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**RUSSIAN NEO-POPULIST PARTIES ABOUT THE PROBLEM OF  
FORMULATING CIVIL CONSCIOUSNESS**

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*Abstract*

The article analyzes the approaches to the problem of formulating civic consciousness of the Russian working population, proposed in the beginning of the XXth century by neo-Populist parties. Neopopulism is a generalized definition of revolutionary and moderate populism, which revived at the turn of the 19th — 20th centuries and renewed its ideological background through the synthesis of classical populist and some social democratic ideas, represented by the Russian Socialist Revolutionary and Popular Socialist parties. These parties were Russian native representatives of democratic socialism. Neo-populists regarded a source of income as the main criterion of the class division of society and did not range the workers according to their revolutionary prospects, but consolidated workers, peasants and the working intelligentsia into the general concept of "working people". The peasantry was the "target audience" and the main neo-populists selectorate of the early twentieth century. Both parties were active in enlightening the peasant population in common cultural and in civil and political terms. They paid a lot of attention to the problem of morality: all neo-populists recognized the dialectical unity of the development of an individual as a moral being and social progress in general. Unfortunately, many of the proposed and successfully tested forms and methods of the interaction of these parties with their "wards" from people were subsequently rejected and forgotten. Meanwhile, the commitment to moral imperatives in both political and personal life is an example for modern politicians choosing the means and methods to implement their programs.

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**Keywords:** People socialists, personality, society, state.



## 1. Introduction

In modern social sciences, in history especially, the definition of “democratic socialism” has been firmly established. This word combination is an indicative of the dichotomy: socialism can also be undemocratic (as it was shown by the Bolshevist dictatorship in the USSR and a number of totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, proclaimed their goals as to build a socialist society). Democratic socialism is an ideological-political phenomenon that combines the best characteristics of social democratic and liberal ideologies. The core values of “classical” social democracy (from a justice society to the employment equity society) are supplemented by an explicated doctrine on individual freedom, its sovereignty, that is, a man, an individual, recognition of his/her inherent value in society as a system, that is an liberalism ideological know-how. It should also be noted that the representatives of the democratic socialism did not strongly accept dictatorship and lack of freedom “for the radiant future” on an either state or intraparty scale.

In Russia, democratic socialism was developed under the influence of the European social democracy and from liberalism to a certain degree, but it acquired original, unique features owing to homeland. This peculiarity is naturally explained by the special economic and social and stratificational realities of the Russian society, its political, social and cultural and mental features. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, there was an active process of formation of a civil (democratic) culture in the country, accompanied by the rapid development of a competitive party and political system. Many European countries had already passed that way by that time, and the Russian public politicians and ideologists considered that experience as useful: they used not only political struggle methods, but also the basic principles of world ideologies as well, being, as it is known, the products of Western culture. For modern social and liberal democrats the issue of the relationship between the sovereignty of the individual and the communal interests of society and the state has not still lost its significance.

## 2. Problem Statement

According to the German historian N. Plotnikov, “a conceptual pair “state-personality” is rated as the main pain point and, at the same time, the most frequently discussed topics in Russian intellectual and political history (Plotnikov, 2013). Furthermore, an equally important issue for the political forces, having chosen socialist ideology as a roadmap, was the problem of the relationship “society-personality”. At the beginning of the twentieth century there was certainly a clause on personality issue, exercising and enjoying its rights and liberty in the ideological constructions of the leading political parties in Russia though it was expressed in different forms and to various extents. Personal liberty, its all-round development are factors which are essential for the development of people legal consciousness and, consequently, social progress. The topic of the masses social and personal development was particularly relevant for the neo-populist parties, such as the Socialist-Revolutionaries (SRs) and the Popular Socialists (PSs). According to these parties a source of income but not an attitude to property was the main criterion for division of society into classes. Thus, in one camp there were those classes which source was exploitation of other’s labor, and in the other camp there were people who lived by their labor - “working people” - the trinity of the peasants, the workers and the working intellectuals (intelligentsia) (Protasova, 2017). Both parties positioned themselves as political force acting on behalf of and in the interests of the working people.

Russian specificity was such that the overwhelming majority of the working population consisted of peasants. Moreover, compared to the intelligentsia and even the relatively cohesive and mobile working class, and due to the traditional, inactive way of life, the peasants had immeasurably less opportunities to gain the civilian experience and knowledge necessary for moving towards socialism separately without help and “wardship”. Consequently, it was the peasants that were the “target audience” and the main social foundation of neo-populism of the early XXth century.

The work with the peasant mass was extremely hampered by the traditional way of their life and the resulting peculiarities to the worldview of the poor, underdeveloped, stubbornly inert in the habits and tastes, “average” village worker. According to Gudimenko (1994), etatism, state hypertrophy and civil society atrophy, causes such a Russian feature as a lack of proper social integrating foundations, a very weak ability of the people to self-organization “... when the state becomes unable to execute its managerial integrative functions, the Russian population demonstrates civil helplessness” (p. 157). The place of the state in the political consciousness of the Russians was so great that in their minds there was a mixture of patriotism and loyalty to the regime, love for the Motherland merged with allegiance in power. It was extremely difficult to shake these age-old habits and preferences: it was necessary to adapt to the language of the peasant population, so that to find out not in theory, but in practice the needs inside and out, which the peasants could hardly voice. Consequently, it was necessary to work hard and long in the village. That was the start in the career of a number of neo-populist leaders.

