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Lutz Hafner

*Russian Review*, Volume 50, Issue 3 (Jul., 1991), 324-344.

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*Russian Review*

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# The Assassination of Count Mirbach and the “July Uprising” of the Left Socialist Revolutionaries in Moscow, 1918

LUTZ HÄFNER

The Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets opened on 4 July 1918 amidst an extremely complicated domestic and foreign political situation. Although the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk had been signed on 3 March, the war continued. In Finland, where the treaty had pledged the Bolsheviks to noninterference, German troops supported the “White Finns” in suppressing the revolution. In the Ukraine a puppet regime under P. P. Skoropadsky had been established with German help. The forces of the Central Powers were advancing via the Ukrainian frontier in the direction of Rostov-on-the-Don, while Turkish and German troops were gaining ground in the Transcaucasus. In March Allied forces disembarked in Murmansk and in April in the Far East. At the same time, the domestic situation reached a stage that Vladimir Brovkin has called “frontline civil war.”<sup>1</sup> By the end of May, fights were breaking out between Russians and units of the Czech Legion; in June anti-Bolshevik governments were established in Samara and Omsk.

The coalition government of Bolsheviks and Left Socialist Revolutionaries (Left SRs), to this day the only coalition government in Soviet Russia, collapsed over the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. The Left SRs had broken apart from the Socialist Revolutionary Party after the Second Congress of Soviets, forming their own party in December 1917, the same month that they entered the Council of People’s Commissars. Although they rejected the treaty and resigned from the government at the Fourth Congress of Soviets in mid-March 1918, this did not mean a final breach in the relationship between the former coalition partners. Both parties continued to cooperate in many soviets throughout the country.

While the number of Bolshevik party members and their influence in the soviets declined from the spring of 1918, the Left SRs enjoyed an increasing popular-

<sup>1</sup> Vladimir Brovkin, “The Mensheviks’ Political Comeback: The Elections to the Provincial City Soviets in Spring 1918,” *Russian Review* 42 (January 1983): 38.

ity.<sup>2</sup> From April to the end of June 1918, membership in the Left SR party grew from about sixty thousand to approximately one hundred thousand members.<sup>3</sup> In contrast to the Bolsheviks the Left SRs rejected a dictatorship of the proletariat, but favored the rule of all toiling people, the peasants, workers, and "intelligentsia." Above all, the land socialization law that the Left SRs designed earned them great popularity among the peasantry. But the Left SRs could also rely on significant worker support.<sup>4</sup> The fact that they rejected the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was no obstacle to their popularity. In numerous village, district, and county soviets the Left SRs had a majority. The same is true for some provincial soviets, such as those in Olonets and Kazan.

Not until May 1918 did the relationship between the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs, the last major party not in open opposition to the government, deteriorate considerably.<sup>5</sup> Apart from foreign policy problems, major disagreements emerged in domestic politics. The Bolsheviks' decision to expel the Menshevik and SR opposition from the soviets particularly outraged the Left SRs, but so did the disbanding of freely elected soviets in which the Bolsheviks had failed to gain a majority, the forcible requisitioning of grain from the peasants, and the establishment of the committees of the village poor.

Above all, it was Bolshevik agricultural policy designed to carry the class struggle into the village and to break the Left SRs' influence among the peasantry that forced the Left SRs into opposition.<sup>6</sup> They severely attacked the decree of mid-May on the food-supply system, as well as a supplementary decree of 27 May that gave government-appointed commissars "unlimited dictatorial authority," including the power to dissolve any local soviets which failed to implement the orders of food-supply authorities. Completing these measures was the decree of 11 June 1918 on the "Committees of the Village Poor."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 1-50; Brovkin, *The Mensheviks after October: Socialist Opposition and the Rise of the Bolshevik Dictatorship* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 246; K. V. Gusev and Kh. A. Eritsian, *Ot soglashatel'stva k kontrrevoliutsii: (Ocherki istorii politicheskogo bankrotstva i gibeli partii sotsialistov-revoliutsionerov)* (Moscow, 1968), 280f., 438-47; K. V. Gusev, *Partiia eserov: ot melkoburzhuznogo revoliutsionarizma k kontrrevoliutsii* (Moscow, 1975), 244f.; L. M. Spirin, *Klassy i partii v grazhdanskoi voine v Rossii* (Moscow, 1968), 117f.

<sup>3</sup> *Golos trudovogo krest'ianstva*, 1 May 1918, 3; *Znamia truda*, Organ Tsentral'nogo Komiteta Partii levyykh Sotsialistov-Revoliutsionerov, 30 April 1918, 3; I. N. Steinberg Archive, box 56, F 1004 C, p. 1, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York City (hereafter cited Steinberg Archive). In contrast, Spirin and Ionkina mention eighty thousand members for June 1918. See Spirin, *Klassy*, 165, and idem, *Krakh odnoi avantiury, (miatezh levyykh eserov v Moskve 6-7 iul'ia 1918 g.)* (Moscow, 1971), 20; and T. D. Ionkina, *Vserossiiskie s'ezdy Sovetov v pervye gody proletarskoi diktatury* (Moscow, 1974), 143.

<sup>4</sup> David Mandel, *The Petrograd Workers and the Soviet Seizure of Power: From the July Days 1917 to July 1918* (Houndmills, England, 1984), 339.

<sup>5</sup> *Piatyi Vserossiiskii s'ezd Sovetov Rabochikh, Krest'ianskikh, Soldatskikh i Kazach'ikh Deputatov, stenograficheskii otchet, Moskva, 4-10 iul'ia 1918 g.* (Moscow, 1918), 44f.; K. T. Sverdlova, *Iakov Mikhailovich Sverdlov* (Moscow, 1957), 491.

<sup>6</sup> "Die Juliereignisse 1918," 4, Steinberg Archive, box 55, F 989; James Bunyan, ed., *Intervention, Civil War, and Communism in Russia, April-December 1918: Documents and Materials* (Baltimore, 1936), 459; V. V. Kuchma, "Iz istorii zakliuchitel'nogo etapa soglasheniia bol'shevikov s levymi eserami (mart-iul' 1918 g.)," *Trudy vysshei shkoly MVD SSSR* 1 (1969): 29.

<sup>7</sup> *Znamia truda*, 29 May 1918, 3; *Protokoly zasedanii Vserossiiskago Tsentral'nago Ispolnuel'nago Komiteta 4-go sozyva (stenograficheskii otchet)* (Moscow, 1920), 321-28, 332f., 428; A. A. Izmailovich,

Mensheviks and SRs supported the Left SRs in their fight against Communist agricultural policy, yet on 14 June both these parties were expelled from the Soviet parliament, the VTsIK (Central Executive Committee), and subsequently, from many provincial soviets. Left SR Central Committee member V. A. Karelin branded the expulsion bill illegal, arguing that the Mensheviks and SRs had been sent to the VTsIK by the All-Russian Congress of Soviets and that only the next congress could legitimately withdraw their representation. Moreover, the Bolsheviks had no right to pose as defenders of the soviets against the alleged counterrevolution of SRs and Mensheviks when they themselves had been disbanding the peasants' soviets and replacing them with committees of the village poor.<sup>8</sup>

This was the situation at the opening of the Fifth Congress of Soviets, which would have to decide the future course of domestic and foreign affairs. Naturally, the atmosphere was full of tension. The Left SRs' hopes to win a majority of delegates and to cooperate with the "Left Communists" had come to nought.<sup>9</sup> The best orator among the Left SRs, B. D. Kamkov, opened the congress with a fierce rhetorical attack upon Soviet foreign policy and thundered—while addressing the Bolsheviks and the German envoy, Count Wilhelm von Mirbach-Harff, who was attending the congress as a guest—that it was impossible for the Ukrainian and Russian workers and soldiers "to tolerate the German marauders and hangmen, to be accomplices of those villains and plunderers who have arrived here." G. E. Zinoviev answered on behalf of the Bolsheviks: "We say to you that if this is a challenge to battle we accept it. I raise the question whether you will pick up the gauntlet."<sup>10</sup> But the Left SRs were indeed ready to pick up the gauntlet. The policies of these two parties being irreconcilable, a showdown, as many historians are claiming today, was only a matter of time, and this imminent showdown was to be the "uprising" in Moscow.<sup>11</sup>

On 6 July 1918, at about 2:15 P.M., two members of the Left SR party who were also officials of the Cheka, Ia. G. Bliumkin and N. A. Andreev, arrived at the German Legation in Moscow and, under the pretext of discussing "a personal matter," asked to see the German envoy. They showed a letter of introduction, supposedly signed by the head of the Cheka, F. E. Dzerzhinskii, to Counsellor Dr. K. Riezler, who was in charge of political affairs.<sup>12</sup> Having consented to meet the Cheka representatives, Count Mirbach joined them. During the ensuing conversation—at about 2:50 P.M.—

*Posleoktiabr'skiiia oshibki* (Moscow, 1918), 23; M. V. Spirina, *Krakh melkoburzhuznoi kontseptsii sotsializma eserov* (Moscow, 1987), 142.

<sup>8</sup> *Protokoly zasedanii VTsIK*, 428.

<sup>9</sup> *Svoboda Rossii*, 3 July 1918, 2.

<sup>10</sup> *Piatyi Vserossiiskii s"ezd*, 24, 27.

<sup>11</sup> Richard K. Debo, *Revolution and Survival: The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia, 1917-18* (Toronto, 1979), 312.

<sup>12</sup> P. Makintsian, ed., *Krasnaia kniga V.Ch.K.*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1920), 211f. (137), 215 (144) (hereafter cited *KKVChK*). The pagination of the original is in parentheses as the pagination of the typewritten copies available in the West differs. The first page number refers to the pagination of the microfilm available in the New York Public Library. The microfilm was duplicated on the basis of the copy in the Hoover Library. See also Ia. Peters, "Vospominaniia o rabote v VChK v pervyi god revoliutsii," *Byloe* (Paris) 2 (1933): 104.

