Tiflis During The Russian Revolution of 1905

The Momentum of The "Georgian" Menshevism

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Abstract:

With a population of up to 200,000 inhabitants, Tiflis[1], the largest city in the South Caucasus, was a crucial site of the first Russian revolution in 1905. The revolutionary process and widespread discontent were participated by various social groups, each with its own distinctive political identity and objectives. The 1905 revolution in Tiflis was significantly impacted by ethnic, religious, and class identities, as well as the persistent conflicts among these identity groups.

The ethnic confrontation between Armenians and Tatars[2] represents one of the most noteworthy occurrences in Tiflis during this period. This article concentrates on the political organizations that were operational in Tiflis throughout the Russian Revolution of 1905. It discusses the typology of these groups and their primary drivers for action, along with analyzing the interaction among them, which predominantly determined the fate of the revolution in both the South Caucasus and Tiflis.

Keywords: Revolution; Marxism; 1905; Menshevism; Tiflis; Russia

Introduction

The incorporation of the Georgian polities into the Russian imperial order in the early nineteenth century signaled the gradual dissolution of centuries-long Ottoman and Iranian predominance in the South Caucasus. This act of annexation was legitimated by the assertion that imperial suzerainty would safeguard the Christian Georgian people and secure the continuity of their cultural inheritance. Over the ensuing decades, the Georgian territories subjected to Russian rule experienced a series of transformations conventionally associated with modernity, among them the construction of extensive transportation infrastructures—most notably the railway— alongside developments in print culture and the expansion of communications. Moreover, the accelerating industrialization of the Russian Empire in the latter half of the century

[1] During the period of Russian imperial administration, the city of Tbilisi was officially known as *Tiflis* (Russian: Тифлис). This designation was used in administrative, cartographic, and literary Russian-language sources from the incorporation of the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti into the Russian Empire in **1801** until the collapse of imperial rule in **1917**. The name "Tiflis" remained in widespread international and Russian usage into the early Soviet period, although the Georgian name "Tbilisi" was officially restored in **1936**.

[2] In late imperial Russian usage, "Caucasus Tatars" referred primarily to the Turkic-speaking Muslim population of the South Caucasus, especially in present-day Azerbaijan and parts of eastern Georgia. This was not an ethnic self-designation but an administrative and ethnographic label used in the 19th–early 20th centuries. By the late imperial period and especially after the 1918–1920 national movements, this population increasingly adopted the ethnonym "Azerbaijani" (Azerbaijani Turks), which became the standard national identity in the Soviet period. The term "Caucasus Tatars" was officially abandoned in the 1920s as Soviet nationality policy formalized "Azerbaijanis" as a distinct titular nation.

generated new social strata and ideological currents, which exerted a profound influence upon the populations of the Tiflis and Kutais governorates[3].

In the final decades of the nineteenth century, two intellectual and political currents— liberalism[4] and populism within the Russian imperial milieu—exerted a decisive influence upon the formation of Georgian nationalism and the articulation of its political language. Prior to the advent of Marxism in the 1890s, liberalism entered Georgia in the 1860s through students educated in St. Petersburg, who styled themselves the *Tergdaleulebi*[5]. Transposed into the Georgian context, this current was gradually interwoven with national aspirations, giving rise to a specifically Georgian variant of liberal nationalism. Russian populism, by contrast, represented a more radical and politically activist tendency, committed to the overthrow of the autocracy and the construction of an egalitarian social order grounded in the peasantry. Both movements left enduring imprints upon Georgian society in the late nineteenth century: if the young liberals elaborated the conceptual foundations of the modern Georgian nation, it was the populists who first established the repertoire and political culture of mass protest within the governorates of Tiflis and Kutais.

[3] Natalie Sabanadze considers the development of the printed press as one of the main catalysts of Georgian nationalism in the 19th century. See: (Sabanadze 2010)Authors such as Hobsbawm (Hobsbawm 1977) and Rabinowitz (Rabinowitz 2023) also link the development of the railroad with the development of social life and, above all, nationalism.

[4] In the 19th century, Liberalism in the Russian Empire wasn't a steady belief system; instead, it appeared in scattered instances driven by different groups. The roots of this liberal movement can be traced back to the 1820s, after the 'Decembrist uprising'. The primary goals of this movement were to end serfdom and establish constitutional governance in Russia. However, it took almost thirty years for these goals to come to fruition, mainly due to Alexander II's authoritative approach. His top-down strategy incorporated various liberal elements, with the most significant being the abolition of serfdom. A key intellectual figure, Alexander Herzen, played a central role in shaping Russian liberalism during the mid-19th century. Categorized as a radical liberal, Herzen strongly advocated for empowering the peasant class and improving their living conditions and political influence. Yet, Russian liberalism's landscape underwent significant changes alongside Alexander II's reforms and Alexander III's conservative rule. During this transition, Russian liberalism transformed to align with the nobility. It prioritized peaceful societal changes and the establishment of a constitutional monarchy.

[5] The term "T'ergdaleulebi" denotes individuals who have engaged in the ritualistic drinking of water from the Tergi River. Originating in the northern region of Georgia, the Tergi River, known as Terek, meanders through the Caucasus Mountains before extenting into Russia. Its course closely aligns with the famed "Military Highway," a pivotal thoroughfare facilitating vital connectivity between Georgia and Russia. Conceptually, partaking in the waters of the Tergi River embodies a figurative emblem of profound immersion into Russian cultural mores, societal conventions, and intellectual pursuits. This transformative journey was ardently embraced by aspiring Georgian youth subsequent to their arduous passage through the challenging terrain of the Caucasus mountain range, ultimately leading them to the city of St. Petersburg.

The 1860s marked the advent of liberalism in Georgia[6], epitomized by the emergence of Ilia Chavchavadze as a preeminent public intellectual. Chavchavadze was a central figure in the articulation and mobilization of Georgian national consciousness, engaging rigorously in debates surrounding the emancipation of the peasantry. Simultaneously, he played a pivotal role in the development of the Georgian press, drawing inspiration from Giuseppe Garibaldi[7] as he sought to foster a cohesive and enduring sense of Georgian national identity.

Chavchavadze made significant contributions to the establishment of 'The Society for the Spreading of Literacy among Georgians[8]', which played a crucial role in shaping Georgian national identity. As a result of the proliferation of printing press, pamphlets, and literature, the Georgian population began to engage in public discourse predominantly in the Georgian language in the 1860s[9] and especially after 1879 when the society was first established.

The rise of liberalism in Georgia mirrored broader trends in the Russian Empire and was linked to the populist Narodnichestvo movement of the 1870s and 1880s. In the late nineteenth century, Georgian intellectuals, driven by nationalist aspirations and opposition to imperial hegemony, became partially integrated into the Marxist movement. The Menshevik faction of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP), led by Georgian revolutionaries, gained significant support among both the peasantry and the growing proletariat, particularly in Tiflis. Consequently, the Tiflis and Kutais governorates became hotbeds of revolutionary contestation, where Socialist Revolutionaries, Monarchists, Marxists, Anarchists, and various nationalists— Georgian, Armenian, and Tatar—competed for influence. Key urban centers, including Tiflis, the port of Batumi, and the mining towns of Tkibuli and Chiatura, emerged

[6] In the mid-19th century, access to Russian higher education was a privilege extended solely to the Georgian aristocracy. This circumstance engendered the infusion of liberalism into the Georgian milieu by young Georgian aristocrats, an import characterized by pronounced echoes of the Russian ideological framework. The variant of liberalism espoused by the Tergdaleulebi, while diverging from the fervor of Alexander Herzen's radicalism, nonetheless espoused the idea of serfdom's emancipation. It is noteworthy that the ideological tenets upheld by the Tergdaleulebi were distinguished by their predilection for bolstering Georgian identity and linguistic heritage, thereby sowing the seeds for the nascent Georgian nationhood. Consequently, the periphery of the Russian Empire saw an intriguing amalgamation between liberalism and the burgeoning currents of Georgian nationalism. An equally salient figure in this historical panorama, Ilia Chavchavadze, bore witness to the seismic convulsions of the 1905 Revolution within the Russian empire and Georgian governorates. However, despite this vantage point, his stature as a trenchant antagonist of Georgia's Social-Democratic faction precipitated a relegation of his ideological stance to being outdated. This ebbing of popular endorsement for Chavchavadze's intellectual discourse unfolded concomitantly with the growing tide of the Marxist movement.

[7] In his 1860 poem titled "I Hear," Chavchavadze alludes to the political climate in Italy and the victory of Giuseppe Garibaldi. Within his verses, Chavchavadze implores, "May I be granted the privilege of hearing the resonant sound of liberated shackles within my native land, O God."

