

P. A. STOLYPIN: A GOVERNOR OF RUSSIA

Other officials had acquired their experience of autocratic administration outside the ministries of St. Petersburg. Few had immersed themselves in the life of provincial Russia as fully as Petr Arkad'evich Stolypin.⁷ Born in 1862 to an old hereditary noble family, he was the son of a general of artillery. His father, who also enjoyed a passing reputation as sculptor and essayist, managed to squander the family's estate holdings after emancipation. Coming of age during the crisis years of 1878–81, Stolypin enrolled at St. Petersburg University, where, rather than read the law, he entered the physics-mathematics faculty and studied agronomy. Intent on a career in state service, Stolypin requested and received an appointment to the Ministry of Internal Affairs while still at university. With two years already registered on the Table of Ranks, he graduated in 1885 and joined the Ministry of State Properties' Department of Land and Agriculture. Already married to a daughter of the influential Neidgardt clan, the

⁶ Weissman, *Reform*, pp. 124–30; Diakin, *Samoderzhavie*, pp. 19–37; Miliukov, *Political Memoirs*, pp. 216–28; Shipov, *Vospominaniia i dumy*, pp. 480–84; and Guchkov, "Iz vospominanii," *Poslednye novosti*, 26 Aug. 1936, p. 2.

⁷ The following discussion is drawn from "Formuliarnyi spisok," TsGIA, f. 1162, op. 6, d. 511, ll. 60–75; M. P. Bok, *Vospominaniia o moem otse P. A. Stolypina* (New York, 1953); Izgoev, *P. A. Stolypin*, pp. 7–10; Manning, *Crisis of the Old Order*, pp. 21–28; A. Stolypin, *P. A. Stolypin, 1862–1911* (Paris, 1927); and V. V. Shul'gin, *Vospominaniia byvshego chlena Gosudarstvennoi Dumy* (Novosti, 1979). The whereabouts of Stolypin's personal papers is a mystery. His archive, TsGIA, f. 1162, only contains scattered materials concerning his personality and politics.

young official made good use of family ties to obtain court rank in 1888. A year later, he accepted appointment as marshal of the nobility of Kovno county in the Lithuanian borderlands, where he owned a hereditary estate of some 800 desiatins (approximately 2,200 acres), and left St. Petersburg for the provinces. There he would spend the next eighteen years of his life.

The decade he spent in Kovno, most biographers agree, was a formative experience. Russians of the day attested, sometimes less than benignly, that Kovno was a "cosmopolitan" place. Near both Kovno and Vilnius, major cities in the Jewish Pale of Settlement, Kovno county contained an ethnically mixed population of Lithuanians, Jews, Polish Catholics, Germans, and a minority Russian Orthodox community. Close by the border with German Poland, life for a Russian nobleman here undoubtedly led to heightened nationalistic sentiments; by all accounts, however, the county marshal mixed well in society and performed the ceremonial duties required from the corporative officer of the local nobility. Moreover, unlike many appointed marshals he took an active interest in rural administrative affairs. In his service record Stolypin noted that he had actually presided for a decade on the county council of arbiters of the peace. Through this administrative appeal board he came to know the details of land disputes, criminal or civil misdemeanors, and the daily events of peasant life that often crossed ministerial desks in St. Petersburg as statistical compilations or summary reports.

As important, he spent his time in Kovno acquiring the perspective of a landowner actively engaged in the management and improvement of his estate's agriculture. Together with his own educational background, the setting of Kovno was itself conducive to the effort. Over half the county's land was owned by nobles, and peasant allotments were held in hereditary tenure. The local agricultural economy, devoted to grain export and some flax production, was thus fairly diversified and capitalistic.⁸ Apparently successful at his work, Stolypin, when he died in 1911, still owned two estates that he had inherited, the one in Kovno and a second in Penza. He had purchased a third of some 800 desiatins (approximately 2,200 acres) in Nizhnii Novgorod province and with his wife possessed large Neidgardt family holdings in Kazan.

By 1899 a prosperous noble landowner and a local official with some expertise in rural affairs, Stolypin had acquired the credentials that marked out a promising candidate for promotion in provincial administration.⁹ That year, he received an imperial appointment as Kovno pro-

⁸ "Kovenskii uezd," *BE*, 11:128.

