The Emigration and Revolution

Developments after Herzen

On 23 January 1870 Alexander Herzen died in Paris. About five hundred people came to his funeral, most of them French, reported one Russian émigré who attended. The only speech given at the funeral, however, was by a Russian émigré, Herzen’s close friend Grigorii Vyrubov. This situation accurately reflects the dilemma of the entire emigration: being spoken for by a countryman in the midst of foreigners in an alien land. At the time of Herzen’s death, two generations of Russian émigrés had experienced this problem in one way or another, and the next generation of populist émigrés from Russia was about to arrive in the capitals of Western Europe. The growth of the émigré communities had reached a new level, and the emigration would soon swell to even greater numbers. Institutions had been established and became permanent features of the émigré landscape—certain neighborhoods to live in, selected cafés for discussions and planning, specific halls for larger meetings, and perhaps most important of all, reliable publishers and personally controlled printing presses to disseminate the voice of a free, uncensored Russia.

Herzen’s death came at a critical moment in the history of the Russian emigration. Herzen himself had become concerned about the viability of the whole emigration as a political force during his last years. Before his death, he confessed to his daughter that he had come to feel like “a foreigner in our foreign circle, a perpetual outsider.” Sadly he came to the realization that “we have become so tightly knit” that both the European left and the young Russians “regard us as outsiders.” He compared his life abroad to his earlier exile in Viatka, “a kind of second exile,” not only because of the
separation from Russia but also because of the schism between himself and the young generation of émigrés. Herzen's pervasive sadness over his disintegrating career was noticed by friends who spent time at his home in London. Beyond, or perhaps beneath, the sadness was another quality of émigré life, one that was noted by Herzen's friend Vyrubov when he visited the Russian community in Geneva in 1865: “They lived—survived would be a better way to put it—in a fog of bitter disappointments and unrealized hopes. Having no realistic soil on which to stand, externally irritated and angry at everything and everyone, they quarreled among themselves needlessly, without any reason.”

This senseless animosity and savage quarreling within the émigré milieu has been described by P. L. Lavrov as “a pathology endemic to any emigration, torn by the roots from its homeland and living with dreams about returning there.” And while the country of the émigrés' birth, which has nourished their hopes, becomes more and more a “creation of their imagination,” in reality it undergoes “a fatal transformation under the influence of events” with which they are no longer in touch. This, Lavrov adds, causes a form of suffering itself once the unbridgeable nature of the chasm between these two disparate worlds becomes a conscious part of the émigré mentality.

This “émigré dilemma” is evident from numerous testimonies. Vasilii Kel'siev, of whom we have already spoken, wrote of the immense unhappiness he experienced abroad. He could not forget the world he had left behind, and felt that as an émigré “no one respected” him. Thus, the apartness and isolation he experienced were due not only to a natural longing for Russia but also to the disdainful attitude he encountered among Europeans in England, France, and Switzerland. Even when a Russian émigré wanted to assimilate, a wall of prejudice against him had to be overcome. It was impossible to both be Russian and be in Europe; one could either become a European (and renounce Russian culture) or live in a sequestered émigré community sealed off from both Russia and Europe. This, Kel'siev wrote, was the hardest thing to endure.

In addition to this dilemma, a more serious issue confronting the emigration was the problem of leadership. During the era of the first generation, prior to the emergence of an authentic opposition movement abroad, there was no reason to raise this issue. However, during the 1860s, the second generation could not avoid confronting the problem of leadership. Many observers were of the opinion that, with Herzen's death, there was no single individual capable of
providing an overall leadership. Hence, according to this view, the emigration was doomed to fall into disarray, to function only in internecine competing factions that tended to weaken the entire movement.9 A number of émigrés were aware of this problem before Herzen’s death and tried to fill the void with a new, collective leadership. Utin, most notably, dedicated several years to this task, as we have seen, but did not succeed.

