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

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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 Transcaucasia. 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.” 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-


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ity. 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. 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. 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. 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 village.

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. 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."


3 Golos trudovago krest'ianstva, 1 May 1918, 3; Znamia truda, Organ Tsentralkogo Komiteata levykh Sotsialistov-Revolucionerov, 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, Klasy, 165, and idem, Krah odnoi avanturi, (miatzeh levykh eserov v Moskve 6–7 iiulja 1918 g.) (Moscow, 1971), 20; and T. D. Ionkina, Vsesrossiiskie s'ezdy Sovetov v pervye gody provetskoi diktatury (Moscow, 1974), 143.


5 Piatyi Vsesrossiiskii s'ezd Sovetov Rabochikh, Krest'ianskikh, Soldatskikh i Kazakh'skikh Deputatov, stenografcheskii ocherk, Morkva, 4–16 iiulja 1918 g. (Moscow, 1918), 44 ff.; K. T. Sverdlov, Iakov Mikhailovich Sverdlov (Moscow, 1957), 491.

6 "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 zakluchitel'nogo etapa soglasheniia bol'shevikov s levyimi eserami (mart-iul' 1918 g.)," Trudy vysheh shkoly MVD SSSR 1 (1969): 29.

7 Znamia truda, 29 May 1918, 3; Protokoly zasedanii Vsesossiiskago Tsentralkogo Ispolnitel'ago Komiteta 4-go sozyva (stenografcheskii ocherk) (Moscow, 1920), 321–28, 332 ff., 428; A. A. Izmailov,  


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. Karelgin 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.

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 naught. 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.” 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.

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. Blumkin 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. Having consented to meet the Cheka representatives, Count Mirbach joined them. During the ensuing conversation—at about 2:50 p.m.—

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., Dzerzhinski, 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.”\footnote{KKVChK, 302 (192).} Dzerzhinski 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, Dzerzhinski 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 Dzerzhinski and the accompanying Chekists.\footnote{Ibid., 227 (151), 254 (167), 257 (168), 303f. (191f.), 324 (202), 347 (214), Izvestia, 8 July 1918, 3. Dzerzhinski; disavowed the allegation of several Left SRs that he wanted to arrest two Central Committee members as hostages.}

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 Bolsheviki put under guard the whole Left SR faction of approximately 450 people.\footnote{KKVChK, 230 (133), 235 (155); See Izvestia, 10 July 1918, 6.} Popov reacted by ordering some detachments to undertake reconnaissance in the streets of Moscow.\footnote{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. Muratow’s and N. Podvoiski’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 ("Leveys esery v 1917–1918 g.g.", Protetskaya revolutsiya 4 [1927]: 125) thinks these figures are exaggerated. In her opinion no more than a thousand men were actively involved. L. M. Spirej (“Rasprostranenye levikh eserov v Moskve v 1916–1918 g.g.,” Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal 10, no. 8 [1968]: 411), who talks of 1,300 Left SRs, and I. I. Mints (Grod 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 Sabin 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).} For a short time the
Left SRs controlled the Cheka headquarters and the main telegraph office. 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. [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. The Left SRs had built barricades and dug trenches in the streets, but the Latvian troops advanced nevertheless, with some casualties on both sides. 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. The very first salvos hit

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20 KKVChK, 257–76 (168–78); Evan Mawdsley, The Russian Civil War (Boston, 1987), 41.
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.” 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 terrorist 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.

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.”

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. Kingissepp, and Ia. Sheinkman, the three members of the “Special Fact-Finding Committee” that the Soviet government set up as early as 7 July 1918. 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...

