

HSEM 2540H Final

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One of the defining events of the 20th century was the creation of the Soviet Union. But this state was not made in vacuum but in the atmosphere of the dynamic Russian Empire. In the years leading up to the Russian revolution, Russian society, its people, politics, and institutions changed dramatically. There were assassinations, famines, revolutions politically and large quantifiable changes in the economic conditions of Russia during this time =. How Russian people used land also changed during this time also changed. In what ways did these forces brought change to late imperial Russia will be explored.

How was our backdrop set up for our players and forces to act upon? Economically speaking, agriculture was the most important field. Industries like mining, manufacturing, and forestry although existent at the time were not what the typical worker did. Culturally, the 2nd half of the 19th century was a great time for Russia. There were famous authors like Turgenev, Spielhagen, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky writing. Russian In the previous half century lead up to 1900, Russia had painfully lost the Crimean war(1853-1856), freed the serfs in 1861, and built thousands of kilometers of railroads. In 1880, the reform minded Tsar Alexander the 2nd was assassinated by radical Russians. This led to his successor, Tsar Alexander the 3rd abandoning the political reform movements and becoming more autocratic and instituting strong political repression.

The perspective of this paper is shaded by one primary source in particular so it is worth discussing him and his biases. Our source the memoirs a Russian Coal Engineer Aleksandr Fenin wrote title "Coal and Politics in Late Imperial Russia". Fenin is a Russian engineer who grew up in 1870s and 1880s, worked as an engineer in the 1890s and 1900s, and then emigrated when the revolution hit. In this book he recounts not only his life but also the changing environment around him. His

position points him in a position to give useful information on multiple groups. He was born into a fairly wealthy agricultural family, was well educated, travelled to other countries for business which gives perspective on how Russian and the rest of Europe compared, and because of the various roles he played interacted frequently with "the people" of whom he speaks extensively. He is a patriotic and wishes to build a strong Russia and believes by that helping to build up Russia's industry sector he is helping to create a stronger more independent Russia. An interesting contrast to the modern reader is that he doesn't seem to think nature and industry are really at odds with each other. Although he frequently talks about the importance of industry, he also frequently waxes poetic about the beauty of the Russian landscape. For example here's a particularly wonderful passage describing the landscape, "One might step out into the garden, into the darkness and the dry, fragrant air as smooth as velvet. The steppe starts right here, with the never-ending music of the grass hoppers and the night sounds that were occasionally impossible to define. When the moon shines everything is touched by a deep, silvery, still light, bearing no resemblance to the pale, transparent, clear, nights of the North, which seems now like some remote dream. And here once again is endless, quiet, wonderful Russia." [1]

But as a real human being his story is not an exact replica of reality but instead he harbors biases big and small. He openly despises communists or leftists as he sometimes refers to them. He doesn't look kindly on the average village farmer or coal miner for being dirty and uncultured but he also doesn't like the wealthy landowners who to him are lazy and not help Russia become strong. He also lived much of this time period in the country away from the cities where politics started to heat up. It wasn't until around 1904-1905 when political events such as the

revolution of 1905 made matters difficult to ignore. He later joined the Kadet party but what he truly wanted was a true centrist party.

The common people, the coal miners for Fenin in particular, are an important sector of Russian society that played a large role in the this time period. They differed by their ancestors by not being serfs and from their descendents by not living in the Soviet Union but instead were in this intermediate state of industrialization. They had flaws but also positive aspects.

