

Chapter 6

The Development of the Russian State System in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

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The last *zemskaa sobor* met in 1683-84. For over 200 years no general Russian representative assemblies were convened, if one does not count Catherine the Great's summoning of the "Great Commission," which had only a limited purpose. During that time a broad array of mutual misunderstandings and estrangements between society and the state developed. Many statesmen, public figures, and even a number of tsars understood how unnatural this situation was.

Alexander I, upon assuming the throne in 1801, considered abolishing serfdom, introducing a constitution, and convening a people's government. Above all else, however, he thought it important to strengthen the central government, which was then in a state of routine disarray. The colleges established by Peter the Great were clearly not working out. Widespread evasion of responsibility predominated in them, concealing the taking of bribes and the embezzling of public funds. The local authorities, taking advantage of the weakness of the central government, fostered lawlessness.

Alexander hoped to introduce order and to strengthen the state by introducing a ministerial system based on individual management. In 1802 eight ministries were created to replace the previous twelve colleges: the ministry of war, navy, foreign affairs, internal affairs, commerce, finance, public enlightenment, and justice. This measure strengthened the central government, but a decisive victory in the struggle against abuses of power was not achieved. The old defects

were transplanted to the new ministries. It was obvious that it was impossible to solve the problem of creating a system of state authority that would actively contribute to the economic, social, and political development of the country and not devour its resources simply by making some rearrangements in the bureaucratic machine. A fundamentally new approach to the problem was needed.

In 1809, at the tsar's instruction, Secretary of State M.M. Speranskii put together a plan for radical reform. Speranskii placed the separation of power — legislative, executive, and judicial - at the foundation of his state structure. Each of these, from top to bottom, was supposed to act within a strictly outlined framework of law. Representative assemblies were created at several levels headed by the State Duma, a representative body for all of Russia. The Duma was supposed to pass judgment on bills presented for its examination and monitor the accounts of the ministers.

All power — legislative, executive, and judicial — was unified in a State Council, the members of which were appointed by the tsar. The opinions of the State Council, after confirmation by the tsar, became law. If a disagreement arose within the State Council, the tsar by his choice would confirm the view of the majority or the minority. No law could be promulgated without being discussed in both the State Duma and the State Council.

In Speranskii's plan real legislative power remained in the hands of the emperor and the upper-level bureaucracy. But Speranskii emphasized that the judgments of the Duma should be made freely and should express the "opinion of the people." This was the essence of Speranskii's fundamentally new approach: he wanted to subject the actions of both the central and local authorities to the control of public opinion.

Under Speranskii's plan voting rights would be enjoyed by all citizens of Russia who possessed land or capital, including state peasants. Workmen, domestic servants, and serfs would not participate in elections, but would enjoy important civil rights. The most important of these was that no one could be

punished without a court sentence. If enacted, Speranskii's plan would have greatly limited the power that landowners held over the serfs.¹

The implementation of the project began in 1810 when the State Council was created. But these things remained. The gentry, having heard of Speranskii's plans to grant civil rights to the serfs, openly expressed their dissatisfaction. All of the conservatives from N.M. Karamzin to A.A. Arakcheev joined together against Speranskii. "We don't need a constitution," Karamzin wrote in a note given to the emperor, "give us fifty intelligent and virtuous governors, and everything will turn out well." Speranskii was surrounded by hired and voluntary spies, who passed along to the tsar his every imprudent word. The proud and rancorous emperor would not allow any denunciation reaching his ears to go unnoticed. Further, in expectation of the inevitable war with Napoleon, Alexander I did not want to cloud his relations with the upper estate in any way. In March, 1812, Speranskii was arrested and exiled to Nizhnii Novgorod. Alexander said that he was "sacrificed to public opinion." And indeed, Speranskii's exile provoked loud rejoicing amongst the gentry.²

After the end of the war with Napoleon, Alexander I returned to his unrealized plans. In accordance with the decisions of the Congress of Vienna in 1814, a significant part of Polish lands, including Warsaw, were transferred to Russia. Poland was granted a constitution. In his speech at the opening of the Polish Diet on 15 March 1818, the emperor announced his intention to give a constitutional structure to all of Russia. Alexander then instructed his close friend, N.N. Novosil'tsov, to develop a plan for a Russian constitution. In order to carry out this request Novosil'tsov brought together a group of educated bureaucrats that included Prince P.A. Viazemskii, a poet and statesman. The Polish Constitution was taken as a model, and even Speranskii's plan was used. By 1821 work on the "Constitutional Charter of the Russian Empire" was completed.

Under the "Constitutional Charter" Russia was to receive a federal structure that divided it into twelve regions, each of which would have a representative body. The general Russian representative assembly would consist of two chambers. The upper chamber would be the Senate whose members were to be appointed by the tsar. The members of the lower chamber would be elected by local assemblies and confirmed by the tsar (one deputy was to be chosen from three candidates). The part of the "Constitutional Charter" that would guarantee personal immunity was extremely important. No one would be arrested without being charged. No one would be punished except by a court and on the basis of law. Freedom of the press would be established.³

If the "Constitutional Charter" had been put into effect, Russia would have stepped on the path of a representative system and civil freedoms. While a draft of the constitution was being worked out, however, Alexander I lost the desire to have it introduced. Upon receiving the final version of the "Constitutional Charter," he familiarized himself with it, set it down on the table, and never again returned to it.

