The Constitutional Agitation in Russia

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1905-01

Contents

The greatest excitement has prevailed in Russia for the last few weeks since it became known that representatives of the Zemstvos of thirty-four provinces of the Empire were going to meet at St. Petersburg in order to discuss the necessary reforms in the general political organization of the country. The very fact that such an authorization had been granted was equivalent to an invitation to discuss a scheme of a Constitution; and so it was understood everywhere. When the Zemstvo delegates were leaving their respective provincial towns they were sent off by groups of enthusiastic friends, whose parting words were: 'Return with a Constitution!'

Their original intention was to make of their conference a solemn official gathering which would speak to the Government in its official capacity, but at the last moment the Minister of the Interior refused to grant the necessary authorization; and as the Zemstvo delegates declared that they were decided to meet nevertheless, they were informed that they could do so only in private, and that their conference would be treated as a private gathering, but that their resolutions could be handed by a few delegates to the Minister of the Interior, and through his intermediacy to the Emperor. This is how this Conference, which surely will become an important historical date, took place on the 19th, 20th, and 21st of November at St. Petersburg.

The decisions of the Conference were expressed in eleven resolutions, which, as will be seen presently, are now becoming the program of an agitation which is gradually spreading all over Russia. Moreover, in contrast with all the petitions addressed to the Czar on previous occasions by certain Zemstvos, the present memorandum is couched in far more dignified language and in definite terms. It begins by mentioning the abnormal character of State government which has developed since the beginning of the eighties [1881], and consists in a complete estrangement of the Government from the people, and the absence of that mutual confidence which is necessary for the life of the State' (Section 1). 'The present relations hetween the Government and the people'—they say further on—' are based on a fear of the people's self-administration, and on the exclusion of the people from the management of State affairs' (Section 2). The result of it is that while the bureaucracy separates the Supreme Power [read *The Emperor*] from the nation, it thus creates the very conditions for an entire lawlessness in the administration, in which the personal will of every functionary takes the place of law (Section 3). This destroys confidence in the Government and hampers the development of the State (Sections 3 and 4). Consequently, the Zemstvos express the following desiderata, which deserve to be given in full, because in such history-making documents as this the wording is almost as important as the general idea:

> (5) In order to put an end to this lawlessness of the Administration, the inviolability of the individual and the private dwelling must be proclaimed and thoroughly carried out in life. Nobody can have a punishment or any restriction of his rights inflicted upon him without a sentence having been pronounced to this effect by an independent magistrate. For this purpose it is moreover necessary to establish such a responsibility of the members of the Administration as would allow of their being legally prosecuted for each breach of the law, in order thus to secure legality in the actions of the functionaries.
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> (6) For the full development of the intellectual forces of the nation, as also the expression of the real wants of society and the free exercise of public opinion, freedom of conscience, religion, speech, and press, as also of meeting and association, must be guaranteed.
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> (7) The personal and political rights of all the citizens of the empire must be equal.

(8) Self-administration being the main condition for the development of the political and economical life of the country, and the main body of the population of Russia belonging to the class of the peasants, these last must be placed in the conditions that are necessary for the development of self-help and energy, and this can only be obtained by putting an end to the present subordinate and lawless position of the peasants. Therefore it is necessary: (a) to equalize the rights of the peasants with those of all other classes; (b) to free them from the rule of the Administration in all their personal and social affairs; and (c) to grant them a regular form of justice.

(9) The provincial and the municipal institutions which are the main organs of local life must be placed in such conditions as to render them capable of performing the functions of organs of self-administration, endowed with wide powers. It is necessary for this purpose: (a) that the representation in the Zemstvos should not be based on class principles, and that all forces of the population should be summoned, as far as possible, to take part in that administration; (6) that the Zemstvo institutions should be brought nearer to the people by instituting a smaller self-administrative unit;[1] (c) that the circle of activity of the Zemstvos and the municipal institutions should include all the local needs; and (d) that these institutions should acquire the necessary stability and independence, without which no regular development of their activity and their relations to the organs of the Government is possible. Local self-government must be extended to all the parts of the Empire.

(10) For creating and maintaining a close intercourse between the Government and the nation, on the basis of the just-mentioned principles, and for the regular development of the life of the State, it is absolutely necessary that representatives of the nation, constituting a specially elected body, should participate in the legislative power, the establishment of the State's budget, and the control of the Administration. [The minority of the conference, consisting of twenty-seven persons, accepted this paragraph only as far as the words 'should participate in the legislative power.']

(11) In view of the gravity and the difficulties of both the internal and external conditions which the nation is now living through, this private conference expresses the hope that the supreme power will call together the representatives of the nation, in order to lead our Fatherland, with their help, on to a new path of national development in the sense of establishing a closer union between the State's authority and the nation.

This memorandum, signed by 102 delegates out of 104—two abstaining—was handed to Prince Sviatopolk Mirsky, and through him to the Emperor. Four more resolutions were taken later on by the same Conference, and they offer a special interest, as they represent a first attempt at legislation upon a definite subject in the form, well known in olden times in this country, of a

[1] The smallest self-administrating unit is now the district (uyezd), which embodies from 100,000 to 200,000 inhabitants. The next unit below it, the canton (volost), has also a self-administration, but only for the peasants. The Zemstvo resolution asks for a self-governed canton, composed of all the inhabitants, while the peasant self-government would be limited to the village community. It must be said that all the peasant self-government, introduced in 1861, had been entirely wrecked under Alexander III. by the introduction of special 'land-chiefs,' nominated by the Governor of the Province, and endowed with unlimited rights.

