Chapter 22

Alexander II, Reformism, and Radicalism

Alexander II was the "tsar liberator," the ruler who finally freed the serfs in 1861. He also instituted other important reforms, especially in local government, the judiciary, and the military. Mindful of Russian weaknesses displayed during the Crimean War and faced with serious economic problems, he hoped the reforms would strengthen Russia without weakening autocracy. Fulfilling such a combined goal, however, was an almost impossible task, even if Alexander II had been a stronger and more visionary leader than he was.

Although the reforms helped modernize Russia, the climate that bred them also fostered discontentment and discord. Reactionaries, conservatives, liberals, radicals, and government officials battled against each other and among themselves. In a famous dream sequence in his novel *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoevsky wrote apropos of this period: "All were in a state of unrest and did not understand one another. Each thought that he alone possessed the truth." Alexander's reign ended tragically when he was assassinated in 1881 and his reactionary son, Alexander III, came to the throne.

ALEXANDER II: THE MAN AND HIS TIMES

Alexander II was thirty-six when he came to the throne upon the death of Nicholas I. He was fairly well educated and trained for his future responsibilities and, like most of the Romanovs, he possessed a high sense of duty. This sense of obligation, coupled with the demands of the time, helped energize him to carry out the bulk of his reforms during the first decade of his reign. After that, however, his energy waned. By the end of his reign he was a tragic figure, criticized by much of the educated public and hunted by assassins.

Two personal failings contributed to this tragedy. First, he possessed no clear ideas, no grand vision, on how to reconcile his basic conservative instincts with the modernizing demands of the second half of the nineteenth century. The closest he came to any guiding idea for ruling successfully was woefully inadequate. It was what Wortman has called his "scenario of love." By it he envisioned gaining his

people's love and gratitude by working to improve their lot and displaying his love of them. Yet, to Alexander's mind, such a relationship required no formal sharing of power, no constitutional order; in fact, he believed that introducing such an order would lead to the disintegration of the Russian Empire. In general, Alexander did not possess an agile, curious, or creative mind. As tsar, during Russia's Golden Age of Literature, he displayed more interest in hunting and whist (an early form of bridge) than he ever did in the writings of Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, or Turgenev.

His second major failing was one of character. Long ago, his boyhood tutors had noted that he was easily discouraged by difficulties, but it was not until 1865–1866 that this trait began to have serious consequences. After a decade of reforms, Alexander was upset that his efforts had not brought forth greater appreciation and social harmony. In 1865, his oldest son, Nikolai, died, and the death of this promising young man was a crushing blow to his parents. The following year, a few months after an assassin attempted to shoot him, Alexander began a sexual relationship with a young teenage lady, Catherine (Katia) Dolgorukova, that was to last the rest of his life. It helped to undercut his prestige among his family and at court, and in his final decade and a half, he often sought solace from his troubles in her arms. Excerpts from his letters to her, such as the following from spring 1874, give some idea of his dependence on this woman he came to consider his wife (even though the Empress Maria lived on until 1880): "Oh, my Angel, I cannot bear it any longer, I do so yearn for you and would so like to be warmed by you, my adored little wife, and I feel more than ever that my whole life is in you." And a few days later, he wrote, "all my life is left in you, and yours in me. We want each other and nothing else."[1]

Alexander's lack of vision and personal failings often made him seem irresolute and weak to contemporaries—at times a reformer, at others, an opponent of reform. The judgment of the Moscow historian, professor, and occasional tutor to Alexander's children, Sergei Soloviev, is harsher than some but still valid: "Fate did not send [Alexander II] a Richelieu or a Bismarck; but the point is that he was incapable of using a Richelieu or a Bismarck; he possessed pretensions and the fear of a weak man to seem weak."

Yet, despite his personal flaws, circumstances propelled Alexander II toward enacting the "Great Reforms." After the Crimean War ended in early 1856, the country's main problem was its economic and social backwardness. Indeed, it had been a major cause of Russia's loss to its enemies. In 1856, for example, the Slavophile Yuri Samarin wrote:

> We were defeated [in the Crimean War] not by the external forces of the Western alliance but by our own internal weakness. . . . Now, when Europe welcomes the peace and rest desired for so long we must deal with what we have neglected. . . . At the head of the contemporary domestic questions which must be dealt with, the problem of serfdom stands as a threat to the future and an obstacle in the present to significant improvement in any way.[2]

[1]Alexandre Tarsaidzé, *Katia, Wife before God* (New York, 1970), pp. 162, 166.

2 Martin McCauley and Peter Waldron, eds., *The Emergence of the Modern Russian State, 1855–81* (Totowa, N.J., 1988), pp. 99–100.

EMANCIPATION OF THE SERFS

Causes and Background

The Crimean defeat called into question not only Russia's military prowess, overestimated since the defeat of Napoleon four decades earlier, but also economic traditions that were thought to affect it adversely. Thus, any economic factor that stood in the way of increasing Russia's overall strength was now examined with a new urgency. Many thought, like Samarin, that serfdom was a major impediment to a whole range of economic as well as social improvements.

