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Reluctant Terrorists? Transcaucasian Social-Democracy, 1901–1909

ERIK VAN REE

Abstract

This article discusses the development of Transcaucasian social-democratic terrorism from 1901 to 1909. For two reasons the ‘psychohistorical’ model emphasising the subjective and irrational aspects of terrorism has only limited value for the Transcaucasian case. First, the significance of the contextual factor is powerfully underscored by the phenomenon of workers’ ‘economic terrorism’. It was not uncommon even, for workers to blackmail reluctant party organisations into supporting the killing of their enemies. Secondly, the social democrats were not driven by irrational urges but followed a rationally motivated and selective terrorist strategy. They attempted to limit or prevent workers’ terrorism from below, the ‘anarchist’ potential of which they considered a threat to the organised mass struggle. They set their hopes on a division of labour, with a militant but mostly peaceful workers’ movement and terrorism as the prerogative of the party.

THE PRESENT ARTICLE DISCUSSES THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF Transcaucasian social-democratic terrorism from 1901, when social democrats of the region began to engage in ‘terrorist acts’, to 1909, by which time organised terrorist formations had been dissolved. Anna Geifman and Stephen Jones have pointed to the remarkable scope of Transcaucasian social-democratic terrorism. In Jones’s words, ‘From 1903 on, Georgian Social Democrats assassinated, bombed, and used death threats against landowners and police officials’. Terror even ‘became central to Georgian social-democracy’s success’ (Jones 2005, p. 183). The Georgian *mensheviks* were almost as enthusiastic practitioners of the trade as their *bolshevik* comrades (Jones 2005, pp. 98, 183–84; Geifman 1993, pp. 99–100).

One might wonder whether the killings perpetrated by the Transcaucasian social democrats should indeed be described as terrorism. Revolutionary violence after all is not necessarily terrorist. The violent actions under discussion here did not take place in a vacuum. As revolutionaries the social democrats were under permanent threat of being betrayed by spies and informers, whose activities were often potentially life-threatening and could at a minimum lead to prison sentences or exile. Left-wing

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activists were threatened by Black Hundred groups and pogromists. The workers' rage was provoked by an often brutal factory regime with foremen and managers riding roughshod over them; peasants were oppressed by landlords and their agents. In 1905 the situation spiralled into a state of semi-civil war. All this caused a violent escalation partly out of the control of those involved in the struggles. Aggression and retaliation were no longer clearly distinguishable.¹

Yet it seems significant that both the *bolsheviks* and the *mensheviks* themselves used the term 'terrorist' to describe their own outrages. The *bolsheviks* continued this practice when discussing their own past. For this research I read several dozen autobiographies of Georgian Old Bolsheviks, often written in the early 1930s. Although I made no quantitative analysis with a categorisation of recorded life experiences according to formal criteria, a substantial percentage of the autobiographers—I would estimate one out of five—admit to having personally killed or attempted to kill someone or been indirectly involved in such acts. They called this 'terrorist acts' and 'murders'.

There are other, more fundamental grounds for using the term. I define terrorism here as ideologically or politically inspired violence targeted against civilians or non-combatants.² To some extent, the social democrats organised what were in fact military operations, in which army personnel were killed in combat. But they also targeted individuals, whom they struck not to defend themselves in a physical fight but premeditatedly. Their stated motive of 'self-defence' referred to killing people who were either perceived as threats to the security of the organisation, or whom they considered deserving of punishment for the crimes they had committed. The main categories in danger of social-democratic retaliation were police spies and informers; policemen, soldiers and cossacks; high-ranking or low-ranking government officials held responsible for anti-popular misdeeds; Black Hundred activists; and particularly hateful members of the economic elite, down to the level of ordinary foremen (Geifman 1993, p. 100). The social democrats did not detonate bombs with the purpose of killing as many citizens as possible; nor did they spread fear among the citizenry at large through random actions; but they did commit systematic violence against particular categories of civilians or non-combatants.

There are two main, not necessarily incompatible models to grasp the terrorist phenomenon: subjective and contextual. Anna Geifman argues that objective circumstances do not suffice to explain the phenomenon. The key to understanding terrorism in the Russian Empire would lie in the revolutionaries' supposedly disturbed personality structure. With modernisation and the dissolution of traditional collective

¹Mayer (2002, pp. 6, 128, 137) makes the insightful observation that under the condition of a revolutionary breakdown of sovereignty the resulting all-out struggle between the contenders for power would typically result in something like a reversion to a political state of nature. Regardless of the ideological profiles of the fighting parties, there would occur a return to traditional vengeance, a 'surge of founding violence mixed with wild vengefulness' (Mayer 2002, p. 137). For a related argument see Nieburg (1969, pp. 82–100, 116–17).

²For definitions of terrorism close to the one used here, see Goodwin (2006) and B. Ganor, 'Defining Terrorism: Is One Man's Terrorist Another Man's Freedom Fighter?', available at: <http://www.ict.org.il/var/119/17070-Def%20Terrorism%20by%20Dr.%20Boaz%20Ganor.pdf>, accessed June 2007.

institutions, psychologically vulnerable people would have been unable to successfully adapt their personalities to the requirements of a new, more individualistic age. They resolved the resulting neurotic inner conflicts by drowning themselves in alcohol, drugs, aberrant sexual practices or the occult. The ‘mysticism of death’ and a turn to terrorism represented another powerful way out for the mentally unbalanced (Geifman 2005).³ Oleg Budnitskii (2000, p. 14) concurs that the background of terrorism should not primarily be found in ‘socio-political circumstances, but above all in the ideology and, to a significant degree, the psychology of a certain part of the Russian revolutionaries’.

Geifman’s approach not only rejects a contextual focus but also heavily emphasises the irrational motives of obsessively committed, almost addicted terrorists. Their actions supposedly tended to be uninhibited and indiscriminate to the point of being self-destructive. In a futile drive to restore their personal wholeness and live out their frustrations without restraint, they not only overstepped all ordinary moral boundaries, but also failed to take seriously the boundaries set by their own ideological doctrines (Geifman 2005, pp. 14–15, 18–21, 25).⁴

To this one may add the further subjective factor that social-democratic objections against terrorism formulated in the late nineteenth century were of a merely tactical nature. The desire to set themselves apart from their rivals (the openly terroristic populists and socialist-revolutionaries) formed an important motive in formulating such objections. From the 1890s, Russian Social-Democratic Workers Party (RSDWP) leaders Plekhanov, Martov and Lenin rejected terrorism as an unsuitable tactic diverting the party from the organised mass struggle. But without a fundamental moral engagement with the issue of terrorism one would be easily tempted to engage oneself in the practice when opportunities became more promising. During the revolution of 1905, Lenin indeed began to support terrorism openly. He recommended the selective killing of individual spies, policemen, cossacks, repressive government officials and Black Hundred activists as measures of self-defence. Liquidating enemies was furthermore held to be a useful preparation for the armed uprising, a form of live military training. The Russian *mensheviks* now also tended to accept terrorism as a form of self-defence, but they stopped short of wholeheartedly embracing it. After the defeat of the December 1905 risings they reverted to their old position. Lenin, though, continued to defend the partisan war.⁵

Geifman’s ‘psychohistorical’ model has been criticised for being one-sided. John Keep points to the context in which revolutionary terrorism flourished, in particular to the widespread approval of murdering tsarist authority figures. To deem moral objections to terrorism irrelevant was no idiosyncrasy of disturbed individuals, but characteristic of large sections of the liberal public outraged by the repressive tsarist system (Keep 2006, p. I). The contextual model would furthermore focus on the violent Georgian and Transcaucasian working class culture and the traditional

³See also Geifman (1993, pp. 6, 19).

⁴See also Geifman (1993, pp. 6, 19).

⁵For the most extensive analysis of these Russian social-democratic views on terrorism see Newell (1981). See also Geifman (1993, ch. 3) and Budnitskii (2000, ch. 5). For nineteenth-century social democracy and terrorism see Naimark (1983). On Russian social-democratic theory and practice of the ‘armed insurrection’ during the 1905–1907 revolution see Fischer (1967).

political culture which accepted ‘violence and revenge as proper and honorable’ (Jones 2005, p. 97). Workers routinely used ‘threats, beatings, and killings and the swearing of oaths’ as weapons in their economic struggles (Jones 2005, pp. 77, 97–98, 171). Workers’ culture cannot but have influenced the social-democratic party rooted in that class. Jörg Baberowski (2003b, pp. 24–25) analyses the revolutionaries’ adoption of violence as an adaptation to the language of the workers to overcome their own marginal position.

The present article takes issue with the psychohistorical model on both points. It will appear that workers regularly and perseveringly blackmailed reluctant party organisations into supporting terrorist strikes. This powerfully underscores the contextual model emphasising the significance of the workers’ culture for understanding the terrorist phenomenon. Furthermore, and somewhat paradoxically, though themselves extensively engaging in terrorism on a regular basis, the social democrats of both factions remained committed to limiting and preventing working class ‘economic terror’. The model of the wild, irrational terrorist is of little use in accounting for the selective and strategically motivated approach followed by these revolutionaries. I believe Transcaucasian social-democratic violence deserves a more balanced treatment than the psychohistorical model would provide.⁶

Beginnings

According to Aleksandr Ostrovskii (2003, p. 602) the ‘terrorist tendency in the Georgian social democracy’ arose in 1901–1902. It should be set against the background of wider developments in the Russian empire. In the first years of the twentieth century, socialist-revolutionary terrorism was again on the rise. In February 1901 Minister of Education Bogolepov was assassinated, followed in March by an attempt at the life of Procurator of the Holy Synod Pobedonostsev. In April 1902 Minister of the Interior Sipyagin was killed. Among the Russian social democrats the periodical *Rabochee delo* defended terrorist strikes against high-ranking persons with the argument that the masses sympathised with them. The newspaper *Iskra*, mouthpiece of Plekhanov, Lenin and Martov, continued to reject terrorism on tactical grounds, but among militant workers there grew a widespread sympathy for the murdering of state officials. The sympathy was reflected in local *Iskra* groups, which to *Iskra’s* own dismay often cooperated with socialist revolutionaries for the

⁶Our knowledge of social-democratic terrorism in the Caucasian region remains quite fragmentary. What we know is composed from a variety of far from perfect source materials. It is nevertheless possible to construct a reasonably reliable image of the phenomenon, though important gaps and uncertainties remain. My research is partly based on memoirs of Georgian *bolsheviks* in the Stalin *fond* 558 and autobiographies of Georgian Old Bolsheviks in *fond* 124 of the Russian State Archive of Social-Political History (RGASPI). For a non-Georgian speaker this is a way of accessing Georgian materials. Department of Police *fond* 102 in the State Archive of the Russian Federation, GARF, contains informers’ reports about the RSDWP as well as a great number of pamphlets and other documents translated from the Georgian into Russian. Nestan Charkviani and Simon Montefiore kindly provided me with a number of important Georgian language documents translated into English, for which I thank them. These documents are cited in the footnotes and reference list by their original Georgian titles.

purpose of committing terrorist acts (Newell 1981, chapters 5–6; Fischer 1967, p. 18; Haimson 1955, pp. 122, 149; Keep 1963, p. 79).