Royal petition. Three of these resolutions, which concern education, blame the Government for its negative attitude in this matter, and ask full freedom for the Zemstvos to deal with it; while the fourth demands the abrogation of the state-of-siege law and an amnesty in the following terms:

> Considering that the Law of the 26th of August 1881, embodying the Measures for the Maintenance of Order in the State [state-of-siege law] is one of the chief causes which favor the development of lawlessness in the Administration and breed popular discontent, which both stand in the way of mutual confidence and unity between the Government and the population, the Conference finds that the repeal of this law is desirable. Besides, taking into consideration that the system of administratively inflicted penalties, which has been applied lately on a large scale in virtue of that law, has produced a great number of victims of the arbitrary actions of the Administration who are now suffering various penalties and limitations in their legal rights, the Conference considers it its duty to express itself in favor of a complete remission of all penalties inflicted by mere orders of the Administration. It expresses at the same time the hope that the Supreme Power will introduce pacification in the country by an act of amnesty for all persons undergoing penalties for political offenses.

The Press was not permitted to mention the Zemstvo Conference, or to discuss its resolutions; but the latter were hectographed in thousands of copies at St. Petersburg, reprinted in a more or less clandestine way in many cities, and spread broadcast all over Russia. On the other side, as soon as Sviatopolk Mirsky had made his declarations about the need of 'confidence between the Government and the nation'—confirming his declarations by the release of a small number of 'administrative' exiles—the Press at once adopted quite a new tone. The need for a new departure, under which the nation would be called to participate in the government of the country, began to be expressed in a very outspoken way. All the main questions concerning the revision of taxation, the necessity of not merely returning to the original law of the Zemstvos (altered in 1890), but of revising it in the sense of an abolition of the present division into 'orders'; the necessity of reestablishing the elected Justices of the Peace, and of granting a thorough self-government to all the provinces of the Empire; the equality of political rights of all citizens, and so on—these and numbers of similar questions are discussed now with the greatest liberty in the daily Press, and nobody conceals any longer his disgust of the reactionary *régime* which has swayed Russia for the last thirty years.

Of course, censorship continues to make its victims. The review *Law (Pravo)* has already received two warnings, and of the two new dailies, one (*Son of the Fatherland*), which came out under a new 'populist' editorship, is already suppressed for three months; while the other (*Our Life*), which has Social Democratic tendencies, has its sale in the streets forbidden. With all that, the Press, with a striking unanimity, support the Zemstvo resolutions, without naming them. Even the *Novoye Vremya*, which has always vacillated between ultra-Conservative and Liberal opinions, according to the direction of the wind in the upper spheres, is now Constitutionalist. As to the ultra-reactionary Prince Meschersky, owner of the *Grazhdanin*, he has published some of the most outspoken articles against the old *régime*—only to turn next day *against* those who demand a Constitution. Since 1861, this gentleman's house has been the center of a semi-Slavophile but chiefly landlord and bureaucracy opposition to the reforms of Alexander the Second. Hold

was adroitly taken in this center of the two successive heirs to the throne, Nikolai Alexandrovitch and his brother, who became later on Alexander the Third, in order to secure, through them, an overthrow of all the reforms made by their father.[2] Now, the *Grazhdanin* reflects the unsettled condition of mind in the Winter Palace spheres. The *Moscow Gazette* is thus the only consequent defender of the old *régime*. At the same time, the provincial Press acquires a new importance every day, especially in Southern, South-Western, and South-Eastern Russia. I have several of these papers before me, and cannot but admire the straightforward and well-informed way in which they discuss all political questions. They reveal quite a new provincial life.

It would be impossible to render in a few words the depth and breadth of the agitation provoked in Russia by the Zemstvo Conference. To begin with, 'the Resolutions' were signed at once by numbers of persons of high standing in St. Petersburg society, who do not belong to the Zemstvos. The same is now done in the provinces, so that the memorandum of the Zemstvos becomes a sort of ultimatum—it cannot be called a petition—addressed by the educated portion of the nation to the Emperor. In most provincial cities the return of the Zemstvo delegates is being made the occasion of influential meetings, at which the members of the Provincial Assemblies (the District Assemblies will follow suit) send to St. Petersburg their approval of the resolutions; while numbers of landlords and other influential persons in the provinces seize this opportunity for adding their signatures to those of the Zemstvo delegates.

Wherever a few educated persons come together, nothing is spoken of but the coming Constitution. Even the appalling war has been relegated to the background, while the constitutional agitation takes every day some new form. In the universities, both professors and students join it. The former sign the resolutions, while the latter formulate similar resolutions, or organize street demonstrations to support them. Such demonstrations have taken place already at St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Kiev, and they surely will be joined by working men as soon as they spread southwards. And if they are dispersed by force they will result in bloodshed, of which none can foresee the end.