Nikolai Miliutin, who participated in bringing about the reform, believed that it was necessary to end serfdom to increase agricultural productivity and thereby increase the capital required for industrialization. His friend the legal historian and Westernizer Constantine Kavelin, who had good connections with reform-minded relatives of the tsar, maintained that serfdom was the chief cause of poverty in Russia. Although historians have debated to what extent serfdom retarded economic development, what is crucial is that Alexander II and important figures such as Samarin, Nikolai Miliutin, and Kavelin believed that ending serfdom would strengthen the Russian economy and thereby the country as a whole.

In 1856, General Dmitri Miliutin, the brother of Nikolai, composed a memorandum on army reform in which he indicated the necessity of reducing the size of Russia's traditionally large and costly standing army and creating instead a large trained reserve. He pointed out, however, that this could be done only if serfdom were first eliminated. The historian Alfred Rieber has plausibly argued that Miliutin's thinking, and military considerations in general, strongly influenced the tsar's decision to emancipate the serfs. In 1861, Alexander II made Dmitri Miliutin his minister of war.

Also related to Russia's strength was its great-power status. Larisa Zakharova has written that its loss and diplomatic isolation were the ruling elite's chief fears emanating from the Crimean defeat. These fears, along with a desire to create a more positive view of Russia abroad, helped propel Alexander and his officials toward ending serfdom.

Another cause was the increase in peasant disturbances in recent decades and the fear of massive rebellions in the future. In early 1856, Alexander II told a group of Moscow nobles: "It is better to begin to abolish serfdom from above than to wait until it begins to abolish itself from below." Although Alexander might have alluded to the possibility of dangers "from below" partly to scare Russia's serfowners into working with him to abolish serfdom, he also took the threat seriously himself.

Two additional factors helping to bring an end to serfdom were public opinion and enlightened bureaucrats. Although most serfowners were opposed to losing their serfs, and some land along with them, most leading opinion makers, from the influential radical émigré editor Alexander Herzen to the conservatist publicist M. P. Pogodin, were for emancipation.

From 1857 to 1861, reforming officials such as the tsar's brother, Grand Duke Constantine, and Nikolai Miliutin, deputy minister of interior, were instrumental in preparing for the emancipation of the serfs. The Interior Ministry pressured

FIGURE 22.1. The Kremlin's Grand Palace and churches, Moscow. In August 1856, with the Crimean War now over, Alexander's official coronation took place in the Kremlin.

Lithuanian and then other nobles to establish gentry committees to draft proposals for freeing the serfs. Although most lords wished to free their peasants without providing them land, Alexander II made it clear by the end of 1858 that some gentry land would have to be made available to former serfs.

In the capital, a Main Committee directed the work of the newly established provincial gentry committees, whose various reports were considered by Editing Commissions established in 1859. It was in these commissions, soon combined into one, that Nikolai Miliutin was especially influential in drafting the emancipation legislation of 1861.

Emancipation Statutes

On February 19, 1861, Alexander II signed the legislation into law. The government did not issue Alexander's emancipation manifesto and have it read in the churches until two weeks later—after the annual pre-Lenten carnival-week drinking had come to an end and the populace was, it was hoped, in a sober Lenten mood. The new law was a political compromise between the interests of the nobles and those of the peasants and their supporters, and the government was unsure of the response of either side.

The nearly 400 pages of statutes and annexes that made up the new law were terribly complex, but the emancipation provisions can be summed up as follows: (1) "the right of bondage" over serfs was "abolished forever" (except in some outlying areas of the empire such as the Caucasus, where separate emancipation

legislation came later); (2) new arrangements regarding gentry-peasant relations and landholding were to be worked out in stages during the next few decades; (3) peasants who had previously farmed gentry land, as opposed to household serfs, were eventually to receive land, the exact amount to be determined by a combination of negotiation, government maximum and minimum norms for each province, and the use of mediators; (4) most of this new land was to go to peasant communes, not directly to individual peasants; (5) landowners were to be compensated for their loss of lands by a combination of government notes and peasant payments; and (6) peasants, unless they chose a free and minuscule "beggars' allotment," were obligated to repay the government with annual redemption payments spread over a 49-year period.

This legislation applied only to the country's serfs—about 40 percent of the total population and slightly less than half of all peasants. By the end of 1866, however, the government had promulgated further legislation to bring the status of other peasants more into line with that of the freed serfs. In general, all these peasants were still treated as a separate class: They were judged on the basis of common law, the powers of the communes and households over individual peasants were strengthened, and peasants continued to pay a head tax from which the nobles were exempt.