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23 Izvestia, 8 July 1918, I. See a similar comment by Lenin in V. I. Lenin, Sochinenia, 2d rev. ed., vol. 23 (Moscow, 1930), 388.
25 Platy Virosositisski s’ezd., 132, 208; Izvestia, 10 July 1918, 3. Similar wording is also found in the proclamation of 7 July 1918 to all district soviets of workers’ deputies, KKVCkhK, 27ff. (170f.), 291 (190). See also Pravda, 9 July 1918, 3; 13 July 1918, 3; and 18 July 1918, 4.
26 Golos trudovogo krest’ianstva, 10 July 1918, 1; Izvestia, 8 July 1918, 1; Pravda, 9 July 1918, 1; KKVCkhK, 290 (186). See also D. Rudnev and S. Tsybov, “Sledovatel’ respubliki,” Volga, no. 5 (1967): 105.
the Left SR Party currently in power in particular are to be withheld."27 But evidence indicates that the SR Maximalist V. V. Likhobadin, a member of the executive committee of the party 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."28

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."29 Not only did the expression "uprising"

27 KKVChK, 253f. (1917), emphasis added. See also Vestnik parti zoobshechestva, nos. 7-8 (1918): 40; Golos trudovogo krest'ianstva, 11 July 1918, 4; Vladimirova, "Levye esery," 122; P. Mal'kov, Zapiski komandanta Moskovskogo Kremlia (Moscow, 1959), 222; and Piati toey XVII Sovetov Rabochikh, Krest'ianstva, Kazach'stva i Krasnoarm. Deputatov (Moscow, 1919), 58.
29 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.\(^x\)

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.\(^{y}\) The party leadership, in contrast, was "a crowd of adventurers" or even "whites," who lacked affinity with the masses.\(^{z}\)

Although these judgments have remained predominant in Soviet historiography, early Soviet assessments still exhibited a few differences.\(^{a}\) G. Ustinov, for instance, spoke of "treason, not yet known in universal history," whereas Lenin's right-hand man, V. D. Bonch-Bruevich, called the events a "political farce" and "tragically.

The expressions "anti-Soviet," "counter-revolutionary," and "adventurous" occur most frequently; rarer is the term "white-guard."\(^{b}\) Few Bolshevik

\(^{x}\) Lenin, Sochinenia, 4th ed., vol. 44 (Moscow, 1967), 67, "Likvidatsiya levosersovskogo miatezha v Moskve v 1918 godu," Krasnyi arkiv, 4, no. 101 (1940): 103; Pravitel’noye sъedint’ 2, p. 122 (SR-Maximalist Svetlov); ibid., p. 123 (SR-Internationalist Lindov); Nashe vek. 9 July 1918, 2; Izvestiia, 10 July 1918, 4; ibid., 8 July 1918, 5; Pravda, 9 July 1918, 3 (Menshevik Bishtok). More critical of the measures taken by the Bolsheviks were: L. K. Przhevalskii, Pravitel’noye sъedint’ 2, 119; Izvestiia, 10 July 1918, 4; Gurevich, Pravda, 9 July 1918, 3; and Lagovskii, Osobogozydanie truda, Organ Rossiiiskoi Sotsial-Demokraticheskoi Rabochei Partii (revolutionistynkh internatsionalistov), 31 July 1918, 2.

\(^{y}\) Trotsky, Sochinenia, vol. 17, pt. 1, p. 469. With this he quoted Left SR Tolkaevich's speech at the Moscow Soviet. See Izvestiia, 9 July 1918, 3; Nashe vek, 10 July 1918, 2; and Novaia zhizn’, 10 July 1918, 2. The Left SR A. Egorov spoke of 99 percent of the party members. See Gobba trudovogo krest’ianstva, 16 July 1918, 2; Pravda, 9 July 1918, 1, 2; and ibid., 10 July 1918, 1.

\(^{z}\) Pravda, 9 July 1918, 1. See also ibid., 9 July 1918, 4, and 10 July 1918, 4; Krasnaia gazeta, Izdanie Petrogradskogo Soveta Rabochikh i Soldatskich Dduparatov (vechernei vypusk), 9 July 1918, 1; Izvestiia, 8 July 1918, 1, and ibid., 10 July 1918, 1; and Zirovskii and Trotsky, O miatezhe, 16.