Another important current in the movement was created by the celebrations of the fortieth anniversary of the Judicial Law, which was promulgated on the 2nd of December 1864. Large meetings of lawyers (*avocats*), followed by banquets, at which all professions of 'intellectuals' were represented, including members of the magistracy and, occasionally, of the administration, have been held at St. Petersburg, Moscow, Saratov, Minsk, Tomsk, and so on; and at all these meetings the program of the Zemstvos, reinforced by strong resolutions requiring the repeal of the exceptional state-of-siege law and condemning the whole *régime* under which Russia is now, was voted and transmitted to the Minister of the Interior. At Moscow the resolutions passed at the meeting of the lawyers were worded very strongly, as may be seen from the following characteristic abstracts:

> 1 (1) The fundamental principles of Right, expressed in the Judicial Law of the 2nd of December 1864, and which recognize only such a form of State life, in which all the actions of all are submitted to law, equal for all, and applied by the Courts with no regard to any outside influence, are incompatible with the principles of the bureaucratic lawlessness which endeavors to take hold of every manifestation of life and to submit it to its uncontrolled power.' . . . '(4) The principle of religious tolerance,

[2] The Memoirs of Prince Meschersky contain extremely instructive data in this respect.

> proclaimed in this law, was brought into nonexistence by a series of by-laws and circulars, by means of which large portions of the population were placed into special categories, and deprived of important personal, family and property rights—and this, not for crimes of theirs, and not in virtue of legal sentences, but merely for the expression of the dictates of their conscience, and by mere orders of the Administration.' . . . '(7) The principle of an independent Justice, equal for all, has been reduced to naught by the abolition of all guarantees of independence ' ; and the declaration enumerates the main by-laws by means of which this purpose was achieved.

And, finally, their last resolution expresses what every educated Russian is thinking, while at the same time it contains a reply to the Czar's manifesto of April 1903. It runs as follows:

> It appears from all the life of Russia for the last forty years that it is absolutely hopeless to endeavor to introduce in our country the reign of Right, so long as the arbitrary rule of bureaucracy continues to exist, even though all sorts of rights may be inscribed in our code.

Nothing short of a thorough reform in the fundamental laws of the State can secure the ends of justice and law—such is the conclusion of the Moscow lawyers.

Striking facts were produced at these meetings. Thus, the following figures just published by The *Messenger of Law* will illustrate the lawlessness which prevails under Nicholas the Second in all matters concerning political offenses. From 1894 till 1901, not one single political affair was brought before a court of justice or an examining magistrate. All inquests were dealt with by police officers or functionaries of the Ministry of the Interior. As to the numbers of such cases, they are simply extravagant. Thus in 1903 no fewer than 1988 political cases, concerning 5,590 persons, were opened, in addition to all those which were pending. In the same year, 1,522 inquests, involving 6,450 persons, were terminated. Out of this number 1,583 persons were liberated, 45 were sent before courts-martial, and *no fewer than 4,867 persons were submitted to various penalties, including imprisonment, inflicted by the Administration, without the interference of any magistrate.* Out of these, *no fewer than 1502 were sent into exile*, for terms up to ten years, to various remote provinces of Russia and Siberia! Nothing on this scale was done even under Alexander the Third, the corresponding figure for the last year of his reign being only 55 (in 1894).

The Judicial Law of 1864 contained certain guarantees against the arbitrary action of the police. But, as has been indicated during the last few days, already in 1870 and 1875 the preliminary inquest was taken out of the hands of independent examining magistrates and was handed to the ordinary police and the State police officers. No fewer than *seven hundred by-laws* have been issued since 1864 for tearing the Judicial Law to pieces—limiting the rights of the courts, abolishing trial by jury in numerous cases, and so on; so that—to use the expression of the Saratov lawyers' meeting&mdash: 'all the principles of the law of Alexander the Second have been annihilated. This law exists only in name.'

At the same time the exceptional laws promulgated during the last two reigns have given to every police officer, in every province of the Empire, the right to arrest every Russian subject without warrant, and to keep him imprisoned as a suspect for seven days— and much longer under various other pretexts—without incurring any responsibility. More than that. It was 'publicly vouched at one of the lawyers' meetings that when arrests are made *en masse*, simple policemen

receive in advance printed and signed warrants of arrest and searching, on which they have only to inscribe the names of the persons whom they choose to arrest! Let me add that all these resolutions and comments have been printed in full, in both the provincial and the Moscow papers, and that the figures are those of official reports.

At St. Petersburg the fortieth anniversary of the Judicial Law was celebrated by nearly 700 persons—lawyers, literary people, and soon—and their resolutions were equally outspoken.

> The martyrology of the Judicial Law [they said] is a striking illustration of the fact that under the autocratic and bureaucratic *régime* which prevails in Russia the most elementary conditions of a regular civil life cannot be realized, and partial reforms of the present structure of the State would not attain their aim.

The Assembly confirmed therefore the resolutions of the Zemstvo representatives, only wording the chief ones still more definitely, in the following terms:

> 3. That all laws be made and taxes established only with the participation and the consent of representatives, freely elected by all the nation.
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> 4. That the responsibility of the Ministers before the Assembly of Representatives of the nation should be introduced, in order to guarantee the legality of the actions and the orders of the Administration.

For this purpose, and in view of the extremely difficult conditions in which the country is now involved, the Assembly demanded the immediate convocation 'of a Constituent Assembly, freely elected by the people,' and 'a complete and unconditional amnesty for all political and religious offenses,' as well as measures guaranteeing the freedom and the possibility of responsible elections, and also the inviolability of the representatives of the people. This declaration was signed by 673 persons, and sent to the Minister of the Interior.

The anniversary meetings of the Judicial Law being over, the agitation has already taken a new form. It is the municipalities, beginning with Moscow and St. Petersburg, which now pass the same resolutions. They ask for the abolition of the exceptional laws and for the convocation of a representative Assembly, and they insist upon holding a general Conference of representatives of all the Russian cities and towns, which would certainly express the same desires.