Evidence exists to suggest that a group of social democrats in Baku were considering just such an arrangement. Lado Ketskhoveri, editor of the radical social-democratic periodical *brdzola* in that city, may have masterminded a plan to organise a terrorist group. Between February and September 1902 three agent reports were filed in which it was stated that Ketskhoveri and fellow social democrats Abel Enukidze and Vano Sturua were planning to establish a group of ‘fighters’ (*bortsy*), together with either anarchists or socialist revolutionaries linked with Kharkov and Kiev. They intended to travel to St. Petersburg to commit a terrorist act.⁷ These reports cannot be taken at face value, but the project would have fitted in with the all-Russian trend of the time. Ketskhoveri’s arrest in September 1902 in any case aborted the project.

Spectacular strikes against high-ranking officials, such as the one in St. Petersburg would have been, were however never very typical of the Transcaucasian social democrats. The idea of protecting their organisation against police attention, i.e. the party culture of *konspiratsiya*, was always central. It seems that, as soon as the social-democratic organisation became a target of police interest, the party activists awarded themselves a self-evident right to kill informers. Information about early Transcaucasian social-democratic terrorism is sparse. But though highlighting only specific incidents and examples, memoirs in the archives suggest that during 1901 and 1902 killings became regular occurrences in Baku and Batumi as well as in Tiflis. Moreover, one is struck by the apparent ease and the matter-of-fact way with which decisions to kill were taken.

The first case known to me again concerns Ketskhoveri. It was in Baku in 1901 that the latter told his comrade G. Z. Lelashvili that he was being followed by spies: ‘I told him that he should try to make the spies follow him on Balakhany Street, which is what he did; we killed both spies’.⁸ Lelashvili moved to Batumi to work at the Rothschild plant in early 1902. Perhaps he had acquired the name of a specialist, for he was ‘ordered by the Batumi social-democrat[ic] organisation, in which at the time also worked Soso Jughashvili (Stalin)’ to commit a ‘terrorist act against a provocateur’ who had been discovered at the plant. The man was killed.⁹ Possibly this refers to the same event as the one recalled in the 1936 memoirs of D. A. Vadachkoria. Pointing to a worker who wished to attend an illegal meeting, Jughashvili said: ‘That guy’s a spook’. When shortly afterwards cossacks broke up a meeting, in Vadachkoria’s words, ‘we saw that man in a policeman’s uniform. It was decided to wipe him out. He was killed’.¹⁰ On 9 March 1902 the police opened fire on a demonstration of mostly Rothschild workers in Batumi, killing 13 people. The sense of outrage was immense. One social-democratic activist recounts in his memoirs that Rothschild director von Stein was ‘in high spirits’ and triumphantly drove around in his cab. They entrusted someone with the task to assassinate him, but the attempt failed.¹¹

⁷GARF, f. 102, op. 226, d. 5.52.A, t. 2, ll. 58–60, 72; GARF, f. 102, op. 230, d. 700, ll. 1, 4.

⁸Lelashvili Old Bolshevik autobiography (RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 1102, l. 5). See also Ostrovskii (2003, p. 602).

⁹RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 1102, ll. 5, 11, 15. See also Ostrovskii (2003, p. 602).

¹⁰1936 memoirs D. A. Vadachkoria (RGASPI, f. 558, op. 4, d. 537). This is quoted in Montefiore (2007, pp. 75–76).

Early in January 1902 the director of the Transcaucasian railroads, engineer Vedeneev, was murdered in Tiflis. A police report discussed the possibility that ‘democratic workers’ or social democrats were behind the attack. At a 12 January 1902 meeting of the RSDWP Tiflis Committee the chairman proposed to dedicate an article in *Iskra* or *brdzola* to the murder, in order to show that Vedeneev was himself to blame for his fate. Another committee member argued successfully that the social democrats would then be blamed for the murder. This intervention was reason for the police report to conclude that the social democrats were not involved.¹² That conclusion may have been rash, however. A former social democrat testifies in his autobiography that he organised the murder of a director of the railways on the orders of the party committee.¹³ In February 1902 almost the whole Tiflis Committee was arrested. From prison, the leaders of the committee ordered the traitor responsible for their arrest to be killed. Lelashvili, who had meanwhile moved on to Tiflis, attacked the man with an axe.¹⁴

The party did not strike in isolation, attacking police spies was becoming common practice among the workers at large. Social-democratic murders formed an organic part of a mass phenomenon. The future *menshevik* S. T. Arkomed, at the time himself a party activist, recalls that when an army of informers was sent out among the Tiflis workers in the aftermath of the 1 May demonstration of 1901, the workers felt provoked to commit ‘terrorist acts’. They began beating up and murdering police spies and government officials. Arkomed insists that the social-democratic committee tried to stop these excesses, but he acknowledged that some social democrats were of the opinion that terror was a ‘necessary instrument’ serving the purpose of ‘paralysing and disorganising’ the administration. These ‘Blanquist social democrats’ stimulated the ‘feeling of revenge’ among the workers (Arkomed 1910, pp. 52–53).

In light of the fact that it was not uncommon in the party to have police informers shot or attacked with axes, one wonders why the committees would have attempted to stop such ‘excesses’ at all. One way to interpret this is to assume that a radical ‘Blanquist’ minority in the party was behind the killings, against the wishes of the majority on the committees. Ketskhoveri and Jughashvili were indeed radicals. However, this cannot be the complete answer.

In December 1902 Ketskhoveri’s *brdzola* featured a powerful attack on terrorism. The anonymous author of ‘The way we see terror (A letter from Tiflis)’ reported that during the past years terror had become widespread in the Transcaucasus.¹⁵ Not a month went by in Tiflis without somebody being killed or maimed, provocateurs were decapitated with axes, team-leaders shot to death. The author attributed this to a

¹¹T. Gogiberidze, ‘Memoirs about Comrade Stalin’, Saqartvelos Prezidentis Arqivi (hereafter SPA) [Georgian Presidential Archive, GPA], f. 8, op. 2/1, d. 9: 384–88. Ostrovskii (2003, p. 602) has unconfirmed information about social-democratic activist A. Tsulukidze organising a terrorist group in Batumi in late 1901.

¹²16 January 1902: GARF, f. 102, op. 226, d. 5.52.A, t. 2, ll. 3–4.

¹³G. D. Rtveladze: RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 1646, l. 10. Possibly Stepan Shaumian was involved. See Ostrovskii (2003, p. 602) and Montefiore (2007, pp. 70, 342n).

¹⁴RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 1102, l. 5.

¹⁵RGASPI, f. 71, op. 10, d. 176, l. 200–2. This source is a Russian translation of the four issues of *brdzola* published between September 1901 and December 1902.

government decision after the great August 1900 railroad strike to increase the number of police informers among the working population. Frequent arrests and exiles provoked ordinary people to take to terror. Though understandable enough, it was argued, this was a deplorable development, because reactionary governments could not be terrorised into reforms. Shedding the blood of ‘some mean provocateur and dirty spy’ was short-sighted and shameful. Revolutionary times would come when the ‘sword’ would indeed be needed, ‘but then terror will be totally different—the knife in the hands of the surgeon is a source of life’.¹⁶ For now the social democrats were

completely against terror, because it is a totally unsuitable means of solving the social question; it scatters and weakens our forces. Whoever belongs to our organisation must submit to the general decision and consider terror a break on the revolutionary movement.¹⁷

With this article *brdzola* toed the official *Iskra*-line. According to G. F. Vardoyan’s memoirs, when terrorist acts against gendarmes and spies became more frequent in Tiflis in 1901–1902, *Iskra* collaborator V. Kurnatovskii wrote a proclamation from prison in Tiflis ‘supporting the idea that not individual murder but the organised struggle against the autocracy was effective’.¹⁸

The best way to make sense of these, at first sight, deceptive public objections against terrorism would be that, though the party organisers were in fact not really averse to terrorism as such, which for them followed from the needs of *konspiratsiya*, they were indeed profoundly uneasy about spontaneous worker terrorism. It went without saying for them that the party had the right and duty to kill whoever was considered a threat. But a terrorist process from below involving the working classes was another matter. It was a deep-seated conviction among social democrats that the autocratic state could only be broken by organised mass struggle—not by terror. For the working masses to be overcome by a terrorist mood, outside the party’s control, carried the danger of undermining the real force of the class. To degenerate into a mob of heroic individual avengers doomed the mass movement ultimately into ineffectiveness.

For the years prior to the 1905 revolutionary explosion, further evidence that the party committees attempted to limit and prevent working-class terrorism is slender but not entirely absent. The Tiflis railways remained an arena of bloody struggles. Social-democratic workers turned violently against fellow workers lacking in solidarity. In 1902 a conflict over overtime work heated up the situation. Police agents filed several reports about attacks with sticks and stones against workers and foremen returning home after a night of overtime working. The guilty party was presumed to be Georgian workers of the social-democratic tendency. Four team-leaders were attacked, in one instance resulting in death.¹⁹

Particularly hated figures in the administration were hunted down, though not always successfully. In August and September 1902 social-democratic railway workers

¹⁶See footnote 15.

¹⁷See footnote 15.

¹⁸G. F. Vardoiani, ‘Memuarebi [Memoirs]’ (SPA, f. 8, op. 2/1, d. 7, ll. 71–75).