\(^{a}\) There is one recent exception questioning the findings of Soviet historiography. See V. Golovanov, "Levye eseny: Sorvannyi urok," Literaturnaya gazeta, 18 July 1990, 13.

\(^{b}\) Ustinov, Krashchenie partii levikh "esernov," 18; V. D. Bonch-Bruevich, Ubitstvo germanskogo posta Mirbachka i vosstanie levykh esernov, (po techenyam vospominniam) (Moscow, 1927), 17, 35.


For the term "counter-revolutionary," see Gusev, Krakh partii levikh esernov (Moscow, 1963), 215; A. Koroleva, "Levye eseny i khlebnaia monopoliia," Bor’ba klassov, 5, no. 10 (1925): 62; V. V. Kuchma, "V. I. Lenin o teoreticheskikh osnovakh soglasheniiia bol’shevikov s levymi esernami," in Besmotrye Leninskie idei: lublennye vypusk trudov k 100–leitu so dnya rozhdenia V. I. Leninga (Volgograd, 1970), 130; N. Muratov, "Vstrecha s Vecherom na voennom rabote," Spasskii politicheskii zhurnal, 7 (1925): 31; N. N. Popov, Melkoburzhuaznye antisovetskii parat, (shiest’ lektsii), 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.36

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.37 G. Hilger makes a similar assessment when he refers to the best-organized effort ever made to overthrow Soviet power from within.38 G. v. Rauch, one of the leading experts on Soviet historiography in Germany, even mentions the “uprising” in close connection with the uprising in Iaroslavl’ organized by the former SR B. Savinkov.39 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.”40 M. Perrie, a specialist in SR history, calls the “unsuccessful rebellion” of July an “ill-considered effort on the part of revolutionary idealists.”41 This virtual unanimity on an event of such


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."42 Chief among this small group are G. Katkov and Iu. Fel'sh'tinskii, 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.43 Their interpretation denies a Left SR insurrection and asserts instead a well-prepared Bolshevik "conspiracy" against the Left SR party.44 In their view, the Bolshevists 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 Bolshevist 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 Bolshevists. Particularly striking was the case of Blumkin, who originally was labeled an agent provocateur and who gave himself up in 1919, but whom the Soviet government then almost immediately granted amnesty and allowed to rejoin the Cheka.45 Moreover, Katkov and Fel'sh'tinskii point out the rather mysterious part played by Dzerzhinskii in July. The evidence he gave to the fact-finding committee is very contradictory.46 Fel'sh'tinskii 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.47


46 Katkov, "The Assassination of Count Mirbach," 88; Fel'sh'tinskii, "Istoriiia," 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 Bollnner 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 contact Popov at the. Popov had said that Blumkin had not been in the building. Dzerzhinskii "convicted" Popov because he saw Blumkin's cap in Popov's room. This, however, was not possible because we know that Blumkin forgot his cap in the German Legation. Dzerzhinskii's statement that Blumkin had forged his signature on the credentials is also 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 Bolshevists hurried to remove Aleksandrovich; he was shot without a court trial by Dzerzhinskii himself on 8 July.

47 Fel'sh'tinskii, Bol'sheviki, 256. Fel'sh'tinskii 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.\(^48\) 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.”\(^49\) This also becomes clear from the larger context of the minutes of 24 June: immediately after the offending sentence is a passage concerning 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.\(^50\) 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.\(^51\) The Left SRs repeated their call for an “uprising against the imperialists,” moreover, in a circular to all soviets early on 7 July.\(^52\) At

\(^{48}\) J. Steinberg, “The Events of July 1918,” 1, 15. Hoover Archives; l. N. Steinberg, In the Workshop of the Revolution (New York, 1954), 244; M. A. Spiridonova, Pismo M. Spiridonovoi Tsentral’nomu Komitetu partii bol’shevikov, 2d ed. (Petrograd, 1918), 4, 25, 28. See also KKVChK, 381 (221), 384 (222). On 17 July 1918 Spiridonova wrote to A. A. Izmailovich: “How is one to persuade them [the Bolsheviks] that there was no plot, no uprising? I am beginning to believe they have convinced themselves of it and now believe it. After all they are maniacs.” See “Kremli za reshetki,” (pis’ma iz Kremlevskoi) tsar’my M. A. Spiridonovoi i A. A. Izmailovichu), “in Kremli za reshetki, (podpol’snaia Rossia) (Berlin, 1922), 13.

