Chapter 19

Nicholas I: Despotism, Reform, and Legitimacy, 1825–1855

Although Nicholas I continued selective Western borrowings and shared his two predecessors' love of the parade ground, he also stressed Russia's uniqueness and its national principals. At the very beginning of his reign, he perceived the Decembrist revolt as reflecting Western ideas and his crushing of it as a manifestation of loyalty to Russian ways. The coronation ceremony and celebrations in 1826 also stressed the unique Russian spirit as well as Nicholas's role as a forceful "pacifier" of subversive elements. His successful wars against Persia and the Ottoman Turkish Empire early in his reign, his smashing of the Polish rebellion of 1830–1831, and his expansion of Russian territory in the Caucasus and Asia contributed further to his image of being a strong champion of Russian interests (see Figure 19.3 for an architectural example projecting this image).

Despite his attempts to portray himself and autocracy in a favorable manner, some of his subjects were overwhelmingly critical of him, especially by the end of his reign. The radical Alexander Herzen called him "Chinghis Khan with telegraphs." The judgment of the nineteenth-century historian Sergei Soloviev, a more moderate contemporary of Herzen, was just as harsh. Although Soloviev was an advocate of strong monarchy and believed Peter the Great the greatest leader in history, he compared Nicholas to the despotic Roman emperor Caligula. In his memoirs, Soloviev faulted Nicholas for turning the Russian people into "sticks"; for suppressing individual and social initiative; and for failing to realize that national strength depended on the realm of the spirit, not just material might. Most leading historians after Soloviev, whether Russian or foreign, were also critical of Nicholas.

There are solid reasons for such negative assessments. Both minority nationalities and independent-minded thinkers suffered from his distrust of diversity and free thought. Although he fought successful wars against Persia and the Ottoman Turkish Empire early in his reign and expanded Russian territory in the Caucasus and Asia, he ultimately weakened Russia by alienating even moderate intellectuals and, in 1853, by entangling Russia in the Crimean War. By the time it ended in 1856, however, he was dead, and his son Alexander was left in the unenviable position of having to conclude it.

Yet there is another side to Nicholas's reign. In his 1978 biography of him, W. Bruce Lincoln provided a needed corrective to balance the prevailing negative view. Lincoln pointed out that Nicholas was also responsible for many initiatives that prepared the ground for the "Great Reforms" of his son Alexander II. Like most of Peter's successors, Nicholas wished to be an enlightened, although absolute, ruler, and he realized that some reforms were necessary if Russia was to remain a great power.

NICHOLAS I: THE MAN AND HIS POLITICAL VIEWS

Nicholas was twenty-nine when he became tsar. He was tall, stern, and humorless and invariably dressed in military uniform. His father, that lover of Prussian-like drill, Paul I, had made him a colonel when he was only four months old and surrounded him with tutors who reinforced a militaristic mentality.

Yet Nicholas's imposing and severe appearance concealed an insecure, nervous man who adopted a military approach to life partly because of the unbending structure and assurance it provided. He was not quite five when his father was murdered in the palace coup that brought his older brother Alexander to the throne. As a youngster, Nicholas displayed a special interest in defensive fortifications and eventually became Alexander I's commander of army engineers. The Decembrist revolt, which attempted to prevent his accession, reinforced Nicholas's insecurity.

Many women, including a young Queen Victoria of England, thought that Nicholas was a handsome, charming, and courteous man. Not surprisingly, he was attracted not only to Prussian-like drilling, but also to a Prussian princess, whom he married and who took the Russian name Alexandra Fedorovna. They had seven children, four boys and three girls. Nicholas the father—like Nicholas the ruler—stressed the virtues of hard work, duty, and patriotism. Despite his sternness and exacting standards, he was, in his own way, a loving father. From his marriage in 1817 until the early 1840s, when Alexandra's poor health seems to have ended their sexual relations, he also apparently was a faithful husband. Even after establishing a lasting liaison with one of his wife's ladies-in-waiting, he continued to value his wife's companionship.

Despite his later infidelity, Nicholas emphasized the importance of family life and thought of himself as a faithful servant of God. It was his religious convictions and high sense of duty, not any love of his work, that kept him laboring at the increasingly difficult job of running his empire. Especially toward the end of his reign, he regarded his obligations as his Christian cross to bear.

His political doctrine (later labeled Official Nationality) was summarized in three words: Orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality. Count Uvarov, his minister of education from 1833 to 1849, first articulated and consistently reiterated the importance of this triad.

Nicholas was a firm believer in autocracy. He once told the French Marquis de Custine that he could not understand representative monarchy because it was typified by "lies, fraud, and corruption."

Orthodoxy was important to Nicholas and his followers not only because it

provided a system of personal religious beliefs, but also because it propped up autocracy. Orthodox priests annually proclaimed a curse on "those who do not believe that the Orthodox monarchies have been elevated to the throne thanks to God's special grace."[1] The Fundamental Laws of the country stated that God ordained that Russians should obey their tsar. Orthodox reminders of human weakness, sinfulness, and the fallible nature of reason served well a regime attempting to keep its subjects in their proper humble places. They were to be loyal subjects, and the all-powerful autocrat was to be their stern but loving ruler. Russian conservatives also valued Orthodoxy because it was so intricately intertwined with Russian traditions and helped ward off unwanted Western influences.

