

Fedor Andreevich SHCHERBINA

b. 13 February (o.s.) 1849 - d. 28 October 1936

Summary. Shcherbina was the most eminent of the zemstvo statisticians in the Russian Empire; his work served as a prototype in the field, and Lenin used his data. As an émigré professor in Prague, he published a history of statistics.

Shcherbina was born in the Cossack settlement of Novodereviankovskaia (Novodereviankivka *stanytsia*) in the Kuban' River region of the Russian Empire, the son of a priest. Such settlements (*stanytsi*) derived from and continued the democratic and military traditions of the Dnieper Cossacks. At age 12 he entered the military theological school in the region's capital Ekaterinodar (from 1920: Krasnodar), and in 1866 the theological seminary of the Caucasus at Stavropol'. His teachers were sympathetic to the Populist movement (intellectuals "going out among the common people"), and like his idealist generation he was influenced by the writings of N.G. Chernishevsky (1828-1889) and political economists such as John Stuart Mill, Lasalle, Becher, and especially Pfeiffer on cooperative activity. With 6 other seminarians, he left the seminary and founded the first agricultural cooperative ("collective farm") in Russia, which, however, foundered within 3 years because of lack of knowledge and experience. Seeking to deepen his knowledge, with financial support sympathetically provided by a Cossack military stipend Shcherbina entered in 1872 the Petrovsko-Rozumovsky Academy of Agriculture and Forestry in Moscow. He had to leave on account of his student political activity and moved to the Faculty of Science of the Novorossisk University in Odessa in 1874, which year saw the beginning of the destruction (1874-1877) of the Populist movement, with some 3000 of its activists sentenced to imprisonment or banishment. Among them was Shcherbina, who was sent to the Vologda *gubernia* (province) in 1876.

In those backward, impoverished and isolated communities, he committed himself to the socio-economic study of the common people, and the year 1879 saw the publication of the first monographic¹ study of agriculture of any region in Russia. He was pardoned in 1800 and returned to the Kuban'

¹The "monographic method" pervaded early attempts at representative sampling. It amounted to selecting a cluster of elements "typical" of population, and their extensive investigation.

region to continue in pacifist manner his populist investigation, largely of this locality.

The next, most stable and active, stage of Shcherbina's life began with his taking up in 1884 the directorship of the statistical department of the Voronezh *zemstvo*. The *zemstvos* were institutions of local government established from 1864 in the course of the great political and social reforms. Their statistical departments came to concern themselves with the rural economy of the European part of the Russian Empire. Shcherbina remained at this post for some 18 years, editing 66 volumes of statistics of the Voronezh gubernia and producing 16 separate books on related topics. For his history (1891) of the Voronezh *zemstvo*, he received from the Imperial Academy of Science a Tsar Aleksandr II Prize. His *Krest'ianskie biudzhety (Peasant budgets)* of 477 pages published in 1900 was a highlight of the intense statistical activity in Russia of the time, in which Shcherbina's work had served as a model for other statisticians. Its Chapter II, on budget investigation in foreign countries, reveals familiarity with developments in Western Europe, such as the work of Quetelet (q.v.), Sir Frederick Morton Eden (q.v.), the International Statistical Congresses and the London Statistical Society. Shcherbina is listed among the editorial staff of the *Bolshaia Entsiklopedia (The Great Encyclopedia)* published in St. Petersburg around 1900. There is a substantial entry under the title *Statistika* in volume 17, which he may have authored, which divides the statistical studies of the time into the "formal" and the "material". The first, as defined by von Mayr (q.v.), is said to be exhaustive numerical description of an entire population. (The "material" is said to be "statistical science", where causes and effects are inferred from numerical investigation.) In his later book (Shcherbina, 1925; the transliteration of the Ukrainian form of his name is Fedir Andrievych Shcherbina), he mentions the "new mathematical direction" of statistics based on random sampling of which the chief Russian protagonist is named as A.A. Chuprov (q.v.). Shcherbina to the end of his days, like von Mayr, remained opposed in principle to this direction.

In continuing sympathy with the efforts of the *zemstvos* and bourgeoisie to improve the lot of the peasantry and workers he wrote an influential pamphlet in 1902 on the needs of the peasant-agricultural economy, demanding amongst other things unacceptable to the then-regime, a constitutional system of government. After being questioned in early 1903 as a result he was sent into administrative banishment in the Kuban' region, under police surveillance. During this time he researched his book on the history

of the Kuban' Cossack Host, and due to its widespread popularity (the work was known to Tsar Nikolai (Nicholas II)) was permitted to revive in 1906, and then head, the Cossack Council, a form of governing body, in the Kuban'. In 1904 Shcherbina was elected Corresponding Member of the Imperial Academy of Sciences, and in 1907 was elected to the second Duma (Russian parliament) as a Populist Socialist. After the revolution of February 1917 the people of the Kuban' region and of Ukraine sought existence as independent republics. Shcherbina was elected to the Kuban' Legislative Council (1917-1920) and headed the supreme court of the Kuban' Cossack Host. At this time his cultural orientation began to revert to his ancestral Ukrainian. When the Bolsheviks had subjugated the Kuban' in 1920, he emigrated to Yugoslavia. During the journey across the Black Sea by ship, for his Kuban' Cossack "separatism" he was nearly thrown overboard by fleeing Russian White Guard officers.

During a short period in Yugoslavia he wrote a scathing attack from an economic standpoint of the 3 years Bolshevik rule in Russia (Shcherbina, 1921) which was printed in Prague to which he had moved. Here he was made full professor (1922-1936) and rector (1924-1925) at the Ukrainian Free University. He also taught statistics at the Ukrainian Husbandry Academy [Polytechnic] at Poděbrady. These institutions were distinct from the Russian College in Prague, with which A.A. Chuprov, as fellow statistical émigré from the Russian Empire, had a brief association. The years in Prague saw the publication of Shcherbina's history of statistics (Shcherbyna, 1925), remarkable for its historical scholarship and detailed insight into pre-revolutionary Russian developments.

The fifth edition of Lenin's collected works, Volume 3, is aware of the year of his death, but, unlike the second edition concludes with the statement "V.I. Lenin severely criticized the author's incorrect methods of analysis, which distorted reality of statistical data". However, Lenin had used Shcherbina's data extensively, and Soviet writers continued to accord him respect.

Shcherbina, therefore due to his eminence, longevity and immense careful productivity figures in all three of the politically incommensurate: tsarist *Entsiklopedicheskii Slovar (Encyclopedic Dictionary)* (1904), the *Bolshaia Sovetskaiia Entsiklopediia (Great Soviet Encyclopedia)* (1957), and the émigré *Encyclopedia of Ukraine* (English version: 1993). It testifies to the universality of statistics.

References

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E. Seneta