The aggrieved Viazemskii, it seems, did not make a secret of his work. Among those who became familiar with it was the ideologue of the Decembrists, Nikita Murav'ev. He placed the work of NovosiFtsov-Viazemskii at the foundation of a constitution he developed. In Murav'ev's plan, however, the rights of the representative body were significantly expanded and those of the monarchy curtailed; Russia was to become a constitutional monarchy. But the most profound difference was that Murav'ev linked the introduction of a constitution to the abolition of serfdom and estate privileges. "Villenage and slavery are abolished," he wrote in his plan,

The slave, tied to the land in Russia, will be free. The division between the noble and the common people is rejected in so far as it is contrary to Faith, by which all men are *brothers*, all are born *good* by the will of God, all are born *for the good* and all are *common people*: for everyone is weak and imperfect.⁴

Over the course of many years Soviet historians did all they could to transform the Decembrists into revolutionaries, to bring them closer to the Bolsheviks. The time has now come to revisit the Decembrists in the context of their time. A number of different social estates participated in the Decembrist movement (the landed gentry, provincial officers, the intelligentsia-raz7ioc/iwte;y), but the leading role, nonetheless, belonged to the upper gentry and aristocrats, both titled and untitled. In contrast to the revolutionary aristocrats of the following period (A.I. Herzen, P.A. Kropotkin, S.L. Perovskaia, etc.), the Decembrists did not break ties with their environment, but rather functioned as its representatives. The reason for this was that toward the end of Alexander I's reign the attitude of the gentry toward a constitution began to change. Further, a highly influential opposition to the autocratic system arose during the period between the tsars, which went well beyond the limits of the Northern and Southern Societies (one needs simply to mention the names of respected figures such as N. S. Mordvinov, A.P. Ermolov, M.A. Miloradovich, A.S. Griboedov, and also of Viazemskii to show this is so). The officers of the Guard came forward on 14 December 1825 to a large degree because they were counting on the support of the high-ranking opposition. These hopes were unwarranted, for Nicholas was able to win some of them over to his side and to neutralize others. Having broken up the Decembrists, he brought his anger down upon them directly. At the same time he decided not to punish other malcontents who had hesitated to act so that he would not spoil his relationship with the gentry. Of such men the Decembrists said with bitterness: "There are our friends from the fourteenth who granted us the favor of banishment."⁵

Nicholas I piously believed in the strength and righteousness of the autocratic system. Lacking trust in the public, the emperor saw his main foothold of support in the army and the bureaucracy. During Nicholas I's reign an unprecedented expansion of the bureaucratic apparatus took place. The most varied branches of human activity became the

objects of bureaucratic regulation, including religion, art, literature, and science. The number of bureaucrats grew rapidly from 15-16,000 at the beginning of the nineteenth century to 61,500 in 1847 and 86,000 in 1857.⁶

Administrative centralism was reinforced beyond all reason. Practically everything was decided in Petersburg. Even the top institutions (the State Council and Senate) were overburdened with a mass of trivialities. This engendered a huge correspondence that quite often had a purely formal character (local bureaucrats would respond to papers from Petersburg without trying to grasp the essence of things and without collecting the necessary information).

The essence of bureaucratic administration, however, is not that it creates a large quantity of paper and official red tape. These are only its external signs. Its essence consists of decisions being made and carried out not by some collection of representatives and not individually by someone having supreme authority or by some responsible official (a minister, a governor), but rather by the entire administrative machine as a whole. The tsar himself, the ministers, the governors become nothing more than a parts of this machine, albeit very important ones.

Since all the information a minister receives flows through his administrative apparatus, it would seem that the minister is in the power of this apparatus. In addition, subordinate bureaucrats prepare draft decisions on various matters. Many matters, especially those in which the leadership has little interest, are in fact decided by the bureaucrats who prepare the draft documents. Under Nicholas I the leadership posts of civil departments were often filled with army generals who were poorly acquainted with their new assignments. Most often departments headed by such men turned out to be run by their subordinates.

If day after day subordinate bureaucrats methodically exert influence on the leadership of a given department in a certain direction, then in the end the policy of this department will be pushed in that direction. As a general rule sharp changes in

the policies of a government are not introduced from without (for example, by the tsar, his advisors, or the public), but rather, over the course of many years they blossom little by little in the bureaucratic depths. Even if the idea comes from the outside, as it makes its way through various offices it will acquire a particularly bureaucratic interpretation.

Nicholas I, in a moment of insight, once said, "Russia is ruled by department heads." Indeed, middle bureaucrats (department heads) play a special role in directing the course of policy (in assessing information received from the provinces, in making decisions, and in interpreting how to implement them). If a particular decision leads to disastrous results, the minister or governor is deprived of his post. In an extreme case the tsar might even be overthrown. The department head, however, will stay in his previous job and at best add a new sauce to the same old policies. This is how an irresponsible bureaucratic administration operates.

To deal with the government's needs superficially, treating them narrowly and single-mindedly, is characteristic of bureaucracy and its narrowly grouped interests. The staffs of ministries and departments expand, especially for political investigations; foreign political ambitions grow and along with them, military expenditures. The bureaucratic caste and those social groups connected with it (in nineteenth-century Russia the landed gentry in particular) take advantage of the unnecessary paperwork. Literally nothing is done to improve the lives of the people, even though official propaganda never tires of repeating that this is the government's primary concern. Expenditures on education, science, and culture remain extremely meager and highly selective: first, a showcase is created for the outside world; next, preference is given to those branches of science from which militarily significant results can be expected. These are the fundamental properties of a bureaucratic system of administration.