[8] The society was uniting several hundred members throughout Tiflis and Kutais governorates who were founding schools and teaching subjects in Georgian language.

[9] Ilia Chavchavadze has established the first Georgian periodical *Sak⊠art⊠velos Moambe* (Herald of Georgia) in 1963; and *Iveria* (Iveria) in 1877.

as focal points of political upheaval. The revolution of 1905 in Tiflis and Kutais governorates took on two discernible forms: one originating in rural areas and the other emerging within urban centres. This investigation places particular emphasis on Tiflis, the foremost metropolis in the Caucasus region. In the setting of this city, a diverse array of factions engaged in fierce competition for influence, resulting in an intricate fabric where the Marxist movement intersected with the emergence of different schools of Socialism (Socialist Revolutionaries, Socialist-Federalists, Anarchism) and nationalism[10].

This article delves into the history of the Committee of the Caucasian Union of the RSDLP (dominated by Georgian Mensheviks in governorates of Tiflis and Kutais) during the revolutionary events of 1905, with a specific emphasis on the influential role played by the Mensheviks within the party. It argues that the success of the Mensheviks in Tiflis can be attributed to their inclusive approach towards the city's diverse ethnic groups[11], which positioned them as leaders of the mass protests during this period. Despite the predominance of the Menshevik movement among Georgians in the South Caucasus, they adeptly navigated the delicate balance between fostering national consolidation among Georgians and promoting crossnatioal solidarity among the working class, benefiting from the socialist ideology advocated by the RSDLP.

This study argues that the Mensheviks' inclusive strategy enabled the Nadzaladevi insurgency to function as a form of direct-democratic self-organization, in which Georgian, Armenian, and Russian workers, alongside interparty coordination mechanisms, organized strikes, patrols, and neighborhood defense. Drawing on collective action theory (Olson 1965) and critical mass approaches (Marwell and Olivier 1993) it shows how the Mensheviks addressed a core dilemma of mass mobilization: the free-rider problem, whereby individuals appropriate collective goods—such as protection, labor gains, or political concessions—without incurring the costs of participation. The Nadzaladevi commune mitigated this dynamic not through ideological commitment alone, but through dense multi-ethnic embedding, high visibility of participation, and interparty coordination that made individual contributions socially observable. Collective benefits were further organized as contingent goods, accessible through active engagement in local activities. Through processes of critical mass formation and embedded enforcement across ethnic and political boundaries, the Mensheviks sustained coordinated collective action while simultaneously constraining the autonomy of exclusionary,

[10] Armenian nationalism assumed particular significance owing to the Armenians' political dominance within the Tiflis city council and their substantial influence over the city's economy. Simultaneously, Georgian nationalism was positioned to play a pivotal role in shaping the city's future.

[11] Professor Charles Steinwedel, in his study of the 1905 revolution in the Russian town of Ufa, distinguished the population according to their social status: students, intellectuals, women, petty bourgeoisie or workers (Steinwedel 2002). In Tiflis, ethnic and class identities intersected, while ethnicity was central at the beginning of the revolution. This division is the central theme of this article and will be discussed below.

ethnonationalist, or semi-nationalist organizations, keeping them in continuous negotiated coordination throughout most of the insurgency period.

Although Leon Der Megrian's dissertation (Der Megrian 1968) offers a detailed account of Armenians in Tiflis, it overlooks key events, leaving the broader history of the city during 1905 insufficiently explored. Drawing on previously underutilized English- and Georgian-language sources, this article examines the 1905 revolution in Tiflis, with particular attention to revolutionary and direct-democratic practices. It highlights the active role of the revolutionary masses and traces the emergence of "Georgian" Menshevism as praxis central to emergence of growingly ethnocentric, yet interparty and interethnic alliance-building Marxist movement in Georgia. The study highlights the Nadzaladevi[12][13] insurgency in Tiflis as an exemplary manifestation of a community shaped by the Mensheviks' unwavering commitment to promoting internationalist revolutionary ideals while concurrently nurturing their emerging sense of Georgian identity and introducing their Georgianhood as the piece of their political agenda. The events of Tiflis in 1905 marked a significant watershed moment, granting the Mensheviks uncontested dominance over the revolutionary landscape in the region for the subsequent decade. This trajectory culminated in their ascendancy in the South Caucasus during the revolutionary era spanning from 1905 to 1917, ultimately culminating in their majority representation in the constituent assembly of The Democratic Republic of Georgia from 1918 to 1921.

The National Library and Archives of Georgia house an extraordinary body of primary sources on the 1905–1907 Revolution. In order to capture the historical panorama of the Tiflis uprising, I examined Russian and Georgian newspapers to obtain comprehensive coverage of the events. A thorough analysis of more than one hundred issues of publications, including C'n*obis* P'*urc'eli* (The News Sheet) *Iveria* (Iveria), and Soc'ial Demokratiuli P'urc'eli (*Social Democratic Sheet*) was conducted with the aim of extracting material of considerable historical significance.

[12] Nadzaladevi, derived from the Russian term "Нахаловка" (Nakhalovka), carries a literal connotation of being "populated by force" and specifically denotes an illegal settlement on the outskirts of a city, akin to a squatter settlement in contemporary parlance. In Tiflis, this locality became associated with the commencement of the railway line connecting Tiflis and the Black Sea port city of Poti in 1872, leading to the settlement of railroad workers in the eastern vicinity of the main railway station. Notably, similar "Nakhalovkas" exist in various Russian cities, with the most renowned one found in Rostov, serving as a poignant reminder of the historical squatter movements prevalent throughout the Russian Empire during the 19th century.

[13] The case of Nadzaladevi illustrates a limited but notable form of Georgian–Armenian cooperation during the revolution. Although Nadzaladevi emerged as a predominantly Georgian working-class district and remained politically subordinate to the Armenian-dominated urban center of Tiflis, Armenian workers were not excluded from local assemblies and participated alongside Georgian workers on broadly egalitarian terms. This contrasted with contemporary segments of the Georgian bourgeois milieu, including Ilia Chavchavadze, which more frequently interpreted social relations through national categories, whereas the RSDLP and Georgian Mensheviks privileged class-based political integration.

This article also engages with Soviet-Georgian scholarship on the First Russian Revolution in Georgia. Throughout the twentieth century, historians affiliated with Tbilisi State University and the Institute of Marx, Engels, and Lenin produced a substantial body of work on the subject. Although shaped by the intellectual and ideological context of their time, these studies remain valuable as repositories of empirical material, archival references, and contemporary interpretations that continue to inform historical research.

Furthermore, it is worth underscoring that international scholars have exhibited a growing interest in recent Georgian history, particularly in the past two decades. As a result, there has been a notable surge in the evaluation of writings pertaining to the Russian Revolution of 1905–1907 in the context of the historical events unfolding in Georgia and Tiflis during that period (Suny 1994) (Suny 2020) (Jones 2005).

Identities, population and agendas

The revolutionary upheavals of 1905 in Tiflis must be understood through both structural conditions of collective action and the social composition of participating groups. Drawing on Mancur Olson's framework in The Logic of Collective Action (1965), groups may be characterized by inclusive or exclusive modalities, with the former unifying actors across ethnic, religious, and social divides, and the latter maintaining bounded, often ethnically homogeneous memberships. In Tiflis, this distinction was critical: while Bolshevik and Menshevik factions of the RSDLP, as well as conservative Tsarist-aligned groups, represented the spectrum of revolutionary and counter-revolutionary activism, only those able to transcend narrow affiliations successfully mobilized significant social forces. Tatars and Armenians, by contrast, primarily organized into exclusive[14], ethnically bounded associations, limiting their capacity for mass coordination.

By 1905, the Social Democrats (RSDLP) had already split into the Bolshevik and Menshevik factions. Despite this division, they cooperated during the revolutionary events of 1905, though they frequently operated independently, maintaining separate representatives, particularly in the formation of strike committees. At this stage, however, the split was less acrimonious than it would become later, both across the Russian Empire and in Tiflis. As the editors of *Komunisti* noted in their 1922 eulogy for Menshevik leader Silibistro Jibladze[15]: "The first half of Jibladze's life was dedicated to the cause of the revolution, but the latter half was marked by his commitment to countering the revolution. Nevertheless, we remember him as a steadfast champion of the revolutionary ideals he fought for, unwavering in his dedication to his beliefs."

[14] Nevertheless, in Tiflis many Armenians found their way into the ranks of the RSDLP, keeping their working class identity prior to their ethnic oneness, an issue which is described in more detail below.