There was one effort at establishing a post-Herzen leadership which we have not yet mentioned, one which was at once utterly logical and hopelessly impossible. In 1870, after Herzen’s death, the revolutionary populist German Lopatin began devising a fantastic plan to unite the disparate factions of the demoralized emigration which he witnessed in his visits to the London, Paris, and Geneva émigré communities. As he wrote at the time, “There was only one person living at that time who could fire the imagination of an entire young émigré generation,” who could be accepted by the great majority of the emigration as an authority. This was Nikolai Gavrilovich Chernyshevskii.10 After all, it was in Chernyshevskii’s name that most of the younger generation had opposed Herzen ever since the 1864–65 émigré congress. He had been the symbol of the revolt that Serno-Solov’evich had attempted to generate when he wrote his pamphlet attacks on Herzen. Lopatin’s plan, however sensible it might seem in theory, was not one that could easily be realized. He did return to Russia to organize the freeing of Chernyshevskii, but the authorities made certain that their prisoner would not escape.11 One can only imagine what changes might have occurred in the history of the opposition movement abroad and at home had this plan ever succeeded, with Chernyshevskii surfacing in Geneva to take command at that crucial moment, on the eve of the emergence of revolutionary populism.

Another vexing problem for the emigration was the difficulty of creating and sustaining abroad a permanent organization dedicated to the overthrow of the Russian autocracy. By 1870, émigré communities existed or were in the process of forming in London, Paris, Geneva, and several lesser cities in Western Europe. There was no clearly established center on the Continent or in England to plan strategy and tactics for the whole emigration, however. It was a problem analogous to the one facing Russian revolutionaries working inside the borders of the empire, where separated centers of radical activity had to be coordinated in order to move effectively against the government. The difference was that the émigrés faced
The seemingly insurmountable conflicts engendered by their peculiar circumstances as exiles rather than the confining restrictions and repressive measures confronting the underground revolutionaries at home. First, they were burdened by the very conditions of freedom which made it possible for them to carry on their work. They were now at liberty to communicate as freely with one another as they wished, but without an organizational framework, they were in danger of setting up a vacuous network for themselves without the force to affect the political situation inside Russia. Second, they were essentially devoid of a natural constituency; this they had left behind when they emigrated. The Russian people, in whose name they were beginning to speak in louder voices, were far off, and the lines of communication were too tenuous, too distant, between the emigration and the empire.

To some extent, efforts to overcome these two formidable problems of leadership and organization were initiated during the 1870s. The emigration was simultaneously weakened and strengthened at this time as a result of a series of events. The decade began with the revelations of the Nechaev affair, which tied together the new student generation (many of whose members were questioned in 1869 at the well-publicized trial in St. Petersburg of the Nechaev circle’s role in the death of the student Ivanov), and the emigration (where Nechaev’s association with Bakunin ultimately damaged the prestige of the whole opposition abroad for a time.) In addition, the struggle between the followers of Marx and Bakunin for control of the First International also made the emigration vulnerable to charges from the established order and from bourgeois society, both in Europe as well as in Russia, that the émigrés were hopelessly doomed to internal factionalism. On the other hand, the arrival of a large number of new students from Russia to study in Switzerland during the early 1870s, including for the first time a significant number of women, provided a burst of energy for the emigration as a whole. Bakunin and Lavrov came to Zurich to compete for the attention of this new generation of youth from their homeland which stimulated some of the most original and enduring theories and tactics for revolutionary activity that had been produced abroad by the Russian emigration to date. This “Zurich colony,” in a sense, picked up where the Heidelberg colony had left off a decade ago. This time, with changed conditions both in Russia and in the evolution of the emigration, matters intensified. For the moment, Bakunin and Lavrov provided the desperately needed leadership
for the emerging émigré communities abroad, and the colony in Zurich similarly provided a model for Russian émigrés on the realities of revolutionary organization outside the country.