The modern state can not get by without using the apparatus of bureaucrats. It should, however, function within

the strict framework of law and under the supervision and control of representative bodies in both the center and the provinces. Only the introduction of a genuinely constitutional system permits the redistribution of the bureaucrats' absolute power. The experience of Russia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries attests to the fact that bureaucracy is the most inveterate enemy of a constitutional system. It does not give up even when the circumstances are such that representative assemblies begin to operate. Bureaucracy makes every effort to free itself from parliamentary control, to transform the representative body into a decorative appendage of the state machine.

All of this leads to the idea that introducing a constitutional system would have been far easier, perhaps, under Alexander I than after the reign of Nicholas I, during which the bureaucracy grew, became stronger, and was transformed into an independent force.

In the scholarly world (with the exception, perhaps, of only Russia) ideas about bureaucracy carry the imprint of Max Weber's work on "ideal types." Although no "ideal" bureaucracy exists anywhere, Russia is even more difficult to evaluate in terms of Weberian types. By comparison, the works of the turn-of-the-century Russian political scientists N.M. Korkunov and N.I. Lazarevskii are considerably less well-known to the scholarly world (including in Russia).⁷

Knowledge of bureaucratic arbitrariness undoubtedly reached Nicholas I, but the tsar assumed that it could be curbed with the aid of a precisely composed system of laws. At the beginning of his reign complete confusion ruled this area. Since Alexis' Code of 1649 thousands of manifestos, instructions, and orders had accumulated that supplemented, replaced, and contradicted one another. The absence of a code of current laws made the work of the government more difficult and created fertile soil for bureaucratic abuses.

Nicholas I ordered that work on compiling a Code of Laws be concentrated in the Second Department of His Imperial Majesty's Own Chancery. The immediate direction of this

project was given to Speranskii, who had returned to Petersburg at the end of Alexander F's reign. In the first stage of the work all of the laws passed after 1649 were dug out of the archives and arranged in chronological order. These were then published in the fifty-one volume *Complete Collection of the Laws of the Russian Empire*.

Then the more difficult part of the work began: all the current laws were selected, arranged according to a definite design, and revised. The revisions consisted mainly of eliminating the contradictions amongst the laws. Sometimes, however, the current laws were insufficient to complete the design, and Speranskii had to "finish writing" a law on the basis of the norms of Western law. By the end of 1832 all fifteen volumes of the *Code of Laws of the Russian Empire* had been prepared. The beginning of the first volume contained the "Fundamental Laws" in which the main principles of the state structure were consolidated. "The Emperor of all Russia," stated the first article of the Code of Laws, "is an autocratic and absolute monarch. God Himself commands us to obey his supreme authority not only out of fear, but also out of conscience."

The Code of Laws was approved by the State Council on 19 January 1833. Nicholas I, who was present at the meeting, took the Order of St. Apostle Andrew of the First-Called (the highest Russian award) from his chest and placed it on Speranskii. On 1 January 1835 the Code of Laws became the only official source of laws for the Russian empire.⁸

Soon after the Code of Laws was accepted, the Minister of State Domains, P.D. Kiselev, conducted a reform in the administration of state peasants. A little later the Minister of Finance, E.F. Kankrin, enacted monetary reform. All of these measures strengthened Emperor Nicholas I.

Under Nicholas I no one drew up constitutional plans, and no one created secret societies; everyone knew his place. Nicholas's Empire seemed to be unshakably secure. But it was unreceptive to changes. Nicholas I decided not to carry out even those reforms that he certainly knew were necessary. It

is well known, for example, that from the very beginning of his reign he thought about abolishing serfdom and that he even took a number of steps in this direction. It became clear, however, that such a fundamental change would set all of the estates of the huge empire in motion and necessarily entail other changes as well. Having imagined all this and mentally shuddered, Nicholas I said, "There is no doubt that there is evil in serfdom as it exists amongst us today. This is perceptible and obvious to everyone, but to touch it *now* would be even more disastrous." In 1848 the idea of abolishing serfdom was decisively dropped.⁹

The Crimean War shattered the illusion that the Russian system was superior to that of Western Europe. It became obvious that Russia was in many respects falling behind the countries of Western Europe and that this backwardness was taking on dimensions that were dangerous for Russia's national sovereignty.

Alexander II's greatest service to his country consisted of his taking it upon himself to abolish serfdom, his persistence, and his seeing the affair through to the end. From the moment the laws were published on 19 February 1861, estate peasants stopped being considered property; from then on they could not be sold, bought, given as a gift, or resettled according to the whims of their owners. The government announced that the former serfs were "free rural inhabitants," and conferred upon them civil rights — the freedom to marry, the right to enter into contracts independently and to bring suits, the right to acquire property in their own name, etc.

Alexander II's government did not limit itself to the acts of 19 February 1861, but rather introduced a series of reforms, which are deservedly called the "Great Reforms." The creation of the *zemstvos* in 1864 restored local self-government to Russia in a new form and in accordance with the conditions of the nineteenth century. In 1870 city government was restructured according to non-estate principles. As a result of the judicial reform of 1864, Russia obtained an open court with jurors that was independent of the administration. Military

reforms completed in 1874 eliminated the recruitment system and introduced general liability for military service. A secondary result of all these reforms was a slowdown of growth in the number of bureaucrats in the central government, while zemstvo reform allowed the staffs of local state institutions to be reduced.

