man of science.” It is Chernyshevskii who has founded a school of thinking and won the admiration of the young generation. Herzen, Serno goes on, is only “a poet of freedom,” while his adversary Chernyshevskii is the creator of freedom. Herzen, Serno concluded, was “already a dead man” [uzhe mertvyi chelovek] from whom nothing more could be expected. The age of Kolokol had come to an end.

Serno’s assault on Herzen was devoid of any tribute to Herzen’s earlier years. He pronounced judgment on Herzen’s entire career in the context of his present, fiery critique. For Serno, Herzen’s politics had always been bankrupt—he recalled Herzen’s willingness to support Alexander II’s emancipation efforts (forgetting that, for a time, Chernyshevskii had done the same) as collaboration with the hated regime; he reminded Herzen of his calling Karakozov a “fanatic”; he blamed Herzen for the demise of Zemlia i Volia, which meant that he held Herzen indirectly responsible for the arrest of his brother and for his own emigration; and he argued that Kolokol had failed to provide the ideological leadership that Chernyshevskii’s Sovremennik had begun to exercise so effectively before it was silenced by the autocracy. Serno’s critique was merciless, vengeful, relentless, and uncompromising. He was seeking to destroy not only Herzen’s political credibility but also the legend that surrounded him. In addition, Serno was looking beyond the present impasse and issuing a call to arms for a new revolutionary strategy to transcend Herzen’s failures.

The last of this series of brochures was again occasioned by an article to which Serno felt compelled to respond. This time it was a piece on the Russian emigration written by N. Ia. Nikoladze and published in 1868 in the third issue of the Geneva-based émigré journal Sovremennost'.
Nikoladze's article was highly critical of the Russian émigré community and included a number of insinuations about the motives and behavior of the Russians living in Europe. According to him, the émigrés were only semiliterate in political relationships, were devoid of firm conviction, lacked talent and skill in dealing with the serious matters in which they became involved abroad, and could not offer any well-conceived, convincing explanation for why they had chosen to flee their homeland. Under these circumstances, Nikoladze concluded, the émigrés had no alternatives other than to follow the example of Vasilii Kel'siev and return to Russia or to renounce political activity, remain abroad, and plunge into the narrow Philistine currents of ordinary, everyday life.

Serno was enraged by what he considered a slanderous attack on the emigration and, by implication, on himself. Rather than issue a point-by-point refutation of Nikoladze's argument, he published a brochure, *Mikolka-Publitsist*, in which he sought to discredit the author and to destroy his general portrait of the emigration. He did this by first asking a series of pointed questions. Since Nikoladze was not legally an émigré himself and could return freely to Russia, Serno wondered publicly why he would elect to publish an article abroad that could so easily have been published in Russia under the rules of the censor. Alternatively, why not publish in *Kolokol*, where, Serno believed, the criticism of the emigration in the article would have found acceptance and a wider readership. Moving one step further, Serno asked whether there might even be some connection between the *Sovremennost* author and the tsarist Third Section. The bulk of the brochure ridicules the viewpoint of Nikoladze's article. Serno makes his own preferences quite clear in mentioning Chernyshevskii's novel *What Is to Be Done?* as an antidote to what he calls the "social pathology" of the status quo, which his antagonist Nikoladze is prepared to accept. Playing on the fact that both *Sovremennost* and *Sovremennik* derive from the same root word, Serno belittles the former as a poor imitation of the latter. Further, he asserts that Chernyshevskii's journal displays "critical realism" in approaching questions of significance, while Nikoladze's journal exemplifies folly, collaboration with evil forces, and weakness. Serno also mocks Herzen's memoir, *My Past and Thoughts*, as if it were a Richardson novel capable of little more than bringing tears to the eyes and passion to the heart. While caricaturing Nikoladze as concerned solely with finding "a warm corner" on this earth to burrow into (here Serno quotes Marmeladov in Dos-
toevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*). Serno declares that he and all his émigré comrades have painfully renounced their “warm corners” to live abroad in discomfort for a higher purpose than the pursuit of the safe, secure careers they abandoned in Russia. “I am a man, I say, of lofty aspirations and bold ideals. I do not wish to be a shoemaker or a doctor [in an autocracy]; I want to be a social activist.”

Although it does not appear in these brochures, Serno was developing a political alternative as he moved away from Herzen’s socialism. This alternative—the European workers’ movement and the International—was never developed by Serno as a mature theoretical position, but there is little doubt that he was seriously committed to this new strategy, as his letters and activities clearly show. His involvement with the Geneva section of the International and the labor struggle in that city began in the winter of 1866–67, the same time that he was in the midst of his brochure campaign against Herzen. A personal tragedy of enormous significance for him also occurred at this time, and was at least partly responsible for his shift from warring against *Kolokol* to joining the International. In February 1866 he received the news that his brother, Nikolai, had died in an Irkutsk prison, and this he immediately translated into a motive for new action against the Russian autocracy. “I am tormented,” he wrote of his comrades, “that I cannot go to Russia to avenge the death of my brother and his friends. But any individual revenge on my part would be insufficient and futile. By working here for the common cause, we will have our revenge on this cursed order, because the International holds the promise for the destruction of this entire system, everywhere!” Thus, rather than turning away from Russia, he felt he was fighting the battle against autocracy from afar by aiding the efforts of the International.