\(^{49}\) Znamia truda, 13 January 1918, 2, and 13 January 1918, 1.

\(^{50}\) Znamia bor’by (Moscow), 30 July 1918, 4; KKVChK, 330 (200f). Claiming the opposite are V. Vladimirova, God slazhby “sotsialistov” kapitalistam: Ocherki po istorii kontro-revoluiistov v 1918 godu (Moscow, 1927), 269; Parfenov, Razgrom, 37; and Lonkina, Vserossiiskie v’ezdy Sovetov, 152f.


\(^{52}\) 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.53

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.54 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 as an act of self-defense.55 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.56 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.57 The fact that the Bolsheviks began to crush the “uprising”

53 Голос трудового крестьянства, 25 July 1918, 2.
54 KKVChK, 316 (203с); Spiridonova, Pis’ma, 28.
56 See KKVChK, 309 (1918), 309 (195); and Pravda, 18 July 1918, 3.
57 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. Simultaneously, the Bolsheviks took all Left SRs in the Kremlin into custody. The same happened to the Left SR party members of the Cheka. 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.

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. 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; 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”? 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

58 Bonch-Bruevich, Ubiitso germanskogo posia, 24f.
59 Lenin’s sbornik, vol. 34 (Moscow, 1942), 30; “Telefonogrammy V. I. Lenina v Moskovskii Sove in levo-sekovskogo miateza, 6 iulia 1918 goda,” Bor’ba klassov, nos. 2–3 (1932): 23; KKVChK, 310 (192); Golos trudovogo krest’ianstva, 16 July 1918, 2. See information about the release of Left SR Emelianov from Bolshevik arrest by Popov’s unit in KKVChK, 311 (196); and Izvestia, 8 July 1918, 3.
60 KKVChK, 310 (195). For further details about Zaks, see Novaia zhizni, 11 July 1918, 3, and 16 July 1918, 3.
61 See KKVChK, 325 (203); “Vostanie levykh sov.-ov v osveshchenii gen. Vatsetisa,” 5, Steinberg Archive, box 52, F. 967 L; Scheibert, Lenin an der Macht, 427; Fel’shteinskii, Bolsheviki, 204f.
62 Nash ves, 29 June 1918, 3; Novaia zhizni, 29 June 1918, 3.
63 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 “intelligentsia.” 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.64

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.65 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?66

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.67 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

64 Peters, “Vospominanii o rabote v VChK,” 107f.
66 Izvestiia, 8 July 1918, 5; Bonch-Bruevich, Ubiistvo germanskogo posla, 23. See also KKVChK, 315 (198).
67 Bonch-Bruevich, 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. 68

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; Iv. Sabin, 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.” 69 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. 70 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. 71 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

69 KKVChK, 311 (196), emphasis added. See also Pravda, 18 July 1918, 3.
71 Zinov’ev and Trotsky, O miatezhe, 9.
accompli that would force them to change their foreign policy by breaking off diplomatic relations with Germany. 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.” 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. 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.

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.

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.’” 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.” 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.

