AUTOCHTHONOUS AND PRACTICAL LIBERALS:
VESTNIK EVROPY AND MODERNIZATION IN LATE IMPERIAL RUSSIA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates a strain of liberal thought based on materials published in the thick journal *Vestnik Evropy*, which formed a unique synapse in the matrix of Russian social thought. The period under examination, 1892-1903, was a testing ground for liberal values as Finance Minister Sergey Witte forced industrialization on an agrarian society. With the Witte System as background, the *Vestnik* liberals articulated an alternative socio-economic development program to those of the Finance Ministry, the Marxists, and the populists. The dissertation also analyzes *Vestnik Evropy* as an institution with a unique interpretation of late imperial politics. The first part integrates the biographies of *Vestnik*’s main contributors—founder and chief editor Mikhail Stasiulevich, de facto council and domestic expert Konstantin Arseniev, historian and literary scholar Alexander Pypin, and foreign policy and economics specialist Leonid Slonimskii. The second part explores *Vestnik*’s conceptual affinity with populism, the evolution of its views on the agrarian crisis and the peasantry, and its eventual separation from populism. The second part also focuses on the articulation of an economic democracy beyond the commune through the extension of local self-government, or zemstvo, rights and responsibilities and the part they played in amortizing modernization’s effects. The third part examines *Vestnik*’s criticism of Marxist ideology, how the authors associated it with a justification of the late imperial modernization, and...
their articulation of a humane form of modernization and a new definition of a moral economy that evaluates modernization from its effects on the local level.

The *Vestnik* group accepted capitalism as an inevitable global process and entertained no utopian schemes of avoiding it. On the contrary, it welcomed the productive improvements that it promised. However, the group also recognized the costs of a transition economy, but did not ascribe them to capitalism per se, choosing instead to target specific policies implemented by the Finance Ministry under Sergey Witte’s direction. In the process of arguing against Marxist and populist writers, the *Vestnik* group produced an eclectic system of values at whose center stood neither a mode of production, nor a class, neither the commune, nor *homo economicus*, but the enlightened individual drawing energy from institutions of local self-government, the zemstvos, which were a unique Russian administrative invention. The group thereby articulated a moral economy based on values that grew out of autochthonous socio-economic conditions. How the individual could define himself in the post-Emancipation socio-economic flux was the unique contribution that the *Vestnik* group made to the Russian liberal tradition.
To my mother Irina and my wife Anita
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My parents, Irina and Andrei, were, of course, at the sources of it all. They dissolved the Iron Curtain and allowed me to grow intellectually by exposing me to the best of what both sides of the Cold War world had to offer. To my mother, Irina, I owe my love of knowledge and passion for inquiry. From my father, Andrei, I inherited the joie de vivre that, I have come to realize in later years, is an essential component of serious intellectual persistence. My grandparents on both sides of the family created a warm and joyous childhood. I have read descriptions of it in the best Russian novels and memoirs.

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I would also like to thank the staffs of the European Reading Room at the Library of Congress, the Pushkin Archive in St. Petersburg, and the Lenin State Library in my native and beloved city of Moscow.
As each intellectual product is the result of a person’s entire mental experience, the friends who have intellectually accompanied me and helped me develop also deserve mention here: Kirill Orekhov (Washington and Moscow); William Aaron, James Keidel, and Damon Kovelsky (Annapolis); Andrea Despot (Boston); and James Class and Brandon “Carlos” Schneider (Washington). Having written about a journal as an institution, perhaps the greatest lesson I have extracted from this dissertation is that I have never stood alone. All the people whom I have mentioned here have contributed greatly to my intellectual and spiritual development. No scholar stands alone.
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Part I: The Genealogy of *Vestnik Evropy*

Introduction

On a cloudy February day in 1911, prominent St. Petersburg jurist and Senator Anatoly Koni walked into an empty office on the second floor of 20 Galernaia Street. At 67 years of age, he belonged to a rapidly shrinking constellation of distinguished intellectuals at the center of which once stood Mikhail Stasiulevich who had just died. Koni had come to pay his last respects to Stasiulevich not at his house but at the editorial office of *Vestnik Evropy*, which Stasiulevich had founded, owned, and ran until 1908. “In this office,” wrote Koni, “you could feel the pulse of Russia’s intellectual elite.”¹ More than an editorial headquarters, this was one of the most important synapses of Russia’s liberal matrix.

*Vestnik Evropy*, according to Koni, was an “old, welcome, dependable, and loyal” companion whose monthly visits prevented his interlocutors from “descending into the morass of egotism and apathy.” The journal encouraged men “to pronounce a modest word in defense of human dignity, to be tolerant of the human spirit’s sacred concerns, and to serve freedom’s cause in all of its variations.”² A professor of medieval history, Stasiulevich believed above all in the enlightening and ennobling power of education. He was an active member of Petersburg’s self-government and, although childless, devoted most of his energies to the city’s educational infrastructure. Koni referred to him as the “keystone” that held together all those around him. “Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table” was what fellow historian Konstantin Kavelin called Stasiulevich when he

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² Ibid., p. 231.
presided over the weekly dinners at his house. The list of guests was impressive. Among many others, there were historians Kavelin, Nikolai Kostomarov, and Vasilii Kliuchevskii, philosopher and poet Vladimir Soloviev, writers Ivan Turgenev and Ivan Goncharov, and British journalist and historian Sir Donald Mackenzie-Wallace. Stasiulevich’s close friends and loyal colleagues Alexander Pypin, Konstantin Arseniev, and Leonid Slonimskii constituted the Vestnik group’s core and attracted many luminaries who entered and left Vestnik’s gravitational field. Towering above this group, like a “moral Areopagus,” as Koni put it, was the chief editor himself.³

Koni described a loosely knit constellation of intellectuals that grew in density around the center that was Vestnik Evropy. The following chapters will explore the intellectual and personal loyalties that connected these remarkable men, binding some to the journal for life and repelling others. The members of the “knights’ table” interacted through the medium of Vestnik Evropy, which, as a cultural phenomenon, acted as a keystone of Russia’s local self-government network. Connecting readers from all over the empire, Vestnik Evropy was an institution that had to struggle against official interference and face established competitors in an open but saturated publishing market. The following four chapters will justify why for the first time in Russian historiography Vestnik Evropy deserves to be examined as an institution all of its own. They will explore the journal in the context of the bureaucratic pressures, intra-ministerial struggles, and state policies that influenced it and bound together its editors and contributors.

³ Ibid., p. 259.
By the mid-19th century, literary or “thick” journals were the primary instruments through which Russian society explored and contextualized itself. Virtually every major 19th-century Russian novel was first published in serialized form, which is why collected works editions were such popular and lucrative but at the same time painstaking undertakings—they offered a writer’s scattered publications in one set. In addition to the journals, there were other cultural institutions such as the imperial court, the schools and universities, scientific societies, salons, discussion groups and circles, academies of arts and sciences, and theaters. Among these, the thick journal was a unique cultural nexus because of its intellectual breadth. It recorded, analyzed, and coordinated social, economic, and literary developments in Russia and abroad and then delivered this cultural bundle to the reader. A randomly selected issue gives an idea of what this bundle was.

What would a reader find between Vestnik’s covers? The journal’s binding was orange. The front cover was designed in the modern style and its inside contained the table of contents. On January 1892, they were as follows. The journal opened with a 44-page article by historian Vladimir Gerie entitled “The Triumph of the Theocratic Beginning in the West (17th Century)” in which the author analyzed an ascetic doctrine that the future Pope Innocent III had articulated in a pamphlet in his youth. The article drew on Latin documents and explained Catholic doctrine. The next item was part one of three of Peter Boborykin’s Vasilii Terkin, a novel in the realistic style about a successful peasant beating the odds (70 pages). Then the reader came to a 50-page biographical sketch of Blaise Pascal by historian R. M. Lunin. A three-stanza poem by Alexei
Zhemchuzhnikov, a regular contributor, separated Lunin’s article from V. Ptitsyn’s 35-page “Buddhism beyond the Baikal: From the Personal Observations of a Tourist.” A 45-page installment of a novella entitled “The Uplifted Curtain” told of a young female university student torn between her studies and a dashing young lawyer whom she wanted to marry. Written in the first female person, it was signed “Nik. Mar.” Two poems by Vladimir Ladyzhenskii separated the young scholar’s dilemma from a translation of Auguste Philon’s tearjerker short story “Violetta Merian” (46 pages) followed by a 50-page review article by Alexander Pypin of an ethnographic study of Russian colonizers of Siberia. Six poems signed “V. G-en” followed this. Lawyer and writer Nikolai Sokolovskii contributed a 30-page article entitled “The Story of One Household and the Peasant Bank: From Village Observations”—a critique of the Peasant Bank and its inability to meet peasant needs. An anonymous but detailed 12-page analysis of the Comptroller’s report for the year 1890 concluded the journal’s feature articles and literary section.

Arseniev’s 30-page “Domestic Survey” opened the journal’s news section and began with an overall assessment of 1891. It then analyzed the amount of food reserves, the Nizhnii Novgorod reserve commission’s activities, the Nizhnii governor’s speech to the newly convened provincial zemstvo meeting (in which the governor roundly criticized private famine aid distributions), the Special Committee on Famine Relief’s proposal to create intermediate committees in provincial capitals, and the Saratov Province’s dilemma regarding the purchase and distribution of grain during the spring thaw. Leonid Slonimskii’s 10-page “Foreign Survey” analyzed the main events of 1891,
explored the European diplomatic reaction to the Franco-Russian alliance, surveyed
German politics and public opinion, compared the new and old chancellors, analyzed the
Russo-German trade agreements and their implications, and reported on the Congress of
geographers in Bern. General Mikhail Annenkov’s 10-page speech to the Bern Congress
followed, in which the builder of the Central Asian railroad explored its importance to
ethnography and colonization. The 10-page “Literary Survey” featured Slonimskii’s
review of Friedrich List’s *National System of Political Economy*, in which he praised the
book, but argued that it had become outdated. The book was, of course, a pillar of Witte’s
thinking. The survey also covered a brochure on student life in Derpt and presentations at
Moscow University’s Society of History and Ancient Russia. A two-page bibliography of
newly published Russian books followed. The “Foreign Literature Survey” covered
*Modern Socialism* by Maurice Block and Hans Blum’s *The Lie of Our Social Democracy.*
Arseniev’s 15-page “Social Chronicle” surveyed the December zemstvo commission
meetings, the legal aspects of placing name plaques on houses, the health dangers of
railway station buffets, the enforced Christianization of Siberian natives, the reaction of
the conservative press to Vladimir Soloviev’s “On the Causes of the Decline of the
Medieval Worldview,” church schools, the freedom of the professorial and legal
professions, and questions about the Petersburg city zemstvo’s purchase of grain from the
Baltic provinces. An announcement for the Congress of Fire Prevention Specialists listed
the topics for discussion and solicited presentation proposals. A 16-page bibliographical
brochure closed out the journal and included Stasiulevich’s publications as well as
advertisements from other printing houses, periodicals, and dailies. The back cover
contained another bibliographical list on the inside and subscription details to *Vestnik* on the outside. The entire issue was 440 pages long and not a single page was blank. In general, the journal contained between 440 and 460 pages, which suggests that it was more than a coffee table decoration.

The journal culture was not unique to Russia in the 19th century. Studies of British serialized literature and journalism have been examining since the 1960s the role of serialized writing on Victorian culture. Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lind have explored the temporal features of serialization and the effects they had on Victorian readers’ conceptions of sequential and progressive development. Hughes and Lind have argued that the publication format and the responses of contemporary reviewers contributed to the “anti-closural” Victorian conception of human institutions and processes such as marriage and politics. The readers’ sense of “long middles” in serialized novels favored “processual” thinking over termination. Readers of serials were always in the midst of narrative and could not predict how the plots developed. Works published in installments, be they literary, critical, or scientific, created a special interpretive space that gave readers a greater sense of writing as a process and lessened the distance between the ongoing experiences of their lives and the fictional processes they witnessed on the journals’ pages.

Exploring magazine novels in 19th century America, Patricia Okker has argued that serialized novels negotiated the tension between the ideas of a public and literary

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culture and engaged in the social project of establishing a community of readers. While
the conventional novel conjured up images of the solitary reader absorbed in a book,
magazine novels were frequently read aloud, and serialization meant that at any given
time readers were at more or less the same point in the novel. Okker also emphasized the
magazine novel’s engagement in, rather than retreat from, the great civic questions of the
day.6

In addition to being a carrier of information and creating reader communities, the
journal was also a focal point around which intellectuals structured their social and
literary identities. Like-minded contributors often gathered around journals and
sometimes changed loyalties in groups. Proximity to the journal bred intellectual kinship
as contributors read the same books, exchanged ideas about new works, recommended
them to each other, and attended the same lectures and events. The close personal,
artistic, political, and financial support systems fostered the intellectual survival and
growth of several generations of writers. Russia in the second half of the 19th century was
no exception to this literary trend. Moreover, its journal culture was in some senses richer
than were those in Europe.

Robert Belknap has argued that the “community of journals” made the “Russian
literary world a tight and structured whole” and created “an extraordinary literary form”
unlike anything in the West.7 Much as they had done with the genre of the novel,
Russians took the European journalistic tradition and in the 1850s transformed it into a

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cultural power more dynamic than was its parent. Hughes and Lind identified the following as the most important topics examined in Victorian periodicals: creating a home, living in history, building an empire, expressing doubt, and prefiguring an end to progress. It would be hard to improve upon such an impressive list. However, Russia had unique factors in its political system that forbade parliamentary politics, severely limited social participation in administrative reforms, and largely ignored wider social interests in economic development planning. As a result, society’s constrained intellectual energy flowed into and off the pages of the monthlies.

In the 1850s, after Nicholas I died and the Buturlin Censorship Committee ceased to exist, Russian literary journals resumed their prominence and rapid development. When *Messenger of Europe* (*Vestnik Evropy*, 1866-1918) appeared on the scene in 1866, it was a newcomer among equally promising beginners and several well-established veterans. The literary giants were the highly popular *Contemporary* (*Sovremennik*, 1837-1868) and *Fatherland Notes* (*Otechestvenny zapiski*, 1839-1884) both under Andrei Kraevskii’s direction by 1866. In London, Alexander Herzen was still publishing *The Bell* (*Kolokol*, 1857-1867) in which he defined his own strain of liberalism. In 1856, the *Russian Herald* (*Russkii vestnik*, 1856-1906) became the quintessential “establishment” journal under the guidance of its conservative and nationalist editor Mikhail Katkov. Because of his ties to officialdom, Katkov enjoyed protection and could outbid his competitors for the leading talents of the age: Leo Tolstoy, Fedor Dostoevsky, Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin, Ivan Turgenev, Alexei Pisemsky, and Nikolai Leskov, among others. Kraevskii’s *Sovremennik* and *Otechestvennye zapiski* were to the left of *Russkii*
vestnik, but also boasted great talents such as Tolstoy, Turgenev, Afanasii Fet, Fedor Tiutchev, and Apollon Maikov.

In addition to the literary journals, new specialized periodicals appeared at the time. Peter Bartenev’s Russian Archive (Russkii arkhiv, 1863-1918) reflected the “establishment” approach in selecting and interpreting historical documents. Mikhail Semevsky founded Russian antiquity (Russkaia starina, 1870-1918) to compete with Bartenev’s journal by publishing “unsanctioned” primarily literary materials from the 18th century on, especially works that had not been published due to censorship. In 1866, Grigorii Blagosvetlov, a former editor of the radical Russian Word (Russkoe slovo, 1859-1866), who had spent three weeks in the Peter and Paul Fortress because of Dmitrii Karakozov’s failed attempt on the tsar’s life, founded The Cause (Delo, 1866-1888), the most notable organ of radical populism after Dmitrii Pisarev’s death. It published writer Gleb Uspenskii and social critics Peter Tkachev and Peter Lavrov, among others. The journal field was already full of hopeful newcomers in 1866 when historian Mikhail Stasiulevich decided to try his hand at publishing. His attempt, however, proved to be no ordinary undertaking—a journal with gravitational force that affected Russia’s intellectual field.

It is a testament to its founder that on a crowded field of journals, Vestnik Evropy became Russian liberalism’s flagship and a nucleus around which revolved a constellation of intellectuals so broad that it accommodated eminent writers of the Golden Age as well as local statisticians. Vestnik’s chief editors were also theorists who created a unique socio-economic vision in which the individual determined his self-worth
in apolitical currency, justified his existence without religious values, and negotiated with the state in the total absence of representative political institutions.

*Vestnik Evropy* was at the center of a loyal opposition to the autocracy that was uninterested in conspiratorial tactics, underground organizations, or direct appeals to the urban or rural masses. It voiced its concerns on paper and engaged in polemics with both conservative publications and radical critics. It also encouraged personal participation in local self-government while defending the zemstvos against the state’s encroachments. In the last third of the 19th century, *Vestnik Evropy* was the unparalleled leader of thick journals and the centerpiece of Mikhail Stasiulevich’s publishing complex. As George Fischer has put it, the journal “voiced (and shaped) the activities, thinking and mood of Russia’s liberal notables after the Great reforms.”

During its 52-year lifespan, *Vestnik Evropy* became the undisputed pillar of Russian liberalism.

Three milestones justified the journal’s flagship reputation. First, it came into being in 1866 two years after the zemstvos were created. Founded during the Great Reforms, it remained faithful to their legacy until the last issue. Second, located in the imperial capital, *Vestnik* successfully navigated the treacherous currents of censorship and managed to avoid the ultimate administrative punishment—closing—despite two official warnings in the “three-and-you’re-out” system of Russian censorship. Far from “imitating” western examples and unquestioningly following foreign ideologies, it was a window on Russia. Third, it survived until 1918, after which the Bolshevik authorities did

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what the Tsarist government had failed to do—shut it down. It disappeared along with the rest of the achievements of the Great Reforms, including the zemstvos.

Chapter 1

The Vestnik Constellation

The Vestnik story began with its creator, owner, publisher, and chief editor Mikhail Matveevich Stasiulevich who was born in 1826 into a Petersburg physician’s family that fell apart soon thereafter. As a gymnasium student, Mikhail had to support his younger brother Nicholas and his mother. He received a Master’s degree in European history from St. Petersburg University. From 1856 to 1858, Stasiulevich attended lectures in France, England, and Italy where he regularly read Alexander Herzen’s Kolokol and Poliarnaia Zvezda.9 During this trip, he met the daughter of merchant millionaire Isaac Utin whose son, Boris, Stasiulevich already knew from the university. Utin’s daughter, Liubov’, accompanied her six brothers on their European trip as she prepared for entrance exams. Stasiulevich joined their study circle and quickly fell in love. Liuba agreed to marry him, and the ceremony took place in April 1859. The Petersburg press took note of it: “A millionaire’s daughter marries not ‘his highness’… but a poor, young academic.”10 Soon after the wedding, the young couple moved into one of Utin’s properties on 20 Galernaia Street behind the Senate and Synod buildings.11 Liuba’s father lost his fortune in the late 1860s, but his sons became famous in their own right. Nicholas Utin organized

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Russia’s section of the First International and corresponded with Karl Marx. Together with his brothers Boris and Eugene, he also regularly contributed articles to Vestnik Evropy.

During the same European trip, Stasiulevich met another student who was to become one of his closest friends and most trusted colleagues in the publishing business. Alexander Pypin was born into Saratov Province’s landed nobility in 1833. His mother’s elder sister, Eugenia, had married the priest G. I. Chernyshevskii, whose soon to be famous son Nicholas was five years Alexander’s senior. Pypin remembered his childhood with fondness, but the occasional scenes of injustice and violence to which he was privy on country estates scared and enraged him.\(^{12}\) He escaped the realities of serfdom by reading. Alexander’s father worked for the local administration while Nicholas’ was an ecclesiastic superintendent. What Nicholas Chernyshevskii’s biographer William Woehrlin wrote of his subject applied equally to Alexander Pypin who “grew up with knowledge of two avenues of service which, as performed by his father and uncle, possessed integrity and dedication.”\(^{13}\)

Both the Chernyshevskii and Pypin families valued education highly. Pypin was home-schooled for the first nine years of his life at which time he came under his elder cousin’s influence. Nicholas’ father Gavrili Chernyshevskii gladly let the boys into his library, which opened the world of history, literature, and the arts. The Chernyshevskii family members read Otechestvennye zapiski in the early 1840s when it published articles

\(^{12}\) A. N. Pypin, Moi zametki (Moscow, 1910), pp. 8-10.

by Alexander Herzen and Vissarion Belinskii. Nicholas Chernyshevskii closely monitored his cousin’s academic progress through the gymnasium years and convinced the Pypins to support their son’s intellectual aspirations. While he studied at the Saratov gymnasium, Pypin witnessed the peasantry’s suffering and heard the wild rumors about promised lands and mythical eras to which it gave rise. This convinced him that educating the masses was the surest way to help them. Alexander absorbed at least some of his dedication to learning from his cousin who in August 1846 wrote to him:

We will firmly resolve, with all the strength of our soul to work together with others in order to end this period in which learning has been foreign to our spiritual life, that it may cease to be a strange coat, a sorrowful, impersonal aping for us. Let Russia also contribute what it should to the spiritual life of the world, as it has contributed and contributes to political life; to enter powerfully, in its own way, a saving way for humanity, in another great arena of life—learning, as it has already done in the arena of state and political life. Yes, and may this great event be achieved through us, even if only in part.

