

Preface and Acknowledgments

The title of this book is a transparent allusion to Bloody Sunday, the infamous massacre of peaceful demonstrators in St. Petersburg by the tsar's soldiers that touched off the Russian revolution of 1905. In Soviet Russia, the event was held up in schools and in historical and popular writings as one of the most abominable acts of the reactionary imperial regime, and was so regarded by the population at large. It was unnecessary to state what was considered obvious, that nothing of the kind could possibly happen in the "workers' state." But on June 2, 1962, what had been deemed impossible occurred in the south Russian town of Novochoerkassk. There demonstrators taking part in a great strike were subjected to an attack that killed twenty-four people and seriously wounded sixty-nine others. Immediately reminded of the episode of January 9, 1905, persons on the scene dubbed what they had just experienced "Bloody Saturday."¹

The strike had erupted on June 1 at the Novochoerkassk Electric Locomotive Works (NEVZ), which employed 13,000 workers. The workers had several grievances, but most immediately the strike was triggered by the Khrushchev government's announcement on May 31 of a steep rise in the prices of meat and butter. The stoppage rapidly spread to other plants in the city's industrial zone, bringing out many thousands of workers. Activists in the party and Komsomol (Communist Youth League) who attempted to justify the government policy and dissuade the workers from striking were hooted down and sometimes roughed up. Some of the strikers blocked a train on the nearby Saratov–Rostov line, bringing the traffic on much of the line to a halt. Others invaded the factory administration building and for a while held hostage the first secretary of the Rostov oblast (province) party organization, who had tried in vain to persuade the workers to return to work. Efforts of local police and military garrison forces to bring the disorder to an end proved fruitless. With lightning speed, the vaunted Communist apparatus lost the control that it cus-

tomarily exercised. Heartened by their successes, the strikers resolved to march the following day, Saturday, to the *gorkom*, the headquarters of the local party organization, to press their demands for a reduction in food prices and an increase in pay.

The Kremlin learned of the strike and some of the workers' collateral actions by midday of June 1. So alarmed was the leadership that a top-flight team headed by F. R. Kozlov, Khrushchev's heir apparent, and the venerable Anastas Mikoyan was dispatched to deal with the situation. Although the possibility of a peaceful resolution of the conflict was envisaged, the military option was not excluded, and several thousand troops as well as tank units were hastily deployed into the city. It was considered mandatory to keep the strike from spreading, and to that end the roads into and out of Novocherkassk were sealed off and telephone communication with the outside world was interrupted. Lacking a tradition of collective action and having taken no steps to create a strike committee, the workers were ill prepared to negotiate. The elite leaders who came to Novocherkassk disagreed on the course to take and proved inept at exploring the possibility of a negotiated settlement. An agreement might have been worked out, however, had the contest not come to a head so speedily—only twenty-eight hours after it had begun.

On June 2, thousands of strikers, some accompanied by wives and children and their ranks soon swelled by supporters and curious onlookers, marched nine kilometers to the *gorkom*. Led by Father G. A. Gapon, the demonstrators in St. Petersburg in 1905 had carried religious icons, uttered prayers, and sung the national anthem, "God Save the Tsar." The Novocherkassk demonstrators affirmed their devotion to the ideals of the revolution by holding aloft red banners and portraits of Lenin and singing revolutionary songs. The authorities planned to block the procession at the one bridge over the Tuzlov River that connected the industrial zone with the town proper. In the event, the tanks arrayed there neither intimidated the marchers nor attempted to stop them. As the marchers approached the *gorkom*, they generally shunned disorderly conduct; but the Moscow leaders assembled there perceived them as a vicious mob and fled ignominiously to the security of a military compound.

