Chapter 23

Reactionary Politics, Economic Modernization, and Political Opposition, 1881–1905

In the quarter century after the death of Alexander II, tsarist domestic policy combined reactionary policies designed to safeguard the autocratic order with modernizing economic measures intended to strengthen Russia in the world. Yet the two aspects were difficult to harmonize and frequently undercut each other. Modernization, for example, greatly increased the number of educated people, but by 1905 opposition to Nicholas II's autocracy was widespread among them and took primarily two forms: socialist and liberal.

ALEXANDER III AND POBEDONOSTSEV: THE AUTOCRAT AND HIS CHIEF ADVISER

Just a few days after his thirty-sixth birthday, Alexander III succeeded his assassinated father. He was a bearded, herculean man who liked to entertain the friends of his twelve-year-old son Nicholas by twisting iron pokers into knots. In a train wreck in 1888, he protected his wife and children by holding up a collapsing dining car roof. Although honest, dutiful, and forthright, he lacked intellectual discernment, curiosity, or flexibility. He was often ungracious and could be blunt to the point of rudeness. Once at a state dinner, after the Austrian ambassador had mentioned the possibility of mobilizing a few army corps because of Balkan differences with Russia, the tsar bent a fork into a knot and pitched it toward him, saying: "That is what I am going to do to your two or three army corps."[1]

As Wortman has indicated, Alexander III's appearance and personality matched well the ideological tone of his reign. He and his followers preferred the virile old Russian and Muscovite ways to the more refined and Westernized world of St. Petersburg. His court historian, S. Tatishchev, and others compared him to the *bogatyri* (knightly epic heroes of old Rus). The tsar and his supporters often viewed his father's reign as comparable to the Time of Troubles and Alexander III's task as being similar to that of the early Romanovs who restored autocratic

[1]Aleksandr Mikhailovich, Grand Duke of Russia, *Once a Grand Duke* (New York, 1932), pp. 66–67.

power following it. One of the chief ideologists of Alexander III's "counter-reforms" argued that Alexander II's reforms "had sundered the historical unity of the Russian state, bringing dissatisfaction and disorder."[2] In 1886, the government prohibited any public celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the freeing of the serfs. Many of those closest to Alexander III shared the belief of the Slavophile Ivan Aksakov that the killing of Alexander II was the "logical, extreme expression of that Westernism which, since the time of Peter the Great, has demoralized both our government and our society."[3] Alexander III's cultural and ethnic policies also reflected his stress on the superiority of Russia, Russian Orthodoxy, and old Russian ways. (See Figures 22.3 and 24.2 for two church designs approved under Alexander III that reflected his preference for more typical "Russian" designs as compared to the more Western-influenced church architecture seen in Figure 21.2.)

Alexander's style of rule also reflected his appearance and personality. He emphasized autocratic strength and displayed an impatience with any bureaucratic procedures or laws that might inhibit it. He often bypassed or ignored the advice of the State Council, which reviewed proposed statutory laws and made recommendations before tsarist approval.

Alexander III's chief adviser was Constantine Pobedonostsev, a tall, thin, humorless man. He was the grandson of a priest and graduate of the Imperial School of Jurisprudence. In addition to other positions, he had been the chief tutor and guide of Alexander since 1865, and Alexander III's early policies often mirrored Pobedonostsev's ideas, which coincided with the tsar's basic instincts. Only later in his reign did Alexander increasingly balance Pobedonostsev's advice with that of others, especially that of several military men who had become part of the tsar's court.

Pobedonostsev spelled out his ideas most clearly in 1896 in *Moskovskii Sbornik*, a book published in England two years later with the title *Reflections of a Russian Statesman*. His view of the human condition was pessimistic. ("From the day that man first fell falsehood has ruled the world.") He divided men into two groups: a small intellectual aristocracy and the vulgar "herd," incapable of higher thinking. Because he believed that humans were by nature sinful and the masses ignorant, and because of Russia's historical development, he thought that autocracy was the only form of government for it.

He stated that parliamentary bodies were "one of the greatest illustrations of human delusion." Universal suffrage is "a fatal error, and one of the most remarkable in the history of mankind." The press, the organ of public opinion, "is one of the falsest institutions of our time." Also, "faith in abstract principles is the prevailing error of our time." Parliaments, democracy, the press, and rationalism, like the ideas of human perfectibility and secular progress, led to discontentment and misery. So too, he thought, did education beyond one's needs. So pessimistic

[2]Richard S. Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy, Vol. 2, From Alexander II to the Abdication of Nicholas II* (Princeton, 2000), p. 259. I am also indebted to this work for several other revisions dealing with Late Imperial Russia.

[3]Ivan Aksakov, "Russia and Autocracy," in *The Mind of Modern Russia: Historical and Political Thought of Russia's Great Age*, ed. Hans Kohn (New York, 1962), p. 113.

and negative were his ideas that one fellow conservative told him "You have a negative attitude toward everything," and another wrote, "In more than twenty years of friendship with Pobedonostsev I never heard him, directly and simply, make a positive statement about mankind." Even Alexander III came to recognize that while Pobedonostsev was an "excellent critic, [he] was incapable of ever creating anything himself."[4]

Because the natural, organic development of a nation was important to Pobedonostsev, he was more tolerant of parliamentarism in England, where it had slowly evolved, than he was of it in other countries where it was not an organic growth. He thought it had no place in Russia, however, and Western imports such as liberalism, legalism, and religious tolerance did not belong there either. He believed the Orthodox Russians should dominate the empire.

Pobedonostsev took his religion most seriously and from 1880 until 1905 served as the procurator of the Holy Synod. He believed that the true religion and faith were the only hope for sinful humanity, but happiness was to come primarily in heaven, not on earth.

The Orthodox Church was not only to help Russians save their souls and get to heaven, but also it was "to inspire the people with respect for the law and for power." Orthodoxy was to be the moral glue that bound people to their Orthodox tsar. For the non-Orthodox of the empire (counting Old Believers and sectarians, probably more than a third of the population), Pobedonostsev could offer no effective "moral glue," only coercion.

REACTIONARY POLICIES OF ALEXANDER III

Although the oppression of ethnic and religious minorities was one characteristic of Alexander III's reign (see Chapter 24), his first task was to deal with his father's assassins and other members of the People's Will. A panel of government-appointed officials, acting as both judges and jury, condemned six individuals, including two women, to be hanged. After it was discovered that one of the women was pregnant, her sentence was changed to life imprisonment. The other woman was the noble-born Sophia Perovskaia, who had directed the assassination.

