

My Life with G. V. Plekhanov  
by Samuel Baron

When in 1963 my book *Plekhanov: The Father of Russian Marxism* was published, I had been closely involved with Plekhanov some fifteen years. My research for a dissertation on a phase of his life and thought began in 1948, but my involvement did not end with the completion of the dissertation four years later. Believing that what I had produced was too narrow in focus to warrant publication, except perhaps in article form, with scant appreciation of the implications I resolved to write a full-scale biography. Because the sources were so voluminous, the subject so complex, and my free time so limited, it required eleven years to see the plan through. During these years, although I was burdened with a heavy teaching load and had a home and family to care for, Plekhanov was rarely out of mind. I spent many an evening during the teaching year, as well as weekends, holidays, and vacations, in research and writing. Over the years my research took me to New York, Cambridge, and Palo Alto, to London, Paris, and Leningrad. My sleeping as well as my waking hours were often filled with reflections and refractions of my subject. The task I had set myself seemed so interminable that sometimes I wondered out loud whether it would finish me before I finished it. Yet there could be no thought of quitting, for I had too much invested, and so I continued doggedly at my Sisyphean labor. A turning point came in 1959, when, thanks to the encouragement given by a leading university press, I was able to muster the vigor and enthusiasm to complete the book in the next few years.<sup>1</sup>

By the time the manuscript had been accepted, I was ready to wash my hands of Plekhanov, Russian Marxism, the Social Democratic movement, and intellectual history. In the next fifteen years, except for two articles on his historical ideas and their status in the USSR (published in 1974), my research and writing centered on such far-removed subjects as travel accounts of Muscovite Russia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the merchant elite of Muscovy, and certain aspects of Soviet historiography. Then, in 1978, I experienced a new surge of interest in Plekhanov. Having learned that the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam had acquired a new collection of Plekhanov papers, I contrived in the course of a brief visit to Europe to spend a few days gaining an overview of these materials. The papers appeared to be far richer than I had anticipated, and I decided then and there to return to Amsterdam as soon as possible to study them with the care they deserved.

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<sup>1</sup> First published in *Introspection in Biography: The Biographer's Quest for Self Awareness*, ed. Samuel H. Baron and Carl Pletsch (Hilldale, N.J.: The Analytic Press, 1985), pp. 191-208.

Meanwhile, I secured permission to carry away a copy of an interesting seventeen-page letter on Plekhanov's circumstances following the Bolshevik Revolution (which he opposed), hoping to transcribe, edit and publish it.

A few months later, while this enterprise still occupied my attention, I was asked to speak to a seminar at a neighboring university on a certain dimension of Plekhanov's thought and activity. As I believed that I had covered the matter in question quite adequately in the book, I brushed aside this suggestion and countered with a proposal to talk about my long association with G. V Plekhanov. I obviously wished to go beyond the boundaries of my earlier study, and my new engagement had kindled a particular desire to reflect on my personal relation to Plekhanov. This desire was not a bolt out of the blue. A recently aroused interest in self-examination had led me in 1975 to prepare an autobiographical address, entitled "Scholarship and Politics: The Education of an American Historian of Russia," for presentation to an organization of Russian and East European historians.<sup>1</sup> In composing this paper, I was prompted to review the circumstances which shaped my outlook prior to graduate school, the experiences which determined my professional career, and the evolution of, my thinking on the relations between scholarship and politics.

In collecting my thoughts for the seminar talk, I made an unexpected discovery. I had assumed that with the publication of my book I had gotten Plekhanov out of my system, but I was mistaken. Immediately following its completion, I launched an investigation of the Westernization of Russia, which led me to translate and edit *The Travels of Olearius in Seventeenth-Century Russia*, and to write an article on the West European suburb in seventeenth-century Moscow.<sup>2</sup> At the time these subjects seemed far removed from Plekhanov, but some reflection suggested otherwise. Among other things he was a historian, who envisaged the Westernization of a society once Oriental (or semi-oriental) as the central theme of his uncompleted, multivolume *History of Russian Social Thought*.<sup>3</sup> I could hardly have been unconscious of this as I dealt with Olearius, for in 1958 I had published an article called "Plekhanov's Russia: The Impact of the West upon an 'Oriental' society." Yet the connection does not seem to have been at the fore-front of my mind. Nor was it the only connection. I was astonished a few years ago to have brought to my attention an unpublished letter from Plekhanov to an associate who owned a large library, asking to borrow a copy of Olearius's book. When I went back to Plekhanov's *History*, I noted what I must once have known but almost certainly was unaware of while working on the travel account—that he cites Olearius a number of times in his characterization of seventeenth-century Russia.