Chernyshevskii and Pypin would take remarkably different paths towards this goal.

Pypin’s entrance exams into the university fell on the inauspicious years 1848-1849. Although Nicholas Chernyshevskii wanted his cousin to apply to St. Petersburg University, the family decided that Pypin had a better chance of entering Kazan University due to the restrictions in place in the capital. Alexander’s year in Kazan proved fortuitous. Under the influence of the famous Slavic scholar V. I. Grigorovich, he fell in love with Slavic history and gained access to Grigorovich’s extensive library. Meanwhile, Chernyshevskii prepared the groundwork for transferring his cousin to St.

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14 Ibid., p. 19.
17 A. N. Pypin, Moi zametki (Moscow, 1910), pp. 28-29.
Petersburg University by organizing all the paperwork in the capital and convincing his aunt and uncle by mail. In 1850, Chernyshevskii traveled back to Saratov, where Pypin was spending his summer vacation, and accompanied his younger cousin back to St. Petersburg. Pypin enrolled in the historical-philological department just as Chernyshevskii was finishing there.

Pypin found the university atmosphere at once intellectually rich and institutionally repressive due to education minister P. A. Shirinsky-Shikhmatov’s reactionary policies that aimed to stem the 1848 revolutionary tide. In Pypin’s view, the threat was imaginary because in Russia “serfdom and bureaucratism ruled, while the overwhelming majority of the population was ignorant and unconcerned with social issues.” Because Pypin did not develop close friendships at the university, he remained under the influence of Chernyshevskii who introduced him to the works of utopian socialists Henri Saint-Simon and Charles Fourier. Pypin rejected their schemes as fantastic for Russia and preferred instead Ludwig Feuerbach’s “powerful and decisive” logic. Chernyshevskii also introduced Pypin to the work of Charles Dickens and Nikolai Gogol, and brought him into writer and also Saratov native Irinarkh Vvedensky’s literary circle where sensitive historical subjects as well as banned works by Vissarion Belinskii and Alexander Herzen were discussed.

18 Chernyshevskii to parents, 12 December 1849, in N. G. Chernyshevskii, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii (Moscow, 1950), XIV, pp. 168-169.
19 A. N. Pypin, Moi zametki (Moscow, 1910), pp. 54-56.
20 Ibid., p. 57.
21 Ibid., pp. 75-77.
Pypin immediately demonstrated his intellectual competence and became a regular visitor to the salons of Alexander Nikitenko, a famous critic and censor, and Andrei Kraevskii, a journalist and publisher, where he met the light of Petersburg’s academic and social intelligentsia. The philological-historical profession that Pypin joined in the 1850s experienced great pressure from the state to avoid political topics. History became detail-oriented and highly specialized, which suited Pypin, because he was uninterested in Slavophilic “dreams about the national spirit.”

With Chernyshevskii’s help, he began to publish in Otechestvennye zapiski and Sovremennik, which brought him into the journal’s intellectual milieu. At Sovremennik evenings, he made the acquaintance of the writers Ivan Turgenev, Ivan Goncharov, Dmitrii Grigorovich, and Lev Tolstoy, all of whom left indelible marks on his intellectual development.

Having successfully defended his Master’s thesis on ancient Russian tales, Pypin won the right to travel abroad and left for Berlin in January 1858. After he met Stasiulevich there, they left for Paris together in order to complete a comparative study of universities in Russia, Germany, and France. After his friend left, Pypin stayed in Paris for three extra months and befriended Boris Utin. The two then traveled to London where they met Alexander Herzen and his friend, the poet Nikolai Ogarev. Pypin went on to visit Switzerland, Italy, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, all of which produced important impressions, especially Prague, where he realized how poorly Russian

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22 Piatidesiatiletie nauchno-literaturnoi deiatel’nosti akademika A. N. Pypina (St. Petersburg, 1903), p. 17.
23 Ibid., p. 18.
24 IRLI, f. 250, op. 2, d. 6, l. 1-172.
25 A. N. Pypin, Moi zametki (Moscow, 1910), p. 118.
literature was known and how misguided were the aspirations of the Slavophiles.  

Pypin’s European experience had a significant impact on his theories of Russia’s socio-political development. It may not have made a “westernizer” of him, but it certainly discredited whatever Slavophilic notions he may have entertained and it undermined any chance for the emergence of isolationist sensibilities in the young scholar.

Stasiulevich also came back from Europe a changed man with the firm belief that Russia had to develop along European lines. He soon joined the faculty of St. Petersburg University and his travel experience began to come through in his lectures. Longin Panteleev, a member of the radical Land and Freedom group of the 1860s and a successful publisher in his own right, was one of Stasiulevich’s students and recalled in his memoirs that the “lectures covered the latest achievements of European science, and the audience heard them with great attention and interest, and with each lecture the number of students increased.”  

Stasiulevich also gave public lectures in the Passazh, a commercial arcade on Nevsky Prospekt. Alexander Nikitenko wrote in his diary that the talks were full of “hints about the true contemporary state of Russia.” Fellow Petersburg University professor P. V. Ostrogorsky called Stasiulevich a “brilliant lecturer-popularizer” who “showed us for the first time history’s significance, explained the profound meaning of civilization.”  

Conversely, in his autobiographical article, “Our University Science,” famous literary critic Dmitrii Pisarev created a sarcastic image of Stasiulevich as a young professor by the name of Ironiansky who had a passion for

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28 A. V. Nikitenko, Dnevnik (Moscow, 1955), II, p. 56.  
29 V. P. Ostrogorsky, Iz istorii moego uchitelstva (St. Petersburg, 1895), pp. 52-53.
flowery speech, shallow analysis, and unoriginal ideas. Literary critic Alexander Skabichevsky disagreed with Pisarev’s sarcasm and confirmed Stasiulevich as a “talented popularizer” who “behaved himself as a European,” used the language of contemporary science, and knew his subject well.

Although Stasiulevich and Pypin came to similar conclusions during their European trip, they expressed them in different ways. By the time Pypin returned to Petersburg in 1860, educational district administrator I. D. Delianov had approved his appointment as professor of the history of world literature at St. Petersburg University. According to contemporaries, Pypin’s lectures were straightforward and scientific without superfluous flourishes or catchy phrases. Nothing about his professional career attracted suspicion. Stasiulevich, on the other hand, had already appeared on the Third Section’s radar in 1855 as one of the suspected authors of Nikolai Dobroliubov’s acerbic poem inspired by the anniversary of N. I. Grech, a conservative journalist, philologist, and pedagogue who had been the object of ridicule from such prominent figures as Alexander Pushkin and Vissarion Belinskii. The authorities immediately received reports on the less than orthodox views on European scientific achievements, social changes, and political sensibilities that Stasiulevich expressed in his lectures and the excited reactions that they elicited from his listeners. The Ministry of Interior began to limit his public appearances. Meanwhile, Pypin became part of the capital’s salon culture.

31 A. M. Skabichevskii, Literaturnye vospominaniia (Moscow-Leningrad, 1931), pp. 73-80.
On Tuesdays he visited famous historian Nikolai Kostomarov’s apartment, spent Thursdays and Saturdays in the company of his cousin Nikolai Chernyshevskii’s friends, and on Sundays he was the guest of Konstantin Kavelin.34

Together with Kavelin, legal scholars Vladimir Spasovich and Boris Utin, Pypin and Stasiulevich tried to democratize the academic atmosphere of St. Petersburg University.35 Education minister E. V. Putiatin established a special peer-elected commission of which Pypin, Utin, and Stasiulevich became members to create new university rules. They tried their best to retain as much corporate independence for the student body as possible, but Putiatin, who favored centralized control, personally oversaw the new university charter and blocked the group’s initiatives. When the new charter was ready for distribution in September 1861, Pypin was one of 15 faculty members who refused to hand out the new document. When student disturbances took place, Stasiulevich refused to support them, although his own students, and even relatives Nicholas and Eugene Utin, took part. He believed that any opposition outside the application and petition system was unacceptable. It was bound to fail and have counterproductive effects. However, Satsiulevich was equally appalled when the authorities meted out excessive punishments and temporarily closed the university.

When it became clear that all hopes for reform and democratization were illusory, Stasiulevich was part of a progressive group of professors who resigned. Konstantin

35 V. D. Spasovich, “Piatišëatiute Peterburgskogo universiteta,” Vestnik Evropy 4 (1870) and 5 (1870) and A. V. Nikitenko, Dnevnik (Moscow, 1958), II, p. 373.
Kavelin, Vladimir Spasovich, Boris Utin, and Alexander Pypin were the others. They did so separately to prevent it from appearing as a collective political statement.\(^{36}\) Pypin justified his decision as a refusal to become an administrator under the new system.\(^{37}\) Stasiulevich explained his motives in a letter to his wife: “Only a strong reaction can maintain order under present conditions; that is why I do not want to become an executioner, and even if I wanted to, I could not.”\(^{38}\) When Stasiulevich tried to join the Military Academy’s history faculty, the academy head Grand Duke Nicholas Mikhailovich turned him away.\(^{39}\) His only academic activity remained to lecture Crown Prince Nicholas Alexandrovich on ancient and medieval history. He also dedicated his time to writing *The History of the Middle Ages through its Writers and the Latest Research* (1863-65).

Pypin was the only member of the group who was prohibited from reading public lectures. He intended to give a series of talks on “medieval Russian literature and false books.” The proposal was bounced around state offices, but none could find any fault with it until it was finally forwarded to the Holy Synod for consideration. The subject was religious and the Synod justified its prohibition by pointing to the broad nature of Pypin’s proposal which made it impossible to judge its merits.\(^{40}\) Pypin soon found himself in financial straits from which he could emerge only by working more closely

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\(^{37}\) IRLI, f. 250, op. 1, ed. khr. 48, l. 50.


\(^{40}\) D. A. Balykin, *A.N. Pypin kak issledovatel techenii russkoj obshchestvennoi mysli* (Briansk, 1996), pp. 34, 150.
with Sovremennik, which, however, he did not consider to be the best alternative. From 1861 on, the Third Section, the Tsarist equivalent of a secret police, kept Pypin under surveillance as a “person especially close” to Chernyshevskii and progressive writer Mikhail Mikhailov as well as a suspect in “facilitating Herzen’s correspondence.” The Education Ministry sent Pypin on an eight-month European tour to gather information about western educational systems. The Third Section opened his correspondence with Chernyshevskii in which it found Russia’s educational and political systems compared unfavorably to Europe’s. When Chernyshevskii wrote What Is to Be Done? in his cell in the Alekseevsky Ravelin at the Peter and Paul Fortress, he sent Pypin the manuscript in parts after the censors perused them. Pypin oversaw the novel’s publication on the pages of Sovremennik and delivered books to his cousin while he was in prison.

In 1859, Pypin was one of the founding members of the Literary Fund, which was created to support financially struggling writers and their families. He became a committee member in 1863. He worked closely with writers Nikolai Nekrasov and Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin on Sovremennik’s editorial board. Between 1863 and 1864, he and Vladimir Spasovich edited and published the Survey of the History of Slavic Literatures (1865) for which Pypin received the prestigious Uvarov Prize. Throughout this period, he made numerous appeals to the authorities on his cousin’s behalf, but in

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42 Ibid., p. 104.
45 IRLI, f. 250, op. 2, ed. khr. 1, l. 25.
vain. On 5 February 1864, Nikolai Chernyshevskii was stripped of his title and property and condemned to 14 years of forced labor and permanent exile in Siberia. In March, he sold his father’s house to Pypin who also took upon himself the care and education of his cousin’s children.\textsuperscript{46} The responsibility proved to be a burden because Chernyshevskii’s wife, Olga, could not get along with the Pypin family and complained about them in letters to her husband. In turn, he played peacemaker in his correspondence with Pypin and the two tried to smooth matters over between Olga and the only source of aid and means of support she had—the Pypin family.\textsuperscript{47} In addition, Pypin organized the publication of Chernyshevskii’s works to bring the exile’s family some income. All of this made him increasingly suspect in the eyes of the Third Section, conservative and moderate partners, and even some of his literary colleagues.\textsuperscript{48}

Meanwhile, Nekrasov made Pypin the deputy chief editor of \textit{Sovremennik}, which would eventually bring Pypin and Stasiulevich together with the third member of the \textit{Vestnik} group, Konstantin Arseniev. According to the Statute of 1865, select thick journals, \textit{Sovremennik} among them, could publish without submitting prior survey copies to the censor’s office. However, in the event that the contents were found to be offensive, the chief editor and deputy editors were held criminally responsible and the journal received an official warning. The reform of 1865 also required not only that the censor state his reasons for warning a publication but that the periodical publish that statement. This practice, designed to chasten editors and writers and to make clear the limits on

\textsuperscript{46} IRLI, f. 163, op. 4, ed. khr. 41, l. 35-37.
public discourse, served to place in full view of the public what often seemed to be vague and petty rulings by censors.\textsuperscript{49} Nekrasov and Pypin had an agreement that when one of them went abroad, the other took over responsibility for the journal.\textsuperscript{50} Pypin was in charge when the censorship bureau ordered the presses to stop in April 1866 after economist Julius Zhukovsky’s article “The Question of the Young Generation” critical of the landed nobility appeared in the March issue. The state accused Pypin and Zhukovsky of damaging the “honor and reputation of the gentry.”\textsuperscript{51} The accused hired Konstantin Arseniev as council who gladly took the case on behalf of “persons whom I sympathized with because they faced a completely groundless accusation.”\textsuperscript{52} As Pypin wrote to Nikolai Nekrasov, Arseniev was the reason that they eventually won the case, although a subsequent trial placed them in jail for three weeks.\textsuperscript{53} Years later, Arseniev referred to this case as an example of state “persecution of the radical press.”\textsuperscript{54} This close call proved to be a long-term blessing by bringing Arseniev into the \textit{Vestnik} group.

Konstantin Konstantinovich Arseniev was born in 1837. His father Konstantin Ivanovich taught geography and statistics at the St. Petersburg Engineering University until he was dismissed in 1821 as a result a faculty purge by arch-conservative Educational District Administrator D. P. Runich’s who formulated the official reason as “inculcating students with a preconceived system of doubt, harmful rules, and destructive

\textsuperscript{49} Charles A. Ruud, \textit{Fighting Words: Imperial Censorship and the Russian Press, 1804-1906} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), p. 228.
\textsuperscript{50} N. A. Nekrasov, \textit{Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem} (Moscow, 1952), XII, p. 53.
\textsuperscript{51} IRLI, f. 250, op. 2, ed. khr. 73, l. 115-120.
\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Peresipka N. A. Nekrasova} (Moscow, 1987), I, p. 500.
tendencies.” The elder Arseniev had suggested in his lectures on statistics and geography that free labor was more efficient than serf labor, praised personal initiative in cottage crafts, considered the absence of an official law code an obstacle to socio-economic development, and criticized judicial corruption. Luckily, Grand Duke Nicholas Pavlovich’s intercession saved Arseniev from complete professional oblivion, and his luck changed again when, in 1828, Nicholas I appointed him to be Crown Prince Alexander’s history and statistics instructor. Since Russian economic historiography was non-existent at the time, Tsar Nicholas granted Arseniev access to the appropriate ministry archives for organizing his lectures on statistics. In 1835, the Tsar extended this right to state and foreign ministry archives for organizing modern Russian history lectures. The tutor thus influenced the future Tsar-Liberator, who developed a warm rapport with his teacher. Arseniev deserves partial credit for planting the idea of emancipation into Alexander’s head.55

This background sheds light on the domestic atmosphere in which young Konstantin Arseniev’s socio-economic views evolved. He received a degree from the Academy of Law and joined the Justice Ministry in 1858 when the court reform was being considered. His introduction to publishing occurred in 1859 when he became assistant editor of the *Justice Ministry Journal*. However, his passion for bureaucratic work rapidly ebbed, and he became more and more interested in literary criticism, some of which he published in the arch-conservative *Russkii vestnik* run by the notorious M. N. Katkov. He broke with the journal in 1861 as it drifted to the extreme right and began to

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publish in *Otechestvennye zapiski*. The same year he joined a group of lawyers who were discussing judicial reform issues. Ober-Procurator and distinguished lawyer Dmitrii Stasov was the spirit of this small salon, which also included Konstantim Kavelin, Vladimir Spasovich, and Boris Utin. In 1862, Arseniev shared editorial duties at *Otechestvennye zapiski* with famous journalists Andrei Kraevskii and Stepan Dudyshkin and oversaw the journal’s political news section.

The student disturbances of September 1861 marked a turning point in Arseniev’s life just as they had in Stasiulevich’s and Pypin’s. Dmitrii Stasov asked his colleagues at the Justice Ministry to sign a petition asking the Tsar to mitigate the punishment of the students. Arseniev was one of the signatories. When the Third Section got wind of the proposed petition, it arrested Stasov and threatened all who were implicated with dismissal. Stasov was eventually released, but lost his position only to rise to the top of Russia’s new legal profession in the wake of the 1866 reform. Arseniev was demoted and this convinced him further of the futility of state service in which intellectual talent and initiative were not favored. He wrote in his diary that despite the spirit of the Great Reforms, many “old bureaucratic and police tactics remained: unregulated suspicion, the tendency to arrest first and investigate second, and intolerance of social activism’s slightest tendencies.” The “October history,” as he referred to the officially sanctioned purges that followed the student disturbances, was an early sign of state attitudes that would “cast a dark shadow upon the following decades.”

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57 Ibid., pp. 164-167.
58 Ibid., p. 161.
“October history” and the counter-reforms was that the officials who had exceeded the “limits of necessary security”—education minister E. V. Putiatin, St. Petersburg Governor-General P. N. Ignatiev, Corps of Gendarmes chief P. A. Shuvalov, and police chief A. V. Patkul—in 1861 were eventually also dismissed, whereas in succeeding decades such acts became regular affairs. In 1862, Arseniev published a series of articles on British constitutionalism in Otechestvennye zapiski and oversaw the journal’s foreign news section. He left state service at the end of 1862 when journalist and literary historian Valentin Korsh offered to put him in charge of Sankt Peterburgskie Vedomosti’s foreign news section. In 1866, Arseniev joined the St. Petersburg Council of Jurors of which he remained a member until 1872.59

As Stasiulevich’s, Pypin’s, and Arseniev’s biographies demonstrate, Vestnik Evropy was born into a precarious world. The 1860s saw the realization of the long-awaited reforms and the upsurge of radicalism in their wake. Ironically, the reforms generated a new antagonism that the government and the liberals feared equally. Radical pamphlets urged the “educated classes to relieve the incompetent government of its power,” demanded “a good solution of the peasant question,” the liberation of Poland, a constitution, and some even predicted popular rebellions and urged revolutionary violence.60 Student disturbances broke out in St. Petersburg University and in the spring of 1862 a series of fires which badly damaged certain quarters of St. Petersburg

heightened public tensions. These events formed the background of Chernyshevskii’s arrest in 1862 and the brutal suppression of the Polish revolt of 1863. Ironically, the Emancipation marked the end of the period during which the liberals were able to exercise any effective influence on the state. In the early 1860s, they faced an unenviable choice. Either they resigned themselves to their jobs and studies, or they adopted political views incompatible with their ideals.

The “fathers and sons” phenomenon manifested itself as a generational fault on liberalism’s surface. Liberal thinker of the 1840s and 1850s Vasilii Botkin became unashamedly reactionary by the 1860s and approved of views expressed in Katkov’s Moskovskie vedomosti and spent increasing amounts of time abroad, especially in Berlin. The arguments between the government, the radical intelligentsia, and the moderate liberals obscured the values for which his generation had fought. He died in 1869. Writer Pavel Annenkov, who had witnessed the revolution of 1848 in Paris, also turned increasingly conservative. His relations with Herzen soured over the Polish uprising and he also began publishing in Katkov’s Russkii vestnik. He spent most of his time abroad, although he actively corresponded with friends and assisted the editors of Vestnik Evropy. He died in Dresden in 1887. Alexander Druzhinin edited The Library for Reading (Biblioteka dlia chteniia, 1835-1865), which specialized in publishing the Golden Age writers and poets. In the early 1860s, he witnessed his journal’s popularity plummet because it did not address the burning political issues of the day. In February 1863, he sold Biblioteka to a young and naïve Peter Boborykin who invested all of his inheritance in the journal, borrowed profusely to keep it afloat, watched his project self-destruct, and
ended up in debt that took twenty years to repay. This forced him to depend on serial publications and made him a regular contributor to Vestnik Evropy. Even while Druzhinin was editor of Biblioteka, it was apparent that the utilitarian tendencies prevalent among the reading public made the journal’s purely literary vector untenable. Once that battle was lost, the even-handed and tolerant liberal views were sure to suffer the same fate.

Konstantin Kavelin was perhaps the most outstanding victim of the split between the liberal “fathers” and the more radical “sons.” He had identified with student complaints in 1861 and resigned along with Stasiulevich, Pypin, and other faculty members from Petersburg University. By 1862, however, his opinions drifted to the right. He condemned the Polish uprising although he had been sympathetic to Polish ambitions in the 1850s. Kavelin published a pamphlet in Berlin in 1862 entitled The Gentry and the Emancipation of the Peasants in which he argued that the Russian gentry should remain the “first estate,” rejected a constitution as premature, and expressed confidence in the monarchy’s ability to spearhead reform. These views were not unreasonable, but that Kavelin articulated them on paper symbolized an entrenchment. Kavelin ended his days teaching at the St. Petersburg Academy of Military Law, but he no longer had any great influence in the intelligentsia.