Before the sentences could be carried out, two prominent individuals appealed to the tsar to act like a true Christian monarch and forgo applying capital punishment. One was the famous novelist Leo Tolstoy; the other was the philosopher and religious thinker Vladimir Soloviev, whose father, the University of Moscow's Sergei Soloviev, had once tutored Alexander III in history. Upon hearing of the appeals, Pobedonostsev wrote to the tsar, advising him not to heed the requests of those possessing "weak minds and hearts." The tsar did not. Despite one of the condemned twice hitting the scaffold floor before being strung up for a third try—shades of the Decembrists' slipshod hangings in 1826—all five were hanged on April 3, 1881.

[4]Quotes are cited in A. IU. Polunov, "Konstantin Petrovich Pobedonostsev—Man and Politician," RSH 39 (Spring 2001): 25, 28–29.

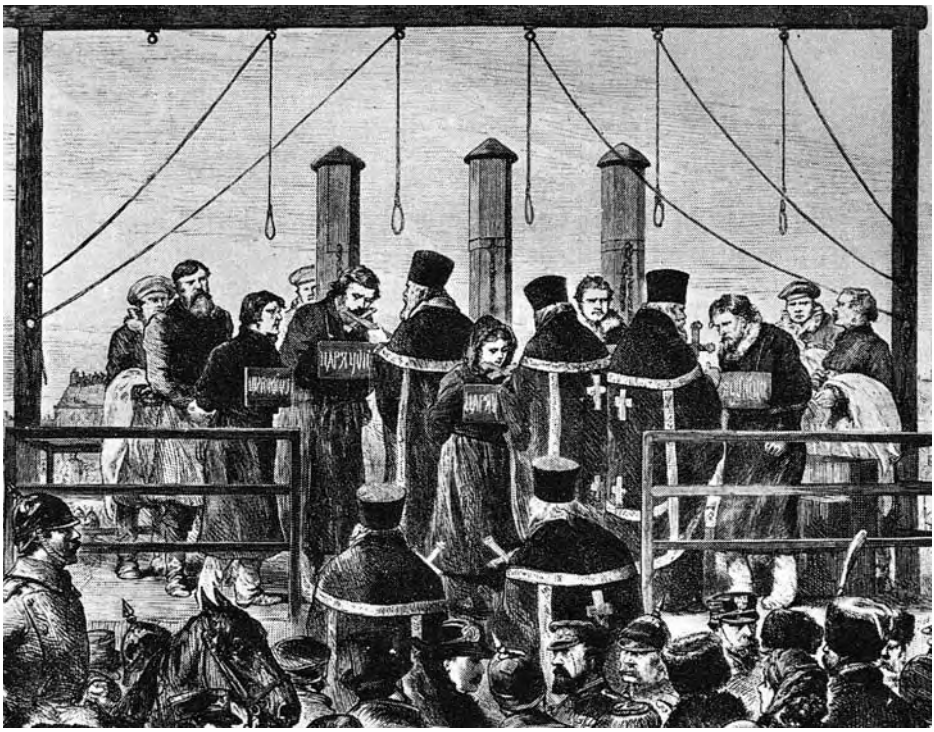

FIGURE 23.1. The hanging of Alexander II's assassins on Semenovskii Square, St. Petersburg, April 3, 1881.
(From Ian Grey, *The Horizon History of Russia*, American Heritage Publishing Company, New York, 1970, p. 287, New York Public Library.)

In the next several months the new tsar made it clear that he intended to rule with an iron hand. Siding with Pobedonostsev, who (according to Dmitri Miliutin) called the Great Reforms of Alexander II a "criminal mistake," the tsar rejected Loris-Melikov's earlier plan for the establishment of advisory commissions and issued a manifesto affirming the necessity of maintaining absolute power. Upset at this course of events, Loris-Melikov, Miliutin (who thought Pobedonostsev a "fanatic-reactionary"), and a few other reform-minded ministers resigned.

In August, in an effort to root out revolutionaries still at large, the tsar approved a "Regulation on Measures for the Safety of the State and the Protection of Public Order." Strictly speaking, it was not a "law," arrived at by normal bureaucratic procedure (through the Council of State), but an emergency ordinance. Although applying to only some provinces and supposedly lasting only three years, these "temporary regulations" were gradually extended and continued to exist for more than three decades. They squelched the hopes of reformers who wished to see Russia build upon Alexander II's judicial reforms and become a country in which the due process of law was a recognized right of citizens.

The "temporary regulations" recognized two types of emergencies and permitted governors to bypass regular courts and laws. Under varying conditions,

they could fine, imprison for three months or less, turn over to military courts, or banish from their province any suspected person. They could also prohibit meetings and gatherings, including those of zemstvos, shut down factories or schools, suppress newspapers, and fire certain officials.

Throughout his reign, Alexander III attempted to strengthen the state's control over society. The University Statute of 1884 curtailed university autonomy. From 1889 to 1892, the government cut back on rights of peasants and local governing bodies. Most significant of Alexander's "counterreforms" was the creation of land captains in 1889. By 1895, there were about 2,000 of them. These government-appointed noblemen received sweeping administrative and judicial powers over the peasants, who referred to them as "little tsars." Each land captain was responsible for overseeing part of a district's peasants, their elected peasant officials, and institutions such as the village and canton (*volost*) assemblies and cantonal courts. He could overturn assembly decisions and suspend peasant officials and cantonal court rulings. He could even fine or briefly jail such officials. He also became a judge in civil and minor criminal cases involving peasants beyond the cantonal court level, replacing for them the elected Justices of the Peace created by the 1864 judicial reform.

In 1890, a new law strengthened the government's powers over the zemstvos. Alexander III and his officials especially distrusted the estimated 70,000 zemstvo professionals including teachers, doctors, and agronomists. According to the new measure, zemstvo heads now had to be confirmed by the minister of interior and zemstvo boards and employees by their provincial governor. The latter also received new powers, including that of appointing the peasant members of the district zemstvos from lists of candidates submitted by canton assemblies. Not only did peasants lose their previous right of electing delegates to the district zemstvos, but also they saw their proportion of delegates decline to less than one-third of the total delegates in district assemblies.

Conversely, noble representation in them increased, and the 1889–1890 changes are sometimes taken as a sign that Alexander III wished to rely more on the nobles as a bulwark of the regime. Thomas Pearson's study of the autocracy's local government policies in this era indicates, however, that the 1889–1890 changes polarized and alienated the nobles. Although the policies were intended to strengthen Ministry-of-Interior control while making local government more efficient, St. Petersburg also hoped they would gain it more provincial support. It proved an illusory hope, as peasants as well as nobles became more disillusioned with the government.