⁹ Richard G. Robbins, Jr., *The Tsar's Viceroys: Russian Provincial Governors in the Last Years of the Empire* (Cornell University Press, 1987), chap. 2.

vincial marshal of the nobility. In May 1902 Pleve designated him governor of neighboring Grodno province, making Stolypin one beneficiary of the minister's policy of promoting prominent provincial nobles to administrative posts. After a year, he was transferred to the governorship of Saratov province, a major agricultural region in the Volga River valley that was a hotbed of political activism—radical, liberal, and conservative. Indeed, in a biography that largely dwelt on the personal, Stolypin's daughter remembered how the family had been struck by the altogether different tenor of public life in Saratov as compared to the Western region, a fact she attributed to the existence of *zemstvo* self-administration in the province.¹⁰ Stolypin remained in this turbulent provincial center until the spring of 1906, and it was here that he lived through the 1905 Revolution.

Two aspects of Stolypin's Saratov experience in 1904–06 deserve particular attention: his analysis of the revolutionary crisis, and his use of gubernatorial authority to combat it. The first he detailed in the annual summary of Saratov provincial affairs that he submitted to the tsar in January 1905.¹¹ Here Stolypin emphasized that the state confronted two dire threats to civil order. Peasant unrest was rising, but, he hinted, to attribute it solely to revolutionary propaganda trivialized the scope of the problem. Social instability in the villages was chronic; poverty, the unproductive system of communal agriculture that intensified it, and the growing desperation of peasants forced to pay exorbitant land rents inevitably created "enmity" toward estate owners and "animosity to the existing order." Dangerous because they were intractable in the short-term, these structural problems thus provided "enemies of the state [with the opportunity] . . . to create sedition"—a prognosis that became reality in the counties of Saratov during and after the summer.¹² There was, moreover, small consolation in the fact that, "excepting the [question] of land," most peasants appeared indifferent to the second issue that concerned the governor: "the public movement [*obshchestvennoe dvizhenie*]" sweeping all "other classes of the population." Indeed, because fertile economic grounds for radical agitation existed, the volatility of Saratov "political life"—an unusually candid expression in an imperial report—threatened

¹⁰ Bok, *Vospominaniia*, p. 118.

¹¹ "Vsepoddaneishii otchet saratovskogo gubernatora P. Stolypina za 1904 g.," in "K istorii agrarnoi reformy Stolypina," *KA* 17 (1926): 83–87.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 83–85. Stolypin advocated the consolidation of peasant smallholdings as the only path to assure "peaceful labor in the village based on mutual agreement of landowner and peasant." He foresaw both free exit from the commune and state-supported land reorganization as the "single counterweight to the communal principle." See also "Donesenie gubernatora Saratovskoi gubernii," in N. Karpov, *Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie v revoliutsii 1905 goda v dokumentakh* (Leningrad, 1926), p. 162. On the Saratov agricultural economy, see Fallows, "Forging the Zemstvo Movement," pp. 39–150.

to ignite the very sedition against which the governor warned. And, as Stolypin knew, provincial politics was already escaping his control:

Zemstvo [and] public men and all individuals of the free professions stand in the forefront of the movement; they have attracted in their wake the worker element and student youth. . . . All of this, *given the absence until now of a political life* [*politicheskaia zhizn'*] *in the country*, seems so new that . . . it cannot but summon displays of extreme intemperance by public groups and . . . attempts by radical circles to direct the entire movement onto a revolutionary path. Moreover, in view of the distrust toward the government that legal groups in Saratov province have articulated, the public atmosphere has become antigovernmental, [it is] of a negative, denunciatory character.¹³

In short, government authority was being challenged in all strata of Saratov society, and his administration was becoming more and more powerless to influence events that threatened to become revolutionary.

His attempts to exercise gubernatorial authority under these conditions were thus all the more instructive. In the first instance, he relied on force and administrative power, the oldest weapons in a governor's arsenal. Saratov peasants particularly felt their firepower in 1905–06. Stolypin's widespread employment of police and troops, applied especially to all forms of collective action, was energetic enough to attract frequent notice in the liberal national press, as well as an expression of personal gratitude from Nicholas II.¹⁴ He also harassed zemstvo third element employees, especially doctors and primary school teachers, whose presence in rural areas, combined with the often democratic, sometimes socialist politics of the Saratov third element, rendered their professional activities suspect.¹⁵ This assault on the "influential, even powerful" third element reflected as well a general apprehension before zemstvo liberalism. Stolypin made full use of the veto and administrative rulings in an attempt to bridle political opposition in the Saratov zemstvo, which, it should be noted, was one of the most influential sources of liberal and conservative provincial activism in the country.¹⁶

¹³ "Vsepoddaneishii otchet sarakovskogo gubernatora," pp. 86–87. Emphasis added.

