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Author(s)	Wheatcroft, Stephen
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# The Younger Lenin and Statistical Thinking before the Revolution and during the Creation of TsSU and Gosplan

Stephen Wheatcroft

We no longer have the enthusiasm and respect for statistical thinking that was felt in the 19th Century when the smartest young brains across Europe were looking to Quetelet and his successors to explain how probability theory could be used to explain how social scientific laws could be applied to the history of large numbers of apparently independent agents.<sup>1</sup> The enthusiasm that was felt by Prince Albert and his colleagues in Britain, as they promoted statistical congresses and statistical work in the mid 19th century was shared by many Russian intellectuals in the late 19th century and flowed with them into the early revolutionary period. In fact the enthusiasm of the Russian statisticians was part of the great Russian Revolution of 1917. Trotskii, who was not himself a statistical thinker, caught a glimpse of this feeling of enthusiasm in the young Lenin and his generation when he described them as seeing statistics as “the science of sciences” in a new world that would be dominated by science.<sup>2</sup> Few other biographers have dwelt much on this aspect of revolutionary enthusiasm for statistical thinking of the times. It was an important factor in Lenin’s thinking until mid 1921, when faced with a series of economic, political and personal (health) crises Lenin appears to have changed his mind on these matters. It is the views of this later sick and old Lenin that were followed by Stalin and his successors, and it is the “sick” late Lenin’s views on statistics that have generally been accepted by his biographers as his views on statistics and statisticians.<sup>3</sup>

This article attempts to uncover this missing aspect in Lenin and the revolution. It begins with: 1) a survey of the exciting state of statistical thinking in Russia before the Revolution. It provides 2) an account of how Lenin and other statistical thinking revolutionaries reconciled their work on the revolution and statistics. Then it considers 3) Lenin’s attitude to statistical thinkers in the early years of the Soviet state: a) in relation to the food problem, b) the formation of

1 Theodore Porter, *The Rise of Statistical Thinking, 1820–1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Bernard Cohen, *The Triumph of Numbers: How Counting Shaped Modern Life* (New York: Norton, 2005).

2 Leon Trotsky, *The Young Lenin* (Translated from the Russian by Max Eastman) (Melbourne: Wren, 1972), p. 191.

3 See, A. I. Gozulov, *Ocherki istorii otechestvennoi statistiki* (Moscow, 1972); Robert E. Johnson, “Liberal Professionals and Professional Liberals: The Zemstvo Statisticians and Their Work,” in Terence Emmons and Wayne S. Vucinich, eds., *The Zemstvo in Russia: An Experiment in Local Self-Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 343–364; Samuel Kotz and Eugene Seneta, “Lenin as a Statistician,” *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, Series A* (Statistics in Society) 153:1 (1990), pp. 73–94.

TsSU in July 1918, and c) the formation of Gosplan in February 1921. This was the period of the relatively young and healthy Lenin, before the old and sick Lenin took over and prepared the way for Stalinism and Communist conceit to triumph over statistical thinking.

## 1) THE DEVELOPMENT OF STATISTICAL THINKING IN RUSSIA BEFORE THE REVOLUTION

Russian statisticians were not only “world class,” they were world leaders and pioneers. This was apparent at the time when the International Statistical Institute held its 6th World Congress in St. Petersburg in 1897. And the enormous significance of the theoretical statisticians of the Russian Empire remains apparent to modern statisticians, if not to modern historians. A recent American compilation of “The Leading Personalities in Statistical Sciences from the Seventeenth Century to the Present”<sup>4</sup> shows the very high predominance of leading experts in statistical and probability theory coming from the old Russian Empire.

The volume lists 47 names in sections on “Forerunners,” and “Statistical inference.” None of these came from the area of the former Russian Empire. But the sections on “the theory of statistics” and on “probability theory” are dominated by statisticians from this area.

Roughly a quarter of the statisticians that the book mentions as international leaders in statistical theory came from the former Russian Empire. They were: Oskar Anderson (Minsk 1887 – Munich 1960), Login Bolshev (Moscow 1922 – Moscow 1978), Ladislaus Bortkiewicz (Bortkevich) (St. Petersburg 1867 – Berlin 1931), Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Chuprov, (Mosalsk 1874 – Geneva 1926), Nikolai Smirnov (Moscow 1900 – Moscow 1966), ie. five out of a total of nineteen leading statisticians.

In the section entitled “Probability theory” the importance of Russian statisticians is even greater with over 50% of the leading personalities coming from the Russian Empire. They are: Sergei Bernstein (Odessa 1880 – Moscow 1968), Pafnuty Chebyshev (Kaluga province 1821 – St. Petersburg 1894), Boris Gnedenko (Simbirsk 1912 – Moscow 1995), Andrei Kolmogorev (Tambov 1903 – Moscow 1987), Aleksandr Liapunov (Yaroslavl 1857 – Odessa 1918), Yuri Linnik (Belaya Tserkov, Ukraine, 1915 – Leningrad 1972), Andrei Markov (Riazan 1856 – Petrograd 1922), Yuri Yanson (Kiev 1835 – St. Petersburg 1892) and Boris Yastremskii (Kharkhov 1877 – Moscow 1962) ie. 9 out of a total of 17 leading statisticians.

Of the 17 named leading statisticians in the section on Government & Economic statistics only 2 came from Russia and the USSR: Aleksandr Konus (Moscow 1895 – Moscow 1990) and Evgenii Slutskii (Yaroslavl Province 1880 –

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<sup>4</sup> Norman L. Johnson and Samuel Kotz, eds., *The Leading Personalities in Statistical Sciences from the Seventeenth Century to the Present* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997).

Moscow 1948). And of the 14 statisticians in the sections entitled "Applications in medicine and agriculture" and in "science and engineering" only 1 was a Russian : Vasilii Nemchinov (Penza 1894 – Moscow 1964).

While it is easy to criticize this listing and to find important Russian exclusions from this list; (ie. Chaianov, and Kondratiev), the listing does nevertheless indicate the extraordinary importance of Russian statisticians in international terms, as accepted by American historians of statistics.

Russian literature would agree that the leading Russian academic statisticians in the late 19th and early 20th centuries included Y. Yanson and A. A. Chuprov from St Petersburg (before the latter emigrated in 1917). Both of these St. Petersburg statisticians were on the American list. But they would argue that the list should include the leading Moscow statisticians: A. I. Chuprov (the father of A. A. Chuprov) and N. A. Kablukov. They would also want to see the inclusion of some of the very large number of quite extraordinary Zemstvo (local government) statisticians.<sup>5</sup> The St Petersburg statisticians tended to be more academic and theoretical, whilst A. I. Chuprov and N. A. Kablukov and the Zemstvo statisticians were far more applied and involved with the work of local government and town agencies. They also tended to be more involved in politics.