¹⁹18 March 1902: GARF, f. 102, op. 226, d. 5.52.A, l. 9; 5 August 1902: GARF, f. 102, op. 230, d. 700, l. 7; August/September: GARF, f. 102, op. 230, d. 700, ll. 10, 19–21; 19 September 1902: GARF, f. 102, op. 230, d. 700, l. 32; 31 December 1903: GARF, f. 102, op. 232, d. 5.11.A, l. 8. See also: Jones (2005, p. 85).

decided that three more team leaders, who were not expected to support a planned strike, must be killed. An assassin was hired to kill Vedeneev's successor, engineer Ivanovskii. Also, a group of foremen was planning to kill the foreman Blyumberg.²⁰ A certain Uteshev was arrested for the conspiracy to have Ivanovskii murdered. After his release he presided over a meeting of Tiflis railroad workers on 17 January 1903. There he proposed to have Blyumberg, against whom a failed murder attempt had just been staged, beaten up.²¹ A later gendarmerie report mentions social-democratic workers threatening to beat up or kill workers who were working on night shifts. Probably the same workers were involved in the decision to murder another worker and foreman Blyumberg.²²

In October 1904 a meeting of social-democratic railroad workers requested the representative of the party committee 'to remove from their midst those who do not sympathise with the movement'. It is here that we find an indirect indication that the party organisation was not on the side of the workers in this matter, or that the workers were in any case not confident of the committee's support: they threatened to leave the organisation if support was not forthcoming. Only then was the committee prepared to draw up a list of seven people to be killed. A group was formed 'with the purpose of terrorising spies and non-sympathisers'. On 21 December two of the listed men were shot to death by a hired assassin.²³

Revolution

When the Transcaucasus, along with the whole Russian empire, slipped into a revolutionary crisis in 1905, social-democratic terrorism began to assume more organised forms, with the establishment of special formations exclusively dedicated to that purpose. Parallel to this, the 'self-defence' concept shifted to an offensive revolutionary strategy. At the same time, though, the social democrats preserved their suspicions concerning terrorist initiatives from below.

At the third congress of the Caucasian Union (the Transcaucasian RSDWP branch) in May 1904 it was decided that social-democratic demonstrations were in urgent need of armed protection against police, cossack and right-wing ('hooligan') violence. After the conference it was decided that each party committee should organise an 'armed nucleus'. It was reported to the *bolshevik* Third Party Congress during April–May 1905 that 'combat squads' (*boevye druzhiny*) had been formed in Batumi, Baku and Guria county of Kutaisi province (*Tretii s'ezd* 1959, pp. 130–32, 139, 141, 237).²⁴

Combat squads were no terrorist units. Their job was to protect the party and workers' organisations. They were moreover expected in due course to evolve into a revolutionary army, the instrument of the armed uprising. But protective measures in

²⁰GARF, f. 102, op. 230, d. 700, ll. 9–10. Included in these reports are four letters to railway employees carrying death threats. The one to the director of the railroads is signed TSDRP' (Tiflis Social-Democratic Workers Party) (GARF, f. 102, op. 230, d. 700, ll. 13–18).

²¹Tiflis gendarmerie report 24 March 1903 (GARF, f. 102, op. 226, d. 5.52.V, ll. 61–63).

²²GARF, f. 102, op. 232, d. 5.11.B, ll. 23–24.

²³Police reports 16 December 1904 (GARF, f. 102, op. 232, d. 5.11.B, ll. 30–31, 39, 55; 12 January 1905: GARF, f. 102, op. 232, d. 5.11.B, l. 86).

²⁴See also Senchakova (1975, pp. 57–58).

practice shaded off into selected individual killings. Moreover, there were established special organisations for terrorist assignments. The first *bolshevik* terrorist group was formed by the Baku Committee. Baku delegate Rybkin reported to the Third Party Congress that his committee had established a 'combat group' for the specific purpose of eliminating spies, provocateurs and Black Hundred activists. Rybkin proposed that all party committees establish such units (*Tretii s'ezd* 1959, pp. 141, 158).²⁵

In the course of 1905 the Transcaucasian RSDWP split into separate *bolshevik* and *menshevik* party committees. The *bolsheviks* mostly succeeded in preserving only a very limited following among the workers. Except in Baku, their committees were mostly insignificant compared to the *menshevik* ones. We know of at least one instance when the *mensheviks* established a special terrorist group of their own. Guria, the most revolutionary county in the whole of Georgia, came largely under *menshevik* control during 1905. In his memoirs, the *bolshevik* activist 'Baron' Bibineishvili notes that the Guria Committee's 'military staff' organised the killing of spies and provocateurs, and of landlords and officials unsympathetic to the movement. Besides leading the combat squads, the staff also established a 'special group of terrorists' to carry out the 'sentences of the committee' (Bibineishvili 1931, pp. 123–28).

As in the rest of Russia, the bloodbath of 9 January 1905 in St. Petersburg triggered an immediate response. A strike of the Tiflis railway workers quickly fanned out to other branches and cities. It ended in defeat, but that did not put an end to the movement. In June the RSDWP was instrumental in calling a general strike. The atmosphere became even more polarised when on 29 August cossacks killed over 60 people at a public meeting at the Tiflis city *Duma*. On 14 October Tiflis railroad workers gave the signal for another general strike, forcing all major cities to a standstill. On 22 October the atmosphere reached boiling point when demonstrators belonging to the Russian Patriotic Society killed seven students. The strike ended after the tsar's 17 October Manifesto, but during the 'days of liberty' it came to open rebellion. Once more a general strike was called.

When the state came increasingly under threat and the collapse of the autocracy was no longer completely unthinkable, *bolsheviks* and *mensheviks* had to reconsider their

²⁵See also Senchakova (1975, p. 106). We find references to the actions of such groups scattered through the autobiographies of Old Bolsheviks. L. A. Morgipadze (1931) describes the unit of the legendary 'Kamo' that he became acquainted with in 1905 as a 'group of terrorists' (RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 1330, l. 6). V. D. Dzneladze was persuaded by Kamo to form a combat squad, fabricate bombs and plan 'terrorist acts' during 1905 (RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 589, ll. 5–6, 15). V. I. Areshidze recounts discussions of a 'factional and terrorist character' taking place in 1905 in his apartment, which served as headquarters of the combat squad of the seventh Tiflis district committee. The squad bombed a cossack unit (RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 75). In October 1905 the *bolshevik* Batumi Committee ordered its combat squad to kill three Black Hundred pogrom organisers (Chulok 1970, pp. 141–43, 146, 205). See also Senchakova (1975, pp. 151–52). K. Z. Tsintsadze, one of the commanders of the *bolshevik* 'revolutionary flying detachment' in Chokhatauri district of Gori county describes himself as leader of a punishment squad (*karatel'naya troika*) (RGASPI, f. 124, op. 2, d. 77, l. 7). The Gori Committee combat squad was established to protect demonstrations. It engaged in military style battles with Black Hundred groups as well as in assassinations of Black Hundred activists and police spies (G. Elisabedashvili, 'Memuarebi Rusetis Sotsial-Demokratiuli Mushata Partii Goris Komitetis Shesakheb [Memoir RSDWP Gori Committee]': Goris I. B. Stalinis Sakhelobis Sakhelmtsipo Sakhlmuzemis Pondi I.V. Stalin Gori State House—Museum Fund [GSSSP], 3(3), d. 1955/147, ll. 1–4).

attitude towards terrorism. In 1931 Bibineishvili acknowledged that in 1904 and 1905 terrorist activity acquired a 'gigantic scope' in the Caucasus. Government officials were attacked or murdered almost on a daily basis, in an allegedly largely spontaneous process of 'popular lynch justice' (*samosudom*). Even though admitting that the social democrats used terrorist acts as a 'defensive instrument' to protect themselves from the police, Bibineishvili insisted that they continued to reject terror as 'a system of political struggle' (Bibineishvili 1931, pp. 85–87).

Officially, terrorism indeed remained a matter of 'self-defence', to be interpreted by the Transcaucasian social democrats as the right to kill anyone constituting a threat to the revolutionary movement and connected to the authorities or the Black Hundreds. But during the revolutionary crisis, this already very generous interpretation of 'self-defence' was widened to turn into something altogether different. It was a social-democratic dogma that terrorism was ineffective as a revolutionary strategy to overthrow the regime: only the organised mass struggle could accomplish that feat, but the temptation was too great. At the local level, social democrats now began to employ terror as a strategic instrument.

The case of Guria is most instructive. From 1902 the local peasants organised boycotts against their landlords; landlords unresponsive to their demands received death threats; spies, policemen and landlords engaging gangsters to protect their property were frequently killed. By early 1905 most Guria government officials had stopped working for fear for their lives. They did not dare venture out of their offices. By this time, one out of the eight police officers in the county was murdered, one had been wounded, and six had left. The local government was paralysed with fear (Sivkov 1940, p. 93; Talakvadze 1925, pp. 130–32; Maglakelidze & Iovidze 1956, pp. 89, 96; Uratadze 1968, pp. 82–83; Jones 2005, p. 149).²⁶ Much of the Guria countryside came to be ruled by committees controlled by the RSDWP. The same went for much of the countryside of nearby Kutaisi county of Shorapani. By late 1905 parts of the city of Batumi too were in social-democratic hands. In Poti, Sukhumi and Kutaisi the police could no longer work.

How this looked from the inside is related by the *bolshevik* Taratuta. In the second half of 1904 the Guria Committee ruled the county, in his words, on a principle of 'mass terror'. Police chiefs and other officials were killed. The workers' neighbourhoods of the city of Batumi were ruled in the same way. The Batumi and Guria Committees were led by the same person, who was 'in fact the dictator'. He 'determined which of the police chiefs, priests and landlords should be "taken out"' (Taratuta 1926, pp. 210–12). Thus, terrorism served a new purpose of 'cleaning' areas of traditional authorities. Into the vacuum stepped the social-democratic party with its own organs of power.

The temptation to set terrorism to strategic use was also perceptible in Tiflis. Discussing the 'terrorist acts against gendarmes and agents of the *okhrana*' organised by the *menshevik* Tiflis Committee, *menshevik* leader Noe Zhordania insists in his

²⁶Bibineishvili (1931, pp. 86–87) remembers that one police chief agreed to become an informer for the Imeretian-Mingrelian Committee (under which Guria fell) if only he was 'amnestied' by the party. When this arrangement did not work committee member Bibineishvili ordered a 'comrade-terrorist' to resume the hunt on the man.

memoirs that he and his comrades only recognised terror as a ‘weapon of self-defence’, never as an ‘instrument to topple the autocracy’. But Zhordania does recount that terror also served the purpose of ‘creating panic among the police’. He furthermore acknowledges that in late 1905 his bombing campaigns were so successful that ‘the whole administrative apparatus fell into confusion, fear seized the agents of the *okhrana*, all thought about saving themselves. A *de facto* freedom of assembly, strike and demonstration was established’ (Zhordaniya 1968, p. 44).²⁷ Thus in Tiflis too, the *mensheviks* began to employ terrorism to secure the strategic goal of undermining government power.