The Great Reforms, however, did not touch upon all areas of the Russian state system. The estate system of local government remained inviolable. Government at the *guberniia* level was, for the most part, bureaucratic. At the *uezd* level of government the main figure was the marshal of the gentry (during the reform period the significance of the marshal even grew). The lower link (volost and rural society) was estate-peasant based. Local government of post-reform Russia was made up of three levels: the estate-peasant, the estate-nobility, and the bureaucratic. The bottom level was isolated from the other two and squeezed by them. No volost elder in history, most likely, ever managed to serve until he reached the position of governor. On the other hand, between the second and third levels — and even higher — there was a broad exchange of people and ideas.¹⁰

The Great Reforms also did not affect the upper levels of power. The Senate — the upper judicial-administrative instance, the interpreter of laws — was not reformed. But the most important thing over which Alexander II stumbled was the question of a constitution.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, as we have seen, the gentry rancorously banished Speranskii and his constitutional plan. By 1861 the upper estate had, to a significant degree, changed its position. It would appear that the lessons of Nicholas I's long reign were not lost, for all the layers of the population, including the owners of serfs, suffered from the absolute power and self-rule of the bureaucracy. The danger also existed that once the bureaucracy had taken the management of the peasantry into its own hands it would become excessively powerful and utterly stop taking account of the gentry. Of course, there was no complete unanimity of

opinion amongst the members of the upper estate, and the landowners of the southern and south-eastern provinces (the most peripheral and least enlightened part of the gentry) were largely indifferent to establishing a constitution and in the final analysis were satisfied with expanding their participation in local affairs. But the gentry in the capital and the surrounding provinces were decisively in favor of a constitution.

In February 1862 gentry from Tver province subjected the activity of the government to severe criticism at their provincial assembly and declared that the government was completely bankrupt. In an address to the tsar they emphasized: "Gathering together elected representatives from all the lands of Russia is the only way to solve satisfactorily the problems that have arisen, but have yet to be solved, as a result of the statute of 19 February." A few days later a meeting of peace negotiators from Tver province took place. In an even sharper form they repeated the basic points of the resolution from the gentry's assembly. All thirteen participants at the meeting were sent to the Peter-Paul fortress. After five months of confinement they were brought before a court, which sentenced them to a loss of freedom for periods of two to two and a half years. The harshest punishments were conferred on the main "ring-leaders," Aleksei and Nikolai Bakunin, brothers of the well-known revolutionary M.A. Bakunin. Although the Bakunins were quickly pardoned, they were prohibited from participating in any future elections.

In October of the same year a Petersburg provincial zemstvo assembly brought forth a petition calling for "a central zemstvo assembly to discuss the economic resources and needs common to the entire state."

In January 1865 the Moscow gentry addressed the following appeal to the tsar: "Complete, Sovereign, the state edifice founded by you by calling a general assembly of the elected people from all of the lands of Russia to discuss the needs common to the entire state." When the appeal was received a

lively meeting took place in which quick-tempered speeches were made against the "oprichniks" surrounding the tsar.

Alexander II was extremely unhappy with this appeal, but, not wanting to spoil his relationship with the influential Moscow gentry, he did not resort to repression. Instead, he limited himself to a rescript issued in the name of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in which he announced, "No one may take it upon themselves to petition me on the general resources and needs of the state." In a private conversation with a member of the Moscow gentry he claimed that he would willingly give "some pleasant constitution if he were not afraid that on the following day Russia would fall to pieces."¹¹

It would seem that Alexander II began to think that continuing the reforms would be dangerous. Both dignitaries and his closest ministers often repeated this, and under their influence Alexander II began to stop the reforms. At the same time discontent in the country was growing, left-radical groups were gathering momentum. The reign of Alexander II demonstrates just how difficult it is to *start* reforms and just how dangerous it is to stop them halfway, for once a country following a reformer has gathered the inertia of movement, it cannot suddenly stop. Once events began to take on a dramatic character, Alexander II acceded to creating a certain prototype representative assembly, but this decision was incapable of averting a tragic outcome.

Alexander III was able to stabilize the situation in the country quickly, but he at once removed the question of a representative assembly from the agenda.

The liberation of the serfs in 1861 was built upon difficult compromises. The reform was too one-sided in taking into account the interests of the landowners and therefore, in technical terms, had a very short "resource time." At most, it had twenty years. After that it would be necessary to introduce new reforms in the same area, i.e., to expand the civil rights of the peasantry and return to it the land stripped away during the reform. After some wavering, however, Alexander III adopted the opposite policy. Zemstvo and urban

counter-reforms limited the rights of the zemstvos and of the city dumas and strengthened bureaucratic control over them. Peasants were strained by their economic circumstances, and leaving the commune became extremely difficult.

