



AN EXCERPT FROM:

REVOLUTION FROM WITHIN

*THE YMCA IN RUSSIA'S ASCENSION TO FREEDOM FROM
BOLSHEVIK TYRANNY*



"...A third front was needed, the battlefield of truth—truth to be achieved in freedom at whatever cost."

—Donald Lowrie, *Rebellious Prophet: A Life of Nicolai Berdyaev*, 1960

Catherine Baird, Ph.D.

Preface

A BRIEF CRACK OF LIGHT

“The cradle rocks above an abyss and common sense tells us that our existence is but a brief crack of light between two eternities of darkness.”

—Vladimir Nabokov, *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited*, 1898.¹



¹ Vladimir Nabokov, *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited*. London: Vintage, 1898.



Lenin's Hubris

Irony pervades this book. The story of The 160, the YMCA, and Russia's revolution from within that ended in the dismantling of the Soviet Union was a complex web of power struggles: over food and money, individual rights and State control, faith, and power. As the outcomes achieved by this unusual alliance emerged—between such seemingly strange bedfellows as the YMCA and The 160—the threat that Lenin perceived in their ideas became more and more apparent. And, by 1922, his sense of urgency to get these thinkers out of the country, to extinguish any chance of their continued influence among the Russian people, had risen to a fevered pitch.

The expulsion of The 160 was clearly Lenin's personal fight. His obsession with these intellectuals, many of whom were his former colleagues, was equaled only by his supercilious arrogance. Lenin's own *Collected Works* transparently describe in blatant, even gloating terms, about how successfully he contrived his diabolical plots. And so while many people may be more familiar with the atrocities that Stalin enacted against the people of Russia than with these precursors,² The 160 and the related repressions against the intelligentsia and Russian Orthodox Church were entirely Lenin's folly.

² When I was immersed in Russian history writing this thesis, the prevailing approach was to quickly skim over the early years of Bolshevism to focus on the Stalinist era and its concomitant purges and atrocities. Stalin and Hitler made for interesting comparison. Several books did deliberately expose Lenin's brutality and cast him as "Mentor of terror" to Stalin, but these were often dismissed in academic circles as emotional, or ideological. All this changed in the 1990s when historians gained access to the full breadth of Soviet Archives, once kept secret. Volkogonov's *Lenin* (1994) led this disclosure, followed by updated biographies on Lenin from leading Soviet scholars who felt it timely to update their theses (for example, Robert Service, *Lenin: A Biography* (2000) or Richard Pipes, *The Unknown Lenin* (1999)). One of the most damning criticisms of Lenin (and all Communist Parties worldwide) was produced in 2007 in the collection *Livres Noir Due Communism (The Black Book of Communism)* edited by Stéphane Courtois. The book was controversial: According to review by historian Tony Judt in *The New York Times*: "The myth of the well-intentioned founders—the good czar Lenin betrayed by his evil heirs—has been laid to rest for good. No one will any longer be able to claim ignorance or uncertainty about the criminal nature of Communism." See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Black_Book_of_Communism 3/2/2014.

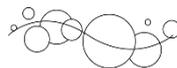
It was no accident that it was Lenin, not Stalin, who collected all the works written by The 160. His obsession caused him to trace their every move, read everything they wrote, and get reports of everything they said— and then hoard the whole mass of information in his private library. There they lay like a glowing coal for 70 years, supposedly unseen by anyone other than the most loyal Communist officials. Until Yakovlev brought about the Return as an essential component of *glasnost'*, and Gorbachev's restructuring of the Soviet Union overturned the very same colossal State empire that Lenin had created!

In fact, the subtlety of The 160's ideas and their ability to impact popular beliefs did not appear to resonate strongly with Stalin at all. Nowhere was this clearer than in a seemingly innocuous interlude when Stalin, toward the end of World War II, reopened the Russian Orthodox Church and allowed members to rebuild the theological academies, libraries, and a printing press. Immediately, Church members asked the YMCA Press to supply its *entire collection* of books and articles in order to help fill their library shelves.

Through this trick of fate, the YMCA brought back to Russia the treasure trove of ideas they had so painstakingly cultivated with The 160.