In 1892, town councils, officials, and voters experienced the government's heavy hand. A new law stipulated the government confirmation of elected officials, regulated the number of council meetings, and, by increasing property qualifications, shrunk the electorate. For example, the already small number of eligible voters in St. Petersburg and Moscow was reduced by more than 60 percent. This meant that in the two cities combined, less than 1 percent of the total population could now vote.

Other measures also reflected the government's distrust of the masses. In 1887, for example, the government increased gymnasium fees in the hope of keeping lower-class children out of the gymnasiums.

POLICIES OF ECONOMIC MODERNIZATION, 1881–1903

Despite Alexander III's fondness for Muscovite Russia, he realized that economic modernization was necessary if Russia was to remain a Great Power. Although begun earlier, this modernization now accelerated rapidly. Not all government economic policies contributed to modernization, however, and it occurred for many reasons in addition to governmental actions.

The government pursued modernization chiefly by investing or encouraging investment in railways, mining, and manufacturing. This policy necessitated building up capital for investment, which, in turn, spurred other increases: in tax revenues, the balance of payments, the gold reserve, and foreign loans.

Alexander III's first of three finance ministers was N. K. Bunge. He inherited a national budget drained by heavy military expenditures and servicing a high foreign debt. To build up Russia's gold reserve, he set out to improve its balance of payments by raising import tariffs. By thus boosting the prices of foreign products, Bunge aided competing Russian industries. He also reorganized the railway system, which in 1880 was overwhelmingly in private hands, and increased the state's role in constructing and operating new lines. Believing that Russia's tax policy placed an unrealistic burden on the peasants and that it had to be overhauled if the Russian economy was to be healthy, he reduced peasants' taxes, even eliminating the long-standing soul tax. Although careful not to drive capital out of Russia, he introduced new taxes that affected mainly the upper classes, for example, on inheritance, profits, and savings. Finally, he oversaw the establishment of a factory inspectorate and peasant and noble land banks to provide loans.

Compared to the policies of his two successors, Bunge's initiatives were fairly moderate, but they did not generate enough income to enable the government to balance its budget or reduce its foreign debt. He resigned in 1886.

Alexander III's second finance minister (1887–1892) was I. A. Vyshnegradsky. As with Bunge, not all his policies were directly motivated by the modernizing impulse, but collectively they did move Russia further down that road. To balance Russia's budget, increase gold reserves, and produce a healthy trade surplus, he increased indirect taxes and exports, especially grain, and upped import tariffs to higher levels than those of any other power.

These policies contributed to both positive and negative results. The most devastating of the latter was the famine of 1891–1892. Increases in indirect taxes on basic goods, along with other government measures, led the peasants to sell more grain, leaving them little surplus if an emergency arose. Vyshnegradsky's statement of 1887 that "we may undereat, but we will export" now took on a grim reality. The resulting famine and the public outcry it created forced him to resign. (For more on this famine, see Chapter 26.)

His successor from 1892 to 1903 was one of the most dynamic ministers of late imperial Russia, Sergei Witte, a man who came to symbolize Russia's modernization drive. After studying mathematics at Novorossiisk University in Odessa, he began a successful career in railway administration. By the time he became minister of finance, he had gained a reputation for his practical business sense, his hard-working habits, and his passionate belief in the necessity of rapid Russian industrialization.

FIGURE 23.2. Peasants depicted taking thatch from their roof to feed their animals during the famine of 1891–1892.
(From Otto Hoetzsch, *The Evolution of Russia.* Harcourt, Brace & World, New York, 1966, #137, p. 161. © Thames & Hudson of London.)

To achieve it, he continued and expanded some of his predecessors' policies regarding high import tariffs, indirect taxes (on such items as sugar, matches, tobacco, and kerosene), and the maintenance of a favorable trade balance. Although grain exports had to be reduced in 1891 and 1892, by 1894 they accounted for more than 50 percent of the value of all Russian exports. During his eleven years in office, the state's annual revenue doubled. To facilitate foreign loans and make the ruble convertible, in 1897 he put Russia on the Gold Standard. Not only foreign loans, but also foreign investment rose quickly while he was in office, and he estimated that in 1900 about half of all industrial and commercial capital was of foreign origin.

The results of all these financial moves were impressive. Partly because of them, government investment in industrial modernization increased significantly, as did industrial production, which more than doubled in the 1890s. Especially notable was the growth of iron and petroleum production and of railways. As the government's railway head and then minister of finance, Witte oversaw the building of most of the Trans-Siberian Railway, begun in 1891 and almost completed by the time he left office in 1903.

But Witte's policies also had negative consequences. For almost a century, the dominant view was that his policies—along with those of Vyshnegradsky before him—led to an extended agrarian or peasant crisis. Some recent research, however, has challenged this view. Yet there still seems little doubt that at least sectors of the

MAP 23.1

peasant economy and parts of the country (for example, the central black-soil provinces) suffered increased economic hardship, that government financial policies had something to do with it, and that many of Witte's contemporaries believed his policies were helping to cause an agrarian crisis. Witte himself became convinced by Bunge that "the chief obstacle to the economic development of the peasantry was the medieval village commune."[5] But several more years were to pass before Peter Stolypin, one of Witte's successors as prime minister, attempted to break up the communes (see Chapter 25).

Witte's policies certainly helped accelerate changes, such as the rapid growth of industrial workers, and helped fuel the rising manifestations of public discontent. The landed nobility were critical of him, and in the late 1890s, industrial and student strikes became more prevalent. In 1902, peasant disturbances broke out in the provinces of Kharkov and Poltava. Other sectors of the public were also becoming more restive.

Partly to further industrialization and keep foreign loans (primarily French) and investments coming, Witte advocated an easing of government repression. This displeased many of Nicholas II's more reactionary ministers and advisers, especially his minister of interior, V. K. Plehve, who blamed much of the increased dissatisfaction in the country on Witte. Witte's standing was further undercut by an economic depression that began around 1900. Finally, in 1903, Nicholas replaced him as finance minister. Although the tsar appointed him chairman of the Council of Ministers, the council seldom met, and the position was largely honorific.