Kavelin’s teacher and one of the Nicholas era’s most notable liberals, Timofei Granovskiy, died in 1855, lucky to escape the drawing of lines in the 1860s. He left a rich liberal legacy behind him. A professor of history, he was an inspiration to literary

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characters such as Bersenev in On the Eve by Turgenev who had aspired to follow in Granovsky’s professional footsteps and to Chernyshevskii who expressed profound respect for him as a “servant of enlightenment.” Priscilla Roosevelt has argued that Granovsky provided “a classroom that prepared a generation of young men for their roles as statesmen in the reform era” and that he inculcated in his students “open-mindedness that is the hallmark of the liberal mentality.”63 Granovsky had turned his historical scholarship into a medium for the dissemination of humanitarian values and in this he was Pypin’s direct precursor.64

Boris Chicherin’s biographer Gary Hamburg has given his subject a prominent role in contributing to Russia’s “first well-defined political agenda,” the substance of the Great Reforms, that had marked the shift from “1840s Westernizer to 1850s liberal activist,” and therein the birth of Russian liberalism.65 Chicherin’s “conservative liberalism,” Hamburg has argued, was the reference point toward which the liberals of the 1840s tended in the 1860s demonstrating that Russian liberalism owed as much to context as to conviction. Chicherin opposed the Polish uprising of 1863 in terms that Hamburg has described as “unworthy even of Metternich.”66

This retrenchment of old liberalism was the context in which Stasiulevich conceived his journal. By the mid-1860s, Vestnik’s stars came into alignment in the guise

66 Ibid., p. 272.
of three frustrated intellectuals. Their disappointment with the state aside, however,
Stasiulevich, Pypin, and Arseniev firmly believed in social potential. They
wholeheartedly supported the reform spirit, but parted ways with the state when its desire
to control society exceeded reasonable bounds. The Great Reforms created media, such
as the legal profession, for example, through which men of liberal views could express
their disappointment with politics. Stasiulevich seized his chance and, enthused with the
spirit of reforms, established a journal that became the uncontested proponent of social
progress and a beacon of hope for the cause of human dignity in the Russian Empire.

Chapter 2

Vestnik’s Formative Years

The beginning of the 1860s was a difficult time for the Utin family. As soon as
Nicholas emigrated for his safety, the police began to open his correspondence with
Stasiulevich. It is a sign of Stasiulevich’s prescience that he wrote in 1862: “I will try to
arrange my affairs in such a way that I am ready for anything. To be under the stick and
above snaps, I agree, is very uncomfortable. It seems a time of reaction has begun; the
only question is how long it will last; I am afraid there will be enough for our time. They
consider us retrogrades, almost scoundrels, from below, and from above they look upon
us as instigators. Decent people nowadays who find themselves between two fanaticisms,
without doubt, will move aside and will comprise, so to speak—the party of
temperance.”\textsuperscript{67} Stasiulevich positioned himself between Nekrasov’s Sovremennik and
Katkov’s Moskovskie vedomosti. He was not the only one searching for alternatives in the

\textsuperscript{67} Stasiulevich to wife, 6 June 1862, \textit{M. M. Stasiulevich i ego sovremenniki v ikh perepiske}, ed. M. K.
Lemke (St. Petersburg, 1911-1913), I, p. 405.
1860s, but it was still too early for the loyal opposition to organize itself into parties or movements. A crucial element was absent—a constructive common denominator. Before agreeing on any platform, the moderate intellectuals needed a medium through which to engage each other and to focus and channel their interaction. Filling this niche became Mikhail Stasiulevich’s life project.

Stasiulevich credited Vladimir Spasovich with the idea of founding a journal.68 However, before moving ahead, he consulted his other close friends, Spasovich, Kavelin, and Boris Utin. He also relied heavily on the advice of famous professor, critic, editor, and publisher Peter Pletnev (1792-1862). Pletnev had known Alexander Pushkin very well and was a permanent and close member of the poet’s circle of friends. Gogol and Zhukovskii had turned to him for advice. A native of Tver, Pletnev became the head of the Russian Philology Department at St. Petersburg University and its rector in 1832 and was one of Stasiulevich’s favorite professors.69 He wholeheartedly supported Stasiulevich’s journal idea, but warned him that publishing was not only unprofitable, but also time-consuming and stressful. In November 1865, Stasiulevich informed Pletnev that he had submitted an application to the Chief Department on Press Affairs for permission to publish an “historical-political” quarterly. He decided to call it Vestnik Evropy in honor of Nicholas Karamzin, famous writer, literary critic, historian, and publisher, who would have turned 100 in 1866.70 Karamzin founded his Vestnik Evropy in 1802 as an historical

68 IRLI, f. 293, op. 1, ed. khr. 105, l. 101.
and literary journal that would appeal to and unite Russia’s best minds in the pursuit of 
enlightenment and public education. The journal covered intellectual and political trends 
in Europe as well as prose and poems in translation. Yet Karamzin was critical of aping 
all things European and remaining in a state of tutelage for too long. The journal was 
short-lived—Karamzin stopped publishing it in 1804 when he devoted himself fully to 
writing the History of the Russian State.\textsuperscript{71} Stasiulevich wanted to resurrect a publication 
that looked to the west with a curious but analytical glance.

He expected the Interior Ministry to balk at the proposal. To emphasize the 
journal’s historical nature, he convinced accomplished historian Nikolai Kostomarov to 
join the editorial board. In his biography, Kostomarov maintained that it was his 
suggestion to call the journal Vestnik Evropy in honor of Karamzin and poet Vasilii 
Zhukovsky.\textsuperscript{72} Meanwhile, through his connections, Pletnev won over the Chairman of the 
Petersburg Censorship Committee for Foreign Materials, the poet Fyodor Tiutchev, who 
interceded with interior minister P. A. Valuev. Much as Sergei Witte would do, Count 
Valuev had built a successful state career by walking the razor’s edge between reform 
and autocracy, but was especially suspicious of the liberal press.\textsuperscript{73} During a personal 
meeting with Stasiulevich, the minister informed him that he had nothing personal 
against the journal, but that negative rumors abounded about the editor himself. 
Stasiulevich’s answer was an example of diplomatic insubordination: “Who cares what

\textsuperscript{72} N. I. Kostomarov, Avtobiografiia N. I. Kostomarova (Moscow, 1922), pp. 376-377.
bad things are said about people, Your Highness? They are not only said about me." He was referring to the widespread rumors about Valuev’s own professional indiscretions and abuses of power.

Daily Telegraph correspondent and professor E.J. Dillon, who had spent decades in Russia and came to know its official and unofficial sides well, gives an idea of what was in store for Stasiulevich as a journal editor:

On no profession in Russia does the nightmare of the Censure inveigh so heavily as upon journalism; an editor’s life in one of the mushroom cities of the Far West, who is one day short of the letters I and V, another day short of money, and a few days later on is hurled into eternity by a pistol-shot, is tame in comparison with the checkered life of some Russian journalists. To foreigners it is a mystery how a capitalist can risk his money in such a precarious investment as a newspaper. Russian journals, however, require but a small capital to start them, and even that seldom belongs to the editor, who generally begins his journalistic career with credits, continues it in debt, and frequently ends it in bankruptcy. So trained are the editors of the latter class of periodicals that they cut and mutilate the contributions destined for their journals with the same unerring judgment, the same unbending vigor as the paid official.

Stasiulevich received permission to publish the journal on 12 December 1865. It was initially to have five sections: critical historical research; analysis of new books and documents; a survey of historical literature and historical societies’ proceedings; pedagogical literature; and historical chronology. Kostomarov oversaw all materials related to Russian history. Vestnik’s editorial office could request foreign literature in unlimited quantities for review purposes. In 1867, Stasiulevich received permission to

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75 E. J. Dillon, Russian Traits and Terrors: A Faithful Picture of the Russia of Today (Boston, 1891), p. 267.
add two more sections: a survey of foreign literature and a “Jurisprudence Chronicle.”

**Vestnik**’s original structure made it possible for its editors to express their political views without the intricacies of Aesopian language. The literature they chose to survey and the documents they chose to publish and examine reflected the journal’s political bent and made it more than an academic, peer-survey publication.

After the government closed **Sovremennik** in 1866, Alexander Pypin found himself without a source of steady income and in the position of supporting his own family as well as Chernyshevskii’s. He refused Nekrasov’s offer to work for **Otechestvennye zapiski** because Pypin’s friend Julius Zhukovsky had also declined it. Instead, Pypin asked journalist and editor N. L. Tiblen for permission to join **Sovremennoe obozrenie** whose program was to “spread serious positivist knowledge” and “the self-education of man” by exploring “nature, the history of culture, social development, and the sciences.” In the realm of economic development, the program emphasized “the creation of new wealth, not the redistribution of the old.” However, differences between Tiblen and Pypin soon made their cooperation impossible and in 1868 Pypin left the journal.

This time, however, he was not left without options—Pletnev had recommended Pypin to Stasiulevich in 1866 and, in 1867, he had already published a series of articles on the Russian freemasons in **Vestnik Evropy**. Stasiulevich was ecstatic about hiring an experienced editor and writer who had gone through the “school of **Sovremennik**.” He

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77 *Sovremennoe obozrenie* 2 (1868), p. 106.
78 “Ob izdanii v 1868 g. zhurnala ‘Sovremennoe obozrenie,’” *Sovremennoe obozrenie*, 1 (1868).
wrote to his wife that whatever salary Pypin demanded “the journal would make up for in sales.”

When she expressed concern with Pypin’s association with radicals, i.e. Chernyshevskii, Stasiulevich assured her that he would not let Pypin determine the journal’s “political tone.”

Although Stasiulevich came to depend heavily on Pypin and even let him run the journal during his trips abroad, Pypin wrote to Saltykov-Shchedrin in 1871 that he was kept away from the day-to-day editorial work, which Stasiulevich held entirely in his own hands. Pypin gave his advice only when Stasiulevich asked him for it.

Employment at *Vestnik Evropy*—Stasiulevich paid 100 rubles per printer’s sheet—provided Pypin with the steady income that he desperately needed and allowed him to continue his academic research and to publish it on *Vestnik*’s pages. Until his election to the Academy of Sciences in 1897, he depended on the journal for his livelihood, becoming its resident historian, a role that Stasiulevich had once envisaged for Kostomarov.

At first, *Vestnik*’s financial situation was shaky. In 1867, it had only 26 subscriptions and 43 in 1868. Stasiulevich had to sell some of his personal belongings and to reduce his own salary to 50 rubles per month in 1867. Nevertheless, he chose to look at the bright side. As subscriptions grew steadily, he decided to expand the journal further and turn it into a literary and political monthly. He redesigned the journal cover, and the December 1867 issue redefined *Vestnik*’s mission as the “gradual change and

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79 IRLI, f. 293, op. 1, ed. khr. 105, l. 89, 93.
80 IRLI, f. 293, op. 1, ed. khr. 102, l. 1.
betterment of the social order by way of perfecting and developing the individual personality, by way of enriching the [worldview of the] people and educating its thoughts.” The new motto was: “Labor, Effort, Knowledge.” Stasiulevich’s gamble produced the desired results—by March 1868, subscriptions reached 3,500. The Gintsburg banking family supported the journal. *Vestnik* established itself as the mouthpiece of the loyal opposition that favored the Great Reforms, bemoaned any retreat from their accomplishments, and believed in convincing, not threatening, the autocracy.

The Polish uprising of 1863 that had been Russian liberalism’s litmus test, and the Polish Question in general, played an important role in the journal’s creation and early success. In 1868, Katkov, who had contributed substantially to the anti-Polish hysteria in 1863, denounced *Vestnik* as a “Masonic brotherhood” that “arouses and supports the political significance of various nationalities” and acts as a spokesman for Russia’s “enemies within.” He launched this attack at a time when the epithet “Polish” was an accusation, as Pypin later wrote. Most of the people associated with *Vestnik* in its early days were in one way or another tinged with “Polishness.” Stasiulevich’s surname betrayed Polish roots. Polonsky, Spasovich, and Pypin were Polonophiles, and only Ukrainian Nikolai Kostomarov had a reputation for hating the Poles at St. Petersburg University, which he had left independently of the *Vestnik* group. His articles about the Time of Troubles, Khmelnitskii, and the decline of the Polish state in *Vestnik*’s early

84 *Vestnik Evropy* 12 (1867), pp. vii-viii.
85 IRLI, f. 293, op. 1, ed. khr. 101, l. 82.
issues contributed to its popularity because they were highly critical of the Poles and the materials’ appearance on the journal’s pages protected it from accusations of pro-Polish attitudes at a time when these were liabilities.\(^{88}\)

*Vestnik* quickly became Russia’s leading popular historical journal, but in the literary field it had to compete with heavyweights. Nikolai Nekrasov and Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin ran *Otechestvennye zapiski* until 1877, after which Nikolai Mikhailovsky took it over. All three published their works on its pages. Meanwhile, Fyodor Dostoevsky and Lev Tolstoy wrote for Katkov’s *Russkii vestnik*. In order to find contributors, Stasiulevich began to frequent the capital’s salons. Economist and writer Vladimir Bezobrazov organized weekly “economic dinners” during which the guests debated economic development issues.\(^{89}\) Of education minister A. V. Golovnin’s salon, Stasiulevich wrote that he was the only one in attendance who was not a member of the State Council.\(^{90}\) At one of these evenings, he met poet and playwright Alexei Tolstoy. He became a regular contributor to *Vestnik* in 1868 after Stasiulevich drew him over from *Russkii vestnik*. Although he paid Tolstoy 500 rubles per printer’s sheet, Stasiulevich was convinced that the gamble would pay off in the long run.\(^{91}\) Tolstoy was not only a useful contributor but himself the host of a popular salon where Stasiulevich made the acquaintance of writers Ivan Goncharov and Grigorii Danilevskii, poets Fyodor Tiutchev

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\(^{90}\) IRLI, f. 293, op. 1, ed. khr. 101, l. 75.

\(^{91}\) IRLI, f. 293, op. 1, ed. khr. 102, l. 101.
and Iakov Polonskii, and literary critic Alexander Nikitenko. When, in 1868, Tolstoy found himself in tough negotiations with a publisher, Stasiulevich gladly took over the process and defrayed the costs of publication in exchange for part of the profits—it happened to be at the same company that had printed the early Vestnik issues. He thereby gained a moral, if not yet a financial, beneficiary. The editor and playwright disagreed on politics, however. Tolstoy was more conservative than Stasiulevich and openly criticized him for turning Vestnik into a political publication.

Stasiulevich fought hard to convince Ivan Goncharov to publish his anti-nihilist novel, The Precipice, in Vestnik Evropy. It eventually came out in five installments in 1869. The editor was sure of the novel’s success and spared neither money, nor time in his efforts to win Goncharov over from Otechestvennye zapiski. Once again, his gamble paid off. According to writer Peter Boborykin, “all literate Russia” attacked the novel, but the negative attention significantly boosted Vestnik’s popularity. In the spring of 1869, Vestnik had 3,700 subscribers; by April it passed 5,000, the “Pillars of Hercules” in the Russian publishing business, as Stasiulevich put it, and by 1 May 1869 subscriptions reached 5,200. Stasiulevich remained friends for life with Goncharov who made him one of the executors of his will. The work of Aleksei Tolstoy and Goncharov significantly enhanced the journal’s reputation and attracted to it playwright Alexander

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92 IRLI, f. 293, op. 1, ed. khr. 101, l. 64.
Ostrovskii, poet Iakov Polonskii, and writers Ivan Turgenev, Nadezhda Khvoshchinskaia-Zaionchkovskaia (who published under the name V. Krestovskii), Alexander Levitov, and Nikolai Uspenskii.

In the charged ideological atmosphere of the 1860s, Stasiulevich had to navigate carefully between profit and the controversy over nihilism. Although he went out of his way to attract literary talent, he ignored writers who had “compromised themselves” in the 1860s, such as Nikolai Leskov and Vasilii Avenarius, whose *Plague* Stasiulevich refused to publish because of its overt anti-nihilism.97 He must have considered Goncharov’s equally anti-nihilist novel the safest bet. The reason why Stasiulevich had to push Goncharov to finish *The Precipice* was because the author had witnessed the harsh treatment of Turgenev, Leskov, and Pisemsky by what Charles Moser has called the “unofficial, radical” censorship.98 So nervous was Goncharov about the novel’s reception that he even asked Stasiulevich for permission to print an article defending it in *Vestnik*, but Stasiulevich refused. However, after the novel came out (on time), *Vestnik* published Eugene Utin’s critique of it in which the author respectfully defended the younger generation and advance the thesis that a clique of reactionaries was using the honorable writers of the old generation to discredit the young.99 Stasiulevich was hedging his bets,

but the public reaction proved his acumen—*The Precipice* gave *Vestnik* a tremendous boost in circulation.\(^{100}\)

Although literature was *Vestnik*’s “investment policy,” Stasiulevich also attracted talented political writers. Leonid Polonskii, lawyer Eugene Utin, and historian Nil Koliapanov became regular contributors. When Nikolai Kruze was dismissed from his job as a censor in the 1850s, Petersburg’s literati organized a conspicuous farewell to this social activist and liberal.\(^{101}\) He then served on the Petersburg provincial zemstvo board until Tsar Alexander II dissolved it for intransigent insubordination. Stasiulevich hired Kruze, and he became the journal’s specialist on zemstvo questions. On the other hand, writer Maria Tsebrikova, who explored women’s rights, only published one article in 1871 because she proved too radical for Stasiulevich’s taste.\(^{102}\) In the 1870s, historian Vladimir Gerie, linguist Iakov Grot, military historian Modest Bogdanovich, historian of literature Alexander Veselovskii, and famous historian of Russia Sergey Soloviev published in *Vestnik Evropy*. Famous historian, archaeologist, and journalist Mikhail Pogodin contributed in the 1860s, but ended his ties with the journal and with Stasiulevich because of what he saw as *Vestnik*’s radical bent. In 1872, he wrote to the editor: “The reappearance of the same disgusting [political] thoughts [in the journal] makes me suspect that you may have lost your mind on some issues.”\(^{103}\)

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\(^{102}\) *M. M. Stasiulevich i ego sovremenniki iikh perepiske*, ed. M. K. Lemke (St. Petersburg, 1911-1913), V, p. 159.

Stasiulevich wrote very little for the journal and mostly under pseudonyms. His contributions focused on the debate on secondary education—“real schools” vs. classical education.\(^{104}\) He argued that the curriculum for the Prussian *Realschulen*, which focused on modern languages and the natural sciences, should be introduced into Russian secondary schools. Stasiulevich sought to educate Russian students in the manner of their European counterparts and thereby broaden the social base of the universities. He took German education for a model as part of the effort “to introduce a new system of European life” into Russia.\(^{105}\) After education minister D. A. Tolstoy forced through the classical program in 1871 that was supposed to reinforce Orthodox values and prevent the penetration of Western ideas into Russia, the state discouraged further debate on the issue.

One piece that Stasiulevich published under his own name was the obituary of Alexander Herzen in 1870.\(^{106}\) Stasiulevich took upon himself to defend Herzen from the avalanche of slander that issued from the conservative press. He had agreed with Herzen’s criticism of the Russian autocracy and Herzen’s friends and regular correspondents Eugene and Nicholas Utin informed Stasiulevich of the exile’s life. Herzen’s aunt and writer Tatiana Passek believed that Stasiulevich’s article “notably contributed to Russian social life.”\(^{107}\)


\(^{105}\) M. [Stasiulevich], “Zametka o russkoi pochte,” *Vestnik Evropy* 7 (1871), p. 405.

\(^{106}\) *Vestnik Evropy* 2 (1870), p. 935.

For many years, Stasiulevich corresponded with famous social philosopher Peter Lavrov, who also knew Pypin from the Petersburg Chess Club of which both were founding members since 1862. After Karakozov’s failed attempt on Alexander’s life in 1866, a rumor spread through Petersburg that Lavrov was under suspicion and had been arrested. Stasiulevich and his wife Liubov even went to his apartment to confirm that their friend was still a free man. Lavrov was so enamored with Vestnik that he recommended in 1867 that Stasiulevich increase the number of the journal’s sections. However, Lavrov thought that certain articles and novels on Vestnik’s pages placed it into the conservative camp along with Katkov’s Russian Herald (Russkii vestnik, 1856-1906) and Mikhail Pogodin’s Dawn (Zaria, 1869-1872). He voiced the general populist criticism of Vestnik as a champion of bourgeois and “western” values that cared nothing for the legacy of the 1860s. Saltykov-Shchedrin also criticized Vestnik for its materialism and western values. Vestnik’s influence even went beyond Russia and its intellectuals. When economics professor of Petersburg University Illarion Kaufman published “The Viewpoint of Karl Marx’s Politico-Economic Criticism” in the May 1872 issue, Marxist economist Nikolai Danielson, the first translator of Capital into Russian,

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sent Marx the *Vestnik* issue. Marx used *Vestnik Evropy* articles extensively for information on the Russian economy, the zemstvo, and for agricultural statistics.113

In the late 1860s, the *Vestnik* group organized its own salon, the “round table,” which Koni described. Every Monday, excluding the summer vacation season, Stasiulevich’s wife Liubov Utina, hosted the salon in their home. In the 1890s, the *jour fixe* moved to Saturdays. According to Koni, a regular visitor and one of *Vestnik*’s editors, this was one of Petersburg’s cultural nuclei. The group discussed the most important literary, social, and political questions. The participants criticized the autocracy and defended civil rights and popular education.114 Such openness could only take place behind closed doors. No publication was free from persecution in Tsarist Russia and all unofficial criticism had to be muted or veiled.