### **3. Research Questions**

The subject of the study is program views and political journalism of the parties of socialist revolutionaries and national socialists, considering the problem of formulating the basis of civic consciousness and the development of the moral culture of the “working people” of Russia, aimed at the further successful integration of the personality of the worker into socialist society.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The aim of this study is to systemize the ideas of neo populist parties of the beginning of the XXth in relation to the formation of civic consciousness and increase of common and moral culture of the Russian “working class” and peasant preliminary.

### **5. Research Methods**

The research is focused on strictly following the principles of historicism, specificity, objectiveness, systematicity, reliance on historical sources, the principle of historiographic tradition.

The basic methods of work are:

- system-structural (all aspects of neo-populism as an important part of Russian democratic socialism in Russia are considered in the general context),
- comparative (here are compared the views of the SRs and Popular Socialist parties on the formation of civic consciousness of the working people),
- generalization (here are revealed the general principles of these views),

- method of historical personification (here are highlighted the people who contributed most to the discussion of this problem).

## 6. Findings

In the political field the SRs and PRs were united, primarily, by a broadly democratic approach to the definition of the working people unlike the Marxists, who did not consider the peasants as a full socialist class because of its “petty-bourgeois essence”. At the same time, these two Populist parties were different a lot: their attitude to the means and methods of struggle (SRs were much more radical than the moderate popular socialists), to the nature of the party organization (PSs, unlike the SRs, always insisted on the openness of the party, that is, in fact, on its legality). They also had a number of program disagreements (primarily on the land issue — socialization among the SRs and nationalization among the PRs), multiple social and psychological contradictions and other factors that prevented the creation of a single neo-populist party in Russia. However, both parties had similar approaches to the formation of civic consciousness. This study considers the main theses of their leaders on this issue in parallel.

The socialist revolutionaries did not have a single formal leader as the party was too massive and devoid of absolute ideological unity, but perhaps Chernov (1911, 1947) was the most striking theoretician. According to Nikolayevsky (1953), he put such a strong seal of his individuality on the whole ideology of populism at the beginning of the twentieth century, that the whole this period in the history should be called as “Chernov’s”. Although it is possible to argue with the last statement, Chernov was really very convincing, eloquent and tireless in his political journalism.

Discussing socialism, Chernov (1947) pointed out that the progressive doctrine did not have more complex and deep problem, and at the same time less developed than the problem of personality in socialist society. “.. Humanity, humanism require putting a Man at the center of all issues of morality and society” (Chernov, 1947, p. 15). The ideologist of the SRs was convinced that solidarity with other people was necessary for a person as a social creature, and its character and degree correspond to the stage of social development - the higher the level is the more conscious and large-scale solidarity is. However, in striving to achieve human unity, even for the noblest goal, one should not forget about the moral development of a man. The concepts of morality and ethics play a key role in ethical science, humanitarian knowledge, are widely used in everyday consciousness (Egorova & Samarin, 2018). The refusal of Marxism to discuss the problem of morality and ethics, recognition of it as imaginary a populist called it as “the mind capitulation”, since the real society consists of individuals, sovereign personalities, it is not a soulless sociological material. According to the laws of biological and social evolution, as human empathy has been developed the “zoological” self-preservative instincts are displaced by egoistical and social ones. “Sympathetic experience” covers the circle of fellow countrymen, clan, family, community by blood or race, class, profession, class or circle of religious or political co-religionists, citizens in the state, etc. The higher the system of morality is, the more universal it is, as it strives to embrace all humanity with a moral connection and even requires humanity to the rest of live nature. Chernov (1911) underlined that “we need such a solution to the whole set of morality questions, personal and public, which could be offered to the masses, to the people instead of harmonic in its way old system of moral concepts and norms” (p. 70). Chernov (1911) stressed that until this task had not completed, any party of the most sincere nation defenders would