Serno threw himself into the maelstrom of labor unrest in Geneva, working at a feverish pace reminiscent of his sleepless nights during the student upheavals in St. Petersburg in 1861. In the midst of his involvement in the 1868 Geneva builders strike, he wrote with enthusiasm of his new activities to his friend M. V. Trubnikova:

Here, in the last three to four weeks, the workers question has undergone a very serious revolution. As a member of the International Society of workers, I have written several articles that have been discussed in both camps. There is a huge amount of work, with the result that I am sleeping only two to three hours a night. Now the thunder is subsiding, but of course, it will soon revive with a new
force. The International Society has selected me for a post in its statistical bureau, on a newspaper, and even in the local central committee.\textsuperscript{35}

The newspaper Serno referred to was *La Liberté*, edited by Adolf Catalan, an independent radical who had close ties with the International and the labor movement in Geneva. Unfortunately, since the articles in *La Liberté* are all unsigned, it is impossible to determine how many and which ones were actually authored by Serno.\textsuperscript{36} Nevertheless, from the evidence that has been identified with certainty during this period, it is clear that Serno was not entirely uncritical of the tactics of the International. While he admitted that the International was “the best creation of our age” and fully agreed with its ultimate objectives, he warned against adopting its position on “the economic question” as the dominant theme in the labor struggle to the exclusion of “the moral consideration of man.”\textsuperscript{37} Serno was also cautious about the timing of the strike tactic. The lesson of the 1868 Geneva strike for him was that the builders had been unable to choose the right moment to confront their employers successfully. This led him to call for a stronger organization of the International, which itself must become an independent force, bound and beholden to no political party or political leader.\textsuperscript{38} Serno decided to take action on this himself. In the summer of 1868, after the demise of the Geneva strike, he began the process of creating an independent party of workers which, he hoped, would participate in the national elections on behalf of its own interests as well as in organizing strike movements designed to alter the existing relationship between labor and capital.\textsuperscript{39}

As he became a prominent figure in the affairs of the labor movement and in the local organ of the International in Geneva, Serno came to the attention of Karl Marx. Serno, aware of Marx’s role and reputation in the International, was both surprised and proud when Marx sent him a copy of the first volume of *Das Kapital*.\textsuperscript{40} In a long letter that Serno sent to Marx in November 1868, he wrote that he “could not guess how you knew my name, all the more so since I am Russian.” Serno had two main purposes in writing to Marx: to solicit Marx’s participation in a new workers’ paper Serno was planning to edit, and to apprise him of the local situation in Geneva in the aftermath of the spring strike. Serno told Marx that the workers’ movement was strong in Switzerland and that its growth was intimately tied to the existence of the Interna-
A. A. SERNO-SOLOV'EVICH

ational—"the strength of the [labor] movement in the country is in direct relationship to the strength of the International." However, he added, "the International, like the country itself, is completely lacking in intellectual forces. With the exception of a few microscopic concentrations of people, all the rest understand nothing, absolutely nothing, and are led along by the vaguest and cloudiest aspirations. Consequently, the movement may collapse through the absence of any clear ideas, drowning as it is in a wave of catch phrases about brotherhood and solidarity, phrases that are contradictory by reality at every step."\(^{41}\)

Serno’s plan for counteracting this distressing state of affairs was to establish a weekly labor newspaper designed to reach a minimum of 2,000 subscribers under the aegis of the International Association. Serno was perfectly aware that for the newspaper to succeed in bringing the international labor movement to the attention of the local Swiss working-class population, it was necessary to recruit people who not only were socialist in thought but who also knew how to write. For this reason, he turned to Marx to ask him to participate in the newspaper as a contributor of "articles of theoretical questions." He also requested Marx to correspond with the newspaper on a regular basis on the workers’ movement and on the history of the labor question, to indicate to Serno the best newspapers in English on the labor movement, and to send him a list of recent English brochures of interest to the International Association concerning strikes and trade unions.\(^{42}\) Serno closed his letter to Marx by indicating that he was firmly convinced that "the workers’ movement as it is presently developing here, despite all its defects, represents a genuinely impressive sight." However, because of the lack of preparation and the absence of a solid leadership, Serno confessed: "I have never been so afraid of a revolution as I am right now. I know that on this question I am in disagreement with many people who think that the main thing is to provoke a general upheaval as soon as possible. . . . The last strike revealed how few workers are capable of leading themselves." Nevertheless, Serno remained sanguine about conquering these difficulties, in the short run at least, if Marx would agree to aid in the newspaper effort.\(^{43}\)