By 1870, *Vestnik* was the most coveted journalistic employer. It paid well and the atmosphere in the journal’s offices was creative and friendly. The contracts encouraged all the editors to publish.115 From the very beginning, Stasiulevich retained the right of final approval but relied heavily on his editors’ input—collegiality reigned. Each editor read all the materials and conferred on their quality and the risk of publishing them. It greatly helped that Stasiulevich had two “highly placed” friends. Dmitrii Solskii, a friend from younger days, became State Comptroller in 1873, State Council member and Chairman of the Legal Department in 1889, Chairman of the National Economy

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113 Russkie knigi v bibliotekakh K. Marksa i F. Engelsa (Moscow, 1959), p. 159.
115 IRLI, f. 293, op. 1, ed. khr. 102, l. 99.
Department in 1893, and was State Council Chairman between 1904 and 1906.\textsuperscript{116}

Stasiulevich’s more important insider contact was A. V. Golovin, former liberal education minister and State Council member. In 1866, he warned Stasiulevich that education minister D. A. Tolstoy considered the journal suspicious and in 1871, he wrote to Stasiulevich that “strong enemies were rising against the journal.”\textsuperscript{117} The relationship was symbiotic. In 1871, Golovin asked Stasiulevich for information on the state of the publishing business in Russia. He was preparing a report for the State Council in which he argued that the literary culture in Russia was still so weak that there was no need to implement extraordinary measures to control the press.\textsuperscript{118}

The Polish Question resurfaced on \textit{Vestnik}’s pages in the early 1870s when education minister Tolstoy began to implement Russification policies in Poland and Stasiulevich saw an opportunity to continue its educational crusade by defending Polish education against Tolstoy’s encroachments. However, Stasiulevich’s enthusiasm for the German system ended when Bismarck’s \textit{Kulturkampf} began in the early 1870s. He accepted articles from Kiev University historian Mikhail Dragomanov in support of Polish rights against Prussian as well as Russian abuses.\textsuperscript{119} Spasovich began to publish pro-Polish pieces under his own name instead of “V. D.”\textsuperscript{120} Stasiulevich hired journalist L. G. Lopatinsky to contribute “Polish letters” to the journal. Warsaw joined Berlin,

\textsuperscript{118} A. V. Golovnin to Stasiulevich, 2 February 1871, \textit{M. M. Stasiulevich i ego sovremenniki v ikh perepiske}, ed. M. K. Lemke (St. Petersburg, 1911-1913), I, p. 504.
\textsuperscript{120} V. D. Spasovich, “Polskie fantazii na slavianofilskuiu temu,” \textit{Vestnik Evropy} 8 (1872), p. 741.
Florence, and Paris in having a Vestnik staff correspondent. Lopatinsky drew his readers’ attention to a group of moderate Poles who argued for reconciliation with Russia, rejected romantic nationalism and revolutionary conspiracies, and focused their attention on the economic and cultural reconstruction of the Kingdom. This moderate party coalesced around the Przegląd Tygodniowy (Weekly Review) that had appeared in 1865 and based itself on “the principles of contemporary scientific positivism.” Lopatinsky argued for an alliance between the young Polish positivists and the Russian liberals, but Vestnik’s second official warning in 1873 and Stasiulevich’s caution prevented this from happening. He opened the journal once again to Kostomarov’s Polonophobic articles.

The Polish Question posed a dilemma for the Vestnik group because public opinion saw the journal’s strain of liberalism as a foreign, and even a Polish (!), import and therefore much more subversive because of its proximity. In reality, there were similarities between the Vestnik liberals and their young positivist colleagues in Poland of which the most important was their academic background. The Vestnik group’s resignation from Petersburg University paralleled their Polish colleagues’ inability to find positions during Tolstoy’s Russification campaign. Both liberal groups had to prove their patriotism to radical opponents and both were suspected by the state. However, the respective pro-Russian or pro-Polish stigmas that they carried prevented an alliance, which demonstrated the general tendency of Eastern European and Russian liberalisms to become hostages of prevailing political sensibilities and state policies. Pressuring the

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state was out of the question, while influence on public opinion demanded popularity and
time, in other words, survival.

By the early 1870s, Vestnik had experienced a burst of growth. It rapidly gained
popularity as an intellectual force for which Stasiulevich’s business sense and publishing
acumen were responsible, but they also told him that this initial accomplishment was
insufficient. Stasiulevich had successfully navigated the journal through its rough
formative period, but he also understood that prominence brought unwelcome attention
from the authorities. Although an optimist by nature, Stasiulevich was anything but
naïve. As Russia moved along its tortuous reform path, he would have to navigate
increasingly turbulent waters. In this, Pypin and Arseniev became invaluable first
officers. They knew that the currents ahead were treacherous. Navigating them strained
even Stasiulevich’s close relationship with Pypin. According to Vera Pypina’s
unpublished memoir about her father, Stasiulevich decided to rely less on specialized
scholarly contributions as Vestnik became more popular, but Pypin believed that the
journal owed its readers an “unofficial” interpretation of the Russian past. He believed
that this would contribute to the articles’ liveliness and social responsiveness, but
Stasiulevich consistently refused to allow Vestnik to become a spokesman for any
particular cause or individual.123

Stasiulevich made a wise decision in hiring Arseniev who had made a successful
legal career specializing in cases involving the press after the Statute of 1865
implemented exemptions from preliminary censorship but instituted post-publication

123 Alexis Pogorelskin, “‘The Messenger of Europe’.” In Literary Journals in Imperial Russia, ed. Deborah
punishments. The Pypin and Zhukovskii case was one of many. In 1866, Arseniev defended Alexei Suvorin against accusations that his book of essays entitled *All Sorts* took a dangerous political stand and expressed sympathy for state criminals. In 1867, he defended *Petersburg Gazette* editor A. I. Arseniev and writer D. E. Zvenigorodskii against “commentaries injurious to the government and officials.” In 1869, he defended F. F. Pavlenkov, publisher of 3,000 copies of the second volume of Dmitrii Pisarev’s collected works, against the charge of “disrupting the basic principles of government or confidence in the dignity of the emperor.” Not only had Stasiulevich hired a cautious critic of the regime, but also a house lawyer with an acute sense for the limits of the permissible. In 1869, Arseniev gave a cautiously optimistic assessment of censorship in the Russian Empire:

> The abolition of preliminary censorship, by lessening press dependence on arbitrary circumstances and personal whim, made possible the discussion of subjects that were previously banned to literature. Analysis of government policies is even now not easy and without risk, but several years ago the press could not even consider it. Tutelage over the press exists, of course, but it has lost its trivial, capricious character: it ponders thought but does not hang as before on each separate word.

The shifting of the censorship from administrators to the courts was part of Russia’s modernization. According to historian of censorship Charles Ruud, the Statute of 1865 caused the expansion of the publishing industry, powerful representatives of

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125 Ibid., p. 174.
126 Ibid., p. 184.
which in turn began to negotiate with the state for greater concessions. Stasiulevich took advantage of the expanding publishing market and reinforced *Vestnik*’s liberal message with the support of a solid publishing complex.

**Chapter 3**

**Stasiulevich’s Publishing Complex**

Storm clouds first gathered over *Vestnik* in the late 1860s. In 1870, Alexander Pypin began to publish in the journal chapters of his *Notes on the Social Movement under Alexander I*. In December 1870, the censors cut out ten pages of an article that included N. N. Novosiltsev’s constitutional project of 1819 and explained their decision by accusing Pypin of searching for liberal strains of thought among high-placed officials and members of society at the time. In the same month, the Moscow City Duma sent Alexander II a note in which its members expressed anxiety about the fate of the Great Reforms. Alexander reacted with anger. The Censorship Bureau received the order to increase its vigilance and turned its attention to *Vestnik Evropy*. Warnings about impending action came from all quarters, including Nekrasov and Saltykov-Shchedrin. Stasiulevich became nervous and admitted in a letter to Pypin that he had lost the “censor’s scent.” Stasiulevich had several meetings with the censors throughout 1871. When Arseniev sent him the manuscript of “The Outcome of the Court Reform,” he

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129 RNB, f. 621, op. 1, ed. khr. 823, l. 16.
asked Stasiulevich to “pay special attention to it and to submit it to [self-]censorship.”

But even this could not protect a “marked journal.”

In 1871, the Academy of Sciences decided to make Pypin an adjunct in the field of Russian philology and history. However, because the Vestnik group strongly opposed conservative education minister Count D. A. Tostoy’s “pseudo-classicism,” he and the Chief of Gendarmes Count P. A. Shuvalov opposed Pypin’s candidacy. They had already forbidden him to give public lectures in the late 1860s. The conservative The Voice (Golos, 1863-1884) and The Moscow News (Moskovskie vedomosti, 1756-1917) echoed the official opposition. Conscious of the overwhelming current against which he had to swim, Pypin decided to spare the Academy from negotiating with the Education Ministry and the state—Alexander II had appointed a commission to consider the appointment. In December, he sent Academy President F. P. Litke a letter gratefully declining the appointment due to a “change in circumstances.” The case was closed.

Arseniev took part in the infamous 1870-71 Nechaev trial as a defense lawyer for the 87 individuals accused of direct and indirect involvement in Sergei Nechaev’s radical terrorist group known as The People’s Revenge and the murder of its member Ivan Ivanov in 1869. Nechaev himself had escaped abroad. In an article, Arseniev suggested that trials would not prevent such events from recurring and that only eliminating the causes that fostered such attitudes could stem the revolutionary tide. The censors

130 IRLI, f. 293, op. 1, ed. khr. 165/1, l. 3.
132 IRLI, f. 250, op. 2, ed. khr. 8, l. 4.
133 Moskovskie vedomosti, no. 220 (1871).
134 IRLI, f. 250, op. 3, ed. khr. 45, l. 1.
considered the article sufficiently provocative to submit a report about it to interior minister A. E. Timashev who forwarded his concerns to Tsar Alexander. In November 1871, Vestnik received a reprimand, which Stasiulevich considered a badge of honor. Kavelin wrote to him: “I think it will only increase the number of your subscribers.”\(^{135}\) He was right—in 1870, 6,997 copies were sent out and in 1872 that number rose to 8,003. Petersburg had the most subscriptions, between 1,500 and 1,800.\(^{136}\) Moscow consistently brought in about 500. The provincial orders steadily grew from 4,915 in 1870 to 5,552 in 1872. Kherson, Kiev, and Kharkov provinces in Ukraine were the undisputed leaders. Yet Vestnik never made Stasiulevich a fortune and his name never appeared among the distinguished Russian philanthropists.

The journal’s administrative office was located at 30 Nevsky Prospekt by the Kazan Bridge and in the same block where the Evropa Hotel currently stands. The editorial offices were in Utin’s building on 20 Galernaia Street. A white carpet path led up to the journal’s offices where Stasiulevich kept appointments in his office every Wednesday. Most of the people who met him described Stasiulevich as a simple, straightforward, and warm person who treated novice writers with respect and conducted his correspondence in a timely fashion.\(^{137}\) By 1872, Vestnik had become a well-known journal and began to attract people of liberal views. Stasiulevich decided to organize his own printing shop—F. S. Sushinskii had printed the first six years of Vestnik. Located at number 7, Second Line of Vasilievskii Island, where Shevchenko Square is now located,

it would become one of Petersburg’s largest and best printing companies. Opened in
November 1872, by the end of 1873 it broke even and became profitable the next year.

An idea of what Stasiulevich had to endure in the process of establishing and
running the printing shop can be gleaned from E. J. Dillon’s description of censorship in
the Russian Empire. The efficacy of the laws depended largely on the state’s exclusive
control over printing offices, type foundries, booksellers’ shops, circulating libraries, and
all cognate trades and callings. None of these establishments could open without special
authorization. An in-depth inquiry pried into the applicant’s antecedents “the sins and
backslidings of fathers being visited upon sons and daughters and the imprudence of the
children recoiling upon their parents.” The rest deserves to be quoted in full:

> When permission is finally obtained, the heavy responsibility that goes with it,
the galling restrictions that fetter the successful applicant, and his helpless
dependence in business matters upon a number of venal officials devoid of
scrapes of any kind, is sufficient to crush out whatever enterprise he may have
been originally endowed with. Every new printing machine, every set of type
bought, sold or repaired, every book or pamphlet destined to be printed, must be
first announced to the authorities, verified by them, next entered in detail in a
number of books, and then sent to the Censure for examination. If a printer gets
one of his presses altered and neglects to notify the fact to the authorities, he is
fined five hundred roubles, besides being visited with other and more serious
pains and penalties. If a journal, having been read by the Censure, is sanctioned
for publication, but the written authorization should happen to be delayed, the
printer who dared to set it up in type and publish it, would be fined three hundred
roubles and imprisoned for three months. A person who sells type, printing
presses, hectographs, etc., is in duty bound to look upon the intending purchasers
as against the State, and must, in his own interests, turn them away, unless he
knows them personally, and is in possession of their real names and address. Nor
is this acquaintance considered sufficient to allow of business relations: he can
deal only with authorized printers, and he is exposing himself to a heavy
punishment if he parts with a set of type without having first seen, with his own
eyes, the authorization to the buyers to purchase and keep a printing press.
Permission to open a bookshop, a circulating library or a reading-room is more
difficult to obtain than a railway concession…

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With his first major project, Stasiulevich intended to emphasize not only his business’s profitability, but the liberal education ideology behind the whole endeavor. In *Vestnik*’s April 1874 issue, Stasiulevich printed a “Plan of Publication for the ‘Russian Library’.” Each volume contained works of Russia’s greatest writers and poets: Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol, and others. Prominent literary scholars and writers took part in the preparations: Pypin, bibliographer and biographer Peter Efremov, and writers Nekrasov, Goncharov, Turgenev, Saltykov-Shchedrin, and Pavel Annenkov.\(^{139}\)

The Russian Library was not a commercial enterprise. Stasiulevich intended it to be widely accessible. He set the price at 75 kopecks per volume regardless of how much effort it took to negotiate the copyrights and how much paper, ink, and labor each book required. The advertisement for the new series read that it intended to “share the wealth of our literature with those who have been condemned by lack of funds to nourish their minds with literature of suspect quality.” The set price allowed anyone to buy the books.\(^{140}\) The profits from the first volume of Pushkin’s works went for hunger relief in Samara province.\(^{141}\) The volume was the first widely affordable publication of Pushkin’s work and came out in 10,000 copies in March 1874. The second volume of Lermontov’s works appeared on bookshelves in May 1874; Gogol in November of the same year; Zhukovskii in the winter of 1875; and Griboedov in June 1875. All in all, 18,484 volumes sold in 20 months, which Turgenev considered a great success, especially for a start-up

\(^{139}\) *Vestnik Evropy* 4 (1874), p. 900-904.

\(^{140}\) *Vestnik Evropy* 6 (1876)—see advertisement in the back.

business. Yet he wrote of Stasiulevich in a letter to Annenkov: “His affairs in Russia—as usual, hang by a hair—yet the hair does not break.” The first five volumes completed the first Russian Library series. Stasiulevich followed through with the second series: the best of Turgenev’s work appeared in early 1876, Nekrasov’s in April 1877, Saltykov-Shchedrin’s in May 1878, and Leo Tolstoy’s in December 1878. Every volume, except for Pushkin, came out in a series of 5,000 copies, which were considered sufficient to fulfill public demand for literary works.

The Russian Library was Stasiulevich’s enlightenment project, which brought him name recognition but no profits. His publishing business was his philanthropy. Kavelin published The Goals of Psychology (1872) through Stasiulevich’s shop. In 1874, Pypin and Nekrasov bankrolled the second edition of John Stuart Mill’s Principles of Political Economy, translated, edited, and with commentary by Chernyshevskii, for whom this publication was the only source of income at the time. In 1875, Stasiulevich printed Herbert Spencer’s Principles of Sociology, which was later banned from public libraries. Many books on communal land holding came out of Stasiulevich’s shop: A. I. Vasilchikov’s Land Ownership and Agriculture in Russia and Other European States (v. 1 and 2, 1876) and Ianson’s Statistical Research into Peasant Allotments and Payments (1877). Both books found their way into Karl Marx’s library. On the eve of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78, Stasiulevich and Sergey Soloviev decided to publish the latter’s

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143 Turgenev to P. V. Annenkov, 18/30 September 1875, I. S. Turgenev, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem (Moscow-Leningrad, 1965), XI, pp. 132-133.
144 Russkie knigi v bibliotekakh K. Marksa i F. Engelsa (Moscow, 1959), pp. 33, 204.
Russia and Europe in the First Half of Alexander I’s Reign (1877). Soloviev even joked that since the book was clearly not in the Panslavist camp, Stasiulevich would have to put a picture of the author without his head on the cover in order to sell the volume. In fact, it became so popular that it sold out immediately and a German translation appeared a few months later. 145

Throughout the 1870s, Stasiulevich’s publishing business grew and prospered, but Vestnik Evropy always remained at the forefront of his vision. One of the reasons for this success was Ivan Turgenev’s close friendship and involvement in the journal. He and Stasiulevich shared views on many aspects of Russian life and the country’s history. More importantly, they were believers in a balanced combination of western socio-political traditions and Russian historical traits. In 1866, Turgenev wrote to his poet friend Alexander Fet that the “reappearance of Vestnik Evropy is the most pleasant phenomenon yet.”146 From 1870 on, Turgenev published almost exclusively on the pages of Vestnik, which significantly helped sales. Moreover, Stasiulevich published one of Turgenev’s novels in the first issue of his journal as a New Year’s present for his readers and an encouragement to subscribe.147 When Stasiulevich announced in the autumn of 1871 the serial publication of Torrents of Spring, subscription reached its high point just over 8,000. Turgenev’s Huntsman’s Sketches (1871) and Novelty (1874) helped maintain Vestnik’s popularity. The journal itself attracted criticism similar to that directed at

145 Karl Marx to P. V. Annenkov, 28 December (no year), M. M. Stasiulevich i ego sovremenniki v ikh perepiske, ed. M. K. Lemke (St. Petersburg, 1911-1913), III, pp. 458-462.
146 Turgenev to A. A. Fet, 26 March/6 April 1866, I. S. Turgenev, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem (Moscow-Leningrad, 1963), VI, p. 66.

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Turgenev: conservative critics saw in him an isolated Westerner and radicals upbraided him for excessive “liberalism” and “aristocratism.”

Turgenev, who lived in Paris throughout the 1870s, suggested to Émile Zola that he publish in Vestnik. The young French writer was in constant financial straits at the time and needed steady employment. He had been publishing literary reviews and criticism since the 1850s, but began to have trouble placing them in the late 1860s and had not yet made his name as a writer in France. Part of the reason why Zola had a hard time publishing his articles was that French editors deemed his pen “too violent” because he “carried revolutionary methods into literary discussion.” How ironic therefore that he found an outlet for his views in a Russian publication! Then again, Boborykin prepared and published seven articles in 1875 entitled “Pierre Joseph Proudhon” based on the latter’s voluminous correspondence, which explored his democratic views, criticism of bourgeois society, Spartan lifestyle, and moral asceticism. Indeed, French social philosophy and literature were all the rage in Russia at the time.

Stasiulevich hired Zola as Vestnik’s Paris “correspondent” to inform Russian readers of French literary, artistic, and social events. And so, from May 1875 until

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149 Colette Becker, Les apprentissages de Zola (Presses Universitaires de France, 1993), see the chronological list of published works at the end of the volume.
150 Ernest Alfred Vizzetelly, Émile Zola, Novelist and Reformer: An Account of His Life & Work (London and New York: John Lane; the Bodley Head, 1904), p. 150.
151 P. D. Boborykin, Vospominaniia. (Moscow, 1965), II, p. 502. See Vestnik Evropy 3 (1875), 5 (1875), 7 (1875), 8 (1875), 9 (1875), 10 (1875), 11 (1875), 12 (1875).
152 Turgenev to Émile Zola 19/31 October 1874, I. S. Turgenev, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem (Moscow-Leningrad, 1963), X, p. 315.
November 1880, Zola “organized his professional life around two calendars, the
Gregorian and the Julian,” always bearing in mind Petersburg’s twelve-day lag.153
According to Zola biographer Matthew Josephson, the “fine commission for a great
Russian newspaper” allowed the young writer to “move into better quarters, begin to
fatten out, and gain weight wonderfully.”154 Zola ended up contributing 64 Lettres de
Paris between 1875 and 1880. The contract also stipulated that all of his literary works
would appear in France only after Vestnik had published their Russian translations, the
first of which, Abbe Mouret’s Transgression, the fifth installment of the “Rougon-
Macquarts,” appeared in 1875.155 The novel combined theology and physiology, the
doctrine of natural sin and the idea of hereditary doom, in the story of a young priest torn
between his instincts and his education. Zola described the plot: “The story of a man
neutered by his early education who recovers his manhood at twenty-five through the
solicitations of nature but fatally sinks back into an impotent state.”156 The translated
novel came out in the February and March issues of Vestnik. Zola’s anti-clericalism
enraged Russian conservative and religious critics, but found great favor in the
bookstores. A similar reaction took place in France when the original came out. The
Scenes of Political Life Under the Second Empire that began to appear in Vestnik’s
January issues, demonstrated Zola’s genius for subverting gala events as he portrayed the

155 Alexis Pogorelskin, “‘The Messenger of Europe.’” In Literary Journals in Imperial Russia, ed. Deborah
Empire as kitsch and broad farce. He and Stasiulevich often quarreled over censorship issues, yet the symbiosis was beneficial.