All this notwithstanding, the social democrats remained suspicious of terrorist initiatives from below. *Bolshevik* as well as *menshevik* memoirs clearly reflect this. *Bolshevik* activist M. Leman (Nevskii) recounts that among the ‘lower ranks of the party’ there was a tendency towards unnecessary ‘excesses, a preparedness to violent actions against the bosses and the administration’. The party committees went to great trouble to control these moods (Stopani & Leman 1925, p. 18). *Menshevik* memoirists likewise point to the party committees’ efforts to limit peasant terrorism.²⁸

Menshevik party activist Razhden Arsenidze attributed killings by members of the public to the traditional Georgian culture in which treason was considered particularly loathsome. The ‘habit of revenge’ was strong enough among the Georgians for the traitor’s family and friends to join up with the harmed party to kill him. Arsenidze proudly noted that there were relatively few traitors among the Georgians, ‘we did not forgive such people, such people awaited an inevitable death!’²⁹ But at the same time he did try to limit workers’ vengefulness. One day in 1904 or 1905, Batumi social-democratic workers approached him to have a cossack officer killed for whipping fellow workers. Arsenidze answered that he would not expel them from the party for taking revenge, but he insisted that murder was inadmissible unless in the case of direct self-defence. Two days later the man was shot. The workers of the city were grateful to the party committee, which they incorrectly assumed had organised the murder.³⁰

On occasion however, social democrats were tempted. In an event described in several memoirs we find a lively view of how the party used terrorist moods among the wider population. In early 1905 the Chiatura party organisation in Shorapani county was not yet split between *bolsheviks* and *mensheviks*. The united party committee’s ‘Red Hundred combat squad’ set itself the task to disarm or kill Black Hundred activists in the villages.³¹ The following story is based on information provided by three *bolshevik* participants in the event, G. S. Vashadze, Vano Kiasashvili and Kote Tsintsadze. Their stories do not confirm each other in every detail, but show the party’s willingness to whip up the atmosphere of *samosud*.

²⁷See also Arkomed (1924, pp. 70–72); Arsenidze (1963, p. 232). For bombing campaigns directed against the cossacks by the Tiflis *mensheviks* in 1905, see Jones (2005, pp. 180, 184, 186, 188), Geifman (1993, p. 99) and Makharadze (1927, pp. 227, 261–62).

²⁸Interview 25 July 1961 R. Arsenidze: Hoover Institution Archives [HIA], Collection B. Nicolaevsky [Nic.], Box 667, Folders 4 and 5, pp. 88–89; Uratadze (1968, p. 81).

²⁹HIA, Nic. Box 667, Folders 4 and 5, pp. 103–4.

³⁰Arsenidze interview, 24 July 1961 (HIA, Nic., Box 667, Folders 4 and 5, pp. 11–12).

³¹See Old Bolshevik autobiography of G. S. Vashadze (RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 328, ll. 5, 9); autobiography Bibineishvili (RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 181, l. 5); Talakvadze (1925, p. 138).

In February 1905 the Chiatura social-democratic organisation called a strike among the manganese workers of the area. The social democrats decided to get rid of two police officials held responsible for gathering information about the strikers. One was quickly killed, but the hit against the other, Mkheidze, failed. The experienced terrorist Shakro died in the bungled attempt. Thereupon hundreds of enraged workers surrounded the town to prevent Mkheidze and the policeman who had killed the terrorist from escaping. According to Tsintsadze, peasants came running from the Friday market to help when they heard that ‘the police were to be annihilated’. The combat squad and the infuriated mob surrounded the police station to where the two men had fled. The door was forced by squad members and Mkheidze was shot to death by Vashadze. Then the building was set on fire. Shakro’s killer emerged, begging for his life, but he too was shot. Tsintsadze called this operation ‘active propaganda’, intended to show that the social democrats were able to take effective revenge.³² Significantly, though, in this case the initiative had been that of the Chiatura organisation. It was a case of mass anger being mobilised to support the party rather than the party letting themselves be mobilised by radical workers or peasants.

During the January, February and June 1905 strikes, the Georgian cities saw an explosion of terrorism. Russian workers and foremen who refused to strike were stabbed and shot for their collaboration with the administration. The perpetrators were often very young Georgian workers recently arrived from the villages (Stopani & Leman 1925, p. 18; Makharadze 1927, pp. 222–28; Keep 1963, pp. 159–60; Jones 2005, pp. 171, 186). There is ample evidence that the *mensheviks* attempted to limit these outrages. In early 1905 the *menshevik* Tiflis Committee issued a proclamation against terrorism. In a letter of 19 March 1905 the *bolshevik* Union Committee with apparent satisfaction noted that the workers, who ‘often kill only on the ground of suspicions’, demanded the withdrawal of the proclamation (*Tretii s’ezd* 1959, p. 310). In April 1905 a *menshevik* conference deplored the ‘murders, robberies and violence’ in the villages. In a resolution ‘On terror’ they pointed out that terror inevitably drew unreliable, non-revolutionary elements into the movement, and ‘once again’ reminded the comrades ‘of the need to take a negative position towards terror’, as an ‘unsuitable and harmful means of struggle obscuring the class consciousness of the proletariat’.³³ On 3 July 1905 the *menshevik* Tiflis Committee distributed a pamphlet concerning cases of Patriotic ‘hooligans’ working in the railroad workshops who had been poisoned. The committee assured its readers that no social democrat could have committed such an act. ‘And if that is not the case, if the criminal will turn out to be really from our party’, then this person must be removed as a ‘traitor’. The pamphlet concluded, ‘you yourselves must try to purge your circles from such people’.³⁴

I found no indications of *bolshevik* resistance against workers’ terrorism in Tiflis during this period. But in Baku (where the two factions traditionally entertained something of a balance) it was precisely the *bolsheviks* who were the most wary of

³²G. S. Vashadze (RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 328, l. 10); Vano Kiasashvili, ‘Personal Memoirs of the Activity of the Chiatura Bolshevik Fighting Squad in 1905’ (SPA, f. 8, op. 2/1, d. 25, ll. 261–62); Tsintsadze (1923, no. 2, p. 120; no. 3, pp. 68–69).

³³See Volobuev *et al.* (1996, pp. 132, 478 n); and 15 May 1905 police report (GARF, f. 102, op. 233, d. 5.11.A, ll. 20–22); *Konferentsiya kavkazskikh* (1905, pp. 2, 6).

³⁴GARF, f. 102, op. 233, d. 5.11.A., l. 54.

terrorism from below. In December 1904 the Baku oil workers struck and spectacularly forced the employers to sign an agreement. The strike, organised mainly by the *mensheviks*, was a violent affair (Keep 1963, p. 205; Schwarz 1967, pp. 130–33; *Tretii s'ezd* 1959, p. 140). Workers fought the police with sticks, stones and iron bars (Nevskii 1924, pp. 70–72). To put pressure on the employers more than 250 derricks were torched (Baberowski 2003a, p. 58). In 1930 A. Raevskii wrote that the *mensheviks'* tactics had been characterised by the combination of 'economism' (an exaggerated focus on economic demands) and violence. They used sabotage and arson to bring the employers to their knees. The *bolsheviks* objected against the tactic out of fear for the chaotic, anarchistic 'individual arsonists' (Raevskii 1930, pp. 117, 121). The supposed *bolshevik* objections were no invention after the fact. In early 1905 local *bolshevik* leader Stopani complained to N. Krupskaya that the *mensheviks* 'set fire to industries, sabotaged derricks (these are the facts), in their leaflets they called for violence and destruction' (Stopani & Leman 1925, p. 19).

To explain the *mensheviks'* easier acceptance of rank-and-file terrorism, *bolshevik* authors suggest that the *mensheviks* were more open towards the mass of the workers. A. Sukhov, who worked with the Baku *mensheviks* during the summer of 1905, noted that they were far from peaceful. 'On the contrary, the "right-wing" *mensheviks* here stood surprisingly close to the anarchist adherents of direct action'. They were not averse to practise 'economic terror' (Sukhov 1925, p. 118).³⁵

Aftermath

After the defeat of the Moscow uprising in December, the Transcaucasian revolutionaries were driven into retreat. Martial law was proclaimed and General F. F. Gryaznov managed to enforce it. Police, army and Black Hundred Patriots recaptured the streets. On 18 December the army reconquered the parts of Tiflis under social-democratic control. The strike ended. There was heavy fighting between government forces and combat squads in many parts of the country, but the small and badly armed revolutionary units could not hold their own. Under these new circumstances social-democratic terrorism reverted to the classical formula of 'self-defence'.

Early in 1906 the Transcaucasian party was reunified under *menshevik* dominance. The *bolshevik* minorities upheld factional units of their own in or next to the *menshevik* dominated unified committees, but terrorist operations were often conducted jointly. In January the United Tiflis Committee established a group of 'expropriators'. In his memoirs, a participant of the group, Kote Tsintsadze, attributes this initiative to the *mensheviks*. The group was not only employed in finding money but also in terrorist strikes. Tsintsadze was ordered by Jughashvili to prepare some 'fine fellows'. Railway worker Arsen Jordzhiashvili had been ordered by *menshevik* leader Silibistro Jibladze to kill the widely hated Gryaznov; but should he not succeed within a week, 'then we will entrust this task to you'. Jordzhiashvili killed Gryaznov on 16 January (Tsintsadze 1927, p. 40; Talakvadze 1925, pp. 143f). Characteristically, *menshevik* memoirist Uratadze (1968, p. 130) explains that his murder had nothing to

³⁵See also Stopani & Leman (1925, p. 18).

do with a strategy of toppling the autocracy by murdering ‘a couple of ministers’ but was a case of ‘self-defence’.