[15] "Silibistro Jibladze" Komunisti 42 (22 February 1922) "Komunisti" 22 February. 1922.

The Socialist-Revolutionaries, focused primarily on peasant interests, had potential support in Georgia's agrarian governorates of Tiflis and Kutais. Yet, their orientation toward Russia as a whole limited their appeal, and many peasants instead aligned with Georgian-speaking Marxists within the RSDLP. As a result, during the 1905 revolution, Socialist-Revolutionary influence in Georgia was largely confined to Tiflis and concentrated among ethnic Russians.

The Georgian Socialist-Federalist Revolutionary Party, or Socialist-Federalists, founded in 1904, represented the first explicitly nationalist political movement in Georgia. Advocating for autonomy within the Russian Empire, the party sought cultural independence and the creation of autonomous Georgian institutions. Drawing support primarily from the rural peasantry, the Socialist-Federalists promoted a federalist vision of Russia, emphasizing self-governance. Nevertheless, like the Socialist-Revolutionaries, they struggled to maintain peasant allegiance, which increasingly favored the RSDLP.

Georgian anarchism, rooted in the Russian Nihilist movement, gained distinctive form through figures such as Varlam Cherkezishvili, a Georgian nobleman closely associated with Sergey Nechayev and exiled multiple times to Siberia before escaping to Switzerland. In Europe, Cherkezishvili collaborated with Pyotr Kropotkin, while remaining actively engaged with the Socialist-Federalists and the cause of Georgian national liberation. This synthesis of anarchism and nationalism was shared by other Georgian anarchists, including Mikeil Tsereteli and Giorgi Gogelia, who contributed primarily through writing and advocacy for Georgian self-governance during the 1905 revolution. Cherkezishvili notably organized a petition against Tsarist oppression of Georgians, which he presented at the Hague Peace Conference in 1907, demonstrating his commitment to national liberation beyond the Federalist autonomy agenda[16]. Despite these innovations, Georgian anarchists maintained close collaboration with the Socialist-Federalists while Cherkezishvili also exerted international influence within the anarchist movement across Europe, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Below, is the table which attempts to fully contextualize groups, active and influential during the revolution of 1905–1907 in Tiflis[17]:

[16] "Pioneers of Anarchism: Varlam Cherkezishvili (Tcherkesoff)" *Freedom: Journal of Anarchist Socialism:* `https://freedomnews.org.uk/2019/07/27/pioneers-of-british-anarchism-varlam-cherkezishvili-tch`

[17] These categories synthesize archival evidence, newspaper coverage, and secondary literature and should be understood as analytical ideal-types,

Group	Logic	Base	Ethnicity	Orientation	Mobilization	Role in 1905
RSDLP (Bolsheviks/ Mensheviks)	Inclusive class party	Urban workers, intellectuals	Multiethnic	Marxist revolution	High	Core strike leadership; tactical unity despite split
Socialist-Revolutionaries	Agrarian-class party	Peasantry	Russian-dominant	Agrarian socialism	Low–moderate	Weak Georgian reach; mainly Russian enclave in Tiflis
Socialist-Federalists	National-territorial party	Georgian peasants, intellectuals.	Georgian	Autonomy/ federalism	Moderate	Main Georgian nationalist force; limited scale vs RSDLP
Georgian Anarchists	Network/ intellectual	Intellectuals, diaspora	Georgia n + transnational	Anarchism + national liberation	Low local / high symbolic	Ideological influence; weak mass structure, strong external reach
Tsarist forces	Coercive hierarchy	State elites, police	Imperial multiethnic	Autocracy	High coercion	Order enforcement; no mass legitimacy

Table 1: Political Groups Active in Tiflis, 1905–1907

Tiflis's political significance in 1905 was amplified by its role as the administrative center of the Caucasus Viceroyalty and by its rapid demographic growth, which fostered a heterogeneous urban population and complex networks of alliances and conflicts,

sometimes erupting into violent confrontations. As the Russian Revolution unfolded, Tiflis, like other imperial cities, became a focal point of revolutionary struggle, hosting nearly all the major political forces that would shape the broader course of the Russian Revolution. Consequently, the study of Tiflis during 1905 offers crucial insight into the dynamics of revolutionary Russia and the interplay of nationalism, socialism and The Tsarist Autocracy in Caucasus.

The Georgian Mensheviks exemplified an inclusive approach, prioritizing shared socioeconomic interests of workers and peasants above narrower identities. Their praxis was informed by the experience of the Guria Republic (1902–1906), a peasant-governed polity structured on principles of direct democracy, which provided both a model and a training ground for mass mobilization. The Nadzaladevi district in Tiflis emerged as a focal point of Menshevik organization in 1905, functioning effectively as a Marxist insurgency where revolutionary consciousness was both generated and enacted. Mass assemblies operated on egalitarian principles, facilitating coordinated collective action without reliance on a vanguardist hierarchy.

By contrast, the Bolsheviks maintained marginal influence within Tiflis but pursued a radicalized, terror-oriented strategy, reflecting a distinct conception of revolutionary ethics. The 1907 Yerevanski Square expropriation[18] illustrates this approach. In parallel, Ronald Grigor Suny observes a nuanced pattern among South Caucasus Mensheviks (Suny, Stalin: Passage to Revolution 2020) (1905–1907), noting that, contrary to the Russian mainstream, they occasionally employed revolutionary terror. However, their use of coercion remained primarily instrumental, supplementing a broader strategy rooted in direct-democratic mobilization and anti-vanguardist principles. Whereas terror for the Bolsheviks constituted a primary organizing ethic, for the Mensheviks it was a controlled, ancillary tactic integrated within inclusive mass politics. The Mensheviks' ability to aggregate diverse constituencies in Tiflis was strengthened by their popular reputation and experience from Guria, as well as cultural vehicles such as the Georgian-language magazine Kvali, which enhanced their social legitimacy. While terror remained part of their arsenal, their primary strength lay in mass politics, permitting the Mensheviks to consistently outmaneuver Bolshevik rivals within the city. Bolshevik groups, in contrast, had to pursue the Mensheviks' organizational footprints, seeking opportunities for violent disruption rather than mass mobilization.

Ethnic conflict further complicated revolutionary dynamics. The Armenians and Tatars, concentrated in the southern governorates of Baku, Yerevan, Elizavetpol, and Kars, were locked in persistent territorial competition, producing recurrent communal violence that overshadowed broader political and class objectives. In this contested environment, groups able to organize across ethnic boundaries gained a decisive advantage. The Social Democrats, committed to the struggle against the Russian Empire,

[18] News of the robbery spread throughout the country, and the bloody result (40 killed) triggered a sharp conflict within the party, after which Stalin's position was seriously undermined for years, Stalin's direct involvement in robbery is disputed, however, politically, he was behind planning of robbery and responsible person to the party for the outcomes and delivery of stolen finances.

contrasted sharply with the Black Hundreds[19], the reactionary clerical-pro government groups, which's aim was reactionary consolidation, defending Tsarist authority through coercion.

Analytically, the mechanisms underlying successful collective action in this context align with the critical mass principle as articulated by Marwell and Oliver (Marwell and Olivier 1993): movements are typically propelled not by the ordinary participants, but by a subset of highly motivated and resourceful actors capable of generating sufficient momentum. Inclusive groups, capable of bridging social, ethnic, and ideological divides, accumulated the necessary strength to influence events decisively, whereas exclusive associations remained structurally constrained, their potential mitigated by narrow membership and limited resources.

The Tiflis experience demonstrates how revolutionary efficacy depends on the interplay of ideology, social structure, and strategic calculation. Menshevik success rested upon their capacity to mediate between macrostructural conditions—urban proletarian expansion, the precedent of Guria, multi-ethnic demographic composition—and micro-level organizational practices, including participatory assemblies and controlled use of coercion. Bolshevik praxis, by contrast, reveals a variant logic: radicalization and terror (Van Ree 2008)[20] compensated for insufficient mass penetration in Tiflis and Kutis governorates but not in wider South Caucasus, where in Baku, Bolsheviks, including Stalin were prominent rebels.

Collective action in Tiflis was structurally constrained by free-rider problems, meaning that dispersed dissatisfaction only became politically effective when organizational forms could reduce coordination costs and stabilize participation. In this sense, "inclusive" movements were not normatively inclusive but functionally efficient: they converted heterogeneous actors into coordinated blocs capable of sustained action. However, The Marwell–Oliver critical mass model refines the explanation by showing that collective action is driven not by average participation but by a strategically concentrated subset of actors whose commitment and resources are disproportionately high. Movements in Tiflis did not succeed because they were large; they succeeded when they contained a critical mass capable of initiating and sustaining momentum beyond the threshold of instability.