NICHOLAS II AND THE POLITICS OF REACTION, 1894–1904

When Alexander III died unexpectedly of nephritis in October 1894, his oldest son, Nicholas, was only twenty-six. His reaction to his father's death is described by Grand Duke Alexander Mikhailovich (then twenty-eight) to whom Nicholas addressed the following words:

> What is going to happen to me, to you, to Xenia, to Alix, to mother, to all of Russia? I am not prepared to be a Czar. I never wanted to become one. I know nothing of the business of ruling. l have no idea of even how to talk to the ministers. Will you help me, Sandro?[6]

These words revealed much of Nicholas's character. Much shorter and thinner than Alexander III, he was also much less confident and outspoken. Although adoring and in awe of his father, he was closer to his solicitous mother, Maria, who

[5]*The Memoirs of Count Witte*, ed. and trans. Sidney Harcave (Armonk, N. Y., 1990), p. 330. See also Esther Kingston-Mann, *In Search of the True West: Culture. Economics, and Problems of Russian Development* (Princeton, 1999) for a critical approach to Russian modernization and those who were overly eager to eliminate the commune and embrace certain Western economic ideas.
[6]Aleksandr Mikhailovich, pp. 168–169.

had been born a Danish princess. He grew up surrounded by his parents, his large extended family of relatives, and a faithful array of servants and tutors. Partly as a result of the terrorism that brought the terrible death of his grandfather, Alexander II (which he had witnessed as a twelve-year-old boy), Nicholas was raised in a sheltered environment.

Whatever the complex reasons, he grew up a dutiful son, showing few signs of rebellion or independence. As his later life made clear, he was often fatalistic, resigned to suffering what he felt was inescapable—a feeling reinforced by the fact that he was born on St. Job the Sufferer's day. After he became tsar, observers commented on his politeness and charm, but they often failed to discern the personality behind these external appearances. He was cautious and suspicious and could be stubborn, but he hated confrontation. He also hated complexity and lacked the intellectual stamina, although not the intelligence, to work through complex problems. Like most of the Romanovs, however, he possessed a high sense of duty and believed in autocracy. Moreover, his mother had emphasized to him how important it was to display the correct imperial behavior. So he did his best, but he probably spoke from the depths of his soul when he said he never wanted to become tsar.

If one looks at his course of studies and the positions he held as tsarevich, it seems, at first glance, that he was adequately prepared to be tsar, but a deeper look reveals serious deficiencies. He became proficient in French, German, and English; studied history, geography, math, science, religion, drawing, music, and military matters; and was tutored by Pobedonostsev in law and by Bunge in economics and finance. Yet, except for history and especially military matters, he displayed little enthusiasm for learning. The pattern was similar in the positions the young tsarevich assumed after, reaching adulthood. Only military duties, and not very taxing ones at that, elicited much sustained enthusiasm from him. His sheltered upbringing, coupled with the belief that Alexander III (only forty-nine at the time of his death) still had many years to rule, further contributed to his unpreparedness for the awesome task of becoming autocrat of the Russian Empire.

One reason for the tsarevich's interest in the military was his preference for the outdoors. He enjoyed pastimes such as riding, hunting, skating, and sledding and chores such as chopping wood. He also enjoyed other pleasures common among young officers. For several years in the early 1890s, he had an affair with a young ballerina, while simultaneously hoping that a marriage could be arranged between him and Princess Alix (later Alexandra) of Hesse-Darmstadt. Not only did he spend much time at the ballet, but also he enjoyed the theater and the operas of such composers as Glinka, Musorgsky, and Tchaikovsky.

Joining Nicholas at his father's deathbed was Princess Alix, who by then had agreed to give up her Protestant faith and convert to Orthodoxy to marry Nicholas. Although her father was German, her mother was the youngest child of England's Queen Victoria, and Nicholas and Alexandra felt most comfortable communicating in English. Four years younger than he and in a foreign country, she did not hesitate to advise the tsarevich to be firm, show his own mind, and demand the respect due to him from his father's doctors and others. It would be typical of the advice this tall, proud woman would often give him in the years after their marriage, which occurred a month after Alexander III's death. She always

seemed to believe that her husband was not strong willed enough—during World War I, for example, she wrote to him: "How I wish I could pour my will into your veins."

At first, Nicholas II maintained most of his father's officials, including Pobedonostsev as procurator of the Holy Synod and Witte as finance minister. Even though Pobedonostsev's influence on Alexander III had waned somewhat in the final years of his reign, it was reportedly Pobedonostsev who advised Nicholas in January 1895 to object to zemstvo hopes for a greater political role. At a reception of zemstvo delegates and others who had come to congratulate the new tsar, Nicholas referred to wishes of zemstvo government participation as "senseless dreams." And he stated his intention to maintain "the principle of autocracy just as firmly and unshakably" as had his father. Not possessing his father's iron will, however, and in the face of rising opposition, this was easier said than done.

Also exercising influence on the tsar were his uncles, especially his father's brother Grand Duke Sergei, governor-general of Moscow. He was primarily responsible for planning the traditional coronation distribution of presents to commoners and for choosing the site, a large field full of ditches, where this would occur. Some of the large crowd who rushed forward on that May morning in 1896 fell in the ditches and were trampled on by others. Estimates of the number of dead varied, but Wortman cites 1,350 as the official figure, while noting that other estimates were as high as 2,000. Although some advised Nicholas to display his sympathy for the dead and cancel further festivities, Sergei and his brothers argued against canceling anything. The attendance of Nicholas and Alexandra at a ball that night left a bad impression on many, and Nicholas missed an important opportunity to display his concern for the common people. Years later a radical worker observed that this coronation catastrophe "undermined the old blind faith in the tsar, even among the older men."[7]

Once Nicholas settled into the routine of trying to run the empire, he found the task difficult and often distasteful. It consisted of innumerable meetings with individual ministers and others who reported on and received his instructions on everything from promotions to divorce applications—as one scholar has noted, "'a government' in the sense of a group of people organized into a unified body of policy makers and executors did not exist." Sensing that he was a much weaker man than his father, ministers and relatives competed to win his backing for various causes, schemes, and ideas.[8] But Nicholas was suspicious of most officials and distrusted formal government bodies; as he gained experience in office he increasingly ignored his ministers' advice. He had to read many reports and correspondence and, unwilling to trust a private secretary, he personally wrote out his own letters. There were also the countless formal and ceremonial appearances, military reviews and

[7]Semën Ivanovich Kanatchikov, *A Radical Worker In Tsarist Russia: The Autobiography of Semën Ivanovich Kanatchikov*, ed. and trans. Reginald E Zelnik (Stanford, 1986), p. 45.