Although Russia's status as a multinational empire has led to some scholarly discussion as to whether "nationality" (*narodnost*) was to refer to the people of the empire or just the ethnic Russians, Nicholas and his followers certainly implied the superiority of the latter and their history and culture. "Uvarov believed it possible to force Russian culture onto Poles, Balts, Jews, and Asiatic tribesmen . . . to turn non-Russians into Russians."[2] Although Nicholas was not as ethno-centered a nationalist as a Slavophile like Yuri Samarin and stressed that love of the emperor united the peoples of the empire, nevertheless "his inclination was to use the stick and to force outright russification in order to achieve a homogeneous empire."[3] (See below for both Samarin and Russification.) Like many Russian conservative nationalists, Nicholas believed "Holy Russia" was superior to a Western Europe more infected with individualism, class struggle, and free-thinking anti-Christian and revolutionary behavior. Although Nicholas's besieged-fortress mentality led him to take many steps to defend Russia against certain Western influences, some of his nationalist followers, such as the historian and publicist M. P. Pogodin (1800–1875), were more offensive-minded and dreamed of spreading Russia's "holy" influence and hegemony, especially over other Slavic peoples.

ADMINISTRATION AND INTERNAL POLICIES

Nicholas's desire for control and order led him to involve himself personally in numerous aspects of government. This became evident at the start of his reign when he questioned many Decembrists and decided their fates. Sometimes he even ordered St. Petersburg's firemen about as they sought to put out the capital's fires. He especially liked "pop-in" inspections, not only of military units, but also of government offices, schools, prisons, and hospitals. The government official Alexander Nikitenko recounted how Nicholas's visit to a secondary school in 1833 led to the dismissal of a history teacher and the superintendent of the St. Petersburg school system, primarily because two students were not sitting up straight.

Nicholas's penchant for control and discipline also led to increasing government centralization; the appointment of trusted military men to run civilian offices

[1]J. S. Curtiss, *Church and State in Russia* (New York, 1940). p. 28.
[2]Cynthia H. Whittaker, *The Origins Of Modern Russian Education: An Intellectual Biography Of Count Sergei Uvarov, 1786–1855* (DeKalb, 1984), p. 108.
[3]Ibid., p. 190.

FIGURE 19.1: Statue of Nicholas I, St. Petersburg, 1859, by P. Clodt. On the pedestal, Faith, Wisdom, Justice, and Might are represented by the faces of Nicholas's wife and daughters.

and ad hoc committees; and the expansion of the emperor's own private Imperial Chancery, which eventually comprised six divisions and often bypassed the established bureaucracy.

Nicholas's drillmaster personality and his suspiciousness often won out over his better qualities and hindered Russian modernization efforts. Of course, the desires of powerful interest groups, such as the wealthy landowning nobles, and Nicholas's desire not to alienate them also blocked the path to some needed changes.

A year after coming to power, Nicholas established the Committee of 6 December to propose minor government reforms. Although no changes of substance were enacted as a result of the committee's work, the fact that it held many meetings over the next five years and that the reform-minded Mikhail Speransky was a member of it indicated that Nicholas was at least open to the possibility of limited reforms. He kept the committee's existence secret, however, wishing to discourage any suggestions from the educated public. Like his brother Alexander, he was not against paternalistic reform, but he wanted only solicited advice and reforms that would not threaten the existing social order.

More fruitful than the efforts of the Committee of 6 December were Nicholas's actions in increasing the size of the government and appointing some capable

individuals to serve it. As compared with Western countries such as Great Britain, France, and Prussia, Russia's government was woefully short of personnel when Nicholas came to the throne. Although it would remain comparatively understaffed and many of its top positions would continue to be dominated by aristocrats, Nicholas increased the ratio of civil servants to population, and from 1836 to 1843 about two-thirds of those who reached the rank that brought with it hereditary-noble status were from nonnoble backgrounds.

Among Nicholas's appointments were Counts L. Perovsky and P. Kiselev. These two men, in turn, made use of the talents of reform-minded men such as Nikolai Miliutin, who was Kiselev's nephew and worked under Minister of Interior Perovsky. As head of a section for reorganizing municipal government, Miliutin worked to prepare a statute that was accepted for St. Petersburg in 1846 and later served as a basis for Alexander II's municipal reforms. Miliutin himself would later be a principal force in helping to bring about the emancipation of the serfs in 1861.

Despite these positive steps, Nicholas's desire for more control contributed to drowning his officials in paperwork. In 1850, Perovsky's Ministry of Interior alone processed more than 30 million documents.

Nicholas's most important reform was overseeing the collecting, codifying, and publishing of almost all the laws enacted since 1649. This herculean task was carried out under the direction of Speransky and the Second Section of Nicholas's Imperial Chancery. By 1833, *The Complete Collection of the Laws of the Russian Empire* and a fifteen-volume *Digest of the Laws of the Russian Empire* were completed. Now it was possible, with a few exceptions, to know what the law was. This helped curtail, but certainly did not end, governmental arbitrariness and was a necessary first step if Russia was to become a state governed by laws. The founding in 1835 of the Imperial School of Jurisprudence was another step forward.

Again, however, Nicholas's fears prevented him from going further. He deliberately withheld from Speransky some secret decrees that he did not want published, and he rejected Speransky's early suggestion that once the old laws were gathered and systematized, the tsar should draft a new law code more in keeping with modern demands. In 1845, Nicholas did issue a new Criminal Code, but forty-five pages of it dealt with crimes against the government, including any attempts to limit autocracy. The code stipulated that even failing to report such attempts made one liable to capital punishment. Mere disrespect toward the tsar could lead to confiscation of property and as many as a dozen years' hard labor.

Nicholas's censorship policies and infamous Third Section of his Imperial Chancery (created in 1826) also reflected both his desire to be an enlightened absolute monarch and his fears of disorder and revolutionary ideas. A censorship law of 1828 was more moderate than an earlier one of 1826 or than conditions prevailing during Alexander I's final years, and Nicholas wished to encourage literature as long as it was not subversive. Yet censorship later became more intense, especially after European revolutions in 1848–1849 alarmed Nicholas more than ever. Ludicrous examples of censorship were numerous; for example, a cookbook was prohibited from using the term "free air," although only referring to oven space.