Bliumkin drew a revolver and shot at point-blank range at Count Mirbach, Dr. Riezler, and the interpreter, Lt. Mueller, but failed to injure any of them. Riezler and Mueller took shelter under a large table, whereas Mirbach, who tried to escape, was then shot by Andreev. The assassins fled, leaving behind their bags, their evidently forged credentials, and Bliumkin's cap; they covered their retreat by throwing two bombs and disappeared in a car that was waiting for them in front of the legation.<sup>13</sup>

The assassins drove straight to the building of a Cheka unit under the command of Left SR D. I. Popov, where at the time the Central Committee of the Left SR party was in session. At about 5:00 P.M., Dzerzhinskii, who had been given responsibility for investigating the assassination, followed a lead as to the murderers' likely whereabouts and went to the building in order to "arrest Bliumkin and those who concealed him."<sup>14</sup> Dzerzhinskii immediately started a search for Bliumkin and thereby came across the Left SR Central Committee. After Central Committee members P. P. Prosh'ian and V. A. Karelin told him that Mirbach had been assassinated by order of their Central Committee, Dzerzhinskii placed them under arrest as hostages against possible German demands. Because the Left SRs were in the majority, however, they had little difficulty disarming and arresting Dzerzhinskii and the accompanying Chekists.<sup>15</sup>

After that things happened quickly. M. A. Spiridonova went to the Soviet Congress in order to spread the news about the assassination of Mirbach. Shortly after her arrival, however, the Bolsheviks put under guard the whole Left SR faction of approximately 450 people.<sup>16</sup> Popov reacted by ordering some detachments to undertake reconnaissance in the streets of Moscow.<sup>17</sup> For a short time the

<sup>13</sup> *KKVChK*, 217 (145), 220 (147), 343f. (212f.), 374f. (227f.); Karl v. Bothmer, *Mit Graf Mirbach in Moskau: Tagebuch-Aufzeichnungen und Aktenstücke vom 19. April bis 24. August 1918* (Tübingen, 1922), 73; Kurt Riezler, *Tagebücher, Aufsätze, Dokumente*, ed. Karl Dietrich Erdmann, *Deutsche Geschichtsquellen des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, vol. 48 (Göttingen, 1972), 468, 713f., 716; Winfried Baumgart, ed., *Von Brest-Litovsk zur Deutschen Novemberrevolution: Aus den Tagebüchern, Briefen und Aufzeichnungen von Alfons Paquet, Wilhelm Groener und Albert Hopmann, März bis November 1918*, *Deutsche Geschichtsquellen des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, vol. 47 (Göttingen, 1971), 56. For a detailed description of the assassination, see George Katkov, "The Assassination of Count Mirbach," *St. Anthony's Papers* 12 (Soviet Affairs, 3) (1962): 53-93.

<sup>14</sup> *KKVChK*, 302 (192).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 227 (151), 254 (167), 257 (168), 303f. (192f.), 324 (202), 347 (214); *Izvestiia*, 8 July 1918, 3. Dzerzhinskii disavowed the allegation of several Left SRs that he wanted to arrest two Central Committee members as hostages.

<sup>16</sup> *KKVChK*, 230 (153), 235 (155); See *Izvestiia*, 10 July 1918, 6.

<sup>17</sup> Figures about the strength of the forces the Left SRs had at their disposal vary considerably. Soviet historiography normally gives—on the basis of N. Muralov's and N. Podvoiskii's data—the following figures: 1,800 infantrymen, 80 cavalry, 6 or 8 cannon, 48 MGs and 4 armored cars. See *KKVChK*, 282 (181). V. Vladimirova ("Levyk esery v 1917-1918 g.g.," *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia* 4 [1927]: 125) thinks these figures are exaggerated. In her opinion no more than a thousand men were actively involved. L. M. Spirin ("Razgrom miatezha levykh eserov v Moskve 6-7 iulia 1918 g.," *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal* 10, no. 8 [1968]: 41f), who talks of 1,300 Left SRs, and I. I. Mints (*God 1918-i* [Moscow, 1982], 409) reach similar conclusions: Popov's unit had eight hundred men. Furthermore, the Left SRs had sent for another four hundred men from Petrograd and Tula. Mints, however, fails to mention that these did not arrive in Moscow. The Left SRs themselves also gave different figures about their strength: Popov said he had had eight hundred men [*KKVChK*, 327 (203)]; whereas Sablin notes only six hundred men, of whom as few as two to three hundred were involved in the fighting. See *KKVChK*, 329 (205), 348 (214).

Left SRs controlled the Cheka headquarters and the main telegraph office.<sup>18</sup> From the latter they sent several messages to all parts of Russia, the common feature of which was the overview they provided of the assassination and the Left SRs' motivation for it. They asked the people to defend the revolution and to fight against counterrevolution and imperialism. The Left SRs included no direct anti-Bolshevik slogans in these cables. As the first cable of the Left SR Central Committee to the workers and soldiers demonstrates, they did not call for a war against the Bolsheviks or for the overthrow of the government, but explicitly criticized the Bolsheviks only for signing the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk:

Count Mirbach, torturer of the Russian toilers, friend and favorite of [the Emperor] Wilhelm, has been killed by the avenging hand of a revolutionary in accordance with the resolution of the Central Committee of the Left SR Party. German spies and traitors demand the death of the Left SRs. The ruling group of Bolsheviks, fearing undesirable consequences for themselves, continue to obey the orders of German hangmen.<sup>19</sup> [In this and a few subsequent long quotations, incidental phrases have in some cases been left out.]

Although parts of the Moscow garrison sympathized with the Left SRs' actions or at least remained neutral, by the early morning of 7 July the Bolsheviks had gathered enough forces, mainly Latvians under the command of I. I. Vatsetis, to launch an attack against the Left SRs.<sup>20</sup> The Left SRs had built barricades and dug trenches in the streets, but the Latvian troops advanced nevertheless, with some casualties on both sides.<sup>21</sup> At about 10:00 A.M. they set up their artillery only two hundred yards in front of the building where Popov's unit was located. After an unsuccessful Left SR attempt to negotiate with the Bolsheviks in the hope of avoiding further bloodshed, the Latvians opened fire.<sup>22</sup> The very first salvos hit

<sup>18</sup> *KKVChK*, 223–36 (148–55), 254–57 (167f.); *Izvestiia*, 8 July 1918, 3f.

<sup>19</sup> *KKVChK*, 223f. (148f.); Bunyan, *Intervention*, 215f.

<sup>20</sup> *KKVChK*, 257–76 (168–78); Evan Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War* (Boston, 1987), 41.

<sup>21</sup> *KKVChK*, 282 (181), 311 (195f.), 327 (204), 352 (216); "Diary of Madame Patouillet: October, 1916–August, 1918," 408, Archives of the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, Stanford, California (hereafter cited Hoover Archives); V. Parfenov, *Razгром "levykh" eserov* (Moscow, 1940), 48; G. Ustinov, *Krushenie partii levykh "es-erov;" ro* (Moscow, 1918), 20; N. Nefedov, "V ogne vosstaniia," in *Zheleznyi zanaves* (New York, 1978), 77f.; E. Iaroslavskii, *Trekhsviatitel'skaia bogoroditsa Mariia* (Moscow, 1919), 2; I. I. Vatsetis, "Miatezh levykh eserov v iul'e 1918 goda," in *Latyshskie strelki v bor'be za Sovetskuiu vlast' v 1917–1920 gg., vospominaniia i dokumenty* (Riga, 1962), 68f.; idem, "U Lenina v iul'skie dni 1918 goda," in *Lenin v vospominaniakh revoliutsionerov Latvii* (Riga, 1969), 199; idem, "Vystuplenie levykh eserov v Moskve (vospominaniia)," *Voina i revoliutsiia*, nos. 10–11 (1927): 105; F. A. Riekst [Riekstyn'], "Iz boevogo puti 2-go latyshskogo strelkogo sovet'skogo polka," in *Latyshskie strelki*, 148; B. A. Toman, "V iul'skie dni vosemnadsatogo," *Kommunist Sovetskoi Latvii*, no. 6 (1968): 44; idem, "Stranitsa iz istorii latyshskikh strelkov: Likvidatsiia miatezha levykh eserov v Moskve 6–7 iulia 1918 g.," *Trudy Moskovskogo istoriko-arkhivnogo instituta* 16 (1961): 189.

<sup>22</sup> *KKVChK*, 271f. (176f.), 283 (182), 317–20 (199f.); *Nash vek*, 9 July 1918, 2; D. L. Golinkov, *Krushenie antisovetskogo podpol'ia v SSSR*, 2d rev. ed. (Moscow, 1978), 169; Ustinov, *Krushenie partii levykh "eserov"*, 20; I. I. Vatsetis, "Grazhdanskaia voina, 1918 god," *Pamiat'*, 2 (Moscow, 1977; Paris, 1979), 13, 32, 34f.; idem, "Miatezh," 70.

the Left SR headquarters, after which the Left SR Central Committee left the building at once. By about 2:00 P.M. the "uprising" was crushed and the Left SRs took flight.

