Foreword

Larissa Zakharova

The author of this book, Alexander Polunov, is a young Russian historian whom I know well. He was my student both as an undergraduate and in graduate school, and we have continued to work together without interruption. Polunov received his professional training in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. These were critical years in which the Soviet Union disintegrated and the Soviet system and the Communist regime collapsed. Three years after graduating from Moscow State University in 1989, Polunov completed his graduate studies and defended his candidate's dissertation. It formed the basis of his book *Under the Rule of the Supreme Procurator: Church and State in the Era of Alexander III*, published in 1996.

Polunov carries on the tradition of Professor Petr Zaionchkovsky in Soviet historiography and rightly considers himself a member of Zaionchkovsky's school. He has also been able to take advantage of the new opportunities in research and teaching that became available to his generation. Fluent in English and with a reading knowledge of French and German, he has kept abreast of new research and approaches to history and is well-versed in contemporary Russian and world historiography. He has held visiting appointments in the United States at the Harriman Institute of Columbia University and the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies, and at the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme in Paris. He has participated in international conferences and received grants and prizes from international scholarly organizations.

The idea of writing this book grew out of Polunov's teaching and scholarly interests. At Moscow State University he has taught comprehensive survey courses on Russian history from ancient times to the present, while focusing his research on the imperial period. The book covers one century of

Russian history, the hundred years that elapsed between two wars with far-reaching consequences for Russia, the Patriotic War of 1812 and World War I. The author addresses one of the fundamental questions of Russian history: what caused the social and political upheaval that destroyed the age-old foundations of tsarist Russia and led to its collapse?

The major event of the twentieth century, the revolution of 1917, initiated the formation of the Soviet regime; its fall ushered in the current era of Russian history. Unless we examine the history of the last century of Imperial Russia, it is difficult to understand the Russian Federation's complex, contentious, and painful development since the collapse of the USSR. Many aspects of contemporary Russian life bear obvious similarities to problems that faced the country in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Those similarities impel us to take a new look at Russia's past so as to understand the events of the present. As the historian Vasily Kliuchevsky succinctly put it, "We must study the past not because it is receding but because, as it recedes, it leaves its consequences behind."

Polunov regards the abolition of serfdom in 1861 and the reforms that followed it as the determining events of nineteenth-century Russia. Although the Great Reforms of the 1860s and the 1870s did not bring about a sharp break with the past in all areas of public life, they laid the foundations for such a break and precluded a return to pre-reform practices. The reforms undermined a basic principle of Russian life, that progress was linked with serfdom. Russia's modernization proceeded on a new basis of free labor, private initiative, and the emergence of a civil society. In this respect, 1861 marks the turning point from which "a new history, a new era begins in Russia," as many contemporaries interpreted the abolition of serfdom and as many historians have agreed. Polunov makes clear the organic connection between the Great Reforms and Russian socio-economic and political developments in the first half of the nineteenth century, as well as their similarity to liberal reforms in the European countries, from which they sometimes borrowed.

Polunov points out the shortcomings of Alexander II's later reforms, especially in the agricultural sphere, financial policy, and the creation of a new court system. He demonstrates, however, that the reforms were by no means unsuccessful. The foundations of a state based on the rule of law began to arise, industrialization grew rapidly, and by the end of the nineteenth century the financial system was strong enough to permit convertibility of the ruble. The author argues convincingly that the "old regime" at the beginning of the twentieth century was not doomed. Contending forces pulling in different directions, and the conflict between the government and society, determined its fate. Russia's participation in World War I precipitated the revolutionary outcome.

Polunov's attention to socio-economic developments does not mean that he neglects other areas of history. The book covers the basic trends in Russian foreign policy, the organization of the imperial state, the emergence of ethnic issues, and the rise of the liberal and revolutionary movements. The author provides a full picture of the country's life in the last century of the tsarist regime and shows how the various elements of the historical process interacted.