In 1970, I began a series of studies on the upper-level Muscovite merchants in the

sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>4</sup> I supposed that a careful examination of their business practices and the context in which they operated would throw some light on a problem in which I had been interested for some time--the failure of capitalism to develop in Russia when that economic system was taking shape in Western Europe. Plekhanov had little to say on the Muscovite merchants, and certainly did no primary research on them, but he had a decided interest in the pattern of Russia's historical development. In his opinion, the system of Oriental despotism with which Russia was saddled for centuries was an institutional complex distinct from the West European, and so structured as to inhibit capitalist development. He emphasized such features as the extravagant power of the ruler and the communal organization of the peasantry in what was an overwhelmingly agrarian economy. He was also convinced that these arrangements militated against the growth of commerce and towns, whose weak development had profound effects upon Russia's history. Though not fully aware of it at the time, it seems that my own researches were an effort to help solve a problem which had been one of Plekhanov's major preoccupations.

While investigating the Muscovite merchants, my attention was drawn to a related controversy in Soviet historiography on the question of the transition from feudalism to capitalism in Russia. I immersed myself in the literature, particularly the proceedings of a conference in 1965 which brought into sharp focus the conflict between different sectors of the Soviet historical guild on this matter. After publishing an article on the controversy, I went on to study Soviet historiography further. Inevitably, I came up against M. N. Pokrovskii, the dean of Soviet historians from 1917 until 1932. To my great surprise, I also came upon Plekhanov once again.

I became aware that at roughly the same time each had produced a history of Russia, and their histories were sufficiently different to warrant my speaking of two Marxist interpretations of Russian history. For political reasons Pokrovskii's had prevailed after the revolution. In the twenties he mounted a campaign designed to outlaw Plekhanov's views, and his own continued to influence Soviet historiography powerfully even after he was dethroned in the thirties. In the sixties, de-Stalinization liberated Soviet historians relatively, frozen positions thawed, and controversy flared on many fronts. Pokrovskii was personally vindicated of the charges leveled against him in the thirties, but his overall historical conception was generally repudiated. By contrast, the influence of Plekhanov's interpretation made itself felt in the writings of a number of historians. Not least interesting, the sixties saw a sensational revival of a Marxian concept that Stalin had banned in the thirties: the "Asiatic mode of production." This is another name for Oriental despotism or Oriental society, the phenomenon that figured so prominently in Plekhanov's historical work. The "resurrection of Plekhanovism," a danger Pokrovskii foresaw in the twenties, seemed

to be occurring.

For me, the principal finding of my seminar talk was that virtually all the research I had undertaken in the fifteen years since completion of my biography was somehow related to Plekhanov. As I had pursued my various projects, I experienced fleeting moments of awareness of a connection, but little sense of a definite, persistent, and comprehensive pattern, which I now tried to explain. Was it because Plekhanov's interests were so all-embracing that he had touched everything I turned to? Or had my thinking been so deeply affected by him in the course of our long association as to determine the range of my interests and my research program? There is probably some truth in each proposition, but the force of the latter is especially significant for it revealed something I was disposed to doubt, that my protracted and intense association with Plekhanov produced important, enduring effects upon me. In turn, this perception helped to prepare me for an enterprise in which I was about to become involved.

A few days before the presentation of my remarks to the seminar, I mentioned to a colleague, Carl Pletsch, the topic I intended to treat. He responded with extraordinary interest. He himself had done a biographical study for his recently completed doctoral dissertation; and, together with a psychiatrist, George Moraitis, had designed an experiment calculated to determine systematically his relationship to the person whose life he had examined. The experiment had proved stimulating, productive of fresh insights, and its results were soon to be published.<sup>5</sup> Pletsch urged me to have my seminar remarks taped, and soon thereafter he listened to the recording. He then showed me some material he had written on his experiment and suggested that I attempt to replicate it, to explore fully my relations with Plekhanov, in conjunction with someone who had had psychoanalytical training. After my initial misgivings had been allayed, and once a suitable collaborator had been found in Professor Alan Stem, I agreed to participate, on the assumption that the further work on Plekhanov I planned to do might benefit from a clearer understanding of my relations with him.<sup>6</sup>