Reaction of the Peasants and Analysis

As was to be expected, the reaction to the emancipation manifesto was mixed. Many of the emancipated serfs were confused about the complex new statutes and disbelieving or disappointed when told they would have to make payments (for half a century) for land they received. Many peasants believed that the fault lie with evil officials and nobles who were frustrating the tsar's real intentions. They thought that as soon as he overcame these troublemakers, new, more favorable, legislation would

FIGURE 22.2. Serfs on a Moscow noble's estate hear the provisions of Alexander's emancipation decree.
(Novosti Press Agency.)

be forthcoming. Before the year was over, nobles reported more than 1,000 disturbances, most of which required troops to quell. In the summer of 1861, Alexander thought it necessary to admonish a delegation of peasants: "There will be no emancipation except the one I have granted you. Obey the law and the statutes! Work and toil! Obey the authorities and noble landowners!" Despite these disturbances and dissatisfactions, however, David Moon is certainly correct in stating that only a very small percentage of peasants actively opposed the new legislation, while most of the former serfs attempted to obtain the best terms possible under it.

Collectively the former serfs received less land than their pre-emancipation allotments. More than one-fourth of them received allotments insufficient to maintain their households—former serfs of Polish landowners, especially after the Polish rebellion of 1863, and imperial and state peasants came off better. Overall the noble serfowners kept roughly two-fifths of their lands, whereas the ex-serfs, greatly outnumbering them, received the rest. And the peasants eventually paid more for their land than it was worth and received land less suitable than that retained by the owners.

On a more positive note, the ending of the serfs' personal bondage to serfowners was an important step forward, and relatively little bloodshed resulted from the emancipation. Finally, in assessing the settlement, the practical difficulties and realities of the economic and political situation should be noted. The tsar feared to force a more equitable settlement upon a resentful gentry that made up the backbone of the country's elite.

ADDITIONAL REFORMS

Although censorship remained in place, Alexander II eased up on some of its restrictions—during the first seven years of his reign, the number of Russian periodicals increased about eightfold. Furthermore, Alexander II's government enacted measures to improve state financing, allowed more freedom to the empire's universities, expanded educational opportunities, and enacted other minor reforms. Three other major reforms in addition to emancipating the serfs dealt with local government, the judiciary, and the military.

Zemstvo Reform

The zemstvo (or local government) reform was enacted in early 1864 to help fill the void left by the collapse of the gentry's control over their serfs. As with the emancipation legislation, it did not immediately apply to all areas of the empire. Fearful that their establishment in non-Russian areas might provide a forum for separatist sentiments, the government permitted them only in areas where the ethnic Russians predominated; Belorussia and western Ukrainian provinces, for example, were not allowed to establish zemstvo institutions until 1911. The tsars also never permitted them in Siberia. Nevertheless, by the end of Alexander II's reign there were zemstvo institutions in thirty-four of the country's fifty European provinces and in more than 300 districts within these provinces.

District assemblies were elected by three separate electorates: private rural

Peasant Opinions on the Emancipation

The following selection is from D. M. Wallace, *Russia* (New York, 1877), pp. 500–501. This is from the first edition of the Englishman's first-hand observations and reflections. This selection offers valuable insights not only into the peasants' reaction to the emancipation, but also into their general mentality. Ellipses are mine.

It might be reasonably supposed that the serfs received with boundless gratitude and delight the Manifesto. . . . In reality the Manifesto created among the peasantry a feeling of disappointment rather than delight. To understand this strange fact we must endeavor to place ourselves at the peasant's point of view.

In the first place it must be remarked that all vague, rhetorical phrases about free labor, human dignity, national progress, and the like, which may readily produce among educated men a certain amount of temporary enthusiasm, fall on the ears of the Russian peasant like drops of rain on a granite rock. The fashionable rhetoric of philosophical liberalism is as incomprehensible to him as the flowery circumlocutionary style of an Oriental scribe would be to a keen city merchant. The idea of liberty in the abstract and the mention of rights which lie beyond the sphere of his ordinary everyday life awaken no enthusiasm in his breast. And for mere names he has a profound indifference. What matters it to him that he is officially called, not a "serf," but a "free village inhabitant," if the change in official terminology is not accompanied by some immediate material advantage? What he wants is a house to live in, food to eat, and raiment wherewithal to be clothed. . . . If, therefore, the Government would make a law by which his share of the Communal land would be increased, or his share of the Communal burdens diminished, he would in return willingly consent to be therein designated by the most ugly name that learned ingenuity could devise. Thus the sentimental considerations which had such an important influence on the educated classes had no hold whatever on the mind of the peasants. They looked at the question exclusively from two points of view—that of historical right and that of material advantage—and from both of these the Emancipation Law seemed to offer no satisfactory solution of the question.

landowners, peasants, and industrial property owners and merchants. These assemblies, which varied in size but averaged almost forty delegates per assembly, met annually for no longer than ten days. Gentry representatives slightly outnumbered those from the vast peasantry, and together the two estates made up about 80 percent of district-assembly representatives.

One of the main jobs of a district assembly was the election to a three-year term of a district board of three to six members. This board operated year-round, overseeing the work of the zemstvos. Another job of a district assembly was the election of delegates, again for a three-year term, to participate in an annual provincial assembly, which, in turn, elected a provincial executive board. For a variety of reasons, including the gentry's greater education, leisure, and wealth—zemstvo assembly and board service was not remunerated—the gentry furnished a clear majority of the members of zemstvo boards and an even greater majority of provincial assembly representatives.