In attempting to strengthen the estate structure and the power of the bureaucracy, Alexander III literally returned to the traditions of his grandfather's reign. But that reign was brought to an end by military defeat. As if to compensate for its conservative policies, therefore, the government under Alexander III adopted a course aimed at the rapid development of strategically important branches of industry. The initiator of this policy was the Minister of Finance, Sergei Witte. Having expanded railroad construction and set about rearming the army and navy, the government provided a market for metallurgic and machine-construction factories. In 1893 an enormous industrial expansion began in Russia. Unprecedented industrial monsters — what the writer A.I. Kuprin called "molocho" — grew out of Russian soil. The optimal ratio between heavy and light industry is approximately 1:4. On the eve of the industrial boom in Russia this ratio was about 1:5. Russian industry had a somewhat "light-weight" character. After years of expansion in favor of heavy industry, however, this ratio rose to 1:3.¹² A powerful heavy industry sector capable of overwhelming the economy was created in a country with a backward agriculture, impoverished villages, and a limited market. The urban population expanded rapidly. The number of inhabitants in Petersburg and Moscow nearly doubled in 30-35 years and towards the end of the century surpassed one million.

But while industrialization decisively ravaged the countryside, it failed to enrich the city. The created wealth was concentrated in the hands of a small group of industrialists and banking bigwigs, and the impoverished peasantry, in search of a better lot, began to flow into the cities. The traditional inhabitants of the city — the shopkeepers, the artisans, the petty proprietors, that "middle

class" on which the movement for a constitution and for civil freedoms in nineteenth-century Europe relied - were lost amongst the thousands who migrated to the cities. In the contemporary developed countries the working class is organically inscribed in the social structure of society, and the workers' movement has become an important component part of the mechanism for supporting stability. In the West as well, however, the working class used to be a "difficult child."

In Russia the vast majority of the working class were peasants who retained their ties to the country. In the city they felt like foreigners; they were lost when left alone with city life and saw their salvation in mass action. The very difficult working and living conditions pushed them toward the most desperate forms of protest, all the more so since they had nothing to lose in the city and could always return to their native rural communities. The rural-oriented, simple-minded working masses eagerly believed the stories about how it was possible to improve their situation immediately and miraculously and were ready to follow any demagogue — Father Gapon, the leaders of the Black Hundreds, the Bolsheviks. Unfortunately, neither the official authorities, the liberal constitutionalists, nor the Church promised the masses much in this life, and they did even less.

Hardly had the first wave of arrivals (in the 1890s) settled and become urbanized before they were swallowed up by a second and third wave (in 1912-13 and during World War I). After each such wave enthusiasm for strikes increased, which was quickly taken advantage of by the various "well-wishers" of the common people.

The government soon came to pay a very dear price for the first successes of its industrialization policy. In 1900 an economic crisis developed that quickly became a political one as well. Soon thereafter began what for society and the people was an unfortunate and unpopular war with Japan. "How can a *muzhik* happily march off to battle to defend some leased piece of land in what to him is an unknown country?" asked P.A. Stolypin (at that time the Saratov governor) having in

mind Port Arthur, which Russia leased from China. "A sacrificial impulse does not make this sad and difficult war more bearable."¹³

Before the war was over, revolution had arrived. At the height of the Revolution on 17 October 1905 a manifesto was published that promised to give the citizens of Russia political freedom and to create a legislative Duma. The elections to the Duma, while indirect and multilayered, nonetheless encompassed a fairly wide range of electors. The manifesto contained the proviso that the "further development of the principles of general electoral law" will remain with the newly established legislative order. At the same time a united government was created. Sergei Witte became the first chairman of the Council of Ministers.

At the beginning of 1906 a new edition of the "Fundamental Laws" was prepared. The word "absolute" was removed from the tsar's title. The State Council was reorganized into the upper legislative chamber. Half of its members were elected by the gentry societies, zemstvos, the orthodox clergy, industrialists, the universities, and the Academy of Sciences. The other half was appointed by the tsar. When the legislative chambers were not in session, the tsar could use his authority to enact any law that was urgently required, although he subsequently had to submit it to the legislature for approval. This was the infamous Article 87 of the Fundamental Laws. This power did not include the right to modify the laws governing elections to the Duma. Legal experts at the time pointed out that the 1906 edition of the Fundamental Laws partly resembled the Japanese constitution of that time.

The First Duma began its work on 27 April 1906. Contrary to prior predictions the creation of a parliament did not cause Russia to be "shattered to pieces." But the bureaucracy's lack of desire to work with the representative body quickly became apparent. The government, led in 1906 by I.L. Goremykin, cooperated with the Duma only begrudgingly, held up the introduction of legislative bills whenever possible (the first bill introduced by the government concerned the laundry at

Dorpat University),¹⁴ and soon recommended dissolving the First Duma. After its dissolution P.A. Stolypin became the chairman of the Council of Ministers. He chose a different tactic. The government introduced an entire series of bills into the Second Duma, categorically insisting that the Duma preserve their basic provisions.

The majority of the members of the Duma rejected the government's ground rules, and consequently the government decided to change the electoral law to obtain a more subservient Duma. But it was illegal to make such a change without the Duma's consent; Article 87 in this case did not apply. On 3 June 1907, by dissolving the Second Duma and publishing a new Electoral Law, Stolypin's government violated the Fundamental Laws. This act went down in history as the June 3 coup *d'etat*. The government's coup did not immediately evoke any unpleasant consequences. The regime, however, had undermined its own legitimacy. This, in the end, sealed its fate.

The question of whether or not Russia was a constitutional state raised more than mere academic interest at that time; it was a pointed political question. Members of the government never used the word "constitution" in their official speeches. In an interview with the Saratov newspaper *Volga* in September 1909, Stolypin declared:

The development of a purely Russian state structure, responsible to both the spirit of the people and to historic traditions, was foretold from the eminence of the throne by the Manifesto of October 17...