*Vestnik* became so popular when Zola wrote for it that Stasiulevich published *His Excellency Eugène Rougon* and *Lettres de Paris* as books and they sold out immediately.\(^{157}\) Zola was exceptionally grateful to Stasiulevich and, through *Vestnik*, to the reading public and to Russia in general for giving him the opportunity to speak his mind when French critics kicked him from pillar to post.\(^{158}\) Stasiulevich hired Anna Engelgardt, Alexander Engelgardt’s wife and one of the first and most prominent members of the Russian women’s rights movement, to translate Zola’s work.\(^{159}\) She stayed on as a literary translator for *Vestnik* until her death in 1903. Zola wrote for *Vestnik* until 1880 when he became sufficiently famous to make a living by writing in his own country. His views on literature drew criticism from, among others, Mikhailovskii who wrote in *Otechestvennye zapiski* that Zola had substituted “a science of man” for “strictly defined moral and political ideals.”\(^{160}\) As a counterweight to Zola’s “self-propagandizing,” as Polonsky described it, Arseniev began to publish *Vestnik’s* Literary Survey in 1880.

By the 1870s, *Vestnik* was firmly in the loyal opposition camp. When in 1874 news reached socialist Peter Lavrov in London that his friends tried to arrange for his articles to appear in *Vestnik*—he was in dire financial straits at the time—he was


outraged: “We upbraid the constitutionalists in almost every issue and suddenly everyone finds out that I am asking them for work: they will tell everyone, and it will be a scandal.” At the time, Lavrov was editor of the most important Russian socialist émigré periodical Forward! (Vpered!, 1873-1877). Its doctrine of “preparationism,” however, was not the same as Vestnik’s, although both targeted “critically thinking individuals.” Lavrov’s Historical Letters, published in 1869, had offered progressively thinking Russians an alternative to nihilism and conspiratorial duplicity, but his fatalistic sense of duty to the masses fed by gnawing guilt eventually forced him into the vanguard of revolutionary socialism separating him from the moderate opponents of the tsarist regime, such as the Vestnik group.

Philip Pomper has argued that Lavrov “had little or no capacity for the kind of passionate and total commitment to a cause that would permit him to act ruthlessly in its behalf.” In other words, Lavrov was an accidental revolutionary. However, the fact that his friends approached Vestnik demonstrated that the Russian “revolutionary movement” enlisted genuine and powerful commitments of different types and degrees and could coexist with the loyal opposition of the Vestnik variety. Even so, this did not prevent personal conflicts such as the one Lavrov had with Pypin in 1876 over the publication of Chernyshevskii’s Prologue in Vpered!. As soon as Pypin found out about Lavrov’s intentions, he sent him an angry letter emphasizing the primacy of family relations over revolutionary interests—the publication of this work would further damage

Chernyshevskii even in Siberian exile, Pypin feared. Lavrov argued that
Chernyshevskii’s work had to be published before the younger generation forgot about
him completely. Such a contribution to the revolutionary movement in Russia would be
much more effective, Lavrov added acrimoniously, than Pypin’s publication of *Prologue*
as a “literary rarity” twenty years after its composition.\(^{163}\)

*Vestnik*’s editorial board did not share the views of the revolutionary-democratic
camp and condemned its tactics. On 6 December 1876, members of Zemlia i Volia, a
revolutionary populist group, held a demonstration next to Kazan Cathedral in St.
Petersburg. By condemning the event, Stasiulevich carefully expressed part of *Vestnik*’s
political program. He had received a letter from A. V. Golovnin in which the former
education minister explained the futility of such demonstrations. Stasiulevich published
part of this correspondence in the January 1877 issue.\(^{164}\) Golovnin had argued that in
Russia, revolution, reforms, and progress came only from above. Even had the
revolutionaries preached to the downtrodden *muzhik*, that same *muzhik* would have been
the first to report them to the police. In the absence of tinder for the flames of revolution,
revolutionary tactics only forced the state to delay reforms, thereby producing effects
opposite to those intended. The state was constantly considering changes, but the process
was inefficient and slow partly because of disturbances such as the one on Kazan
Square.\(^{165}\) Many years later in his memoirs, Osip Aptekman, one of the leaders of Zemlia

\(^{164}\) *Vestnik Evropy* 1 (1877), pp. 130-141.
\(^{165}\) A. V. Golovnin to Stasiulevich, 8 December 1876, *M. M. Stasiulevich i ego sovmenniki v ikh
i Volia, wrote that Vestnik’s reaction seemed to the revolutionary-populists both insulting and unfair.\textsuperscript{166}

\textit{Vestnik} also ran afoul of the authorities. In December 1879, Pypin became a senior member of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society,\textsuperscript{167} which, by the way, Arseniev’s father had helped to organize in 1845 and whose vice-chairman he was between 1850 and 1854.\textsuperscript{168} Pypin’s first presentation to the ethnographic division focused on the southern Slavs. The timing could not have been more auspicious—trouble was brewing once again in the Balkans. Pypin had prepared a field study of the region in 1880, but the absence of funds and the political tension in southeastern Europe prevented the trip from happening. Instead, Pypin channeled all of his energy into the \textit{History of Slavic Literatures} (1879-1881). The book was critical of Panslavism, which went against the thrust of state policy at the time. The conservative press condemned the work. The censor’s bureau cut 14 pages out of the manuscript, but this did not diminish the book’s popularity with the reading public. German, French, and Czech translations appeared within three years.\textsuperscript{169} Of course, Stasiulevich published the Russian edition.

Although \textit{Vestnik}’s position was moderate, Stasiulevich had no peace from the censors in the 1870s—at least one article was annually forbidden and at least one book from Stasiulevich’s print shop had to be withdrawn. Encounters with the censors, conducted during the last four days of each month, were vital to the journal’s existence.

\textsuperscript{166} O. V. Aptekman, \textit{Obshchestvo ‘Zemlia i volia’ semidesiatykh godov} (Prague, 1924), p. 34.
\textsuperscript{167} IRLI, f. 250, op. 2, ed. khr. 1, l. 40.
\textsuperscript{169} D. A. Balykin, \textit{A. N. Pypin kak issledovatel techenii russkoi obschestvennoi mysli} (Briansk, 1996), p. 53.
According to writer Peter Boborykin, a regular contributor to the journal since 1873, Stasiulevich took the censorship threat so seriously that he refused to accept serialized literary submissions and insisted on seeing the entire text upfront before deciding on its acceptability.\(^{170}\)

A committee of three censors scrutinized *Vestnik*, so Stasiulevich cultivated the chairman Petrov.\(^{171}\) In 1873, *Vestnik* received an official warning after Pypin published “Characteristics of Literary Opinions from the 20s to the 50s,” in which he maintained that state policies had encouraged such revolutionary organizations as the Peterashevtsey. The article examined Belinskii’s work although his name was banned from appearing in print—hence the article’s broad title. Pypin compared Belinskii’s fate to Chernyshevskii’s, which drew criticism from Turgenev who saw no connection between the men of the 1840s and those of the 1860s.\(^{172}\) Arseniev’s article “Transformation of the Legal Statutes” was critical of the state’s encroachments on the jury system. The censors described in it “undermining of trust in the government.”\(^{173}\) Stasiulevich admitted to his wife that he was at a loss to explain how these articles crossed “the vague line of sedition.”\(^{174}\) Turgenev wrote with sarcasm to Fet: “You will be happy when this honest, moderate, monarchical publication is closed on charges of


\(^{172}\) Ibid., p. 134.


\(^{174}\) IRLI, f. 293, op. 1, ed. khr. 102, l. 77.
radicalism and revolutionism."  

After receiving the warning, Stasiulevich became even more circumspect and examined every line to make sure that nothing could arouse the censors’ suspicions. The journal took over his life. He worked from eight in the morning until midnight. Even while abroad, he received daily correspondence and piles of manuscripts. Of the censure’s arbitrariness, E. J. Dillon wrote: “It is, perhaps, superfluous to remark that the principles by which Censors are guided in forbidding or permitting leading articles, stories, etc. are as difficult to discover as those which determined Buridan’s ass to choose one haystack in preference to the other.”

Luckily, the amnesty of 1877 wiped the slate clean of warnings.

By 1881, Stasiulevich’s printing company was the third largest in Russia after the Academy of Sciences and “Social Aid” (“Obshchestvennaia pomoshch”). Vestnik was the third most popular thick journal in the country after Otechestvenye zapiski and Delo. Monthly subscriptions in the late 1870s stabilized at about 6,000. Stasiulevich’s bookstore, which abutted the printing shop, sold thousands of Russian and western European titles in translation. Despite the difference in social views between Stasiulevich and Nekrasov, the poet published his major works through Stasiulevich’s shop: Who Lives Well In Russia, Complete Collection of Poems (in one volume) and Nekrasov for

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175 Turgenev to A. A. Fet, 21 August/2 September 1873, I. S. Turgenev, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem (Moscow-Leningrad, 1963), X, p. 143.
176 IRLI, f. 293, op. 1, ed. khr. 102, l. 77.
177 E. J. Dillon, Russian Traits and Terrors: A Faithful Picture of the Russia of Today (Boston, 1891), p. 275.
Russian Children. After the poet’s death in 1878, Stasiulevich took upon himself the first posthumous collection of works, which came out in four volumes in 1879.

Meanwhile, Stasiulevich’s printing business attracted increasing numbers of progressive intelligentsia members. As usual, however, the steady increase in popularity also attracted the censors’ attention. An internal ministry memorandum from 1879 accused Vestnik of two principle faults: first, dwelling on the advantages of a constitutional form of government and supporting further reforms, and second, arguing that excessive centralization and Russification, especially in Poland and Ukraine, instead of strengthening state unity, contributed to ill feeling towards the government and the Russian nationality. Vestnik formulated its defense of local autonomy and initiative, the keystone of its political program, in administrative as well as ethnic terms. “Russia, in its civilization’s infantile state, should not take upon itself the role of organizing new states,” wrote Stasiulevich.¹⁸⁰

Interior minister M. T. Loris-Melikov’s attempt to split the opposition by favoring its moderate wing resulted in the creation of the Valuev Commission in November 1880, which worked under state supervision to re-codify the publishing laws. The Interior Ministry encouraged Russia’s most prominent publishers to participate in some of the meetings, but, understandably, men who had lived in fear of the censors’ arbitrary rules were skeptical of the invitation. In the end, however, influential liberals such as Arseniev, Anatoly Koni, Stasiulevich, historian Vasilii Kliuchevsky, and several Ministry of Justice

officials participated. Koni described one of these meetings in his memoirs: “The newspaper and journal editors of the Valuev Commission behaved themselves without dignity and pusillanimously. Only Stasiulevich spoke and spoke to the point.”

Stasiulevich’s address before the Commission boiled down to two central theses. First, educated society realized that the press was under strict supervision and when it consciously avoided important topics, educated members of society assumed that the government was covering something up. This “absence of glasnost” contributed to the mutual alienation between state and subjects. Second, in order to avoid this situation, all the press demanded was for the state to treat it “by means of laws and courts, and to eliminate administrative arbitrariness.” In his diary, P. A. Valuev noted that Stasiulevich’s speech was “long and dry,” but that it found favor with the commission members.

Stasiulevich evaluated all legislation in relation to the freedom of the press. When in 1880 Loris-Melikov abolished the Third Section, Stasiulevich wrote to Pypin: “I do not know how Arseniev will welcome this day, but he already knows that I think, as usual—‘Fear the Danaans, when they come bearing gifts’.” In another letter to Pypin he wrote: “Our own censorship forces us to approach western civilization like lackeys, that is, to eavesdrop by western civilization’s door, and to refrain from discussing what we have

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185 RNB, f. 621, ed. khr. 831, l. 44-45.
The only freedom that the press enjoyed in the 1870s and 1880s was to criticize western governments’ domestic and foreign policies. Stasiulevich was understandably skeptical of this liberty. When it came to domestic Russian affairs, he believed it was often more noble to remain silent. He understood that shafts shot at Vestnik by the conservative press found favor among state officials and some were even commissioned by them. Parallels abound between the state of the Russian press before the 1905 revolution and the problems that publishers and journalists face under the Putin regime. E. J. Dillon’s description of the pitfalls of the journalistic profession in late imperial Russia justifies Vestnik’s reticence on certain issues and has increasing relevance to contemporary Russia:

Thus a Russian journalist, if he only eschews politics, religious and social topics, steers clear of political economy, finance, philosophy, and certain epochs of history, is careful not to offend persons who, whatever their official position, can resent fancied insults, sedulously avoids such burning questions as the taxes, the laws, the economic condition of the peasantry, the press, medicine, education, and the partial famines in the empire, enjoys considerable liberty in the choice of topics for his paragraphs and themes for his leading articles, subject, of course, to the caprice of a timorous censor, who is painfully aware that his career may be irreparably destroyed by a single mistake on the side of indulgence.

An experienced legal mind was a welcome addition to the editorial staff, which Konstantin Arseniev officially joined in the spring of 1878. Already a regular contributor, he immediately began the “Literary Survey” and in 1880 took over the “Domestic Survey,” which “set the standard for permissible criticism of the regime.”

186 RNB, f. 621, ed. khr. 835, l. 47.
187 RNB, f. 621, ed. khr. 829, l. 36.
188 E. J. Dillon, Russian Traits and Terrors: A Faithful Picture of the Russia of Today (Boston, 1891), p. 273.
mirror opposite of his predecessor, Leonid Polonsky—much less self-consciously European and nothing of the Anglophile. Stasiulevich never had to restrain him on the issue of liberalization in Russia and he was much better suited to the stricter censorship conditions that were ahead. Nevertheless, Arseniev consistently condemned the regime’s encroachments on zemstvo and municipal duma responsibilities. He protested Ober Procurator of the Holy Synod Konstantin Pobedonostsev’s heavy handed treatment of religious minorities such as the Old believers, Catholics, and Lutherans. And he warned against “the increasing danger of clericalism that threatens Russia.”

Arseniev brought with him a breadth of interests and experiences. In 1874, he became a member of the Shakespeare Society where fellow players, members of the Vestnik circle among them, read critical essays on literary topics. This increased his literary interests and he began to contribute reviews to the journal, which Pypin gladly encouraged him to do. Between 1866 and 1874, Arseniev maintained his successful law practice and was among those who made the new courtroom procedures function. His work as a trial lawyer gave him first-hand exposure to Russia’s social ills. Between 1878 and 1884, he lived with his family on an estate half a day’s journey from Petersburg where he was closely involved in rural and peasant affairs through the zemstvo.190

Arseniev had made a career in the government and used his extensive contacts among reform-minded bureaucrats to keep the “Domestic Survey” as current as possible. He had to cover Alexander II’s 25th anniversary as Tsar in 1880 and described to Stasiulevich how he wanted to approach the event: “My initial thought was the following:

190 Ibid., p. 140.
not to praise, but to show that everything that has been done up to now has prepared and facilitated further steps forward.”¹⁹¹ This attitude set the tone of Arseniev’s political sensibilities throughout his long career at Vestnik. Konstantin Kavelin also contributed to defining the journal’s political stance. More credulous than Stasiulevich of the Interior Ministry’s liberal tendencies, or perhaps just more optimistic, he saw in Loris-Melikov’s initial thaw—the liberalization of press laws and the willingness to negotiate with the social elite and to consider public opinion—the promise of a general change of course. He wrote to Stasiulevich in 1880: “The time of false silence and false alliances has passed even for us. It is time for each to express his opinion openly, honestly, and boldly.”¹⁹² Kavelin published a series of articles on the peasant question and issues of state power in Vestnik. Stasiulevich collected these into separate volumes. However, he chose to print two of these works, Political ghosts. State Power and Administrative Arbitrariness. One of the Contemporary Russian Questions (1878) and A Conversation with a Socialist-Revolutionary (1880), in Behr’s publishing company in Berlin—beyond the censors’ reach.

Arseniev was one of the defense lawyers in the famous 1877 Trial of the 193 in which members of Land and Freedom answered for their attempts to establish revolutionary peasant “colonies,” agitation among religious sectarians, and “agrarian terrorism.” Most of the public defenders involved in this case were also Stasiulevich’s friends. The authorities published the proceedings in Pravitelstvennyy vestnik, from which other publications could reprint the information, but only if it coincided

¹⁹¹ IRLI, f. 293, op. 1, ed. khr. 165, l. 33.
¹⁹² RNB, f. 621, ed. khr. 362, l. 24-24.
completely with the official text. The public defenders hired their own stenographers to record every word of the proceedings, including the speeches of the accused. Stasiulevich understood, of course, that publishing this manuscript in Vestnik meant certain disaster.

As it turned out, even Stasiulevich’s publishing house could not pull it off. Before the ink dried on The Stenographic Report of the Case of the Revolutionary Propaganda, the censorship bureau forwarded a copy directly to interior minister Timashev, who ordered the printing to stop and the police to confiscate all existing copies. The book was banned and destroyed in the autumn of 1878. A few unofficial copies remained, however, and so State Comptroller and close friend Dmitrii Solskii, who received one of them, wrote to Stasiulevich: “I sincerely thank you, dear friend Mikhail Matveevich, for sending [me] a non-existent book. Only you can perform such tricks.”

In the 1880s, Vestnik became increasingly politicized. Stasiulevich followed the moderate line that Arseniev had set. Article after article summed up developments in economics, explored the state of the working class, and addressed the peasant question. Arseniev’s “Domestic Surveys” examined zemstvo and town council successes and inefficiencies, analyzed the problems of national education, and reported on parallel developments in Western Europe. A brief list of regular contributors illustrates the microcosm that Stasiulevich had created around the Vestnik nucleus. Stasiulevich stood at the center. In the first circle around him were Pypin and Arseniev. In the next were cultural critic Vladimir Stasov, famous literary historian and critic Semyon Vengerov, Eugene Utin, and writer Alexander Stankevich who contributed important political

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analysis and literary criticism. Historians Konstantin Kavelin, Alexander Gradovskii, legal theorist Fyodor Voronov, literary critics Viktor Goltsev and Valentin Korsh covered social, literary, and historical issues. Physiologist Igor Sechenov, botanist Andrei Beketov, embryologist Ilia Mechnikov, economist Nikolai Ziber, and sociologist Maxim Kovalevsky contributed their research and covered the latest scientific developments abroad. In the 1880s, Vestnik published about 6,000 monthly copies.194

Whatever temporary and illusory liberties Vestnik may have enjoyed under Loris-Melikov, they disappeared with the murder of Tsar Alexander II on 1 March 1881. By August, an interior ministry memorandum accused Vestnik of “aiming to replace insufficient forms of political expression with an increased freedom of the press, of dwelling on the dissolution of social support for the state.”195 The conservative head of the Press Department from 1883, E. M. Feoktistov, wrote in his memoirs much later that the unruliness of the press had rarely achieved such a scale as it did in the early 1880s: “The leading role in this belonged to ‘Vestnik Evropy’ of Stasiulevich.”196 The publishing house also ventured perilously close to trouble. Ianson’s Statistical Research into Peasant Allotments and Payments rapidly became “the famous ‘Koran’ of our liberals,” as the conservative paper Rus’ put it.197 Examples of books published in the early 1880s were Gradovskyy’s The Foundations of Russian State Law (3 v. 1875-1882), criminologist Ivan Foynitskii’s Exile in the West in Its Historical Development and Its

Current State (1882), and Nikolai Kostomarov’s Russian History in the Life Portraits of its Greatest Statesmen (2 v. 1880-1881).

During Loris-Melikov’s tenure, Stasiulevich received in 1881 permission to publish the daily newspaper Order (Poriadok, 1881-1882), which, although short-lived, became another liberal hub. The editors were economist Vladimir Bezobrazov, positivist philosopher Eugene de Roberti, Kavelin, and Korsh. By this time, the young economist Leonid Zinovievich Slonimskii was already a contributor to Vestnik. After Korsh left Order, Slonimskii took over as the “Foreign Section” editor. Prominent lawyer Sergey Muromtsev, Moscow’s de facto liberal opposition leader, was the daily’s Moscow journalist. Legal writers Vasilii Sobolevskii, Ivan Durnovo, and Sergey Priklonskii and statistician and economist Vasilii Pokrovskii contributed articles. Russian philosopher Gregory Vyrubov was the Paris correspondent. Ivan Ianzhul and Nikolai Ziber covered British intellectual life. Émigré revolutionaries S. M. Stepniak-Kravchinskii, N. I. Dobrovolskii, and S. L. Kliachko were regular contributors. Turgenev helped then unknown writer, Guy de Maupassant, to publish some of his early short stories, including A Portrait, in Poriadok. Circulation reached 5,000 by the end of 1881. It is a compliment to Poriadok that it gave no peace to arch-conservative Konstantin

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199 S. A. Muromtsev, Sbornik statei (Moscow, 1911), p. 412.
Meanwhile, the police monitored the meetings of the editors at Stasiulevich’s home by recruiting one of his servants.