How did contemporaries evaluate the events of July 1918? Under the direct impression of the events, numerous Bolsheviks, especially those personally involved, left accounts. An official communiqué published as early as 8 July spoke of a "senseless and dishonest adventure" and a "crazy revolt of the so-called Left SRs."<sup>23</sup> On 9 July, at the first session of the Soviet Congress after the "uprising," L. D. Trotsky expressed himself in similar terms:

Even to those among us who were inclined to look with benevolent, patient tolerance upon the behavior of the Left SR Party as such, to those who said: "It must be individual madmen and criminals who have committed this terroristic act, for it is impossible that the Central Committee of the Party can be mixed up in it"—even to them, it was already plain one hour, half an hour, after the murder of Mirbach that this was a real conspiracy, a counterrevolutionary revolt organized under the banner of the Central Committee of the Left SR Party.<sup>24</sup>

In effect, Trotsky accused the Left SRs of treason, claiming that they wanted to draw Russia into a new war against Germany and to overthrow the Soviet government. In a Bolshevik-sponsored resolution the Soviet Congress made the same accusations, arguing that Mirbach's assassination was "part of a conspiracy to transfer power by means of an armed uprising from the hands of the workers' and peasants' soviets to those of a party of adventurers that tries at any cost to draw Russia into a war—with the consent of the Russian counterrevolutionary bourgeoisie and the Anglo-French imperialists."<sup>25</sup>

Were the Bolsheviks justified in these reproaches or did they go too far? Since the interrogations of witnesses did not confirm the accusations, these questions may well have occurred to P. Stuchka, V. Kingisepp, and Ia. Sheinkman, the three members of the "Special Fact-Finding Committee" that the Soviet government set up as early as 7 July 1918.<sup>26</sup> The Bolsheviks' view seemed to be supported only by a telegram the Left SRs sent on 6 July to the telegraph workers, which ordered that "all cables with Lenin's, Trotsky's and Sverdlov's signatures as well as all cables from counterrevolutionaries which are dangerous to Soviet power in general and to

<sup>23</sup> *Izvestiia*, 8 July 1918, 1. See a similar comment by Lenin in V. I. Lenin, *Sochineniia*, 2d rev. ed., vol. 23 (Moscow, 1930), 388.

<sup>24</sup> L. D. Trotsky, *Sochineniia*, vol. 17 (Moscow, 1926), pt. 1, pp. 456f.; *Piatyi Vserossiiskii s'ezd*, 108f. See the similar results of the fact-finding committee, *KKVChK*, 292f. (187f.); G. Zinov'ev and Trotsky, *O miatazhe levyykh s.-r.* (Petrograd, 1918), 3.

<sup>25</sup> *Piatyi Vserossiiskii s'ezd*, 132, 208; *Izvestiia*, 10 July 1918, 5. Similar wording is also found in the proclamation of 7 July 1918 to all district soviets of workers' deputies, *KKVChK*, 277ff. (179f.), 291 (186). See also *Pravda*, 9 July 1918, 3; 13 July 1918, 3; and 18 July 1918, 4.

<sup>26</sup> *Golos trudovogo krest'ianstva*, 10 July 1918, 1; *Izvestiia*, 8 July 1918, 1; *Pravda*, 9 July 1918, 1; *KKVChK*, 290 (186). See also D. Rudnev and S. Tsybov, "Sledovatel' respublikii," *Volga*, no. 5 (1967): 105.

the *Left SR Party currently in power* in particular are to be withheld.”<sup>27</sup> But evidence indicates that the SR Maximalist V. V. Likhobadin, a member of the executive committee of the post and telegraph union, was solely responsible for this cable and that the Left SR Central Committee had nothing to do with it. On 15 July, however, the Bolsheviks finally found a document, the minutes of the Left SR Central Committee meeting of 24 June, that seemed to confirm the Bolshevik picture:

The Central Committee of the Left SR Party, having examined the present political situation of the republic, resolves that in the interests of the Russian as well as of the international revolution, an immediate end must be put to the so-called “breathing space” created by the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. The Central Committee believes it to be both possible and practical to organize a series of terrorist acts against the leading representatives of German imperialism. At the same time—in order to carry out its decisions—the Central Committee of the Left SR Party resolves to mobilize all reliable armed forces and to take extreme measures to make the toiling peasantry and the working class take part in the *uprising* and actively support the party in its proceedings. . . . Moreover it was decided to prepare all local party organizations for the current party tactics by encouraging them to take vigorous action against the present policy of the Council of People’s Commissars. . . . It was resolved that acts of terrorism should start after a signal from Moscow. . . . In order to distribute the forces of the party and to carry out this plan the Central Committee is organizing a board of three persons (Spiridonova, Golubovskii and Maiorov). In view of the fact that, contrary to the wishes of the party, this may involve a collision with the Bolsheviks, the Central Committee makes the following declaration: “We regard our policy as an attack on the present policy of the Soviet government, not as an attack on the Bolsheviks themselves. As it is possible that the latter may take aggressive counteraction against our party, we are determined, if necessary, to defend the position we have taken with force of arms. In order to prevent the party from being exploited by counterrevolutionary elements, it is resolved that our new policy be stated clearly and openly, so that an international social revolutionary policy may subsequently be inaugurated in Soviet Russia.”<sup>28</sup>

Despite the disclaimers, the single use of the term “uprising” confirmed for the Bolsheviks their assessment of the events; “uprising” became the official Bolshevik description. Accordingly, they branded the July episode a “mutiny against Soviet power” and a “treacherous adventure.”<sup>29</sup> Not only did the expression “uprising”

<sup>27</sup> *KKVChK*, 253f. (167f.), emphasis added. See also *Vestnik putei soobshcheniia*, nos. 7–8 (1918): 40; *Golos trudovogo krest'iansva*, 11 July 1918, 4; Vladimirova, “Levye esery,” 122; P. Mal'kov, *Zapiski komendanta Moskovskogo Kremliia* (Moscow, 1959), 222; and *Piatyi sozyv VTsIK Sovetov Rabochikh, Krest'ianskikh, Kazach'ikh i Krasnoarm. Deputatov* (Moscow, 1919), 58.

<sup>28</sup> *KKVChK*, 197f. (129f.), emphasis added. See also *Pravda*, 18 July 1918, 3; *Krasnaia armia*, 18 July 1918, 2, and 19 July 1918, 2; Isaac Steinberg, *Spiridonova: Revolutionary Terrorist*, trans. and ed. G. David and E. Mosbacher, reprint ed. (Freeport, NY, 1971), 208ff.; Adasia Steinberg, *The Left Social-Revolutionaries and the October Revolution: A Manuscript Essay* [1937], 90; *Das Sozialistische Rußland: (Die Ereignisse vom Juli 1918)* (Genf, 1918), 69f.; *Znamia bor'by*, Organ gruppy raionnoi organizatsii partii levyykh Sotsialistov-Revoliutsionerov (Internatsionalistov) g. Moskvy, 30 July 1918, 2.

<sup>29</sup> *Pravda*, 9 July 1918, 1, 3. See also *ibid.*, 23 July 1918, 1.



appear later in several articles and official documents, it also gained acceptance from elements of the political opposition—for example, the SR-Maximalists, the Social-Democratic Internationalists, and the Mensheviks.<sup>30</sup>

In an obvious attempt to split the Left SR Party, the Bolsheviks quickly differentiated between the Left SR leadership and the remainder of the party and soon proclaimed the innocence of the latter—Trotsky described 98 percent of the members as blameless.<sup>31</sup> The party leadership, in contrast, was "a crowd of adventurers" or even "whites," who lacked affinity with the masses.<sup>32</sup>

Although these judgments have remained predominant in Soviet historiography, early Soviet assessments still exhibited a few differences.<sup>33</sup> G. Ustinov, for instance, spoke of "treason, not yet known in universal history," whereas Lenin's right-hand man, V. D. Bonch-Bruевич, called the events a "political farce" and "tragicomedy."<sup>34</sup> The expressions "anti-Soviet," "counter-revolutionary," and "adventurous" occur most frequently; rarer is the term "white-guard."<sup>35</sup> Few Bolshevik

<sup>30</sup> Lenin, *Sochineniia*, 4th ed., vol. 44 (Moscow, 1967), 67; "Likvidatsiia levoeserovskogo miatezha v Moskve v 1918 godu," *Krasnyi arkhiv* 4, no. 101 (1940): 103; *Piatyi Vserossiiskii s"ezd*, p. 122 (SR-Maximalist Svetlov); *ibid.*, p. 123 (SR-Internationalist Lindov); *Nash vek*, 9 July 1918, 2; *Izvestiia*, 10 July 1918, 4f.; *ibid.*, 8 July 1918, 5; *Pravda*, 9 July 1918, 3 (Menshevik Binshtok). More critical of the measures taken by the Bolsheviks were Lozovskii, *Piatyi Vserossiiskii s"ezd*, 119f.; *Izvestiia*, 10 July 1918, 4; Gurevich, *Pravda*, 9 July 1918, 3; and Lagovier, *Osvobozhdenie truda*, Organ Rossiiskoi Sotsial-Demokraticheskoi Rabochei Partii (revoliutsionnykh internatsionalistov), 15 July 1918, 2.

<sup>31</sup> Trotsky, *Sochineniia* vol. 17, pt. 1. p. 469. With this he quoted Left SR Tolkachev's speech at the Moscow Soviet. See *Izvestiia*, 9 July 1918, 2; *Nash vek*, 10 July 1918, 3; and *Noviia zhizn'*, 10 July 1918, 1. The Left SR A. Egorov spoke of 99 percent of the party members. See *Golos trudovogo krest'ianstva*, 16 July 1918, 2; *Pravda*, 9 July 1918, 2, 4 and *ibid.*, 10 July 1918, 1.

<sup>32</sup> *Pravda*, 9 July 1918, 1. See also *ibid.*, 9 July 1918, 4, and 10 July 1918, 4; *Krasnaia gazeta*, Izdanie Petrogradskogo Soveta Rabochikh i Soldatskikh Deputatov (vechernii vypusk), 9 July 1918, 1; *Izvestiia*, 8 July 1918, 1, and *ibid.*, 10 July 1918, 1; and Zinov'ev and Trotsky, *O miatezhe*, 16.