The Third Section systematized political police functions that had earlier been

haphazard, and it directed paid informers and several thousand blue-uniformed and white-gloved gendarmes. Early in its existence, it suggested to Nicholas certain reforms that might decrease dissatisfaction with the government. Its main job, however, was to prevent, or at least ferret out, subversive activities.

In his approach to Russia's serfs and state peasants, Nicholas again mixed limited reform and extreme caution. In 1842, he recognized that serfdom, as it then existed, was "an evil, palpable and evident to all." But he added that "to attack it now would be even more disastrous." Nicholas had no wish to anger the serf-owning nobles by taking away their most prized right, and he did not wish to awaken peasant expectations. He did approve, however, of some minor steps to ameliorate serf conditions. For example, a law of 1842 *allowed* serfowners to transform their serfs into freer, but still "obligated," peasants. Unfortunately for the serfs, however, any such measures depending on serfowner benevolence were unlikely to have much overall impact.

In dealing with state peasants, Nicholas had less to fear and therefore accomplished more. In 1836, he appointed Kiselev to head a Fifth Section of his Imperial Chancery, charged with directing state peasant affairs. In late 1837, Nicholas created the Ministry of State Domains, with Kiselev as its head, to take over and upgrade the Fifth Section's functions. For the rest of Nicholas's reign, Kiselev tried to improve the lot of the state peasants. He broadened their involvement in local affairs, promoted better farming methods, eventually made more government land available to communes with insufficient amounts, and improved sanitary and educational conditions. Some of Kiselev's reforms, however, brought unwanted government intrusions into peasants' lives and reflected what Kingston-Mann has referred to as "repressive modernization" (see Chapter 20 for more on Kiselev's policies).

By 1848, Nicholas had presided over almost a quarter century of educational growth—both secondary and university students had more than doubled since 1825. Yet his fears following the European revolutionary outbreaks of 1848–1849 led to new educational policies that decreased university enrollments and imposed standard uniforms and haircuts. The government also prohibited the teaching of constitutional law and all philosophy but logic, which was henceforth to be taught only by priests. In addition, professors now had to submit their lecture notes for prior administrative approval.

NICHOLAS AND THE WESTERN NATIONALITIES

In dealing with his empire's non-Russian nationalities, Nicholas's Official Nationality policy blended with his suspicious and order-loving personality to impose more centralized control. Being a cautious man, however, he restrained his centralizing tendencies at times when he feared that imposing them might stir up still waters. Finland was a good example. Appreciating the stability and loyalty of this area won by Alexander I, he continued to allow it considerable autonomy.

Nicholas also displayed restraint in the Kingdom of Poland (Congress Poland) before a rebellion there in 1830. His sense of honor prevented him from violating

its 1815 constitution, but his distaste for the limitations it placed upon him was clear enough.

Although economic and political conditions were better in this "kingdom" than in Russia itself, this offered little solace to Poles inflamed by the spirit of revolution and romantic heroism then in the European air. Coupled with the Poles' accumulated grievances—including the late-eighteenth-century partition of their country and more minor, but still galling, recent complaints—this spirit sparked a rebellion in November 1830. Students from a Warsaw school of cadets attacked Grand Duke Constantine's Warsaw palace. Warsaw workers also soon joined the young rebels. Besides other complaints, the workers were upset by recent increases in grain and alcohol prices.

In the days that followed, the rebellion spread throughout the Kingdom of Poland and beyond to the "western provinces," which had been part of Poland before the late-eighteenth-century Polish partitions. The Polish national army, which had been under Grand Duke Constantine, joined the rebels. But the Poles were hurt by divisiveness between Polish radicals and moderates and by a lack of substantial peasant support. England and France offered only vocal support to the rebels, and by the fall of 1831, superior Russian forces had defeated the Poles.

In 1832, Nicholas replaced the 1815 constitution with an Organic Statute. It no longer permitted a Polish Sejm (Diet) or national army but did allow the Poles to retain separate laws and some participation in government. Although Nicholas gradually increased his control over Polish administration and education, the Poles retained their legal code and right to use Polish in their schools, courts, and lower government offices.

In the Lithuanian, Belorussian, and Ukrainian provinces, where he never had to worry about constitutional scruples, Nicholas now accelerated Russification. He closed the University of Vilna—as he also did the University of Warsaw. Instead, he founded a new university in Kiev (1833). Minister of Education Uvarov made it clear that its task was "to disseminate Russian education and Russian nationality in the Polonized lands of western Russia."[4]

To further this goal in the western provinces, Nicholas and his officials also closed Polish schools and curtailed instruction in Polish, substituting Russian schools and more instruction in Russian. By the end of 1840, Nicholas had abolished in the region the Lithuanian Statute (a law code rooted in Western medieval law) and the Magdeburg Law, which had allowed a city like Kiev certain autonomous legal rights. He also struck at the dominant Polish nobility in these provinces, depriving many thousands of them of their lands and noble status and exiling some far into Russia. Finally, Nicholas chipped away at the Uniate form of Catholicism. He pressured its practitioners to revert to Orthodoxy and ultimately, in 1839, forbade it except in the former Kingdom of Poland .

All these measures inadvertently stirred nationalist reactions. In 1847, a small group of Ukrainian nationalists were arrested. They were members of the secret Brotherhood of Sts. Cyril and Methodius. Although it contained only about a dozen active members and a few dozen sympathizers, two leading Ukrainian figures were associated with it. One was its central founder, Nikolai (Mykola)

[4]Quoted in Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*. 2d ed. (Toronto, 1994), p. 210.

FIGURE 19.2. Kiev University, 1837–1842, by V I. Beretti. Nicholas I himself decided it should be the same color as his Winter Palace, which was then red.

Kostomarov (1817–1885), who just months before his arrest had begun teaching Russian history at Kiev University. The other was the poet Taras Shevchenko (1814–1861), whose writings did more than those of any other nineteenth-century Ukrainian to foster a Ukrainian literary language and a sense of Ukrainian nationhood.