A virtue of the book is its introduction, which provides an overview of Russian history from ninth-century Kievan Rus to the war against Napoleon. Its conclusion is also valuable, culminating in a description of the challenges that face post-Soviet Russia.

Polunov's book successfully synthesizes Russian and Western scholarship on Imperial Russia and supplements existing knowledge with his own archival research. It will interest anyone who wishes to learn about Russia's past and to understand the historical context from which present-day Russia has emerged.

Foreword

Thomas C. Owen

To inform English-speaking audiences of current trends in Soviet scholarship, M.E. Sharpe, Inc., publishes several quarterly journals of translations, among them *Soviet Studies in History*, begun in 1962 and renamed *Russian Studies in History* in 1992. During the late 1980s, in the era of perestroika (restructuring of the Soviet system) and glasnost (open discussion), Donald J. Raleigh, an American historian of the early Soviet period who edited the journal from 1979 to 1994, recognized the need to produce a series of books in English by Russian experts on Russian and Soviet history.

Ten such books appeared between 1993 and 2002 in the New Russian History series, published by M.E. Sharpe and edited by Raleigh. Drawing information from documents in newly opened archives and writing freely, unhindered by Soviet censorship, the authors offered fresh interpretations of neglected aspects of Russian and Soviet history from the reign of Peter the Great (d. 1725) to the mid-1950s. The subjects included the status of women, the personalities of the most important Romanov emperors and empresses, the career of one of Joseph Stalin's closest economic advisers, the chronic shortage of consumer goods under the five-year plans, relations between the Soviet state and the Russian Orthodox Church, and the functioning of the prison system (Gulag). Alexander Polunov's book on the Russian Empire between 1814 and 1914, in Marshall S. Shatz's precise and elegant translation, completes the New Russian History series.

Polunov not only demonstrates a mastery of current trends in Russian and American scholarship but also examines the legacy of the tsarist and the Soviet autocracies in our time. His interpretation of the last century of imperial rule marks a sharp break with Soviet-era histories of the late Russian

Empire. Rather than view the events from the Napoleonic Wars to World War I as the prehistory of the allegedly socialist revolution of 1917, he examines the decay of the two major institutions of the empire—serfdom and autocracy—from an essential liberal and democratic standpoint. An undercurrent of tragedy pervades Polunov's analysis of the social psychology of the major social groups in Russian society under the last emperors, from serfs and priests to merchants, landowners, and bureaucrats. His account helps to explain why the tsarist government successfully resisted fundamental change at crucial moments in the nineteenth century and why a reformist, evolutionary path did not become an alternative to the Bolshevik Revolution. The moral and political dramas described by Polunov have lost none of their relevance. The struggle between militarism and authoritarian rule on the one hand and humanitarianism and the rule of law on the other persists in the post-Soviet era as well.

Readers interested in the recent work of Russian historians of Russia and the Soviet Union will find more fascinating material in the journal *Russian Studies in History* and in *After the Fall: Essays in Russian and Soviet Historiography,* edited by Michael David-Fox, Peter Holquist, and Marshall Poe (Bloomington: Slavica, 2004).

Preface and Acknowledgments

During the twentieth century Russia endured shock waves rarely equaled in world history. The collapse of the monarchy and the coming to power of the Bolsheviks, the formation and consolidation of the Soviet regime, and that regime's fall at the end of the century were not only milestones of Russian history but profoundly affected the world as a whole. We cannot understand these events without analyzing their origins, above all in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In historical perspective, the question of origins presents us with a peculiar paradox. The nineteenth century differed from the twentieth both in its character and in its orientation. What made Russia's historical experience so distinctive? The establishment of local self-government and an independent judiciary, the development of a market economy, and the inception of a multi-party parliamentary system hardly seemed to foreshadow the events that would take place in the following decades. How did the movement toward a civil society and a state based on the rule of law even become possible in a country that lacked firm democratic traditions? What were the roots of the government's successful reforms "from above" in the nineteenth century, and why were they unable, in the last analysis, to prevent the fall of the monarchy? Was the revolution at the beginning of the twentieth century inevitable?