Through *Poriadok*, Stasiulevich came face to face with anti-Semitism. Alexei Suvorin who had owned the popular newspaper *Novoe vremia* since 1876, and his friend and literary critic Viktor Burenin, who had contributed to *Vestnik* in the 1860s and 1870s, turned *Novoe vremia* into a bulwark of conservatism. Catering to consumer tastes, the paper explained all social ills in simplistic terms that instigated witch-hunts. Suvorin repeatedly reminded his readers that the Gintsburg banking family was behind Stasiulevich’s business—it was true that Stasiulevich had borrowed money from them—and Burenin repeatedly pointed out that Stasiulevich’s wife was Jewish. Neither of the critics mentioned the fact that Suvorin had himself acquired *Novoe vremia* with the help of Warsaw bankers.

The Censorship Bureau added to the conservative barrage. Stasiulevich made weekly trips there to defend the paper. Loris-Melikov’s dismissal from the Interior Ministry after Alexander II’s assassination brought in N. P. Ignatiev who was closer to Pobedonostsev in outlook. By the summer of 1881, the press began to feel the weight of increased oversight. Stasiulevich wrote to Pypin: “[It is like] an uninterrupted series of unbearable torture: the feeling makes me want to resort to the bludgeon, not the court.”

In January 1882, Ignatiev closed the paper for 45 days and wrote to

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203 RNB, f. 621, ed. khr. 832, l. 13.
Pobedonostsev: “I have banned ‘Poriadok’ for a month and a half. Are you finally satisfied with me?” The prohibition came at the worst possible time: *Poriadok* had just completed a subscription (3,865) for the next year, but as soon as news of the ban spread, many subscribers demanded their money back. By month’s end, Stasiulevich announced the paper’s closing. When V. I. Lenin wrote condescendingly how the Russian liberals came up with “smart attempts to lead the monarch over the desired line, so that he would not notice it himself,” he was referring to liberal newspapers, of which *Poriadok* was one.

Pypin most accurately expressed the *Vestnik* group’s attitude to the events of 1 March 1881 and their causes. In February of that year, he had sent Alexander II his famous *Memorandum on the N. G. Chernyshevskii Case*, in which he had argued that the accusations against his cousin were unsubstantiated. Pypin was very critical of socialists whom he called “idealistic fanatics made up of excited youths who had found no place for themselves in the complex and tense relations of the contemporary world.” He accused their leaders of using Chernyshevskii’s name as a justification. He called Mikhail Bakunin a “windbag” and Lavrov a “crazed philosopher” who had misled the Russian youth that was without a counter-guide in literature. After the assassination, Pypin published an article in *Poriadok* wherein he called the murder “a tragic historical event that has shocked the minds of the people.” He simultaneously defended liberalism against

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204 K. P. Pobedonostsev i ego korrespondenty: Pisma i zapiski (Prague, 1923), I, bk. 1, p. 85.
the conservative Panslavist Ivan Aksakov who equated it with nihilism. Pypin also argued that the liberal press expected the state to “continue the reforms, extend self-government, and defend the freedom of the press and the sciences.”

The 1880s and 1890s were commercially successful years for Stasiulevich despite the closing of *Poriadok* and prominent philanthropist Horace Gintsburg’s bankruptcy. Of Petersburg’s 133 printing houses, Stasiulevich’s was in the top five in trade volume. *Vestnik* stabilized at about 6,000 monthly subscriptions, which placed it ahead of *Delo*, *Russkoe bogatstvo*, *Severnyy vestnik*, and *Nabliudatel*, but second to the leading thick journal—Saltykov-Shchedrin’s *Otechestvennye zapiski* with 10,000 subscriptions. The political situation, however, became inhospitable to liberal publications. *Otechestvennye zapiski* was closed in 1884 partly because émigrés, political criminals, and populists were its regular contributors. Despite the incompatibility of their political views, Saltykov-Shchedrin began to publish in Stasiulevich’s journal. He tried to bring others with him, but *Vestnik* would only accommodate writers Gleb Uspenskii, Hieronymous Iasenskii, and poet Alexei Pleshcheev. Stasiulevich refused to publish other populist writers: Nikolai Mikhailovskii, Vsevolod Garshin, Ilia Salov, Eugene Karnovich, and Nikolai Zlatovratskii. This uneasy but close relationship lasted for five years until Saltykov’s

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207 *Poriadok*, 27 April and 28 April 1881.
death in 1889. Saltykov wrote: “If it had not been for ‘Vestnik Evropy,’ literature itself would have ostracized me, thereby simplifying the censorship bureau’s job.”

In 1882, Stasiulevich’s old nemesis, Count Dmirtrii Tolstoy, became interior minister, which bode ill for Vestnik. His first report to Tsar Alexander III emphasized the journal’s disloyalty to the throne, its writers’ repeated use of the term “counter-reforms,” and consistent opposition to the state’s policies. But when Tolstoy demanded the closing of Vestnik, his long-time opponent, Pobedonostsev, insisted that this be done in a lawful manner via a third warning. With Alexander III’s accession, arch-conservative Count V. P. Meshcherskii found his way back into court circles. Through his newspaper Grazhdanin, together with Katkov and Suvorin, he resumed and spearheaded conservative attacks on Vestnik. Stasiulevich sued Suvorin in the fall of 1882 and hired Vladimir Spasovich to represent him in court. They won the case and Stasiulevich presented Spasovich with a small bronze figurine of an African hunter. In the accompanying letter he wrote that usually the Moors returned with a lion’s corpse: “But you and I hunted not in Africa’s deserts, so you managed to catch not a lion, but a pig—a local animal.” As arrests increased in the wake of the assassination, some of Vestnik’s contributors were also detained: literary critic Mikhail Protopopov and populist writer Sergey Krivenko. Stasiulevich was pessimistic and saw “not the slightest light even in the distant future.” He complained that, to avoid taking risks, the thick journals now had to

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210 M. E. Salytkov-Shchedrin to Stasiulevich, 3 February 1881, M. E. Saltykov-Shchedrin, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii (Moscow, 1976), XX, p. 381.
211 IRLI, f. 293, op. 1, ed. khr. 1769, l. 29.
212 RNB, f. 621, ed. khr. 831, l. 61 and f. 124, ed. khr. 4125, l. 4.
213 IRLI, f. 293, op. 1, ed. khr. 104, l. 37.
publish translations “not from some strange foreign language, but from our own Russian, in which we only think to ourselves, and have to translate into another Russian in order to speak aloud.” Analyzing the censorship of the 1880s, E. J. Dillon wrote: “Printed words are looked upon in Russia as caterpillars, and their creators are held responsible not only for their existence but likewise for the acts of the mature butterflies.”

In 1882, a new “Social Survey” section appeared in Vestnik from the pen of Konstantin Arseniev, who had joined the journal’s editorial board permanently that year. He was also in charge of all the other Survey sections and formulated the journal’s liberal program. Pypin remained the literary editor. In 1882, the young and talented economist Leonid Slonimskii joined the Vestnik team and quickly found favor with his older colleagues. Slonimskii soon took over the “Foreign Survey” and the “Letters from Abroad” sections.

Slonimskii was the son of distinguished Jewish publisher and mathematician Zinovii (Haim Zelig-Yakovlevich) Slonimskii. The father had been born into an extremely Orthodox Jewish family in Bialostok, which forced him to read literature in foreign languages surreptitiously while he was growing up. Under the auspices of Alexander Humboldt and others, he was offered a position as mathematics professor at one of the Prussian universities in 1844, but had to turn it down due to family

circumstances. Haim’s son, Leonid, was born in Zhitomir in 1850. He studied at Kiev University’s Juridical School. As soon as he graduated in 1872, he began to publish in Court News (Sudebnyy vestnik), The Court Journal (Sudebnyy zhurnal), and The Journal of Civil and Criminal Justice (Zhurnal grazhdanskogo i ugodovnogo prava). Between 1875 and 1879, he wrote the political survey section of Russkii mir and became its deputy editor in 1879. He joined Stasiulevich’s Poriadok in 1881, but earlier, in 1878, he had published his first article in Vestnik Evropy entitled “About the Forgotten Economists” in which he criticized Marx and his followers. In 1883, he took over the journal’s “Foreign Survey.” He gave a series of presentations to the St. Petersburg Juridical Society on issues of private property and the peasant commune in 1885 and 1891-92. Stasiulevich called Slonimskii Vestnik’s foreign minister, but constantly had to restrain the enthusiastic young writer: “Engage your opponents as a traveler engages a barking dog: in these cases you never argue directly with the barking dog, you just continue, quietly and without looking back, walking where you intended to walk.”

Stasiulevich had the chance to practice what he had advised his young colleague to do after Turgenev died in Paris on 22 August 1883. Stasiulevich accompanied the body back to Russia and organized the burial. The Russian authorities created so many problems for him that he wrote to his wife in exasperation: “You’d think I’m bringing

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218 IRLI, f. 293, op. 1, ed. khr. 98, l. 42.
back the body of the Nightingale-Bandit! A nightingale—yes! A bandit—no!”  He also prepared and edited Turgenev’s posthumous collection of works. Later, Stasiulevich also took upon himself to organize and publish Saltykov-Shchedrin’s collected works, to the ninth volume of which Arseniev contributed critical articles and biographical documents. Stasiulevich also advised Goncharov and Ostrovskii in regard to printing their posthumous works. In the late 1880s and early 1890s, Stasiulevich published Silver Age poets Zinaida Gippius, Dmitrii Merezhkovskii, and Konstantin Balmont’s first works. Vestnik’s turn to young talent at this time reflected the general state of Russian literature between the death of the Golden Age’s last writers and the full blossoming of the Silver Age: Alexander Ertel, Dmitrii Mamin-Sibiriak, Nikolai Minskii, Konstantin Staniukovich, Alexei Apukhtin, and Afanasii Fet. In the 1890s, Ivan Bunin made his literary debut on Vestnik’s pages with his poem Songs of the Spring.

Unlike Bunin, Vladimir Soloviev came to Vestnik an accomplished poet and thinker. Like the other members of the Vestnik group, he also lost his academic job and the right to speak publicly as a result of his infamous 28 March 1881 lecture, in which he urged the state to amnesty Alexander’s assassins. Slonimskii was present at that event. Having published in Slavophile journals until the mid-1880s, Soloviev joined the liberal camp after reconsidering his worldviews and he began to submit his poems to Pypin and Stasiulevich in 1886. Many articles followed, and Soloviev became a regular contributor,

221 I. A. Goncharov to Stasiulevich, 30 October 1882, M. M. Stasiulevich i ego sovremenniki v ikh perepiske, ed. M. K. Lemke (St. Petersburg, 1911-1913), IV, p. 370.
although he published in other periodicals as well. The turn to Vestnik coincided with Soloviev’s rupture with Slavophilism and especially with one the chief proponents of pochvennichestvo, Nikolai Strakhov. They clashed over Nikolai Danilevsky’s Russia and Europe, which Soloviev reviewed negatively on the pages of Vestnik in 1888. Strakhov published his replies in Russkii vestnik and Suvorin’s newspaper Novoe vremia. The argument revolved around the validity of the Europe-Russia standoff. In a letter to Stasiulevich in December 1888, Soloviev complained that “contemporary quasi-Slavophilism” had split into the Byzantine, liberal, and “gut patriotism” varieties, each of which was developing in a separate direction. Concerned more at this time with unity, Soloviev no longer shared the Slavophil desire to isolate Russia from the West.

Not all the members of Vestnik’s editorial staff understood Soloviev’s theories, however. Arseniev wrote to Stasiulevich in 1890 regarding one of Soloviev’s articles: “I have to admit that it is total abracadabra to me. There are only a few comprehensible phrases at the very end.” Nor did Soloviev’s work find favor with conservatives like Pobedonostsev who asked writer Eugene Feoktistov: “What is Vl. Soloviev whoring on about [bliadoslovit] in the new issue of ‘Vestnik Evropy’? When you can, send me a copy.” Soloviev became friends with Stasiulevich and defended him against conservative attacks: “I do not know of another man in Russia who deserves more respect than this ‘liberal’.” Soloviev penned this humorous quatrain to Stasiulevich:

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224 IRLI, f. 293, op. 1, ed. khr. 165/4, l. 100.
226 V. S. Soloviev, Pisma (Prague, 1923), p. 5.
I am not sick and I am not saddened,  
Though Moscow’s climate is bad for me;  
It is too continental, –  
There is no Galernaia or Neva here.\textsuperscript{227}

Soloviev also published all of his major books through Stasiulevich’s press: The National Question in Russia (1\textsuperscript{st} ed. 1888, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. 1891), The Spiritual Foundations of Life (1897), and Poems (1900), among others. Stasiulevich wrote Pypin upon Soloviev’s premature death: “He is more than a contributor to us and to the journal—and we are not mourning so much the loss of a colleague as an irreplaceable loss of a person whom everybody loved.”\textsuperscript{228}

Having lost Poriadok, Stasiulevich tried to compensate the coverage of current affairs through the “Domestic” and “Social Surveys,” which he left for Arseniev, Pypin and Slonimskii to compose, but which he carefully monitored. In 1894, Stasiulevich wrote to Pypin: “Please pay attention to the quotation marks: this is a polemical article, so the slightest mistake in quotation marks will change the entire meaning.”\textsuperscript{229}

Stasiulevich’s printing business continued to prosper and expand. In the 1880s, he published Kavelin’s The Peasant Question (1882) and Ethical Goals (1884), as well as From the Earliest Reminiscences about K.D. Kavelin (1885); Arseniev’s Critical Studies about Russian Literature (1888) and The Novel—A Tool of Regress (1885); Slonimskii’s The Main Questions of Politics (1889); Ziber’s D. Ricardo’s Theory of Value and Capital (1883) and David Ricardo and Karl Marx through Their Socio-Economic Research (1885); Vasilii Vorontsov’s The Fates of Capitalism in Russia (1882) and Our Directions

\textsuperscript{227} V. S. Soloviev, Stikhotvoreniia i shutochnye p’esy (Leningrad, 1974), p. 171. This is my translation.  
\textsuperscript{228} RNB, f. 621, ed. khr. 850, l. 13.  
\textsuperscript{229} RNB, f. 621, ed. khr. 834, l. 9.
Throughout the 1880s, Pypin and Stasiulevich tried to determine the right balance between mass appeal and enlightenment value. Pypin complained to Academy of Sciences member V. F. Miller that Stasiulevich was shunning specialized and lengthy articles in trying to make Vestnik a popular journal. On the other hand, Pypin admitted in the same letter, “scientists would do a great service if they came closer to their readers.”

Both men worked hard on the Russian Library volumes. In an 1886 article on Russian folk literature, Pypin wrote that the Russian scholar’s role should not be exclusively scientific, “he must facilitate the growth of [science’s] elementary shoots among the social masses.”

A native of Saratov, Pypin encouraged the studies of local history and folklore, and donated rare books to the town’s public library. In 1885, he enthusiastically supported the opening of the Saratov Radishchev Museum to which he donated rare documents and manuscripts. An ethnographer, Pypin worked closely with the Imperial Geographic Society to support local studies and imperial conferences. His 1884-1890 titles included the following: honorary member of the Bulgarian Scientific Society of Sophia; member of the Russian Society of History and Ancient Studies; member of the Society of Natural Science, Anthropology, and Ethnography; honorary member of Moscow University’s Society of Russian Philology; active and honorary

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230 Iz perepiski deiatelei Akademii nauk (Leningrad, 1925), p. 40.
member of Petersburg University’s Neo-Philological Society; corresponding member of the Friends of Ancient Writing; member of the Saratov Province Scientific Archive Commission; and member of the Scientific Archival Commission of Nizhni Novgorod. Pypin’s series of articles on the history of Russian ethnography appeared on the pages of Vestnik between 1881 and 1889. He eventually published them through Stasiulevich’s printing house as The History of Russian Ethnography (1891), the first systematic overview of the subject. Pypin also worked on a reference compendium, The Index of Ethnographic Literature, which he did not have the time to publish.

If Stasiulevich represented a general standard of public enlightenment through his publishing conglomerate, Pypin stood for specialization and local immersion, and Arseniev was an example of the Renaissance man in how he blended his legal training, state service experience, literary interests, and political analysis. The youngest man in the Vestnik group, Leonid Slonimskii quickly became an integral member and covered economic and foreign policy issues. Together, the men symbolized the breadth and depth of the liberal enlightenment crusade. Vestnik entered the 1890s as Russia’s premier liberal publication with a solid scholarly and literary pedigree. However, the course of events in the Russian Empire soon complicated the playing field and compromised the position that the editors had fought so hard to achieve.

Chapter 4

Vestnik in the 1890s: Behind or Beyond?

233 IRLI, f. 250, op. 2, ed. khr. 1, l. 40-41; ed. khr. 66, l. 1; and ed. khr. 61, l. 49, 70.
The 1880s and 1890s witnessed the unraveling of social and literary criticisms whose close relationship persisted since Belinskii’s time. More and more intellectual currents separated themselves out of this tradition and the Silver Age offered new alternatives for creativity and forms of artistic expression and social criticism. The 1880s saw major shifts in Russia’s journal culture. Katkov’s *Russkii vestnik* dropped from view as a literary influence by 1880. In 1884, *Otechestvenye zapiski* was closed. Vukol Lavrov established the Moscow monthly *Russian Thought* (*Russkaia Mysl’*, 1880-1918), which moved from a conservative towards a moderately liberal position by 1885 under Victor Goltsev’s editorship. *Russian Wealth* (*Russkoe bogatstvo*, 1876-1918) went from a weak beginning to an important vehicle of populist thought, especially after former *Otechestvenye zapiski* critic Nikolai Mikhailovskii joined its staff and his anti-modernist views added spice to the literary scene. In 1885, *The Northern Herald* (*Severnyy vestnik*, 1885-1898) appeared, although its eventual role as the first major publication to welcome modernist writers was not yet in place.

In the 1890s, preoccupations with literary questions morphed into an interest in pedagogical issues with an emphasis on the formation of human consciousness. A new generation of journals sprang up to satiated the public’s interest in psychology and aesthetics. *Education* (*Obrazovanie*, 1892-1909) regularly printed psychological studies and reviews of psychological and psychiatric literature, including Schopenhauer, Ibsen, Durkheim, Max Nordau, and Wilhelm Wundt, among others. Articles explored the influence on human behavior of dreams, hypnotism, poetry, the psychology of women, predictions of racial degeneration manifested in neurosis, pessimism, and suicide. *God’s
World (Mir bozhii, 1891-1906) also had a pedagogic mission that took on a more social concern when former radical Angel Bogdanovich became its editor in 1894. The most serious and erudite of these was the journal of the Moscow Psychological Society, Problems of Philosophy and Psychology (Problemy filosofii i psikhologii, 1889-1918). Under Iakov Grot’s editorship, the journal offered an educated readership whatever help the broadest forms of learning might give in solving contemporary spiritual problems. It introduced Russia to Nietzsche and published Tolstoy’s controversial “What is Art?” In 1899, The World of Art (Mir iskusstva, 1899-1904) began its short, but remarkable career. Its mission was to revolutionize Russian taste and simultaneously to save Russia’s artistic tradition from the dead hand of positivist interpretation. Editor Sergei Diaghilev and contributors Zinaida Gippius and Dmitrii Merezhkovsky determined the journal’s direction.234

On this background, Vestnik appears to be a fish out of water in the 1890s. However, it can also be seen as a literary and social establishment that maintained its weight while the brilliant but short-lived aberrations in the history of Russian journalism lit up and fizzled out around it. Sustainable only in the special cultural conditions of the time, the artistic journals came and went. Nevertheless, the questions they posed about the make-up of the human psyche could not be dismissed out of hand. In their own way, Russia’s artistic elites were reacting to the empire’s political tradition and the social legacy it left in its wake. Vestnik also belonged to this tradition, but it provided a rich

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tapestry of local news and practical administrative activity as the answer to Russia’s growing pains.

By the 1890s, Vestnik was at a steady 7,000 monthly subscriptions.\(^{235}\) It was still a standard bearer for many intellectuals. In a letter to Arseniev dated 26 January 1891, famous physician and writer N. A. Belogolovyi mentioned the journal’s 25\(^{th}\) anniversary celebration, which passed without excessive show, but marked a truly momentous milestone. He noted how much the journal had contributed to Russia’s general education, especially in the past ten years when “beasts roamed freely, but men sat in fear.”

Throughout the 1880s, Belogolovyi wrote, Vestnik managed to keep its ideals intact and never compromised, while the reactionary press attacked the journal with greater frequency and increasing support from the state.\(^{236}\) By 1897, Stasiulevich’s publishing house was one of the ten largest printing companies in Petersburg. Having turned 70 in 1896, he remained in control of the journal *de jure*, but relied more and more on his loyal editors Arseniev, Pypin, and Slonimskii whose ranks enlarged with the coming of writer Mikhail Lemke and literary and social historian Mikhail Gershenzon. The infusion of new blood could not have been timelier—in the late 1890s Stasiulevich began to lose his eyesight.