<sup>33</sup> There is one recent exception questioning the findings of Soviet historiography. See V. Golovanov, "Levyie esery: Sorvannyi urok," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 18 July 1990, 13.

<sup>34</sup> Ustinov, *Krushenie partii levykh "eserov"*, 18; V. D. Bonch-Bruевич, *Ubiistvo germanskogo posla Mirbakh'a i vostanie levykh eserov, (po lichnym vospominaniiam)* (Moscow, 1927), 17, 35.

<sup>35</sup> Only a representative sampling of references is given here. For the expression "anti-Soviet" see I. Fridman, "Bor'ba s eserami i anarkhistami," in *Osoboe zadanie* (Moscow, 1968), 97; E. G. Gimpel'son, "Iz istorii obrazovaniia odnopartiinnoi sistemy v SSSR," *Voprosy istorii*, no. 11 (1965): 18; K. V. Gusev, "Krakh melkoburzhuznykh partii v SSSR," *Novoe v zhizni, nauke i tekhnike*, Seriia 1: Istorii, nos. 9–10 (1966): 43 passim; Gusev and V. A. Polushkina, *Strategiia i taktika bol'shevikov v otnoshenii neproletarskikh partii* (Moscow, 1983), 60; V. Parfenov, "Likvidatsiia miatezha 'levykh' eserov v Moskve v iuile 1918 goda," *Istoricheskii zhurnal* 8, no. 6 (1938): 33; A. I. Razgov, "Pravitel'stvennyi blok bol'shevikov i levykh eserov (oktiabr' 1917 g.-ianvar' 1918 g.)," *Istoricheskie zapiski* 117 (1989): 150; Iu. I. Shestak, "Nekotorye voprosy taktiki bol'shevikov po otnosheniiu k melkoburzhuznym partiiam (na primere partii 'narodnikov-kommunistov')," in *Put' bor'by i pobed, sbornik statei po voprosam istorii KPSS*, part 1 (Moscow, 1971), 145; D. S. Tochenyi, "Raspad levoeserovskikh organizatsii v Povolzh'e," *Nauchnye trudy Kuibyshevskogo gosudarstvennogo pedagogicheskogo instituta imeni V. V. Kuibysheva*, no. 165 (1975): 59; I. Voronkov, "Razгром miatezha 'levykh' eserov v 1918 godu," *Leninskii put'*, nos. 7–8 (1940): 54, 59.

For the term "counter-revolutionary," see Gusev, *Krakh partii levykh eserov* (Moscow, 1963), 215; A. Koroleva, "Levyie esery i khlebnaia monopoliiia," *Bor'ba klassov* 5, no. 10 (1935): 62; V. V. Kuchma, "V. I. Lenin o teoreticheskikh osnovakh soglashiia bol'shevikov s levymi eserami," in *Bessmertnye Leninskie idei: Iubileinyi vypusk trudov k 100-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia V.I. Lenina* (Volgograd, 1970), 180; N. Muralov, "Vstrechi s Il'ichem na voennoi rabote," *Sputnik politrabotnika* 7 (1926): 31; N. N. Popov, *Melkoburzhuznye antisovetskie partii, (shest' lektsiu)*, 2d rev. ed. (Moscow, 1924), 72; Iu. I.

and Soviet historians can be excluded from this compass. B. A. Toman and K. T. Sverdlova view the action of the Left SRs as part of a larger conspiracy; A. Khatskevich and M. Ia. Latsis say that the Left SRs wanted to arrest the Bolshevik faction of the Soviet Congress as well as the government. Khatskevich adds, however, that the Left SRs had planned to murder Lenin.<sup>36</sup>

Surprisingly, most Western historians have adopted many of the Soviet judgments. R. V. Daniels and E. H. Carr, for instance, say that the Left SR "uprising" took place in the hope of overthrowing the Bolshevik government.<sup>37</sup> G. Hilger makes a similar assessment when he refers to the best-organized effort ever made to overthrow Soviet power from within.<sup>38</sup> G. v. Rauch, one of the leading experts on Soviet historiography in Germany, even mentions the "uprising" in close connection with the uprising in Yaroslavl' organized by the former SR B. Savinkov.<sup>39</sup> The latest highly praised German handbook on Russian and Soviet history also talks of a "dilettante *coup d'état*;" W. Baumgart, P. Scheibert, G. Leggett, V. Brovkin, and R. Sakwa all speak of a "rising" or "uprising."<sup>40</sup> M. Perrie, a specialist in SR history, calls the "unsuccessful rebellion" of July an "ill-considered effort on the part of revolutionary idealists."<sup>41</sup> This virtual unanimity on an event of such

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Shestak, "Bankrotstvo partii levyykh eserov," *Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta*, no. 2 (1973): 38; D. V. Sivovolov, "O telegramme Vladimira Il'icha Lenina Zadonskomu Uezdnomu Ispolnitel'nomu Komitetu ot 17 avgusta 1918 goda," *Trudy Voronezhskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*, Vypusk 1: Obshchestvennye nauki, 60 (1957): 43; E. B. Skobelkina, "Bor'ba Simbirskikh bol'shevikov protiv 'levyykh' eserov v 1918 g.," in *Iz istorii partiinykh organizatsii Povolzh'ia*, ed. M. Ia. Bromberg et al. (Volgograd, 1967), 24.

For the term "adventurous," see Kuchma, "Iz istorii," 17; Mints, *God 1918-i*, 412. For the term "white-guard," see M. G. Gaisinskii, "Chrezvychainyi i 2-i Vserossiiskie s"ezdy sovetov krest'ianskikh deputatov, (odin iz episodov bor'by proletariata za krest'ianstvo)," *Krasnaia letopis' 5*, no. 32 (1929): 251.

<sup>36</sup> Toman, "Stranitsa," 182; Sverdlova, *Sverdlov*, 503; Peters, "Vospominaniia o rabote v VChK," 105; M. Ia. Latsis, *Dva goda bor'by na vnutrennem fronte: Populiarnyi obzor dvukhgodichnoi deiatel'nosti Chrezvychainykh Komissii po bor'be s kontr-revoliutsiei, spekuliatsei i prestupleniiami po dolzhnosti* (Moscow, 1920), 55; A. Khatskevich, *Soldat velikikh boev: Zhizn' i deiatel'nost' F.E. Dzerzhinskogo*, 2d rev. ed. (Minsk, 1965), 239.

<sup>37</sup> Robert V. Daniels, *Das Gewissen der Revolution: Kommunistische Opposition in der Sowjetunion*, trans. K. Römer (Berlin, 1978), 116; E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1923*, reprint ed., vol. 1 (Harmondsworth, 1977), 173.

<sup>38</sup> Gustav Hilger, *Wir und der Kriml: Deutsch-sowjetische Beziehungen 1918-1941, Erinnerungen eines deutschen Diplomaten* (Frankfurt/M, 1964), 17.

<sup>39</sup> Georg von Rauch, *Geschichte der Sowjetunion*, 6th rev. ed. (Stuttgart, 1977), 110.

<sup>40</sup> Manfred Hellmann, Gottfried Schramm, and Klaus Zernack, eds., *Handbuch der Geschichte Rußlands* (Stuttgart, 1983), vol. 3, pt. 1, pp. 604, 630; Winfried Baumgart, *Deutsche Ostpolitik 1918: Von Brest-Litovsk bis zum Ende des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Vienna, 1966), 226f.; George Leggett, *The Cheka: Lenin's Political Police: The All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage (December 1917 to February 1922)* (Oxford, 1981), 110; Peter Scheibert, *Lenin an der Macht: Das russische Volk in der Revolution 1918-1922* (Weinheim, 1984), 426; Richard Sakwa, "The Commune State in Moscow in 1918," *Slavic Review* 46 (Fall/Winter 1987): 437; Sakwa omits the inverted commas in his book, *Soviet Communists in Power: A Study of Moscow during the Civil War, 1918-21* (Houndsmill: Basingstoke, 1988), 130, 170f.; Brovkin, "The Mensheviks under Attack: The Transformation of Soviet Politics, June-September 1918," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 32 (1984), 386; idem, "Politics, Not Economics Was the Key," *Slavic Review* 44 (Summer 1985), 248; idem, *The Mensheviks after October*, 246.

<sup>41</sup> Maureen Perrie, "Left Socialist Revolutionary Revolt of 1918," in *Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet History*, ed. J. L. Wiczynski, vol. 19 (Academic International Press: Gulf Breeze, FL, 1981), 132, 134.

significance—the elimination of the last bulwark against the establishment of one-party rule—is quite unfortunate.

A few historians in the West question the standard view; Leggett even describes the dissenters as a "school of thought."<sup>42</sup> Chief among this small group are G. Katkov and Iu. Fel'shtinskii, both of whom reject the Soviet version that the Left SRs organized the assassination of Count Mirbach and staged their ill-fated "uprising" on 6 July.<sup>43</sup> Their interpretation denies a Left SR insurrection and asserts instead a well-prepared Bolshevik "conspiracy" against the Left SR party.<sup>44</sup> In their view, the Bolsheviks began to liquidate the "rebels" even before it was clear who was behind Mirbach's murder. The Left SR Central Committee decided to take responsibility for the act because of political commitments, thus falling into a Bolshevik trap. In order to support their thesis, both authors stress the fact that the Left SRs who were responsible for the assassination received lenient treatment from the Bolsheviks. Particularly striking was the case of Bliumkin, who originally was labeled an agentprovocateur and who gave himself up in 1919, but whom the Soviet government then almost immediately granted amnesty and allowed to rejoin the Cheka.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, Katkov and Fel'shtinskii point out the rather mysterious part played by Dzerzhinskii in July. The evidence he gave to the fact-finding committee is very contradictory.<sup>46</sup> Fel'shtinskii goes so far as to claim that Lenin's visit to the destroyed former Left SR headquarters can be explained in terms of the typical behavior of a criminal drawn to the scene of the crime.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Leggett, *The Cheka*, 81. See also, for example, Adam Ulam, *The Bolsheviks: The Intellectual and Political History of the Triumph of Communism in Russia* (New York, 1965), 425f.; Stephen T. Possony, *Lenin: The Compulsive Revolutionary* (Chicago, 1964), 283f.; and Joel Carmichael, *Trotsky*, trans. J. Schwab (Frankfurt/M, 1974), 186f.