To carry out their work, boards hired administrative staff and specialists. The latter included teachers, physicians and other medical personnel, veterinarians, agronomists, and statisticians. In areas such as primary education, the zemstvos made a major difference. By the end of Alexander's reign, they were involved in the running of some 18,000 primary schools in European Russia—twenty-five years earlier, there had been only 8,000 in the whole empire. Professional medical and veterinary services often became available to peasants for the first time. The insane, paupers, and orphans also received meaningful assistance from zemstvo workers. By organizing fire brigades and other measures, the zemstvos helped peasants deal with village fires, in addition to offering them fire insurance.

Although the zemstvos were primarily known for these services, the central government required additional functions from them: They had to assist in recruiting and housing troops, maintaining local roads, and operating the postal system. Local taxes were the main source of zemstvo revenues, although they were limited to a small amount compared with central government taxation. Despite the uplifting work of the zemstvos, peasants often blamed them for problems and complained of the additional burden of zemstvo taxes. In Chekhov's story "The Peasants," he writes: "The zemstvo was blamed for everything—for the arrears, the unjust exactions, the failure of the crops."

In 1870, many of the zemstvo principles were copied when the government established town councils (dumas) in the cities. The delegates were selected by three electorates divided by wealth. Again, improvements, especially in education, were soon evident. In St. Petersburg, for example, spending on municipal schools increased tenfold during the last ten years of Alexander II's reign.

Judicial Reform

In late 1864, the judicial reform became law after several years of strenuous effort. It replaced the old arbitrary, backlogged (over 3 million undecided cases before the courts in 1842), corrupt, and despotic judicial system with one based largely on Western principles. As with the previous two "Great Reforms," however, it was not applied immediately in all parts of the empire. Some of its provisions, for example trial by jury, were not introduced at all in Belorussia, parts of Ukraine, Poland, and the Caucasus.

Where it was applied fully, the following principles came into effect: (1) the creation of two separate court systems—for major civil or criminal cases, there were regular courts, and for minor cases, there were courts presided over by a Justice of the Peace, elected by a zemstvo or city duma; (2) rights to appeal under either system to higher courts; (3) the independence of the judiciary from administrative interference and the appointment of judges for life except when removed for moral misconduct; (4) trial by jury for serious criminal cases unless considered crimes against the state; (5) the right to a lawyer; (6) the open publicity of court proceedings; (7) the use of oral testimony and pleadings—as opposed to the use of exclusively written evidence as under the old system; and (8) the establishment of a professional bar.

As sweeping as these changes were, not all elements of the old judicial system disappeared. During the pre-trial phase of a criminal case, for example, the state and its prosecutors and investigators continued to have all sorts of advantages not

available to the defense attorney. The new judicial system also reflected certain Russian cultural traditions different than Western ones. The adversarial nature of the jury trial, for example, was tempered by procedures and practices that encouraged all sides to reach a consensus. One scholar (Bhat) relates this quest to the principal of collegialism that had been displayed in various ways earlier in Russian history, for example by Peter the Great in creating "colleges" instead of ministries (see Chapter 13).

In addition to the new courts, separate military, ecclesiastical, and peasant courts continued to exist. Because the country's peasants made up about four-fifths of the population, their *volost* courts were especially significant. Following the emancipation, the government reconstituted these courts, which had previously existed for state peasants. In each *volost* (an administrative unit generally containing several village communes), peasants now elected from among themselves their own judges. These judges dealt with minor peasant criminal offenses and most civil disputes involving only peasants. They could impose small fines, imprisonment for short periods, and even sentence a peasant to be flogged with a rod for up to twenty blows. Their decisions were to be based upon customary practices, as opposed to written law.

Although the Russian official Nikitenko complained in his diary that the new laws failed to generate widespread discussion or enthusiasm, the new judicial profession that it created did prove popular with university students. By the end of the 1860s, more than half of them were majoring in law.

Military Reform

The fourth major reform, that of the military, was actually a series of reforms culminating in the Universal Military Service Statute of 1874. The driving force behind them was Dmitri Miliutin, who for two decades (1861–1881) served as Alexander II's war minister.

The motivation for reform was the clear necessity of modernizing Russia's military and in a manner as economically efficient as possible. The country's many conquered territories, its continuing expansion, its extensive borders, and its great-power ambitions all seemed to necessitate a strong military. But rubles to finance improvements were scarce. By 1863, the military was already soaking up about one-third of the state's budget.

Therefore, influenced by both military and economic considerations, Miliutin attempted to create a more efficient, streamlined army. To accomplish this, he reorganized the army structure and improved the training and education of both officers and enlisted men. The pre-Crimean War army had emphasized parade ground maneuvers and ignored such basics as target practice. Miliutin rectified this and had recruits taught the basics of reading and writing. Moreover, he set out to improve morale by abolishing the worst abuses of the old military justice system, for example, running the gauntlet, whereby soldiers sometimes died from thousands of blows. Because of rapidly changing armaments and high costs, rearming the military with the latest weapons was more difficult, but Miliutin made some progress even in this area.