This is a tale about the hubris of political leaders determined to use all means, however despicable, to manipulate their people into helpless submission. If Lenin's secret archive became an unintended glimmer of light for the inner echelons of the Communist Party, the YMCA Press' delivery of books to these restored Orthodox academies made the "lost ideas" available to clerics and rigorously-screened academics who shared them with others—in their homes, in the forced labor camps of the Gulag, and in their classrooms. Anywhere they could. And it was enough.

Like the first crack in a concrete foundation, a tiny flicker of light returned to Russia, and it grew...



Who Were “The 160”?

The label “The 160” is a convenience, denoting approximately 160 intellectuals who were arrested and expelled from Russia in 1922, along with their families—some 225 people in all. My initial attempt to tally the complete list in 1997 arrived at the positive identification of 141 intellectuals. Since then, the newly opened archives in the former Soviet Union have enabled scholars to add to this accounting and arrive at the now accepted number. The full list may be found in the appendix.

The 160 did not all belong to any particular political party; they were not all adherents of any one faith, ideology, or belief. More than a third were involved in the development of spiritual philosophy, art and culture in Russia. Some taught university courses and many were prolific writers.

Another third were mostly former politicians, local cooperative assembly leaders, doctors, agronomists, and economists. The remainder of The 160 belonged to small sects like the Abrikosov group, Tolstoyans, or the Eurasians. And some did not even fit the designation “intellectual.” The only commonality they all shared was that Lenin personally selected them for arrest and deportation as dangerous opponents of the Bolshevik Party, people he deemed threatening enough to warrant expulsion, yet also too risky to kill.

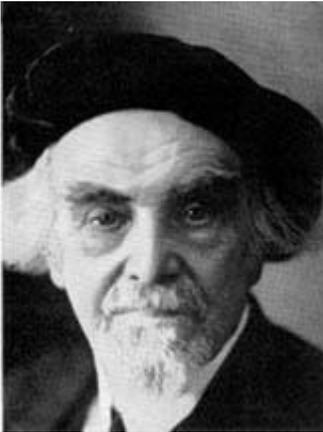
In Russia today, these people are collectively referred to as *Filosofskii parokhod* (the Philosophers’ Steamer), denoting the luxury steam liners that were used to transport them out of the country. Since 2002, every five years on the anniversary of their expulsion, someone writes a memorial article to remember the impact of their loss for Russians.³

Recently, the leading political thinkers and philosophers expelled as part of The 160 have been compared to the founding fathers of the United States of America: to thought leaders like Benjamin Franklin, Patrick Henry,

³ http://philosophynow.org/issues/31/The_Philosophers_Ship,
<http://russiaprofile.org/politics/a1191848461.html>,
http://www.sptimesrussia.com/index.php?action_id=2&story_id=7933#null
http://english.ruvr.ru/radio_broadcast/2248959/60164565

John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson.⁴ The 160 believed in federalism, republicanism, and balance of powers in order to try to ensure a small, powerless government and protect the inalienable rights of man. Losing these thinkers can be equated to a massive brain drain for the vibrant, growing Russia at the turn of the 20th century.

Some of “The 160”



Nikolai Berdyaev (1874-1948) - Of noble birth, Berdyaev began his career in Marxism (Legal Marxist). He was arrested and exiled within Russia to Vologda province by the Tsarist police in 1898.

Influenced by Vladimir Solovyov and Slavophile and Orthodox ideas in general, he renewed his faith and shifted first to Idealism (Neo-Kantianism), then Symbolism, and finally to Spiritual Philosophy. Berdyaev was one of the authors in *Vekhi* (“Signposts”). He was deeply involved in the Vladimir Solovyov Society and continued it in the Free Academy of Spiritual Culture (1918-1922). He was arrested by the Bolsheviks several times prior to his expulsion from Russia.