The Zemstvo statisticians were not trusted by their own central government. The Tsarist government was suspicious of the political objectives of the respectful Zemstvo leaders, but considered some of the Zemstvo employees, including the statisticians to be the centers of subversive forces in the country. Robert Johnson notes how P. N. Durnovo once described "medical aides" and "Zemstvo statisticians" as being "individuals who had recently been marshals of predatory gangs raiding [landowners'] estates."<sup>6</sup> Durnovo was not far wrong. A very large number of the Zemstvo statisticians had been very radical in their youth and were in the localities because they had been exiled there and banned from large cities.<sup>7</sup> We should also remember that local government

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5 V. P. Kornev provides a very useful Russian listing in his volume "Outstanding Personalities in the statistics of the Fatherland," Viktor P. Kornev, *Vidnye deiateli otechestvennoi statistiki, 1686–1990: Biograficheskii slovar'* (Moscow, 1993). This volume which contains about 240 biographies will be widely used for its biographical data in this article.

6 Johnson, "Liberal Professionals and Professional Liberals," p. 343.

7 With access to greater biographical data than was available to Johnson in the 1980s, when he could only find 61 biographies, I am inclined to think that he somewhat underestimated the level of oppositional behavior from Zemstvo statisticians, which seems to have affected a majority rather than minority of statisticians. And his claim that the statisticians were a more stable group in which "only a few ... ever abandoned statistical work" seems to me to be incorrect. Also the suggestion that Lenin was hostile and critical to the statisticians seems to me to be incorrect. Lenin was not an easy person. He was critical to almost everything that he took seriously. And in his later infirm days he was hostile and angry with many people who he had earlier been friendly with. Lenin was serious about statistical thinking, but angry in his later years (after the summer of 1921) when the economy was facing disaster and his own health was fading.

agents, including the statisticians did indeed replace the Central government agents in February 1917.

Central government (Ministry of the Interior) prejudice and hindrance made it difficult for the zemstvo statisticians to meet together to co-ordinate their activities. A. I. Chuprov provided a meeting place for them in the statistical section of the Juridical Faculty of Moscow University, and in his honor, after he died this institution was renamed the A. I. Chuprov society with Kablukov as its chair.

Zemstvo statistics had developed as a consequence of the local government reforms required by the abolition of serfdom in 1861. They were required to provide some local government structure in the localities to replace the previously all powerful functions of the landowner. They provided education, health services, assistance in agricultural improvement, and security over food supplies. They quickly developed statistical services that began carrying out ambitious schemes of statistical investigation, involving pioneering studies of peasant budgets and the differentiation of the peasantry.

The radical part of their nature derived from the long established Russian penal policy of exiling young offenders to the periphery where they sought employment in worthy ventures. Well before the establishment of the Zemstvo in 1863 earlier generations of exiles had demonstrated an interest in local statistical investigations.

Herzen, who was exiled to Viatka in 1835–1837 worked as an official in that province, and on his own initiative organized a provincial statistical committee and devised his own program of statistical work which was affirmed by the Ministry of Interior and allowed him to write a brief statistical survey of Viatka, which appeared in the Viatka Provincial *vedomosti*.<sup>8</sup>

Lenin's hero, N. G. Chernyshevskii (1828–1889) in exile in Astrakhan from 1883 to 1889 was particularly interested in statistical work and wrote reviews of the major works by contemporary statisticians Zhuravskii, Solov'ev, Troitskii and others.<sup>9</sup>

Later generations of students who found themselves stranded in distant outposts, quickly moved to find employment in the new statistical offices which were opening up, and they soon began carrying out ambitious schemes of statistical investigation, involving pioneering studies of peasant budgets.

The first modern surveys were carried out in 1870 by V. Y. Zavolzhskii in Viatka Gubernia, where Herzen had previously worked. Zavolzhskii was ordered to investigate the situation in the 15 poorest volosts in the North of the Gubernia. A year later N. N. Romanov was employed as a permanent statistician by Viatka Gubernia Zemstvo. The same year V. I. Pokrovskii received a similar position in Tver Gubernia., with another position filled in Riazan Gubernia. By 1874 a statistical bureau had been established in Kherson Gubernia,

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8 Kornev, *Vidnye deiateli*, p. 39.

9 Kornev, *Vidnye deiateli*, pp. 175–176.

and by the end of 1875 statistical bureaus were set up in Moscow Gubernia Zemstvo under V. I. Orlov, and in Chernigov Gubernia Zemstvo under P. P. Chervinskii, V. E. Varzar and A. A. Rusov. Further statistical bureaus opened in Perm Gubernia in 1876, Novgorod Gubernia in 1879, Tambov and Kharkov gubernia in 1880. Ekaterinoslavl, Kursk, Poltava and Riazan followed in 1881, Saratov and Samara in 1882, Kazan in 1883, Voronezh, Smolensk and Taureda in 1885, and in Orlov and Ufa in 1887. By 1894 Zemstvo statistical bureau were working in 17 of the 23 Gubernia with Zemstvo Lenin arrived on the scene, just as this revolution in collection of statistical materials was taking place, and he appreciated it.<sup>10</sup>

In his article in Efron and Brokhaus Encyclopaedia in 1894 the Zemstvo statistician A. F-ov (presumably A. Fortunatov) wrote that the Zemstvo statistical work was on a scale and a sophistication that was unrivalled in any other foreign state at the time. Before his death Marx was learning Russian, not to communicate with Russian Revolutionaries, but to read Russian Zemstvo statistical investigations.

Martine Mespoulet in her book *Statistics and Revolution in Russia: An Impossible Compromise (1880–1930)* provides a good account of these early statisticians, but fails to cover the extent to which Lenin and some of the early Bolshevik leaders shared their enthusiasm for statistics.<sup>11</sup>

## 2) THE STATISTICAL THINKING OF LENIN AND OTHER REVOLUTIONARIES

### a) Lenin

Trotsky tells us that prior to University Lenin was reading Chernyshevskii, and Turgenev. At University in Kazan and later in his external degree in St. Petersburg Lenin was reading law. Trotsky describes the breadth of subjects that Lenin studied which included Police Law and Church History.<sup>12</sup> He mentions briefly a subject on Political Economy, without mentioning that the subject was actually Political Economy and Statistics, which was the main subject taught by the famous statistician E. Yanson (who is included in the American collection above).

Kotz and Seneta (1990) are more informative about Lenin's statistical subject. They cite Sipovskii and Suslov (1972) that the text-book for the oral examination on this subject was Y. Yanson, *Teoriia statistiki*.<sup>13</sup> They also note that the statistics exam was taken on April 5th and that Yanson (the Dean of the Faculty

10 A. F...tov, *Zemskaia statistika*, in *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar' Brokgauza i Efrona*, volume XIIa (St. Petersburg, 1894), pp. 492–493.