One of his greatest desires was to create a large, efficiently trained reserve and

to reduce the length of service in the regular army. By the 1870s, he thought that such a reduction would bring about savings, which could be used for further expansion of the railways—from 1855 through 1870, there had already been about a tenfold increase in the country's railway track. The success of the Prussians in using their railways to mobilize troops during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1871 seemed to strengthen his case, and in 1874 he won a major victory with the enactment of the Universal Military Service Statute.

Its provisions reduced to six years the maximum period of required active service—at the beginning of Alexander II's reign, fifteen or more years was the norm. After a six-year stint, the new law required nine more in the reserves and five in the militia. Lesser amounts of time, however, were usually served. Reductions could be achieved for volunteering or for educational attainment; university graduates, for example, had to serve only six months. Another major change was that now men of all estates could be drafted upon reaching the age of twenty if their names were selected in a draft lottery. Previously the upper classes had been exempt, and pre-reform enlisted men had come almost entirely from the peasants, often from those considered minor criminals or at least troublemakers. As with the emancipation of the serfs, some nobles fought this reform, especially the stipulation making young noblemen liable to the draft. Alexander II stated, however, that military service was a task that should be "equally sacred" for all.

The long-range effect of the military reform, including its emphasis on new training methods, helped to modernize Russia, but at the same time contributed to weakening the "old order." As David Rich and Josh Sanborn have demonstrated, the reforms not only lessened noble privileges, but by stressing more modern qualities and values such as individual initiative and loyalty to scientific military principles and to the welfare of the state, the reforms eventually contributed to the erosion of autocracy.

AUTOCRACY AND ITS OPPONENTS

Although willing to grant sweeping reforms, Alexander II was unwilling to limit his autocratic powers. In 1865, he reacted forcefully to an assembly of Moscow nobles who urged him to create an elected General Assembly to discuss state needs. He dissolved the noble assembly and responded with a document that stated:

> The right of initiative . . . belongs exclusively to ME, and is indissolubly bound to the autocratic power entrusted to ME by God . . . No one is called to take upon himself before ME petitions about the general welfare and needs of the state. Such departures from the order established by existing legislation can only hinder me in the execution of MY aims.[3]

[3]As quoted in Terence Emmons, *The Russian Landed Gentry and the Peasant Emancipation of 1861* (London, 1968), p. 411. Although Alexander II resisted legal limits on his autocratic powers, the Great Reforms and other changes helped weaken his actual controls. See Alfred R. Rieber, "Interest-Group Politics in the Era of the Great Reforms," in *Russia's Great Reforms, 1855–1881*, eds. Ben Eklof, John Bushnell, and Larissa Zakharova (Bloomington, 1994), pp. 79–80.

During this same year, he privately stated that he would sign a constitution if he were convinced that it was good for Russia, but that he knew that the result would only be Russia's disintegration.

Moderate Reformism and Radicalism, 1855–1865

The great Russian writer Leo Tolstoy later described the year 1856 in this way: "Everyone tried to discover still new questions, everyone tried to resolve them; people wrote, read, and spoke about projects; everyone wished to correct, destroy, and change things, and all Russians, as if a single person, found themselves in an indescribable state of enthusiasm." Although ideas and projects were plentiful in the first decade of Alexander II's reign, moderate reformers and radicals were the chief proponents of change.

In 1856, the historian Boris Chicherin wrote: "Liberalism! This is the slogan of every educated and sober-minded person in Russia. This is the banner which can unite about it people of all spheres, all estates, all inclinations." Liberalism, he thought, would also cure Russia of its social ills and enable it to take its rightful place among the nations of the world. In this one word, he wrote, lies "all the future of Russia." Chicherin identified liberalism with various freedoms, including freedom from serfdom, and with due process of law and openness (*glasnost*) regarding government activities and legal procedures.

But the hopes of Chicherin and other liberals were soon smashed on the rocks of Russian reality. Rather than becoming a rallying flag, liberalism increasingly became a target of scorn. Its failure was crucial for the future of Russia.

In the West, liberalism had been supported by a strong middle class and by those wishing to reduce monarchical and governmental powers. In Russia, the middle class was weak, and its businessmen were not especially liberal. In addition, men such as Chicherin and the Miliutin brothers wanted a reforming monarch but did not wish to weaken his powers. In fact, they wanted a strong monarch who would stand above class interests and champion progressive policies in the interest of the entire empire. Thus, as paradoxical as it might seem, Constantine Kavelin (Chicherin's fellow reformer and former professor) wrote about the "complete necessity of retaining the unlimited power of the sovereign, basing it on the widest possible local freedom."

These liberal "statists" soon came into conflict with another group of moderate reformers. They were gentry liberals, whose appetites for political participation had been whetted by involvement in the provincial assemblies set up to discuss emancipation. Already in the late 1850s and early 1860s, most liberal statists had opposed gentry requests for more extensive participation in formulating public policy. Although ideas such as convening an elected national assembly might seem to be liberal, the liberal statists feared such an assembly would be dominated by the gentry and their own narrow interests.