<sup>43</sup> Katkov, "The Assassination of Count Mirbach;" Iu. G. Fel'shtinskii, *Bol'sheviki i levye esery, oktiabr' 1917-iiul' 1918: Na puti k odnopartinoi diktature* (Paris, 1985); idem, "Istoriia odnoi provokatsii, (ubiistvo Mirbakha i levo-eserovskii miatezh v Moskve v iiule 1918 goda)," *Novyi zhurnal* 142 (1981): 161–87; *ibid.*, 144 (1983): 105–35.

<sup>44</sup> Katkov, "The Assassination of Count Mirbach," 90; Fel'shtinskii, "Istoriia," 125. See also Georg Solomon, *Unter den roten Machthabern: Was ich im Dienste der Sowjets persönlich sah und erlebte*, trans. W. Cremer (Berlin, 1930), 48f.

<sup>45</sup> Katkov, "The Assassination of Count Mirbach," 87. See also G. Maksimov, "Sud nad Ia. Bliumkinym v 1919, den'gi dlia partii," *Pamiat' 3* (Moscow, 1978; Paris, 1980), 379f.

<sup>46</sup> Katkov, "The Assassination of Count Mirbach," 88; Fel'shtinskii, "Istoriia," 179f. Dzerzhinskii, for example, made the statement that he had been informed of the assassination by Lenin at about 3 p.m.; that is, at the time Mirbach was assassinated. For unknown reasons the German Legation's telephone connections were cut off, so that Major von Bothmer and Lieutenant Mueller had to drive to the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs. This took at least a quarter of an hour. Therefore, Dzerzhinskii cannot possibly have been informed that early. Moreover, Dzerzhinskii gave evidence that he had been able to convict Popov of a lie. Popov had said that Bliumkin had not been in the building. Dzerzhinskii "convicted" Popov because he saw Bliumkin's cap in Popov's room. This, however, was not possible because we know that Bliumkin forgot his cap in the German Legation. Dzerzhinskii's statement that Bliumkin had forged his signature on the credentials also is dubious. As Left SR Aleksandrovich, vice-chairman of the Cheka, was also allowed to sign documents it would not have been necessary to forge Dzerzhinskii's signature. Finally, one wonders why the Bolsheviks hurried to remove Aleksandrovich: he was shot without a court trial by Dzerzhinskii himself on 8 July.

<sup>47</sup> Fel'shtinskii, *Bol'sheviki*, 256. Fel'shtinskii argues that Dzerzhinskii, as a Left Communist and outspoken opponent of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, planned the assassination of Mirbach. See *ibid.*, 179–89.

This interpretation, while provocative, lacks the hard evidence needed to prove that the Bolsheviks instigated the murder of Mirbach and the alleged “uprising.” Moreover, Katkov and Fel’shtinskii do not take into consideration that the assassination was fully in keeping with the political traditions of the Left SRs, the spirit of which was later maintained in acts like the murder of Field-Marshal von Eichhorn, the commander-in-chief of the German forces in the Ukraine. Nevertheless, Fel’shtinskii and Katkov have at least subjected the “findings” of official Soviet historiography to a healthy scrutiny. If they overstep the evidence about Bolshevik complicity, they nevertheless rightly point out that the Left SRs consistently denied any intention of overthrowing the Bolshevik government by means of an armed uprising.<sup>48</sup> In light of this, it is perhaps worthwhile to subject the events of July 1918 to a thorough reexamination.

As we have seen, the original Bolshevik indictment of the Left SRs as well as subsequent Soviet historical accounts rest on one sentence of the Left SR Central Committee minutes of 24 June 1918, in which the “Central Committee of the Left SR Party resolves to mobilize all reliable armed forces and to take extreme measures to make the toiling peasantry and the working class take part in the uprising.” Clearly, an anti-Bolshevik uprising cannot be deduced from a single sentence. This passage refers not to the overthrow of the government, but to a military doctrine toward Germany that the Left SRs had formulated in January 1918: in Mstislavskii’s words, “not war, but uprising.”<sup>49</sup> This also becomes clear from the larger context of the minutes of 24 June: immediately after the offending sentence is a passage concerning proposed military and propaganda actions of the Left SRs in the Ukraine. Thus the planned “uprising” was not against the Communists but against the Germans in the Ukraine! The fact that the Left SRs’ Third Party Congress at the end of June did not take a decision concerning an uprising also provides evidence against the theory of an anti-Bolshevik uprising.<sup>50</sup>

For several months already the Left SRs had been demanding an uprising against imperialism in general and German imperialism in particular—a fact which had reached Lenin’s attention.<sup>51</sup> The Left SRs repeated their call for an “uprising against the imperialists,” moreover, in a circular to all soviets early on 7 July.<sup>52</sup> At

<sup>48</sup> J. Steinberg, “The Events of July 1918,” 1, 15, Hoover Archives; I. N. Steinberg, *In the Workshop of the Revolution* (New York, 1954), 244; M. A. Spiridonova, *Pis'mo M. Spiridonovoi Tsentral'nomu Komitetu partii bol'shevikov*, 2d ed. (Petrograd, 1918), 4, 25, 28. See also *KKVChK*, 381 (231), 384 (232). On 17 July 1918 Spiridonova wrote to A. A. Izmailovich: “How is one to persuade them [the Bolsheviks] that there was no plot, no rising? I am beginning to believe they have convinced themselves of it and now believe it. After all they are maniacs.” See “Kremli' za reshetkoi, (pis'ma iz Kremlevskoi tiur'my M. A. Spiridonovoi i A. A. Izmailovichu),” in *Kremli' za reshetkoi, (podpol'naiia Rossiia)* (Berlin, 1922), 13.

<sup>49</sup> *Znamia truda*, 12 January 1918, 2, and 13 January 1918, 1.

<sup>50</sup> *Znamia bor'by* (Moscow), 30 July 1918, 4; *KKVChK*, 320 (200f.). Claiming the opposite are V. Vladimirova, *God sluzhby "sotsialistov" kapitalistam: Ocherki po istorii kontr-revoliutsii v 1918 godu* (Moscow, 1927), 269; Parfenov, *Razgrom*, 37; and Ionkina, *Vserossiiskie s"ezdy Sovetov*, 152f.

<sup>51</sup> Lenin, *Sochineniia*, 2d ed., vol. 23, p. 136.

<sup>52</sup> *KKVChK*, 254 (167).

the plenary meeting of the Moscow Soviet on 24 July, A. A. Bitsenko, one of four Left SRs in the Council of People's Commissars of the Moscow region who had worked closely with the Bolsheviks, criticized both the attitude of the Left SR Central Committee toward the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and their activities during the events of July 1918. Only a short time later she left the Left SR party because of these disagreements and became a member of the Central Committee of the Party of the Revolutionary Communists, finally joining the Bolsheviks in November 1918. Nonetheless, she insisted that the Left SRs had not attempted an uprising against Soviet power, but that the aim of Mirbach's assassination had been the mobilization of the "toiling classes for an uprising against the suppressors of the revolution," that is, against the Germans.<sup>53</sup>

Nor was the concentration of Left SR troops in Moscow intended for overthrowing the Bolshevik government. The Left SRs were realistic enough to anticipate Bolshevik countermeasures, so the Central Committee took a purely defensive position, declaring on 24 June that it did not on any account view its policies as a fight against the Bolsheviks and urging only an armed defense of its position.<sup>54</sup> This stance was identical with the position the Left SRs adopted on 6 July.

Soviet historiography obviously has not been able to provide any hard evidence on the planning and organization of a Left SR "uprising;" otherwise Soviet historians certainly would have published it long since. From this one can only conclude that no such documents exist and that there was no "uprising." In addition, Bolshevik announcements would have us believe that the murder of Mirbach, committed at about 3:00 P.M., was the signal for a simultaneous "uprising." But what did the Left SRs do at 3:00 P.M.? When and where did they take the offensive? Neither Bolshevik eye-witnesses nor the proponents of Soviet historiography offer proof about this crucial point. The answer is that the Left SRs did nothing.

A major clue to the interpretation of the July events is the time factor. The Left SRs made their first move at about 6:00 P.M., when they arrested Dzerzhinskii. Since the Left SRs could not possibly accept the arrest of two of their Central Committee members, however, this is properly interpreted an act of self-defense.<sup>55</sup> Trotsky stated at the Fifth Congress of Soviets that it was this step by the Left SRs that prompted the Bolsheviks to take military action against them.<sup>56</sup> The evidence contradicts him. According to testimony given by the commander-in-chief of the Moscow military district, N. I. Muralov, and the head of the Supreme Military Inspection, N. I. Podvoiskii, by order of the Council of People's Commissars they had begun to organize the operation to suppress the Left SR "uprising" at 5:00 P.M.—at a time, therefore, when the Left SRs had not yet done anything beyond the assassination itself.<sup>57</sup> The fact that the Bolsheviks began to crush the "uprising"

<sup>53</sup> *Golos trudovogo krest'iansva*, 25 July 1918, 2.