The Sovereign gladly appealed to the people's representatives for cooperation. Is it possible to say after this that the people's representatives "snatched" something from the Tsar's power?¹⁶

In practice Stolypin's policy was to bring social "grass-roots" local reforms to the forefront. His agrarian reform is by far the best known of all of his reforms. Far less well-known is that under Stolypin's leadership a series of reforms were developed for restructuring local government along non-estate

principles. In place of the former volosts Stolypin suggested creating something like small zemstvo units. If previously the landowner was above the peasant, then Stolypin now wanted to place them side by side in the volost government. Power on the *uezd* level would be in the hands of an *uezd* official appointed by the government and responsible to it.

The situation for local reforms, however, became inauspicious. In the central non-black-earth provinces the amount of land owned by landowners dropped significantly for a variety of economic reasons. The enlightened and liberal gentry from the capital and adjacent provinces who lacked land poured into the ranks of the intelligentsia. In the gentry congresses, which took place regularly beginning in 1906, the prevailing tone was that of the southern gentry (from Kursk, Bessarabia, etc.), which was, on the whole, not so enlightened and not at all liberal. In any case, after the events of 1905-07 the gentry in general became much more conservative. Even in the non-black-earth provinces conservative elements emerged.

Beginning in 1907 at all the gentry congresses and at many of the gentry provincial assemblies sharp criticism of the local reforms proposed by the government could be heard. Encroachment upon the leadership role of the *uezd* marshal of the gentry evoked particular unhappiness. Representatives of the upper estate asserted that the government's plans would "destroy the institutions created by history and create new ones similar to the institutions of republican France that would democratize all local structures and annihilate the estate system." These plans, they argued, might "lead to the overthrow of the monarchy."¹⁶ Energetic behind-the-scenes actions accompanied the public criticism. Many visible members of the gentry were present at court or became members of the State Council. The upper chamber was composed of an influential coalition of opponents to local reforms.

The State Council was reorganized in 1906 with the goal of creating a counter balance to the legislative Duma.

Accordingly, the government tried to expand the representation in the upper chamber of those groups of the population on whose support it believed it could rely. At the same time no mechanisms were envisaged that would allow a deadlock to be broken if irreconcilable differences of opinion arose between the two chambers of parliament. As a result a right-wing majority composed of aged bureaucrats and conservative landowners dominated the State Council. If they decided to be stubborn, neither the Duma nor the government could make them budge. Only the tsar, perhaps, could bring those members of the upper chamber whom he had appointed into line. Most often, however, the tsar's sympathies were on their side. Thus, the legislative machine was, in essence, unable to function. But no one really suspected this as long as the government and the Duma were fighting. Once this war was over the problem of the upper chamber came to light. Stolypin's government was unable to carry out a single major reform by a normal legislative path. The only reforms it was able to carry out were enacted under legislative emergency, according to Article 87, or through departmental instructions (as with the law of 29 May 1911 "On Land-Tenure Regulations").

The first bills in a series of local reforms that made their way through the Duma and were sent to the State Council bogged down there for a long time. At the height of the struggle with the upper chamber, in September 1911, Stolypin was killed. In May 1914 the State Council voted down a bill for volost reform, the first in a series of local reforms.

Russian historians have argued over the form and essence of the state structure of Russia in the final decades of the empire for a long time. The opinions expressed by E.D. Chermenskii and N.P. Eroshkin represent the most typical points of view.

In a very cautious way and with a number of reservations, Chermenskii leaned toward the idea that beginning in 1906 Russia had a constitutional structure, that a return to absolutism was impossible, and that the "evolution of

autocracy toward a bourgeois monarchy" would have continued.¹⁷ N.P. Eroshkin, on the other hand, believed that "the State Duma was literally not a legislative, but only a consultative institution that shielded the autocracy by pseudo-constitutional means."¹⁸ Both points of view can be supported by a number of arguments. The first of them, however, seems to be too optimistic, while the second is somewhat oversimplistic. The Duma was a very poor "shield" when compared with the Supreme Soviet during the Bolshevik dictatorship, which always voted with unanimity. From a juridical point of view this question is indeed very difficult to resolve.

What is far clearer is that beginning with the Great Reforms, Russia set out on a path from the old estate-based society and an autocratic state toward a modern civil society and a state based on law. The process of modernization, as is well-known, also includes an industrial revolution, the introduction of market relations and of an advanced system of farming into the agricultural sector, and the widespread development of public education. In Russia the process of modernization proceeded at a slow pace and with breaks and stoppages. At times the temptation to develop a single facet of modernization (for example, creating large-scale industry) at the expense of all others won out. As a result the process of modernization in Russia was not confined to the optimal period of time — from the Crimean War to World War I. When Russia entered World War I some of its institutions had yet to acquire the necessary stability, while others had hopelessly decayed. Society was a mixture of former estates and new classes, and their interests and goals rarely coincided. This is why Russia was unable to endure the difficult ordeal of World War I and slid toward a national catastrophe that turned out to be long and arduous and whose consequences were extremely difficult to overcome.

In order to come closer to understanding the reasons for this change of events, one needs to examine the attitudes toward modernization of the most influential, active, or simply the

most numerically significant classes, estates, and social groups. The most important of these was the gentry, next came the bureaucracy, then the peasantry, the working class, and the intelligentsia.