The demonstrators took possession of the square before the *gorkom*. Then, exasperated by the unwillingness of the leaders to confer with them, elements of the crowd rioted. They seized the building, vandalized some of the rooms, and harangued the throng from the balcony. When a female speaker contended that some fellow strikers arrested the night before were being abused at the po-

lice station, a contingent hastened there and forced their way in. In the skirmish that ensued, the soldiers on guard killed five persons and wounded others. About half an hour later, military forces cleared the gorkom of the intruders, who offered no resistance. Although the crowd refrained from other aggressive acts, the patience of the Moscow leaders was running out, and they determined to disperse the throng one way or another. When a general's warning over a loudspeaker went unheeded, firing began, first into the crowd and then at men, women, and youths fleeing the area. Sixteen persons were killed and dozens wounded. Strange as it may seem, to this day there is uncertainty as to who precisely ordered the fusillade, who carried it out, and whence it came. A hypothesis on these matters is offered in the body of the text.

Mass arrests followed the shootings, and 114 persons were tried in a series of court proceedings. In the most important trial, conducted before a panel of the Supreme Court of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR), seven persons were convicted of fomenting mass disorders and banditry, sentenced to death, and executed. The courts sentenced scores of others to long terms in "severe regime" correctional labor camps.

Because the Novocherkassk massacre so flagrantly contradicted the Soviet regime's ideology and rhetoric, it was inevitable that it would be covered up. The bodies of those slain on Bloody Saturday were secretly buried at places some distance from Novocherkassk. Not a word about what had occurred on June 2 or of the trials held in August and September appeared in the Soviet press. Fragments of information did seep out of the USSR and were published abroad but, understandably, for a long time what the outside world knew of the Novocherkassk events was both extremely limited and flawed in many respects. In the mid-1970s, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn produced much the best account to that point in his searing indictment of the Soviet regime, *The Gulag Archipelago*.² Unfortunately, his rendition also perpetuated a good many errors and myths about the events of 1962. When such dissidents as General Petr Griorenko, Andrei Sakharov, and his wife, Elena Bonner, gained an inkling of the Novocherkassk story, they clandestinely sought to publicize it.

It was not until the advent of glasnost, however, that the Soviet people had occasion to learn of "the Novocherkassk tragedy," as it came to be called. From obscurity it then achieved the status of a cause célèbre, in good part because of the unremitting agitation of P. P. Siuda, one of the strikers who had been imprisoned for several years. Beginning in mid-1988 and continuing for the next four years, investigative reporters zealously ferreted out and published bits and

pieces of the shocking story in dozens of newspaper articles. Public revulsion was magnified by Yevgeny Yevtushenko, who vented his outrage at the government's handling of the matter in a poem conspicuously featured in *Literaturnaia gazeta*.³

Parallel with these revelations, a campaign was launched in Novocherkassk to secure a reconsideration of what had occurred and of the trial verdicts as well. The campaign gained momentum when reformist deputies elected to the First Congress of People's Deputies (May 1989), led by the dean of Leningrad University's law school, A. A. Sobchak, demanded an independent review of the matter and the rehabilitation of people wrongfully slain or convicted. For many months the KGB, the USSR Procuracy, and the military high command did everything they could to obstruct efforts to disclose the embarrassing truths. When it was no longer possible to deny that people had been shot, the authorities justified the action as the appropriate response to "mass disorders" instigated by criminals and hooligans who had attacked soldiers and state institutions. Ultimately, as the Soviet regime went through its death throes, the Supreme Court of the USSR exonerated the victims, and the Procuracy followed suit. In a final act to the protracted drama, the bodies of those murdered on Bloody Saturday were located, disinterred, and, exactly thirty years after the day of the massacre, given a decent burial in a Novocherkassk cemetery.⁴