11 Martine Mespoulet, *Statistique et revolution en Russie: Un compromis impossible (1880–1930)* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2001).

12 Trotsky, *The Young Lenin*, pp. 165–167.

13 Kotz and Seneta, "Lenin as a Statistician," p. 75; I. V. Sipovskii and I. P. Suslov, eds., *Istoriia prepodavaniia i razvitiia statistiki v petersburgskom-leningradskom universitete (1819–1971)* (Leningrad, 1972), p. 36.

of Political Science and Statistics, and sometime Rector of the University) was one of Lenin's three examiners. They also claim that Yanson asked Lenin a question about Quetelet, and was very impressed with Lenin's answer.

Lenin received top marks for his statistics subject, as he did for all of his exams, and he was the only student in his year to do so. This was quite remarkable given that Lenin had managed to cram the whole degree which normally took three years into one year with the first year exams in September 1890, intermediates in April – May 1891 and finals in autumn 1891.<sup>14</sup> Lenin appears to have been cruising through all of his subjects.

If the dating provided by Kotz and Seneta is correct then the statistics exam on April 5th would have been Lenin's intermediate exam. It is not clear whether he took another statistics exam in his finals in November, but the Bio Khronika indicates that Lenin was very interested in statistics, after this exam. It reports that Lenin spent two months between September 7 and November 12, 1891 preparing for his exams in the reading room of the library of the Academy of Sciences in Petersburg and that Lenin's reader's registration lists "Political Economy and Statistics" as his only research topic.<sup>15</sup> This suggests that Lenin's interest in statistics at this time was much greater than is normally presumed. Kotz and Seneta who have tried to trace Lenin's contact with statistics as a discipline may have been misled by basing themselves on Gurevich's account of what was in Lenin's personal Library. On that basis they presumed that Lenin's contact with the discipline of statistics was mainly through Yanson's theory of statistics since Lenin had an annotated copy of the second edition of this book in his library.<sup>16</sup> The materials available to Lenin over a two month period in the Academy Library, would have been much greater, and would indicate a more significant investment of Lenin's time and effort in this subject.

When Lenin did begin his law profession the following year in Samara, he continued to demonstrate a serious interest in statistics. The Bio-Khronika notes that

Late 1891: Lenin in Samara visits the head of the statistical bureau of the gubernia Zemstvo I. M. Krasnoperov, who had edited *zemskaa statisticheskii sbornik* on Samara.<sup>17</sup>

I. M. Krasnoperov (1839–1920) like Lenin had been a student at Kazan University, and had similarly found himself in opposition to the government. Kras-

14 Christopher Read, *Lenin: A Revolutionary Life* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), p. 18.

15 This is from volume 1 of the official 12 volumned Lenin Biographical Chronicle which provides the day by day events in Lenin's life as by the Institute of Marxism-Leninism under the Central Committee of the former Communist Party of the USSR.

16 Kotz and Seneta, "Lenin as a Statistician," p. 75; S. Gurevich, *Vestnik statistiki* (1962) 4, pp. 38–49.

17 <http://leninism.su/biograficheskie-xroniki-lenina/100-tom-11.html> (accessed April 2020)

noperov had been arrested in the spring 1863 for expressing sympathy for the Polish rebels. He had been imprisoned for 4 years 1863–1867. After a brief period in St. Petersburg, 1872–1874, and Roslavl 1874–1882, he had become head of Samara Gubernia zemstvo Statistical office, in 1883–93 where he had published 10 volumes of statistical data on Samara Gubernia.

Trotsky identifies the enthusiasm that Lenin felt for statistics at this time, and how Lenin's disputes with the Populists led him into taking an interest in statistics.

Is capitalism continuing to develop in Russia or is it not? Tables listing factory smokestacks and industrial workers acquired a tendentious meaning, as did tables on the class stratification of the peasantry. In order to ascertain dynamic movements, today's figures had to be compared with yesterday's. **Thus economic statistics became the science of sciences.** Columns of figures concealed the answer to the fate of Russia, of her intelligentsia, and of her revolution. The military horse censuses were called upon to answer the question of who was the stronger, Marx or the Russian peasant commune.<sup>18</sup>

Trotsky went on to explain that the statistical data available to Plekhanov had been sparse, and that the zemstvo statistical studies only began to be completed systematically in the 1880s. Lenin now dived into these exciting new sources not available to his masters:

During the last year or so of his life in Samara, statistical compilation occupied a place of honour on Vladimir's desk. Although his major work on the growth of Russian capitalism did not appear until 1899, it was preceded by a considerable number of preliminary theoretical and statistical studies on which he had begun to work back in Samara.<sup>19</sup>

When Lenin arrived in St. Petersburg in 1896 and first met Krzhizhanovskii the impression that he made on his future friend was quite striking. Krzhizhanovskii describes himself as being almost drowned in Lenin's figures.<sup>20</sup>

Lenin's book *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, produced in 1896–99 in exile in Siberia exhibits the nature of Lenin's statistical thinking at this time. Lenin stated that he had to survey and digest all of the statistical material on the subject. It would be misleading to give a partial presentation. The work is consequently a massive compilation of the statistical material available to Lenin at that time. The section on agriculture begins with a survey of available zemstvo statistical data on peasants from 13 provinces: Novorossia, Samara, Saratov, Perm, Orel, Voronezh and Nizhnii Novgorod in great detail, and Novgorod, Chernigov, Yenisei, Poltava, Kaluga, and Tver in less detail. It compares zemstvo data with the results of military horse censuses

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18 Trotsky, *The Young Lenin*, p. 191. My emphasis.

19 Trotsky, *The Young Lenin*, p. 192.

20 Christopher Read is one of the few biographers of Lenin to catch this reference from Krzhizhanovskii. See, *Lenin: A Revolutionary Life*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), p. 27.



Lenin not only wanted to apply Marxism in his arguments, but he was convinced of the need to carry out a detailed statistical investigation and to marshal statistics in support of his argument. This was perhaps not as unusual for the time, as it now appears.

Lenin completed his exile in Siberia in 1899 well before Krupskaiia's time was up, so Lenin returned with Krupskaiia to Ufa where she had initially been exiled before marrying Lenin. Lenin spent a number of days in Ufa, where he is reported to have met some of the local exiles. The names of the statisticians Tsyurupa, Sviderskii and Krokmal are mentioned in the *Biokhronika*. Other exiled statisticians who were in Ufa at this time included P. I. Popov and V. G. Groman, but neither of them appear to have met Lenin on this or his subsequent visit.