Serno’s acceptance of the tactic of workers’ participation in local elections and his rejection of the theory that a general insurrection was imminent brought him into direct conflict with Bakunin and the supporters of his Alliance of Socialist Democracy in Geneva. There was a good deal of ideological warfare between the
Bakuninists and the Internationalists on these issues, and Serno figured prominently in these battles. One of the consequences of this conflict was that Serno was excluded from the constituency of the congress of the Italian and Spanish sections of the International, which was held 2–4 January 1869 in Geneva. This congress was dominated by the Bakuninists and the local paper *Égalité*, which supported them. In general, this was a period of rising Bakuninist influence that Serno was helpless to stop, in spite of all his efforts.

All of Serno’s activities were brought to a halt by the recurrence of a mental illness that finally incapacitated him in 1869. It is not clear how long Serno was afflicted by this disorder, nor is any specific diagnosis given in the materials on his career. Although there is some indication that Serno inherited the disorder from his mother, he managed to conceal it from his closest friends until it was quite advanced. Only his brother, Nikolai, really knew the seriousness of his problem: “My brother, Alexander, is a man who is very seriously disturbed. In the last two years [1862–63] he has been ill around thirteen times, and every time has feared for his life. He was sent abroad against his will, and because of the doctor’s urgent demands, he remained abroad for the duration of a complete convalescence. He stubbornly wanted to return after one treatment. The illness has made him extremely anxious and nervous.”

There is no evidence of dysfunctionalism during Serno’s transition from student agitator in Russia to revolutionary émigré in Switzerland. However, immediately after the January 1865 conference at which the émigrés confronted Herzen over the orientation of *Kolokol*, Serno suffered a nervous breakdown. In addition to working at a feverish pace, Serno had been terribly concerned about the condition of his brother, who was languishing in a tsarist prison, and about the fate of the child he had fathered during his affair with Lidia Shelgunova in Geneva shortly after his arrival from Russia in 1862. In any case, Cherkesov, his closest friend abroad, arranged for his admission to a psychiatric hospital. Serno lacked the means to pay for this hospitalization, and his bills were eventually paid by his self-declared enemies—Herzen, Ogarev, and Tuchkova-Ogareva. In spite of the antagonism between Serno and Herzen that had emerged at the 1865 conference and that would surface even more devastatingly in Serno’s 1867 brochures, Herzen provided financial assistance to Serno at such critical moments. We do not know for sure whether Serno was even made aware of this generosity, since Cherkesov handled the arrangements and may
have chosen not to anger Serno by revealing the identity of his benefactors. But Herzen went ever further by calling on Serno during a later hospitalization to discuss the future of Kolokol.\textsuperscript{49} By this time Serno was gravely ill, and Herzen was showing compassion for a dying man.

We have already noted how Serno was affected by his brother's death in 1866, which he mourned deeply for a long period.\textsuperscript{50} Even before his brother's death, however, Serno was writing to friends about suicidal urges and fears of insanity. In September 1865, while hospitalized, he wrote Tuchkova-Ogareva that he was losing his mind, that he had decided to drink himself into unconsciousness in order to be able to drown himself, and that he was profoundly depressed over his illness. The following month he again threatened suicide in a letter to Tuchkova-Ogareva. He also mentioned that he was slipping closer to a state of insanity as a result of all that he had lost, especially his son and his brother. Although both were alive at that moment, they were lost to him forever, as was his homeland, where they existed and to which he could never return.\textsuperscript{51} When his brother died, Serno became even more depressed, but at the same time he gained a new purpose. As one of his comrades noted at the time, he now dedicated himself to the workers' movement, in part to avenge the death of his brother.\textsuperscript{52}

Serno drove himself furiously, carelessly, with no regard for his health. During the builders' strike in Geneva, as we have already seen, he slept only a few hours each night for several months. In January 1869, after he was excluded from the editorial committee of the Bakuninist-oriented \textit{Égalité} and from attending the congress of the Bakuninist sections of the International, Serno again suffered a breakdown. At the hospital, he asked for the truth about his condition. His doctor told him he had an incurable mental disturbance that would progressively deprive him of his powers of reasoning, and that increasing amounts of pain would accompany the deterioration. Serno decided not to endure this destiny, and on the night of 16 August 1869 he committed the act of suicide he had spoken about so often. In a note discovered later by friends, he wrote: "I love life and people, and I am sorry to have to leave them. But death is not the greatest evil. Far more terrifying is to be a living death."\textsuperscript{53}