Kostomarov wrote the constitution and guidelines for the society. They stipulated that its members would work toward the creation of a Slavic federation in which nationalities such as the Ukrainians would have their own autonomous national governments. Kostomarov also called for abolishing both serfdom and class distinctions, and he said that the federation should contain democratic institutions similar to those in the United States.

For his activities, Kostomarov was imprisoned in the capital's dreaded Sts. Peter and Paul Fortress for a year and then exiled to Saratov on the Volga. But his punishment was minor compared to that of the better-known and more radical Shevchenko, who was sentenced to ten years in a Siberian military labor battalion. Another response of the government was to issue an imperial decree calling on scholars, writers, and educators to promote loyalty to the Russian Empire over non-Russian nationalist sympathies.

Nicholas's centralizing tendencies also spelled trouble for another nationality residing primarily in the western provinces—the Jews. There were about 1.5 million Jews living in the area and in the Kingdom of Poland. In 1827, Nicholas decreed that henceforth Jews would no longer be allowed to pay a tax in lieu of military service. Henceforth, they were to be subject to the standard draft of

twenty-five years and even longer if they were drafted when under eighteen. In the next three decades, as Michael Stanislawski has noted, "Some seventy thousand Jewish males, most of them children [many younger than twelve], were drafted into an army that swore to eradicate the Jewishness of any of its soldiers who managed to survive. Few returned to their families; most either converted or died."[5] No other nationality saw such a high percentage of its children treated in such a way. By forcing Jewish communities to select such recruits and by imposing additional restrictive cultural, economic, and educational policies upon Jews, Nicholas undercut the stability of Jewish communities.

Toward Baltic Germans, Nicholas was more tolerant, probably because of their conservatism, their record of distinguished state service, and his own Prussian inclinations. For these reasons, he continued to allow separate institutions and laws in the Baltic provinces where the Baltic Germans dominated other nationalities. Yet even here his Official Nationality triad made some inroads, especially the principle of Orthodoxy. The Orthodox Church established a bishopric in Riga in 1836, and the new bishop and other Russian authorities strongly encouraged Latvian and Estonian conversions to Orthodoxy. This was especially true between 1845 and 1847, when some 75,000 of them occurred.

PUBLIC OPINION AND OPPOSITION

Despite Nicholas's harsh treatment of the Decembrists (including members of some of Russia's leading families) and his distrust of educated public opinion, most Russians supported autocracy. Nicholas's reign looked worse in retrospect, after his death and Russia's defeat in the Crimean War, than it did during the heyday of his rule, when Russia still basked in the glory of a military that had defeated Napoleon. Serfs might wish to throw off their shackles, but they blamed the nobles and not the tsar for their plight. Some writers such as Gogol and the poet Tiutchev were ardent supporters of Nicholas's Official Nationality principles. Although most moderates or liberals were critical of some policies, such as Nicholas's stringent post-1848 censorship, they wished a strong, albeit reforming, monarch.

Before 1848, most opposition to Nicholas's government came from a small group of men, mostly nobles, who had once been friends or acquaintances in Moscow. In salons and in academic circles, students of Moscow University and their friends gathered to find meaning for their own lives and that of their country. Two circles were especially prominent in the 1830s. One was headed by Nikolai Stankevich (1813–1840) and included Mikhail Bakunin (1814–1876), Vissarion Belinsky (1811–1848), T. Granovsky, M. Katkov, and C. Aksakov. The

[5]*Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews: The Transformation of Jewish Society in Russia, 1825–1855.* (Philadelphia, 1983), p. 185. Two articles that look at the treatment of Jews, including those under Nicholas I, from a broader perspective are John Klier, "State Policies and the Conversion of Jews in Imperial Russia" in R&E, and Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, "'Guardians of the Faith,' Jewish Traditional Societies in the Russia Army: The Case of the Thirty-Fifth Briansk Regiment," in MSR. Taken together, these two articles indicate that the conversion campaign was haphazard before 1843 and that many Jews in the military continued to practice their faith even after 1843.

other was headed by Alexander Herzen (1812–1870) and his good friend Nikolai Ogarev.

The dominant influence on the Stankevich circle was a succession of German philosophers—Schelling, Fichte, and Hegel. Herzen later ironically described the impact of Hegel and German philosophy:

> People who loved one another parted for whole weeks because they disagreed on the definition of [Hegel's] 'transcendental spirit.' . . . All the insignificant brochures on German philosophy—published in Berlin and other provincial and district towns—where Hegel was only mentioned were written for and read to shreds . . . A man who went to walk in Sokolniki [Park] went in order to give himself up to the pantheistic feeling of his oneness with the cosmos.

Although influenced by Hegel himself Herzen's circle was more politically oriented. In 1834, when the government discovered that Herzen and Ogarev were sympathetic to the ideas of the French utopian socialist St. Simon, they were arrested, imprisoned, and later exiled to the provinces.

By late 1842, Herzen was back in Moscow interpreting Hegel in a new and revolutionary way, and Bakunin and Belinsky also now realized the revolutionary potential of Hegel's ideas, especially the dialectic. Like Karl Marx in Germany, all three men in the early 1840s were influenced by the German Left Hegelianism of individuals such as Ludwig Feuerbach and the ideas of French Utopian socialists such a Charles Fourier.

While Herzen was still in exile in 1836, he read an amazing article that had slipped past the censors and into the journal *Telescope*. It was, said Herzen, "a shot that resounded through the dark night." It was the first "Philosophical Letter" of the Moscow nobleman Peter Chaadaev. It stated that Russia was a wasteland that had contributed nothing of value to civilization, partly because Orthodoxy was not the positive civilizing force that Catholicism was in the West. After Nicholas declared Chaadaev insane and put him under medical and police surveillance, Chaadaev wrote the *Apology of a Madman* (1837). In it he conceded that thanks to Peter the Great's westernizing policies, Russia could still make significant contributions in the future.