In exile, Berdyaev forged strong ties with the American YMCA as well as French and other European intellectuals. He was editor in chief of the YMCA-Press, founder of the Russian Religious-Philosophical Academy in Berlin and Paris, editor of the periodical *Put'* (“the Way”). During WWII, he was visited by the Gestapo on several occasions but never arrested or imprisoned. [Read more...](#)

⁴Paul Robinson, “Putin’s Philosophy,” *The American Conservative*, March 28, 2012. <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/putins-philosophy>



Sergei Bulgakov (1871-1944) – Longtime colleague and friend of Berdyaev, Bulgakov’s career followed a similar path, although more strongly tied to the Orthodox Church and economics. Bulgakov was also more politically engaged. In addition to contributing to Marxist theory, he was elected as a Christian socialist to Russia’s Second Duma (Parliament) and participated in the Great Sobor (Church Council) in 1917-1918.

Bulgakov was also targeted by Lenin in the arrests and expulsion of The 160 in 1922.

Son of an Orthodox Priest, Bulgakov became ordained in 1918 and was part of the Bratstvo sviatoi Sofii. In exile, he reconstituted the Bratstvo in 1923 and helped found St. Sergius Orthodox Seminary in Paris with financial help orchestrated by the YMCA. Like Solovyov, Bulgakov advocated ecumenism and worked for the reunification of the Christian Churches. [Read more...](#)



Semen Frank (1877–1950) - Another Marxist who was to embrace idealism and then spiritual philosophy, Frank largely shared the same experiences as Bulgakov, Struve, and Berdyaev until the 1922 expulsion.

When exiled in 1922 with The 160, Frank chose to stay in Berlin until the Nazi repressions against people of Jewish descent became intolerable, causing him

Photo: Peter Scorer

to move first to France and then to England. He converted to Orthodoxy in 1912.

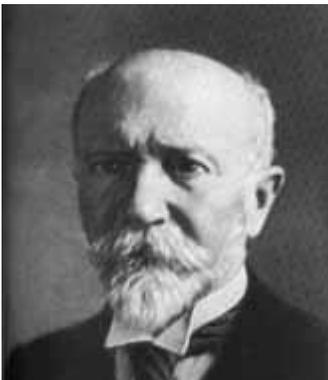
[Read more about his biography in the beautiful interview his grandson, Peter Scorer, undertook with Voice of Russia radio.](#)



Yekaterina Kuskova (1869–1958)

- was a journalist and activist with medical training who almost ended up lynched by the Russian peasants in 1891–1892. With her common-law husband, Sergei Prokopovich, she became a Marxist, then joined Struve, Frank, Berdyaev, Bulgakov and the others in moderating the communist ideology.

Like her fellow (Legal Marxists), Kuskova left the party at the turn of the 20th century and helped form constitutional democratic political movements. 1921, she and Prokopovich lead the Famine Relief Committee (VKPG), and both were exiled the following year as part of The 160. [Read more...](#)

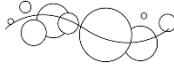


Nikolai Lossky (1870-1965) - was an intuitivist spiritual philosopher, member of the Vladimir Solovyov Society who went on to participate in the Free Academy of Spiritual Culture in St. Petersburg after the 1917 Bolshevik coup. Like Berdyaev and Frank, he evolved personalism and libertarianism throughout his work.

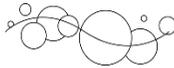
Following a near-death experience, he turned formally back to the Russian Orthodox religious beliefs of his

childhood, mentored by Father Pavel Florensky (who himself was caught up in the wave of arrests, but not expelled with The 160).

While many of The 160 settled in Berlin and then Paris, Lossky became Professor at the Russian University of Prague in Czechoslovakia - personally invited to join the faculty by President Masaryk. [Read more...](#)



Full List of The 160



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About the Author

Catherine Baird, Ph.D. completed her doctorate in Russian and French Intellectual History at McGill University, Montreal, Canada, in 1998. Since then, she has diversified her experience in business and technology, working as a Director, Architect, Vice-President of Operations, and CIO. She is now an Information Technology executive, specializing in Cloud Solutions and Big Data. Catherine Baird is also the founder of “From Pyramids to Clouds,” a place for discussion and discovering connections as people embrace unity and consciousness.



Catherine Baird can be reached through
www.catherinebairdbooks.com, at rfwthebook@gmail.com,
[@CBairdWriter](https://www.facebook.com/catherinebairdbooks), [facebook.com/catherinebairdbooks](https://www.facebook.com/catherinebairdbooks)

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