

## Conclusion

The February Revolution was the explosion of two fundamental contradictions in Russia – the revolt of the masses against the established order and the irreconcilable conflict between ‘society’ and ‘state’. The process of what Haimson describes as dual polarisation had steadily progressed after 1905 under the impact of the successful modernisation undertaken by Russia. The outbreak of the First World War at first appeared to halt this process – the liberals pledged to support the government in its effort to win the war and the ‘sacred union’ seemed to close the gap between state and society. The workers’ strike movement that had appeared to be approaching a clash with the regime was silenced at the outbreak of war. But internal peace did not last more than a year. Once a crack appeared in the monolith after the first humiliating defeat of the Russian army, the war that had initially cemented state and society began to rip them apart with ferocious force.

### Workers’ Revolt

#### *Sources of the Workers’ Discontent and Revolutionary Parties*

The working class provided the most important source of social instability in Russia. Politically disfranchised, culturally and socially segregated, workers constituted the dangerous ‘other’ challenging the established order. At the outbreak of war, the modicum of independence that had existed previously had been brutally taken away. Unlike other classes in society that had formed national organisations to advance their class interests, workers were deprived of such privilege. Whatever modest legal organisations they maintained during the war were severely curtailed by the police. And yet the workers’ labour lay at the foundation of the war effort. As Russian industry rapidly expanded and created a shortage of skilled workers, the workers’ confidence grew in proportion. It was precisely the combination of resentment stemming from their exclusion from privileged society and their growing pride as a distinct and vital class that made the working class in Russia explosively dangerous.

The strike movement was suddenly revitalised in the summer of 1915, and from then on grew in size and militancy. It was by no means a linear development constantly moving upward toward a climax; rather it was characterised by peaks and valleys. But as time went on, the peaks became constantly higher and

the valleys less deep. At the vanguard of the strike movement in Petrograd stood the metalworkers in factories that employed between 1,000 and 8,000 workers, and in particular it was the metalworkers in the Vyborg District who provided the major impetus. Workers in the largest munitions plants and in large textile factories participated in economic strikes, but they generally stayed out of political strikes until the end of 1916. As the new wave of strikes began in January 1917, even these workers merged with the militant metalworkers in the Vyborg District in a series of political strikes. Moreover, the new wave began to involve workers who had not participated in strikes since the war began. The basic trend of the wartime strike movement – to grow ever larger and wider – culminated in the February Revolution.

Just as the workers themselves were alienated from the existing order of society, the workers' movement developed independently of the conflict within the established society. What drove them out of the factories and into the streets for the first major strike during the war was not the defeat of the Russian army but the massacre of fellow workers in Ivanovo-Voznesensk. The prorogations of the Duma and the government's other repressive measures against liberal organisations had little effect on the workers' movement. But the workers showed their class solidarity in the 9 January strikes and in a series of sympathy strikes in protest against the arrests of their leaders.

No doubt such wartime miseries as decline in real wages, inflation, long working hours, deterioration of working conditions, and above all the food shortage contributed to the development of the strike movement. But behind these grievances the workers felt profound resentment toward the established order from which they were excluded. There was little possibility of establishing a united front between the liberal opposition and the workers' movement during the war. All such attempts made either by the leaders of the workers' movement or by the liberals ended in failure.

The growth of the strike movement was not entirely spontaneous. In fact, it would be impossible to organise 'spontaneously' such strikes as happened in August and September 1915, January, March, and October 1916, and January and February 1917. These strikes involved many factories throughout the entire city. Strikes required organisers who planned strategy, agitators who appealed to the workers, orators who spoke at factory rallies, and a network of communication that coordinated activities with other factories. Amorphous grievances of the workers had to be defined in simple slogans. Demonstrations had to be directed to a certain destination through specific routes. Although no single political group could claim exclusive leadership of the workers' movement and it is impossible to measure accurately the influence of the underground revolutionary activists, it is certain that it was the underground activists at the factory