It is evident that the reactionary party is also at work, and a meeting of reactionists took place at the house of Pobiedonostsev, in order to discuss how to put a stop to the constitutional movement. They will leave, of course, not a stone unturned to influence the Czar in this direction, and, to begin with, they hit upon the idea of convoking meetings of the nobility in different provinces. They expected that such meetings would vote against a Constitution. But, beginning with Moscow, they met with a complete fiasco; the Moscow nobility adopted the same resolutions as the Zemstvos. More than that. A new movement was set on foot, in the old capital, in the same direction. A few days ago, at a meeting of the Moscow Agricultural Society, one of the members proposed a resolution demanding the abolition of the exceptional state-of-siege law promulgated in 1881. He met with some opposition, but after brilliant speeches had been pronounced in support of the resolution it was voted with only one dissentient.

One may expect now that many other societies, economic and scientific, will follow the example of the Moscow agriculturists. In the meantime the public libraries, both municipal and

supported by private contributions, have inaugurated a movement for demanding a release from the rigors of censorship. There is in Russia a special censorship for the libraries, and even out of those books which have been published in Russia with the consent of the censorship many works, chiefly historical and political, are not permitted to be kept in the circulating libraries. The Smolensk public library has now petitioned the Minister of the Interior asking for the abolition of these restrictions, and this petition is sure to be followed by many others of a similar kind, the more so as simply prohibitive restrictions are imposed upon the village libraries, the public lectures, and, in fact, in the whole domain of popular education.[3]

It will be noticed that in all the above resolutions the form to be given to representative government has not yet been defined. Must Russia have two Houses or one? Will she have seven or nine Parliaments (like Canada) and a Federal Senate? What extension is to be given to the federative principle? And so on. All these matters have not yet been discussed in detail. It is only known that some Zemstvo delegates, under the presidency of M. Shipov, are discussing these vital questions. However, as the Zemstvos exist in thirty-four provinces only, out of fifty, of European Russia proper, and there are besides Finland, Poland, the Caucasus, Siberia, Turkestan, and the Steppe Region, no scheme of representative government can be worked out without the consent of these units. This is why the idea of a Constituent Assembly is gaining ground. All that can be said in the meantime is, that the Jacobinist ideas of the centralizers find but little sympathy in Russia, and that, on the contrary, the prevailing idea is that of a federation, with full home rule for its component parts, of which Finnish home rule may be taken as a practical illustration.

Such are, then, up to the 18th of December, the main facts of the constitutional agitation which is going on in Russia. And from all sides we hear the same questions: "Is it really the end of autocracy that is coming? Is Russia going to pass from autocracy to representative government, without a revolution similar to that of 1789 to 1793 in France? Is the present movement deep enough to attain its goal? And, again, are the Czar and his nearest advisers prepared to make the necessary concessions, without being compelled to do so by popular uprisings and internal commotions?"

First of all, let it be well understood that there is nothing unforeseen in the demand of a Constitution, so unanimously expressed by the representatives of provincial self-government. Over and over again, for the last forty years, they have expressed the same desire, and it is for the third or fourth time that they now address similar demands to the Emperor. They did it in 1880-1881. They repeated it in 1894, as soon as Nicholas the Second came to the throne, and again in 1902 in connection with the Committees on the depression of agriculture. At the beginning of this year, when the war broke out and the Zemstvos decided to send their own field-hospitals to the seat of war (these hospitals, by the way, are described as the best in Manchuria), representatives of all the Zemstvos demanded the permission to meet together, to agree upon joint action in

[3] Here is the resolution passed on the 9th of December by the Zadneprovsk public library at Smolensk, and published in the Russian papers:— 'After having heard the statement of the committee concerning the difficulties standing in its way the meeting decided to ask from the Minister of Interior: (1) The abolition of the bylaws according to which the administration and the helpers of the library have to receive the investiture of the Government; (2) that all books allowed to circulate in Russia be allowed to be kept in the library; (3) the abolition of censorship; (4) to permit educational societies to be opened after a mere notification. At the same time the meeting has entrusted its committee to inform the Minister of the Interior of its deep conviction that the spreading of education in the country is quite impossible without the rights and the dignity of the individual, and the liberty of conscience, speech, the Press, the associations and meetings being guaranteed.'

the organization of relief for the wounded, as well as for the families of the Reservists. On both occasions the authorization was refused and the meetings forbidden; but on both occasions the Zemstvo delegates held secret conferences at Moscow and discussed their affairs in spite of the menaces of Plehve (Shipoff went for that into exile). And in both cases they concluded that the convocation of a National Assembly had become an imperative necessity. The present move is thus a further development of several former ones. It is the expression of a long-felt need.

The necessity of a representative government for Russia was spoken of immediately after the death of Nicholas the First, and we are informed by Prince Tatischeff (*Alexander The Second and his Times*) that as early as in 1856 Alexander the Second had had a plan of a Constitution worked out. However, precedence had to be given then to the abolition of serfdom and the terrible corporal punishments then in use (which meant a judicial reform); besides, some sort of local self-government had first to be created. These reforms filled up the years 1859-1866. But in the meantime the Polish revolution broke out (in 1863), and it was then believed at the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the uprising was supported by promises of intervention given to its leaders by the Western Powers.