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72 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.
73 Vladimirrova, “Levye esery,” 113 (emphasis added).
74 Steinberg, Events, 165; Vladimirrova, God sluzhby, 266.
75 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.
76 Piatyi sovetskiy VTsIK, 57, 62; Novaya zhizn’, 12 July 1918, 2; N. A. Nogoven-Stepanov, Etapy Velikoi Rosskoi Revoliutsii (Samara, 1918), 167. The Left SR delegate of the Koz’mo-Dem’ianskiy county, Kazan province, confirmed this. He gave evidence that the July events had been totally surprising. See KKVChK, 269 (175).
78 Porepskaya sekretariya TsK RSDRP(h)-RKP(b) s mesyami partnymi organizatsiyami, vol. 3, 1918 g. (Moscow, 1967), 115. See also Novaya zhizn’, 12 July 1918, 2, and 14 July 1918, 3; Izvestiya, 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. 70

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. 80 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. 81

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.” 82 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. 83 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. 84 Furthermore, all party offices and even some private dwellings of Left

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19 Spridonova, Fiz’ma, 17; Novaya zhizn, 14 July 1918, 3.
20 Novaya zhizn, 11 July 1918, 1; Pristavkin, “Kommunisticheskaya partiya,” 300.
21 Perepiska, pp. xi, 89, 108, 118. See also Sakwa, Soviet Communist, 182–84.
22 Zinoviev and Trotsky, O miatezhe, 3; Gusev, Krakh, 211; Partenov, “Likvidatsiya,” 38.
24 Izvestiya, 8 July 1918, 3; Nash vek, 9 July 1918, 3 and 10 July 1918, 3; Izvestiya, 9 July 1918, 3; Krasnaya armiya, 9 July 1918, 1 and 10 July 1918, 3. See also E. D. Stasova, Vospominaniia (Moscow, 1969), 169f; and Partenov, “Likvidatsiya,” 107.
SRs were searched; despite strong protests from, among others, the Putilov workers, the Petrograd party organ Znamia bor’by was prohibited. 85 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.” 86 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.” 87 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. 88

In Kazan, a Left SR stronghold, the Bolsheviks tried unsuccessfully to prompt the Left SRs to condemn the policies of their Central Committee. 89 Here, too, the party organ, Za zemliu i volu, was prohibited and many “suspicious elements” were arrested. 90 The local Bolsheviks now followed the maxim: “Everyone who is not for us is against us.” 91 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. 92 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-

86 Gusev, Krakh, 220; A. Kuzmin, “V Petrogradskoi gubernii v 1917–1918 g.g. (vospominania o ranote v lamburgskom uzele v Petrogradskom gubernskom sovete v 1917–1918 g.g.,” Krasnaya letopis’ 3, no. 27 (1928): 246.
87 Krasnaya armiya, 12 July 1918, 2. See also Novaya zhizn’, 12 July 1918, 2.
88 Golos trudovogo krest’ianstva, 18 July 1918, 2.
89 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, (oktar’ 1917–niut’ 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.
90 The Left SRs’ attempt to reopen the newspaper again on 1 August 1918 was stopped by the Cheka after the first issue.
91 Andrianov, Uprochenie, 583.
92 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. 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. 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. But the Bolsheviks were not entirely certain of success, and for good reasons. 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.

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.

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

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83 Ib. , 595, 602f.
84 Ib. , 698.
85 Ib., 599, 613; Protokoly Piaty s’ezda, 134, 209.
86 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.
87 N. A. Andrianov and K. A. Tolstjakov, Stanovlenie i uprocheniia vlasti sovetov Tsarii (Kazan, 1967), 139; A. L. Levin, Krest’ianskovo Srednego Povolzh’ia v gody grazhdanskoi voiny, (materialy) (Kazan, 1972), 141.
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. 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. 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."

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. 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. 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.

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

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100 Spiridonova, Pis'ma, 264; KKVChK, 362I (221f); Rudnev and Tsybov, "Sledovatel' respubliki," 127.
101 See Novaya zhizn', 12 July 1918, 1.
102 On 29 November 1918, Spiridonova and Sablin were pardoned because of their service for the revolution. See KKVChK, 365 (222); Leggett, The Cheka, 78, claims that the Bolsheviks decided on clemency because they did not feel strong enough about the matter to risk antagonizing the countryside, where the Left SRs enjoyed a wide following.
103 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 Kharkov. He was executed in Moscow in May 1921.
104 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.