As the experiment began, it occurred to me that I had never carefully and straightforwardly defined Plekhanov's personality and my attitude toward it. To be sure, I did make a sustained effort to analyze and deal critically with his intellectual evolution, the ideological system he created, and the ways he responded to changing circumstances. In the process, various facets of his personality were revealed, but I had to admit that my efforts to probe and delineate that personality were more episodic than systematic, and left a good deal to be desired. Sensing some inadequacy in this area while working on the book, I had done some reading on psychology and the writing of biography, but without much profit. Accordingly, at the time this

concern made hardly a dent on my cast of mind as the following incident illustrates.

In the later years of writing, a colleague had asked me more than once whether I liked Plekhanov. I had never really considered the question, and it struck me as somehow offensive. My personal attitude was irrelevant, I thought, and I resisted giving a direct reply. One has to empathize with one's subject in order to understand him, I observed, but one must also maintain detachment if an objective portrayal is to be made. I neither liked nor disliked Plekhanov, I told myself, for I was presenting a dispassionate account. Well aware though I was of discussions of the subjective factor in historical writing, I evidently expected through conscious effort to reduce it to negligible proportions. As I wrote the book, awareness that I might be putting a personal stamp upon it was dim at best. Occasional impressions to the contrary notwithstanding, I conceived of my work as a truthful and rather exact representation of what had been, as an objective biography.

In the course of the experiment I was impelled to examine more closely the belief in my neutrality and a series of important subordinate propositions. The first concerned my selection of a subject for a doctoral dissertation. When asked how I happened to choose Plekhanov, I replied along the following lines: As the completion of my work for an M.A. drew near, I was obliged to find a suitable subject to investigate in order to be admitted to the Ph. D. program. A more advanced acquaintance suggested the possible utility of a look at a bibliography which listed sources-published-in-Russia since the revolution. In poring over this work, I came across a number of substantial collections of material relating to Plekhanov: his collected works in twenty-four volumes; a further eight volumes billed as his literary heritage; six volumes of documents on the Emancipation of Labor Group, Russia's first Marxist revolutionary organization, which Plekhanov and a few associates founded, and which served as the vehicle of his organizational activity for the first decade or so of his Marxist career; and a two-volume collection of his correspondence with his closest collaborator, P. B. Aksel'rod. I also discovered a bibliography on Plekhanov and the Emancipation of Labor Group which provided abundant references to still other materials, both primary and secondary. Plekhanov was generally recognized as a major figure, almost nothing had been written on him outside the Soviet Union, and the available sources for a study of him were apparently more than ample. As I saw it, my decision to elect "Plekhanov and the Emancipation of Labor Group, 1883-1894" as my dissertation subject resulted from fortuitous circumstances on the one hand and pragmatic considerations on the other.

Like any fledgling, I had read that historians generally choose research topics related to contemporary problems and preoccupations, and which somehow articulate with

their personal backgrounds and concerns. Plausible though this sounded, my case seemed to be an exception to the rule. Professor Stern and I tacitly undertook to determine whether it was in fact what it seemed to be. Under his persistent prodding, I strove to recapture my concerns and attitudes around the time I was casting about for a dissertation topic. The autobiographical paper I had written a few years before proved helpful, for it evoked the mood of my early years as a graduate student, but in a context unrelated to my quest for a dissertation subject.

As an undergraduate I had majored in botany, but following four years in the armed forces (1942 to 1946) I enrolled in the first class of Columbia University's newly created Russian Institute. I had decided to abandon what now seemed like an escapist pursuit for a more engaged career in the social sciences. As one who had grown up during the Great Depression and lived through a world war, I was appalled by the injustice, brutality, and irrationality that afflicted mankind. Believing in the possibility of corrective action, I hoped through work as a teacher, and perhaps as a writer, to strike a blow in favor of more rational social and international relations. I thought of myself as an antifascist, I harbored friendly if not uncritical feelings toward our erstwhile Soviet ally, and my aspirations found an immediate outlet in political activity of a leftish sort. While a graduate student at Columbia, I joined the American Veterans' Committee, an organization created to counter the influence of the American Legion. I worked in political campaigns of New York's American Labor Party, and for Henry Wallace's candidacy for the presidency on the Progressive Party ticket. In these same years, as a consequence of preoccupation with Soviet affairs at the institute, I had my first serious encounter with Marxism. A skeptical streak in my nature held me back from total commitment, but I found it illuminating, and it deeply influenced my outlook. Marxian ideas affected the way I thought about history, and they somehow buttressed my aspirations for progressive social change through professional and political work.