This revolution had the worst imaginable consequences for Russia. It closed the reform period. Reaction set in—the reaction which has lasted up to the present day, and which has cost Russia hecatombs of her best and most devoted men and women. All schemes of constitutional changes were abandoned, and we learn from the same author that the reason which Alexander the Second gave for this abandonment was his fear for the integrity of the Empire. He came to Moscow in 1865, and there, at his Illynsky Palace, he received Golohvastoff—that same President of Nobility in one of the districts of the Moscow province who had forwarded to the Czar an address, in the name of the nobility he represented, demanding a Constitution. The words which Alexander is reported to have said to Golohvastoflf during the interview are most characteristic: 'I give you my word,' he said, 'that on this same table I would sign any Constitution you like if I were sure that this would be for the good of Russia. But I know that if I did it to-day, to-morrow Russia would go to pieces. And you do not desire such an issue. Last year you yourselves [the Moscow nobility] told me that, and you were the first to say so.'[4] There is no reason to doubt the authenticity of these words. They are just what Alexander the Second would have said, and while he was uttering them he was quite sincere. But, as I have explained in my Memoirs, his was a very complicated nature, and while the menace of the Western Powers, ready to favor the dismemberment of the Empire, must have strongly impressed him, the Autocrat also spoke in him, and still more so the man who demanded above all to be trusted implicitly. On this last point he was extremely sensitive.

Be that as it may, the idea of giving Russia a Constitution was temporarily abandoned; but it cropped up again ten years later. The great movement 'towards the people' was then in full swing. The prisons were overflowing with political prisoners, and a series of political trials, which had taken place with open doors, had produced a deep impression on the public. Thereupon Alexander the Second handed in a scheme of a Constitution, to be reported upon to the Professor of Civil Law and the author of a book much spoken of on this subject—K. P. Pobiedonostseff!

What the appreciations of Pobiedonostseff were, we do not know; but, as he has expressed his views on representative government in a number of works, we may be certain that his report was

[4] They had asked indeed that the integrity of the Empire should be maintained, and that Poland should not be separated from Russia.

negative. His ideal is a Church, as strongly organized as the Catholic Church, permeating all the life of society and assuming, if need be, a fighting attitude against the rival Churches. Freedom and Parliamentary rule are the enemies of such a Church; consequently, he concludes, autocracy must be maintained; and Russia is predestined to realize the happiness of the people under the rod of the Church. The worst was that Pobiedonostseff succeeded for years in maintaining a reputation for honesty, and only lately has it become evident that, although he does not care for wealth, he cherishes power and is most unscrupulous as to the means by which he maintains his influence at Court.[5]

In 1876 Alexander the Second was thus besieged with doubts. But then came the uprising in Servia, the Turkish War, the Berlin Treaty, and once more the inner reforms were postponed. The Turkish War revealed, however, such depths of disorganization in the State machine that, once it was over, the time had apparently come for making a serious move in the constitutional direction. Discontent "was general," and when the trial of "The Hundred and Ninety-three" began at the end of 1878, and full reports of it were given in the papers, the sympathies of the educated classes went all in favor of the accused, and all against their accusers. The moment was opportune; but one of those omnipotent functionaries who had teen nurtured in the atmosphere of the Winter Palace, Trépoff, gave a different turn to affairs.

The history of the years 1878-1881 is so fresh in the memories of all that it need not be retold. How, immediately after the excitement produced at St. Petersburg by the above trial, Trépoff, the head of the St. Petersburg Police, ordered one of the 'politicals' to be flogged in prison; how thereupon Véra Zasulitch shot at Trépoff, and wounded him; how Alexander the Second, inspired by the Chief of the State Police, Mézentsoff, revised the relatively mild sentences pronounced by the Court in the trial of 'The Hundred and Ninety-three,' and rendered them very much heavier; how, in reply to this, Mézentsoff was killed in broad daylight; and how this was the beginning of a fearful struggle between the Government and the revolutionists, which ended in a wholesale slaughter and transportation to Siberia of the best elements of a whole generation, including children sixteen years old, and in Alexander the Second losing his life—all this is well known. It is also known that he was killed the very day that he had made a timid and belated concession to public opinion by deciding to submit to the State Council a scheme for the convocation of an *Assemblée des Notables.*

This scheme is often described as a Constitution. But Alexander the Second himself never attributed to it this meaning. The proposal of Loris Melikoff, which received the approval of the Czar on the 17th of February (March 1), 1881, consisted in this: the Ministries were to bring together by the next autumn all the materials which they possessed concerning the reorganization of the Central Government. Then special Committees, composed of representatives of the different Ministries, as well as of persons invited by the Government for this purpose, would prepare schemes for reform of the Central Government 'within the limits which would be indicated by the Emperor.' These schemes, before submitting them to the State Council, would be discussed by a general Commission composed as follows: (a) Persons nominated by the Emperor out of members of the above Committees; (b) delegates from the provinces in which the Zemstvos have

[5] See, for instance, his article in the North American Review, September 1901, in which he threw the responsibility for the law in virtue of which students, for university disturbances, were marched as private soldiers to Port Arthur—*a law of which, we now know, he himself was the promoter*, and which led to such serious disturbances—upon the Minister of Public Instruction, already killed by a student, and the Minister of the Interior, who was killed soon after that by Balmashoff.