The split between liberal statists and liberal gentry was one reason why a Western-style liberalism was not more successful in Russia. Although the liberal statists correctly feared gentry bias, they failed to perceive adequately the inherent unlikeliness of any lasting marriage between an unlimited monarchy and reform.

If the two liberal groups could not be held together, it was even more unlikely

that the radical Alexander Herzen, then publishing in London, would long cooperate with divided reformers. But this founder of Russian agrarian socialism, who had left Russia in 1847, temporarily toned down his radicalism, hoping to encourage reform. His periodical, *The Bell*, was smuggled into Russia and became essential reading for many liberals and radicals. Each of its few thousand copies passed through countless hands, even those of members of the royal family. It alone delivered news and opinions not subject to censorship. Among its Russian contributors were not only radicals, but also some government officials writing anonymously—for example, Nikolai Miliutin.

From 1857 until 1862, Herzen continued to exert a major influence on Russian public opinion. Although many educated people disagreed with him, not many chose to ignore him. Visiting him in London became a must for Russian intellectuals traveling to Europe, including the writers Tolstoy, Turgenev, and Dostoevsky.

If moderates such as Turgenev tried to restrain Herzen's more militant tendencies, radicals such as Herzen's co-editor Nikolai Ogarev and the fiery Mikhail Bakunin encouraged such leanings. After being imprisoned and exiled for more than a dozen years, Bakunin escaped from Siberia and arrived in London at the end of 1861 eager for revolutionary action. Alluding to his penchant for believing revolution ever imminent, Herzen later wrote that he always "mistook the second month of pregnancy for the ninth."

The influence of Ogarev and Bakunin contributed to Herzen's stepped-up criticism of the government and his increasing support of radical ventures. At the end of 1861, he charged that the government consisted of "riffraff, swindlers, robbers, and whores." In 1862, he aided in the formation of a revolutionary organization called "Land and Liberty." One of the causes supported by this organization was Polish independence. When a full-scale Polish rebellion broke out in January 1863, Herzen supported it in *The Bell*. (For the Polish rebellion, see Chapter 24.) As a result of this support, his popularity and that of his journal plummeted in Russia.

The Polish revolt was the culmination of several years of rising radicalism in the Russian Empire. Student demonstrations led to the closing of St. Petersburg University in 1861, and when mysterious fires broke out in the capital in 1862, many people blamed them on radical students. Blood-thirsty pamphlets such as one entitled "Young Russia" increased the alarm. It called for revolution, for socialism, for the abolition of marriage and the family; and if the defenders of the imperial party resisted, it proclaimed: "We will kill [them] in the streets . . . in their houses, in the narrow lanes of towns, in the broad avenues of cities, in the hamlets and villages."

As a result of Turgenev's controversial novel *Fathers and Sons* (1862), a new word was popularized that some soon applied to such radical beliefs. The term was *nihilism*, and nihilists thought that nothing (*nihil*), including family, society, or religion, should be accepted that was not based on Reason. Many nihilists were noteworthy for their utter contempt for traditional authorities and for their unconventional behavior and appearance (for example, long hair for men or short hair for women).

Although there is some debate as to whether Nikolai Chernyshevsky and Nikolai Dobroliubov should be considered nihilists, they are usually linked with the nihilist Dmitri Pisarev as the most important of the new radical thinkers. All

three men were journalists. Pisarev was the son of a landowner, and Chernyshevsky and Dobroliubov were the sons of priests and members of the *raznochintsy*—a term applied to those who did not fit into any other legal estate.

All three men thought that progress lay in following the path of Reason, science, philosophic materialism, and an enlightened utilitarianism, or "rational egoism," which saw no real conflict between the true good of the individual and that of society. All three also preached the necessity of emancipating women.

Chernyshevsky and Dobroliubov generally believed that the liberals' concern for "rights" and participation in government was not nearly as important to the peasant masses as was climbing out of poverty and stopping a situation whereby "one class sucks another's blood." As the radical Belinsky had earlier put it: "The people need potatoes, but not a constitution in the least."

Pisarev's writings were less political than those of Chernyshevsky and Dobroliubov, who were not only champions of the peasant masses, but also of socialism. Although Chernyshevsky's view of the peasants was in general sober and realistic, the younger Dobroliubov tended more toward idealizing them.

Alarmed by the growing radicalism, the government arrested both Chernyshevsky and Pisarev in mid-1862. Chernyshevsky's two-year imprisonment in the capital's infamous Sts. Peter and Paul Fortress, his subsequent trial, and his nineteen-year exile to Siberia—all based on flimsy and fabricated evidence—were glaring examples of the injustice of the pre-reform legal system. Pisarev's treatment was less scandalous but still harsh; he was jailed for four and a half years for trying to have an illegal article printed. Amazingly, both men were allowed to write while in prison and have some of their works printed legally. While in prison, Chernyshevsky wrote his most famous work, *What Is To Be Done?* (see Chapter 27).