Lenin did not intend to stay in Ufa, miles away from the action in the capitals, but he was formally forbidden to reside in any major industrial or university town, and he needed an excuse to reside anywhere closer to the capitals. An excuse was found by providing Lenin with employment in the Pskov Gubernia Zemstvo Statistical Office, where he was formally listed as working and residing until he emigrated in July 1900.

How exactly this employment was arranged is not clear. Lenin appears to have been well acquainted with at least two Zemstvo statisticians in Pskov: Alexander Mitrofanovich Stopani, who was a contemporary of Lenin's who had studied and been expelled from Kazan University at the same time as Lenin. Stopani had joined the RSDRP in 1893 the same year as Lenin, and began a statistical career by working in the Zemstvo in Pskov.

The other figure who Lenin knew was Nikolai Mikhailovich Kisliakov (1861-?) Kisliakov who had been sacked from his teaching job for political unreliability and had taken up Zemstvo work in Kursk and Nizhnii Novgorod, before being appointed head of the Pskov Gubernia Zemstvo Statistical Department in 1895.

In Nizhnii Novgorod he had been trained by the Narodnik N. F. Annenskii (see below). Kisliakov would remain working and publishing Statistical reports in Pskov for the coming decade.<sup>21</sup>

Whilst nominally employed by the Pskov Zemstvo Statistical Office Lenin undertook some tasks for them, and had just delivered a parcel of materials to the main statistical offices in St. Petersburg when he was arrested, just prior to his emigration.

It is not too extreme to argue that Lenin's sympathies for Zemstvo statisticians, lay in part from his familiarity with them and their work. I would go further and argue that since he had worked for a while in the Pskov Gubernia Zemstvo Statistical Offices, and had demonstrated a major interest and familiarity with Zemstvo statistics, that we should include him in our lists of exiles

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21 Lenin was to mention, the relatively unknown Kisliakov to Popov in the meeting he had in March 1918.

who found it useful to engage in Zemstvo statistical work, and who became a revolutionary ex-zemstvo statistician.

Although Lenin's emigration in July 1900 led to a reduction in his direct association with statisticians, the habit of statistical thinking, remained with him. The statistical compilations in his unpublished Exercise book on Agrarian Questions, 1900–1916,<sup>22</sup> demonstrates Lenin's continued interest in statistical tables and statistical arguments.

### *b) Other Statistical Thinking Revolutionaries*

Here we will consider the ex-Zemstvo statisticians and other statistically thinking figures who were to play a significant role in the Revolution and early Soviet history. We begin by looking at i) some important Zemstvo statisticians who had been the most active revolutionary figures and who had then lapsed from revolutionary work. Then we look at the ii) Bolshevik statisticians and statistical thinkers who remained revolutionaries. We also look at iii) Osinskii an important Bolshevik who gained statistical experience before the Revolution, although he was never a Zemstvo statistician himself. Finally we consider iv) the role of the statisticians in the February Revolution and the Provisional Government.

### *i) Revolutionary Statisticians Who Lapsed from Party Involvement*

A large number of statisticians who had been revolutionary in their youth, followed the same trajectory as the famous economist and politician P. V. Struve<sup>23</sup> and became more conservative as they aged. Here we will just concentrate on those Zemstvo statisticians who had been sufficiently active in Social Democratic Party Revolutionary activities to become delegates of Party Congresses. These included statisticians V. M. Obukhov, O. A. Kvitkin, P. P. Rumiantsev and somewhat controversially I have also added A. D. Tsyurupa to this list.

**Vladimir Mikhailovich Obukhov** (1873–1945) had been exiled to Saratov Gubernia, where he became head of the Department of Current Statistics in the Zemstvo Statistical Bureau from 1899 to 1905, where he published a number of statistical annuals. He was also an active member of the Saratov Committee of the RSDRP from 1902 and was their delegate to the IInd Congress of the RSDRP, in 1903. He was arrested in 1905 and had to endure a difficult exile in Siberia from 1906–1909. After this Obukhov left political work and dedicated himself to statistics. He became head of the Statistical Bureau in Petrograd from 1916–1918, and then a leading member of TsSU, a member of the collegi-

22 Vladimir I. Lenin, *Tetradi po agrarnomu voprosu: 1900–1916*. (Moscow, 1969). The work was unpublished before 1969.

23 Richard Pipes has traced this progression in some detail in his two volumes on Struve: Richard Pipes, *Struve: Liberal on the Left, 1870–1905* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), and Richard Pipes, *Struve: Liberal on the Right, 1905–1940* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

um from 1926–1930, and of TsUNKKhU 1932–1938 and director of their Institute of Experimental statistics and statistical methodology. From 1933 to 1938 he also led a group in NKZem charged with the extremely sensitive task of studying grain yield and factors affecting it. He died of natural causes in 1945 and a collection of his work analyzing the impact of weather on grain yield was published in 1949 after his death.<sup>24</sup>

**Olimpii Aristarkhovich Kvitkin** (1874–1939) was less lucky. As a student at the Medical Faculty in Moscow University in 1896 he had been caught up in student agitations and had been arrested and exiled to Vologda Gubernia where he began working for the Zemstvo statistical office, producing and publishing statistical handbooks. He moved on to work in Orel, Bryansk and Kostroma Gubernia while continuing to carry out active revolutionary work. He joined the Bolshevik wing of the RSDRP in 1904 and was a delegate to the 3rd, 4th and 5th Congresses of the RSDRP. But then in the years of repression he also left the party. He went abroad and completed a course in Mathematics at the Sorbonne in Paris. He returned to Moscow in 1915 and resumed his statistical work. From 1919 to 1937 he was the lead demographer in the censuses carried out in TsSU and TsUNKKhU, and was arrested and executed as a result of the false sabotage charges leveled against the statisticians who carried out the 1937 census.

**Petr Petrovich Rumiantsev** (1870–1925) had been actively involved in illegal revolutionary work in St. Petersburg and other towns from the 1890s. He began working in Zemstvo Gubernia Statistical Bureau in Smolensk in 1892, and then went on to Vologda and Samara Gubernia Zemstvo Statistical Offices. He had been a member of the Bolshevik party from 1903 and a delegate to the 3rd and 4th Congresses of the RSDRP in 1905 and 1906. He was also a member of the editorial team for the Bolshevik newspapers *Novaia zhizn'* (1905) and *Vestnik zhizni* (1905–7), but in 1907 he abandoned political work and devoted himself to statistics. In 1916 Rumiantsev played an important role in the livestock section of the Agricultural census of that year, but he subsequently emigrated to Germany.