ces were brought to the conscious level, it appeared doubtful that my choice of a dissertation topic was entirely fortuitous or determined largely by pragmatic considerations. I may well have encountered other possible subjects of investigation that I shunted aside for one that had greater appeal. Or I might have followed the example of most of my fellow students, who seemed content to take on topics suggested by our supervising professor. I knew relatively little about Plekhanov when I made my choice, but I was certainly aware that he devoted his life to study, writing, and politics, with Marxism his lodestar, in an effort to change his world for the better. It would seem that I chose Plekhanov because I sensed a resonance between his life history and my life plan.

Professor Stem persistently intimated that I had scant attention to Plekhanov's personality, and especially the emotional side. Though I recognized some truth in these intimations, I adduced a whole series of arguments to the contrary, along with justifications for what I had done along this line. For one thing, the sources set severe limits: much the largest block consisted of Plekhanov's formal writings; he had left little material of an autobiographical nature; data on his childhood and youth were extremely sparse. Nevertheless, I had done as much as possible with these materials, and the considerable volume of published correspondence, to bring my subject to life and make his behavior intelligible. My first chapter focused upon the formation of his character and values. Subsequent chapters treated other aspects of his personality as they were brought to light by the circumstances of his experience--his aggressiveness in polemic, his thirst for knowledge, the pronounced rationalistic cast of his thought, his intransigence on theoretical issues and his readiness to stand alone, his willingness to suffer privation for the cause he had made his own, and so on.

Moreover, I had given sustained attention throughout the book to motivation--I was concerned to record not just what he thought and did but also the whys and wherefores. My analyses were usually--perhaps too often--couched in rational-intellectual terms, but not always. Some of the most successful chapters, those on Plekhanov's struggles against revisionism and economism and his early relations with Lenin, so I thought, made the reader aware of irrational elements in his conduct. If I did not consistently address issues of personality, I argued, my episodic consideration of them was effective. One reviewer found the book moving, another colleague told me privately that it was the only work of history she had ever read that made her cry, and a selection from the chapter on Plekhanov's early relations with Lenin had been excerpted as an example of excellent biographical writing. I was willing to admit that I had not drawn the elements together into a fully integrated portrait, but I could point to sections throughout the book which furnished abundant materials for such a portrait.

Finally, the way in which I conceived the work and my literary inclinations and values played a part too. As I had set out to write what was primarily an intellectual biography, my concentration on the development of Plekhanov's many-faceted outlook, and the interaction of ideas and historical developments, was entirely appropriate. Conceiving the book in some measure as a work of art, I strove not to be comprehensive but instead to single out and concentrate on the most revealing episodes, those which produced important, enduring effects. I wished to make the book dramatic, and success in this required sustained movement and the avoidance of rambling digressions. These aims dovetailed with my long-standing concern for

conciseness and the selection of material for inclusion according to strict standards of relevance to the main thrust of the work. I wanted desperately to avoid boring the reader and so produced a comparatively short book where another historian might have written one twice as long.

With each passing session, I sensed increasingly that these protestations were less than fully convincing, that in some degree they were rationalizations. I was compelled to confront the notion that I might have slighted Plekhanov's personality partly because I was ill-equipped to deal with it. Thanks to teaching obligations which required me to do a good deal of careful reading in primary sources of intellectual history, and to the particular attraction such figures as Erasmus, Montaigne, and Camus exercised on me, my tendency to skepticism was reinforced, and I was comparatively well-prepared to deal critically with Plekhanov's ideas. By contrast, I possessed too little knowledge of psychology to deal confidently and comprehensively with his personality. Having made a brief and unprofitable excursion into psychology, and lacking time to go farther, I may have persuaded myself-as a measure of self-defense-that it had little use to my enterprise any way. As I could not in practise ignore Plekhanov's personality, I ended up treating it sporadically, intuitively, and perhaps at times superficially.