Yet it was the Russian nationalistic reaction to the Polish rebellion of 1863–1864, rather than the earlier arrests of Chernyshevsky and Pisarev, that was most important in slowing, at least temporarily, the growth of radicalism. In the new climate, flirting with radicalism became less popular.

Liberalism was another casualty of the reawakened Russian nationalism and one that did not bounce back as quickly. The nationalist reaction ripped apart any tattered hopes of rallying public opinion around a liberal banner. Just as many liberals in Germany in the 1860s opted for the nationalist policies of Bismarck over their own earlier liberal principles, so too in Russia some liberals became more nationalistic and less liberal as a result of the emotions generated by the conflict with the Poles.

Reformism and Radicalism, 1866–1881

During the last fifteen years of Alexander II's reign, reformism from below made little headway. As the judicial and zemstvo reforms were gradually implemented, many lawyers and zemstvo workers, including physicians and teachers, supported further reforms. So too did several journals, such as *The Messenger of Europe*. Yet, having already implemented most of his major reforms, Alexander II was disinclined to go much further. In fact, after the assassination attempt on him in 1866, a period of reaction set in.

The would-be assassin, Dmitri Karakozov (subsequently hanged), had been influenced by the ideas of a cousin who headed a revolutionary group in Moscow called "Organization." A small cell within it, labeled "Hell," advocated terrorist methods and talked of freeing Chernyshevsky from Siberian exile. Before trying to shoot the tsar, Karakozov composed a manifesto which stated that the tsar was the greatest enemy of the "simple people" and that he enabled the rich to continue exploiting them.

Although Karakozov was acting on his own and the "Organization" that influenced him had only about fifty members, the attempted assassination led to a major government shake-up. The most prominent new appointments, both conservatives, were Dmitri Tolstoi as minister of education and General Peter Shuvalov as head of the Third Section (secret police). Shuvalov often represented the interests of wealthy landowners, and he soon became the second most powerful man in Russia. He remained as head of the Third Section until 1874, when he became ambassador to England. In the eyes of War Minister Miliutin, Shuvalov overemphasized the dangers facing Alexander and was primarily responsible for impeding new reforms.

After Karakozov's arrest, the next big revolutionary case stemmed from a murder committed in 1869 by the revolutionary Sergei Nechaev. After a trip to Switzerland, where he had impressed Bakunin and Ogarev, Nechaev returned to Russia and, with some accomplices, murdered a young revolutionary named Ivanov, who had refused to subordinate himself to Nechaev. Whether there were other causes is not certain. The subsequent publicity given to the murder helped to discredit Nechaev and some of his more unsavory and authoritarian beliefs and tactics—many of these were spelled out in *The Revolutionary Catechism*, a pamphlet he had prepared with the help of Bakunin.

The populist radical movement of the 1870s emerged partly in reaction to Nechaev's methods. One of its first groups, the Chaikovsky Circle, was opposed to having a single leader and thought of itself as a group of friends working together for their own improvement and for the good of the people. At first, the group confined itself primarily to distributing radical literature to various parts of the country and to teaching and propagandizing among city workers and peasants.

The two strongest influences on these young populists were Bakunin and Peter Lavrov. By the beginning of the 1870s, Bakunin had completed the development of his anarchistic philosophy. He believed that any centralized government was incompatible with human liberty and that the state and religion were humankind's two greatest enemies.

Bakunin's ideal, similar to that of Herzen's, was a system of free federated communes. In contrast to Herzen, who by his death in 1870 had foreseen that a revolution of blood would have to be maintained by blood, Bakunin wanted violent revolution. He encouraged young Russians to become brigand-rebels among the peasant masses. Whereas Herzen admired the Russian peasants primarily for their socialistic and democratic tendencies, Bakunin also saw in them potential rebels. Like those who had joined the Razin and Pugachev rebellions of earlier centuries, Russia's peasants, he thought, were just waiting for an opportune time to rebel.

Peter Lavrov was a more moderate man than Bakunin. Like Bakunin, he was

from the wealthy gentry and escaped from Russian exile and settled in Western Europe. From there, he continued to influence young Russian radicals. Both before and after his 1870 escape, he stressed the *debt* of the educated and privileged minority to the masses, a debt they owed because their privileges, including education, had come at the expense of the peasants, who had been exploited for centuries. Although he desired an agrarian socialist society, he emphasized patient educational and propagandistic work among the peasants, rather than trying to incite them to any premature upheaval.

The influence of both Bakunin and Lavrov was especially evident in 1874. That spring and summer, more than 1,000 radicals went into the countryside to work among the masses, to repay their debt to the people. Depending upon the varied inclinations of the radicals, "work" took on various forms: for example, carpentry or cobbling, giving smallpox inoculations, teaching literacy, propagandizing, and fomenting revolution. Many also believed that there was much they themselves could learn from the peasants.

But centuries of oppression had made the peasants naturally wary and cautious. Although they did not generally denounce the radicals to the authorities, they realized that being too receptive to these outsiders might get them in serious trouble. In addition, the mental gap between the peasants and newcomers was often great. And the local gentry and others were often not as reluctant as the peasants to report them to the police. Before the year was out, more than 700 of these populists were arrested.