According to *bolshevik* historian Talakvadze, the *mensheviks* continued to carry out terrorist strikes, but mainly under the pressure of the workers, and they did it ‘unofficially’ and ‘unceremoniously’ (*po-domashnemu*). In contrast, the *bolsheviks* defended terror openly as a way to revive and strengthen the organisation now that the enemy was on the attack (Talakvadze 1925, pp. 148–49). Talakvadze’s suggestion that the *mensheviks* only half-heartedly remained involved in terrorism does them no justice. The fourth Transcaucasian social-democratic congress of September 1906 concluded that ‘permanently armed combat squads’ tended to transform themselves into independently powerful organs in the party. Therefore, from now on arms should be handed out to them only during operations (Volobuev *et al.* 1996, pp. 224–25). According to a police informer, the conference decided that the combat squads should be attached to the party committees. Remarkably, this *menshevik*-dominated congress also decided that the squads ‘will assign from their membership “active terrorists” to carry out various terrorist acts according to the decision of the “leading collective” and the “executive commission”’.³⁶ The newly elected Regional Committee noted in a ‘Letter to the comrades’ of 16 October 1906 that under the state of emergency, strikes and other forms of peaceful struggle became difficult. The new conditions demanded ‘more decisive forms of struggle’. The local organisations were ordered ‘to create terrorist groups’ plus unarmed combat squads of workers and peasants that would at the right moment be provided with weapons.³⁷

Despite its *bolshevik* majority, in April and May 1907 the Fifth Party Congress adopted a resolution calling for an ‘energetic struggle’ against all ‘partisan actions’, including ‘individual or group attacks against the life of government agents or representatives of the bourgeoisie’. Such actions were considered an expression of ‘anarchist tendencies among the working mass’. All squads were to be dissolved (*Pyatyi (londonskii) s’ezd* 1963, pp. 581–82).

However, the *menshevik* Regional Committee did not comply with this order. According to agent information contained in a report of 1 July 1907, the ‘Central Committee’ had recently directed the Tiflis Committee to strengthen its combat detachments. Obviously, the agent was confusing the Regional with the Central Committee. According to the report, the directive demanded

that every party district should have its own group to carry out individual attacks and terrorist acts. Terror is supposed to be directed against persons occupying high as well as low administrative positions, as well as against officials of the gendarmerie and the general police.

The committee preferred this kind of ‘partisan struggle’ to preparations for an armed uprising. If possible co-operation with the socialist revolutionary party should be

³⁶Police report 4 October 1906 (GARF, f. 102, op. 235, d. 25/56, ll. 8–9). See also Sidorov *et al.* (1963, p. 419).

³⁷The letter is attached in translation to a 21 October 1906 police report (GARF, f. 102, op. 234, d. 4.6, ll. 30–32). See also Tiflis police report 13 December 1906 (GARF, f. 102, op. 235, d. 25/56, ll. 34–35).

achieved.³⁸ Materials found in the Old Bolshevik archive suggest that terrorist groups were indeed organised down to the level of the city district committees. I found testimony of the establishment of such groups, and of murders committed by them, in the second,³⁹ third⁴⁰ and fourth⁴¹ Tiflis district committees.

In Baku too, groups were established at the district level. On 15 September 1907 the Baku police reported a recent meeting of RSDWP district delegates. Pointing to the terrorist attacks by the Union of the Russian People, the *bolsheviks* proposed to establish new detachments of 'self-defence'. The *mensheviks* opposed this proposal by reference to the decisions of the Fifth Party Congress, but the *bolshevik* majority commissioned the newly elected inter-district organisational commission to organise the self-defence units anyhow.⁴²

Bolshevik memoirists give us a glimpse of how such units were established and how they operated. In 1907 local *bolshevik* leader Alesha Japaridze ordered *bolshevik* L. Rogov to form a 'commune' from unemployed workers to carry out the committee's 'death sentences' against provocateurs. Rogov describes his 'group of terrorists' as one of the 'mobile groups' of the Balakhany district committee. One day committee member 'Apostol' ordered the commune to 'take out' a company manager who hindered the revolutionary propaganda. The commune appointed Rogov by secret vote to carry out the sentence. He killed the manager and his two guards.⁴³

Bolshevik activist Ivan Bokov relates that Jughashvili, who had been elected to the inter-district organisational commission, proposed the formation of a self-defence combat squad in Bibi-Eibat district. Interestingly, he spoke up against individual terror on this occasion, and argued that the squad should serve as a 'threat' to the oil bosses and the Black Hundred gangs so that they might no longer murder social-

³⁸GARF, f. 102, op. 237, d. 5.61, l. 89.

³⁹K. I. Khomeriki formed a 'group of terrorists' for the second district committee in 1906. The group was ordered to kill two Black Hundred leaders (Autobiography 1931: RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 2048, l.6. T.A). Mgaloblishvili, who worked on the tram in Tiflis from 1906 to 1911 and became an organiser for the second district committee, notes in his 1931 autobiography that he worked as a 'leader of terrorist acts' (RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 1244, l.8).

⁴⁰D. G. Nasaridze, a Tiflis tram conductor from 1906 to 1908 and a member of the third district committee, killed a police spy on the tram and was probably involved in the murder of the director of the tram Levin. In 1907 he was ordered to form a 'group of terrorists' to kill another provocateur (1931 and undated autobiographies: RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 1366, ll. 7, 13–16).

⁴¹Vano Karapetov (Davakhetke) founded a 'group of terrorists' in 1906 under the fourth Tiflis district committee. A. G. Japaridze, who claimed to have been involved in over 60 'terrorist acts' against Black Hundred activists, police and army officials and spies, worked for the group until late 1907. According to Karapetov, the Tiflis Committee ordered the murder of an *okhrana* officer (1934 autobiography A. G. Japaridze: RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 582, ll. 13–14, 21–22, 32); recommendations by Karapetov and others (RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 582, ll. 27–28, 32). B. T. Magaidze was part of the group. He killed many policemen and admits that he 'became carried away by terror'. He also killed a provocateur in the sixth district: (RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 1236, l. 5). V. P. Sukhishvili, who committed 'terrorist acts' during 1906–1908 for the fourth district, was probably in the same group (RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 1885, ll. 4, 9–10).

⁴²Police report 15 September 1907 (GARF, f. 102, op. 237, d. 5.3, l. 100–1). See also Iskenderov (1958, p. 138). According to Stalin's *Sochineniya* (1946, p. 409), the meeting took place on 24 August.

⁴³Cited from two Rogov memoirs. For the first: Rogov (1927, pp. 126–28). The second, published in *Katonga i Ssylka* (1927, no. 6), I did not have available. See Budnitskii (2000, p. 322).

democratic workers. Bokov admits that there were 'cases of murder by our squad'. At least four Black Hundred leaders were killed. He and three others were later arrested for the murder of three *okhrana* agents.⁴⁴

All this suggests that during 1906 and 1907 the Transcaucasian branch of the RSDWP attuned its organisational structure to terrorism down to the district levels. However, the *mensheviks* of the region could not afford to ignore the party line forever. At the *menshevik* dominated fifth Transcaucasian social-democratic congress of February 1908 a formal decision was at last taken to put a complete halt to all terrorist activity.⁴⁵ Subsequently it was the understanding of the Transcaucasian *mensheviks* that all partisan struggle should be stopped, all combat organisations should be dismantled and all *boeviki* should lay down their arms.⁴⁶ This provoked a number of conflicts with the *bolsheviks*, but even now the differences between *bolsheviks* and *mensheviks* never became very wide. The common pattern for them was to dismantle their terrorist groups but to continue individual killings of supposed spies in the organisation.

In the autumn of 1907 the Baku social democrats once again split into separate *bolshevik* and *menshevik* committees. In February 1908 the *menshevik* Leading Collective decided to dissolve the 'combat staff'. In response, the *bolshevik* Baku Committee distributed a pamphlet arguing that 'self-defence' remained urgently necessary. With hooligans killing comrades at Bibi-Eibat, in the Black Town and at the railways, the only proper answer was to strengthen the combat staff and the district self-defence squads.⁴⁷ On 5 March the *bolshevik* Baku Committee published a notification to the effect that a new 'staff of Self-Defence' had been organised.⁴⁸

We know that *bolshevik* terrorism continued in Baku. If we may take Soso Jughashvili as representative for the local *bolshevik* leadership it seems to have remained a fairly routine matter. There is the case, probably in early 1908, of a social-democratic worker who was suspected by Jughashvili of being a provocateur. He was condemned to death, escorted out of the city and shot, but left alive by mistake.⁴⁹ After his arrest in late March 1908 Jughashvili remained in the Baku prison until early November. The socialist-revolutionary Vereshchak recalls that a worker from Balakhany suspected of treason was knifed to death on Jughashvili's orders

⁴⁴RGASPI, f. 558, op. 4, d. 658, ll. 39–41; RGASPI, f. 558, op. 4, d. 583, ll. 24–25.

⁴⁵I do not have formal records of this decision, but it was referred to by a Tiflis party collective in a conversation with representatives of social-democratic tramway workers in January 1909. See 13 January 1909 report by 'Ulichnyi' (GARF, f. 102, op. 239, d. 5.61.A(1), l. 3).

⁴⁶This appears from a 19 June 1908 proclamation of the Telavi organisation of the RSDWP. Referring to the decisions of the Fifth Party Congress, it noted the complete halt to all violent activities (GARF, f. 102, op. 238, d. 5.61, l. 35).

⁴⁷The pamphlet is attached to a police correspondence of 21 February 1908 (GARF, f. 102, op. 238, d. 5/3, l. 13).

⁴⁸GARF, f. 102, op. 238, d. 5/3, l. 26.

⁴⁹For this case see Tat'yana Vulich's account (HIA, Nic., Box 207, Folder 9, p. 6). Also Vulich's letter of 14 August 1949 (HIA, Nic., Box 207, Folder 9, p. 1). See also Boris Nicolaevsky's letter to Vulich 8 August 1949 (HIA, Nic., Box 207, Folder 15). In 1918 Martov referred to the affair in RGASPI, f. 558, op. 2, d. 42, l. 9.