been introduced—two delegates per province, elected by the provincial Zemstvos—as also delegates from a few important cities; and (c) members nominated by the Government to represent the provinces which had no Zemstvo institutions. Only the members mentioned under (a) would have the right of voting; the others, (b) and (c), would only express their opinions, but not vote. The Commission itself would have no legislative power; its resolutions would be submitted to the State Council and the Emperor in the usual way.[6]

This measure had to be made public, and on the 1st (13th) of March Alexander the Second approved the draft of a manifesto which had to be issued to this effect. He only desired it to be read at a meeting of the Committee of the Ministers on the following Wednesday. He was killed, as is well known, a few hours later, and the next Committee of Ministers, which took place on the 8th (20th) of March, was presided over by his son, Alexander the Third. The meeting fully approved the manifesto, which had now only to be printed. But Alexander the Third hesitated. Old Wilhelm the First had advised him to yield; but the reactionary party, headed by Pobiedonostseff and Katkoff, was very active in the opposite direction. Katkoff was called from Moscow to exert a pressure on the Czar by the side of Pobiedonostseff, and Alexander was easily persuaded by Count Ignatieff and such a specialist in police matters as the *Préfet* of Paris, M. Andrieux, that the revolutionary movement could easily be crushed. Whilst all this was going on the Liberal Ministers, who were in favor of constitutional reforms, undertook nothing decisive, and Alexander the Third, who had already written to his brother: 'I feel so happy: the weight is off my shoulders, I am granting a Constitution,' yielded the other way. On the 29th of April (11th of May) he issued his autocratic manifesto, written by Pobiedonostseff, in which he declared: 'Amid our affliction, the voice of God orders us to vigorously take the ruling power in our own hands, with faith in Providence and trust in the truth and might of the Autocratic Power which we are called upon to reinforce and to protect against all attacks, for the welfare of the nation.'

One of the first acts of this personal power was the promulgation of that state-of-siege law which, as we saw, handed all classes of Russia to the now omnipotent police officials, and made of Russia one great State prison. Thus began those gloomy years 1881-1894, of which none of those who lived them through can think otherwise than as of a nightmare.

To tell the truth, Alexander the Third was not exactly a despot in his heart, although he acted like one. Under the influence of the Slavophile, Konstantin Aksakoff, he had come to believe that the mission of autocracy in Russia is to give a certain well-being to the peasants, which could never be attained under a representative government. Towards the end of his life he even used to say that there were only two thorough Socialists, Henry the Fourth and himself. What induced him to say so I do not know. At any rate, when he came to the throne he adopted a program which was explained in a French review, in an article generally attributed to Turguéneff.[7] Its main points were: a considerable reduction of the redemption tax which the ex-serfs paid for their liberation; a radical change in the system of imperial taxation, including the abolition of the 'poll-tax,' and the excise on salt; measures facilitating both the temporary migrations of the peasants and emigration to the Urals and Siberia; rural banks, and so on. Most of these measures were carried through during his reign; but in return the peasants were deprived of some of the most elementary personal and civil rights which they had obtained under Alexander the Second.

[6] After the Council has voted, the Emperor decides himself whether he accepts the opinion of the majority or that of the minority. This opinion becomes the law.

[7] See Stepniak's "King Stork and King Log: a Study of Modern Russia." 2 vols. London (Downey & Co.), 1896, pp. 22 "seq."

Suffice it to say that instead of the Justices of the Peace, formerly elected by all the population, special police officers, nominated by the Governors, were introduced, and they were endowed with the most unlimited rights over the village communities, and over every peasant individually. Flogging, as in the times of serfdom, was made once more an instrument of 'educating' the peasants. Every rural policeman became a governor of his village. The majority of the schools were handed over to Pobiedonostseff. As to the Zemstvos, not only were they gradually transformed more and more into mere boards of administration under the local Governor, but the peasants were deprived of the representation which they hitherto had in that institution. The police officers became even more omnipotent than ever. If a dozen schoolmasters came together they were treated as conspirators. The reforms of 1861-1866 were treated as the work of rank revolutionists, and the very name of Alexander the Second became suspect. Never can a foreigner realize the darkness of the cloud which hung over Russia during that unfortunate reign. It is only through the deep note of despair sounded in the novels and sketches of Tchéekoff and several of his contemporaries— 'the men of the eighties'—that one can get a faint idea of that gloom.

However, man always hopes, and as soon as Nicholas the Second came to the throne new hopes were awakened. I have spoken of these hopes in the pages of this Review, and shown how soon they faded away. Since then Nicholas the Second has not shown the slightest desire to repair any one of the grave faults of his father, but he has added very many new ones.

Everywhere he and his Ministers have bred discontent—in Finland, in Poland, in Armenia (by plundering the Armenian Church), in Georgia, in the Zemstvos, among all those who are interested in education, among the students—in fact, everywhere. But that is not all. There is one striking feature in this reign. All these last ten years there has been no lack of forces which endeavored to induce the ruler of Russia to adopt a better policy; and all through these ten years he himself—so weak for good—found the force to resist them. At the decisive moment he always had enough energy to turn the scales in favor of reaction by throwing in the weight of his own personal will. Every time he interfered in public matters—be it in the student affairs, in Finland, or when he spoke so insolently to the Zemstvo delegates on his advent to the throne—every time his interference was for bad.