In some aspects, mine owners and leaders mistreated and disrespected the common worker. The common miner doing the real physical labor at these mines often were ex-farmers who just couldn't get enough land to farm to be profitable or were now part time farmers still owning farm land but working in the mines in the off seasons. Fenin paints a picture of the workers being flawed on multiple levels. They were dirty, not just from the realities of coal mining but also because didn't properly maintain their barracks or practice good hygiene. Fenin comments on there being a lice issue inside his companies general barracks. They are uneducated and uncultured. Fenin describes an anecdote about how some minority people in the mine created their own theatre troupe for entertainment and during the showing of a tragedy the common miners were laughing much more than they should during a tragedy just because "it was really amusing to see Vasili Ivanovich Kravtosov (one of the pit foreman), who had no reason to mourn, there on his knees, weeping and beating his chest"[1]. As a crowd easy to aggregate into strikes and potentially dangerous revolts. But perhaps their biggest flaw is their relationship with vodka, or maybe more aptly the miners lack of restraint with vodka. The drinking problem was so extreme that "heavily drinking after the monthly payday; sometimes work stopped for two or three days"[1]. It's almost

comical to think that every month, a typical mine could do nothing for 3 whole days since the miners drank so much on payday. In order to combat the rampant alcoholism at the mines, Fenin and many other managers resorted to blatantly not following a law which requirement the workers' full payment be given to them every month to giving them a small portion of their pay to live off of and giving them the rest of the check twice a year once at Easter and Once at Pokvova, an Eastern Orthodox holiday. There was also a degree of poor behavior. They were usually not very religious or cultured and when given a position of some power like a foreman often abused it. The best summary of the managers view of the peasants would be similar to what Chekhov thought of the peasants who "guzzled vodka hellishly, and that there was horrible lot of filth both moral and physical"[1] but more so in the mines. Mining a 19th century coal miner was also an inherently dangerous occupation. Despite some degree of care to prevent unnecessary accidents, they were inevitable to happen.

Despite this negative view of the miner life, being a miner wasn't a bad occupation but instead carried many opportunities for more disciplined people. Although there were risks and unpleasantness to tell with being a miner, it was objectively a path to economic advancement for an uneducated farmer with only a silver of land to work. Coal miners in the 1890s had a wage on the order of 1 ruble per shift which was much better than what they could expect working only on the farm. Another point is that a talented or hard worker person could reasonably expect to become a skilled professional. In only a couple years, you could go from having never mined before to be the foreman or another skilled profession like a mechanic. This was an actual way for the capable worker's to move up the social ladder one rung. They were able to rent their own apartment or house away from

the barracks which they took care of and planted around it to make it look nicer and be a respectable worker. They moved class from a muzhik or "little man" to a Luidi which is more like a middle class.

What were the politics of the 1890s through 1910s? There were a multitude of political movements during this time. Starting at the left radical groups and moving right, first is the Social Revolutionaries or simply SRs who are often associated with student groups. The leaders who couldn't safely stay in Russia directed operations from Switzerland. The SRs were as the name suggests looked the goal of a peasant driven socialist revolution. They also endorsed violence as a mean to bring political change and therefore were the most dangerous major political group in the eyes of Russian officials. This violence was targeted at high government officials. Here are some notable assassinations: 1901, the minster of education Bogolelpov, 1902 the minster of the interior Sipiagin, 1904, the next minster of the interior Pleve, and 1905 the tsar's uncle Grand Duke Sergei Aleksandrovich. In addition, attempts were made on the following people: Dubasov governor-general of Moscow, Durnovo head of the department of police, Stolypin stateman, governor of Grodno and Saratov, later minster of the interior, and even later the prime minster. Stolypin is also famous for closing the first Duma to get a more conservative body and for his political repressions. So evidently, from 1900 to 1905 was a scary time to be a Conservative Russian official. One could write extensively on how the Russia government's failures to stop home-grown terrorist groups help erode public confidence in the governments ability to govern effectively. The general public it seems was at best indifferent to the victims of these attacks. The next party was the Marxist Social Democrats who had the same goal as the Social Revolutionaries but did not endorse violence as an acceptable to bring political

change to Russia. For this reason, Tsarist police saw this group has the more favorable, less dangerous alternative. The next party were known as the Kadets and echo groups of Western Europe because they wanted reforms like more eligible voters(the Kadets formally wanted universal suffrage), a Constitution, formally stated civil rights, and other "ration" reforms". Fenin later became a Kadet as a closest fit option but not an exact fit. Notably, due to his negative experiences with the peasants he was skeptical of if they should all really be allowed to vote. Next was the Octobrist party which was advocated for a constitution and a strong legislative body but was a more conservative leaning than the Kadets but broadly speaking the the Octobrists and Kadets were similar and later merged together in 1915. Fenin criticizes this party for being too agrarian focused. Finally was the conservative block which wanted to keep the state autocratic and the Tsar strong.