(Vereshchak 1928).⁵⁰ After his escape and return to Baku, Jughashvili was instrumental in the death of a supposed provocateur in 1909.⁵¹ In early 1910 there arose a conflict in the Baku Committee between Jughashvili and 'Kuz'ma' on the case of three alleged provocateurs and the decision to kill other provocateurs, should they be discovered.⁵² It seems, nonetheless, that the *bolsheviks* too allowed their organised terrorist groups to fade away. In the summer of 1908 the police noted in an internal communication that their claim of having established a new combat staff was probably false.⁵³ Some kind of social-democratic combat organisation may still have existed in Baku in the summer of 1909,⁵⁴ but most likely it was merely a paper construction.⁵⁵

As for Tiflis, in the second half of 1908 the *bolsheviks* of that city published an angry comment on a Regional Committee pamphlet that had condemned 'every kind of terror in general'. The pamphlet had been published on the occasion of a wave of arrests among Tiflis tramway workers. According to the July–October issue of *Bor'ba* (numbers 2–4, p. 22) it angered these workers that the committee accused their own former terrorists of being scum. With informers and provocateurs infiltrating the party, 'terror for the self-defence of the organisation is necessary', the comment concluded. But it seems that the Tiflis *mensheviks* really never intended to put a halt to terror at all. In their interpretation the ban apparently concerned only the dissolution of organised units. Decisions to kill spies continued to be taken. For example, on 21 February 1909 there was a discussion in one of the Tiflis district collectives about the decision of 'some party members' to kill a policeman. The collective decided that it was 'against all offensive political terror' but allowed this strike. Another murder remained under consideration.⁵⁶ Even after the renewed split of the Tiflis social-democratic organisation into two separate committees in April 1909, the *mensheviks* continued to kill. In early 1910 it was decided at Tiflis *menshevik* leader Seid Razmadze's house that a person suspected of treason must be killed if the 'slightest evidence' against him were found. The meeting was inspired by the case of another spy

⁵⁰Around the same time the above mentioned Rogov (1927, pp. 126–28) of the 'Balakhany Commune', who was held in the same prison, stabbed a fellow prisoner when 'anarchist terrorists' informed him that the latter was a traitor.

⁵¹For the so-called Leont'ev affair, see 'Arkhivnye materialy o revolyutsionnoi deyatelnosti I.V. Stalina za period 1908–1913 gg', *Krasnyi arkhiv*, 2, 105, 1941, pp. 8–9; 1935 memoirs of S. Gafurov (RGASPI, f. 558, op. 4, d. 658, l. 134); 1924 memoirs of S. Yakubov published in *Zarya vostoka*, 28 April 1924 (RGASPI, f. 558, op. 4, d. 658, ll. 446–48); Yakubov's 1935 memoirs (RGASPI, f. 558, op. 4, d. 658, ll. 461–62; GARF, f. 102, op. 239, d. 5.3A, l. 48); report 'Mikhail' 28 September 1909 (RGASPI, f. 558, op. 4, d. 658, l. 59); report 'Mikhail' 7 October 1909 (RGASPI, f. 558, op. 4, d. 658, l. 66); report 'Fikus' 23 October 1909 (RGASPI, f. 558, op. 4, d. 658, l. 69); Ostrovskii (2003, pp. 317–18, 322–23).

⁵²This is according to 16 March 1910 'Dubrovin' report quoted by Ostrovskii (2003, pp. 323–24). See also report 'Fikus' 15 March 1910 (GARF, f. 102, op. 240, d. 5.6B, l. 26).

⁵³Baku police correspondence 18 July 1908 (GARF, f. 102, op. 238, d. 5/3, l. 35).

⁵⁴Police correspondences 9 August and 9 September 1909 (GARF, f. 102, op. 239, d. 5.3A, ll. 25, 31).

⁵⁵The account of the *bolshevik* Baku Committee for July 1908 to February 1909 fails to mention 'combat' among the category of expenditures (GARF, f. 102, op. 239, d. 5.3, l. 19).

⁵⁶22 February 1909 report 'Ulichnyi' (GARF, f. 102, op. 239, d. 5.61.A(1), l. 14). For three other decisions to kill people taken by district committees in February and April 1909 see (GARF, f. 102, op. 239, d. 5.61.A(1), ll. 12, 56).

who had been killed in 1907 ‘according to the party’s verdict’.⁵⁷ Conversely, just like their *menshevik* comrades, the Tiflis *bolsheviks* let their armed units wither away.⁵⁸

Even at the level of the Regional Committee the *mensheviks* found it hard to abandon terrorism completely. On 23 February 1909 Tiflis *okhrana* agent ‘no. 14’ reported the existence of a multi-party ‘Union Commission to carry out terrorist acts’, with Regional Committee member ‘Viktor’ Kamanyan representing the social democrats. The agent noted that, ‘the mensheviks refrain from terror’. Nevertheless, Regional Committee member Jibladze participated in the decision of the commission to apply terror to several high-ranking persons in the Tiflis administration, such as the governor-general and the chief of the gendarmerie department, to punish them for a wave of arrests. Two other members of the Regional Committee were involved in the decision to murder Tiflis educational official Rudolf’f.⁵⁹

‘Economic terrorism’

Though the social-democratic terror and combat organisations were dissolved after early 1908, the killing of supposed enemies and police spies continued. However, workers’ terrorism was still frowned upon and Party committees continued to attempt to limit ‘economic terrorist’ activities such as industrial sabotage and the murder of enterprise directors, engineers, foremen and strike-breakers. Concurrently, there was a pattern of the higher party orders attempting to limit what was in their view irresponsible aggressiveness from the part of lower committees rooted in the workers’ milieu.

In the late summer of 1906, one of the Tiflis Committee combat squads demanded the right to carry out ‘expropriations’ without the sanction of the ‘leading collective’. When they were rebuffed the group left the party to establish an independent ‘Terror Group of the City of Tiflis and its Counties’, led by an army deserter who went by the alias of Vano the Great.⁶⁰ As we will see, discontented lower party committees linked up with this group to defy the Tiflis Committee.

At the railroad craftshops bloody conflict continued to rage around the issue of overtime work. Russian workers, often of patriotic sympathies and on the side of the administration, clashed with their Georgian colleagues. After one patriotic ‘hooligan’ had been killed in early October 1906, patriotic railway workers torched the inn from which the shot was fired and killed the innkeeper and several visitors.⁶¹ Thereupon, in

⁵⁷4 February 1910 report by ‘Zaikin’ (GARF, f. 102, op. 240, d. 5.79B, l. 67). For Tiflis *mensheviks* responsible for ‘terrorist acts’ in the railroad craftshops, see 8 March 1910 report ‘Chernov’ (GARF, f. 102, op. 240, d. 5.79B, ll. 104–5).

⁵⁸In a ‘notification’ of the (*bolshevik*) Tiflis Committee of December 1909 we find an elaboration of the local party structure with its various departments, but there is no mention of a combat department (GARF, f. 102, op. 239, d. 5.61, l. 117). Most significantly, on 23 January 1910 agent ‘no. 24’ reported that the *bolsheviks* proposed ‘to organise themselves in the old way, i.e. to create combat squads’ (GARF, f. 102, op. 240, d. 5.79B, l. 41). This implies that at the time the squads no longer existed. On two Tiflis *bolshevik* killings of spies in 1909 see Old Bolshevik Khomeriki (RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 2048, l. 6).

⁵⁹GARF, f. 102, op. 239, d. 5.61.A(1), l. 20.

⁶⁰Police report 18 November 1906 (GARF, f. 102, op. 235, d. 25/56, l. 36).

⁶¹Police report 12 October 1906 (GARF, f. 102, op. 235, d. 25/56, ll. 12–13). See also: Sidorov *et al.* (1963, pp. 420–21).

late November the first district committee decided to present the patriots with an ultimatum not to engage in overtime work or terror would be applied to them, and a special company was formed for this purpose.⁶² On 9 December 1906 a social democrat was murdered and on 15 December a member of one of the Tiflis social-democratic combat squads was arrested on suspicion of planning the murder of the director of the railways, colonel Neigebauer.⁶³ Probably in late December one of the Tiflis district committees issued a proclamation openly calling for the killing of worker traitors and praising the recent murder of a spy by 'conscious comrades'.⁶⁴

At that point the Tiflis Committee seems to have concluded that the conflict was getting out of hand and it forbade district committees from killing 'disobedients' for overtime working. Thereupon the first and second district committees contacted the above-mentioned Terror Group to do the bloody work for them. One patriot was singled out to be killed.⁶⁵ In defiance of the Tiflis Committee, a February 1907 third district RSDWP committee pamphlet notified the public that 'some heads of the local hooligans' as well as a Black Hundred priest had been singled out to be killed.⁶⁶ On 23 February 1907 a worker of the Patriotic Society was found murdered.⁶⁷ Under these circumstances the Tiflis Committee could apparently not keep up its ban on killings. On 24 February it condemned five patriots to death.⁶⁸

The situation escalated further. On 5 March a railroad worker was shot to death. When a crowd of social democrats gathered around his corpse, two Patriotic Society members suspected of the murder were caught and condemned on the spot by a people's court to be burned. A police patrol prevented this outrage and made two arrests, including one known member of a social-democratic combat squad.⁶⁹ On 16 May one of the Patriotic railroad workers condemned to death on 24 February was killed,⁷⁰ but in June the Tiflis Committee once again intervened by distributing a pamphlet deploring the daily killings in the city. Its readership was assured that the party had nothing to do with 'all these anarchist murders'.⁷¹

The same pattern continued in the years to come. In February 1909 the Tiflis first district committee assigned three workers to murder chief of the railway depot Pechkinets.⁷² But in August the Tiflis Committee distributed a proclamation in which 'economic terror' was rejected in so many words as a form of struggle which conscious

⁶²Police report 30 November 1906, plus pamphlet (GARF, f. 102, op. 235, d. 25/56, l. 20–21). See also: Sidorov *et al.* (1963, pp. 422–23, 577n); police report 5 December 1906 (GARF, f. 102, op. 235, d. 25/56, l. 24).

⁶³Police report 21 December 1906 (GARF, f. 102, op. 234, d. 4.6, l. 65).

⁶⁴Police report 4 January 1907 (GARF, f. 102, op. 237, d. 5.61, l. 2).

⁶⁵Police report 12 December 1906 (GARF, f. 102, op. 235, d. 25/56, l. 30); 1 February 1907 (GARF, f. 102, op. 237, d. 5.61, l. 15).

⁶⁶Police report 23 February 1907 (GARF, f. 102, op. 237, d. 5.61, l. 21).

⁶⁷Police report 24 February 1907 (GARF, f. 102, op. 237, d. 5.61, l. 23).

⁶⁸Police report 26 February 1907 (GARF, f. 102, op. 237, d. 5.61, l. 24).

⁶⁹8 March 1907 police report (GARF, f. 102, op. 237, d. 5.61, l. 28). On 29 May the first district committee distributed a pamphlet in which it was denied that the 'terrorist hooligan' had been sentenced by a people's court (GARF, f. 102, op. 237, d. 5.61, l. 86).

⁷⁰Police report 21 May 1907 (GARF, f. 102, op. 237, d. 5.61, l. 61).

⁷¹GARF, f. 102, op. 237, d. 5.61, ll. 75–76.