However, already during the great strikes of 1895, and still more so during the student disturbances of 1897, it had become apparent that the old *régime* could not last long. Notwithstanding all prosecutions, a quite new Russia had come into existence since 1881. In the seventies it was only the youth which revolted against the old *régime*. In our circles a man of thirty was an old man. In 1897 men of all ages, even men like Prince Viazemskiy, member of the Council of State, or the Union of Writers, and thousands of elderly men scattered all over the country, joined in a unanimous protest against the autocratic bureaucracy.

It was then that Witte began to prepare the gradual passage from autocracy to some sort of a constitutional *régime*. His Commissions on the Impoverishment of Agriculture in Central Russia were evidently meant to supply that intermediate step. In every district of the thirty-four provinces which have the Zemstvo institutions, Committees, composed of the Zemstvos and of local men invited *ad hoc*, were asked to discuss the causes of this impoverishment. Most remarkable things were said in these Committees, by noblemen and functionaries, and especially by simple peasants—all coming to one conclusion: Russia cannot continue to exist under the police rule which was inaugurated in 1881. Political liberties and representative government have become a most urgent necessity. 'We *have* something to say about our needs, and we *will* say it'—this was what peasant and landlord alike said in these Commissions. The convocation of

an Assembly of the representatives of all provinces of Russia had thus become unavoidable. But then Nicholas the Second, under the instigation and with the connivance of Plehve, made his little *coup d'etat*. Witte was shelved in the Council of State, and Plehve became an omnipotent satrap. However, it is now known that in 1902 Plehve had handed to Nicholas the Second a memoir in which he accused Witte of preparing a revolutionary movement in Russia, and already then the Czar had decided in his mind to get rid of Witte and his Commissions. This he did, handing Russia to that man whom the worst reactionists despised, even though they called upon him to be their savior.

An orgy of insolent police omnipotence now began: the wholesale deportation of all discontents; massacres of the Jews, of which the instigators, such as the Moldavian Krushevan, editor of the *Bessarabets*, were under the personal protection of the Minister; an orgy of wholesale bribery, general corruption, and intimidation. And Nicholas the Second had not one word to say against that man! Only now, when Plehve's successors have brought to the Czar the copies of all his Majesty's correspondence with the Grand Dukes, which Plehve opened and had carefully copied for some unknown purpose— only now they go about in the Winter Palace exclaiming: 'It is Plehve who is the cause of all that agitation! It is he who has brought upon us all this odium!' As if Plehve was not *their* last hope—the last card of autocracy! Truly has the lawyer Korobchevsky said before the Court, in defense of his client Sazonoff: 'The bomb which killed the late Minister of the Interior was filled, not with dynamite, but with the burning tears of the mothers, sisters wives, and daughters of the men whom he sent to the gallows or to die slowly in prison or in Siberia!'

But who are these new men of the Zemstvos—it will be asked— who come now so prominently to the front? Are they capable of playing the responsible part which history seems to bestow upon them?

When provincial self-government was introduced forty years ago there certainly was among the promoters of this reform some sort of idea like this: 'Let the landlords, the merchants, the peasants, familiarize themselves, through the provincial and the district assemblies, with representative government and the management of public affairs.' This is also how the reform was understood on the spot, and this is why the Zemstvos attracted at the outset so many of the best provincial forces.

The mode of composition of these assemblies is original. Russia, as is known, is divided into provinces, and each province into ten to twelve districts. Leaving aside Poland (ten provinces), Finland (which has its own Parliament), Caucasia and Asiatic Russia (Siberia, Turkestan, the Steppe Region), European Russia is divided into fifty provinces, out of which thirty-four have now the institution of the Zemstvo. This means that in these provinces each district has an assembly, elected by all the inhabitants, for the management of quite a number of local matters. Each assembly nominates its own executive, and all the district assemblies nominate a Provincial Assembly, which also has its executive, and is presided over by the provincial President of the Nobility. The towns have their own municipal government. The district elections, however, are made separately by the three 'orders'—the nobility, the mixed landowners (merchants and peasant proprietors), and the peasants belonging to the village communities. Besides, as the foundation of the electoral rights is the value of landed property owned by each person in the district, and the nobility are the chief landowners, the result is that in most assemblies the number of peasant representatives is inferior to those of the other two orders taken together. Only in certain north-eastern provinces such as Vyatka have the peasants a dominating voice. This is, at

least, how the Zemstvos were constituted till 1890, when the would-be 'Peasant Czar' further reduced the number of peasant delegates.

It would seem that under such an organization the Zemstvos would soon become mere administrative boards, on which the country squires would find a number of well-paid positions. So it was indeed at the outset in some central provinces, where the landlords of the old school had the upper hand. But on the other hand there were also provinces, such as Tver (an old nest of 'Decembrists'), Voronezh, Poltava, partly Ryazán, etc., in which the nobility, owing to various circumstances, took the lead of the reform movement. In these provinces, as also in the north-eastern ones, in which the peasants dominate, the Zemstvos became an active force for introducing in the villages all sorts of useful institutions on a democratic basis. These two sorts of Zemstvos became the leaders of the others. This is why, notwithstanding all the obstacles opposed to them by the Central Government, the Zemstvos, as a rule, have accomplished something. They have laid the foundation of a rational system of popular education. They have placed sanitation in the villages on a sound basis, and worked out the system which answers best the purpose of free medical help for the peasants and the laboring classes. They elected Justices of Peace who were decidedly popular. And some of the Zemstvos are doing good work by spreading in the villages better methods of agriculture, by the supply of improved machinery at cost price, by spreading cooperative workshops and creameries, by mutual insurance, by introducing school gardens, and so on. All this, of course, within the narrow limits imposed by the present economical conditions, but capable, like similar beginnings in Western Europe, of a considerable extension.