Solzhenitsyn surely exaggerated in characterizing the Novocherkassk upheaval as "a turning point in the modern history of Russia."⁵ But it would be equally misleading to assert that it did not have significant consequences. Corrective actions instituted by the party-state in the short term included such measures as the provision of more adequate food supplies to the city, the sacking of political and industrial personnel, and the tightening of security measures. More important were certain long-term results. To make some headway against the shortages of meat and dairy products, the regime began to import large amounts of feed grain. Yet so shaken was the Soviet leadership by what had transpired at Novocherkassk that it never dared to increase food prices again. Accordingly, agricultural subsidies grew apace, consumed ever larger shares of the state's budget, and necessitated cuts in the budgets for other economic sectors. The resulting unbalancing of the economy contributed more than a little to the steady decline in the overall growth rate, rightly considered a key factor in the collapse of the Soviet regime. The Novocherkassk eruption was an early signal that the Soviet economy had begun to lose its dynamism, that it would

prove impossible for the USSR to continue its early rate of growth and simultaneously modernize its industry, raise living standards, and maintain its status as a superpower.

The economic factor was not the only cause of the regime's decline and fall, and the Novochoerkassk events figured in another way in that saga. In the glasnost era, the revelation week in and week out of happenings discreditable to the party-state obviously eroded its legitimacy. Surely one of the most devastating blows was the disclosure that the "workers' state" had perpetrated a massacre of workers who had been struggling to better their conditions.

This study tells two stories, one about the 1962 events—the strike, the massacre, and the trial; the second about how knowledge of those events, quite effectively concealed for a long time, was progressively brought to light. Included also is a chapter on General M. K. Shaposhnikov and P. P. Siuda, two interesting characters whose names are closely identified with the events. A social democrat by conviction and a long-time member of the American Civil Liberties Union, I approached the Novochoerkassk happenings with a distinctive mind-set. No doubt my values have colored my treatment in some measure, but I have endeavored to understand as objectively as possible the motives and behavior of the contending groups. Having studied the evidence, I incline to think that the brutal suppression of the strike was not inevitable, other outcomes were possible, and miscalculation and error on one side and the other figured importantly in determining what happened.

I first heard something of the massacre in 1963–64, when I was engaged in research in Moscow. A student at the university residence hall where I was housed told me in a hushed voice that something awful had happened in Novochoerkassk. The student was vague about the circumstances, and my research at the time was focused on seventeenth-century Russia, so the rumor made little impression on me. So far as I can remember, I never encountered anything in print on the Novochoerkassk affair until about thirty years later. At a conference in St. Petersburg in 1993, A. A. Chernobaev, the editor of the journal *Istoricheskii arkhiv*, handed me a copy of the most recent issue. The journal contained the first installment of a two-part collection of secret KGB documents produced contemporaneously with the events of mid-1962. I read the documents on the flight back home, and so engrossing and revealing did the materials appear to me that I resolved then and there to explore the events further. This was undoubtedly an impulsive decision, inasmuch as I had been

mainly concerned with Russia's history in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the preceding twenty years or so. Other commitments prevented me from investigating the story in a sustained way until 1997, although in the intervening years I managed to locate and read much of the relevant published material—dozens of newspaper articles, several pieces that appeared in journals, and a singular pamphlet by Irina Mardar'.

In 1997 I spent a fruitful six weeks, and in 1998 a month, researching the subject in Novochoerkassk, Rostov-on-Don, and Moscow. In Novochoerkassk and Rostov I interviewed a number of persons (some of them repeatedly) who either had been involved somehow in the events or had written about them. Two of the latter called to my attention important unpublished material of whose existence I had been unaware. I had an opportunity to examine closely the terrain in Novochoerkassk on which the events unfolded. The oblast library in Rostov yielded supplementary information in provincial and local newspapers. I gained admission to and gathered precious data in archives in Rostov and Moscow. But it was by no means smooth sailing all the way.