The rise to “power” of the émigré leadership in this manner fed directly back to Russia. Never before had such an effective linkage been established between the émigrés in Western Europe and revolutionaries in the empire. Rather than the very loose and unorganized affiliations that had existed between Herzen and the first Zemlia i Volia group in the early 1860s, the new connections forged between the populists in the Chaikovskii circle, the main populist revolutionary organization in Russia at this time, and the groups around Bakunin and Lavrov in Zurich were far stronger and more consistent. As hordes of populists, many of whom had been in Zurich themselves, fanned out into the Russian countryside to carry out the tactics they had learned either from Bakunin and Lavrov, or from their followers and publications, they were at the same time acting on the slogan of Herzen, who years before, from his émigré vantage point in London, had called on Russia “to go to the people.”

Despite efforts by the Russian government and the legitimate press to portray the activities of the emigration in unflattering terms and to minimize their impact, the fact was that illegal émigré publications hostile to the regime found their way into all the provinces of the empire west of the Urals. Privately, however, the government and the police did admit that the influence of the radical emigration in Russia had grown to unacceptably threatening proportions, as the official reports of this period carefully record.

The articles that did appear in the Russian press contained information on the growth of the emigration as a center of political opposition in spite of their critical interpretation of the émigrés’ political intentions and moral integrity (which was the reason they were permitted to be published in the first place). The émigrés were referred to as self-appointed “leaders of the people and decision-makers of Russia’s destiny” whose efforts to undermine the existing order required conscious resistance, especially on the part of the university-age population in Russia. It was there, in that milieu, one article warned, that the émigrés’ influence could spawn “various Nechaevs,” who could conceivably emerge with hopes of applying these “misguided notions” from abroad.

In another article, a correspondent admitted that “large numbers of gullible people” in Russia had contributed sizable amounts of money, in addition to moral support, to the Russian émigrés in
Europe. Although the article sought to show that this money was only being squandered by irresponsible and manipulative émigrés, it nevertheless concluded with a stern warning that unless these “generous donations” of support were halted, the emigration might be strengthened at the expense of the stability of the government and public order in Russia.\(^{15}\)

The police eventually broke down this “movement to the people” and severed the links that had been built to the émigré centers in Europe. For a time, the émigrés lost their vital connection to the emerging sectors of critical and radical opinion in Russia. During the late 1870s, funds were sent abroad to them in smaller amounts, and evidence of smuggled publications from the émigrés into Russia fell to insignificant levels. According to one study of this period, by around 1880 “the population of Russian political émigrés was fragmented and the sense of community that had prevailed in the mid-seventies had vanished.”\(^{16}\)

However, the connections were revived during the next two decades when another generation of radical figures from the Russian underground fled abroad and rebuilt the émigré communities in Europe. Plekhanov, Aksel’rod, Deich, Zasulich, and others assumed positions of leadership for the next generation of émigrés as they developed new strategies for political and social change in Russia and became an inspiration for younger revolutionaries like Lenin and Trotsky. Continuity with the émigré past was re-established. A wide range of émigré politics flourished again around the turn of the century, especially in the pages of the Russian press abroad, and this would ultimately have a salient impact on the transformation the Russian empire was undergoing in these years.\(^{17}\)

Among the most important of these influences was the formation abroad of many aspects of the political parties that were legalized during the 1905 upheaval when for the first time in Russian history the tsar was forced to grant a national Duma with elected parties. Twelve years later, when the Bolsheviks came to power in the October Revolution, the man who headed the new Soviet government was an émigré who had arrived in Russia only six months earlier, after spending nearly two decades in Europe. During those years of exile, Lenin and his followers had developed the theoretical strategy and organizational tactics that would serve as the foundation for the policies he adopted when he was catapulted to national leadership on the wings of the successful revolution in 1917.\(^{18}\)
**A Quantitative Portrait of the Emigration**

Having cursorily explored these broad trends in the history of the Russian emigration after Herzen's death, we shall now turn to the more objective realm of quantification for the emigration during its formative period. The essential question is, How many people comprised the Russian emigration from its origins, when Nikolai Turgenev became the first émigré by refusing tsarist orders to return to Russia in 1825, through the evolution we have traced up to the death of Herzen in 1870?