Chaadaev's letter began a debate with a group calling themselves Slavophiles. Belinsky, Bakunin, and Herzen, among others, later joined Chaadaev's side and were labeled Westernizers by their opponents. All four men rejected the Slavophiles' belief in the superiority of Orthodoxy and pre-Petrine Russia as well as their contention that Peter I had greatly harmed Russia by trying to westernize it. On the contrary, the Westernizers believed that Peter the Great had performed a great service by attempting to put Russia on the track of Western civilization.

But Belinsky, Bakunin, and Herzen did not share Chaadaev's appreciation of Catholicism or his belief that a "universal mind" was evolving toward the Kingdom of God on earth. They also did not share the moderate westernizing views of others such as the Moscow historian Timothy Granovsky. As the 1840s progressed, the three radical Westernizers became more critical of religion and increasingly sympathetic with socialist ideas that aimed at creating a more humane, reasonable, and just society.

Belinsky was the son of a poor provincial doctor and had been kicked out of the University of Moscow. Thereafter, he made his living as a journalist and as his generation's most influential literary critic. Herzen has left us an excellent portrait of him:

> But in this shy man, in this sickly body dwelt a powerful gladiator's nature . . . When his deepest convictions were touched upon, when the muscles of his cheeks began to tremble and his voice to break, then he was something to behold. He threw himself on his opponent like a snow leopard, he tore him into pieces, made him look ridiculous and pitiful, and in doing so developed his own thought with unusual strength and poetry. The argument ended very often with blood, which flowed from the sick man's throat [Belinsky had tuberculosis].

In 1847, Belinsky wrote a scathing letter to Gogol criticizing him for his *Selected Passages from a Correspondence with Friends*, where he had glorified Orthodoxy, autocracy, and even serfdom. The letter soon circulated in "underground" copies, and only Belinsky's death the following year apparently saved him from prison.[6] Even without the martyrdom of prison, his passionate stand for human dignity guaranteed his reputation among free-thinking youth.

The more robust Bakunin spent the 1840s in Western and Central Europe. By 1842, he was preaching the complete destruction of the old order. He met and was influenced by revolutionary thinkers, including Karl Marx and the French anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. In 1848, he summarized his views at the time in an *Appeal to the Slavs*. It called for Slavic workers and peasants to rise up and dismantle the Austrian, Russian, and Turkish empires by forming a free and democratic Slavic federation.

In the revolutionary years of 1848–1849, Bakunin was a whirlwind of revolutionary activity. He took part in revolutionary activities from Paris to Prague, and he was eventually arrested and then condemned to death by two governments before being handed over to Russian authorities in 1851. He soon found himself in solitary confinement in the Sts. Peter and Paul Fortress.

In 1847, Herzen left Russia and never returned. The failure of the 1848–1849 European revolutions greatly disillusioned him, and like his former Slavophile rivals, but for different reasons, he began glorifying the Russian peasant commune. With its self-governing structure and its periodic redistribution of land, he now saw it as the best hope in the world for developing democratic socialism. First, of course, it would have to be liberated from the shackles of an oppressive state and class system.

But Herzen was also mindful that illiterate masses and their leaders might oppress individuality if they came to power. Thus, he stressed the importance of respecting individual rights and warned against subordinating the individual to abstract concepts and ideals.

The Slavophile rivals of the Westernizers, some of whom had participated in the same salons and circles, were not as reactionary as many of the defenders of

[6]For excerpts from this letter and more on Belinsky as a literary critic, see Chapter 21.

Nicholas's Official Nationality. Essentially Moscow nobles, the group included Alexei Khomiakov, Ivan and Peter Kireevsky, Constantine and Ivan Aksakov, and Yuri Samarin. Although they defended the principles of Orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality, they were wary of St. Petersburg—that city of the westernizing Peter the Great—and its government, and they were opposed to serfdom.[7] Although later Western scholars have often criticized the Slavophiles for their romantic glorification of the Russian peasant and peasant commune, Kingston-Mann has recently argued that the Slavophile attitude toward the peasants was both more realistic and enlightened than that of the Westernizers of the 1840s. In addition to criticizing serfdom, the Slavophiles thought government censorship went too far, and occasionally they crossed Nicholas's rigid line of the permissible. One of the younger Slavophiles, Yuri Samarin, was even imprisoned for twelve days (in March 1849) in the Sts. Peter and Paul Fortress for suggesting that the power of the Baltic Germans should be curtailed. Following this sobering experience, Nicholas—always the scolding father figure—had this young noble brought directly from prison to the royal palace, where the tsar reprimanded him.

A month later, Nicholas's Third Section uncovered what it considered far more serious opposition—the Petrashevsky Circle. Its leader was a nobleman and minor official in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who sometimes walked around St. Petersburg in a cape and sombrero and hosted freewheeling Friday-night discussions at his home. He was an ardent believer in the utopian socialist principles of Fourier and in Feuerbach's belief that humans could transform their lives to a higher plane if they liberated themselves from their religious myths. Like some others influenced by Western ideas, however, his approach to the Russian peasants failed to adequately consider their own desires. After he attempted in 1847 to transform one of his serf villages into a Fourier-like commune (a phalanstery), his serfs burned down the buildings intended to house the new arrangement.

Although Petrashevsky was willing to wait until such minor experiments, talk, persuasion, and legal reforms changed society, a more conspiratorial, revolutionary group formed among some of his Friday-night visitors. One of its members was the young writer Fedor Dostoevsky (1821–1881). He agreed to help set up a secret printing press and read, on several occasions, Belinsky's famous forbidden letter to Gogol.