I had learned of an eight-volume record of the principal trial and, believing it to be a cardinal source, did all I could in both 1997 and 1998 to track it down and secure access to it. My effort foundered, even though an influential jurist intervened on my behalf. Fortunately, in the State Archive of the Russian Federation (*Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii* [GARF]) I came upon the lengthy record of the preliminary investigation that preceded the trial, a document that surely prefigured, as was generally true, the course that the trial ran. I had also noted a reference to a thirty-one-volume collection of testimony on the Novochoerkassk story amassed by the Chief Military Procuracy (*Glavnaia Voennaia Prokuratura*) in 1990–91. Although I was denied an opportunity to examine these materials, located in Moscow, a rich 170-page summary of this compilation came to my attention. Those in authority have evidently considered it imprudent to publish this summary, but it turned out to be the single most important source for my reconstruction of the strike and massacre. In hopes of acquiring a feel for the setting of the drama, I carefully observed the exterior of the NEVZ administration building and the adjacent area in which much of the action occurred on the first day of the strike. But the officious staff member of the plant with whom I managed to secure an interview belittled the significance of the strike and massacre, and stubbornly refused me permission to have a look inside the works. Obviously, persons com-

mitted to the practice of secrecy and cover-up remain ensconced in many important positions in post-Soviet Russia.

Having focused on a topic in recent history, relied to a fair degree on interviews and newspaper reportage, and been stonewalled from time to time in my quest for information, I feel somewhat like a journalist. Yet I have not, of course, abandoned the historian's craft that I've plied for fifty years. So perhaps my current work may be considered a cross between history and journalism. A byword has it that journalism is "a rough draft of history," but I believe that my endeavor is something more than that. It is one of the first attempts at a scholarly study of the Novocherkassk affair; the only other one is a fine, extended chapter in a volume by V. A. Kozlov that appeared after I had completed my work.⁶ The two treatments overlap to some extent, but Kozlov concentrates on the strike and devotes little or no attention to other dimensions of the story that figure prominently in my study. Besides, although both of us have depended on some of the same sources in dealing with the strike, each has also drawn upon materials that the other has not, so the two renditions of the strike are complementary. It is a safe bet that as previously inaccessible sources are made available and others come to light, new and more comprehensive studies of this critical episode will join our pioneer endeavors.

I wish to express my deep appreciation to the many institutions and individuals who have generously assisted me in bringing this work to fruition. Grants from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and the International Research and Exchanges Board enabled me to do indispensable investigatory work in Russia. V. A. Kozlov, deputy director of GARF, whose writing on the Novocherkassk upheaval was then in press, graciously guided me to several key sources. Director N. Ia. Emel'ianenko kindly permitted me to consult relevant materials in the Contemporary History Documentation Center (Tsentri Dokumentatsii Noveishii Istorii [TsDNI]) in Rostov-on-Don. It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of the aid rendered me in Rostov by the knowledgeable journalists Ol'ga Nikitina and Iurii Bespalov, who had published the first articles on Novocherkassk in the Soviet press and continued to bring forth illuminating evidence in further articles. Viktor and Alla Panchenko made me feel at home in Rostov through their friendship, endless hospitality, and support. My work in Novocherkassk was signally assisted by the local archaeologist M. I. Kraismetnyi, who escorted me to the key sites and provided infor-

mation about them and arranged interviews with persons I wished to meet. Other leaders of the Novocherkassk Tragedy Foundation, the former striker Valentina Vodianitskaia, and the journalists Irina Mardar' and Tat'iana Bocharova willingly received me, answered my questions, and shared with me their knowledge and insights. Milton O. Gustafson, of the U.S. National Archives, and Jennie Levine, former librarian at the Open Society Archive in Budapest, kindly found relevant materials in their repositories for me. My long-time friend Vladimir Treml made numerous helpful suggestions and comments on the work in progress. Bruce Menning and Peter Solomon gave me the benefit of their expertise on a number of points. Tatiana Cherednik and Lawrence Feinberg kindly translated some difficult passages for me. Barbara Salazar edited the manuscript meticulously. I am especially indebted to Steven I. Levine, who volunteered to read a part and then the completed manuscript, and whose incisive comments prompted me to reconsider many matters and make constructive revisions. Of course, I alone am responsible for remaining errors.