From this perspective, Menshevik dominance in urban Tiflis reflects not ideological superiority but organizational advantage in assembling a cross-cutting critical coalition. Their inclusivity functioned as a mechanism for aggregating dispersed resources into

[19] "Black Hundreds" were Tsarist conservative groups which were active during the street demonstrations and often violent collective actions (pogroms) during 1905 events in Tiflis and throughout the empire.

[20] Notably, the joint RSDLP committee which was active in Tiflis in 1905 has undertaken the function of terror attacks, this is the testimony of former Bolshevik terrorist, Kote Tsintsadze *'The organization Tiflis Committee itself organized these terrorist acts against prominent government officials, generals, and spies. I remember that I was also assigned to kill a spy who was guarding the "Ray" editorial office on Mihailov Avenue'* (See: Revoluc'iis Mac'ne 1923 (Herald of the Revolution 1923)).

a stable core, reinforced by the institutional legacy of Guria and the organizational infrastructure of Nadzaladevi. Bolshevik and fragmented actors, by contrast, repeatedly encountered Olsonian constraints: narrow recruitment bases, weak coordination, and dependence on episodic disruption or coercion rather than sustained mobilization. Violence, in this framework, is not explanatory in itself but compensatory. Where critical mass fails to form, coercion substitutes for coordination; where it succeeds, violence becomes secondary to mass-based legitimacy. Ethnic fragmentation further structures these outcomes by narrowing the pool of possible coalition formation and limiting the emergence of cross-cutting mobilization blocs.

The empirical section below develops these mechanisms in detail, tracing how Olsonian constraints and Marwell–Oliver critical mass dynamics operated in practice during the revolutionary cycle of 1905 in Tiflis.

Early Revolutionary Activity and Urban-Rural Unrest (January – April 1905)

In the context of events in the imperial capital following the massacre of protesters in January[21], Tiflis assumed a prominent and influential role in Russia's unstable revolutionary landscape. Protests had been underway since January 18 prior to the strike by industrial workers on January 20. In the February 1 issue, *C☒nobis P☒ urc☒eli a* Georgian-language newspaper, reported extensively on the January events in St. Petersburg and their impact on Tiflis[22][23]. The newspaper provided a comprehensive and detailed account that began on January 18, when a strike involving 4000 workers was suppressed by the authorities. Despite the initial repression, the protests continued and eventually culminated in a rally in Didube, an outskirt of Tiflis, where some 2000 people demanded the release of the detained demonstrators. Subsequently, further arrests were made on January 19, 20, and 21, primarily affecting hundreds of workers who had actively participated in the protests.

Another significant event took place on 23 January, as a workers' demonstration unfolded on Tiflis' central Golovin Avenue[24]. However, the authorities responded with a show of force, resorting to violent measures that caused injuries and led to the apprehension of numerous participants. It is noteworthy that *C☒nobis P☒ urc☒eli comprehensively* covered the events of the past ten days as an interconnected whole, as the State Censorship Body had enforced the suspension of Georgian-language newspapers from 20 January to 1 February.

[21] The "Bloody Sunday" massacre in St. Petersburg, where peaceful protesters were shot by Imperial Guard on January 9, 1905 has led to protests, strikes and unrests across the empire.

[22] C'n*obis* P'*urc'eli (The News Sheet)* and *Iveria (Iveria)* were legal and most popular Georgian-language newspapers from the second half of the 19th until the beginning of 20th century.

[23] 'Mušat'a gap'i c'va'(The Strike of Workers) *C☒nobis P☒ urc☒eli* 2730 (1 February 1905).

[24] Modern "Shota Rustaveli Avenue"

Simultaneously with the urban unrest, a widespread uprising unfolded during the winter and spring of 1905, extending into the rural regions of Georgia and profoundly affecting villages within the Tiflis and Kutais governorates. The local peasantry engaged in acts of arson, deliberately setting fire to aristocratic lands and estates, thereby expressing both resistance and acute social discontent. In parallel with these developments, a major event occurred during the April strike in Tiflis, led by tram workers, which resulted in a decisive victory for the labouring classes. The protracted twenty-day strike concluded with the Belgian company conceding to the introduction of an eight-hour working day and a substantial 25 percent wage increase, marking an early and significant success in collective bargaining (Kikvidze 1954).

Political Polarization and the August Massacre

Against this backdrop, a significant debate unfolded in Tiflis between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks in the lead-up to the peak of the riots. The immediate catalyst was the Tsar's proposal for the Buligin Duma, an advisory imperial assembly that extended limited participation to selected political actors, including elements of the revolutionary movement. Such council was proposed in local levl. Tiflis as well, where Mensheviks advocated tactical engagement, , developing a structured strategy of participation. The Bolsheviks, by contrast, categorically rejected involvement, maintaining an uncompromising revolutionary position. Within this factional context, the young Stalin aligned with the Bolshevik line, calling for armed proletarian insurrection and denouncing the Mensheviks as politically conciliatory and excessively accommodating.

The scheduled gathering of City Council (Duma) in Tiflis on 29 August 1905 was highly anticipated, with the expectation of Menshevik politicians' participation in this assembly. However, the unfolding events took an unexpected turn, as only a throng of protesters made their presence felt while other attendees were conspicuously absent. Astonishingly, an assembly of three thousand workers amassed in front of the edifice, united under Social Democrats, including both Bolsheviks and Mensheviks. The Tiflis City Hall underwent a transformation into a crucible of dissent, serving as a platform for the workers to voice their indignation, albeit unwittingly inviting the ire of the Cossacks. Swiftly responding, the troops unleashed a fusillade upon the workers inside the hall and those congregated outside. The ensuing chaos led to the entrapment of the workers, plunging them into darkness as the lights were extinguished, while the resonating cacophony of gunfire persisted for over an hour. Providing a gripping account of the profound magnitude of the bloodshed that unfolded within the confines of the Duma, Filipe Makharadze, a Georgian Bolshevik[25], highlights a noteworthy fact: the workers included members from both the Bolshevik and Menshevik factions.

[25] It is noteworthy that approximately two decades had passed since the events of 1905 when Makharadze authored his work *The Year 1905 in the South Caucasus*. By that time, Makharadze was a representative of Bolshevik authority, and, consequently, his reconstruction and interpretation of the

Although the Mensheviks themselves were absent from the meeting, they congregated at the entrance of the hall, endeavouring to influence the protest from that vantage point. Makharadze vehemently emphasizes that the Cossacks callously showered bullets upon the workers trapped within the hall, perpetrating a deadly assault that endured for a harrowing duration of forty minutes, tragically claiming the lives of no fewer than sixty individuals (Makharadze 1926).

In response to the aforementioned tragedy, labour strikes commenced in Georgia's industrial cities in early September. Notably, both the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks reached a consensus to incorporate individuals associated with acts of terrorism into their collective struggle. It is worth highlighting that the Tiflis municipal council suffered irreparable damage to its reputation following the devastating massacre that transpired on August 29, subsequently leading to frequent session postponements due to minimal participation. In the aftermath of the bloodshed, the Bolsheviks disseminated the rallying cry of "blood for blood, death for death (Jones 2005)".

Capitalizing on the crisis, the Mensheviks endeavoured to exploit the situation by advocating for electoral reform. Such reforms aimed to significantly augment the representation of Georgians within the Tiflis city council. Meanwhile, the Duma adopted an uncompromising stance against unauthorized house building activities in the Nadzaladevi district, which harboured a substantial population of internal migrants, primarily comprising Georgians migrating from various parts of the Tiflis and Kutais governorates. As the Tiflis city council sought to curb such construction endeavours, Georgian workers grew increasingly antagonistic towards both the council and the Tsarist government at large. Simultaneously, the Social Democrats actively fomented agitation and collaborated with the working masses, consequently gaining escalating popularity among them.

In the issue of *C☒nobis P☒ urc☒eli on* 1 September 1905, the newspaper describes the events of 29 August as a disaster[26]. However, it presents a neutral perspective on the matter. The publication includes a statement by the Governor-General, which was widely circulated in Tiflis during that time. According to the statement, the scheduled meeting of the Duma on 29 August was cancelled, and both youth and workers entered the hall without proper authorization. The Governor-General further stated that the Tiflis city council had sought the assistance of the Cossacks but without the intention of dispersing the demonstration. *C☒nobis P☒ urc☒eli reports* that following the massacre, several deputies of the Tiflis city council had already made the decision to vacate their seats. Notably, it is worth mentioning that these deputies were not of Georgian ethnicity[27]. It should be noted that the Georgian nationalist newspaper *Iveria* has

events were largely aligned with the prevailing official discourse and ideological preferences of the Soviet rule in Georgia

[26] "29 agvistos momxdari ubedureba " (Disaster that has happened on August 29) *C☒nobis P☒ urc☒eli* 2899 (1 September 1905).