[8]Quote is from Rex A. Wade, *The Russian Revolution. 1917* (Cambridge, Eng., 2000), p. 2. Tuomo Polvinen in his *Imperial Borderland: Bobrikov and the Attempted Russification of Finland. 1898–1904* (Durham, N.C., 1995), pp. 269–71, quotes numerous primary sources to indicate this competition for Nicholas's favor during his first decade of rule and how it contributed to the perception that a firm autocratic hand was lacking.

FIGURE 23.3. Nicholas II and family early in the century.
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parades, and social gatherings that a tsar was expected to attend.

His main solace in such a world was his family, especially his wife and children, four girls and a boy, all born between 1895 and 1904. Alexandra grew increasingly weary of the social aspects of being an empress and never mixed comfortably in Russian high society.

Nicholas's domestic policies in the first decade of his rule followed the pattern set by his father: a continuation and extension of the "temporary regulations," further restrictions on local government, more Russification and persecution of ethnic and religious minorities, and support of Witte's industrialization program. Although never personally close to Witte, he recognized his ability and therefore retained him as finance minister until 1903.

Nicholas was also like his father in preferring Moscow to St. Petersburg, and he even went further than Alexander III in identifying with the seventeenth-century autocracy. In 1903, he presided over two balls in which those invited were instructed to attend in seventeenth-century attire. Nicholas himself wore the robes and crown of Tsar Alexei, and Alexandra was dressed as Alexei's first wife, Maria; for the next decade pictures of them dressed in these costumes were often reproduced. When the only son of Nicholas and Alexandra was born, they named him after Tsar Alexei. Toward the Westernizing Peter the Great (son of Tsar Alexei), Nicholas had little affection because of his attack on old Russian ways.

The manner in which Nicholas tried to identify with Muscovite rulers differed from that of his father in that he wished to establish a more direct bond with the Russian masses. He believed that such a bond existed in Muscovite Russia before

the growth of a modern bureaucracy. Although his own cautious personality and fears for his security prevented much personal interaction, on a trip to Kursk in 1902 he met with peasant elders from seven provinces and wrote to Alexandra about how much he enjoyed talking to the "simple people." He also supported, at least for a while, his uncle Sergei's backing of the monarchical paternalism of former radical Sergei Zubatov, now chief of the Moscow Security Bureau. Like the liberal "statists" of the late 1850s (see Chapter 22), Zubatov believed that the emperor could work for the good of the masses because he stood above any classes, bureaucracies, or other interest groups. Under Zubatov the Moscow police took steps to assist workers including helping them with work grievances. In February 1902, Moscow workers were allowed to celebrate the anniversary of the emancipation of the serfs with political-religious ceremonies that the conservative *Moscow Gazette* believed demonstrated the workers' love of their tsar and Orthodox Church. When Nicholas came to Moscow to celebrate Easter in 1903 he held an amicable meeting with delegates of Zubatov-sponsored workers' organizations.[9] The mix of the religious and political in Nicholas's attempts to establish a closer bond with the Russian people was also evident later that year when Nicholas and Alexandra traveled to Sarov to participate in the canonization ceremonies for Seraphim of Sarov. That the canonization of this *starets* who died in 1833 (see Chapter 21) took place was primarily due to the royal couple. Partly in an attempt to buttress up support for his regime, Nicholas oversaw the canonization of more saints during his reign than in the entire 1700–1894 period that preceded it. Estimates of the number of others who streamed to Sarov to observe the ceremonies range from about 150,000 to 300,000. When Alexandra gave birth to Alexei the following year she believed that St. Seraphim had helped finally give her a son. As Gregory Freeze has demonstrated, however, this canonization and others that followed failed to build support for Nicholas, and in fact had more the opposite effect. And the royal couple's belief that their faith helped unite them with the common people would also later have serious negative consequences, especially in the case of the infamous Rasputin (see Chapter 25).

PUBLIC OPINION AND POLITICAL OPPOSITION, 1881–1904

One way in which Nicholas was much less effective than his father was in squashing political opposition, but this resulted from more than just his being a weaker man. The modernizing needs of the country had increased the number of opponents to traditional autocratic practices, making repression more difficult. Furthermore, the government's poor handling of the famine of 1891–1892 and the subsequent zemstvo and private initiatives of those trying to alleviate the suffering helped intensify the belief that educated society needed to have a greater political role.

[9]Wortman, II, 370–373, 381–382. For Zubatov and his labor program, see Jonathan W. Daly, *Autocracy under Siege: Security Police and Opposition in Russia, 1866–1905* (DeKalb, 1998), pp. 7, 72–77, 103–104, 111–112, 117–118, 127, 140–141; Jeremiah Schneiderman, *Sergei Zubatov and Revolutionary Marxism: The Struggle for the Working Class in Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca, N.Y.), 1976.

In early 1905, the historian Paul Miliukov noted "the enormous growth of the politically conscious social elements that make public opinion in Russia." Among these elements were more professionals, artists and writers, men of business, government officials, and zemstvo workers. Especially notable was the growth of zemstvo employees, which by 1905 numbered about 70,000 individuals spread out over 358 districts. Although more than half of them were teachers, there were also zemstvo doctors; paramedics; midwives; veterinarians; pharmacists; insurance agents; statisticians; librarians; agronomists; and administrative, technical, and clerical personnel.

Earlier, in 1881, Alexander III had heard two voices giving him the same unsolicited advice to forgo inflicting capital punishment on his father's assassins. In the decades ahead, Leo Tolstoy and Vladimir Soloviev continued to criticize government policies, primarily from an ethical-religious perspective.

Tolstoy's specific criticisms of the government were many, ranging from its persecution of religious and ethnic minorities to its failures to deal adequately with famine needs in 1891–1892, a famine that Tolstoy personally did much to alleviate. In 1901 and 1902, he wrote to Nicholas II advising him on certain minimum steps he should take. But since the early 1880s, Tolstoy's ultimate desires had gone much further. He wanted to abolish centralized governments, which he believed acted in behalf of the upper classes, and he evolved a philosophy of nonviolent anarchism. His main methods for bringing an end to government were for people to refuse to pay taxes or serve the government in any manner, including military service.

Tolstoy especially irritated Pobedonostsev, still the procurator of the Holy Synod, by rejecting many basic Orthodox teachings and doctrines. In 1901, a Holy Synod edict all but excommunicated him for his heresies. If Tolstoy had not by then possessed such an imposing worldwide reputation, there is little doubt that the government would have dealt with him more severely.

The unconventional religious philosopher Vladimir Soloviev also irritated Pobedonostsev. He polemicized with Russian nationalists and criticized religious and ethnic persecution. An early ecumenical thinker, he was especially eloquent in his criticism of Russian antisemitism. Although primarily a philosopher, he was also a gifted poet. He possessed a utopian temperament and was not especially interested in political details. But to further such goals as religious toleration, he allied from the late 1880s until his death in 1900 with secular liberals and contributed to their most popular journal, *The Messenger of Europe*.