To answer these questions, I focus on the economic and social spheres, including the abolition of serfdom, the development of private property, the establishment of market relations, and the role of the state. Other aspects of Russian history, such as ideological conflict, cultural affairs, and relations among ethnic groups, also deserve attention, of course. They are reflected here, but I believe that the success or failure of the fundamental social re-

forms enacted at the center of the Russian state determined events in these other spheres.

The main purposes of this book are to trace developments in society and the governmental apparatus that gave rise to the reforms; to assess the significance of the various factors that influenced the way the reforms were implemented, such as foreign affairs and individual personalities; and to analyze the far-reaching impact of the reforms on the economy, society, and relations among ethnic groups. To do this, I present the work that has been done on the reforms in Russian historiography since the collapse of the USSR and synthesize it with Western scholarship and with my own research.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my thanks to all those whose help I received in the preparation of this book. The book would not have been possible without the careful editorial assistance, advice, and support of my teacher, Larissa Georgievna Zakharova. My participation in Professor Zakharova's seminar, the defense of my dissertation, which she supervised, and our subsequent collaboration over the years have been major milestones in my development as a professional historian. The conception and thematic content of the book took shape in large part under the influence of Professor Zakharova's work. I have drawn particularly on her research on the abolition of serfdom. I am grateful also to my colleague Dr. Valery L. Stepanov, on whose work I relied in the chapter on the socio-economic development of post-reform Russia. Andrei V. Mamonov gave me invaluable assistance in selecting the illustrations.

As the book is intended for an international audience, I could not have written it without the help of colleagues in the United States. In planning the book and through all the stages of its composition I received the unfailing support of Professor Donald J. Raleigh, the editor of the New Russian History series. Don was attentive and tactful in dealing with the problems that inevitably arise in writing a work on a broad topic, especially under the difficult circumstances of present-day Russia. The thoughtful and scrupulous advice of Professor Thomas Owen helped me to formulate many of the book's concepts and conclusions more precisely and to make it more accessible to non-Russian readers. Professor Marshall Shatz's translation conveys not just the letter but the spirit of the text. I hope that the publication of this book, which is devoted to one of the most important periods in the history of Russia, will draw Russian and Western historical scholarship closer together and thereby contribute to greater understanding between our two nations.

Chapter 5

The Great Reforms: Sources and Consequences

Count Sergei Uvarov, minister of public education under Nicholas I and one of his most talented officials, said of serfdom: "This tree has put down deep roots, and both the Church and the throne have given it shade. It cannot be uprooted." In Uvarov's opinion, the abolition of serfdom would inevitably entail political change. "The question of serfdom is closely related to the question of autocracy and even of the monarchy. They are two parallel forces that developed together. They have a single historical origin, and their legitimacy is identical."[1]

The Great Reforms implemented in the 1860s and the 1870s under the guidance of the enlightened bureaucracy sought to refute Uvarov's view. The enlightened bureaucrats understood, of course, that the abolition of serfdom would bring with it social and administrative changes. They assumed, however, that those changes would first affect the "lower stories" of the social edifice and, far from limiting autocratic power, would strengthen it. Reality justified their expectations only in part. The reforms of the 1860s and the 1870s created a system in which the absolute power of the monarch coexisted with an independent judiciary, a relatively free press, and local self-government. Their coexistence was fraught with profound contradictions that pointed to the necessity of extending the reforms to the "upper stories" of the political system by introducing representative government.

The first of the Great Reforms after the abolition of serfdom, the zemstvo reform of January 1, 1864, created rural institutions of self-government in the provinces and districts. The law of June 16, 1870, created parallel urban institutions, the municipal dumas.[2] The need for urban reform had arisen in Russia with the development of market relations, the turbulent process of

urbanization, the increasing complexity of the urban economy, and widening social disparities in the towns.[3] The municipal dumas, which had first been proposed in 1862, took eight years to establish, while the creation of the zemstvos occurred immediately after the emancipation of the serfs. Why did the rural reform take place so quickly, and what role did rural self-government play in Russian history?