Who were the people driving the politics? The first major group we will look at is the intelligentsia especially the student population. The political landscape pushed forward overwhelmingly by the major Russian cities like Muscow, St.Petersburg, and Kharkov. Like cities often are, these cities were not homogeneous fronts but instead had several main forces. The first group of people were the intelligentsia, educated city living people. A particularly important subset of this group was the college aged students. In an unoriginal move, grouping many young together in a college setting in the city was a rat's nest of anti-conservative zeal. Unlike cases of students being revolutionary in western Europe, the students here were a fair indicator of the whole public mood. Surgeon and public figure, Nikolay Pirogov succinctly summed up why this was the case, "where the political striving and passions have penetrated deeply enough through all the social strata. When this passions randomly reach a society which is not used to gradual or rad-

ical transformations, society's mood is strongly reflected in the universities"[1]. It is certainly true Imperial Russia didn't have the same long standing culture of political change that western Europe had. The perceived danger of the universities had already reached such a high point that for 6 years from 1900 to 1906 colleges were unable to teach regular courses. Fenin comments he witnessed a similar trend during political trends in Egypt between 1920-1922. How did the the students choose to express their discontent in this era of heavy repression? As mentioned many joined the Social Revolutionaries party and engaged in the violent acts the party endorsed. Because of this students were often deported and arrested and their meetings broken up forcibly by Cossacks.

The peasants and workers are a core group to any good revolutionary period and this was no different. Fenin characterizes them as easily agitated by political speakers. Some of the issues they cared about achieving are things that make sense for them want like better living conditions, higher pay, and an 8 hour work day compared to the longer hours workers frequently had to endure. Fenin speculates that in the mines specifically there is a deeper reason. He thinks that as people moved from farmers that allowed for individual choices to be made to the heavily structured occupation of mining caused discontentment that provided kindling for strikes. They expressed their beliefs by strikes and sometimes violent revolt. An important point of distinction is that the peasant would rebel and strike against nobles and industrial owners not the idea of the Tsar himself. As a whole, peasants had the idea that the Tsar was a good and benevolent ruler who wanted the best for his subjects but the greedy nobles and owners were responsible for the peasant life being a hard life. This contrasts with those higher up the social ladder like Fenin who thought the inefficiencies, bad decisions, and repression of the government

was the real problem.

The drive to change how the Russian citizen used land has the man Sergei Witte as its torch bearer. Sergei Witte was a large figure in pushing for industrialization in Russia. He helped build thousands of miles of railroad in the 1890s. By the 90s, 30,000 miles of track[2] and moved the country to the gold standard. From 1890 to 1900, with thousands of miles of new railroad, the number of factory workers and industrial output had doubled and just from 1894 to 1899 226 foreign owned companies were established compared to 68 that had been made in the last 43 years before that. Best of all, he is to a historian's delight brilliantly clear on why Russia should industrialize in letters he wrote explaining why to the Tsar. For instance, in 1898 Witte wrote to the tsar:

Your Majesty has 130 million subjects, of whom barely half live decently, while the others vegetate. Our budget before the Emancipation was 350 million rubles; the Emancipation gave us the possibility of of raising it to 1.4 billion rubles. But now the burden of taxation is being felt. Meanwhile the budget of France, with its 38 million inhabitants, is equivalent to 1.26 billion rubles, while that of Austria, with a population of 43 million, is equivalent to 1.1 billion rubles. If the wealth of our taxpayers equalled that of France's, our budget could reach 4.2 billion rubles[1]

In other words he is saying that if Russia advanced to be equally industrialized as France, it would be wonderful for the budget.