To try to answer this question, we must examine the existing data on the Russian emigration. The most striking fact that is immediately discovered is that there are no specific data on the number of émigrés in Western Europe. This lacuna was recognized as early as 1904, when the scholar assigned to write the article on “emigration” for the Brockhaus-Efron encyclopedia admitted that figures on the Russian emigration were not published by the government. He also indicated that the only estimates possible under these circumstances had to be based on passport statistics for Russian citizens at ports of disembarkation, such as Hamburg and Bremen in Germany. Even with these figures, however, one still had to separate the politically motivated émigrés from the general population of departing Russians, which included many people who were abroad temporarily for vacations or for diplomatic or commercial purposes, as well as economic refugees seeking permanent assimilation abroad.19

Another source of data on Russians abroad can be found in the French National Archives. The French government began keeping lists of Russians entering France in 1849, with brief descriptions of age, position, and intentions. For the year 1840, for example, 75 Russians are listed as having entered the country for visits of varying purposes and durations. Most appear to be aristocrats, military officers, and merchants. There are some short reports on specific Russians who were targeted by the government to be monitored by the police, but these materials are of only limited use in analyzing the Russian émigrés in particular.20

In fact, the Russian government was compiling statistics on people leaving the country, in spite of the fact that they were never published. Every year, the Third Section was required to file a lengthy report on its activities to the government. Starting in the 1850s, when “political crimes against the Empire” spread to West
European cities, the Third Section’s agents devoted a good deal of attention to these activities in their annual reports. The trials and tribulations of Herzen’s press in London were meticulously described, often by agents who managed to gain access to Herzen’s home, his meetings, and his *Kolokol* staff. The publications of Herzen’s press were analyzed, and copies of the actual pamphlets and brochures were sent back to St. Petersburg for perusal. The Third Section’s annual reports also include statistics on Russians abroad, with breakdowns according to social class and official reasons for leaving the country. Unfortunately, it is impossible to tell from this material how many of those accounted for were political émigrés.

Recently, a Soviet researcher investigated yet another source of data on the emigration, the names of individuals going abroad which were published in Russian newspapers. In this case, three prominent newspapers were selected (two in the capital, one in Moscow), and a collective accounting was created from the separate listings in the newspapers for the period of 1857–61. Of the total of 213 names, 39 individuals left the country in 1857, 46 in 1858, 70 in 1859, 34 in 1860, and 24 in 1861. The overall record generated by the newspaper listings includes the names of many of the émigrés we have discussed (Dolgorukov, Blummer, Utin, among others), some we have not analyzed (V. I. Kasatkin, A. I. Evropeus, N. M. Satin), and some who would play a role in émigré politics much later (A. Kh. Khristoforov, for example). It also includes, however, the names of writers like Ivan Turgenev and Tolstoy, publicists and critics like Annenkov and Katkov, and a wide variety of other Russian citizens, some of whose names would be familiar to students of Russian history (A. V. Tretiakov, A. N. Pypin, V. P. Botkin, T. P. Passek, etc.). Yet, as interesting as this information is from the standpoint of a social history of prominent travelers abroad, it is not a useful guide to greater knowledge of the Russian émigrés—that is, those individuals who left for strictly political reasons. Moreover, the list does not reflect the illegal journeys out of Russia taken by many émigrés. The newspaper listings are also repetitious from year to year, since many of the people named vacationed abroad every summer (like the Utin family) or traveled to Europe for artistic, business, or diplomatic purposes each year.