<sup>54</sup> *KKVChK*, 326 (203f.); Spiridonova, *Pis'mo*, 28.

<sup>55</sup> *KKVChK*, 321 (201), 324 (202), 349 (215), 381 (231); S. Rudakov, "Nas obviniaiat," in *Vokrug Moskovskikh iul'skikh sobytii* (Saratov, 1918), 36; Golovanov, "Levye esery," 13.

<sup>56</sup> See *KKVChK*, 305f (193f), 309 (195); and *Pravda*, 18 July 1918, 3.

<sup>57</sup> *KKVChK*, 279 (180).

even before the Left SRs themselves had learned about its existence becomes evident from V. D. Bonch-Bruevich's memoirs. He explains that, in order to lull the Left SRs into a false sense of security and to avert any possibility of party members in the provinces taking anti-Bolshevik steps, no connection between the Left SRs and the assassination was mentioned in the government announcement transmitted to the Moscow Soviet at 4:20 P.M. and to the district soviets of the capital one hour later.<sup>58</sup> Simultaneously, the Bolsheviks took all Left SRs in the Kremlin into custody. The same happened to the Left SR party members of the Cheka.<sup>59</sup> The Bolsheviks even wanted to arrest Left SR G. D. Zaks, although he not only cooperated closely with the Bolsheviks (the Left SR Central Committee had already reproached him for this) but also telephoned Trotsky to inform him of Mirbach's assassination.<sup>60</sup>

At about 6:00 P.M., Spiridonova went to the Fifth Congress of Soviets to tell the delegates about the assassination of Mirbach. This put the Bolsheviks on the defensive since they feared that the majority of the delegates would welcome this step, not only because of Spiridonova's eloquence but also because the assassination of the "odious" representative of German imperialism was bound to be popular.<sup>61</sup> Shortly after Spiridonova's arrival the whole Left SR faction was isolated from the others by the Bolsheviks and taken hostage against Dzerzhinskii. This too would appear to discount the thesis of an "uprising." About seventy delegates had attended the Left SRs' Third Party Congress and were therefore informed about the policies of the Central Committee;<sup>62</sup> if the plan called for an uprising, why did they just sit there, taking no action whatsoever? Furthermore, why did the entire Left SR delegation of roughly 450 people—"all brawny peasant lads"—wait like a herd of cattle for three hours after the assassination, without taking any active part in the "uprising?"<sup>63</sup> From the reaction of the Left SR delegates one can only gather that they did not know about the assassination before they were informed by Spiridonova and they certainly did not have a clue about a planned "uprising."

There is, however, a point that remains obscure in this context. Because the Left SR leadership feared a harsh response from the Bolsheviks after the assassination, one wonders why they did not take any preventive measures to save the Left

<sup>58</sup> Bonch-Bruevich, *Ubiistvo germanskogo posla*, 24f.

<sup>59</sup> *Leninskii sbornik*, vol. 34 (Moscow, 1942), 30; "Telefonogrammy V. I. Lenina v Moskovskii Sovet v dni levoeserovskogo miatazha, 6 iulia 1918 goda," *Bor'ba klassov*, nos. 2-3 (1932): 23; *KKVChK*, 310 (195); *Golos trudovogo krest'ianstva*, 10 July 1918, 2. See information about the release of Left SR Emel'ianov from Bolshevik arrest by Popov's unit in *KKVChK*, 311 (196); and *Izvestiia*, 8 July 1918, 3.

<sup>60</sup> *KKVChK*, 310 (195). For further details about Zaks, see *Novaia zhizn'*, 11 July 1918, 3, and 16 July 1918, 3.

<sup>61</sup> See *KKVChK*, 325 (203); "Vosstanie levykh s-r.-ov v osveshchenii gen. Vatsetisa," 5, Steinberg Archive, box 52, F 967 L; Scheibert, *Lenin an der Macht*, 427; Fel'shtinskii, *Bol'sheviki*, 204f.

<sup>62</sup> *Nash vek*, 29 June 1918, 3; *Novaia zhizn'*, 29 June 1918, 3.

<sup>63</sup> Katkov, "The Assassination of Count Mirbach," 56. See also R. H. Bruce Lockhart, *Memoirs of a British Agent*, reprint ed. (London, 1946), 295, 298. This expression should be used very carefully, however, for the majority of the Left SR faction at the Fifth Soviet Congress were not peasants: 23.6 percent were workers, 34.2 percent were peasants, and 39.4 percent were "intelligenty." See *Piatyi Vserossiiskii s'ezd*, appendix.

SR delegation at the Soviet Congress. Perhaps the Central Committee did not believe that the Bolsheviks would be capable of taking steps against the highest legislative organ, the Soviet Congress. The units under Popov's command did eventually go into action, but only after news of the arrest of the Left SR faction reached the Central Committee, and they confined themselves to their district.

Even Soviet claims that the Left SRs occupied the Cheka headquarters and the telegraph office can easily be refuted. A small detachment of sailors from Popov's unit did go to the Cheka headquarters and arrest several Chekists, among them the Latvian Bolshevik Latsis, but this did not happen before the Bolsheviks had arrested the Left SR faction at the Soviet Congress and some leading Left SR Chekists, such as Emel'ianov. The entire episode at the Cheka headquarters bears no resemblance to an "attack." For one thing, most guards at the building were Left SRs. For another, having "taken over" the headquarters, the Left SRs, supposedly undertaking an anti-Bolshevik "uprising," obeyed the order of a Bolshevik Cheka member: two trucks with men of Popov's unit were sent off to look for weapons that had allegedly been hidden by counterrevolutionaries in the Sokol'nichii Park. In the meantime the Left SRs who had remained at the headquarters were disarmed by some forces loyal to the Bolsheviks.<sup>64</sup>

In addition, the circumstances under which the Left SRs "took" the telegraph office render untenable the claim that they occupied it. Accompanied by roughly fifteen men, Central Committee member P. P. Prosh'ian entered the office without any hindrance by the guards, sent his cables off, and returned to the Left SR headquarters. The Left SRs made no attempt to take over the telephone exchange, even though it was situated in the same building, and despite the fact that disconnecting the phone system would have been vital to any uprising: isolated in the Kremlin, the Bolsheviks would have been unable to mobilize and deploy their forces quickly.<sup>65</sup> Does this behavior provide any evidence of a planned "uprising," an idea that the Bolshevik eye-witness Smidovich called into question as early as July 1918?<sup>66</sup>

Of course, one could conclude, as Soviet historiography has done, that the so-called uprising collapsed because the Left SRs not only were politically naive but also lacked military skills.<sup>67</sup> Why else would the Left SRs have let slip the chance, which some commentators claim they had, to occupy the Kremlin on the afternoon of 6 July? I. I. Vatsetis, who was in charge of suppressing the "uprising," argues that the possibility was real, and he was an experienced military man who only a few days later would become commander-in-chief of the Red Army. Although Vatsetis might well have exaggerated the Left SR's chances of seizing the Kremlin in order to play up his own role in defending Bolshevik power, there is an indisputable

<sup>64</sup> Peters, "Vospominaniia o rabote v VChK," 107f.

<sup>65</sup> *KKVChK*, 326 (203f.); Yu. Felshtinsky, "The Bolsheviks and the Left SRs, October 1917-July 1918: Toward a Single-Party Dictatorship" (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1988), 263f.; Spirin, "Razgrom," 45.

<sup>66</sup> *Izvestiia*, 8 July 1918, 5; Bonch-Bruевич. *Ubiistvo germanskogo posla*, 24. See also *KKVChK*, 315 (198).

<sup>67</sup> Bonch-Bruевич, *Ubiistvo germanskogo posla*, 23; Spirin, *Krakh*, 61.

element of truth to his account. Despite the fact that a Bolshevik crack unit, the 9th Latvian Rifle Regiment, was defending the Kremlin, on the night of 6–7 July a unit under Popov's command easily surrounded a company of the Latvian regiment and disarmed it. They did not arrest it, which is ironic in light of the problems the Bolsheviks were having in trying to mobilize any troops at all to suppress the "uprising." Again, the events confirm I. Steinberg's later judgment that the Left SRs would have acted differently had they really intended to overthrow Bolshevik power. The Left SRs did not capitalize on their opportunities because they never seriously considered taking over the Kremlin.<sup>68</sup>

Nor can the Left SRs' inaction be ascribed to military inferiority; that allegation is a myth. After all, the Left SRs had several skilled military men in Moscow during the July events: P. Prosh'ian, a member of the Supreme Revolutionary Military Council; Iu. Sablin, who had distinguished himself during the fighting in Moscow in 1917 and who later became a general in the Red Army; and G. Uporov, commanding officer of Moscow. Why should these and other capable and experienced military men have failed so utterly to carry out tasks essential to an uprising? Why did they remain inactive when an "uprising" called for action? Since military incompetence and inferiority were not the problems, the sole rational explanation is that the Left SRs did not want to take power through an armed insurrection. Evidence buttressing this argument comes from first-hand Bolshevik observers. After having been arrested by the SRs, the important Chekist Latsis asked Central Committee member D. Cherepanov to ensure that the Left SRs "take all measures so that counterrevolutionaries do not take advantage of this *incident* and overthrow Soviet power."<sup>69</sup> Clearly, his concern was not the Left SRs but other forces to the right. The Left SRs' limited steps in Moscow on 6–7 July were simply measures of self-defense taken in response to Bolshevik initiatives following the assassination.<sup>70</sup> The evidence suggests, then, that the July events did not amount to a Left SR uprising.