In Western Europe constitutionalism arose in the course of a struggle between the estates and royal power. Further, the aristocracy emerged at the head of the estates. The Russian gentry also played a part in the struggle for a constitutional limitation to autocracy. One needs only to recall the "Verkhovniki" of the eighteenth century, the Decembrists, or the gentry involved in the liberal movement from 1859 to 1904 to see that this was the case. The gentry in Russia, however, proved to be an inconsistent supporter of constitutionalism and the renewal of political institutions. From the beginning of the nineteenth century until the February Revolution, the gentry changed its position on this question three times (the last time was during the war when a gentry congress spoke out in favor of a Cabinet that would be responsible to the Duma). Moreover, the position of the gentry as a whole was highly conservative on the question of eliminating the estate system in the countryside. It seems that, for the most part, the gentry plays a positive role in modernization only during its earliest stages. To a significant degree this opportunity was lost in Russia.

I have already discussed the attitude of the bureaucracy towards a constitutional system. In general it should be said that of all the aspects of modernization the bureaucracy did advance the creation of modern large-scale industry. The attitude of the bureaucracy toward public education was highly contradictory (there was a pointed struggle on this question within the bureaucracy), but still more or less favorable. The accomplishments of the bureaucracy in the area of modernizing the countryside were not at all impressive, even keeping in mind Stolypin's agricultural reform. As far as the abolition of serfdom is concerned, it was the personal initiative of Alexander II, who relied on the most advanced part of the entire society, including a small group of

liberal bureaucrats (who were shortly after joined by the bureaucracy itself). In general the modernization carried out at the hands of the bureaucracy was extremely one-sided, led to serious distortions in the social and political life of the country, and fostered a growing tension in society. The American investigator Tim McDaniel writes that "autocratic modernization in prerevolutionary Russia... gave rise to class conflict more intense and persistent than in Western countries, where the contradictions of modernization were not so deep or unresolvable." One of the most important conclusions of McDaniel's book is:

... an autocratic regime's attempts to give birth to urban industrial society involve it and the society in a web of intractable contradictions. These contradictions, in turn, foster the emergence of revolutionary situations that, depending on the correlation of events, may culminate in revolutions.¹⁹

Ideas about the peasantry as a blind and ignorant force, the personification of the Acheron, are now to a large degree obsolete. McDaniel correctly points out that the peasantry did not play a leading role in the events of 1917.²⁰ At the beginning of the twentieth century the peasantry was ready to participate constructively in raising the level of Russia's agriculture. Literate peasants worked productively in the zemstvos and in their estate self-government. But not everything depended upon the peasants, and this was felt by the foremost representatives of this estate as well as by the ignorant and backward. The organization of relocations and of agricultural credit, equalizing the rights of all estates, solving the land problem (including limiting landowners' latifundiums) — all this should have come from the outside. Years passed, the problems remained unresolved, life improved only marginally, and going to war made things even worse. The long passive expectation of "charity" from somewhere up above, from the city, could indeed give way to a spontaneous rebellion. It was usually the "urban" peasants who began to rebel, and then the sparks spread through the

countryside. It was the factory worker, his *brother-muzhik*, whom the peasants trusted more than any of the other city dwellers. Thus, the "hegemony of the proletariat" was not just an invention of communist teleologists; it had a real underlying cause.

I have already spoken of the working class, which under the conditions in Russia was the offspring of industrial capitalism and the government bureaucracy. I pointed out its tendency to trust in any shrewd and conscientiously misleading demagogue. At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century the socialist intelligentsia very often and quite successfully assumed the role of such leaders of the blind.

The many judgments made of the Russian intelligentsia during its two-century history contain considerable criticism as well as praise, but very few sober evaluations. The intelligentsia was one of the main creators of the new Russian culture, which justly occupies a place in the family of European cultures. For a long time, however, the intelligentsia kept away from participating in politics. Their passive observation of how slowly things were going, of how discontinuous the process was, acted in a dispiriting way to push the intelligentsia toward an uncritical acceptance of Utopian teachings, toward dogmatism, and toward developing a variety of plans for "saving humanity" in the full certainty of their right to implement them by any means. Even by the time of A.I. Herzen and N.G. Chernyshevskii a significant part of the Russian intelligentsia had become disillusioned with constitutionalism. Representative systems, from their point of view, worked too slowly and were too tedious; they wanted to solve all their problems in a single stroke with a social revolution. A dangerous infatuation for extremes developed in the Russian intelligentsia, which has not been overcome to this day. Herzen, who himself did not escape this infatuation, in the end made a very grim evaluation of it:

We are exceedingly doctrinaire and argumentative. To this German propensity we add our own national, so to speak, *Arakcheevian* element — a mercilessness, an ardent

callousness, and an eagerness for butchery. Arakcheev flogged living peasants to death to satisfy his ideal of a grenadier guardsman; we flog to death ideas, the arts, humanity, former statesmen, anything we please. With a fearless front we march, step by step, *to the limit* and pass it by, never veering from our dialectical path, but only from the *truth*; unawares, we proceed further and further, forgetting that real sense and real understanding of life can only be found in stopping short of extremes....²¹

Of course, not all of the Russian intelligentsia held extreme views. At the beginning of the twentieth century, with the formation of the Kadet Party, centrist forces within the intelligentsia began to gain strength. But as before the left flank was too powerful. Its most decisive representatives played their part in pushing the country toward a national catastrophe, after which the people found themselves ruled by the same bureaucracy and bureaucratized revolutionaries.