**Alexander Dmitrievich Tsyurupa** (1870–1928) is the most important of our individuals in terms of his subsequent role in the Bolshevik government, but he presents a problem because his official biographies tend to obscure the fact that he was a lapsed Revolutionary. His subsequent prominence in Lenin's government, allowed him to present his official listing of party seniority as being uninterrupted from 1898, but his biography shows this not to be the case. Tsyurupa, was born in Taureda Gubernia in 1870 and educated at the Kher-

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24 V. M. Obukhov, *Urozhainost' i meteorologicheskie factory: Statisticheskie issledovaniia* (Moscow, 1949).

son Agricultural Uchilishche, where he participated in Marxist study groups. He was arrested in 1893 and began working on Zemstvo statistics in Kherson Gubernia. His revolutionary activities continued and he was re-arrested and sent to Simbirsk in 1896 where he began working in the Zemstvo statistical office. He compiled an agricultural review of the province for 1894–1895. The following year he went to Ufa and began working in the Ufa Statistical office, producing similar volumes of materials. In 1897 and 1898 he was joined by the recently exiled V. G. Groman and P. I. Popov, both of whom he introduced to statistical work. Tsyurupa and Groman are both reported to have joined the RSDRP in 1898. They must both have become well acquainted with Krupskaya, who was also exiled to Ufa at this time, and Tsyurupa met twice with Lenin in 1900, when Lenin was visiting Krupskaya.<sup>25</sup>

According to Tsyurupa's son, following that meeting with Lenin, Tsyurupa became a true disciple of Lenin.<sup>26</sup> The official biography claims that on Lenin's orders in 1901 Tsyurupa abandoned Ufa and went to Kharkov to engage in party work under the guise of his Zemstvo work. He is reported to have continued in these dual roles in Tula and Tambov before being arrested in 1902 and exiled to Olonets Gubernia in 1903, where he participated in the 1905 revolution.

Lenin's influence on Tsyurupa at this time is unclear. The leading Revolutionary Social Democrat in the area at the time was Prince Viacheslav Aleksandrovich Kugushev (1863–1944) and Kugushev's biography claims that Tsyurupa was invited by Kugushev to work on a RSDRP project to form a Urals Union of Social Democrats and Socialist Revolutionaries that would use one of his estates at Beketova, as their base. Both Tsyurupa and Kugusheva appear to have been working on this very un-Lenin-like project when they were both arrested in 1902 and exiled to Olonets Gubernia. Kugushev soon escaped abroad. Tsyurupa remained in Olonets Gubernia until he was released from exile in 1904 under an amnesty caused by the birth of the Tsesarevich. Kugushev was still abroad and asked Tsyurupa to manage his remaining estates, which he did. On Kugushev's instructions he sold one of the estates and gave the proceeds to the Central Committee of RSDRP, where it was presumably intended to assist Kugushev in promoting collaboration between all Social Democrats and Socialist Revolutionaries. This attempt to promote collaboration was fiercely resisted by Lenin. When Kugushev returned to Russia after the amnesty following the 1905 Revolution he gave up on his attempt to bring the Revolutionary groups together and followed Struve in becoming a Constitutional Democrat.

It is not clear how far Tsyurupa followed Kugushev in these political movements, but on a personal level he remained very close to Kugushev. He

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25 There is no mention of Popov or Groman meeting with Lenin at this time. The *Biokhronika* lists "Tsyurupa, Sviderskii, Krokhmal and others."

26 Vsevolod Tsyurupa, *Kolokola pamiati* (Moscow, 1986), p. 48.

continued to manage his estates and appears to have left the fields of politics and statistics. Later in 1910 Kugushev married Tsyurupa's sister. Both Kugushev and Tsyurupa remained in Ufa, until the October Revolution, and they both became involved in grain procurement operations under the provisional government. As we will see below it was only in December 1917 that Tsyurupa was to be re-united with Lenin.

*ii) Bolshevik statisticians who remained revolutionaries*

There are a much smaller number of Zemstvo statisticians who remained active revolutionaries and Bolsheviks over this period. Apart from Lenin, the two leading examples are S. P. Sereda, and A. G. Shlikhter.

**Semen Pafnutevich Sereda** (1871–1933) had been involved in revolutionary affairs since the 1880s and became a member of the RSDRP in 1903. He had worked in Zemstvo statistical offices from 1896 in Orel, Kaluga, Smolensk and Riazan.

The other major Bolshevik statistician was **Aleksandr Grigor'evich Shlikhter** (1868–1940). In 1891, he was expelled from the Physics and Mathematical Faculty of Kharkov University and was forced to complete his education abroad in the Medical Faculty of Berne University. He returned to Russia in 1892 and worked with medical students on cholera prevention in Poltava Gubernia when he was again arrested for circulating propaganda to students. This led to exile to Sol'vychegodsk in Vologda Gubernia for five years, but because of poor health, he was allowed to move to Samara where he worked in the Zemstvo statistical office. This was at the time that Lenin was working as a lawyer in Samara, and their association presumably dates from this time.

After serving his sentence and working for 4 years in the Samara Statistical Bureau in 1902 Shlikhter went to Kiev and was actively engaged in revolutionary movements with railworkers in the 1905 Revolution. Later that year he fled abroad, lived in Helsinki for two years, and was a delegate to the Vth Congress of RSDRP in London. In September 1907 he was ordered by the Bolshevik Central Committee to return to Moscow and participate in the electoral campaign for the 3rd Duma. He was a member of the Moscow Committee of RSDRP from 1907–1908, before being arrested in July 1908 and sentenced to hard labor and exile in Siberia, where he remained until February 1917.

*iii) Other Bolshevik Statistical thinker—Osinskii*

Another significant Bolshevik who developed statistical thinking through writing and analyzing statistical data in the way that Lenin did, without joining the Zemstva was N. Osinskii (Valerian Valerianovich Obolenskii 1887–1937).

Osinskii's studies in the Economics Department of the Juridical Faculty of Moscow University were disrupted by the 1905 revolution and were resumed in 1906 in Munich and in Berlin. He returned to Moscow in 1907 and joined the Bolsheviks, engaged in underground work. He finished the full course in the Juridical Faculty of Moscow University in 1911. He was arrested three

times and eventually found himself exiled in Kharkov, where for three years he worked as an economist analyzing and writing two technical books on the grain trade. He was then conscripted into the Army but transferred to the Intendants Office where he worked on Food Requisitioning.

*iv) Statisticians in the Provisional Government*

Increasing wartime complexities had already led many local zemstvo statisticians to take on work related to food supplies. While central government agencies were struggling the local government statisticians were mobilizing themselves, calling for national conferences and demanding to carry out national censuses and co-ordinate food consumption surveys. The February Revolution led to a large number of statisticians, and ex-statisticians moving into central government.