be “farther away than the representatives of the so-called religious quest from the modern intelligentsia” (p. 56) in many respects. The difficulty of this task was aggravated by the fact that the socialist party is an exclusively rationalistic and secular organization, and it is a subtle and delicate problem to find a common language with the people for whom overt godlessness is absolutely unacceptable, to be able to influence their hearts and, most importantly, their minds. Rationalism was not peculiar to the Russian common people; therefore, the appeal to the mind of the people required especially circumspect program concept. In the opinion of many theorists. The lack of socialism is in its own, but not borrowed eclectically from various doctrines, moral and ethical platform which hampers the promotion of this ideology to the broad masses. Indeed, even the right, moderate Marxists seemed to be embarrassed to turn to human themes, so as not to be sentimental, soft, “unmodern”. At the same time in private life, they mostly still tried to follow moral laws. However, Karl Marx himself, who glorified the violence as the midwife of history, separated his real life from what he had created on paper. Chernov’s socialism itself, so to speak, was synthetic: the ideologist of the SRs respected the economic doctrine of Marxism, not taking seriously the doctrine of communism as the final stage of social development, considering it as utopia. Moreover, a populist believed that setting any program goal, the ideal result, was unwise and even harmful, as the goal is inevitably corrected, changed during the process of achieving it. Any reasonable person understands that the goal is an ideal anticipation of the result, and the ideal is an abstract phenomenon, therefore, in reality it does not exist. Therefore, when setting the “final goal”, it is necessary to perceive it not as an absolute, but as a recommendation, a general principle that would facilitate the gradual, step-by-step solution of specific tasks. One cannot but see a relationship with Bernstein “the movement is everything, the aim is nothing,”, whose postulate was used by all democratic socialists in one way or another, in spite of the Bolshevik’s “ends justified the means”. Chernov (1947) proclaimed that freedom, personal rights, self-government - everything, the complex of which we name democracy is independent and full cultural values. Socialism is the same as the organism without them as the soul was taken out. Socialism without public and personal freedom is not socialism at all, but only an authoritarian barracks or hard labor (Morozov, 2014). According to Chernov (1947), it is impossible to invest personal principle into work without freedom, without which the work, the highest form of human creativity, stops being a creativity and turns a person into a “living robot”. According to SR’s theorist the Bolshevistic socialism was just the “socialism of robots”, and communism as an ideology that acquired a cult character in the USSR was “the inside out Russian autocracy” (Chernov, 1947). Kerensky (2005), joined in 1917 the SR party, summed up the sad experience of Russian socialism without democracy in his memoirs: “The history of the Bolshevistic reaction once again proves the impossibility of any social and political progress without the individual’s right to complete freedom and open expression of thoughts and beliefs” (p. 280). The socialist doctrine was most often voiced by Peshekhonov (1917), who knew the life and characters of the Russian countryside from the rich experience of county work. For PSs, the party of intellectuals mainly, the personality, the ideas of its inherent worth and supremacy were fundamental in the program settings. Therefore, the people socialists can be boldly named the forerunners of “socialism with a human face”. The main requirement that they intended to impose on a free, conscious of their value in the social system, person and citizen was labor, as “only a working person can be sovereign” (Peshekhonov, 1917).

For the representatives of this party there was an indisputable harmonious unity of the social and personal principles, which will come when the civil consciousness of the working people grows and allows to build a socialist society - a society of justice and prosperity. The people socialists from all the domestic socialist parties were the strongest statist. In the course of time, the state should turn from the eternal enemy of the working people into its friend and protector, and the socialist state, the ultimate goal of the people socialists, will become such. This is impossible under the existing regime, according to Peshekhonov (1917), the task of it was not the development of a common culture and civil identity among working people, but the transformation of working people into “incoherent crowds” and “human dust”. Thus, autocratic power protects itself against mass protests, this security contributes to its self-preservation. Continuing to criticize the power institutions and after the autocracy was limited on October 17, 1905, the people socialists hoped that Russia, becoming a constitutional monarchy, could develop evolutionally, gradually freeing itself from the police-bureaucratic traditions. PSs discouraged violent, overly radical means of struggle, therefore the work on state improvement seemed to them long and diligent. The transition to socialism was planned by them as a consistent limitation of the capital power by state control methods involving workers in the management of state enterprises. The peasants should also approach the state as they know the power of the state organization well, but only as alien and hostile. However, this force can be turned back. But it is necessary to introduce the peasants’ rights into the system of acquired rights and put them under the protection of the state apparatus (Erofeev, 1979). The state should be ruled by the people themselves, not by the officials. The popular brochure “Bread, Light and Freedom” published in 1906 and composed by PSs especially for peasants declared that officials should only carry out what the people's representatives order (Peshekhonov, 1906).

## **7. Conclusion**

By fair remark Karpachev (2016), populism occupied an exceptionally important place in the social and cultural life of our country, because, being the spiritual movement of the Russian intelligentsia, this ideological trend inspired the Russian democrats to unprecedentedly intense search for ways and means of liberating the “common people) from social and political oppression. Undoubtedly, ideas that are relevant to democracy today are not so much the result of modern political and legal creativity, as intellectual baggage accumulated over many decades, and political and public figures of neo-Populism contributed to its creation. Despite a number of fundamental differences in programs and tactics, the neo-people parties: revolutionary (SRs) and evolutionary (popular socialists) — held similar positions on the role and place of the individual in the future socialist society, recognized the extreme importance of activity to inculcate the working people in civil self-consciousness, that should lead to a change in its relations with the state, which is no longer a tyrant and exploiter, but a safe, secure and comfortable home. Both parties were quite active in educating the peasant population (including civil, politically). Unfortunately, many of the proposed and successfully tested forms and methods of the interaction of these parties with their "wardships" from the people were subsequently rejected and forgotten. The experience of the past is very often a very useful matter, especially when the basic values of a developed civil society — humanism, evolutionism, human rights and social justice, despite the many years of practice in fighting for them, not in declarations, but in fact are still scarce for Russia. Modern domestic politics is vital for the forces that organically combine

political and economic realism and striving much to social justice, coupled with respect for the human personality.

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