¹⁴ TsGIA, f. 1162, op. 6, d. 511, l. 60. Stolypin included the following telegram from Nicholas II in his service record: "To Saratov Governor Stolypin. Informed through the Minister of Internal Affairs of the exemplary action shown by you in despatching troops on your own personal initiative to suppress disorders within the borders of Novouzensk county, Samara province, and long esteeming your loyal service, I declare to you my sincere gratitude. Nicholas." See also reporting of Saratov politics in *Russkie vedomosti*, 22 July 1905, p. 4; 19 August 1905, p. 3; 25 August 1905, p. 4; 12 September 1905, p. 5; 4 November 1905, p. 3; and 28 January 1906, p. 4.

¹⁵ "Donesenie 26 apreliia 1905," Karpov, *Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie*, pp. 144–45, and "Donesenie 11 ianvaria 1906," *ibid.*, pp. 161–62.

¹⁶ Fallows, "Forging the Zemstvo Movement," pp. 754–76. Also *Russkie vedomosti*, 20 July 1905, p. 4; 7 October 1905, p. 5; 18 October 1905, p. 4.

In view of his own immersion in provincial public life and politics, however, Stolypin was well aware that the days when a governor relied exclusively on instruments of repression had passed. These were means to establish order, not consolidate authority. Indeed, in his January 1905 report, he recognized that the urban, intellectual, and professional elements whom he classified under the heading third element were declaring their "pretensions to a leading role" in provincial life for good reason. They possessed "boldness, industriousness, energy, and knowledge," which, he realized, had allowed many professionals to become "politicos [*politikany*], the necessary concomitant of a country's political life." This explained "why many public activists of other classes [were] constantly looking to the third element." It was a mistake, Stolypin said, "to ignore and fail to consider this party [*partiiia*]." The government could not "rely on it because it [was] hostile," but "to act against it at present exclusively with force" would only exacerbate public alienation and "strengthen" the hand of extremists. "Local administrative authority" must, he urged, stand firm, approving "that which is useful in the actions of the third element" and placing "an unconditional 'veto' where its progressive [*progressivnaia*] activity begins to become revolutionary." Moreover, he wrote, "this party, as a negative example, might be useful, if others, who stand amongst the people [*imet' pochvu v narode*], could contain it." The mobilization of political support for the government was necessary in order for it to reassert its authority: "In the future, one must await and support the birth of a party of the land that has roots in the people, which, opposed to theoreticians, might render the third element harmless."¹⁷

Stolypin's remarks referred most directly to the consolidation of a potential political base among provincial noble landowners like himself, particularly among those engaged in zemstvo work. Only a year later, however, did these prospects begin to appear realistic. In January 1906 he was able to report a "sharp reaction" occurring in the Saratov provincial zemstvo against its former liberal majority.¹⁸ Although this was a political sea change extending far beyond the actions of a single individual, Stolypin had done his best in the heated atmosphere of 1904–05 to encourage the growing conservatism of Saratov noble landowners. The governor maintained personal ties with moderate and conservative circles in the provincial zemstvo.¹⁹

¹⁷ "Vsepoddaneishii otchet saratovskogo gubernatora," pp. 86–87.

¹⁸ "O povorotakh v nastroenii zemskikh sobranii," TsGIA, f. 1288, op. 2, 1906, d. 76, l. 249. Also *Russkie vedomosti*, 11 February 1906, p. 4.

¹⁹ Bok, *Vospominaniia*, pp. 125–28, 142–51; Kryzhanovskii, *Vospominaniia*, p. 214; Manning, *Crisis of the Old Order*, pp. 266–69. His cordial personal relations with the Saratov moderate N. N. L'vov probably helped to explain why Stolypin's name arose as a candidate for minister of internal affairs during Witte's early negotiations with Octobrists for a coalition cabinet. Witte, *Vospominaniia*, 2:85 and Izgoev, *P. A. Stolypin*, pp. 23–25.