Another important feature is that the Zemstvos draw into their service a considerable number of excellent men, truly devoted to the people, who in their turn exercise a decided influence upon the whole of the Zemstvo institution. Here is a country district in North-Western Russia. Its district assembly consists of twenty noblemen elected by the nobility, one deputy from the clergy (nominated by the Church), one functionary of the Crown (who sits by right), five deputies elected by the second 'order' of mixed landowners (merchants, peasant proprietors, etc.), and nine peasants from the third 'order,' representing the village communities.[8] They decide, let us say, to open a number of village schools. But the salaries of the teachers are low, the schoolmasters' houses are poor log-huts, and the assembly people know that nobody but a' populist,' who loves the people and looks upon his work as upon his mission, will come and stay. And so the 'populist' comes in as a teacher. But it is the same with the Zemstvo doctor, who is bound to attend to a number of villages. He has to perform an incredible amount of work, traveling all the year round, every day, from village to village, over impassable roads, amid a poverty which continually brings him to despair—read only Tchékoff's novels! And, therefore, nobody but a 'populist' will stay. And it is the same with the midwife, the doctor's aid, the agricultural inspector, the cooperator, and so on. And when several Zemstvos undertook, with their limited budgets, to make house-to-house statistical inquests in the villages, whom could they find but devoted 'populists' to carry on the work and to build up that wonderful monument, the 450 volumes of the Zemstvo inquests? Read Ertel's admirable novel, *Changing Guards*, and you will understand the force which these teachers, doctors, statisticians, etc., represent in a province.

The more the Zemstvos develop their activity, the more this 'third element' grows; and now it is they—the men and women on the spot, who toil during the snowstorm and amid a typhus-stricken population—who speak for the people and make the Zemstvo speak and act for it. A new

[8] Taking a district of North-Eastern Russia where, owing to the small number of nobles, the first two 'orders'

Russia has grown in this way. And this Russia hates autocracy, and makes the Zemstvos hate it with a greater hatred than any which would have sprung from theories borrowed from the West. At every step every honest man of the Zemstvo finds the bureaucracy—dishonest, ignorant, and arrogant—standing in his way. And if these men shout, 'Down with autocracy!' it is because they know *by experience* that autocracy is incompatible with real progress.

These are, then, the various elements which are arraigned in Russia against the old institutions. Will autocracy yield, and make substantial concessions—*in time*, because time plays an immense part under such conditions? This we do not know. But that they never will be able any more to stop the movement, this is certain. It is said that they think at the Winter Palace to pass a few measures in favor of the peasants, but to avoid making any constitutional concessions. However, this will not help. Any improvement in the condition of the peasants will be welcome. But if they think that therefore they will be able to limit their concessions to the invitation of a few representatives of the provinces to the Council of State, where they may take part in its deliberations, this is a gross mistake. Such a measure might have pacified the minds in 1881, if Alexander the Third had honestly fulfilled the last will of his father. It might have had, perhaps, some slight effect ten years ago, if Nicholas the Second had listened then to the demand of the Zemstvos. But now this will do no longer. The energy of the forces set in motion is too great to be satisfied with such a trifling result. And if they do not make concessions very soon, the Court party may easily learn the lesson which Louis Philippe learned in the last days of February 1848. In those days the situation at Paris changed every twenty-four hours, and therefore the concessions made by the Ministry always came too late. Each time they answered no longer to the new requirements.

In all the recent discussions nothing has yet been said about the terrible *economical* conditions of the peasants and the working men in the factories. All the resolutions were limited to a demand of *political* rights, and thus they seem to imply that the leading idea of the agitation was to obtain, first, political rights, and to leave the discussion of the economical questions to the future representative Government. If this were so, I should see in such a one-sidedness the weak point of the agitation. However, we have already in the resolutions of the committees on the Impoverishment of Central Russia a wide program of changes, required by the peasants themselves and it would be of the greatest importance to circulate this program at once in the villages.

It is quite certain that every Russian—even the poorest of the peasants—is interested in the destruction of the secular political yoke to which all Russia is harnessed. But the destruction of that yoke, if it has to be done in reality, and not on paper only, is an immense work, which cannot be accomplished unless all classes of society, and especially the toiling classes, join in it. Autocracy has its outgrowths in every village. It is even probable that no progress in the overthrow of that institution will be made so long as the peasant masses do not bring their insurrections to bear upon the decisions of the present rulers. They must be told, therefore, frankly and openly by the educated classes, what the intentions of the latter are concerning the great problem which is now at this very moment facing millions of Russian peasants: 'How to live till the next crop?' Let us hope, therefore, that those who have started the present agitation with so much energy will also see that they must tell the ninety million Russian peasants the improvements in the economical conditions of the toiling masses which they can expect under the new *régime*, in addition to the acquisition of political rights.

P. Kropotkin.

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vote together, we have three functionaries of the Crown sitting by right, twelve members elected by the first two orders (three nobles, the remainder are merchants, etc.), and seven peasants representing the village communities.

FOOTNOTES

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The Constitutional Agitation in Russia
1905-01

"The Constitutional Agitation in Russia." *The Nineteenth Century*, January, 1905. Online source: RevoltLib.com.

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