⁷²Report 'Master' 6 February 1909 (GARF, f. 102, op. 239, d. 5.61.A(1), l. 10).

workers could never accept.⁷³ Interventions from the higher party levels were to little avail however. In early March 1910 social-democratic workers convened to again discuss the question of whether railroad director Neigebauer should be murdered but they concluded that the engineers were more guilty of oppressing the workers than he was. One engineer, who imposed inordinately long working days and fined workers for nothing, was singled out as a possible murder target.⁷⁴ It was furthermore decided to kill a locksmith if rumours were confirmed that he worked as a police spy.⁷⁵

As referred to above, after mass arrests among the Tiflis tram workers in 1908 the Regional Committee distributed a pamphlet in which terror was condemned. At the Tiflis tramways too, killing of administrative staff was considered a normal way of waging the class struggle. Intriguingly, we know from the autobiography of Old Bolshevik Nasaridze that *bolsheviks* and *mensheviks* working on the Tiflis tramway disagreed on the need for political terror against spies and provocateurs, but were of one opinion concerning ‘economic terror’—presumably they rejected it.⁷⁶

Here too leading members of the party feebly attempted to stop the overenthusiastic ranks. In January 1909 Tiflis tramway employees complained of the extreme rudeness of one engineer, who sacked workers at will, replaced them with soldiers, and threatened them with his revolver. They asked the RSDWP to kill him. Pointing to the official rejection of terrorism, the ‘collective’ refused. Instead it advised the workers to ‘act on their own risk and in any case not in the name of the party’.⁷⁷ The social-democratic tramway group apparently understood the dislike that the leadership felt towards grassroots terrorism, for they used this knowledge to get their way: in the autumn of that year they threatened to apply terror against the tramway administration if the Regional Committee would not support their strike against lay-offs.⁷⁸ The answer they received is unknown but on 11 November the tramway social democrats discussed what to do with their director, against whom there were many complaints. Shortly afterwards the man left the city, according to rumours, never to return.⁷⁹

In Baku the *bolshevik* committee deployed a veritable campaign against economic terrorism. I. Shitikov-Samartsev recounts that in late 1907 ‘economic terror’ in Baku grew into a true ‘epidemic of murders’. It began in the settlement of Balakhany, where several managers of the Nobel company were killed. From there the terror spread to other areas. Hardly a day went by without enterprise staff being killed. Personal insults, strike-breaking activities or failure to comply with the demands of the workers

⁷³GARF, f. 102, op. 239, d. 5.61, l. 78.

⁷⁴19 March 1910 report ‘Paradnyi’ (GARF, f. 102, op. 240, d. 5.79B, l. 93). See also report ‘Dvoryanin’ 8 March 1910 (GARF, f. 102, op. 240, d. 5.79B, l. 92).

⁷⁵‘Paradnyi’ 12 March 1910 (GARF, f. 102, op. 240, d. 5.79B, l. 94). For two more death verdicts imposed on spies by social-democratic workers, see informers’ reports 23 February and 3 March 1910 (GARF, f. 102, op. 240, d. 5.79B, ll. 78–79, 91).

⁷⁶RGASPI, f. 124, op. 1, d. 1366, l. 14, 16.

⁷⁷Report ‘Ulichnyi’ 13 January 1909 (GARF, f. 102, op. 239, d. 5.61.A(1), ll. 3–4). See also: report ‘Motor’, 23 January 1909 (GARF, f. 102, op. 239, d. 5.61.A(1), l. 7). In early March 1909 a social-democratic tram ticket-collector was reported as possibly involved in an attempt on the life of director of the tramway Alibegov: Agent report 4 March 1909 (GARF, f. 102, op. 239, d. 5.61.A(1), l. 31); Report agent ‘no. 12’, 23 January 1910 (GARF, f. 102, op. 240, d. 5.79B, l. 40).

⁷⁸4 November 1909 report agent ‘no. 25’ (GARF, f. 102, op. 239, d. 5.61.A(1), l. 213).

⁷⁹1 December 1909 (GARF, f. 102, op. 239, d. 5.61.A(1), l. 217).

were reasons for the killings. Industries were turned into ‘military camps’, staff armed themselves and were accompanied by bodyguards. Oil companies hired assassins to kill workers’ leaders. According to Shitikov-Samartsev the party opposed this terrorist mood of the masses, but experienced great difficulty in restraining them. The Balakhany district committee forced several ‘dark persons’ from among their own ranks to leave Baku (*Dvadtsat’ pyat’ let* 1924, p. 217ff).

The Baku *bolsheviks* seem to have turned against economic terrorism as soon as the ‘epidemic’ started. In his 1935 memoirs, member of the Red Hundred combat squad Sibrat Gafurov recounts that the Baku Committee ordered the murder of hardened enemies of the revolution. But when Jughashvili arrived in the city in the summer of 1907 he announced a ‘cancellation of terror’ at an inter-district workers’ meeting. Killing individual enemies was pointless, it was argued, because they were always replaced. Young party members like Gafurov fiercely disagreed, however, and initially continued to defend the ‘incorrect position taken by the Baku Committee of allowing terror’.⁸⁰ According to the *bolshevik* Efendiev, in a comment on economic terrorism Jughashvili said the ‘chaindogs of the capitalists’ had themselves to blame when they were killed, but he nevertheless rejected the ‘anarchist actions’ of the worker-murderers.⁸¹

In the spring of 1908 the Baku *bolsheviks* began a press campaign against economic terrorism. On 30 March the *bolshevik* trade union magazine *Gudok* carried an article against the ‘*anarchistic-rebellious*’ torching of industrial installations and murders of industrial staff. Admitting that economic terror frightened the bourgeoisie, it also killed the workers’ ‘spirit of initiative [*samodeyatel’nostil*]’ and made them dependent on ‘terrorist heroes’ instead of promoting mass organisations. The author praised a recent resolution of workers condemning the torching of a stoke-hole and the murder of an economic official (Stalin 1946, pp. 110–13). *Gudok* ran another long article against economic terror from 21 April to 18 May (Stalin 1946, pp. 115, 125–26). On 15 May the *bolshevik Bakinskii proletarii* discussed the recent murder of the engineer Murakadze as a pointless undertaking and expressive of an anarchistic ideal of ‘single combat of individual heroes’. It was not out of ‘Christian virtue’ that the social democrats rejected terrorism, but as an ‘unsuitable means of struggle’ in the present period without mass revolutionary actions, proclaiming: ‘We reject *individual* terror in the name of revolutionary *mass* terror’.⁸² Characteristically ambivalent, the *bolshevik* city conference of late April discussed the struggle against Black Hundred elements, spies and provocateurs *and* the struggle against economic terror (Iskenderov 1958, p. 142).⁸³

The campaign had only limited success, though. In June 1908 a meeting of Nobel workers rejected the individual terror of the ‘knights of the Red and other Hundreds’ in favour of mass organisation.⁸⁴ But in early February 1909 Nobel company engineer Maksimov was murdered. The workers claimed innocence, attributing the murder to a

⁸⁰RGASPI, f. 558, op. 4, d. 658, ll. 129–30, 134.

⁸¹Undated memoirs (RGASPI, f. 558, op. 4, d. 658, l. 431). See also RGASPI, f. 558, op. 4, d. 577, l. 4.

⁸²*Bakinskii proletarii*, no. 4, 15 May 1908, pp. 2–3.

⁸³See for the conference also Alliluev documents: RGASPI, f. 558, op. 4, d. 661, l. 352.

⁸⁴*Gudok*, 53, 13 February 1909, p. 1.

gang of oil thieves or government provocateurs.⁸⁵ In a case that drew even more attention, in the early summer of 1909 engineer Borisov of the Mirzoev firm was assassinated. Workers' organisations claimed at one and the same time that they were innocent of it and that murders such as these were provoked by the outrageous behaviour of the directors and engineers towards them.⁸⁶

Conclusion

For several reasons the psychohistorical model seems to be of limited value in the case of Transcaucasian social-democratic terrorism. The case under discussion here highlights the huge significance of the contextual factor. Strikingly, not only did the social democrats of the region operate in an environment of a violent working class culture (as is well known from the literature), but we found furthermore that their party was regularly being pressured from below by militant workers exerting themselves to force a terrorist tactic upon it.

The 'economic terrorism' of Transcaucasian workers must be seen against the backdrop of a particular urban landscape. There exists an extensive scholarly literature about the effects of urbanisation and industrialisation on social relations in cities like Tiflis and Baku at the turn of the century. Daniel Brower's model of the 'migrant city' as a 'deeply divided place' is particularly helpful here. These were violent cities, Baku even more so than Tiflis. The transfer of violent village traditions to the city was one likely factor at work. Perhaps more importantly, the modernising Baku and Tiflis were fragmented, segmented places, marked by social and ethnic segregation. The often despotic and abusive system of factory administration alienated the workers from the management, and to this social divide there was added a spatial dimension. The poor were housed in isolated separate neighbourhoods with defective public services, physically removed from the more well-off parts of the population. Fragmentation had a powerful national dimension overlapping with the social. Urbanisation brought the nationalities of the region into closer proximity and competition. The Russians and Armenians were more stably urbanised and had better paid and more skilled jobs compared to the Georgians and Muslims, who were less well integrated into city life and remained at the lower ends. Reinforcing this pattern spatially, Tiflis and Baku were divided into national districts, physically separating the various segments of the working class.⁸⁷

⁸⁵*Gudok*, 52, 6 February 1909, pp. 7ff; no. 53, 13 February 1909, p. 1.

⁸⁶See the report of July Baku party conference in *Bakinskii proletarii*, 6, 1 August 1909, p. 4. See also 'Who killed Borisov?', article by the Baku Committee in *Sotsial-demokrat*, 7–8, 8(21) August 1909: RGASPI, f. 71, op. 10, d. 20, ll. 221–24.

⁸⁷For Brower's discussion of the 'deeply divided' migrant city, see Brower (1986, 1990, pp. 202–27, quotation p. 227). On the traditional 'honour and shame' society and its violent aspects, see Suny (1991) and Rieber (2001, 2005). See also Baberowski (2003b, pp. 21–24) on the transfer of violent village traditions to the city. The tradition of collective fist fights mentioned prominently by Brower was alive in early twentieth-century Georgia; see Davrichewy (1979, ch. 12). The literature highlighting and analysing the patterns of segregation and fragmentation in Tiflis and Baku is extensive. See Suny (1975, pp. 319–20; 1986), Altstadt-Mirhadi (1986), Parsons (1987, pp. 335–38), Suny (1989, pp. 116–18, 144, 154), Swietochowski (1995, pp. 20–21, 37–40), Suny (1999), Baberowski (2003a, pp. 45–47, 61–68, 77ff), Baberowski (2003b, pp. 21–23) and Jones (2005, pp. 16, 19–21, 77, 84–86, 89, 171).