Some work has been done on a slightly later period than our own in trying to account for the numbers of Russian émigrés in Western Europe, but here too the results are not satisfactory. It is
clear that most Russian émigrés congregated in Geneva, Paris, and London. Geneva was geographically the closest, Paris the cheapest, and London the most distant and most expensive city to live in. It has been estimated from police reports that in 1881 around 50 émigrés were involved in Russian revolutionary activities in Geneva; for Paris and London the numbers were 96 and between 7 and 10, respectively. There were, to be sure, additional émigrés in other cities of Switzerland, France, and England, just as there were still others living in Germany, Italy, Rumania, and other European countries. The data are very inconsistent, however. In the case of France, for instance, while the police counted 91 émigrés in Paris in 1880, another government list categorizes 181 Russian families as "nihilists" or "nihilist sympathizers." According to a separate list compiled by the reactionary Russian organization responsible for counteragitation against Russian émigrés in Europe, there were only 31 militant exiles abroad in 1881. Meanwhile, the French press claimed there were at least 2,000 Russian nihilists in the country!}

According to an unpublished Soviet dissertation on the emigration movement of a somewhat later era, 104 émigrés arrived from Russia during the 1860s and 1870s in Western Europe. This list, compiled from both published and unpublished Russian materials (i.e., no data from European sources were included), extends for twenty years from the time of the first Zemlia i Volia group in 1861 up to, but not including, the collapse of Narodnaia Volia in 1881. It does not, however, include émigrés who came earlier than 1861. An additional 9 Russians emigrated in 1881, according to this material, and another 24 arrived in Europe during 1882–83 in the aftermath of the breakup of Narodnaia Volia. Among other available studies are two contemporary sources commissioned by the Russian government. According to one, there were 200 “socialist and anarchist” émigrés in West European countries in 1881, while in the other, a list of 112 Russian émigré activists in Switzerland alone was compiled for the period 1870–74. The latter list, which includes biographical sketches on each of the 112 individuals, is based primarily on Swiss archival and government records, supplemented by Russian data. There are also several statistical tables on the nationality, social class, and educational background of the émigrés in this particular study.

Taking these varied and contradictory pieces of evidence together, the most reliable estimate we can make is that there were
between 200 and 225 active Russian revolutionary émigrés in Western Europe during the early 1880s—about 37 percent in Switzerland, 25 percent in France, and 6 percent in England. The numbers changed frequently as political conditions in Russia changed (there were marked increases in the number abroad, for example, following the student disorders of 1861–62, after the Nechaev trial in 1869, and again in the wake of the arrests at the time of the assassination of Alexander II in 1881). There seem to have been fluctuations in the numbers for other reasons as well, reasons that relate more to individuals or to the internal development of the emigration itself. Furthermore, since the émigrés moved from city to city so frequently, it would not be surprising to learn that some of them were counted by the police in several different countries during the same year. In any event, allowing for some reduction in these figures, which were compiled for the early 1880s, it would seem accurate to assume that slightly less than 200–225 émigrés were politically active in the 1860s.

*The Significance of the Russian Emigration: Intelligentsia in Exile*

By the time of Herzen's death in 1870, the emigration had become a permanent force in the evolution of prerevolutionary Russia. In spite of his acerbic and sometimes inaccurate rendering of his émigré contemporaries in his memoir, Herzen prophetically conceptualized the crucial role the emigration was to play in Russian history in his 1851 essay, *Du développement des idées révolutionnaires en Russie*, as we have noted. Herzen was clearly aware of the profound transformation Russia was undergoing, and understood that, because of this, the emigration's significance would become even more vital with the passing of his generation. He clung to this faith in spite of opinion to the contrary from close and respected friends. In one instance, A. A. Chumikov, a fellow émigré, told him: “Our emigration becomes estranged from anything native and it loses its support and becomes incomprehensible for the masses.” Moreover, Proudhon wrote to him at about the same time that “exile, like prison, derails the judgment.” To these skeptics, Herzen replied with confidence that the Russians abroad form the ranks of a growing army that “protests vigorously against the despotism of St. Petersburg” and continues “to work toward the common liberation. Far from becoming foreigners, they make themselves the free organs of young Russia, her interpreters.”


