Ivanovo-Voznesensk (now called Ivanovo) is located in the North-Central Industrial Region about 175 miles northeast of Moscow. Before the revolutions of 1917, it acquired the nick-name “The Russian Manchester” because of its large complex of textile mills and related industries. Since 1917 Soviet historians have proclaimed Ivanovo-Voznesensk a prime example of revolutionary activity in the spontaneous labor movement. They claim the essence of Bolshevism was revealed: a sullen, oppressed working class had been “proletarianized” into a classic Marxist self-conscious element of the exploited masses waiting only for party leadership to provide the opportunity to carry out the inexorable dialectic of the revolution. Ivanovo-Voznesensk, therefore, exemplified the slogan which called 1905 the “Dress Rehearsal” for the revolutions of 1917. Many even contended that Ivanovo-Voznesensk’s great strike in 1905 provided the original Soviet of Workers Deputies.1

The labor movement in Ivanovo-Voznesensk was indeed strong, passionate at times, and probably affected some of the government’s political decisions. And for these reasons it deserves more attention than it has received from Western historians. But all the other truisms declared by Party historians—that the labor reaction to Bloody Sunday was direct, that the party guided the strike into overtly political actions, that the workers were proletarianized into a potentially revolutionary force willing to be led by professionals—simply do not bear up under close scrutiny.

When news of the tragic events of January 9 in St. Petersburg arrived in Ivanovo-Voznesensk, the atmosphere was uncertain. Strikes of the previous year or so had convinced the workers only that they were sometimes able to prevent factory owners from indulging in obviously unfair practices. All the strikes had remained random and isolated, in each case dealing with only local problems. The party professionals in the area had not been able to take advantage of the strikes in any way other than to distribute political leaflets, nor had they managed to instigate any strikes on their own. The party could not be sure in January how deeply its political propaganda had penetrated into the working masses and therefore could not feel confident that its call for a strike—even in response to such a horrible incident as Bloody Sunday—would be effective.2

1. For the most complete discussion of this question to date, see Solomon M. Schwarz, The Russian Revolution of 1905: The Workers’ Movement and the Formation of Bolshevism and Menshevism (Chicago, 1967), ch. iv and Appendix 11. See also N. Podvoiskii, Pervyi sovet rabochikh deputatov (Ivanovo-Voznesenskii 1905 g.) (Moscow, 1925); P. I. Galkina, “Vseobshchaia stachka Ivanovo-voznesenskih tekstil’shchikov letom 1905,” Voprosy istorii, no. 6 (1955); P. M. Ekzempliar’ skii, Istoritsa goroda Ivanova, part one (of two), Dooxkiab’ skii period (Ivanovo, 1958); and F. N. Samoilov, Po sledam minuvshego (Moscow, 1948).

The government, central and local, had no such doubts. Certain that professional revolutionaries, operating in Russia's growing industrial centers, would succeed in exploiting the St. Petersburg affair by calling strikes all over the country, the minister of internal affairs sent a message to all industrial centers. To Governor Leont'ev of Vladimir guberniia he wrote: "I have reason to expect that unreliable persons will attempt to exploit the general strike in St. Petersburg...in order to bring about strikes and disorders in various parts of the Empire. I suggest that, in case of necessity and according to the information at your disposal, you take decisive measures for the avoidance of disorders." The information at Governor Leont'ev's disposal confirmed the fears of the minister. The new police chief of Ivanovo-Voznesensk, a man named Kozhelovskii, had reported on January 12 the discovery in two factories of anti-war pamphlets and in another factory leaflets urging the workers to insist on their rights. Though the police had certainly found such materials before, Kozhelovskii was particularly apprehensive at that time because of what had taken place in St. Petersburg. In a telegram to the governor he declared that strikes "could be expected" in all factories and added that they would be economic because some factories had just lowered their rates. To him the solution was clear: "I...humbly request that you send one battalion of troops for my use, since I will not have any hope of putting down the accompanying disorders with the staff of police now at my disposal."4

At a meeting on January 16, party professionals from the various districts and some of the factory cell organizers met to discuss what actions could be taken in response to the St. Petersburg incidents. Apparently no one even suggested that a general strike might be possible. Instead, they issued leaflets to take advantage of two localized strikes already planned in the foundry of the Anonimnyi zavod and in the Kalashnikov dye factory.

The proclamation was printed that night and distributed the following morning, January 17. Addressed specifically to the foundry workers, it called attention to the victims in St. Petersburg who had "spilled their blood to liberate the working class" and asked, "Will you remain silent at such a time?" And, not wishing to rely solely on the workers' uncertain sense of brotherhood, the party leaders added a list of sixteen optimistic economic demands, chief of which were an eight-hour day, a sixty percent pay increase, elimination of fines, and the establishment of worker-management committees to regulate conditions at the factories.5 Seventy workers from two plants began the strike as scheduled. And shortly afterwards workers at a large factory nearby were also induced to walk out.

At the first two places the small body of strikers was met at the gates of the

4. Ibid., pp. 78-79.