For their participation in the Petrashevsky Circle, fifty-one individuals were sentenced to exile. Twenty-one more, including Petrashevsky and Dostoevsky, were condemned to death. After eight months in the Sts. Peter and Paul Fortress, the condemned men were brought to a public square at dawn where a firing squad awaited them. Only at the last minute, after convincing them that they were soon to die, did Nicholas let them know their real sentences—for Dostoevsky it was to be four years in a Siberian prison and then forced military service.

For the rest of Nicholas's reign, few intellectuals dared openly express any radical ideas. Yet the diverse dissatisfaction with the present order, which was already

[7]For an overview of the numerous debates about Russia's identity as it related to Europe and Asia and whether it was a nation-state, multinational empire, or something in between, see Vera Tolz, *Russia*, Inventing the Nation Series (London, 2001). See also below, Chapter 24.

growing among Russian intellectuals during the 1840s, was only exacerbated by Nicholas's increasingly reactionary policies after 1848. The Crimean War, which he began but did not live to finish, further discredited him by its failure. By 1858, three years after Nicholas's death, many intellectuals shared the sentiment that the moderate official and lover of literature A. V. Nikitenko expressed in his diary: "Nicholas's reign . . . was all a mistake."

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND RUSSIAN EXPANSION

Although Nicholas's fear of revolutionary movements and his adherence to Orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality carried over into his foreign policy, it was harder to apply the three principles internationally. Moreover, considerations such as trade and geopolitics also affected his dealings with other countries and peoples. In general, in dealing with foreign countries, he supported the status quo and "legitimate" rulers as the best defense against revolution.

His reign began with a war with Persia (1826–1828). The conflict started when Persian troops, hoping to regain Caucasian territories lost to Alexander I, crossed into Russian territory. But the Treaty of Turkmanchai, which ended the war after a series of Russian victories, only added to Russia's Caucasian gains. Persian Armenia, including the city of Erevan, now became part of the Russian Empire.

Further north in the Caucasus, Muslim mountaineer tribesmen rebelled against Russian incursions, which under General A. P. Ermolov, Commander of the Caucasus Corps (1816–1827), had become especially brutal. By the late 1820s, such policies had incited a "holy war" against the Russian infidels. The rebellion centered in Chechnia and Dagestan. The mountaineers resented the advance of fortified government settlements and Cossacks, the burning of Muslim villages, the cutting of their forests, and the loss of their winter pasturelands in the plains. Nicholas was determined to pacify the mountaineers even if it meant the "extermination of the unsubmissive."[8]

In the mid-1830s, after the death of several Muslim leaders, a remarkable warrior named Shamil assumed leadership. He advocated a radical type of Sufi Islam that preached egalitarianism, holy war, and accepting only laws based on Islamic teaching. To deal with Shamil, in 1844 Nicholas I appointed Mikhail Vorontsov (see Chapter 18 for his previous career) as viceroy of the Caucasus, and Vorontsov attempted to win over less radical Muslims by granting various religious and socio-political rights. In the words of one scholar, "the official Muslim clerics [who did not accept Sufi Islam as legitimate] enjoyed a degree of autonomy in their religious affairs that was unparalleled in the empire since the days of Catherine II."[9] Yet, despite such concessions and having more than 200,000 troops in the Caucasus in the 1840s, the Russians could not stamp out the

[8]Cited in Firuz Kazemzadelt, "Russian Penetration of the Caucasus," in *Russian Imperialism from Ivan the Great to the Revolution*, ed. by Taras Hunczak (New Brunswick, N.J., 1974), p. 253.
[9]Firouzeh Mostashari, "Colonial Dilemmas: Russian Policies in the Muslim Caucasus, " in R&E, p. 240.

Muslim holy war. Only after the death of Nicholas was Shamil finally captured and the war brought to an end.

In Central Asia, Nicholas had to face hostility from Muslim Kazakhs, who numbered about 1.5 million and were largely nomadic and pastoral. As in the Caucasus, the native peoples resisted the advance of Russian settlers (still relatively small in number) and the building of Russian forts. They also resented the imposition of centralized Russian authority and taxes. Yet, despite several open rebellions, Russia extended its control over the Kazakh steppe throughout Nicholas's reign. By 1855, Russia had advanced to the western portions of the Syr-Daria River and in the east to Fort Vernoe (later Alma-Ata).

Further to the east, the dynamic governor-general of Eastern Siberia, N. N. Muraviev, pushed forward along the Amur River region claimed by China. In the early 1850s, Russia established Nikolaevsk at the mouth of the Amur and laid claim to the island of Sakhalin (see Map 24.1).

In foreign affairs, Russia, Prussia, and Austria supported the status quo and "legitimism" in repressing Polish revolutionary sentiments. In 1849, Nicholas displayed his fidelity to legitimism by sending more than 350,000 troops to put down Hungarians (and some Poles) rebelling against their "legitimate" Austrian sovereign.

But support for legitimism sometimes conflicted with Nicholas's other priorities. This was especially true in dealing with the Ottoman Turkish Empire, where a Muslim sultan ruled over many non-Muslims, including Balkan Orthodox Christians. Turkish control of the straits (the Bosphorus and Dardanelles) leading from the Black Sea to the Aegean further complicated Russo-Turkish relations, for access through them to the Mediterranean had become vital to Russia's economic interests.

Nicholas's first war with the Ottoman Turks (1828–1829) was a legacy of unfinished business left to him by Alexander I. At the time of Nicholas's accession to the throne, the Greeks were continuing the rebellion they had begun against the Turks in 1820–1821. Acting in concert with the British and French, and contrary to his usual defense of legitimism, Nicholas assisted the rebelling Greeks. In October 1827, in the battle of Navarino Bay, Russian, French, and British naval squadrons destroyed most of an Egyptian fleet sent by the sultan to put down the Greek rebels.