Herzen's conviction about the significance of the Russian emigration was shared by most of his contemporaries abroad. To be sure, they had serious differences over tactics, and they all experienced some sense of disorientation from the shock of adapting themselves to their new milieu far beyond the familiar borders of the homeland. As we have seen, Leonid Bliummer was so acutely aware of these problems of adjustment that he wrote a sensitive article in his journal on the stages of the adjustment process experienced by Russian émigrés. Also, we know that in some cases the adjustment became intolerable or was deemed not worth the sacrifice; Vasilii Kel'ciev's decision to return to Russia and to renounce the revolutionary cause abroad was to a large extent a result of his inability to cope with these enormous problems over an extended period of time which appeared to have no boundaries. In addition, instances of periodic or complete breakdown occurred: our discussion of Zhukovskii's disintegration into alcoholic dysfunctionalism and Alexander Serno-Solov'evich's suicide can be interpreted in this context. Sazonov's spending sprees and his accumulation of enormous gambling debts are indications of insecurity and unresolved conflicts concerning his changed life as an émigré.

Nevertheless, for most of the Russian émigrés we have discussed, anxiety was overcome through activity and commitment. For them the external enemy was a greater threat than the enemy within. They managed to transcend the despair and guilt of leaving behind their country and its battlefield, no longer "envying the sufferings" of their victimized comrades at the mercy of tsarist jailers in the Peter and Paul Fortress or in Siberian exile labor camps. Europe became the new staging area for the continuation of the struggle against the autocracy, which legitimized their very existence. They gradually established a separate community abroad for this purpose, and it assumed its own historical evolution. In the framework of this unusual society-in-exile, they made constructive use of their own crises, faced as they were with the dilemma of functioning in a situation of extreme alienation. On the one hand, while they refused to assimilate into either bourgeois European society or the radical European social movement, they were dependent on European liberties and tolerance to carry on their work; on the other hand, while they could not return to Russia without risking arrest, they were dependent on forces of protest and on a favorable response to their ideas in Russia in order to sustain their work. Disconnected from the realities of both Russia and Europe in this way, they fashioned new political orientations and new concepts of
ideology concerning the role of the intelligentsia, the nature of workers' movements, and the strategy of revolution.

Among the most important questions concerning these new political currents is the degree to which they were reflections of Russian or European political conceptualizations. The émigrés themselves, at least those of the first two generations, reveal a variety of interests in this regard. All of them, in one way or another, believed there was something vital about the West, something of significance in Europe, that would be useful for a transformed Russia. In some instances, the search for European tools and methods to solve Russian political problems was quite explicit. For Sazonov and Utin, the answer seemed to lie in the theories being developed by Karl Marx; as a result, they proclaimed themselves his disciples at opposite ends of Marx's long career. For Dolgorukov, Golovin, and Turgenev, the solution resided in determining how to apply appropriately the variations of European constitutional monarchy to the Russian empire. Bliummer was an outspoken follower of the ideas of John Stuart Mill, and Sokolov considered himself a Proudhonist. Serno-Solov'evich was an exception in that he saw the most promising strategy to bring about the downfall of the autocracy not in any theory, but in the day-to-day struggle of the Swiss labor movement. However, the attraction of theory continued to dominate most of his émigré comrades.

Yet, not all of the émigrés looked so completely to Europe to find an alternative to Russia's political system. Zhukovskii, Zaitsev, and, for a time, Mechnikov, all turned to Bakunin, whom they believed embodied a Russian understanding of their country's problems. Vasilii Kel'siev thought he had located the future of Russia in the dissenting religious sects of Old Believers. Serno-Solov'evich, in spite of his attraction to the workers' movement in Switzerland, was an ardent disciple of Chernychevskii, and was highly suspicious of European socialist theory as a means of resolving political problems in Russia. In addition, émigrés like Nozhin, Bakst, and Mechnikov, though they were very Russian in their political orientations, remained independent critics who never really reached the stage of deciding on the side of any theory or theorist.