This was not the only circumstance that determined my orientation while I wrote the book. Even though the influence of Marxism on my thought diminished during those years, its emphasis on laws, objective processes, and impersonal forces in history still conditioned me to slight the role of personality. I recognized that my interpretations of Plekhanov's clashes with the so-called economists in the last years of the nineteenth century, and with Lenin in 1900, differed from those of earlier writers. I went to considerable effort to demonstrate that what they took to be struggles motivated mainly or exclusively by personal considerations were in fact primarily ideological or principal in character, with personal aspects secondary at most. For better or worse, in this I followed Plekhanov's lead, for he never admitted that clashes of personality, matters of ego, and the like were basic reasons for the endless conflicts that wracked the Russian revolutionary and the international socialist movements. In this he was surely wrong sometimes. Nevertheless, I persist in thinking that my interpretations of the two above-mentioned episodes is correct, and I find unpersuasive the arguments of my collaborator in favor of a primarily psychological explanation of the differences between Plekhanov and Lenin.

Continued pondering, stimulated by the questions and suggestions of my collaborator, has brought to light another possible reason for my underestimation of personal considerations in dealing with Plekhanov's life. His personality seems to have revealed itself most clearly in conflict situations. I believed that I had given due consideration

to the most important of these up through the revolution of 1905. Perhaps mistakenly, I supposed that the clashes of personality I had dealt with had produced no significant net effects, and so I may have assumed that little or nothing was to be gained by pursuing later conflicts in depth. Now I wondered whether my personal tastes might have played a role. The interminable squabbles in which Plekhanov, and the Russian revolutionists generally, became so often entangled were replete with factional spirit, bickering, backbiting, deception, and intrigue. Perhaps because such behavior offended me I chose to think that it could not possibly be productive or important. It may be, too, that I wished to minimize attention to these acrimonious affairs because they often showed Plekhanov in a most unfavorable light--petty, arrogant, overbearing, and unscrupulous. I may have wished to divert my attention from his repellent qualities in order to make possible continuing empathy, as I worked through the long process of completing the biography.

As my study exposed me to various facets of Plekhanov's character I discovered--and this clearly fostered empathy--that we shared a good many intellectual and personality traits. Notable among these are a high regard for learning and rationality, a passion for communication via the spoken and written word, and a striving for lucid, carefully constructed analysis and argument. These qualities bespeak a somewhat over-intellectualized apprehension of life and history and a tendency to underestimate the extent and power of irrational forces. Over-intellectualization had a counterpart in some underdevelopment of the affective side of personality in both parties. Then, there is the will to achieve, a compulsion to use time productively, a penchant for high expectations of oneself and others, and perhaps as a consequence, a comparative lack of close friends and a tendency to be a loner.

A related characteristic--a need to find order in the world--perhaps deserves special consideration. This may have derived from an early involvement in science, with its belief in a fundamentally orderly universe and our capacity to apprehend it by way of rational analysis. My interest in biology at school led me initially to contemplate a career in science; Plekhanov grew up at a time in Russian history when science enjoyed a great vogue, and he spent two years as a student at St. Petersburg's Mining Institute. Each of us at some point was impelled by an overriding concern with social and historical problems to quit preparation for a career in science, but apparently carried over into his new area of activity concepts and modes of analysis and understanding peculiar to science. Persons so disposed would be especially likely to find attractive the Marxian outlook, with its claim to have discovered the laws of history, to have deciphered the workings of society, and to possess predictive powers: in short, to be *the* science of society. Because of its intimate relationship to such ideas, Plekhanov understandably put a high premium on objectivity, believed in its

attainability, and strove to achieve it in his studies of different phenomena of social life, both past and present. Though less consciously and consistently, I too evidently held such ideas--witness my conviction, alluded to above, that my personal circumstances and tastes were irrelevant to my choice of a dissertation subject or the manner in which I should deal with it.

These correspondences, of which I only gradually became aware, facilitated empathy and understanding. But this kind of link may also produce contrary results: if biographers imperceptibly pass from empathy to more or less complete identification with their subjects, they forfeit the detachment essential for at least relatively objective work. Even George Moraitis, the experienced psychiatrist who was involved in the earlier experiment with Carl Pletsch, reported that he "wanted very much to see Nietzsche (the subject of Pletsch's biography) as a person like myself."<sup>7</sup> I may in some measure have fallen victim to the same hazard; although, interestingly, except for one reviewer of the book who professed to see a "whitewash" of one aspect of Plekhanov, the two dozen or so others found no fault on this score.