This probably sounds great and now Russia is the powerhouse of Eurasia. Not really. In terms, of industrial productivity it still lagged far behind the leading countries in Europe. In 1860, Germany could produce 491420 metric tonnes and

Russian 327613 metric tons of cast iron. But by 1890 Germany could produce 5 million tons and Russia only 1 million tons. But Russia was improving quickly. See Table 1. Fenin calls this phenomena, the Tsar's 5 year plans and due to his personal hatred of communists notes with delight that this by percent increase is "better" than any soviet 5 plan when he wrote his memoirs in the sense of percent increase of a single industry never increased this much.

This industrial drive was certainly not at all uniformly spread. Some areas like the Donets basin were heavily industrialized but many other areas like the Urals did not get heavily altered during this period. It is also worth mentioning the argument Harcave gives in his biography of Witte that taking Russian overall this was not an industrial revolution in the sense normally used. Still the vast majority of the people were agricultural based and didn't use the mechanized agriculture we see in the later soviet years, there wasn't a major capitalist class, a strong demand for consumer good and the issue that a large chunk of this development was fueled by foreign investment. But still the decade of 1890 through 1900 still was an important time for Russia building industrial momentum.

The idea that Russia should devote her land, time, people, and efforts to becoming an industrial powerhouse was met with push back. As mentioned, Russia was largely agricultural and the large land owners who were rich enough to in the nobility or landed nobility were very influence in the politics of Imperial Russia. The nobility in general, many of whom were landed nobility were explicitly favored by tsar Alexander the 3 in 1885. He said that the nobility should have "preponderance in the army, local administration and in the courts"[2]. Industry was seen as an enemy of the current powers that could cut into their power if left unchecked or worse actively promoted. Therefore logically Witte and the nobility

were at odds. Witte's policies like the gold standard and higher tariffs, which made buying new equipment harder but helped industry, were called out by the nobility as being bad policies that threatened their way of life and even suggested his removal of office to the tsar. Farmers and the gold standard being foes is a worldwide occurrence. For example, look at the United States during the same decade with the famous Crosses of Gold speech by presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan. In return, Witte was able to strike back with comments like in 50 years, it would be industrialists and bankers not landed nobles running things PAGE 89.

If that's how the national leaders and government wanted to use the land, how did the more local cultures see the land and its uses? One particularly well studied group whose priorities differed from the national agenda was the Pomor people. Pomor literally means people who go near the sea and not surprisingly they are a group that lives mainly by fishing on the White Sea since the 12th century. This group evolved in semi independence from the rest of with their own local dialect, laws, architecture, and most interesting their own distinct form of Christianity. They were still Christians but in a common worldwide pattern, their flavor of Christianity was a blend of tradition customs and beliefs. Their Christianity added more animist beliefs and they imbued the land with a more sacred nature than is often seen in christian circles. They saw nature as a battle between the forces of good and evil. Each direction the wind could come from was associated with either a positive or negative omen for example. Curiously the sea itself was "anti associated" with religious aspects. As Brian describes "The Christian Environmental ethic", "The Pomor's sea was not ruled by a hostile god but, rather, represented a place where Providence did not dominate"[4]. This in