At the highest level, Peshekhonov became Minister of Food. Chaianov and Vikhliaev both became assistants to the Minister of Agriculture, Groman became President of the Food Department of Petrograd Soviet and Popov became head of the Department of Agricultural Censuses in the Ministry of Agriculture. Most of these figures became involved in the wartime statistical conferences and the carrying out of the 1916 and 1917 agricultural censuses.<sup>27</sup>

**Aleksei Vasilievich Peshekhonov** (1867–1933) had been excluded from the Tver spiritual seminary for political unreliability in 1884. He served for three years in the Army in Dagestan, and was then a rural teacher and Zemstvo statistician in Tver and Orlov Gubernia. In 1894 he was imprisoned for two years and was then appointed head of the Kaluga Gubernia Zemstvo Statistical Bureau. In 1898 he held a similar position in Poltava, but was then exiled for three years for participating in a boycott. After being involved with the Union of Liberation in 1905 he moved towards collaboration with SRs before becoming one of the founders of the Popular Socialist Party.

After the February Revolution he became a member of the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet and in May joined the Provisional Government as Minister of Food.

**Aleksandr Vasilievich Chaianov** (1888–1937) completed the Moscow Agricultural Institute (later Timyriazev Academy) in 1911, and was a protégé of A. F. Fortunatov. As a promising graduate he was sent to Berlin to work with Bortkevich and then to Paris. He returned to a teaching position in the Institute in 1913. During the war he worked for the cooperative movement to produce surveys of Zemstvo food consumption.<sup>28</sup> He extended this work after the February Revolution, and was for a time appointed Assistant to the Minister of Agriculture in the Provisional Government.

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<sup>27</sup> See also Mespoulet, *Statistique et revolution en Russie*, pp. 110–115.

<sup>28</sup> Aleksandr V. Chaianov, "Normy potrebleniia sel'skogo naseleniia Rossii," in *Statisticheskii vestnik*, kn.2 za 1915–16 gg. (Petrograd, 1916), pp. 33–43.

**Panteleimon Alekseevich Vikhlaev** (1869–1928) completed his education at the Petrov Agricultural Academy in Moscow in 1894 and worked initially in Tambov gubernia as a Zemstvo agronomist. But from 1896–1898 he was head of the Economic Department of the Tver Gubernia Zemstvo. From 1907 to 1917 he was head of the statistical department of Moscow Gubernia Zemstvo, where he played an important role in initiating the great work of the Zemstvo and town statisticians in carrying out the 1916 agricultural census. After the February Revolution he became an assistant to the Minister of Agriculture/Food.

**Pavel Il'ich Popov** (1872–1950) was born in Irkutsk gubernia and received his education in a seminary before working for a couple of years as a local teacher. In 1895, aged 23 he went to St. Petersburg for further education, but became involved in the radical student movement of the St. Petersburg Union for the Struggle to liberate the working class' and was arrested in the beginning of 1896 in association with the Lakhtinskii typography affair. Popov was held for a year in the Peter and Paul Fortress and then exiled for three years to Ufa. He began working in the Ufa Gubernia Zemstvo Statistical Office, under the guidance of Tsyurupa. At the completion of his exile Popov moved on to work in Zemstvo statistical offices in Samara, Smolensk, Vologda, and Kharkov, before ending up as head of the statistical department in the Tula Gubernia Zemstvo from 1909 to 1917. During the war from 1915 to 1917 Popov also took on the responsibility of being the secretary and deputy chair of the executive Commission of the statistical congresses of Zemstvo and town statisticians. This led him to take a major role in carrying out the two All Russian Agricultural Censuses of 1916 and 1917.

**Vladimir Gustavich Groman (Gorn)** (1874–1940) completed a degree at Moscow University and became involved in Marxist circles, which led him to be exiled in 1897 to Orlov in Vyatka Gubernia, where he began to work on zemstvo statistics under Tsyurupa's guidance. He joined the RSDRP in Vyatka in 1898. Groman was re-arrested and from 1902–5 was in exile in Siberia. In 1905 he returned and began work in Tver Statistical Bureau. He was active in the 1905 Revolution as a Menshevik and was elected a member of the first Duma. In 1909 he became head of the Penza Gubernia Statistical Office and remained there for two years. During the war he wrote several reports on inflation for the Chuprov Society and became a senior figure in the All Russian Union of Towns. He was their representative on the Special Food Conference. Immediately after the February Revolution he took charge of the Food Commission of Petrograd Soviet, and was considered by many to be the food dictator of Petrograd.

### *The Agricultural Censuses of 1916 and 1917*

The agricultural censuses carried out in 1916 and 1917 originated in a call from Vikhlaev in the Moscow Gubernia Zemstvo Statistical Office in May

1915.<sup>29</sup> This led to the establishment of a conference under the Main Food Committee of the Ministry of Trade with Vikhlaev, Groman and Chermak present. Vikhlaev and Groman produced a program for an Agrarian census which was sent to the Council of Ministers for approval. It was promptly rejected. As the Tsarist government had little interest in statistical thinking, or at least feared that the advantages of receiving improved statistical information, were not worth the political risks of letting these radical zemstvo and town activists begin working together. From their point of view they may well have been right.

After the military reversals and the poor harvest of 1915 the political situation changed and the government began trying to mobilize social organizations into supporting the war effort by creating a series of special councils. The Special Council for Food which contained Groman and Struve as delegates, were in favor of calling for a statistical conference and for the censuses, and on November 4th they sent out the call.

The conference of town and zemstvo statisticians was duly held on November 21-23, 1915 with Popov and Groman providing the main reports on the proposed census, and Prince Shakhovskii, the head of the Special Council presenting a report on the 1915 harvest.

Preparations for the 1916 census went ahead over winter and it was agreed that the census would cover the rural population, the sown area and livestock numbers. A special commission was set up to monitor the preparations for the census, which included Vikhlaev and Popov from the Zemstvo with G. I. Baskin and N. I. Vorobev as their deputies, and with A. E. Lositskii from the towns with N. A. Svavitskii as his deputy.

The Census was carried out in the autumn of 1916, but the results were not completely worked out before the February Revolution.

Following the February Revolution Popov moved from Tula to Petrograd and took charge of the Department of Agricultural Censuses in the Ministry of Agriculture, which became the Ministry of Food. Vikhlyaev also came to Petrograd from Moscow and became an Assistant Minister of Agriculture/Food. Groman, who was already in Petrograd working in the Statistical Department of the Union of Towns, remained in Petrograd, but moved over to head the Food Department in the Petrograd Soviet.