Finally, the question remains about just what the Left SRs intended with the assassination of Mirbach. For the Left SRs, who viewed themselves as representatives of international socialism, the compromises involved in Lenin's foreign policy with Germany were absolutely unacceptable. While the Germans helped suppress the revolution in Finland and the Ukraine and Mirbach negotiated quite openly with the liberals and the political right wing in Russia, the Bolsheviks rushed to fulfill the conditions of the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty. In theory, the Bolsheviks claimed to serve the international principles of world revolution; in reality, however, they made compromises with Imperial Germany.<sup>71</sup> The Left SRs felt that they could not agree to policies they regarded as a betrayal of socialism. The assassination of Mirbach, therefore, was designed to present the Bolsheviks with a fait

<sup>68</sup> Steinberg, "Events," 16; Vatssetis, "Miatezh," 61; idem, "Grazhdanskaia vojna," 23; Toman, "Stranitsa," 185; Spirin, *Krakh*, 40, 43.

<sup>69</sup> *KKVChK*, 311 (196), emphasis added. See also *Pravda*, 18 July 1918, 3.

<sup>70</sup> Spiridonova, *Pis'mo*, 28; B.A. Babina, "Fevral' 1922," *Minuvshee* 2 (1986): 37.

<sup>71</sup> Zinov'ev and Trotskii, *O miatezhe*, 9.



accomplish that would force them to change their foreign policy by breaking off diplomatic relations with Germany.<sup>72</sup> The basis of these Left SR policies had been stated by M. Spiridonova at the Third Party Congress in June 1918: "We are *against war*, and we do not encourage the nation to resume war. We demand that the Peace Treaty be torn to pieces."<sup>73</sup> The most reasonable explanation of their foreign policy is that although the Left SRs did not want a general war, they were willing to put up with partisan warfare with Germany.<sup>74</sup> In any case, a realistic assessment of the military situation by midsummer of 1918 would have shown that Germany was unlikely to resume a full-scale offensive against Russia.<sup>75</sup>

The measures the Bolsheviks took against the Left SRs also shed light on the whole affair. Thirteen Left SRs—among them Dzerzhinskii's deputy, V. A. Aleksandrovich—were shot without trial. Trotsky did not even consider it necessary to inform the Soviet Congress of these executions. The Left SR delegates to the congress were kept in prison and banned from attending further sessions, even though their complicity was neither proven nor obvious. They were also excluded from the VTsIK, including the peasants' section, so very important for the Left SRs.<sup>76</sup>

The Soviet historian V. A. Pristavkin summed up these tactics very concisely when he said that "the politics of the Communist party aimed at the alienation of the rank-and-file [Left] SR from the [Left] SR Central Committee, at its isolation. The result was to be that the grass-roots Left SRs would reject the 'adventure.'" <sup>77</sup> With this goal in mind, the Bolsheviks released all Left SRs who spoke out against the policies of the Central Committee; some of this group quit the Left SR party to form the nucleus of two new parties, namely, the "Party of the Narodniki-Communists" and the "Party of the Revolutionary-Communists."<sup>78</sup> This development was reinforced by an existing dissension within the Left SR Party over different issues and the fact that some Left SRs genuinely rejected the killing of Mirbach.

<sup>72</sup> *KKVChK*, 384 (232); *Das Sozialistische Rußland*, 15, 49; "For the Imprisoned of the Revolution," 1, Steinberg Archive, box 56, F 1005; I. Steinberg, *Events*, 16; *Nash vek*, 9 July 1918, 2; Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War*, 40.

<sup>73</sup> Vladimirova, "Levye esery," 113 (emphasis added).

<sup>74</sup> Steinberg, *Events*, 16f.; Vladimirova, *God sluzhby*, 266.

<sup>75</sup> On 15 July the French forces launched a counterattack at Reims, followed by a second decisive attack on the Marne bulge on 18 July and thus forced the Germans to stop their offensive. See Bothmer, *Mit Graf Mirbach*, 80; Katkov, "The Assassination of Count Mirbach," 76; and Riezler, *Tagebücher*, 475.

<sup>76</sup> *Piatyi sozyv VTsIK*, 57, 62; *Novaia zhizn'*, 12 July 1918, 2; N. Afinogenov-Stepnoi, *Etapy Velikoi Russkoi Revoliutsii* (Samara, 1918), 167. The Left SR delegate of the Koz'mo-Dem'ianskii county, Kazan province, confirmed this. He gave evidence that the July events had been totally surprising. See *KKVChK*, 269 (175).

<sup>77</sup> V. A. Pristavkin, "Kommunisticheskaia partiia-organizator razgroma kontrrevoliutsionnogo levoeserovskogo miatezha v Moskve," in *V bor'be za pobedu Oktabria, sbornik statei* (Moscow, 1957), 298.

<sup>78</sup> *Perepiska sekretariata TsK RSDRP(b)-RKP(b) s mestnymi partiunymi organizatsiiami*, vol. 3, *mart-iun' 1918 g.* (Moscow, 1967), 115. See also *Novaia zhizn'*, 12 July 1918, 2, and 14 July 1918, 3; *Izvestiia*, 8 July 1918, 3; and *Pravda*, 10 July 1918, 4.

As for those who supported the Left SR Central Committee, they were mercilessly persecuted and driven underground.

A reasonable conclusion is that the Bolsheviks consciously and quite successfully aimed to split and thereby destroy the Left SR party. Considering that the Bolsheviks pressured every Left SR into a choice between criticizing the Central Committee and thus retaining his own freedom, or staying loyal to the party and going to prison, it is not surprising that many chose to criticize. Nor should one underestimate the effectiveness of economic sanctions at a time when the economy was in sharp decline. Left SRs who supported their party leadership were driven out of their positions and, in some instances, were evicted from their homes.<sup>79</sup> When threatened with the loss of work, money, home, and even the right to food rations, a member might well break with the party.

At the same time, the Bolsheviks began purging Soviet institutions of Left SRs. The Left SR party also lost the right to return delegates, as leaders of their faction, directly to the soviets.<sup>80</sup> On 9 July the Moscow Regional Bureau of the Bolshevik party directed the executive committees of the fourteen provincial soviets in the Moscow region to remove all Left SRs from their posts. This was increasingly typical of the Bolshevik party's dictatorship over elected soviets. Not only the Bolsheviks but all other factions of the soviets were obliged to submit to the orders of the Bolshevik party committees or, ultimately, of the Bolshevik Central Committee.<sup>81</sup>

Furthermore, the Bolsheviks took the opportunity to act against Left SRs in other parts of Russia. Although Zinoviev characterized the relations between the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs in Petrograd as good, all Petrograd Left SR Party organizations were suppressed because, according to Soviet historiography, they too were planning an "uprising."<sup>82</sup> Why this "uprising" did not take place at the same time as the one in Moscow is not explained. The Bolsheviks in Petrograd were informed about the events in Moscow on the evening of 6 July. In the early morning hours of the following day, several Bolsheviks, among them M. S. Uritsky, arrived in Petrograd from Moscow. A meeting of the presidium of the Petrograd Commune resolved to disarm the Left SRs.<sup>83</sup> Although nothing happened in Petrograd on 7 July remotely resembling a Left SR uprising, the headquarters of the Left SRs and their fighting detachment was surrounded by Red Army units. In the evening, after an exchange of shots lasting about forty minutes, the Left SRs surrendered. The two sides sustained ten fatalities and about fifty wounded. Over 260 Left SRs were arrested.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, all party offices and even some private dwellings of Left

<sup>79</sup> Spiridonova, *Pis'mo*, 17; *Novaia zhizn'*, 14 July 1918, 3.

<sup>80</sup> *Novaia zhizn'*, 11 July 1918, 1; Pristavkin, "Kommunisticheskaia partiia," 300.

<sup>81</sup> *Perepiska*, pp. xi, 80, 108, 118. See also Sakwa, *Soviet Communists*, 182–84.

<sup>82</sup> Zinov'ev and Trotskii, *O miatezhe*, 3; Gusev, *Krakh*, 211; Parfenov, "Likvidatsiia," 38.

<sup>83</sup> *Novaia zhizn'*, 9 July 1918, 3; A. Minichev, "V dni levoeserovskogo miatezha v Petrograde v 1918 g. (iz vospominanii)," *Krasnaia letopis'* 1, no. 25 (1928): 66.

<sup>84</sup> *Izvestiia*, 8 July 1918, 3; *Nash vek*, 9 July 1918, 3 and 10 July 1918, 3; *Izvestiia*, 9 July 1918, 3; *Krasnaia armia*, 9 July 1918, 1, and 10 July 1918, 3. See also E. D. Stasova, *Vospominaniia* (Moscow, 1969), 160f.; and Parfenov, "Likvidatsiia," 107.