Pypin’s energy in the 1890s did not diminish. He was in his sixties, his academic achievements accumulated, and his intellectual energy reached its peak and showed no signs of deterioration until his death in 1904. On the pages of Vestnik, he argued with the populists and criticized the Panslavists. In 1891, he became a corresponding member of


\(^{236}\) IRLI, f. 359, no. 151.
the Academy of Sciences. The Imperial Russian Technical Society elected him to lead the expert commission of the First All-Russian Printing Exhibition. In 1895, he cooperated with the Imperial Free Economic Society as it published the collected works of Krylov, Pushkin, and Lermontov. The Serbian Academy of Sciences elected him a corresponding member in 1895. In 1899, he was active in the Petersburg Pedagogical Society of Mutual Aid, which oversaw the publication of affordable educational literature. In 1898-1899, he reworked a series of Vestnik articles into The History of Russian Literature (1898-1899), which examined literary genres “in the sequence of their historical development, their relations to each other, and to dominant political and social events.” Pypin believed that Peter the Great’s reforms made progress possible and that an academic and historicist approach to Russian culture would yield information conducive to further development. In 1900, Pypin became an honorary member of the Pushkin Lyceum Society, the Russian Bibliographical Society, and a full member of the Petersburg Imperial Russian Historical Society. He also took part in organizing the ethnographic section of the Alexander III Museum. In 1901, he joined the Education Ministry’s commission “on the transformation of middle schools,” where he opposed excessive emphasis on the learning of classical languages. In 1902-1903, Pypin became an honorary member of Iuriev and Kazan Universities as well as Moscow’s Public

237 IRLI, f. 250, op. 2, ed. khr. 1, l. 41.
238 IRLI, f. 250, op. 2, ed. khr. 1, l. 41 and ed. khr. 41, l. 59.
239 IRLI, f. 250, op. 2, ed. khr. 61, l. 96, 5.
Rumiantsev Museum and a foreign member of the Prague Academy of Knowledge, Sciences, and the Arts. 240

Pypin understood liberalism as “the direction of social thought that tends toward maximum social self-realization, toward the maximum freedom for personal individuality and personal thought.” In Pypin’s eyes, Alexander I’s advisor Mikhail Speranskii, members of the literary circles of the 1820s, the Peterashevsty, the Slavophiles and westernizers of the 1840s-1860s had all been liberals, as were the members of Vestnik’s editorial meetings. He defended the reform spirit of the 1860s, advocated further reforms, greater local autonomy, and more freedom for the arts and sciences. In his view, cooperation between the state, representative institutions, and the press could achieve all this without bloodshed. 241 He believed that revolution was antithetical to the Russian national character and historically counterproductive. All socialist tendencies were “purely Platonic,” he believed, and therefore it was “ridiculous to dream of a socialist order within the Russian Empire.” 242 Marxism, like Nietzsche’s philosophy, was a symptom of decadence, “a mistake, a simplification, and a monstrosity.” It represented but an “episode” in European development, and it was an error to treat it as “the ultimate limit of human thought and artistic creativity, and as guidance.” 243 Pypin entertained no illusions about the masses’ ignorance or the state’s intransigence, both of which the Vestnik group came up against repeatedly.

240 A. N. Pypin, Istoriia russkoi literatury (St. Petersburg, 1907), IV, pp. v-vi.
241 “Perezhivaemye dni.” Poriadok, 28 April 1881.
In 1895, a group of publishers and writers submitted a petition to Tsar Nicholas II asking that predictable laws govern the press. Mikhailovskii was the petition’s principle author. Arseniev and Spasovich wrote the “Note on the Changes of the Laws on the Press” as an appendix. Stasiulevich was one of the signatories along with seventy-eight others. It took another ten years and the 1905 revolution before the state began to survey the statutes regulating the press. Stasiulevich, Arseniev, and Koni joined the D. F. Kobeko Special Council charged with this revision in 1905. Their colleagues were ultraconservative Vladimir Meshcherskii, Suvorin, and economist and member of the Black Hundreds Dmitrii Pikhno. The liberals’ minimum program aimed at no more than the substitution of judicial for administrative control. By this time, however, Stasiulevich and Arseniev were considered rightist liberals among the Council members.244

Some state officials’ attitude towards Vestnik during the 1890s was indicative of the tsarist government’s increasing alienation from reality and inability to perceive real threats. In 1895, Pobedonostsev’s protégé M. P. Soloviev was placed in charge of the Main Department of the Press. Although the frequency of Stasiulevich’s visits to the censor’s office did not increase, every issue’s fate became more precarious. Pages were repeatedly cut and printing unpredictably stopped and then allowed. Stasiulevich wrote in 1895: “Our journalism now has to think less about what it says than about what it must not say.”245 Just as Witte’s star began to fade around 1900, conservatives, who were behind this, also created problems for Vestnik. Koni remembered that interior minister

245 IRLI, f. 293, op. 1, ed. khr. 99/2, l. 43.
Pleve had criticized him for cooperating with Stasiulevich.\textsuperscript{246} Was there no greater threat to social stability than a liberal journal of 7,000 monthly copies? In 1889, \textit{Vestnik} still had only one warning, but this changed after Governor of Finland N. I. Bobrikov complained to M. P. Soloviev that \textit{Vestnik}'s articles were having a negative influence on the Finnish press and parts of the Finnish population and that they supported national aspirations and incited opposition to the governor’s initiatives.\textsuperscript{247} As a result, the Interior Ministry issued its second official warning in February 1899.

\textit{Vestnik}'s popularity began to decline in the late 1890s and by 1908 its subscriptions fell to approximately 4,000.\textsuperscript{248} The proliferation of new journals diluted the literary pool from which Stasiulevich had chosen texts. Readers could now turn to \textit{Severnyy vestnik}, \textit{Russkoe bogatstvo}, \textit{Mir bozhii}, \textit{Zhizn}, \textit{Novyy put}, \textit{Skorpion}, \textit{Apollon}, or \textit{Zolotoe runo}. The very age that \textit{Vestnik} helped to create caused its popularity to decline, and its unique character dissipated in the early 1900s. The liberal movement, which gathered strength throughout the 1890s as a result of the Witte reforms led to inchoate political organizations and groups. The majority of these had their own papers, journals, and printing houses. By the revolution of 1905, \textit{Vestnik} had dissolved in the maelstrom of political activity and opposition. The editors even tried to enter politics and created the Poriadok Party, but the process did not go beyond announcements and declarations. The

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{246} A. F. Koni, “Vestnik Evropы (Fevral 1911 g),” \textit{Sobranie sochinenii} (Moscow, 1969), VII, p. 231.
\item \textsuperscript{247} V. E. Kelner, \textit{Chelovek svoego vremeni (M. M. Stasiulevich: izdatelskoe delo i liberalnaia oppositsiia)} (St. Petersburg, 1993), p. 254.
\item \textsuperscript{248} IRLI, f. 293, op. 3, ed. khr. 17, l. 6, 8, 17, 140, 151, 181.
\end{itemize}
platform demanded a hereditary constitutional monarchy, but by now failed to reflect the
dominant demands that even the Octobrists and Kadets satisfied only partially.249

Stasiulevich tried to make up for the lag in Vestnik subscriptions with books. The
publishing house turned to scientific and educational literature, the most successful of
which was a series of unorthodox and provocative textbooks on the history of the Russian
Empire and Western Europe by N. I. Kareev and A. S. Trachevskii. Still, Stasiulevich
remained loyal to his old friends. Kavelin’s works came out in four volumes in 1897,
although Stasiulevich understood that the current “age was not interested in idealism and
the highest ethics.”250 When in 1902 he offered a subscription to Pypin’s The History of
Russian Literature, only 793 people ordered the book.251 And there were other non-
commercial publications of works by Kostomarov, Belinskii, Spasovich, Ziber, Ianzhul,
as well as famous anatomist and surgeon Nikolai Pirogov, and poet Alexei
Zhemchuzhnikov. In 1907, Stasiulevich turned to works by younger writers Vladimir
Kuzmin-Karavaev and Nikolai Rusanov and literary historian and sociologist R. Ivanov-
Razumnik, and even translations of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. However, it was too late for
intellectual somersaults and Stasiulevich was, like his journal, behind the times.

After Stasiulevich’s illness and Pypin’s death in 1904, Arseniev remained the
only editor who belonged to the men of the 1860s. Stasiulevich’s personal reaction to the
events of 1905 demonstrated the difficult position in which mid-19th-century liberals
found themselves. After he found out that the 121 workers of his printing shop had joined

249 Vestnik Evropy 2 (1906), pp. 786-793.
250 D. A. Korsakov to Stasiulevich, 3 February 1896, M. M. Stasiulevich iego sovremenniki vikh perepiske,
251 RNB, f. 621, ed. khr. 852, l. 14.
the mass strike in December 1905, he wrote: “Where are we headed?! You would think that Russia wants to end its history by suicide!!” Predictably, Vestnik moved to the right in reaction to the revolution, which both L. N. Tolstoy and M. Gorky noted in 1907. This did not stop Gorky from contributing to the journal in 1912-1913.

Although the idea was never expressed directly, Vestnik’s subscription numbers and the selection of articles demonstrated that the leading role in gradually modernizing the empire belonged to an enlightened elite—the only group capable of safeguarding and developing the legacy of the Great Reforms. However, unlike members of the Soviet and post-Soviet intelligentsia, the Vestnik liberals did not feel completely alienated from everyday life because they participated in local self-government and encouraged others to do so. Modernization’s keystone was a combination of a national education program and increasing participation in local affairs. Chernyshevskii described Vestnik as a “good journal that commands respect from a majority of the public.” And Anton Chekhov considered it the “best of the thick journals.” Vestnik’s ideology emphasized broader social activism outside of parliamentary politics and below the political radar of the censorship and the police.

Stasiulevich himself was remarkably level-headed, rational, and cool—traits that the Russian intelligentsia rarely possessed, especially during the Silver Age when men and women passionately espoused Marxism one day, neo-Kantianism the next, and
Christian mysticism the week after. Perhaps the predictable frequency of Stasiulevich’s trips to Theater Square, where the censorship committee was located, contributed to his self-discipline and consistency. Perhaps the responsibility of running a successful publishing business in an unpredictable environment and a precarious market demanded profound self-discipline, Job-like patience, and superb diplomatic skills. Stasiulevich was never interested in profits and never saw commerce as an end in itself. The father of Russian Marxism Georgii Plekhanov wrote of him: “Stasiulevich deserves great respect as an honest, unselfish, staunch and productive person. But the convictions of this honest, unselfish and productive person bear upon them the imprint characteristic of abstract Russian liberalism, which, according to its very nature, is condemned to complete debility.”

Plekhanov completely misjudged Stasiulevich and *Vestnik* liberalism as a whole. His accusation was not true of Stasiulevich’s civic activity and most of his life was a testament to what a liberal could do. From 1881 on, Stasiulevich was a member of the Petersburg city duma, which elected him deputy chairman in 1883, although the interior minister prevented the appointment. In the same year, Stasiulevich became the executive head of the city’s water supply commission and spearheaded the campaign to install water filters. The water supply authorities took the case to court, which the city won. From 1884 on, he was a member of the city educational commission and became its chairman in 1890. At the time, Petersburg had 262 gymnasia, the equivalent of high schools, (118 for women) and by 1900 there were 344; Sunday schools increased from 8

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to 22. Stasiulevich explained his dedication in rather interesting terms in a speech given before the city gymnasium commission on 17 November 1897:

National education is the only solid foundation of general education in any country. Our educated society is on a par with those of European countries, but beneath the great writers, scientists, and artists, there is an immense chasm. In the West, enlightenment rests on a broad foundation of national education, while in our country it represents an oasis in an enormous desert of national ignorance—a light, even bright, spot upon a dark background. It is customary to measure material and physical conditions based on mortality rates per thousand. If it rises above 30 per thousand, even the healthy become endangered. If, on the contrary, it decreases below 20 per thousand, then even the sick can find support. The same can be said about education: where the percentage of illiteracy rises above a certain level, intellectual death strikes at a young age, and men live only to reach the physical moment of death. We are only a hair above countries that we consider uncultured when it comes to national education. In Russia, the question of national education is gaining ground and may have moved to the front of the queue. It is on everyone’s tongue and preoccupies many minds already.\(^\text{257}\)

Even after he resigned in 1900 as chairman of the city education commission due to disagreements with the city duma chairman, he remained an active member of that body. He was also a member of the duma’s executive commission and a representative of the city duma in the provincial zemstvo. Between 1887 and 1899, Stasiulevich served as an honorable justice of the peace. Stasiulevich believed passionately in civic participation and that every elected member of a local organization must face “the judgment of his peers if he has been called by them to fulfill a social function for the city.” He was a member of the Candidate Commission (1883-1895) that allocated stipends to students and supported orphans (1884-1895); chairman and then member of the Financial Commission (1884-1894); chairman of the city duma election reform commission (1884); the city representative to the council on prison and poverty issues (1886); member of the

commission on buying flour (1891); member of the commission on the number of city justice of peace districts of the capital district (1892); city representative to the commission on the poor laws (1892); member of the special duma group on the building of the Troitskii Bridge (1894); member of the board of the Alexander III Shelter (1895); chairman of the duma meetings on the number of members (1893-1898); and chairman of the commission on the increase of justice of the peace salaries (1896), among others. On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Stasiulevich’s “public service,” Arseniev sent him a congratulatory letter dated 25 January 1897, which demonstrates both Stasiulevich’s achievements and a fellow intellectual’s gratitude:

I will not say exactly what I think of [this anniversary] because I would have to admit to my jealousy. In my eyes, professorship, especially that of an historian, has always been the most ideal fate; I dreamt of it in my youth—but in vain, because I lacked the most important requisites for it: knowledge of ancient languages and a university diploma. You were lucky: you spent the best years of your youth at an academic department. Unfortunately, you had to leave it too early. But, regardless of the reasons why you left the university, you managed to create a new academic department for yourself—and to create such a solid one that despite the storms and problems, it has survived for 30 years. Vestnik Evropy’s auditorium is not as close to you as that of the students to their professor, but it is undoubtedly wider and has listeners who have been faithful to you from the very beginning. How much kindness and feeling it has towards you! You witnessed this during the journal’s 25th anniversary. Next to your professorship, I have always associated your social activity with its struggles and its victories. The orator’s podium even in Russia stands below the professor’s; in you they were joined by the journalist’s podium. This included immense organizational duties that befall few other city and zemstva activists. In this sense, the 26th [of January] will be a pleasant day for you as you cast a retrospective glance upon your past. It is a shame that nobody will be next to you on that day who appreciates its meaning; but knowing your attitude to anniversaries, I think that solitude, even if complete, will be more pleasant for you than the usual crowd and noise of a jubilee.258

258 IRLI, f. 293, op. 1, ed. khr. 165, l.1.
Arseniev’s lines show genuine sympathy and respect for half a century of service in the interests of society. The truncated list of Stasiulevich’s appointments proves that Arseniev’s awe was well founded. Stasiulevich practiced what Vestnik Evropy preached—social change through civic involvement. The irony was that Stasiulevich and Pypin were more involved in civic affairs in 19th-century autocratic Russia than most members of Western democracies are today.

Alexander Pypin took another path of activity by dedicating his life to uncovering the evolution of the most enlightened and enlightening traditions in Russian history. He explored the genealogy of Russian liberalism under the guise of academic research. If the topics he researched throughout his career are arranged in historical order, they will appear in the following sequence: the freemasons, Decembrism, Slavophilism, westernism, and populism. He never covered the Peterashevtsy due to the risks this would have incurred for him and for Vestnik Evropy. Pypin’s most important intellectual influences were Belinskii, Chernyshevskii, and Herzen. In all the intellectual movements that he examined, Pypin saw individuals as agents of change who brought “society into consciousness of its role in national development and led it through self-activity toward self-government.” Reformers accomplished results when the state treated them as allies and, together with them, enlightened the masses and gradually increased their rights to govern themselves. Each one of the socio-intellectual movements that Pypin explored shared in common the absence of state support at their inception and varying degrees of

state repression and censorship throughout their existence. Yet he considered the potential for self-development as the necessary condition of liberal evolution in Russia. In every one of the movements he examined, he found “liberalism’s shoots.” Russian history was therefore full of examples worth emulating. From a passive receptacle of reforms from above, in Pypin’s view, Russian society slowly turned into an active agent of socio-economic evolution. In this, Pypin spoke for all the members of the Vestnik group.

**Conclusion**

The members of the Vestnik group refused to look on individuals as mere ciphers in sociological and political calculations. In *On Liberty*, John Stuart Mill eloquently argued that dissent was a crucial component of healthy societies. In this tradition, the Vestnik group bemoaned the deadening effect of custom and posited in the human personality the need for self-development and individuality. Mill sought men who would not only “discover truths and point out when what were once truths are true no longer” but also “commence new practices, and set the example of more enlightened conduct, and better taste and sense in human life.”

It is remarkable that Mill wrote a treatise on liberty without once referring to the British Parliament. Of course, he had the privilege of disregarding the constitutional monarchy under which he lived while he conceived of social liberty beyond political institutions. The Russian liberals were not so lucky and were forced to articulate a form of non-political liberty. This may explain why the thick journal played a much greater social and intellectual role in Russia than it did in Western

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Europe and why publishing a successful one in late 19th-century Russia was more than a palliative measure or a “small deed.”

It would be too easy to say that Russian liberalism was a doomed reconciliation project that tried in vain to bring together the late Romanov Empire’s political extremes. George Fischer argued that Russian liberalism lacked “vitality and resilience” even in the 1890s. Vestnik Evropy and the men that worked for it prove the opposite. It is impossible to criticize Russian liberalism for failing to establish a strong and durable tradition because its life was cut short in 1917 together with the organism that nourished it. The Marxist definition of liberalism as a “by-product of the effort of the middle class to win its place in the sun” may have its relative merits in the West, but does not accurately describe Russian liberalism that was not rooted in the bourgeoisie and did not carry strains, such as laissez-faire for example, characteristic of its classical Western European counterparts. Russia’s liberals came from all classes and the reconciliation project was to find a common ground between them. The materials that went into the project’s foundation were cultural and economic, yet the Vestnik group paid most of its attention to the legal rights and economic interests of the peasantry, not the bourgeoisie. The Vestnik project was not revolutionary, but rather horticultural in that it spread and nurtured education by exposing its readers to alternative worldviews. The zemstvo stood at the center of this project.

The combination of intellectual power and publishing experience held in common by the *Vestnik* group justified itself in the ideological battles over Russia’s path of socio-economic development that erupted in the 1890s. The events of 1891-92 opened the floodgate of social involvement for which *Vestnik* had tirelessly prepared itself since its inception in 1866. The journal’s cautious liberalism, which it adapted to Russian conditions, sounded increasingly out of tune with aesthetic solipsism, philosophical idealism, Christian mysticism, and Marxist radicalism on the eve of the 1905 revolution. However, by reviewing the populist and Marxist programs in the 1890s, *Vestnik* crossed over from educated dilettantism to socio-economic articulation. The *Vestnik* members did not see themselves or any of the authors whom they published as prophets possessing moral and national authority, nor did they see their readers as devout and ardent acolytes. Victor Frank has described in a metaphor the houses of the gentry as “cradles of civilization” in Russia:

[Their] pseudo-classical contours with moulding [sic] on the façade, surrounded by neglected parks and overgrown ponds, became for Russia what the cities had been for ancient Greece, the monasteries for medieval Europe, the ‘manses’ of Presbyterian ministers of Scotland, the Pfärrhausen for protestant Germany.\(^{264}\)

The gentry lost this influence after the Great Reforms. Instead, the thick journals carried on the civilizing mission. Through the wide-ranging topics on their pages, they made accessible an immense repository of intellectual and spiritual treasures. Ironically, *Vestnik Evropy* did not open a window on Europe, but consistently drew its readers’ attention to Russia’s unique institutions of self-government.

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At an average length of 500 pages, Vestnik Evropy appears imposing to the modern reader who is used to receiving information in sound bites from an increasing selection of sources, but the absence of radio and television in the late 19th century justified the thick journal’s girth. The length made it possible for each issue of Vestnik Evropy to cover a wide range of topics: contemporary Russian literature and foreign works in translation, historical and ethnographic research from Europe and Russia, travel accounts from all over the world, scientific discoveries, economic theory, foreign and domestic news, and surveys of the latest literary and historical publications.

With the exception of open discussion of political issues, each monthly journal provided its readers with an exhaustive series of topics and exposed them to notable local events from all over the empire. The Vestnik editors’ participation in local self-government demonstrates that this was also a necessary component of the Russian liberal’s life-style although it was insufficient to satisfy one’s intellectual demands. In the absence of political institutions, the Russian liberals developed, or at least had the chance to, not only internally and intellectually, but locally. As a way to act in the environment of rapid economic modernization and stunted political evolution of the 1890s, the Vestnik group re-conceptualized Russia’s socio-economic trends, the role of the state in directing modernization, and the place of the local self-government in this process. In addition to intellectual alternatives, it also offered a positive and constructive worldview that defined the line between escapism and action.
Part II: *Vestnik and Populism: Rural Democracy beyond the Commune*

**Introduction**

In the second half of the 19th century, a thick journal in Russia was more than a publication. In the absence of a political sphere, it acted as a political party with its editorial offices as headquarters, its editors as leaders, their choice of what to publish as a form of a political platform, and the readers as voters. The previous chapters have described how *Vestnik Evropy*, one of these complex organisms, evolved and functioned. The next four chapters will explore the evolution of its program as if it were that of a political party. In the absence of parliamentary politics and the appropriate institutions, Russian intellectuals relied on journals as forums in which they exchanged ideas. Much as political parties do today, each journal had a following that its readers’ social or economic tastes determined. The editors catered to their subscribers. The following chapters will explore four central issues in the formation of the *Vestnik* worldview: the intentional separation of the *Vestnik* group from the populists in the 1870s and 1880s; the role of the 1891-92 famine in the formation of the group’s economic thinking; the role of Witte’s reforms in the formation of the group’s views; and the attempts at a reconciliation with the populists in the 1890s.