Yet Nicholas's actions leading up to Navarino Bay were not motivated by sympathy for the Greeks, even though they shared his Orthodox beliefs. He thought them reprehensible rebels. He violated his own belief in legitimacy primarily to further Russia's aims. Making use of the sultan's precarious position in the face of the coalition against him, Nicholas, in 1826, forced the sultan to accept several ultimatums. By the Akkerman Convention, the sultan agreed to honor previous treaties, which Nicholas thought the Turks had been violating, and to grant navigation rights to Russian merchant ships through the Straits and in Turkish waters.

Two months after the battle of Navarino Bay, the sultan, hoping to take advantage of loosening ties between Russia and its two Western allies, repudiated the Akkerman Convention and called for a holy war. He then closed the Straits to Russian merchant ships. In April 1828, two months after concluding peace with

FIGURE 19.3. Moscow Gate in St. Petersburg, 1834–1838, by V. P. Stasov. This triumphal arch commissioned by Nicholas I was to commemorate his successful campaigns against Persia and Turkey.

Persia, Nicholas declared war against Turkey and shortly thereafter sent troops into the Turkish Danubian principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia.

After Russian victories in the Balkans, where Nicholas personally participated, and the Caucasus, the sultan agreed to peace terms. By the Treaty of Adrianople (1829), he once again pledged to honor the Akkerman Convention, ceded territory to Russia in the Caucasus and at the Danube's mouth on the Black Sea, and recognized Moldavia and Wallachia as a temporary Russian protectorate (see Map 18.1). Greek independence, which was greatly facilitated by Russia's victory, was insured the following year by a conference in London, where Russia, Britain, and France agreed to guarantee it.

In 1832, Nicholas was able to show his support for legitimism by supporting the sultan against his rebellious Egyptian vassal, Mohammed Ali. For helping to turn back the challenge of the rebel armies, Nicholas received new gains in the Treaty of Unkiar-Skelessi (1833). By its provisions, good for eight years, the Turks agreed to close the Dardanelles to foreign war ships, and Russia agreed to support Turkey if attacked by another power.

After another revolt by Mohammed Ali (1839–1840) and the expiration of Unkiar-Skelessi, it was replaced by a broader Straits Convention (1841). In it, the five major European powers (Austria, Britain, France, Prussia, and Russia) and Turkey agreed on the Turkish prohibition of foreign warships through the Straits during peacetime.

THE MILITARY AND THE CRIMEAN WAR

Russia's army looked much better on paper and on the parade ground than it did in battle. On the eve of the Crimean War (1853–1856), it had about 1 million men and was the largest in Europe. Partly because of Nicholas's penchant for discipline and order, he and his officers strongly emphasized inspections and parades. They also thought that parades were good preparation for battle, and battlefield tactics emphasized marching in formation into battle and defeating the enemy with a bayonet attack.

Conditions in the army were not good, however, and its quality was not high. The enlisted men were overwhelmingly illiterate peasants who had to serve fifteen or more years of active service (at the beginning of Nicholas's reign, twenty-five years had been the requirement). Nobles, merchants, and some others were exempt from mandatory service. Moreover, many of the conscripts had been selected because they had displeased one authority or another, often on the communal level. Army discipline and punishments were severe. Especially draconian was the punishment of running the gauntlet, which consisted of passing through rows of soldiers who beat the offender with wooden rods. These beatings—as many as 2,000 blows might be delivered—sometimes led to death. If battles or beatings did not end conscripts' lives prematurely, diseases often did. In the twenty-five years before the Crimean War, about 1 million soldiers died other than in battle, mostly from diseases.

Partly because of Nicholas's experience with the Decembrists, he and his command staff distrusted innovative and intellectual officers. Neither the training nor the military thinking of Nicholas's officers was up to the challenge of the Crimean War. Officers were also frequently involved in graft. Nicholas himself cited one case in which an officer used enlisted men and even some soldiers' wives in various personal enterprises ranging from stealing and processing lumber to caring for his oxen, sheep, and camels.

An untypical officer was the writer Leo Tolstoy, who was an artillery sublieutenant in the Crimean War. He recognized many of the abuses in the army and in early 1855 planned to write a *Plan for the Reform of the Army*. Although he soon abandoned the idea, he did write, "We have no army, we have a horde of slaves cowed by discipline, ordered about by thieves and slave traders." The most intelligent officers and enlisted men were found in the artillery and the engineers—where Dostoevsky had briefly served as a young officer in the early 1840s.

The deficiencies in the army also extended to animals and equipment. Cavalry horses, fattened with oats and beer, looked healthy enough on the parade ground but were often far from the tip-top shape required for war duty. The situation in regard to rifles was even worse. In the Crimean War, Russian infantrymen were armed overwhelmingly with outdated muskets that were no match for the more accurate, rapid, and longer-range percussion rifles carried by many French and British troops.

The most obvious cause of the war was a dispute between Russia and France over Orthodox and Catholic rights in the Holy Lands, then part of the Turkish Empire. Partly because Orthodox pilgrims to Jerusalem and other Holy Lands overwhelmingly outnumbered Catholic ones and because the Orthodox spent

generously to keep up the holy shrines, Russia had been able to persuade the sultan to allow the Orthodox special privileges there. From the late eighteenth century until the mid-nineteenth century, France had not seriously challenged the Orthodox claims backed by Russia. In 1851, President—soon to be Emperor—Louis Napoleon, in a bid for Catholic support at home, attempted to persuade the sultan to grant Catholics more rights. By late 1852, he had wrung some concessions from the sultan, including a promise to grant Catholics a consultative role regarding the restoration of a cupola at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher (Tomb of the Lord) in Jerusalem and to furnish them a set of keys to Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity.