The backgrounds of the émigrés were also rather varied, the general shift from an aristocratic, wealthy first generation to a somewhat less privileged second generation notwithstanding. Still, these differences were of little concern when compared to the overriding sense of outrage and envy which united the younger émigrés in their
criticism of Herzen’s elegant life-style and his financial security. Similarly, once abroad, the distinctions in educational background dissolved into insignificance. The fact that Dolgorukov, Sazonov, and Utin had won prestigious prizes at school and had been highly regarded for their intelligence before leaving Russia did not influence their choice of comrades, organizations, or ideas once abroad; neither was it powerful enough to affect their widely contrasting politics.\(^{33}\)

The émigrés, it should be recalled, were only one of a number of groups of Russians abroad. There were also increasing numbers of university students and research scholars, vacationers, businessmen, and literary critics (like Annenkov) visiting for personal or professional reasons, religious dissenters (of whom Ivan Gagarin and Vladimir Pechorin are the best known), and the aristocrats and diplomats who comprised the Russian salon culture of the capitals of Europe. The last group was by far the largest of the Russian communities abroad. Some of its members assumed the responsibility of acting as a counter-emigration on behalf of the regime at home. In an era before the Okhrana was established in Europe to combat émigré revolutionary activities, several prominent Russian aristocratic salons became active defenders of tsarist politics abroad, extolling the autocracy and agitating against the émigrés. It is not certain how deeply this influence penetrated the public consciousness of European society, but in Paris, at least, there was a measurable impact upon those who wished to prevent the undermining of monarchical values.\(^{34}\)

The émigrés’ battles, however, were directed elsewhere. The struggle to alter the political system in Russia was paramount. Not only was it their “cause” but it was the sole way in which, if they were successful, they could realize their dream of returning home, of ending exile and healing the wounds of years of banishment. This dream drove them forward, kept them alive, and infused their agonized existence with a meaning and a purpose that would otherwise have been impossible to achieve. To accomplish all this, they created what one historian has called, in speaking of a later period, an “intelligentsia in exile.”\(^{35}\) Through the first two generations of its existence, the emigration assumed many of the characteristics associated with the development of the Russian intelligentsia within the borders of the empire. The émigrés began as disconnected individuals and gradually moved toward establishing groups, circles, and organizations galvanized by their intense opposition to tsarism.
and their passionate commitment to inaugurate a new form of social and political existence for Russia. They came to see themselves as possessing a special consciousness because of their freedom from the restricting pressures of Russian politics at home. Conditions abroad also made it possible for them to become aware of themselves as a kind of collective conscience for their homeland, bearers of new values, with an inspired vision of the future and a realistic knowledge of the evolution of history, in which they felt themselves to be important participants. Above all, they believed they had to take action to bring about the desired changes.

From the perspective of the revolutionary intelligentsia, the foundation for the political and social changes that would later move Russia closer to the abolition of autocracy was built by the emigration. Those who went abroad to do battle were considered indispensable to the upheavals that came later. Looking back across the decades from the vantage point of the ashes of the 1905 revolution, one sympathizer wrote that the pioneers of the Russian emigration were heroes “who knew no compromise, who knew no other happiness on this earth other than service to the lofty ideals of the whole of humanity. They carried out the struggle for freedom with such commitment that the ability of the contemporary intelligentsia to wage its war would be unthinkable without them.”

Perhaps it takes a visionary poet to comprehend the necessity, the complexity, and the tragedy involved in the relationship between the émigré and his government. At a time when the world seemed to be collapsing around him in this century, W. H. Auden wrote:

Exiled Thucydides knew
All that a speech can say
About Democracy
And what dictators do,
The elderly rubbish they talk
To an apathetic grave; . . .

And because those who know this in any age cannot be tolerated and must be driven out as exiles, we—society—end up enduring the agony of oppression:

The enlightenment driven away,
The habit-forming pain,
Mismanagement and grief:
We must suffer them all again.