SRs were searched; despite strong protests from, among others, the Putilov workers, the Petrograd party organ *Znamia bor'by* was prohibited.<sup>85</sup> As early as 8 July the Executive Committee of the Provincial Soviet decided to dismiss from their posts all Left SRs who had not explicitly condemned the "uprising."<sup>86</sup> On 10 July the Left SR Grekov demanded on behalf of his faction in the Petrograd Soviet the immediate release of all arrested Left SRs and an end to all coercive measures against Left SRs in the provinces. He also demanded that the right to carry on party affairs be restored to the party's Central Committee until the guilt of single members could be proven and a party congress of the Left SRs could elect a new Central Committee. Zinoviev merely replied: "If this is all the Left SRs can tell us, we must say good-bye to them."<sup>87</sup> The fact that the Left SR faction of the Petrograd Soviet had not reached a unanimous verdict against the Left SR Central Committee served as a pretext for new elections to the Petrograd Soviet in establishments represented by Left SRs. On 17 July all Left SRs who had not broken with their Central Committee were finally expelled from the Petrograd Soviet.<sup>88</sup>

In Kazan, a Left SR stronghold, the Bolsheviks tried unsuccessfully to prompt the Left SRs to condemn the policies of their Central Committee.<sup>89</sup> Here, too, the party organ, *Za zemliu i voliu*, was prohibited and many "suspicious elements" were arrested.<sup>90</sup> The local Bolsheviks now followed the maxim: "Everyone who is not for us is against us."<sup>91</sup> In order to deprive the Left SRs of their dominant position in Kazan, the Bolsheviks used a clever strategy that had been successful elsewhere: on 13 July they proposed a merger between the workers' and the soldiers' sections of the Kazan Soviet and finally dissolved the Left SR-dominated Executive Committee of the Provincial Soviet on 18 July.<sup>92</sup> The ostensible reasons for this step were the failure of the overwhelming majority of the Left SRs in Kazan and the Executive Committee of the Provincial Soviet to reject the policies of the Left SR Central Committee and the fact that they protested against the imprisonment of the Left SR faction of the Fifth Congress of Soviets. The Bolsheviks, however, maintained that the Left SRs had not only symbolically joined the "upris-

<sup>85</sup> *Novaia zhizn'*, 13 July 1918, 3, and 14 July 1918, 3; K. I. Shelavin, "Peterburgskii komitet bol'shevikov sed'mogo sozyva v 1918 godu," *Krasnaia letopis'* 2, no. 29 (1929): 37-39.

<sup>86</sup> Gusev, *Krakh*, 220; A. Kuz'min, "V Petrogradskoi gubernii v 1917-1918 g.g. (vospominaniia o rabote v Iamburgskom uезде i v Petrogradskom gubernskom sovete v 1917-1918 g.g.)," *Krasnaia letopis'* 3, no. 27 (1928): 246.

<sup>87</sup> *Krasnaia armia*, 12 July 1918, 2. See also *Novaia zhizn'*, 12 July 1918, 2.

<sup>88</sup> *Golos trudovogo krest'ianstva*, 18 July 1918, 2.

<sup>89</sup> The Left SRs not only had gained the absolute majority at the Fourth provincial Congress of Peasants' Delegates in April 1918 but also had done quite well in the elections for the workers' section of the Kazan City Soviet: of 215 delegates the Bolsheviks had 80 seats, the Left SRs 45, the Social-Democratic-Internationalists 9. See N. A. Andrianov et al., eds., *Uprochenie Sovetskoi vlasti v Tatarii, (oktiabr' 1917-iiul' 1918 gg.)*, *sbornik dokumentov i materialov* (Kazan, 1964), 512. At the Fifth All-Russian Soviet Congress the province of Kazan was one of seven areas that sent more Left SR (18) than Bolshevik (8) delegates.

<sup>90</sup> The Left SRs' attempt to reopen the newspaper again on 1 August 1918 was stopped by the Cheka after the first issue.

<sup>91</sup> Andrianov, *Uprochenie*, 583.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 587, 595, 602, 667.

ing” but had also planned one for Kazan. According to the Bolsheviks, this would have violated the professed wish of millions of workers and peasants.<sup>93</sup> Although Mensheviks, Internationalists, and Left SRs offered strong resistance in the workers’ section of the Kazan Soviet, the Bolshevik plan received a 75 to 35 majority. In protest, these factions left the meeting, whereupon the remaining delegates elected six Bolsheviks to the new Executive Committee, with one seat reserved for the Internationalists. By means of this bloodless coup, the Left SRs lost their influential positions, not only in Kazan but in every county of the province.<sup>94</sup> The reconstituted Workers’ and Soldiers’ Soviet of Kazan exercised power until new elections to the Provincial Soviet Congress could take place. The new congress convened on 1 August 1918.<sup>95</sup> But the Bolsheviks were not entirely certain of success, and for good reasons.<sup>96</sup> When the Fifth Provincial Congress of Peasants’ Delegates convened, despite all Bolshevik measures the Left SRs again gained an absolute majority. The Bolsheviks then disbanded the congress because of its “counterrevolutionary” majority.<sup>97</sup>

The actions against the Left SRs in Elets, Orel province, also typify what now occurred everywhere. Although both Left SR delegates from Elets at the Fifth Congress of Soviets had criticized their own Central Committee and had spoken very clearly in favor of close cooperation with the Bolsheviks, Lenin wrote shortly after the July uprising:

It is a pity that you have not arrested them [the Left SRs of Elets] as is being done everywhere. It is essential to oust all SRs from responsible posts. We cannot, of course, give you written authorization to arrest SRs, but if you drive them out of Soviet organs, if you arrest them and expose them before the workers and peasants and destroy their influence, you will be doing good revolutionary work, and we in the center will only praise you for it.<sup>98</sup>

Thus, the Bolsheviks soon enough abandoned their initial impulse to bring punitive measures only against those who refused to disavow the Central Committee’s actions.

The Bolshevik assault on the Left SRs culminated with the trial against the party which began on 27 November 1918. One of the main reasons for the trial, namely, to punish Mirbach’s murderers in order to placate the German government, had ceased to exist after the outbreak of the revolution in Germany. Yet the Bolsheviks were not interested in discontinuing the proceedings. Rather, by way of

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 595, 602f.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 608.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 599, 613; *Protokoly Piatyi s’ezd*, 134, 209.

<sup>96</sup> The Bolsheviks in Chistopol’, for instance, decided to apply the resolutions of the Fifth All-Russian Soviet Congress in case the Left SRs gained a majority in the elections. This meant that no Left SR organization that had not explicitly rejected the politics of its Central Committee would be allowed seats in workers’ and peasants’ soviets.

<sup>97</sup> N. A. Andrianov and K. A. Tolstiakov, *Stanovlenie i uprochenie vlasti sovetov Tatarii* (Kazan, 1967), 139; A. L. Litvin, *Krest’ianstvo Srednego Povolzh’ia v gody grazhdanskoi voiny, (materialy)* (Kazan, 1972), 141.

<sup>98</sup> Lenin, *Sochineniia*, 2d ed., 23:560f.

a "legal" sentence against the Left SR leaders they sought a formal and juridically "unobjectionable" basis to justify retrospectively the far-reaching measures they had taken against the party. Fourteen Left SRs were accused, but only Spiridonova and Sablin appeared in court.<sup>99</sup> The others had gone underground. The counts of the indictment were, first, the murder of Mirbach; second, a secret conspiracy with the aim of resuming war against Germany; and third, an armed uprising to overthrow Soviet power. Spiridonova denied these charges and refused to recognize a court consisting only of Bolshevik party members, and not of the International, as she had demanded.<sup>100</sup> A Bolshevik party court was subject to party discipline and its task could only be to confirm what the Bolshevik Central Committee had already decided in July, that is, to find the Left SR leadership guilty of the "conspiracy" and the "uprising."<sup>101</sup>

Although the public prosecutor, N. V. Krylenko, had demanded a more severe punishment, Spiridonova and Sablin, because of their service to Soviet power, received sentences of only one year's imprisonment.<sup>102</sup> All the other accused were sentenced to three years in prison. Only D. I. Popov was characterized as an enemy of the working class and therefore sentenced to death.<sup>103</sup> Thus the Bolsheviks, who had already driven the Mensheviks and the SR party underground, used a highly convenient opportunity to eliminate their last, but very influential political ally of sorts.

A confidential letter Trotsky wrote to Lenin, G. V. Chicherin, N. I. Bukharin, and N. N. Krestinskii on 15 August 1920 suggests just how sensitive the Bolsheviks were about their former allies:

It is necessary to set up preventive security measures in connection with stupid German demands to avenge Count Mirbach. Should these demands be officially expressed, thus forcing us to give an explanation, *extremely disagreeable memories (Aleksandrovich, Spiridonova)* will come up again.<sup>104</sup>

This explains why the Bolsheviks maintained the "propaganda myth" of the "uprising" that determines our conception of history even down to the present day; it also

<sup>99</sup> The accused were M. A. Spiridonova, Iu. V. Sablin, B. D. Kamkov, V. A. Karelin, P. P. Prosh'ian, V. E. Trutovskii, D. A. Magerovskii, L. Golubovskii, D. A. Cherepanov, Ia. M. Fishman, Ia. G. Bliumkin, I. A. Majorov, N. A. Andreev, and D. I. Popov.

<sup>100</sup> Spiridonova, *Pis'mo*, 26f.; *KKVChK*, 362f. (221f.); Rudnev and Tsybov, "Sledovatel' respubliki," 127.

<sup>101</sup> See *Novaia zhizn'*, 12 July 1918, 1.

<sup>102</sup> On 29 November 1918, Spiridonova and Sablin were pardoned because of their service for the revolution. See *KKVChK*, 367 (224). Leggett, *The Cheka*, 78, claims that the Bolsheviks decided on clemency because they did not feel strongly enough about the matter to risk antagonizing the countryside, where the Left SRs enjoyed a wide following.

<sup>103</sup> *KKVChK*, 365 (222); Rudnev and Tsybov, "Sledovatel' respubliki," 126 f. After the July events Popov fled to the Ukraine. In September 1919 he was a secretary of the staff of N. Makhno's army. In November 1920, Popov was arrested by the Cheka in Khar'kov. He was executed in Moscow in May 1921.

<sup>104</sup> Trotsky Archive, Folder T 564, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts (emphasis added).

helps account for their lack of enthusiasm for a complete investigation into the matter. In this way the Bolsheviks were able to pass a death sentence on the Left SR party, the most powerful political entity in Soviet Russia of 1918 besides the Communist party itself. The Bolsheviks used this chance mercilessly and with great precision.