[27] ibid

reacted critically to the ongoing events in its issues of 3 and 4 September[28][29]. *Iveria* was principally linked to the Georgian aristocracy and bourgeoisie. On the front page of *Iveria*, an anonymous author strongly attacked the 'intellectual slavery' of Georgian youth and criticized protesters of Buligin's initiative as well. According to the unknown author, this slavery is evident in the young people's belief in Marxist theories. In the 6 September issue of *Iveria*, he argues that the Georgian youth has turned into a sect by the influence of Marxism[30].

Georgian workers forged a strong connection between Marxism and Georgian nationalism. Ronald Grigor Suny aptly highlights that the Menshevik movement in the Caucasus was predominantly centred around the ethnic Georgian context (Suny, Stalin: Passage to Revolution 2020). This can be attributed to the fact that the resistance exhibited by Georgian workers against military and political authorities stemmed from a fusion of both class-based and national identities. The driving force behind this mindset can be attributed to the rapid growth of the Georgian population in Tiflis[31], which held the promise of gradually dismantling the hegemony imposed on the city by the Armenian bourgeoisie and the Russian bureaucracy. The Georgian bourgeoisie found its societal basis in its close affiliation with the Georgian nobility, serving as a foundational pillar. Consequently, the uprising of Georgian peasants and labourers in the Tiflis and Kutais governorates engendered an inherent antagonism towards their privileged compatriots of aristocratic and affluent backgrounds. Throughout the 19th century, the Georgian nobility maintained a symbiotic relationship with the Russian imperial establishment, establishing intimate ties that endured until the ultimate demise of the empire[32]. Consequently, the aristocracy and bourgeoisie were perceived as adversarial forces by the Georgian peasantry and working class in 1905, rather than as agents of their welfare or enlightenment.

It is notable to acknowledge that the Georgian bourgeoisie invested significant endeavors in the establishment of the "Society for the Spreading of Literacy among

[28] "Politikuri Bedovlat'oba" (Political inflexibility) *Iveria 156* (3 September 1905)

[29] "Gaproletarebis możġvreba da č'veni c'xovreba" (The preaching of proletarization and our lives) *Iveria* 157 (4 September 1905)

[30] "Momavlis Molodin *ši* (Looking forward to the future) *Iveria* 158 (6 September 1905)

[31] It should be noted that in 1905, despite the downward trend, Armenians still constituted the majority of the population in Tiflis (84 000 Armenians, 57 000 Russians (including Poles) and 55 000 Georgians in official numbers. Remarkably, number of Georgians could be much higher because the city duma refused to register settlers of Nadzaladevi for years. However, Tiflis was not claimed by Armenian nationalism as part of the future Armenia, so Armenians in Tiflis had more opportunities to assert their preferences in the political struggle.

[32] It should be noted that despite the gradual incorporation of the Georgian principalities and kingdoms into the Russian Empire (which took place essentially by annexation), the Georgian nobility promptly established a strong link with the Russian government. This was primarily explained by the Russian-Turkish and Russian-Iranian wars and the religious component, as Russia was perceived as a protector of Orthodox Christianity and an ally of Georgia. In addition, armies of Georgian nobles took an active part in the annexation of the North Caucasus, of whose leaders (most importantly, Imam Shamil) were allied to the Ottoman Empire.

Georgians" in 1879. Notably, this organization actively pursued the propagation of the Georgian language and literacy proficiency among the agrarian populace, with the particular focus on regions such as the Tiflis and Kutais provinces. However, the revolutionary manifestos and pamphlets disseminated throughout Georgia in 1905 vehemently denounced the bourgeoisie, equating them with the very enemy embodied by the Tsarist regime.

The escalation of violence in Tiflis has posed a obstacle to maintaining public order within the city. Throughout the month of September, workers in the Tiflis and Kutais governorates actively seized control of trains and liberated incarcerated revolutionaries. The gravity of the situation was further underscored on September 30$^{\text{th}}$, when Teimuraz Amilakhvari, a prominent member of the Amilakhvari family[33], was murdered allegedly by revolutionaries aboard a train in Avchala[34], situated at the western entrance of Tiflis. Subsequently, in early October, Tiflis joined the surging tide of strikes originating from the heart of the empire. An assembly of significant proportions, comprising approximately two thousand railway workers, gathered in Tiflis, effectively disrupting rail operations. The sweeping uprising that engulfed Tiflis and other Georgian cities presented an extraordinary challenge in terms of containment. The protests culminated on October 17$^{\text{th}}$, coinciding with the historic publication of the October Manifesto by Tsar Nicholas II. The manifesto advocated for the preservation of fundamental liberties, including freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and a comprehensive overhaul of the electoral system

Revolutionary Climax and Reaction: From the October Manifesto to the December Uprising

In October 1905, the presence of tsarist troops persisted in their efforts to enforce order and exert control both within the city of Tiflis and the governorates of Tiflis and Kutais. The front page article titled "Today's Situation" in the October 14 edition of the newspaper *Iveria* critically addresses the pervasive campaign of state terror in the empire, depicting it as a period characterized by oppressive cruelty and a resurgence of reactionary forces[35]. While the aristocrats and progressive liberals throughout the empire greeted the proclamation issued on October 17$^{\text{th}}$ with optimism, a notable undercurrent of scepticism permeated the socio-political landscape. This scepticism was particularly prominent among the Social Democrats, who expressed reservations and uncertainties about the evolving dynamics. For instance, while the Bolsheviks and

[33] The Amilakhvari family was considered a reactionary family by the revolutionaries. The most prominent member of the family, Knyaz Ivane Amilakhvari, held the imperial title of general and at various times held various administrative posts in the South Caucasus.

[34] "Axali Ambavi" (News) *C☒nobis P☒ urc☒eli* 2923 (4 October 1905)

[35] "Dġevandeli vit'areba" (Today's Situation) *Iveria* 188 (14 October 1905)

the Mensheviks in Tiflis had acted in unison during the month of August, the situation had become increasingly unclear and ambiguous by the arrival of October.

In October, the divergence between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks becomes evident once again. The Mensheviks, recognizing the altered circumstances following the issuance of the manifesto, perceive the necessity of outlining specific measures to fortify their positions. In contrast, the Bolsheviks highlight the potential risks and express their scepticism towards the manifesto's intentions. For instance, on the 17th of October in 1905, Stalin finds himself in Nadzaladevi, where he advocates for the workers to arm themselves. However, during this period, Nadzaladevi remains predominantly under the control of the Mensheviks. Notably, on the 19th of October, the Social Democrats stage a significant rally in Tiflis, attracting participants from Georgian, Armenian, and Russian backgrounds. Thousands of individuals proceed from the Palace of the Viceroyalty of the Caucasus to Golovin Avenue, chanting the "Marseillaise" and proudly brandishing red flags. According to some sources, the event draws the participation of up to 70,000 individuals, signifying a substantial gathering that encompasses nearly one-third of the city's population at the time (Khatchapuridze 1955).

The manifesto led to a temporary "intermission" in the strikes and workers' protests, albeit without achieving a complete cessation, ultimately resulting in Tiflis descending into a state of violence. The Black Hundreds, composed of mostly Russian officials, clergy, and urban residents, had been active in Tiflis since the 21st of October. Parading through the central thoroughfares of Tiflis, adorned with depictions of the emperor and Orthodox icons, the group engaged in aggressive actions against individuals perceived as politically unreliable. Moreover, many members of the Black Hundreds partook in acts of robbery and looting, targeting the local populace. On the 22nd of October, a clash ensued between the Black Hundreds and the Cossacks against the substantial gathering of Social-Democratic workers in the heart of Tiflis. The entire district, encompassing the establishments of local artisans and merchants, fell victim to rampant looting, while numerous individuals met a tragic demise. The most remarkable and distressing incident unfolded on Golovin Avenue (now Rustaveli Avenue) when a mob comprising both priests and Cossacks laid siege to the esteemed first classical gymnasium, resorting to indiscriminate gunfire against civilians sheltered within the premises.