As a result of the failure of this spontaneous, poorly organized movement, radicals began to emphasize more organization and in 1876 formed a new "Land and Liberty" group. In 1879, however, this group split in two.

It did so primarily because of differences over the use of terrorism. One of the new groups, the Black Repartition, opposed emphasizing it, believing it would distract them from further work among the masses. The other group, the People's Will, thought such tactics were now necessary.

Even before 1879, as the radicals saw their friends arrested, some of them turned to violent methods out of frustration and to facilitate escapes. A forerunner of things to come was the famous case of Vera Zasulich. Because she had heard that General Trepov, the military governor of St. Petersburg, had ordered the flogging of a prisoner, she walked into his office one day in 1878, pulled a revolver out of her muff, and shot him.

Another motivation for now stressing terrorism was the fear of some radicals that capitalism was rapidly developing in Russia and that it would increase the misery of the people. Members of the People's Will blamed the government for being "the greatest capitalist force in the country" and for excessively taxing the peasants to pay for this development. They thought that their best hope of reversing the situation was to overthrow the tsarist government and work toward the establishment of a socialist society. They hoped that terror, especially the assassination of Alexander II, would demoralize the government and awaken the masses to the realization that the government could indeed be overthrown.

Meanwhile, dissatisfaction with the tsarist government had increased. Passions unleashed in the 1876–1877 crusade to help the South Slavs in their battle against the Ottoman Turks were further inflamed by a Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878

(see Chapter 24). But the eventual peace settlement agreed upon at the 1878 Congress of Berlin left many nationalists critical of the government. And the liberal zemstvo assembly of the province of Tver passed a resolution noting that the tsar had helped the Bulgarians establish a liberal constitutional order, which included an elected assembly. The Tver assembly hoped, fruitlessly as it turned out, that Alexander would see fit to grant his own people a similar benefit.

Alexander's continuing relationship with the young Catherine Dolgorukova, which by 1879 had produced three still-living children, was also a source of dissatisfaction to many in royal circles. His treatment of his wife Maria seemed especially shabby to some. Constantine Pobedonostsev, the chief advisor to Tsarevich Alexander, referred privately to Alexander II as a "pitiful and unfortunate man" whose will was exhausted and who wanted "only the pleasures of the belly" [sic][4]. Only six weeks after Empress Maria's death in mid-1880, Alexander married his beloved Katia in a morganatic marriage.

By this time, he was being hunted in earnest by the People's Will, who had already organized a couple of failed assassination attempts. The first had blown up an imperial train but not the one the tsar was on, and the second had killed eleven people in his Winter Palace. After the second explosion, wild rumors spread around the city. The tsar's brother, referring to the terrorists, lamented in his diary: "We do not see, do not know, do not have the slightest idea of their numbers."

To deal with the increase of terrorism after the Russo-Turkish War, Alexander resorted to more authoritarian measures and curtailed some of the previous freedoms of the zemstvos, educational institutions, and the press. Following the explosion in the Winter Palace in early 1880, he appointed a Supreme Administrative Commission. Its head was General Loris-Melikov, who became extremely powerful. Although the commission remained in place only for several months, Loris-Melikov retained his power by then becoming minister of interior.

Loris-Melikov allied himself with Alexander's more progressive ministers, such as Dmitri Miliutin, and combated the influence of more reactionary ministers, such as Dmitri Tolstoi, who was both minister of education and procurator of the Holy Synod. Loris-Melikov also pursued a two-pronged policy of trying to fight terrorism more effectively, while gaining public support for the government. To accomplish the latter, he lessened government restraints on the zemstvos and press and even recommended going one big step further. In early 1881, he presented a plan that provided for the creation of several commissions that would make legislative recommendations in the areas of finance and administration to the tsar's advisory State Council. Moreover, some of the delegates of the commissions would be elected, as would fifteen others who would sit with the State Council to consider the recommendations.

Although this project was a long way from granting an elected national assembly or a constitution to his country, Alexander II expressed fears after approving it that he was "going along the road toward a constitution."

As it turned out, however, the road he went down later that day, March 1, 1881, was the road to his death. Directed by the diminutive Sophia Perovskaia, daughter of a former civilian governor of the capital, People's Will assassins finally

[4]As quoted in Robert F. Byrnes, *Pebedonostsev: His Life and Thought* (Bloomingtn, 1968), pp. 143–144.

FIGURE 22.3. The Church of the Resurrection of the Savior on the Blood, St. Petersburg, 1883–1907, architect A. Parland, was built on the spot where Alexander II was assassinated near the Catherine Canal.

killed him. After a first home-made bomb rocked his carriage and mortally wounded a few people, Alexander got out of his carriage but was then hit by another bomb, thrown by another assassin. It knocked him to the ground and ripped his legs apart. Bleeding profusely, he was rushed to the Winter Palace, but his life could not be saved. Later that same afternoon, the reign of the "tsar liberator" came to an inglorious end.

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