Yet despite Soloviev's strong philosophic and poetic influence (see Chapter 27) and the "Tolstoyan" followers of Tolstoy's ideas, most of educated society's political opposition was more secular. Although it was diverse, Miliukov was essentially correct in identifying its two chief currents as socialist and liberal.

Russian Socialism: The Populist Strain

From 1881 until the beginning of 1905, there were basically two types of Russian socialism. One was an eclectic homespun brand in the populist tradition, and the other was Marxist.

After the assassination of Alexander II, the Executive Committee of the populist

People's Will printed thousands of copies of an open letter to Alexander III. The committee promised that their organization would disband if the new tsar agreed to certain conditions. These included an amnesty for all past political crimes and the calling of a freely elected constituent assembly to remodel Russia's government in accordance with the wishes of the people. If Alexander III failed to agree to their demands, they promised increased terrorism.

Arrests, however, helped prevent them from carrying out any extensive terrorism, and despite efforts of revolutionaries to keep the People's Will alive, it slowly withered and died. By 1887, when a group of St. Petersburg students attempting to assassinate Alexander III claimed to be part of the People's Will, no such organization still existed. There were only some individuals, like the older brother of Vladimir Ulianov (Lenin), who wished to follow in its tradition. For their plans and actions, which included preparing assassination bombs, Alexander Ulianov and some of his co-conspirators were arrested. Ulianov and four others were hanged.

Before his death, Alexander Ulianov had been troubled by the question of whether Russia had to undergo a capitalist era before inaugurating socialism. For decades to come, this issue remained vital to many Russian socialists, including Alexander's brother Vladimir.

Among other socialists concerned with this question were the legal populists. The government permitted them to publish "legally" because they advocated no political overthrow or major political reforms. A major figure in whose journals they often published was the populist writer and editor N. K. Mikhailovsky (1842–1904). Already at the end of the 1860s, he had written an article entitled "What Is Progress?" It spelled out his belief that progress was not the type of capitalist development and increasing division of labor that was occurring in the West. Rather it was whatever contributed to the fullest development of the individual personality and the full use of one's physical and mental capacities. Like most populists, Mikhailovsky stressed the importance of free will and rejected the belief that any historical laws predetermined Russia's future.

Two of the most important legal populists of the 1880s and 1890s were V. P. Vorontsov and N. F. Danielson. What both men wanted was to avoid a fully developed capitalism in Russia, a capitalism both men believed would only increase the suffering of the Russian masses. Indeed, they believed its early stages were already doing so. Instead, they desired a state-sponsored industrialization that would be carried out not for the profits of a minority, but for the good of the masses, including small producers and peasants.

The famine of 1891–1892 helped stimulate a revival of populist activists in the 1890s, especially in the black-earth provinces stretching from Ukraine to the Urals. Until 1901, there was no large populist party, only a small number of groups and individuals working in the populist tradition. In 1901, however, several of these groups came together to form the party of Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs).

The SRs main theoretician was Viktor Chernov, who had organized a populist peasant group in the Tambov Province. In the populist tradition, the SR program emphasized a dislike of capitalism, the belief that Russia's future was not determined by any "historical laws," that it could follow its own unique path of development, and that the interests of small producers and peasants had to be

safeguarded. Although the SRs were active in the cities and propagandized and recruited urban workers, SR leaders considered them as basically urban peasants and that working with them was in keeping with the populist tradition of placing primary emphasis on the peasants and their welfare. Peasant disorders in the Kharkov and Poltava provinces in 1902, including attacks on noble estates, strengthened the SRs' belief in the revolutionary potential of the peasants.

The SRs' immediate goals were raising the revolutionary consciousness of the masses and undermining tsarist rule. Ending autocracy would allow the people's free will to be expressed, and SR leaders were confident they would favor socialism. Because some SRs strongly believed in the use of terrorism to help accomplish party goals, an autonomous "Combat Organization" was formed that was ultimately responsible for killing many officials. From 1902 to 1905, its members killed, among others, Grand Duke Sergei (Nicholas II's uncle) and two interior ministers, including the much hated V. K. Plehve.

After the collapse of autocracy, the SRs envisioned a transition period in which land would be socialized and farmed by individuals or collectives and capitalist practices gradually limited. While predicting a final socialist order, marked by collective cultivation and the socialization of industry, the SRs claimed they would not try to dictate future developments.

Many populists of this period, although not considered Marxists, were familiar with Karl Marx's ideas and admired him for his criticism of capitalism. Danielson had helped translate *Das Kapital* into an 1872 Russian edition. In this work, Marx had quoted British factory inspectors' reports to expose such evils as the exploitation of child labor. To take just one short example, Marx quoted a father who said: "'That boy of mine . . . when he was 7 years old I used to carry him on my back to and fro through the snow, and he used to have 16 hours [of work] a day . . . I have often knelt down to feed him as he stood by the machine, for he could not leave it or stop.'"

Russian Socialism: The Marxists

The "father of Russian Marxism," Georgi Plekhanov, was a former populist and leading member of the Black Repartition. By 1883 (the year of Marx's death), Plekhanov had come to believe that full-scale capitalism was inevitable in Russia. In that year, in Geneva, he and some other former populists, including Vera Zasulich, formed the first Russian Marxist organization, the Emancipation of Labour. For them, the essence of Marx's self-proclaimed scientific socialism was his theory of "the materialist conception of history," or "historical materialism."

Marx spelled out its essence most succinctly in 1859 in a preface to his *A Critique of Political Economy*:

> In the social production which men carry on, they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society—the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social

> consciousness. The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political, and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development the material forces of production in society come into conflict with the existing relations of production . . . From forms of development of the forces of production these relations turn into fetters. Then comes the period of social revolution.

More specifically, Marx stated that such productive forces as technology, material resources, and labor determined economic relationships. The productive forces and economic relationships together made up the foundation (or base) of society and, in turn, determined—or at least conditioned—the superstructure of government, laws, religion, and culture used by the dominant class in any historical period to strengthen its position.

Productive forces, Marx declared, had evolved in the course of history—which he divided into five stages: primitive communism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism, and socialism\communism. The general pattern was that a new class supported productive forces that evolved out of the old society, and this new class came into conflict with the class that dominated the older relations of production and superstructure. The old dominant class, however, never relinquished its power without a struggle. Thus, class conflict was inevitable and would continue until the establishment of socialism\communism—although Marx often used the two terms interchangeably, he sometimes used *socialism* to indicate the transitional period between capitalism and communism, a practice later adopted in the Soviet Union.