On October 24, proclamations from the Social Democrats were distributed across the city, proclaiming:

> *"The great Russian revolution has begun! with its horrible violence, we have already watched the first act of this revolution. Further conflicts and sacrifices await us in the future, but for now, the primary aim is to arm the people and overthrow the autocracy, and we need armaments to do it! Folks, we must utilize all of our resources to purchase firearms. We require*

a decisive fight with the autocracy, as well as a civil and political struggle! All of this would be impossible without firearms[36]*."*

The 26 October issue of *C☒nobis P☒ urc☒eli reported* that 38 bodies, all killed by mobs and Cossacks, were laid to rest in Tiflis's Mikhail Hospital alone on the morning of 23 October[37]. The newspaper reported on the events at the classical gymnasium, where according to witnesses, the crowd chased people for nearly an hour and students and teachers were killed. The majority of those killed in the 22 October pogrom were Georgian teachers who had gathered in the morning at the first classical gymnasium to voice political demands, including an immediate cessation of the raiding of Georgian villages and towns by Cossacks and the lifting of the Martial Law in the region.

Hence, the planned massacre of Georgian teachers, which coincided with the pogrom against the Social Democrats, further solidified the fusion that imbued the Social Democratic movement led by the Mensheviks with distinct Georgian characteristics. On that very day, Golovin Avenue witnessed three separate demonstrations: one by the Socialist Revolutionaries, another by the Social-Federalist Revolutionary Party (left nationalists), and the third by the Armenian Dashnaks[38]. The Dashnaks commenced their march from the Armenian district of Tiflis, Avlabari, and proceeded towards Golovin Avenue. It is noteworthy that the Social Democrats did not participate in the events following the pogroms. Notably, the pogroms within the gymnasium premises and along the avenue served as both a catalyst and incited protests organized by three distinct factions. Conversely, however, the primary target of the pogrom, the Social Democratic Party, was compelled to temporarily withdraw from the ensuing developments.

According to the recollection of Makharadze, the pogrom on October 22nd was characterized by a sizable crowd instigated by the Cossacks and the clergy, estimated to be around twenty-five thousand individuals. This figure represented approximately 8% of Tiflis's population at that particular time, indicating significant participation in the ensuing riot that unfolded within the city. It is noteworthy that the tsarist newspapers of that era portrayed this demonstration as a procession in support of the Emperor, expressing gratitude towards its participants (Makharadze 1926).

Notably, widespread pro-government demonstrations also transpired in other cities of the Russian Empire during the closing days of October 1905. The Tsarist groups orchestrated pogroms not only in Tiflis but also in various other cities, including Ufa, where similar acts of violence resulted in a tragic loss of life. Charles Steinwedel (Steinwedel 2002) argues that these pogroms were a manifestation of the broader "mass politics" that characterized Tsarist Russia. However, it is essential to acknowledge that

[36] Archives of Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia (former archives of the Georgian branch of the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute under the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party. Fund 3, case 113).

[37] 'Tiflisis siaxleebi' (Tiflis News) *C☒nobis P☒ urc☒eli* 2934 (26 October 1905)

[38] Dashnaktsutyun is the still active Armenian nationalist party, found in Tiflis in 1890

the Monarchists held significantly stronger positions in Ufa compared to Tiflis. This distinction can primarily be attributed to the fact that the Russianspeaking population did not constitute the majority in Tiflis.

Towards the conclusion of October, the Mensheviks exhibited a heightened resolve compared to the Bolsheviks in establishing workers' soviets (Suny, Stalin: Passage to Revolution 2020). This determination was promptly manifested through the Mensheviks' proactive efforts in mobilizing workers from various parts of the city within the Nadzaladevi insurgency, with the explicit goal of intervening in the Armenian-Tatar massacres.

Pogroms had already ravaged the cities, including Baku and various regions in the South Caucasus, eventually reaching Tiflis. On the 21st of November 1905, violent clashes erupted between Armenians and Tatars in Tiflis, resulting in casualties on both sides. Armenians breached Tatar neighbourhoods, while Tatars retaliated by targeting Armenians. It is crucial to emphasize that the local gendarmerie proved incapable of containing the situation, necessitating the intervention of the Social Democrats. Filipe Makharadze's account demonstrates that the Social Democrats swiftly implemented a highly effective patrol strategy at the onset of the pogroms. During a public discussion held in Nadzaladevi, it was decided to establish a three-man detachment consisting of Georgian, Armenian, and Russian workers. The author further notes that the Social Democrats did not enjoy widespread support among the Tatars, precluding their inclusion in the working group (Makharadze 1926).

Governor General Illarion Vorontsov-Dashkov of the Caucasus Viceroyalty, along with his troops, visited a Social Democratic gathering on the 24th of November. The governor expressed his willingness to provide the Social Democrats with over 2,000 rifles[39] to quell the violence between Tatars and Armenians. Empowered with weapons, the Social Democrats initiated patrols that effectively put an end to the pogrom. While the wave of pogroms eventually subsided, it persisted until the conclusion of the autumn. Nevertheless, several Armenians and Tatars lost their lives in Tiflis before the bloodshed ceased. For instance, *Kavkaz* reported that on the 23rd of November alone, 13 individuals, including 10 Tatars, 2 Armenians, and one unidentified person[40], were brought to the morgue at Mikhail Hospital. *C☒nobis P☒ urc☒eli highlighted* that on the 27th of November, Tatar shopkeepers were killed by Armenians. In its analysis of the prevailing events, the newspaper asserted that "the Armenian elite had poisoned ordinary Armenians with the venom of chauvinistic nationalism and encouraged their participation in the pogroms[41]".

The issue of *C☒nobis P☒ urc☒eli on* the 28th of November highlights the workers' meeting held in Nadzaladevi[42] on the 27th of November, which focused on addressing

[39] Rifles were delivered. However, part of revolutionaries refused returning of them to the Governor, the case is discussed thoroughly below in the text.

[40] *Kavkaz* 315 (29th November 1905)

[41] "Xoc'va žġleta Tfilisši" (Massacres in Tiflis) *C☒nobis P☒ urc☒eli* 2957 (27th November 1905)

[42] 'Sisxlisġvra Tfilisši' (Bloodshed in Tiflis) *C☒nobis P☒ urc☒eli* 2958 (28th November 1905)

the ongoing clashes between Armenians and Tatars within the inner city. It becomes evident that the Social Democrats played a crucial role in bringing these massacres to an end. In early December, a schism emerged within the party regarding the matter of armaments. The Mensheviks advocated for a resumption of armament, whereas the Bolsheviks advocated for its retention. It is important to note that the Bolsheviks also contributed to the prevention of the Armenian Tatar massacres, necessitating the summons of Bolshevik detachments from the provinces to Tiflis. For instance, Vano Maisuradze, a former partisan, reported the involvement of 80 pro-Bolshevik guerrillas from the Kakheti region of eastern Georgia in quelling the Armenian Tatar pogroms.[43].

Initially, the task of facilitating the return of weapons was assumed by Isidore Ramishvili, the prominent leader of the Menshevik faction, who advocated for the restoration of arms to the gendarmerie in adherence to the agreed terms. Subsequently, owing to the resolution reached by the workers' council, a significant portion of the weaponry was relinquished to the gendarmerie, while the remaining weapons fell into the hands of the Bolsheviks. With the intervention of Social Democratic detachments, hostilities between the Armenian and Tatar factions gradually subsided, culminating towards the latter part of November (Kikvidze 1954).

Another tide of The Russian revolution reached Tiflis in early December, as a part of the mass strikes throughout the empire. In Tiflis, the strikes were concentrated on the railways. From the beginning of December, the Social Democrats gained full control. Notably, the protests were led by the Central Bureau, with the presence of eighteen Menshevik and twelve Bolshevik deputies. The strike could easily paralyze the Baku-Batumi railway line, causing significant damage to the empire's economy. The issue was therefore in the headlines for weeks until the strike finally took place. *Iveria* even decided to devote it's front pages to the announcement of the news from Nadzaladevi workers' councils. For example, the front page of the 11 December issue of *Iveria* invited the workers to a meeting of the workers' councils in Nadzaladevi and underlined that the topic to be discussed was the general strike of the Russian Empire[44].

The initiation of the railway workers' strike in Tiflis instigated a cascade of subsequent strikes across diverse sectors. A prominent role in establishing an inter-party strike committee was assumed by the Social Democrats, who recognized the imperative inclusion of other political factions in its composition. Particularly noteworthy was the committee's incorporation of representatives from two Armenian groups: the Hnchak, characterized by a socialist orientation that surpassed its nationalist tendencies, and the Dashnaktsutyun, renowned for its radical nationalist inclinations. Moreover, the committee garnered support from the Socialist Federalists and the Socialist Revolu-

[43] Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (archive of former party bodies) Fund 93, description 2, file 555, pages — 35

[44] "Saxalxo Mitingi" (Public Gathering) *Iveria* 224 (11 December 1905).

tionaries. Although the Social Democrats assumed the mantle of leadership, the true authority resided with the Mensheviks.