### 3) LENIN, STATISTICAL THINKING AND MANAGING NKZEM; TSU; AND GOSPLAN

When the Bolsheviks took power in October (old style) 1917 they were faced with a number of serious problems, three of the main problems that concerned the statisticians were: a) how to handle the food and agricultural problem; b)

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29 P. I. Popov, "Khronika: Vserosiiskaia sel'skokhoziaistvennaia perepis'," *Statisticheskii vestnik*, kn. 2 za 1915-16gg, p. 240.



how to organize state statistics; and c) whether to expand planning or reintroduce the market. Lenin needed men who could manage these problems and he relied heavily on the small number of statistical thinking specialists.

*a) Food Problems and the First Commissars of Agriculture and Food (Shlikhter, Tsyurupa, Sereda and Osinskii)*

Lenin's first choice for Peoples' Commissar of Agriculture (NKZem) V. P. Milyutin was a disaster. He had no real understanding of agriculture and seemed unable to acquire such a knowledge. He resigned on November 4 having served for under 10 days and having achieved little.<sup>30</sup>

The former Zemstvo statistician Shlikhter was appointed in a temporary acting position as NKZem RSFSR on November 4th (old style) 1917,<sup>31</sup> his predecessor had not even occupied the premises of the former Ministry of Agriculture. Shlikhter tells of the hostility that he felt when he first went there. All of the incumbents were hostile. The old Zemstvo statistician Vikhlyaev, who had been an assistant to the Minister of Agriculture, told Shlikhter that he would not speak to him as deputy Minister to Minister, but as one old zemstvo statistician to another, and he only wanted to talk about the need to complete the working out of the 1917 agricultural census.<sup>32</sup>

On November 24, 1917 when the Left SR Andrei Kolegaev became NKZem, Shlikhter was moved into the position of temporary head of the Peoples' Commissariat of Food Supply (NKProd). With Petrograd facing a continuing desperate food situation, Shlikhter was greatly impressed by a series of grain supplies delivered by Tsyurupa from Ufa. Tsyurupa was invited to attend the All Russian Food Supply Council in Petrograd on November 28th. But prior to the meeting Shlikhter introduced Tsyurupa to Lenin and proposed that Tsyurupa be made his assistant in NKProd. Lenin accepted the proposal and the following day the appointment was confirmed by SNK.

Tsyurupa continued working as Shlikhter's assistant until the end of February 1918, when Tsyurupa became the Commissar and Shlikhter was sent out as roving extraordinary food commissar to Siberia, Perm, Vyatka, Ufa and then Tula Gubernia.

On April 4, 1918, after the treaty of Brest-Litovsk, when the Left SRs walked out of the government Sereda (the other Bolshevnik Zemstvo statistician) was appointed People's Commissar for Agriculture of RSFSR and remained there until March 1921, when he was moved into Gosplan, as we will describe below.

30 V. V. Kabanov, "Narodnyi komissar zemledel'ia: V. P. Milyutin," in *Pervoe sovetskoe pravitel'stvo, Oktiabr' 1917 - liul' 1918* (Moscow, 1991), pp. 76-77.

31 This was after the resignation of V. P. Milyutin and before the appointment on November 24, 1917 of the Left SR Andrei Lukich Kolegaev.

32 V. V. Kabanov, "Narodnyi komissar zemledel'ia: A. G. Shlikhter," in *Pervoe sovetskoe pravitel'stvo, Oktiabr' 1917 - liul' 1918* (Moscow, 1991), p. 445.

In the meantime Osinskii had moved over from his first job of taking possession of the state bank to become chair of VSNKh. VSNKh at this time had a very large remit and had effectively taken charge of much statistical work. It was the base from which Popov was now working in his continued efforts to get the Zemstvo and Town statisticians to work together to complete the results of the 1917 agricultural census.

Osinskii was another casualty of the Left resignations over the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty. His resignation and his leadership of the Democratic Centralists opposition led to Osinskii being sent to the countryside, where he surprisingly prospered as Chair of the Tula Gubernia Ispolkom and even managed to conjure grain surpluses out of the Gubernia. On the basis of this success Osinskii returned to Moscow and was given two key interlocking positions central to the handling of the grain problem. He was appointed a member of the collegium of NKProd in August 1920, and in March 1921, when Sereda moved from NKZem to Gosplan, it was Osinskii who took the lead position in NKZem. He was formerly designated deputy NKZem, but the commissar was only a figure-head. The uneducated peasant Vasilii Grigor'evich Yakovenko held the title but only performed the ceremonial functions of People's Commissar.

This meant that in these crucial years from 1918 to 1921 all of the key positions related to food policy were held by ex-zemstvo statisticians or people with proven statistical thinking capability. These were the people that Lenin (a statistical thinker himself) chose to appoint to run the country with him in these desperate times.

### **b) TsSU**

In the difficult first months of Bolshevik rule Popov, working out of VSNKh, presumably with the support of Osinskii, was able to bring together the ex-Zemstvo statisticians to a conference to work on the results of the 1917 agricultural census, on June 16-18, 1918. On the final day of the conference the statisticians turned their mind to drafting a proposal to Lenin on how they thought that Central State Statistics should be organized in this revolutionary time.

When Popov took his draft proposal on how to organize central state statistics to Lenin in early July 1918, this was not just the product of one former Zemstvo statistician, who happened to be head of the department of statistics and censuses in VSNKh, but a draft that had been discussed by the all-Russian Congress of statisticians.

Popov in his record of meetings with Lenin, published in *Leningradskaiia Pravda* a fortnight after Lenin's death emphasized the confidence that the statisticians had in sending Lenin their draft, that it would be positively received. He noted that, unlike many other branches of the government, the zemstvo statisticians had not engaged in sabotage, as they began working for the Soviet government.

Gaining the support of the Zemstvo statisticians was very important for Lenin, not only in the uninterrupted operation of statistical work, but also in terms of Lenin's argument with renegade Kautskii and all those figures who doubted whether the Bolsheviks had sufficient support from the technical and scientific community to think of holding power by themselves. Lenin's famous reply to "Renegade Kautskii" included the claim that "the Soviet Republic has created a statistical service which has attracted all of the best statistical forces of Russia."<sup>33</sup>

Lenin did not accept all of the proposals included in the Statisticians draft. It was Lenin who suggested the name of Central Statistical Administration (TsSU) instead of Central Statistical Committee (TsSK) which was the name that the statisticians had initially used and which was the same as under the Tsarist government. Lenin wanted to emphasize the change from the Tsarist Committee and the Statisticians were happy to go along with that.