I certainly recognized in Plekhanov qualities which I found unattractive, as some scattered citations from the book will indicate. Though one gets occasional glimpses of warmth and tenderness, as in his relations with his wife and with his colleagues P. B. Aksel'rod and Vera Zasluch, he impressed many people as "severe," "cold," and "unbending." His sense of intellectual superiority appeared to no few as "intolerable arrogance." "His sharply polemical style, replete with pejoratives, penetrating thrusts, and merciless mockery undoubtedly made many readers recoil." "When he resolved to be disagreeable, Plekhanov had few equals." His "offensive against economism overflowed with rancor .... With highly questionable taste, he published . . . private letters not addressed to him." He called some of his adversaries "political castrates," and dismissed others as "persons who had not yet emerged from their diapers when [he] was already an established revolutionary." In his dispute with A. N. Potresov in 1908, he "displayed that combination of egotism, irascibility, and intolerance that had shocked some of the Russian Social Democrats in earlier intra-party conflicts."<sup>8</sup>

As a result of the experiment under review, I came to realize that although I had called attention to such matters, I might neither have emphasized them sufficiently nor plumbed their consequences. Now I was willing to entertain the idea that these features of Plekhanov's personality might have been more than incidental, might have significantly affected the course of his life and the fate of his ideological system. Thus sensitized, in May 1979 I arrived in Amsterdam to examine the fresh archival material that had recently become available. I also deemed it advisable to reread some of the secondary sources in which Plekhanov figured, and to look at other materials not

available to me before the publication of the book. My new openness enabled me to gain some fresh insight into the connection between Plekhanov's personality and his historical destiny.

For one thing, I gained more of an appreciation of how the military ethos had shaped Plekhanov's personality. My book recorded that his father was a military man, that he evidently had attempted to mold the character of his son, and that Georgii was educated at a military school. I did not pursue the matter in relation to Plekhanov's adult life, but now I perceived this as a damaging omission. A fair amount of evidence suggests that his military background strongly and permanently affected Plekhanov's mentality. He sometimes spoke of himself as a "soldier of the revolution" and the duty this office imposed upon him. He reproached himself for "desertion" when he failed to return to Russia during the revolution of 1905. And in 1918 he brooded over Russia's "dishonorable" abandonment of its allies to sign the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with the Germans. He was wont to say (only half-jokingly), his wife noted: "When the superiors command, I must obey."<sup>9</sup> However, the only living person he seems to have recognized as a superior (until his death in 1895) was Friedrich Engels, whom, significantly he addressed in his correspondence as "My General."<sup>10</sup> Plekhanov seems to have assumed that hierarchy, command, and subordination were normal and necessary in social organization. As he plainly considered no one in the Russian Social-Democratic movement his equal, he no doubt envisaged himself through most of his career as its commanding officer, its general.

If, in a government-constituted military organization, men are compelled to serve and to obey the commands of their superiors (no matter how disagreeable the latter may be), a movement such as Russian Social Democracy had no powers of external compulsion at its disposal, and leadership could be exercised and confirmed only by winning the internal assent of those involved in or potentially sympathetic to the movement. Plekhanov enjoyed great prestige for having laid the foundations of Russian Marxism in his theoretical work and for having launched Russian Social Democracy. But because he so often was personally disagreeable-arrogant, vituperative, spiteful, and petty--he failed abysmally to win a sizeable number of dedicated followers.

As the key figure in the Emancipation of Labor Group, he was undoubtedly responsible for its elitist stance. Though it was a tiny group, whose survival and success depended upon the lively expansion of its numbers, Plekhanov insisted on maintaining both its exclusiveness and its unchallengeable leadership, while relegating those who sympathized with its aims to auxiliary-service roles. Repeatedly, as in 1888 and 1896-99, Plekhanov's inflexibility in the face of pressure from the younger Social Democrats in the emigration for a larger and more significant role in the movement

led to acrimonious ruptures. In the latter case, and it was neither the first nor the last, the younger people were alienated. When in 1903 he provoked another bruising episode, even though he subsequently reversed himself, his "most respectable" followers no longer held him in esteem, according to F. Dan, another party leader.<sup>11</sup> Even where conflict did not erupt, Plekhanov's personality put people off. A perceptive revolutionary observed that "by nature," he was "evidently incapable of destroying that 'pathos of distance' that his fame aroused in us."<sup>12</sup>