turn affected how they thought the land should be used. In the later half of the 1800s, the Pomor were a thorn in the sides of government with their refusal to adopt more efficient and modern means of fishing. Despite the growing population in and outside of Russia and corresponding higher demand for fish, the yields that that pomor brought in every year were very stable. This heated up in 1909 when the government leaders including the province governor started a group called the Arkhangel'sk Society for the Study of the Russian North or AOIRS (the name in Russian is rkhangel'skoe obshchestvo izucheniia Russkogo sever) with the aim of creating policies and guidelines to modernize the way fishing was done. The AOIRS and the Pomor did not get along well. The AOIRS thought the Pomor a lazy and technologically backwards people. But still from the perspective of the AOIRS, they wanted to help the Pomor improve. In 1910, they recommended the Pomor get motorized boats and a more efficient form of net called a purse net that was in use elsewhere and even offered generous loans to help the people get this equipment. They also sent surveys out the Pomor to get their perspective. The AOIRS got a whopping 0 responses back and a strong rejection by the Pomor. What complaints did Pomor have against the this modernization? They formed their own committee in 1913 to explicitly answer that question. They claimed that purse nets in other areas extend deep into the ocean and therefore collect other species of aquatic life that are important cornerstones of the food chain. They also complained that unlike their traditional methods which allowed for the harvesting of only mature fish, the purse net was too broad a tool and would kill young and old fish alike which of course would only hurt the sea environment even more.

What happened to the Pomor after the Revolution? The Pomor continued

to resist changes to their way of live but it is fair to say the the Soviets were more forceful to try and get the country as whole to become a modern power. They started by noticing the same problems like the Pomor “demonstrat[ed] no initiative whatsoever in their search for fish”[4] to the extent republished the same information that the AOIRS did years before. But after noticing putting out flyers and info failed to bring real changed to the point where even in 1926 there were 926 ordinary boats to the 30 motorized boats fishing in Pomor villages. And by 1928, this had gotten worse with 6 motor boats operating on the White Sea. The soviets decided to be more deliberate to remake the culture on the White Sea had to be taken and it wasn’t until Stalin’s five years that the White Sea industrialized and by 1930 there were more motor boats than sail boats.

The way the Pomor thought about and used land is a counter example to well known albeit controversial theory proposed in “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis”[5] by White that Christianity promotes a culture to exploit nature. Christianity places humans in a unique position in the universe as rulers of the world to which God telling humans to ”rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”[4] seems like it is actively encouraging the land and its resources to be used. It has been cited over 6000 times but not without some critical flaws. Counters to White’s argument come in two flavors: literary and historical. The literary critiques center around the idea that White’s interpretation of the bible not an accurate one. In particular, some argue that more traditional languages of the bible such Greek or Latin give different connotations to different sections. In this case, the bad translation is that White read something about man having dominion over nature where it should reflect more of a stewardship

type relationship. More relevant to this discussion is the second group critiques , the historical argument. For White's to be a good model to explain why uses of the environment expanded the way they did it has to be shown to have some factual basis. The most bold version of White's claim would be Christianity really pushed people to be willing to explore the land to the point where non-christian groups used the environment in radically different ways. This doesn't hold up to scrutiny at all. Many cultures and nations used and abused nature relative to the technology they had access to. What about the more conservative variant, Christianity was just one of many sources to justify exploitation of nature but certainly not the only one. That's more reasonable but the Pomor are a culture who because of their religious ideals resisted efforts by the Russian government to industrialization. Their thought process was that nature was sacred and the embodiment of a struggle between forces of good and evil. By harvesting more fish than they needed especially via the modes that the Russian government suggested that would harm swathes of the ecosystem as young and old fish as well as shellfish and other unnecessary casualties was blatantly against the Pomor belief system.

The Russian borders like the the rest of Russia were not static at this time. Instead was the Tsar continued its trajectory from the earlier periods in Russian history and expanded and settled into new territories and tried to "make the land Russian"[4]. What does it mean to make the land Russian though? The Far East region of Primore was settled in 1860s. This region was had a rich system of aquatic resources like seaweed, sturgeon and other fish. "'' The explorer Nikolai Przheval'skii wrote that the Sungacha River, a tributary of the Ussuri, "in the literal sense teems with fish. The abundance of [fish] is so great, that they are often killed by the wheels of steamboats. Moreover, fish jumping out of the water