In a telegram published on December 15, 1905, by the legally recognized newspaper *Social Democratic Sheet* in Kutais[45], the Central Strike Committee delivered the alarming news of a full military siege at the Tiflis station, prompting the declaration of a comprehensive strike from Batumi to Baku. These strikes posed a significant threat to the stability of the empire, leading to the implementation of repressive measures. Consequently, Tiflis fell under the impact of these restrictions, and a state of emergency was declared on December 15. The gendarmerie took to the streets in sizable military squads, intensifying their patrols. As a result, workers sought refuge primarily in the Nadzaladevi district, which, being less heavily guarded, could only be subjected to severe measures in the event of a temporary attack. Throughout the Nadzaladevi district, characterized by densely built houses, narrow streets, and labyrinthine alleys, the urban terrain provided optimal conditions for engaging in guerrilla warfare.

Apart from Nadzaladevi, the entire city was effectively under the control of the police, leading to the deportation and imprisonment of numerous leaders, revolutionaries, and workers. The rebels who had gathered in Nadzaladevi took measures to fortify the area to protect themselves against the Cossacks. On December 18$^{\text{th}}$, a conflict erupted near the northern entrances of Nadzaladevi, specifically on the slopes surrounding the neighbourhood from the north. In the evening, the Cossacks encircled the location and initiated an onslaught of gunfire. In the face of a large Cossack force, nine labourers fell victim to the sudden ambush. The insurgents subsequently discovered the remains of these individuals, prompting a significant number of people to visit and pay their respects.[46].

Commencing in the winter of 1905, a series of events occurred that had a significant influence on the revolution's state in Tiflis. Initially, a violent clash between Armenians and Tatars transpired, followed by a progressively more organized and severe response from the Tsarist establishments. Lastly, the schism between the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks deepened, leaving a lasting impact on Georgia throughout the twentieth century. Notably, despite their acrimonious competition, the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks still managed to collaborate with each other on numerous occasions in 1905.

The conclusion of 1905 marked a setback for the revolutionary efforts, as the triumph of the Tsarist reaction in December resulted in the arrest and punishment of insurgents. However, the political system in Russia remained mired in a deep crisis, exemplified by the empire's waning control over its peripheries. Nadzaladevi, situated on the outskirts of Tiflis, emerged as a significant stronghold of revolutionary fervour., while Tiflis experienced notable demographic shifts with a substantial increase in the Georgian population. This demographic transformation served as a catalyst for the rise

[45] "Telegramebi" (Telegrams) *Soc'ial Demokratiuli P'urc'eli* 3 (15 December 1905).

[46] Tiflis is still divided between the right and left banks of the Mktvari (Kura) River, both banks being surrounded by hills that form the natural boundaries of the city and give it a canyon landscape.

of Georgian-influenced socialism. In response to repressive measures, revolutionaries turned to violence, enabling exiled individuals to evade capture and secretly return, thereby revitalizing the movement clandestinely. Symbolism played a crucial role in strengthening the revolutionary cause, as the proletariat hailed fallen revolutionaries as martyrs, intensifying the movement's power and fostering resolute perseverance.

Collective action: winners and losers

Applying collective action theory to Tiflis in 1905 requires treating "population" not as a unified actor but as a fragmented coordination field. Olson's logic makes this immediately clear: even in a rapidly mobilizing city, collective action is constrained by free-rider problems and heterogeneous incentives. Tiflis was not a mature industrial metropolis but a hybrid formation where traditional craft sectors coexisted with emerging industry, producing uneven capacities for organization and sustained participation.

Marwell–Oliver's critical mass model refines this by shifting attention away from aggregate demographics toward structured minorities capable of triggering collective dynamics. The key question is not how many actors exist, but whether sufficiently organized subsets can stabilize coordination across class and ethnic divisions. In Tiflis, this was complicated by shifting urban demographics: the growing Georgian-speaking working class increasingly formed the core of labour mobilization, while Armenians were split between an economically dominant bourgeoisie and a politicized working class.

This internal stratification mattered analytically. As Der Megrian notes, Armenian workers often blamed their bourgeoisie for inflaming ethnic tensions, while parallel critiques emerged among Georgians against their own elite. Such patterns reduce Olsonian fragmentation at the class level and open limited space for cross-ethnic coordination. Yet these solidarities remained contingent, sustained only where critical mass structures—particularly socialist organizations—could aggregate them into durable collective action (Der Megrian 1968). The case of Nadzaladevi insurgency is, in this context, the proof of Georgian-Armenian cooperation in Tiflis during the revolution of 1905.

The 1905 outcome in Tiflis appears less as a linear "victory" of rebellion and more as a structured selection effect. Olson helps explain why repression alone could not permanently suppress mobilization: coercion raises participation costs but does not eliminate the underlying coordination problem, which re-emerges whenever organizational capacity survives.

Marwell–Oliver clarifies why Menshevism proved structurally advantaged. Success depended on whether a sufficiently concentrated core could aggregate dispersed actors into sustained collective action. The Mensheviks functioned as that core by building cross-cutting alliances that linked Marxist organization with emerging Georgian na-

tional consciousness while still incorporating Armenian and Russian workers into a shared mobilization framework.

This inclusivity was not ideological openness but a mechanism for expanding the pool from which a critical mass could be formed. Ethnic and class heterogeneity, instead of fragmenting action, was partially converted into coordinated capacity through socialist institutions and shared urban experience. The result was a durable coalition structure that outlasted short-term repression. In Marwell–Oliver terms, Menshevism succeeded because it consistently maintained the threshold conditions for collective action, allowing localized victories in 1905 to scale into longer-term political transformation up to 1917.

During the initial stages of the spread of Marxism in Georgia, Noe Zhordania, the leader of the Georgian Mensheviks, made significant contributions to several prominent periodicals. These publications were written in the Georgian language and played a pivotal role in shaping the discourse. One notable example is Zhordania's essay titled "Economic Success and Nationality," which served as a strategic blueprint for Georgian Marxists (Zhordania 2015). Published in 1894, the essay explores the process of modern nation-building and its intricate links with migration and broader economic phenomena. Zhordania put forth a Marxist perspective on the formation of nations, highlighting the crucial role played by advancements such as the development of the postal service, printing press, railways, and other modes of transportation during the nineteenth century in the establishment of modern states. Drawing parallels, Zhordania argued that the Georgian nation was following a similar trajectory.

The process of industrialization transformed Tiflis into a regional centre, attracting a predominantly Georgian workforce from the surrounding regions. In the wave of the first Russian revolution in 1905, the Mensheviks emerged as the dominant power in Tiflis. Despite being part of RSDLP, the Georgian Mensheviks primarily communicated their message through Georgianlanguage journals and manifestos. The strategic utilization of the Georgian language played a pivotal role in the Mensheviks' success. Engaging in fervent debates through Georgian-language newspapers, the Georgian Mensheviks and other social democrats garnered recognition and engaged with the Georgian nobility and sections of the bourgeoisie. These exchanges revolved around social and economic matters as well as inter-ethnic relations. Notably, the social democrats confronted the long-standing anti-Armenian rhetoric prevalent in Georgian newspapers during the latter half of the 19th century[47].

Despite the burgeoning Georgian population, Tiflis remained predominantly inhabited by Armenians in 1905. During the late nineteenth century, the city encountered numerous challenges that possessed the potential to escalate into violent conflicts between the Armenian and Georgian communities. These challenges were rooted in the

[47] See, for example the PhD thesis from Vazha Shubitidze (defended at Tbilisi State University in 2003, which is available at Tbilisi State University bases) and describes the rivalry between Noe Zhordania and Ilia Chavchavadze `https://digitallibrary.tsu.ge/book/2021/oct/dissertations/shubitidze-disertacia.pdf`

territorial acquisitions of the Russian Empire in the Ottoman North-East during the Russo-Turkish War, profoundly shaping the historical legacies of Armenia and Georgia. Consequently, a dispute regarding cultural heritage erupted between Armenian and Georgian publishers, frequently accompanied by the deployment of radical rhetoric and provocative discourse. This contentious discourse generated a media frenzy, with select Georgian publications adopting overtly anti-Armenian stances. Initially, it appeared as though deep-seated animosity might flourish between the Armenian and Georgian communities in Tiflis. However, as the year 1905 unfolded, Georgian and Armenian workers forged a shared sense of solidarity, discovering greater affinities with one another than with their aristocratic or bourgeois compatriots.