Plekhanov was occasionally accused of being so hypercritical that he stunted the growth of fresh literary forces in the movement. In fact he fostered the development of at least two figures who attained prominence in early Soviet philosophy--L. I. Aksel'rod and A. M. Deborin. Significantly, they were both extremely deferential. In correspondence, Deborin addressed Plekhanov as "Dear teacher" and closed by describing himself as "deeply respectful and loyal." He once remarked: "I am accustomed to taking seriously your every word"--and it is plain from her correspondence that Aksel'rod did no less.<sup>13</sup> The emergence of even more notable figures such as Lenin, Trotskii, and Rosa Luxemburg would seem to belie the charge against Plekhanov. Yet it is important to note that, except for two brief intervals, Plekhanov's relations with Lenin were extremely stormy, and in respect to Trotskii and Luxemburg he was perpetually at daggers drawn. All three willingly accorded Plekhanov the deference due him, but at the same time they were people of unusual talent who possessed "self-assurance aggravated by youth."<sup>14</sup> They were not content to be mere subalterns and he--constitutionally incapable of sharing the limelight and sensing in them threats to his supremacy--treated them disdainfully or worse. In a famous encounter with Lenin in 1900, Plekhanov so infuriated the younger man by his obstinate, egotistical, and domineering conduct that Lenin soon after wrote: "Never, never in my life have I regarded any other man with such 'humility'. . . and never before have I been so brutally spurned."<sup>15</sup> Luxemburg's biographer reports her as saying that Plekhanov was the kind of man at whom one wanted to stick out one's tongue.<sup>16</sup> Isaac Deutscher relates how in 1903 Trotskii saw at Lenin's side "the haughty aggressive Plekhanov, who had snubbed him on every occasion for no apparent reason."<sup>17</sup> Worse was to come, for in the following year Plekhanov presented an ultimatum to his colleagues on the editorial board of *Iskra*: either Trotskii should be excluded from collaboration or he, Plekhanov, would quit."<sup>18</sup>

How low Plekhanov might stoop is apparent in his comments on his closest collaborators when he found himself seriously at odds with them. In 1903-04, after he had joined with Lenin to oust P. Aksel'rod and Zasulich from the editorial board of *Iskra*, in private he reportedly called Aksel'rod "a cripple, a man who had become completely valueless to the party."<sup>19</sup> Such conduct evoked a cruel cut from several

erstwhile associates who were Menshevik leaders. In 1912--in response to an attack that Plekhanov made in 1912 on his long-time colleagues and friends Aksel'rod and Zasulich--Dan, Martov, and Martynov wrote that Plekhanov tragically combined in himself "a mind worthy of a Chernyshevskii [a highly venerated nineteenth-century revolutionary figure] and the soul of a Don Basilio [the crafty, conniving specialist in calumny of *The Barber of Seville*]."<sup>20</sup>

Data of this kind--and more could readily be adduced--lead to certain conclusions. Plekhanov once lamented that where there were two Russians one was apt to find three parties, but his own conduct helped to produce the very thing he deplored. His personality and behavior promoted factionalism within Russian Social Democracy, causing its severely limited resources to be diverted from revolutionary struggle to fratricidal warfare. At one level, it was a matter of inability to satisfy the modest aspirations of younger comrades, some of whom responded by setting up rival organizations and publications. One such person, Lev Iogiches, went so far as to abandon the Russian for the Polish movement, becoming one of its leaders.<sup>21</sup> He and his comrade-lover, Rosa Luxemburg, were so hostile to Plekhanov, and vice versa, that despite their common interests the two parties cooperated little. Something of Plekhanov's style communicated itself to Lenin and others and may at least partly account for the record of endless sniping, abuse, and organizational splitting so characteristic of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party. At another level, it is apparent that Plekhanov was incapable of sustained collaboration with anyone who was not prepared to put up with his domineering behavior. As regards his ideological system, which began to crumble in 1905, he was too proud and self-important to admit that he might have been wrong or could learn from others. Again and again he engaged in maneuvers which led to his self-isolation. Accordingly, his aspirations were frustrated, he was politically ineffective, and he ended up as a general without an army.