It seems, then, that the constitutional idea in Russia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries lost two important battles: 14 December 1825, after which the bureaucracy grew and intensified, and 1 March 1881 when Alexander III came to power and then initiated a policy of narrow-minded industrialization, and consequently in the largest cities the working class became numerically dominant.

The Revolution, the Civil War, and subsequent events swept entire estates and classes out of Russian life, while others became unrecognizable. But the old problems returned. The process of modernization in Russia is far from over. The drama continues.

Translated from Russian by Gregory D. Crowe

Notes

1 S.V. Mironenko, *Samoderzhavie i reformy: politicheskaya bor'ba v Rossii v nachale XIX v.* (Moscow: Nauka, 1989), pp. 29-33.

2 N.K. Shil'der, *Imperator Aleksandr Pervyi: ego zhizn' i tsarstvovanie*, 2d ed., (St. Petersburg: A.S. Surovin, 1905), 3, pp. 34-48.

- 3 Mironenko, *Samoderzhavie i reformy*, pp. 184-197.
- 4 N.M. Druzhinin, *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX v.* (Moscow: Nauka, 1985), p. 269. In an appendix to his monograph entitled "Dekabrist Nikita Murav'ev," Druzhinin includes the full text of Murav'ev's "Constitution." G.V. Vernadskii was the first to point out the close tie between the "Constitutional Charter" and Murav'ev's constitution (see *Izvestiia Tavricheskogo universiteta (Simferopol')* 1 (1919), pp. 140-141). In a monograph written in 1931 Druzhinin decisively rejects this view (see Druzhinin, *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie*, pp. 194-195). For some reason he believed that the primary influence on Murav'ev came from the state constitutions of North America. He did not include the "Constitutional Charter," which was born in government offices, in this circle of "bourgeois" constitutions out of the fear, it seems, that it might damage the reputation of the Decembrists. S.V. Mironenko, who contends that it is indisputable that Murav'ev was familiar with the Novosil'tsov-Viazemskii work, still leans toward Druzhinin's view on the fundamental difference between the two works (Mironenko, *Samoderzhavie i reformy*, p. 224). Just because Murav'ev introduced improvements into his version of the constitution, however, does not mean that the two works are unrelated.
- 5 A.E. Rozen, *Zapiski dekabrista* (Irkutsk: Vostochno-Sibirskoe knizhnoe izd.-vo, 1984), p. 138.
- 6 P.A. Zaionchkovskii, *Pravitel'stvennyi apparat samoderzhavnoi Rossii v XIX v.* (Moscow: MysP, 1978), pp. 67-68.
- 7 See N.M. Korkunov, *Russkoe gosudarstvennoe pravo*, 2 volumes (St. Petersburg: Tsinzerling, 1893-97) and N.I. Lazarevskii, *Lektsii po russkomu gosudarstvennomu pravu*, 2 volumes (St. Petersburg: tip. "Slovo," 1910).
- 8 Marc Raeff, *Speransky: Statesman of Imperial Russia* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1957), p. 325. See also M. Polievktov, *Imperator Nikolai I* (St. Petersburg, 1914). P.A. Zaionchkovskii, *Pravitel'stvennyi apparat*, p. 109. See also M. Polievktov, *Imperator Nikolai I*.
- 10 For more detail see: P.N. Zyrianov, "Sotsial'naiia struktura mestnogo upravleniia kapitalisticheskoi Rossii (1861 -1914 gg.)," *Istoricheskie zapiski* (1982) 107, pp. 226-302.
- 11 A.A. Kornilov, *Obshchestvennoe dvizhenie pri Aleksandre III 1855-1881: istoricheskie ocherki* (Paris: Izd. red. "Osvobozhdeniia," 1905), pp. 91-94, 133-34, 141-42.
- 12 *Istoriia SSSR s drevneishikh vremen do nashikh dnei*, 12 volumes, first series, (Moscow: Nauka, 1968), 5, p. 312.
- 13 M.P. Bok, *Vospominaniia o moem ottse P.A. Stolypine* (New York: Izd. im. Chekhova, 1953), p. 128.

- 14 S.M. Sidel'nikov, *Obrazovanie i deiatel'nost' I Gosudarstvennoi dumy* (Moscow, 1962), p. 236. 16 *Volga* (Saratov), 1 October 1909.
- 16 *Moskovskie vedomosti*, 25 January 1908.
- 17 E.D. Chermenskii, *Istoriia SSSR, period imperializma* (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 1965), pp. 250, 313; idem, *Burzhuziia i tsarizm v pervoi russkoi revoliutsii*, 2d ed., (Moscow: Mysl', 1970), pp. 146, 410.
- 18 N.P. Eroshkin, *Istoriia gosudarstvennykh uchrezhdenii dorevoliutsionnoi Rossii*, 3d ed., (Moscow: Vysshaia shkola, 1983), p. 264.
- 19 Tim McDaniel, *Autocracy, Modernization and Revolution in Russia and Iran* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 223-224, 227.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 223.
- 21 A.I. Gertsen, *Sobranie sochinenii v 30 tomakh* (Moscow: Izd. Akademii nauk SSSR, 1956), 10, p. 320.