Marx and his frequent collaborator, Friedrich Engels (1820–1895), had begun their famous *Communist Manifesto* with the sentence: "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles." In his own era in Western Europe, Marx believed the capitalist class of merchants and industrialists had proved victorious over the old feudal landowning class. Just as inevitably, said Marx, the industrial working class or "proletariat" would associate itself with still newer productive forces, even then evolving out of capitalist society. This working class would clash with the capitalist class and would eventually overthrow it.

Following the overthrow of the capitalists, the proletariat would establish a "dictatorship of the proletariat." It would deal with any remaining class enemies, end private control over productive forces, and introduce a classless socialist society. Since the main role of the state had previously been to protect class interests, the dictatorship of the proletariat and all the machinery of government would then no longer be necessary. Thus, it would gradually wither away and be followed by a Communist age of equitable social relations, humanized labor, and increased leisure.

Although Marx himself was unclear on the subject, Plekhanov interpreted Marx's writings, as did many others, to mean that Russia had to go through a fully developed capitalist stage before it could reach socialism.[10] In contrast to most of the populists who, following Lavrov and Mikhailovsky, believed that free will

[10]For more on Lenin's interpretation of this and other Marxist doctrines by the end of 1917, see my *History of Russia, Vol. II, Since 1855,* 2nd edition (London, forthcoming), Chapter 8.

created various future possibilities, Plekhanov emphasized deterministic laws of development that humankind could not avoid. In the Marxist tradition, he emphasized the importance of the proletariat rather than the peasants. And because he believed a capitalist era would have to precede a socialist one, he was willing to cooperate with liberals to bring an end to the tsarist regime.

While Plekhanov and the other founders of the Emancipation of Labour remained abroad, by 1896–1897 Marxist circles operated in numerous cities of the Russian Empire. Many of these circles recognized a debt to Plekhanov and his comrades in Switzerland. This was partly because of the Russian censors' willingness to allow works penned by Plekhanov (but under various pseudonyms) to be published in Russia—the government viewed theoretical Marxist works, which often attacked the Populists, as not especially dangerous.

Among those impressed by Plekhanov was Vladimir Ulianov or Lenin, who traveled to Switzerland and met with him in 1895. Lenin was born in the Volga town of Simbirsk in 1870, where his father was a school inspector and passionate believer in education. By the time of his father's death in 1886, his civil service rank was equivalent to that of a general and had earned him and his family hereditary noble status. After graduating at the top of his gymnasium class (shortly after his brother was executed), Lenin enrolled at the University of Kazan, where he was soon expelled for taking part in a demonstration. From 1888 to 1893 he read, studied, and discussed radical ideas, first in Kazan and then in the Samara Province. In 1891, authorities permitted him to take the law examination at St. Petersburg University, which he passed, and in 1893 he moved to the capital, supposedly to practice law.

It was there that he first became involved with leading young Russian Marxists such as Peter Struve and Yuli Martov and began encouraging industrial workers to strike for their rights. Arrested at the end of 1895, he spent the next several years in prison and Siberian exile.

Meanwhile, despite organizing a founding congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour party (RSDLP) in Minsk in 1898, Marxists within Russia were already becoming divided. Plekhanov was especially troubled by what he perceived as Russian variations of the Marxist revisionism of the German Eduard Bernstein, who believed that some commonly held Marxist assumptions had proven false.

At the end of Book I of *Kapital*, Marx had written of the diminishing number of capitalists and the increasing misery and class consciousness of the masses that would precede and help trigger the final collapse of the capitalist system and the "expropriation of the [capitalist] expropriators." He also believed that this collapse would be brought about by the inability of the impoverished masses to purchase the growing number of goods turned out under advanced capitalism. But Bernstein argued that too much emphasis was placed on this one section of Marx's writings and that even it was open to different interpretations.

Regardless, however, of what Marx's true views were, Bernstein maintained that the facts were that the number of capitalists was increasing, that many workers now were better off, and that class conflict was decreasing. As a result of these developments and the growing political role that the proletariat was beginning to play in some countries, Bernstein argued that the dream of a Marxian socialist

revolution was outdated and that workers were right to use trade unions and democratic and parliamentary means to improve their everyday lives and gradually evolve toward socialism.

Plekhanov believed that "Economism" was the Russian variant of these ideas, for Economism's adherents also emphasized, above all, the workers' economic struggle. To some extent, they were merely mirroring the priorities of the growing number of radical workers. In Siberian exile, where Lenin had completed *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* and married a fellow Marxist, Nadezhda Krupskaia, he was also troubled by Economism and other signs of Bernstein's influence in Russia. Like Plekhanov, Lenin was fearful that Bernstein's influence might lead Russian workers from revolutionary thoughts to a trade-union mentality.

Upon being released from Siberian exile in 1900, Lenin joined Plekhanov in Switzerland, and the two men plus Martov and three others began publishing a Marxist journal, *Iskra* (*The Spark*). In it they defended what they considered Marxist orthodoxy against revisionism—besides Economism, they also thought that the "Legal Marxism" of Struve and others was tainted with Bernsteinism.

By 1903, *Iskra*, smuggled into Russia, was having a strong influence on the growing Marxist (or Social Democratic) movement, and Economism was all but smashed. To unify the Social Democrats better, the *Iskra* editors prepared a second congress of the RSDLP. It was held in the summer of 1903 in Brussels and then, for better security, in London. Forty-three delegates represented twenty-six local groups, among them the Jewish Bund.[11]

By then, however, Lenin and Martov disagreed over the nature of the RSDLP. In *What Is To Be Done?*, published in 1902, Lenin stated: "We have said *that there could not have been* Social Democratic [i.e., Marxist] consciousness among the workers. It would have to be brought to them from without. The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness."

Although Marx at times wrote of a leading role for Communist intellectuals, Lenin went much further in downplaying the role of the proletariat and increasing that of the revolutionary intelligentsia. He feared that if workers were left to their own devices, they would be co-opted by the capitalists and sell their potentially revolutionary souls for better working conditions and wages.

The battle between Lenin and Martov at the congress revolved around party membership and centralized control over the party. Lenin's basic mistrust of workers' instincts and his fear of revisionism prodded him to attempt to limit membership to active participants in party organizations. Martov wanted a more broad-based party, which would include not only full-time revolutionaries, but also less active supporters.