This was a world in which working class communities were importantly isolated from the elite as well as from segments of the working class of other ethnic stock. The pattern of social, national and spatial segregation helps us understand the striking psychological dimension of the economic terrorism discussed in this article. The routine, matter-of-fact way in which decisions to kill were taken suggests that, when it came to representatives of the state or of the factory management (or to fellow-workers who took the wrong position in the labour conflict), killing was considered in simple instrumental terms, a practical necessity, and does not seem to have been experienced as much of a problem. The moral notion that it was wrong to kill seems in such cases to have been largely absent. What we have, then, is a modernising process that failed on the psychological level to engender a sense of national community and affinity. Instead, there was created a fragmented universe across the fault lines of which people were experienced as alien 'others'. Towards those 'others' few social or moral obligations would have been felt, and violence would quite naturally not have been experienced as an abuse but as a normal and acceptable way of achieving one's goals.

This conclusion invites us to return to the controversial question of early twentieth-century labour violence. Brower disputes the claim of social historians (as well as of socialist organisers of the turn of the century) that, with the development of modern capitalism, the primitive rebelliousness of violent riots tended to be replaced by more peaceful and orderly forms of struggle such as strikes. On the contrary, urban riots did not become less frequent with the progress of industrialisation. Also, experienced workers were no less active in them than recent worker migrants. Brower further argues that factory riots in late nineteenth century Russia challenged the established patterns of power and were aimed against abuses committed by factory management, traders and police. They therefore 'demonstrated the emergence of class consciousness among workers as clearly as did the spreading strike action' (Brower 1982, p. 431).

Robert Johnson (1982) makes the point that violence was probably less widespread than Brower assumes and, where it occurred, tended to be more self-disciplined than he suggests. Diane Koenker (1982) takes Brower to task for insufficient empirical backing for his thesis of the continued significance of violent riots. It also remains unclear whether the more violent workers were the uprooted ones, newly from the villages, or the more urbanised, but Koenker suspects that urbanisation tended to contribute to a decrease of labour violence. Ronald Suny (1982) adds that Brower underestimates the effectiveness of the social-democratic organisers in turning the workers to more planned and 'conscious' forms of struggle.

In danger of simplifying these complex issues, this debate centres around the question of whether or not urbanisation and capitalist development tend to further more peaceful and rational forms of struggle and mentalities among the working class. The Transcaucasian case suggests an interesting paradox. On the one hand we saw that, even when from 1898 onwards strikes gradually became an important form of struggle, the labour movement preserved a remarkably violent profile. This is not only confirmed by the extensive terrorist practice under discussion here, but also by the mass riots and collective violence (such as the Baku torchings of oil installations and the Armenian – Muslim bloodbaths in 1905) that remained relatively frequent occurrences.

But on the other hand, the violence itself was subject to a process of rationalisation. Though acts of economic terrorism were often committed in unplanned fashion, the

sources suggest that even more often they were not spontaneous explosions of undirected rage. Instead we found a practice of premeditated killings, planned in advance by workers sympathetic to the RSDWP and discussed at formal political meetings, sometimes even announced in pamphlets. It was a deliberate practice intended to increase the effectiveness of the strike movement by 'taking out' stubborn management personnel, strike breakers and those endangering the security of the organisers. These 'economic terrorists' (including Baku arsonists) were no 'primitive rebels' (Hobsbawm 1974), but they were not peaceful trade-union militants either. The 'economic terrorist' discussed here represents a special type of activist who assimilated elements of the discipline and organisation of the modern workers' movement, to combine these with the purposeful application of violence and individual murder at the service of the struggle for economic self-betterment.

Modernity is no monolithic phenomenon. The case of the early twentieth-century Transcaucasian workers' movement underscores the relevance of the concept of 'multiple modernities' in the context of social history (Eisenstadt 2000). What we found suggests that, as the early workers' movement moved from primitive violence to strikes, the learning process that underlay this transition need not necessarily result in a gradual replacement of violence by more rational and peaceful strategies. Instead of diminishing or disappearing, violence might, in an alternative scenario, itself be 'rationalised' to mutate into a strategy attuned to the needs of the economic struggle.

The psychohistorical model seems problematic not only because of its relative neglect of the contextual factor but also for its emphasis on the irrational. It has been noted by Abraham Ascher (2005, pp. 5–6) that the Russian Empire's terrorists did not act as irrationally as this model suggests: they selectively targeted pro-government persons, and did not kill randomly—which is what one would have expected had they been engaging in violence to soothe their troubled souls. The Transcaucasian social democrats did not aim to wreak as much havoc as possible, but followed a selective approach. Their terrorist strategies varied according to time and circumstance. Terrorism arose as a product of the deep-seated party culture of *Konspiratsiya*, characterised by a particular war mentality. The immediate cause for party activists to engage in terrorism in 1901–1902 was to defend the organisation against police attention. When opportunities subsequently improved in Guria and other areas during the revolutionary breakdown of 1905, terrorism was set to wider use. Paul Wilkinson's model is useful to conceptualise this change. Wilkinson (1977, p. 55) distinguishes 'subrevolutionary terrorism', employed for a variety of purposes such as coercion, intimidation, vengeance or 'punishment', from complete revolutionary terrorism aiming for the seizure of power. In these terms, terrorism temporarily mutated from an originally subrevolutionary into a revolutionary variety.⁸⁸ When in 1906 and 1907 the

⁸⁸In a historically important observation Jones (2005, pp. 158, 283) notes the trailblazing character of the Georgian social-democratic movement, providing as it did 'the first prototype of the peasant-based national liberationist movements' organised by leaders like Cabral and Nyerere. But the Transcaucasian social democrats were also trailblazers of the revolutionary-terrorist wing of the twentieth-century 'liberation movements'. Attempting to locally seize power through fear and by creating gradually expanding vacuums, they pioneered strategies later followed by communist groups such as the Indian 'Naxalites', the Peruvian Sendero Luminoso and the Colombian FARC.

state's repressive organs regained the upper hand, social-democratic terrorism reverted to its old form of 'self-defence'.

My findings strengthen Jones's and Geifman's conclusions concerning the important *menshevik* contribution to Transcaucasian terrorism. Perhaps most remarkably, after reunification in early 1906 the regional *menshevik* leadership concluded that under the conditions of severe government repression the tactical significance of terrorism grew as an appropriate middle course and alternative to both peaceful means of struggle and the so-called armed uprising. They accordingly attuned the party's organisational structure to it. Special terrorist groups had already been formed in 1905. After the fourth Transcaucasian social-democratic congress of September 1906, decisions were taken to establish such groups attached to the party committees down to the level of city districts. Thus the *menshevik* Regional Committee spectacularly ignored the decisions of the fourth and fifth party congresses. Only at the fifth regional congress of February 1908 was it finally decided to put a halt to all terrorist activity. In due course both factions dissolved terrorist groups and combat squads, but even now the practice of killing police spies continued as before.

What also remained the same throughout the different periods of development of the terrorist strategy, were the social democrats' attempts to limit and prevent economic terrorism. Even though never ceasing to practise terrorism themselves, they frequently warned the workers against it as a fruitless and detrimental practice to be avoided. One way to make sense of this paradox would be to assume that public appeals against economic terrorism would have been a form of deception, a shrewd way to hide the organisation's true intentions. That however is unlikely. To distribute pamphlets in which murders and bloodshed were deplored while in reality welcoming them would be foolish. Such pamphlets and proclamations could after all be expected to influence social-democratic and other 'advanced' workers and damp down their violent actions. The party would then have sabotaged its own hidden, true desire of violent mobilisation of the workers against their enemies. Moreover, the party often enough turned down concrete requests by the workers to have particular individuals murdered.

What, then, were the organisation's objections against terrorism from below? The key remains the deep-seated conviction that the autocracy could only be toppled through an organised mass struggle. Even though during the revolutionary climax of 1905 the RSDWP did toy with terror as a revolutionary strategy, the conviction that the mass struggle was ultimately decisive was not shaken. Social democrats feared that for the working masses to engage in terrorism would obscure their 'class consciousness'; their mentality of organised discipline would suffer. Terrorism would tempt the workers into a lazy dependence on the heroic avengers, whose individual strikes would come to be seen as substituting for the mass struggle. The 'spirit of initiative' would then be replaced by an 'anarchistic' mindset, leading to a scattering and weakening of the workers' forces. In sum, terrorism from below would sap the vitality of the only real force finally able to defeat the tsarist state.

The Transcaucasian RSDWP developed a dual standard. The party itself was not seriously believed to be in danger of succumbing to anarchist moods. The fears expressed by Russian *mensheviks* such as Yulii Martov that terrorism served as an agent of moral degeneration were not taken very seriously by the Transcaucasian comrades—as long as they were considering themselves. But the dangers of anarchist

degeneration were taken very seriously by them when it came to the working class and the peasantry. With a substantial membership from the popular classes any scheme based on sharply drawn boundary lines between the organisation and the masses was bound to remain a pipe-dream. Nevertheless, the social democrats developed some kind of division of labour. Basically, prior to the 'armed uprising' they expected the mass of the workers to engage in militant but mostly peaceful struggles, while preserving terrorism as the prerogative of the party.

This selective approach to terrorism confirms once again that the social democrats were rational strategists. With its heavy emphasis on the irrational aspect of the revolutionary psychology, the psychohistorical model is not very helpful here. A vitalistic urge, expressed in a cult of heroism and a glorification of violence and rightful vengeance, was admittedly a powerful presence in the social-democratic movement. On a personal level, this may on occasion have expressed the forms of anxiety so lucidly analysed by Geifman. However, irrational urges do not explain the way the terrorists acted and decided as an organisation.

Zhordania, Jughashvili and their comrades were no wild bunch indiscriminately eliminating as many people as they possibly could. They were not engaged in a brutal lifestyle experiment to drown their shattered egos in a sea of violent ecstasy. They were not obsessively drawn to terrorism but adapted it according to circumstance and selectively engaged in the tactic—or chose to reject it, as in the case of grassroots murder campaigns—on the grounds of rational expediency. If one would insist on classifying them in psychological terms, it can be suggested that they represented an extreme case of the political instrumentalisation of morality and suffered from an excess rather than from a lack of rationality.

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