The primary reason for the rapid pace (by Russian standards) of the rural reform was the need to fill the "power vacuum" that the emancipation created in the provinces. Under serfdom, the landowners were not just the owners of the peasants but were responsible for their welfare. The landowners were supposed to give their serfs economic assistance, feed them in times of famine, and provide for their medical needs and education. Before the abolition of serfdom, the provision of those services had been extremely meager, especially in the areas of health and education, but after 1861 the need for them grew substantially. The growing capitalist economy increased the demand for a skilled labor force in the agricultural sector. The almost universal illiteracy of the peasants, the lack of agronomic and veterinary services in the villages, and the recurrent epidemics among both humans and livestock became intolerable. Because the bureaucratic apparatus lacked the capacity to provide social services in the provinces, the only alternative was the introduction of local self-government.[4]

The autocracy had an additional reason for taking this step. As already noted, the constitutional movement among the gentry reached its peak at the end of the 1850s and beginning of the 1860s. The government reasoned that giving society, and most of all the gentry, some autonomy in economic and social affairs promised to divert the public's attention from political matters. Minister of Internal Affairs Petr Valuev reflected this thinking. The primary value of the zemstvos, he remarked sarcastically, was that they would "provide activity for a considerable portion of the press as well as those malcontents who currently stir up trouble because they have nothing to do."[5]

Russian society, of course, saw through the government's maneuver, and not everyone approved of it. On the whole, however, especially at first, society welcomed the introduction of the zemstvos. Konstantin Kavelin, the outstanding representative of Russian liberalism, asserted in 1865: "The whole of our immediate future depends on the success of the zemstvos, and our readiness for a constitution depends on how well they work." The French writer Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu, who had a wide circle of acquaintances in Russia, related the words of the Russians with whom he spoke: "We have begun to erect an edifice from its very foundation . . . We will build it stronger and higher than you [Europeans] have built your fragile structures."[6]

If the edifice of constitutionalism were to grow from the foundation of the zemstvo, however, several contradictions built into its design would have to be overcome. The most significant were those related to the system of zemstvo representation. In creating institutions of self-government, the planners of the reform had to take into account the official division of society into estates and the enormous gaps between the levels of education and well-being of the different strata of the population. The authorities considered this problem in the early stages of planning for the reform, entrusted to a commission formed in 1859 under the leadership of Nikolai Miliutin in the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The commission conceded primacy to the gentry as the wealthiest and most educated estate. At the same time, however, it secured a fairly substantial position for the peasantry and anticipated the zemstvo's transformation into an institution that would truly represent all the estates. Valuev, who assumed responsibility for the preparation of the reform upon his appointment as minister of internal affairs in 1861, took a different view. Valuev felt that after the abolition of serfdom the gentry landowners should rule in the provinces, on the English model. "The masses can be compared to sand, not to solid ground," Valuev wrote in his memorandum "On the Internal Situation of Russia" in 1862. "In vain would we seek firm support in them . . . Only property in larger quantities, landed property that ties its owner to a locality . . . can serve the state as a fully conservative element." Valuev's political program envisaged a major redirection of the government's focus from the lower strata of society to the upper strata, a repudiation of the course that the enlightened bureaucracy had pursued while preparing the peasant reform. He wrote, "On February 19, 1861, the imperial sun brightly illuminated and warmed the valleys. The time has come to illuminate and warm the heights and outlying areas."[7] Valuev's plan included a consultative representative assembly and a broad compromise with the non-Russian elites in the borderlands of the empire, particularly the Polish and Baltic German nobilities, to supplement the predominance of the gentry in the zemstvos. Valuev was able to exert some influence on the zemstvo reform, but on the whole the zemstvos created in 1864 were based on the principles that Miliutin had advocated.