Lenin's second change was more important and more consequential. The statisticians viewed themselves and their Statistical Congresses as being somewhat similar to the Academy of Sciences and the Plenary Assembly of Academics. They wanted the Director and the staff of the new TsSU to be appointed by their statistical congresses and their assemblies of expert statisticians. Lenin could not accept this, and told Popov bluntly that the Director of TsSU and the Collegium would have to be appointed by him as chair of SNK, but he did agree that he would take their advice, and did appoint Popov to be Director of TsSU, with all of the members of the collegium being respected statisticians. He was however insistent that he did not want Groman in the Collegium, and later in 1921 he would put pressure on Popov in TsSU RSFSR to come to an agreement with TsSU UkSSR and to exclude Peshekhonov, who had previously been appointed to the collegium of TsSU UkSSR.<sup>34</sup>

Towards the end of his life Lenin would become highly critical and threatening to Popov, but he largely held his promise. He did not interfere with TsSU appointments, and he assisted Popov to get Vikhliaev released and Osinskii to get Kondratiev released, in these years when the security forces were showing too much interest in them. Unfortunately, this arrangement would not be honored by Stalin after Lenin's death.

### *c) Gosplan*

In the early months of 1921 two important decisions were made, which in official party history, and in most other accounts, have been treated as separate and distinct. These were i) the decision to replace requisitioning with a tax in kind, which heralded the introduction of NEP; and ii) the decision to set up a universal planning system, which arguably had a longer term effect of intro-

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33 V. Lenin, *The Proletarian Revolution and Renegade Kautsky* (November 10, 1918), reproduced in V. I. Lenin Collected Works, Vol. 29, p. 324.

34 This question was resolved by getting the GPU to deport Peshekhonov in 1921.

ducing the central planning system. On the face of it these two decisions look contradictory, and appear to be the result of a series of political compromises between different political actors with different objectives.

Lenin wrote one of his most hard-hitting articles denouncing those extremists who suffered from the same delusion that the former Menshevik Groman had previously exhibited. He accused them of communist conceit and ignorance. On the morning of February 22, 1921 Lenin wrote an article in *Pravda* against this dangerous tendency:

It is time we learned to put a value on science and got rid of the “communist” conceit of the dabbler and the bureaucrat; it is time we learned to work systematically, making use of our own experience and practice.<sup>35</sup>

Lenin argued that instead of creating a comprehensive (*universal'noi*) planning agency and attempting to plan everything, without having any business to do this, they should keep with GOELRO, which was a scientific organization headed by an old colleague of Lenin's who was also a senior party official and a trained electrical engineer—G. M. Krzhizhanovskii.

Later in the day at a meeting of the Central Committee Lenin was forced into a compromise with these bureaucratic extremists. The Central Committee agreed to proceed with replacing the requisitioning system with a tax in kind, which prepared the way for a reintroduction of the market, as Lenin had wanted, but it also agreed to establish a universal planning commission that appeared to be preparing the way for a move towards total planning. Lenin was however insistent that he could keep the ambitions of Gosplan under his control by appointing solid and sensible people like the engineer Krzhizhanovskii to lead it rather than extremists like Larin, Kritsman and Milyutin, or ambitious politicians like Trotskii. In his correspondence with Krzhizhanovskii, Lenin was quite explicit about ensuring that the extremists were contained. He told Krzhizhanovskii:

On you falls the heavy task of subordinating, disciplining moderating Larin. Remember directly he “begins” to go beyond limits, rush to me (or send me a letter). Otherwise Larin will upset the whole General Planning. Larin must be a member of the sub-commission [within Gosplan] but not as chairman and not as vice chairman and not as secretary; counterbalance him, say, with Sereda, a model of balanced mind, non-fantasy, non-harassment.<sup>36</sup>

In line with this, the ex-zemstvo statistician Sereda was moved from NKZem and was appointed to the collegium of Gosplan and made head of the agricultural sector of Gosplan. Later, when Krzhizhanovskii was struggling to keep control, Sereda was moved to become Krzhizhanovskii's deputy, i.e. deputy chair of Gosplan and Popov, the other prominent stable ex-zemstvo statistician

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35 Lenin, “On integrated planning” *Pravda* (February 22, 1921), downloaded from <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1921/feb/21.htm> (accessed on December 27, 2017).

36 Lenin's letter to Krzhizhanovskii (February 25, 1921).

was moved in to take his place, inheriting the impossible task of trying to bring the extremists to heel.

### *The high point and after*

Lenin's denunciation of "communist conceit" in February 1921 can be seen as the peak of Lenin's support for statistical thinking, and for the experience of "old specialists" in general. Against much party opposition Lenin had managed to move stable statistical thinking experts into all of the key positions regarding food policy, statistics and even planning, and he had taken measures to reintroduce the market. While his health and strength held out he could defend the statistical thinkers against the party extremists and those who failed to appreciate the value of objective specialists. But the statisticians were not united, and in particular two ex-Menshevik statisticians (Groman and Strumilin) would join forces with Popov's critics in Rabkrin and would join Gosplan and work towards undermining his position. Within Gosplan Krzhizhanovskii, in Lenin's absence, would not be able, and was perhaps not even inclined to hold the ground and attempt to constrain the extremists. A series of crises were approaching, i) in the form of an extraordinarily serious economic crisis that would bring mass famine, ii) in the form of political concern about the possible growth of bourgeois influences, and iii) in the form of the collapse of Lenin's health, and quite frankly his reasoning ability. This would lead the elderly and infirm Lenin to argue and disagree with everything that he had previously struggled to build. He would undermine the position of the critical statistical thinkers. Between 1925 and 1928 two critically thinking statistical leaders Popov and his replacement Osinskii, would be sacked for disagreeing with Stalin. The direction of TsSU would be transferred from statisticians to the very extremists, who Lenin had riled against. Milyutin was to replace Osinskii as director of TsSU, with Kritsman as his deputy, and they were to contrive to destroy TsSU by merging this proud independent institution into Gosplan. The story of this disaster and its surprising sequel, has been told elsewhere.<sup>37</sup> What is not known, and is described in some detail in this article is the importance that Lenin and many of his generation had felt towards the revolutionary force of statistics, and Lenin's personal involvement with these statisticians and support for them in his more healthy earlier period. We should not let the later accounts of Lenin's successors, and the changes in the infirm Lenin obscure the earlier history of Lenin's more positive attitude towards statistics.

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37 Stephen G. Wheatcroft and Robert W. Davies, "The Crooked Mirror of Soviet Economic Statistics," in Robert W. Davies, Mark Harrison and Stephen G. Wheatcroft, eds., *The Economic Transformation of the Soviet Union, 1913–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 25–30. See also Stephen G. Wheatcroft, "Soviet Statistics under Stalinism: Reliability and Distortions in Grain and Population Statistics," *Europe-Asia Studies* 71:6 (2019), pp. 1013–1035.