Lenin lost the vote on membership to Martov, but he won out over his rival when the congress agreed to stronger controls over the RSDLP by a reduced *Iskra* board including Lenin and Plekhanov (who had supported Lenin). At the congress, Lenin labeled his faction the Bolsheviks (the majority) and Martov's the Mensheviks (the minority). It was not immediately evident that the split and names would long continue after the congress ended, but they did. Plekhanov's

[11]On the Jewish Bund, see Chapter 24.

support of Lenin, however, did not last long. Within months, Plekhanov was trying to reconcile the factions, and when his efforts failed, he increasingly blamed Lenin and charged him with trying to establish a "dictatorship over the proletariat."

Liberalism and Reformism

In the era of counterreforms, the meaning of liberalism continued to be as elusive as it had been under Alexander II. Historians still disagree on whether some men were liberal or not, and the term was not one that individuals frequently applied to themselves. Be that as it may, it is used here to characterize the chief nonsocialist opposition of Alexander III and Nicholas II.

The liberalism of the 1880s and early 1890s has often been referred to as a liberalism of "small deeds." Many reformers were connected with the zemstvos or city councils, as representatives, members of the boards, or hired employees. In their local work, they tried to improve the lot of peasants and urban residents through such means as improving education, sanitation, and health care.

At times, local leaders suggested additional steps. From late 1881 to mid-1883, Boris Chicherin, who in 1856 had called Russians to rally around the banner of liberalism, served as head of Moscow's municipal government. For giving a speech in which he called for "crowning" the zemstvo and municipal structure by establishing a national body, Alexander III forced him to give up his position.

Such government reactions and the counterreforms of Alexander III weakened the voices of moderate reform and ultimately turned many to more radical measures. The government's ineffective response to the famine of 1891–1892, followed by Nicholas II's signals that he intended to follow in his father's footsteps, further stimulated liberals to switch from "small deeds" to more radical demands.

After Nicholas had warned the zemstvos against "senseless dreams" in 1895, some liberals wrote an open letter to the tsar indicating the effect of his action:

> You challenged the zemstvos, and with them Russian society, and nothing remains for them now but to choose between progress and faithfulness to autocracy. Your speech has provoked a feeling of offense and depression; but the living social forces will soon recover from that feeling. Some of them will pass to a peaceful but systematic and conscious struggle for such scope of action as is necessary for them. Some others will be made more determined to fight the detestable regime by any means. You first began the struggle; and the struggle will come.

By 1900, even the "conservative liberal" Chicherin had despaired of autocratic government and was now calling for a "limited monarchy." In 1904, the emerging liberal leader Professor Paul Miliukov called Chicherin's proposed limitations "the minimum program of contemporary liberalism." Along with Miliukov, Peter Struve, a former Marxist, became another liberal leader more radical than most of the liberals of Chicherin's generation. Backed by zemstvo financial support, in 1902 Struve began editing abroad a new liberal Russian-language journal,

Chicherin's Call for a Limited Monarchy

In 1900, Boris Chicherin's *Russia on the Eve of the Twentieth Century* was published in the Russian original in Berlin. The present English language excerpt of it is taken from Paul Miliukov's *Russia and Its Crisis* (Chicago, 1906), pp. 329–330. Ellipsis marks are in the Miliukov text.

It is impossible to limit bureaucracy without limiting the power whose weapon it is, or—as more often happens—which itself serves as a weapon in the hand of bureaucracy. I mean the unlimited power of the monarch. As long as this exists, unlimited arbitrariness at the top will always generate like arbitrariness in the dependent spheres. Legal order can never be affirmed where everything depends on personal will, and where every person invested with power may put himself above the law, while sheltering himself behind an imperial order. If the regime of legality may be said to form the most urgent need of the Russian society, we must conclude that this need can be satisfied only by the change of the unlimited monarchy into a limited. . . . It is necessary that the elective assembly should be invested with definite rights. A consultative assembly, whose decisions may or may not be followed, will always be swayed by the ruling bureaucracy, though it is just bureaucracy that must be limited. Only such an organ as would be entirely independent and possess a deciding voice in state affairs can counterbalance the officials surrounding the throne. Only such an assembly, possessing some rights, can limit the will of the monarch—which is the first condition of the legal order. As long as the monarch will not grow accustomed to the idea that his will is not almighty, that there exists a law independent of his will, and that he must defer to it, every hope to overrule the arbitrariness of the officials, every dream about "guaranties," are vain and futile.

Liberation. The following year, in Switzerland, he and 19 others founded the Union of Liberation.

The ideas of Miliukov, Struve, and others were spelled out in the program the new organization adopted in October 1904. Like Chicherin and Constantine Kavelin in 1856, the new leaders hoped to rally the nation around a liberal banner. Among other demands, including an eight-hour day and more land for peasants, this program called for elections to a Constituent Assembly. This would mean that the future government of Russia would be decided by elected delegates—for Russia a radical step indeed.

Meanwhile, zemstvo leaders, including some Union of Liberation members, prepared for a zemstvo congress to be held in St. Petersburg in November 1904. The assassination of Plehve in July and early setbacks in the Russo-Japanese War (see Chapter 24) had been followed by the appointment of a new reform-minded minister of interior, Prince P. D. Sviatopolk-Mirsky. He allowed the congress to proceed, as long as it met in private residences.

The results of the congress were a clear sign that the majority of zemstvo representatives were becoming more radical. Besides basic freedoms, equal rights, and expanded zemstvo rights, they recommended that elected representatives be empowered to legislate (and not just consult), control the budget, and determine the legality of administrative actions.

Following this early November congress, groups of students, businessmen, and others met to discuss the zemstvo recommendations. The Union of Liberation arranged for a series of banquets to discuss them. While some banquet gatherings supported the recommendations, others went further and called for a Constituent Assembly.

Mirsky realized that Nicholas II would never agree with the majority of the zemstvo congress but tried to convince him of the necessity of at least some reforms, including allowing elected representatives a consultative role in formulating legislation. The minister believed that 99 percent of educated opinion favored some sort of participation by elected individuals. Nicholas did sign a decree in December 1904 that promised a reduction of both censorship and the "emergency rule" begun in 1881, more religious toleration, and an expansion of zemstvo activities. After considerable wavering, however, he followed the advice of Witte, his uncle Sergei, and Pobedonostsev: He refused to go along with his minister of interior's suggestion for a consultative role for elected deputies. Thus, almost a quarter century after his grandfather Alexander II had agreed to allow some elected delegates to offer advice on new legislation, Nicholas II, like his father, refused such a concession.

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