In 1903, Irakli (Kaki) Tsereteli, a prominent figure within the Menshevik movement and later the Minister of Post and Telegraph of the Russian Provisional Government in 1917, articulated a critique regarding the actions of Georgian bourgeois nationalists, with the particular focus on Ilia Chavchavadze, who displayed hostility towards Social Democrats during the early years of the century. Tsereteli accused bourgeois nationalists and particularly, Chachavadze of deliberately fostering animosity between Armenians and Georgians. He contended that on one hand, the Georgian bourgeoisie sought to undermine the Armenian bourgeoisie as a formidable competitor, aiming to seize control of the market and proclaim it as a common cause for the Georgians. On the other hand, by exacerbating national discord between the two ethnic groups, they aimed to sow division among the working class of both nations, instigating conflict and ultimately weakening the revolutionary movement (Tsereteli 2015).

As previously mentioned, the Armenian working class in Tiflis harbored no admiration for the Armenian bourgeoisie, as they viewed them as aligned with the oppressive Tsarist regime. The basis for this discontent stemmed from both the overarching class disparities between the working class and the bourgeois Armenians, as well as more specific grievances. These included the perceived role of the bourgeois Armenians in perpetuating the estrangement between the Armenian and Georgian communities, and their collaboration with the imperial authorities in the revocation of the autocephaly of the Armenian Church in 1903 (Der Megrian 1968). Consequently, the Georgian and Armenian bourgeoisie from both nations faced accusations from their fellow compatriots of prioritizing narrow class interests and fuelling interethnic tensions.

Dashnaktsutyun was the major Armenian party in Tiflis, recruiting a large number of Armenian workers through Armenian-language communication, similar to the way the Mensheviks recruited Georgian workers by approaching them in Georgian. However, Georgian Mensheviks had a choice to use The Russian language as well, since Marxism was an internationalist ideology and the agenda of Social Democrats was to recruit not only Georgians but every worker of every nationality across the city.

Examining the framework of collective action, Lichbach presents four distinct perspectives on the perception of protest and repression. Among these, the "language group" or community emerges as a particularly conducive unit for mobilization (Lichbach 1995). The remaining three levels of analysis encompass the market, contract,

and hierarchical groups. Lichbach asserts that mobilization occurs not solely at one level, but rather at two, three, or even multiple levels. It is worth noting that Armenian and Georgian workers were organized at the community level. While the majority of Armenian workers found cohesion within the linguistic group of Dashnaktsutyun, their Georgian counterparts united under the banner of the Georgian vanguard of Menshevik Social Democrats within the RSDLP. As the 1905 rebellion progressed, the collaboration between Armenians and Georgians expanded into a broader coalition that encompassed multiple social classes, including Russians, ultimately emerging as a formidable opposition to the existing regime under the auspices of the RSDLP.

The Tiflis bourgeoisie, primarily composed of the Armenian nobility and merchant class, faced strong opposition from Armenian labour. This dissent led to the active involvement of Armenian workers in the 1905 uprising and, in certain instances, their alignment with the Social Democratic Party. Notably, this movement attracted prominent figures such as Simon TerPetrosyan, widely known as Kamo, and Suren Spandaryan, both of whom were associated with Stalin. Additionally, Stepan Shaumian, often referred to as the 'Caucasian Lenin,' played a significant role among these ranks. While a considerable number of Armenians joined the RSDLP, a notable faction remained loyal to the Dashnaktsutyun movement.

During the revolutionary period, the Dashnak Party experienced a shift towards the leftwing of the political spectrum and formed an alliance with the Social Democrats. National awakenings often involve widespread movements that challenge existing bureaucratic and ruling classes, which symbolize established power structures. In Tiflis, the Armenian elites held influential positions and were aligned with Tsarism, rendering them unwelcome among the Dashnaks. Conversely, there were Armenian liberals who opposed Tsarism during the 1905 revolution. Nevertheless, the overall revolutionary climate, guided by Marxist principles, propelled the masses further to the left, surpassing the influence of the liberals. Consequently, the Dashnak Party did not encompass all Armenians and had to establish temporary alliances with other ethnic groups, although non-Armenians could not be officially admitted into the party. The alliance between the Social Democrats and the Dashnaks was facilitated by the inclusive nature of the Social Democrats. While the Dashnaks were unable to fully integrate "others" into their ranks, they found a place for them within the revolutionary platform of the Social Democrats and even in the assemblies of the Nadzaladevi insurgency.

In Tiflis, the 1905 Revolution produced a clear set of winners and losers shaped by the logic of collective action. The Georgian Mensheviks emerged as the dominant force because they transformed ethnic and class fragmentation into a functional, cross-cutting coalition capable of sustained mobilization. By anchoring their efforts in the Nadzaladevi insurgency and leveraging Georgian national sentiment alongside socialist internationalism, they created an organizational architecture that other groups could not replicate. While the Bolsheviks achieved episodic successes through audacious acts of expropriation and terror, they remained marginal in the city's mass politics. Ethnonationalist organizations such as the Dashnaks and Socialist-Federalists, though

influential within their communities, proved structurally limited by exclusive recruitment bases. The Armenian and Tatar communities, trapped in mutual violence, and the Tsarist-aligned Black Hundreds, reliant on coercion rather than legitimacy, ultimately failed to shape the revolutionary outcome. Thus, Menshevik victory in Tiflis was not inevitable but the product of superior coalition-building under conditions of extreme heterogeneity. This experience not only prefigured their later dominance in independent Georgia but offers a compelling historical illustration of how organizational adaptability, rather than ideological purity or raw militancy, determines revolutionary success in multi-ethnic settings.

Conclusion

The 1905 Revolution in Tiflis marked not merely a chapter in the broader Russian revolutionary process, but a decisive triumph of "Georgian" Menshevism as a distinctive political formation. By successfully navigating the complex interplay of class, ethnic, and national identities, the Georgian Mensheviks demonstrated a superior capacity for mass mobilization in a deeply fragmented urban environment. Their inclusive strategy—rooted in the practical experience of the Guria Republic and institutionalized in the Nadzaladevi insurgency—enabled them to overcome the classic dilemmas, provided by collective action theory. Rather than relying primarily on ideological fervor or vanguardist coercion, they built a resilient organizational architecture that reduced risks through high-visibility participation, multi-ethnic coordination, and the provision of contingent collective goods.

The critical mass model further illuminates why Menshevism prevailed in Tiflis. While Bolsheviks compensated for their limited mass base with radicalization and selective terror, and ethnonationalist groups such as the Dashnaks or Socialist-Federalists remained constrained by narrower recruitment pools, the Mensheviks assembled a cross-cutting coalition. Georgian workers, Armenian proletarians, and Russian revolutionaries found a common platform under Social Democratic leadership. Nadzaladevi emerged as the practical embodiment of this approach: a site of direct-democratic self-organization where strikes, armed patrols, and neighborhood defense were coordinated across ethnic lines, even amid the harrowing Armenian-Tatar pogroms.

This organizational advantage proved decisive. The Mensheviks did not simply ride the wave of revolutionary enthusiasm; they structured and sustained it. Their ability to fuse emerging Georgian national consciousness with Marxist internationalism—while confronting both Tsarist reaction and bourgeois nationalism—allowed them to dominate the revolutionary landscape in the South Caucasus. The events of 1905 thus served as a crucial rehearsal, not only for the Russian Empire as Lenin famously claimed, but for Georgian Menshevism itself. The political networks, leadership experience, and popular legitimacy forged in Tiflis, Nadzaladevi, and the surrounding governorates

laid the groundwork for the Mensheviks' later dominance in the Transcaucasian Federative Republic and, ultimately, in the Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918–1921).

The Tiflis experience of 1905 therefore offers important theoretical and historical lessons. It demonstrates that in ethnically heterogeneous and politically polarized settings, movements capable of building inclusive yet functionally effective coalitions possess a decisive advantage in sustaining collective action. Revolutionary outcomes are shaped less by the intensity of grievances than by the organizational capacity to convert those grievances into coordinated, observable, and sustained participation. In this sense, the "Georgian" Menshevism that triumphed in Tiflis was neither a pure expression of class universalism nor a simple vehicle of national awakening, but a pragmatic synthesis that proved uniquely adapted to the complex realities of the South Caucasus at the beginning of the twentieth century.

By recovering this overlooked chapter, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the 1905 Revolution beyond the "cannonic" Bolshevik narrative, while illuminating the roots of Georgia's distinctive Social Democratic tradition.

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