The reform of 1864 established zemstvos on two levels, the district and the provincial. Every three years the population of a district elected deputies to a district zemstvo assembly, and the district assemblies in turn elected the deputies to a provincial zemstvo assembly. The district and provincial zemstvo assemblies elected the executive boards of the zemstvos from their own ranks. As a sign of gentry dominance, the chairman of the zemstvo assembly had to be the local marshal of the nobility. The zemstvo electoral system gave even more weight to the gentry. The Statute on Zemstvo Institutions divided the

electors in the districts into groups, or curias. The first curia, consisting of private landowners, mainly gentry, had the greatest degree of representation. The second curia consisted of the owners of urban real estate, and the third of communal peasants. The third curia, which did not have a property requirement for voting, was restricted to members of the peasant estate. As a result of this unequal system of representation, after the first zemstvo elections in 1865–67 the gentry received 41.6 percent of the seats in the district assemblies and 74.2 percent of the seats in the provincial assemblies. Peasant representatives constituted 38.5 percent and 10.6 percent of the deputies at the district and provincial levels, respectively: merchants, 10 percent and 11 percent; clergy, 6.5 percent and 3.8 percent; and petty townspeople, 0.5 percent at each level.[8] By the end of the second decade of the zemstvo's existence, however, this picture of almost complete gentry predominance had changed considerably.

The authors of the zemstvo reform had provided for the possible enlargement of non-gentry representation. Well-to-do peasants, townspeople, and merchants could attain membership in the first curia by purchasing land as private property. The growth of market relations in Russia fostered such transfers, especially in areas of intensive industrial development (the central region) and entrepreneurial agriculture (the Volga region and the steppe region of the south). In the district zemstvo assemblies of Moscow Province, for example, by 1886 the representation of merchants had grown by half, from 15 to 24 percent, and the share of peasant proprietors had more than doubled, from 2.6 to 5.5 percent. In Nizhny Novgorod Province, the share of merchant deputies had increased from 7 to 14 percent, and that of peasant proprietors from 1 percent to 4.8 percent. Peasant proprietors in Tauride Province increased their representation from 1 percent to 14 percent. Similar developments occurred in Vladimir, Kostroma, Kaluga, Kherson, and Saratov provinces. In 1865, non-gentry property owners predominated in 16 out of 260 district zemstvos, but in 1886 the number had risen to 47.[9] The development of capitalism substantially altered the social structure of Russia and inevitably affected the composition and activities of the local self-government institutions.

The growing ranks of zemstvo employees, the so-called "third element" or "zemstvo intelligentsia," had an even greater impact on the functions and social makeup of the zemstvos. (The "first element" consisted of government officials, and the "second element," the elected deputies of the zemstvo assemblies.) The zemstvo's need for trained specialists stemmed directly from the essence of the zemstvo reform. When the administration created the zemstvos, it hastened to rid itself of responsibility for the few social services it provided. These consisted mostly of the schools, hospitals, and pharmacies under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of State Domains and the Offices

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Alexander Polunov received his undergraduate and graduate training in history at Moscow State University, where he is now an associate professor in the School of Public Administration. He has been a visiting scholar at several academic institutions, including the Harriman Institute of Columbia University, the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies, Maison des sciences de l'homme in Paris, and Humboldt University in Berlin. He is the author of a monograph on the relationship between the tsarist government and the Russian Orthodox Church during the reign of Emperor Alexander III (1996).

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ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

Marshall S. Shatz is Professor of History emeritus at the University of Massachusetts at Boston. His special interest is Russian intellectual history. He is the author of *Soviet Dissent in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge University Press, 1980), and *Jan Waclaw Machajski: A Radical Critic of the Russian Intelligentsia* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989). He translated and edited Michael Bakunin's *Statism and Anarchy* and V.O. Kliuchevsky's *A Course in Russian History: The Time of Catherine the Great* (M.E. Sharpe, 1997), and co-translated (with Judith E. Zimmerman) *Vekhi (Landmarks)* (M.E. Sharpe, 1994).