often drop into boats and sometimes even onto the decks of steamships.’[4] In the case, of the Far East province of Primore this is an even more tricky question than in past centuries. When the empire expanded into Siberia, nomadic people were replaced by agricultural based European Russians. But here in the 1800s, ”Russian” people from all across the empire representing different cultures and ways of life were imported to Primore to replace the people already there who were using the land in a similar way to the manner in which the Russian state wished to use the land. The people already there were people from Asian countries like Japan and Korea who already had established efficient fishing and sea weed production pipelines there. The key difference from a high level is probably just that, a Russian settler regardless where in the empire she/he came from was a part of the Russian empire and not the Japanese or Chinese empire. The idea that Japanese and Chinese fishers were making a profit from the sea that that Russia considered to be in her zone of control was an affront to national pride. One traveler D.I.Shreider commented that in 1894 ”the Japanese had extracted some 60,000 rubles’ worth of fish from Russian shores, while the Chinese had taken 126,000 rubles’ worth of seaweed”[4].

The Russian officials in charge of this expansion provided arguments for why the Russians should control the region and it’s aquatic resources. During Russia’s previous expansions in the middle ages, one could justify taking and resettling land because it was from nomadic heretics who didn’t properly use the land to it’s full extent. In contrast the Chinese and Japanese did use the land effectively. In fact, the justification for taking the land from the Asian powers is that they were overusing the land and their were real concerns of the entire ecosystem collapsing due to Asian over fishing. The traveller D.I.Shreider said about the Japanese

use of the region that “the picture of reckless embezzlement of those gifts which nature has so generously provided. . . . [I]t would be better to change the word ‘exploitation’ [eksploatatsiia] (of natural wealth) for the term ‘extermination’ [istreblenie]”[4] Anyone familiar with Russian use of natural resources should be suspicious of the argument that if only the Russian empire was in large managing nature here, overuse won’t be a problem.

Did Russian officials actually practice the policies of resource management that they preached to the foreign powers. The short answer is on paper there were fairly progressive policies proposed and passed to conserve natural resources but due to the lackluster enforcement it’s difficult to say they did a good job. In 1892, the governor general banned fishing that impeded movement of fish swimming upstream[4]. The reasoning is that fish swim upstream rivers as part of the reproductive cycle. Later in 1903, laws were passed that limited the size of nets, created a fishing season for sturgeons, and a year round ban on young sturgeons. In theory these are good policies that would help preserve the fish populations for future generations but as mentioned how these policies were enforced in practice was the weak link. There’s one anecdote that for many years there was only a single patrol boat along the province’s long coast line. Detailed data about Russian fishing the region is also hard to find but we have along the Amur and Ussuri rivers there 73 thousand harvested sturgeons in 1891, 17 thousand in 1909, and 9 thousand in 1914. Despite the concerns the officials and concerned individuals had about conservation, the total fish yields actually increased by seven fold from 1893 to 1913.

So we have seen that Russian from the years from 1890 to 1910 was a dynamic land with drastically different groups with different goals. Some like Witte and

Fenin thought industrialization was the way to make there Russian homeland strong. Some like the the growing Social revolutionary and social democrat parties thought that the capitalist country the Witte's policies were creating was the problem the Russian society faced. But then others didn't embrace a full throttle exploitation of the land by that for pragmatic reasons like the Primore province had or more religious based reasons like the Pomor. But regardless Russian was not stagnant during this period was pushing forward towards a brighter vision of Russia, they just differed on what that meant.

Data

Cast Iron Production		
Year	Production in millions of Puds	Percent increase from 1890
1890	55	0
1895	86.3	56
1900	176.8	220

Southern Region Cast Iron		
Year	Production in millions of Puds	Percent increase from 1890
1890	13	0
1895	33	150
1900	91	600

Year	Coal Production(Millions of Puds)	% Increase from 1890
1890	367	0
1900	986	1.68

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