My recent effort to explore my relationship to Plekhanov has, I believe, enhanced my understanding of him, made me more self-aware, and brought to light some of the apparently countless psychological transactions between us. Had these explorations been carried on earlier, with a qualified collaborator, I am reasonably confident that I would have produced a better book. It would have presented a better balanced, and perhaps a more integrated portrait, of Plekhanov's personality. I might also have more effectively shown how his personal qualities affected his thought, shaped his relationships with others, and helped to determine his life history. All this might have made for a more richly textured biography, .but I do not think that the main contours of the work would have been fundamentally altered. Perhaps I am mistaken, however, for this experiment has also given me some appreciation of the myriad guises in which

psychological defensiveness may manifest itself.

<sup>1</sup>This paper was delivered to the Conference on Slavic and East European History meeting of the American Historical Association, Atlanta, Georgia, 1975. It figures as part of my article "Recollections of a Life in Russian History," *Russian Review*, 17, No. 1 (1990).

<sup>2</sup>Samuel H. Baron, *The Travels of Olearius*; idem, "The Origins of Seventeenth-Century Moscow's Nemeckaja Sloboda," *California Slavic Studies*, 5 (1970).

<sup>3</sup>This constitutes three volumes (XX-XXII) of Plekhanov's *Sochineniia*.

<sup>4</sup>The first of them was entitled "The Weber Thesis and the Failure of Capitalist Development in 'Early Modern' Russia." This essay and six others on related subjects are included in Baron, *Muscovite Russia: Collected Essays*.

<sup>5</sup>A brief outline of the method was presented in Pletsch and Moraitis, "A Psychoanalytic Contribution to Method in Biography," p. 72-74. See also Moraitis, "A Psychoanalyst's journey into a Historian's World: An Experiment in Collaboration."

<sup>6</sup>I am deeply indebted to Professor Stem, a member of the Department of Political Science at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and a graduate of the University of North Carolina-Duke Psychoanalytical Program, for his patience, sensitivity, and skill as collaborator in this enterprise.

<sup>7</sup>Moraitis, "A Psychoanalyst's journey," p. 54.

<sup>8</sup>Baron, *Plekhanov*, pp. 129-130, 134-35, 201, 213, 283n.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 276; R. M. Plekhanova, "God na rodine," *Plekhanov Archive*, International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam, pp. 30, 34.

<sup>10</sup>He had begun by addressing Engels: "Dear Teacher." After the older man asked to be called "simply Engels," Plekhanov shifted to "Dear Citizen Engels," and subsequently to "My General" or "Dear General." *Perepiska K. Marksa i F Engel'sa s russkimi politicheskimi deiatel'iami*, pp. 265-67, 270, 273, 277, 279, 283, 285. The German Social-Democrats often referred to Engels as "the general," and Plekhanov may simply have borrowed that usage. Nevertheless, he showed remarkable reverence and humility in his relations with the old man.

<sup>11</sup>Quoted in Ascher, *Pavel Axelrod and the Development of Menshevism*, p.

193. The preceding items in this paragraph are treated in Baron, *Plekhanov*.

<sup>12</sup> P. A. Garvi, *Vosporninaniia sotsial-demokrata*, p. 418.

<sup>13</sup> *Filosofsko-literaturnoe nasledie G. V Plekhanova*, I, 219-20, III, 287; Plekhanov, *Literaturnoe Nasledie G. V Plekhanova*, I, 292, 295, 269; V 309. Lenin may have exaggerated when he wrote of L. I. Aksel'rod's "blind worship" of Plekhanov, but not much. See V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1927-?), IV, 27.

<sup>14</sup> The phrase is Nettl's in Rosa *Luxemburg*, I, 68. His accompanying suggestion that Plekhanov also disliked Trotskii because he was a Jew is hardly to be credited. Plekhanov's wife was a Jew.

<sup>15</sup> Lenin, *Collected Works*, IV, 29.

<sup>16</sup> Nettl, *Luxemburg*, I, 22.

<sup>17</sup> Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed*, p. 83.

<sup>18</sup> Pis'ma P. B. Aksel'roda i lu. O. Martova, p. 101.

<sup>19</sup> Ascher, *Axelrod*, p. 204.

<sup>20</sup> *Otkrytoe pis'mo P. B. Aksel'rodu i V I. Zasulich*, p. 7.

<sup>21</sup> Nettl, *Luxemburg*, I, 65-69.