Nicholas was displeased by this course of events. According to Goldfrank, the tsar's "fixation" on Orthodox rights at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem was especially crucial. In February 1853, Nicholas sent a special envoy, Prince A. S. Menshikov, to Constantinople. He remained for several months attempting to gain formal Turkish recognition of Orthodoxy's superior rights in the Holy Land—thus repealing France's recent gains—and Russia's right to protect Turkey's 12 million Orthodox subjects. The latter claim was based upon a debatable interpretation of the 1774 Treaty of Kuchuk Kainarji and was especially worrisome to the Turks, who saw it as a wedge for further Russian interference in the internal affairs of their empire.

Believing, with justification, that France and Great Britain would not stand idly by if Russia attacked Turkey, the sultan refused Menshikov's demands. In the beginning of July 1853, Russian troops crossed the Pruth into Turkey's Danubian principalities (Moldavia and Wallachia). Despite a flurry of unsuccessful diplomatic activity in the next few months, Turkey declared war in October. After Nicholas ignored a British–French demand that he withdraw from the Danubian principalities, the two Western powers declared war on Russia in March 1854. In early 1855, Sardinia also entered the allied side against Russia.

Besides Russia's intercession for Orthodox Christians in the Ottoman Empire, there were other causes of the war. They included miscalculations and mistrusts fostered by rising nationalism in Europe, a phenomenon that made it increasingly difficult for the powers to continue the post-Napoleonic concert system of cooperation.

Nicholas's past diplomatic and military successes, especially in dealing with Turkey, made him overconfident. He failed to foresee Britain's resolve in backing Turkey, and he later expressed bitterness toward such nations that called themselves Christian but supported his Muslim Turkish foe. He insisted, apparently sincerely, that he had no desire to dismantle the Turkish Empire, only that if this "sick man" of Europe expired on its own, he wished to share the spoils.

But British mistrust of Russia was high by 1853, both among its diplomats and among the British public. Britain's interests in the Eastern Mediterranean and India made it wary of any expansion of Russian influence or territory southward. British as well as French public opinion was also hostile toward Nicholas (the "gendarme of Europe") because he was perceived as the chief opponent of freedom in Europe. Thus, Western animosity to Russia in the early 1850s bore some resemblance to Cold War hostility to the "Russian bear" a century later.

The Marquis de Custine on Russian Imperialism

Public opinion in the West was strongly influenced by the publication in 1843 of Marquis de Custine's classic *La Russie en 1839*. It was a "best-seller" in France and soon afterwards also appeared in translation in other countries, including England. Even though prohibited in Russia, copies found their way into the hands of intellectuals like Alexander Herzen. Custine's scathing criticism of Russia entered into the debate between Slavophiles and Westernizers. The following excerpt is taken from the English translation, *Russia* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1854), pp. 482, 488–489. It illustrates well both the dislike of Russia's autocracy and an almost paranoid fear of its intentions toward the rest of Europe. Ellipsis marks are mine.

I have found among the Russians that the principles of absolute monarchy, applied with inflexible consistency, lead to results that are monstrous. . . .

An ambition inordinate and immense, one of those ambitions which could only possibly spring in the bosoms of the oppressed, and could only find nourishment in the miseries of a whole nation, ferments in the heart of the Russian people. That nation, essentially aggressive, greedy under the influence of privation, expiates beforehand, by a debasing submission, the design of exercising a tyranny over other nations: the glory, the riches, which it hopes for, console it for the disgrace to which it submits. To purify himself from the foul and impious sacrifice of all public and personal liberty, the slave, upon his knees, dreams of the conquest of the world.

It is not the man who is adored in the Emperor Nicholas—it is the ambitious master of a nation more ambitious than himself. The passions of the Russians are shaped in the same mould as those of the people of antiquity: among them every thing reminds us of the Old Testament: their hopes, their tortures, are great, like their empire.

There, nothing has any limits—neither gifts, nor rewards, nor sacrifices, nor hopes: the power of such a people may become enormous: but they will purchase it at the price which the national of Asia pay for the stability of their governments—the price of happiness.

Russia sees in Europe a prey which our dissensions will sooner or later yield to her.

As so often happens, innumerable smaller details also tipped the scales toward war. For example, Menshikov forgot to bring maps of the Ottoman Empire with him when he came to Constantinople in February 1853. This delayed negotiations for three crucial weeks, weeks in which the British ambassador was absent from Constantinople and the sultan might have been more compliant.

Once the war began, Russia became more diplomatically isolated. A month after Britain and France declared war, Austria and Prussia agreed to oppose any Russian attempt to annex the Danubian principalities, and Austria leaned increasingly in an anti-Russian direction, even demanding Russia's evacuation of the principalities. Nicholas became furious toward Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph, whom he had helped in Hungary in 1849. After hearing of Austria's demand, Nicholas turned a picture of the Austrian Emperor against the wall and wrote on the back of it "*Du Undankbarer!*" (You Ingrate!) After Russia withdrew from the principalities in August 1854, Austrian troops moved in.

In September, allied forces landed on the Crimean peninsula and a month later began the bombardment of Sevastopol. Thanks largely to the engineering fortifications of Colonel Todleben, Sevastopol was able to hold out for almost a year. Yet, despite the heroism and sacrifices of the Russian defenders of Sevastopol (realistically portrayed by Tolstoy in his *Sevastopol Sketches*) and despite some Russian victories in the Caucasus, Russia's handicaps were too great. Besides its outdated muskets, it was hampered by its perceived need to protect the Russo-Austrian border and St. Petersburg, by a backward transportation system, and by poor military leadership.

About a year after Nicholas's death in early 1855, his son and heir Alexander II was forced to agree to the Treaty of Paris. By its terms, Russia had to give up the mouth of the Danube, a chunk of Bessarabia (to Moldavia), and its claims to act as an exclusive protector in either the Danubian principalities or over all of Turkey's Orthodox subjects. Most galling of all were the clauses that prohibited any Russian (or other) warships or coastal fortifications in the Black Sea. Thus, after sacrificing 0.5 million Russian lives in the war, many to diseases, Russia gained only a humiliating peace treaty.

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