The *Vestnik* materials throw doubt onto several key assumptions about late 19th-century Russian liberalism. *Vestnik* liberalism emerged along with populism in the wake of the Great Reforms. The two sensibilities shared common ideals of which the central one was concern for the Russian peasantry. *Vestnik* liberalism was therefore an autochthonous phenomenon, not a foreign transplant or an outgrowth of Russia’s late
capitalism. *Vestnik* liberalism’s focus was the zemstvo, not an estate or a class per se. The contributors articulated a form of rural democracy outside the commune. The *Vestnik* materials demonstrate that the Marxist-populist debate was only one of several important intellectual developments in the 1890s, and that it was peripheral to the liberal mindset. Instead, the journal gave much greater urgency to the role of the zemstvo in the process of modernization. Local self-government was the main arena on which competing interests met in the 1890s, which is why Sergey Witte’s views on rural development and the zemstvo form an essential component of the debate. Witte’s views eventually converged with those of the *Vestnik* group on the issue of the peasantry’s legal status and land ownership, but not on principles of self-government, demonstrating that progressive Russian statesmen viscerally distrusted even strictly socio-economic forms of popular independence. Finally, *Vestnik*’s attempted rapprochement with the populists in the 1890s demonstrated that to be a western-oriented intellectual in late imperial Russia was not synonymous with aping foreign precedents, but implied a higher degree of intellectual openness.

The fifth chapter will explain why it was important for *Vestnik* to create a distance between itself and the populists beginning in the 1870s and why this early date was significant. The Russian development debate originated during this time and revolved around agricultural issues that drove a wedge between the state and the populists and would eventually become the point of contention between them and the Marxists. Arthur Mendel has argued that it took the “magnificent development of the [1890s] to open the skulls of the intelligentsia to the comprehension of a process that had been going on for
almost four decades [and to convince them that] barking at the moon did not alter her
course.”¹ Mendel directed these harsh words at what he believed were the misguided
revolutionary and utopian reformist schemes that appeared in the wake of the Great
Reforms. He saw the Marxist-populist debate as the dominant intellectual development of
the late 19th century that was necessary to guide Russian society out of its mental stupor
by introducing it to the real problems of development thinking. Perhaps there was no
reason why Mendel’s excellent study should have examined liberal strains of thought on
the same subject—such as emerged from the pages of Vestnik Evropy—but the clarity of
his narrative came at the expense of historical accuracy.

To at least 8,000 official subscribers of Vestnik Evropy—and many more who
read acquaintances’ and library copies—the Marxist-populist debate was a footnote to
other discussions about Russia’s socio-economic alternatives and its high-brow tone and
abstractions must have seemed far removed from more proximate concerns. The
enormous amount of material printed on the pages of Vestnik Evropy demonstrates that a
serious exploration of development issues had already started in the 1870s—long before
the Russian Marxists became an intellectual force. The materials printed in the 1890s
demonstrate that there was much more to the development debate than the face-off
between homegrown populist remedies and the Marxists’ scientific predictions and
millenarian promises. By extending the development debate as far back as the 1870s,
which few Western or Russian scholars have done, the Vestnik Evropy materials break
down the artificial threshold of the 1891-92 famine without dismissing this tragic event’s

¹ Arthur P. Mendel, Dilemmas of Progress in Tsarist Russia: Legal Marxism and Legal Populism
importance as a social catalyst. More importantly, the Vestnik materials demonstrate a specific economic slant in liberal thinking that Western and Russian scholars have largely overlooked. Simultaneously, the materials demonstrate that the Vestnik liberals saw agrarian socialism as unrealistic for Russia, but were nevertheless attracted to some of its ideals. Vestnik liberalism was not a bourgeois phenomenon and the line demarcating it from agrarian socialism was porous and fluid early on, which explains why Vestnik went out of its way to distinguish its liberalism from early strains of populism—to the average educated Russian in the 1870s and 1880s the two must have appeared as closely related. The chapter will argue that the evolution of Russian liberalism was the story of its emancipation from populism with the retention of the latter’s socio-economic concern for the peasantry. Conversely, this split also affected populism. The populist-Marxist debate of the 1890s was an outgrowth of the earlier debate between liberals and populists, which is why the liberal contribution to this debate creates a fuller picture of what was really happening intellectually in the 1890s.

Although the famine of 1891-92 did not originate the development debate, the sixth chapter will explore why and how the economic component in the Vestnik group’s thinking evolved in reaction to the tragic events of 1891-92. Vestnik liberalism was an example of a constructive and non-revolutionary form of loyal opposition to state policies that has reacquired contemporary significance in Russia. The Vestnik group’s firm and consistent support for local self-government and the dependence on Stasiulevich’s publishing complex demonstrated its belief that liberalism could become a mass movement in Russia and that civil society could thrive in the absence of national
representative institutions, something that most Western historians have been loath to admit. The *Vestnik* liberals did not believe in innate rights and characteristics and appealed neither to estate nor to class interests. Instead, participation in socio-economic affairs, supported by rudimentary, secular universal education, laid the foundation for basic civil rights such as the right to vote, the right to personal freedom, the right to freedom of movement, and the right of equal protection. Natural law was not a central issue for the group and Konstantin Arseniev’s position on the origin of law was similar to what is today called legal interpretivism. The locus of the liberal project was within the economic realm and did not treat the absence of political rights as an insuperable obstacle to full immersion in local urban or provincial civil society. The first steps towards social justice were local self-government and fair economic policies. The *Vestnik* group raised *homo economicus* above determinism and ennobled him by making social responsibility a primary and essential component of his sensibility.

The zemstvo was at the center of this vision, but the *Vestnik* liberals did not treat it as a precursor to national political participation—something that has been a dominant theme in Western historiography. The *Vestnik* liberals did not see the zemstvo as the origin of a constitutionalist movement. Instead, the copious materials printed in the journal investigated the socio-economic tensions within the zemstvo and explored ways to bring it closer to the needs of the peasantry who had little say in formulating the policies of an institution that had been created for the satisfaction of their needs. Most importantly, the *Vestnik* materials demonstrate that it was impossible in the 1880s and
1890s to read constitutionalist demands into the discussion of zemstvo rights and responsibilities.

The famine of 1891-92 provided the impetus for Konstantin Arseniev to fill in the economic details of his well-intentioned but vague 1882 liberal program. Through a careful and methodical exploration of Arseniev’s articles written about the famine and the relief effort, the sixth chapter will guide the reader through the evolution of *Vestnik* liberalism's economic component and the populist overtones that minimized the difference between the two groups. The chapter will also demonstrate that Arseniev’s suggestions for increased local self-government responsibilities were more concrete and practical than what emerged from populist writings at the time. That “the flagship of Russian liberalism” took this economic turn in the 1890s throws into question what some Western scholars have characterized as the natural tendency of the “zemstvo liberal movement” towards constitutionalism and makes the political achievements of 1905 welcome but contingent events.

The *Vestnik* group’s economic development program was a crucial component of its project to reform the existing social system without undermining the social order. The editors developed a form of liberal sensibility that treated economic activity as the first step towards and necessary condition for civil rights. Although secular, this liberal strain was not materialistic; although economically oriented, it was not deterministic. It evolved independently of the strong currents of idealism and religious thought that flourished during the Silver Age. It focused on the individual as an actor in the world but did not treat him as a spiritual monad in need of theological enlightenment. The *Vestnik* strain’s
vector did not point to Problems of Idealism or Vekhi. The economic sensibility that guided it also makes it impossible to write about the Vestnik group without references to the Witte reforms and the finance minister’s own views on local self-government.

The seventh chapter will demonstrate the relationship between Witte’s views on agriculture, Leonid Slonimskii’s examination of property rights on land, and the remarkable similarity between their opinions. In this light, the state and the Vestnik liberals came close in their assessment of the potential for Russia’s development and its greatest obstacle—poorly defined peasant land rights. This throws into doubt the widely held assumption that political considerations forced the state to place obstacles in the zemstvo’s way. Witte’s administrative manipulations and local self-government deserve to be reexamined. Scholars have analyzed the Marxist-populist debate in the 1890s without reference to either. For example, Arthur P. Mendel’s index contains eight references to the zemstvo and five to Witte, which indicates that he overlooked two essential components of the development debates. The zemstvo was simultaneously a battleground and the center of this debate in the 1890s because different sides saw it as a means to achieve their ends. Members of the gentry dominated the zemstvo but were on the losing end of Witte’s modernization. Witte opposed the zemstvo because he saw the gentry as a moribund class and the zemstvo as its stronghold as well as a diverter of tax revenues and state funds that the Finance Ministry could allocate more efficiently. The Vestnik liberals saw the zemstvo as a link between the intelligentsia and the peasantry, both of which were insufficiently involved in it. The Vestnik group treated the zemstvo as a purely economic unit, but this in no way diminished its social importance. On the
contrary, without pointing toward 1905 and political parties, zemstvo activity was the seedbed of civil participation, but not in a direct political form. This raises an important question with great current implications. Is economic independence necessarily a preamble to political rights or can it be a payoff for political quiescence and apathy?

The *Vestnik* members were liberal pragmatists whose hopes for the future centered on the zemstvo as a non-estate, economic administrative tool. The *Vestnik* group thereby avoided what Mendel characterized as populism’s paradox: “By neglecting the constitutional movement in order to concentrate on the struggle for immediate social justice, the Legal populists were failing to support the promising instrument for social justice.”

Having separated themselves from the populists in the 1880s, by the 1890s, the *Vestnik* group began to reconsider the common origins.

The eighth chapter will focus on Alexander Pypin’s sympathetic examination of populism as a cultural phenomenon. This rapprochement went a long way to smooth over the rifts between the two groups, to eliminate populist extremism, and to reemphasize common values. Through an examination of Pypin’s articles and his exchange with prominent populist Vasilii Vorontsov, the chapter will demonstrate the centrality of socio-economic responsibility in the *Vestnik* group’s conception of civil society. Pypin’s cultural interpretation of populism demonstrated that the two movements had much more in common than both sides admitted. However, Pypin’s liberal critique of populism uncovered a strong current of elitism in populist thinking. On the one hand, populism treated the peasant masses as hopelessly ignorant, inherently apathetic, and in need of

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being led. On the other, it wavered between distrusting the intelligentsia and treating it as an enemy of the masses. This view of the peasants and suspicion of the intelligentsia persisted well into the Soviet period and this attitude towards the electorate survived the Soviet collapse.

The examination of *Vestnik Evropy* as a political forum demonstrates that the journal filled a political niche with a program articulated overwhelmingly in socio-economic terms, but aimed at self-realization and self-direction, not an egalitarian utopia. Politics was thus a process of learning how to govern from the grass roots level. Western scholars have treated *Vestnik Evropy* peripherally at best and have never examined the journal and the people involved in running it on their own terms. The journal’s title appears in most works on Russian liberalism, but the materials are used as supporting evidence, not as documents in themselves. In general, Western scholars have treated Russian liberalism as a portrait gallery of distinguished individuals. An examination of *Vestnik Evropy* as a liberal institution shows the depth and conceptual complexity of the late 19th-century liberal worldview.

On the journal’s pages and in their personal lives, the members of the *Vestnik* group opposed the image of a Russian liberal as an alienated and powerless wordmonger, yet criticism from the Social-Democrats and Socialist-Revolutionaries contributed to the reputation’s persistence. Was there a way to be an agent of progress during the Silver Age without becoming a radical revolutionary or a spiritual solipsist? The *Vestnik* materials demonstrate that there was. The group had little faith in the fraternity of activism, which the state’s radical opponents espoused. Instead, reflective caution guided
its involvement in local self-government. Stasiulevich, Arseniev, Pypin, and Slonimskii
distrusted the power of human intelligence divorced from all social restraints and the
socio-economic development model they articulated was at once more sociologically
grounded than the Marxists’ and more realistic than the populists’.

Norman Stone has characterized the 1880s and 1890s as a period of
“transformism” in European politics. As the influence of the church and nobility
declined, he argued, mass politics rose and classical liberalism everywhere began to
falter. Radical liberalism was a “more secular and socially progressive sensibility” that
was “contemptuous of the past and confident of the future.” It challenged classical
liberalism’s free trade and religious values as well as its preference for “a very limited
franchise that would exclude the ‘irresponsible’ masses from the vote.”3 The Vestnik
liberals’ secularism and social progressivism fit into Stone’s broad scheme, but their
concern for Russia’s peasantry had no trace of condescension—the interest was real and
the empathy visceral. However, Vestnik’s version of “mass politics” was different from
its Western counterpart. Instead of gradually bringing educated groups up into political
participation, the Vestnik liberals examined the possibility of direct local economic
participation for the broadest possible group through the medium of local self-
government. This quid pro quo was a form of humanism devoid of elitism and of what
Alexander Vucinich has referred to as “Malthusian bias.”4 Many Western scholars who
have dealt with the zemstvo were interested primarily in its role as the institutional basis

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for political liberalism. This was the emphasis in the work of George Fischer and Jacob Walkin, among many others, but it exaggerated the potential of the zemstvo as a foundation for representative government in Russia.⁵

The Vestnik group proposed a point of convergence between liberalism and populism and, as finance minister Sergei Witte’s agricultural learning curve proved, even between liberalism and enlightened bureaucrats. In the divisive agricultural debate, Vestnik placed itself in the forefront as a forum—a public meeting place for open discussion and the convergence of ideas. Defending the interests of the peasantry against the sacrifices that modernization demanded of it, the Vestnik group sought a common socio-economic reference point for the populists, local self-government, and the state. This was the zemstvo. Simultaneously, the Vestnik liberals separated themselves from the excesses of Russia’s revolutionary movement. The binary process of condemning extremes while overcoming ideological and social barriers characterized Vestnik liberalism. Pre-revolutionary liberalism’s socio-economic roots are also valuable reminders to contemporary Russian liberals that the withdrawal of the state from the economic sphere was not a component of late imperial liberalism. The “liberal” experiment of the 1990s and the consequent backlash against all liberal values in Russia are the tragic consequences of historical misreading.

⁵ See George Fischer’s Russian Liberalism, From Gentry to Intelligentsia (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958) and Jacob Walkin’s The Rise of Democracy in Pre-revolutionary Russia; Political and Social Institutions Under the Last Three Czars (New York: Praeger, 1962).
Chapter 5

The Populist Roots of Vestnik Liberalism

By the early 1880s, the Vestnik liberals had separated themselves from the radical wing of the populists and from all forms of agrarian socialism as viable vectors of socio-economic development. Populism was still in the process of self-definition, but its radical wing fell well afoul of liberal values and aims. One of the most distinguished historians of Russian thought, Andrzej Walicki has argued that revolutionary Marxism developed not in exile but inside Russia and that, in many respects, it continued the tradition of populism. As proof, he used the example of Aleksandr Uliyanov, Lenin’s older brother, who headed a transitional semi-Marxist, semi-populist intellectual formation that was behind the abortive attempt on the life of the tsar in 1887.\(^6\) The same could be said of Russian liberalism, which was also an outgrowth of populism. This fact explains why Russian liberalism in general, and its Vestnik version in particular, retained a strong social element and never adopted the laissez-faire outlook of its Western counterparts. Nevertheless, the Vestnik Evropy materials demonstrate the importance for liberalism of separating from its parent in the 1870s and 1880s. Simply put, the Vestnik group saw no promise for socialism in Russia and treated the commune strictly as a temporary economic necessity during the transition to capitalism. The liberals chose non-violence over radical tactics and preferred state-directed modernization to utopian revolution. In

other words, the Vestnik group recognized its common origins with “legal populism,” but not the revolutionary populists.7

Vestnik liberalism evolved through perfectly rational debates about the causes of land shortage and rural differentiation, peasant resettlement policies, and the redistribution of the tax burden. These were all concerns that it shared with populists. However, terrorist tactics and the idealization of rural egalitarianism created insurmountable obstacles between the agrarian socialists and liberals. The pages of Vestnik Evropy provide a unique guide to the birth of an autochthonous strain of Russian liberalism. They also put into serious doubt a fundamental assumption of post-Soviet Western and Russian liberalism that economic reforms naturally lead to political liberalization.

Nobody could have predicted that debates over land shortage with representatives of the Slavophiles would eventually lead to a break between liberalism and populism, but this was the first step in a slowly unfolding process. The agrarian question first appeared in the periodical press as a debate about the shortage of arable land in the 1870s. In 1877, St. Petersburg University Professor Iulii Ianson published through Stasiulevich’s printing shop his Statistical Researches of Peasant Allotments and Payments in which he argued that Emancipation had left the peasantry too little land while saddling it with overwhelming redemption payments. Not accusatory in its tone, the book nevertheless polarized the intelligentsia. The liberal paper Golos argued that Ianson’s findings were

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7 For a distinction between the two, see Franco Venturi’s superb Roots of Revolution: A History of the Populist and Socialist Movements in Nineteenth Century Russia (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1966) and Richard Wortman’s The Crisis of Russian Populism (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967).
“scientific, accurate, and correct.” On the other hand, Slavophile Dmitrii Samarin wrote in 1880: “We deny the theory regarding the shortage of land as a principle that is not ‘great,’ but completely false and alien to our way of life.” Samarin argued that intensive agricultural methods, cottage industry, rented plots, and trade would alleviate the poverty that Ianson had unjustly blamed on insufficient plot sizes. The conservative paper Rus referred to the book as “our liberals’ famous Koran.”

*Vestnik Evropy* reacted rapidly against what its editors saw as Slavophilic oversimplifications. Fyodor Voroponov had a lot of experience writing about peasant issues and a long career in public service as a justice of the peace, chairman of several local agricultural committees, and a member of the board of the Peasant Bank. He accused the Slavophiles of grossly underestimating a serious socio-economic problem that affected millions of peasants. Samarin’s “blank shot,” argued Voroponov, only confirmed the gravity of the situation and the need for “decisive measures.” Famous Siberian publicist and archaeologist Nikolai Iadrintsev maintained in *Vestnik*’s June 1880 issue that “shortage of land, which is evident in different provinces of European Russia, with all its unfortunate consequences, is a widely acknowledged fact.” Iadrintsev wrote as an expert on colonization whose causes he linked directly to land hunger west of the

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8 *Golos*. October 1, 1880.
9 D. F. Samarin, “Teoriia o nedostatochnosti krestianskikh nadelov, po ucheniiu professora Lu.E. Ianson,” *Rus* 15 October 1880, no. 3.
10 D. F. Samarin, “Teoriia o nedostatochnosti krestianskikh nadelov, po ucheniiu professora Lu.E. Ianson,” *Rus* 15 October 1880, no. 3.
11 S. F. Sharapov, “Eshche neskolko slov ob ‘opyte’ g. Ianson,” *Rus* 27 December 1880, no. 7.
Urals. The *Vestnik* group also found evidence of the agrarian crisis in social statistics. Voroponov examined and made a direct link between increasing peasant death rates and land shortage. “You need to be truly blind not to be convinced by the deaths of such masses of people,” he concluded.\(^{15}\) Arseniev turned his attention to recruitment commission findings that uncovered alarming increases in the percentage of peasants unacceptable for military service due to sickliness and general weakness. He saw in this “a degeneration of the tribe.”\(^{16}\) Critic and bibliographer Arsenii Vvedenskii was even more pessimistic about the fact that 80 percent of the empire’s population experienced “physical and moral degradation.”\(^{17}\)

It is not hard to imagine that if the liberal intelligentsia took such a pessimistic view of Russian agricultural conditions, the radicals found in them ample combustible material. Even the *Vestnik* liberals believed that Emancipation was unfinished, which made matters worse for the peasantry, and that the state bore a lot of the blame for its balancing act between intransigence and indecision. In this the liberals agreed with the populists, but they parted company when it came to methods of redress. *The People’s Will* and *Land and Freedom* identified the state and its officials as agents of backwardness and even socio-economic slavery. They described the Russian government as an “iron colossus with clay feet.”\(^{18}\) The *Vestnik* group, on the other hand, detected more shades in the gloomy picture of Russia’s agricultural conditions. Arseniev added to

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\(^{18}\) *Literatura partii “Narodnoi voli”* (Moscow, 1907), p. 7 for the “colossus” quote. The compendium is a priceless exploration of cynical idealism, dreams of social justice, and misled justifications.
land hunger problems of soil depletion and taxes. While engaging the populist camp in debates on Russia’s agrarian problems, the Vestnik liberals developed an increasingly sophisticated interpretation of the agricultural question. In addition, many liberals were involved in commissions and boards that dealt with local problems. For example, in 1880-81, Arseniev participated in a senatorial revision of Samara and Saratov provinces. He concluded that the Tatars’ agricultural backwardness stemmed primarily from inefficient methods, while capitalism caused social differentiation in the villages and the exploitation of poorer peasants by their wealthier neighbors and outsiders. Konstantin Kavelin reported similar impressions on Vestnik’s pages in his “Travel Letters”: “The rich muzhiks buy the poor ones’ lands; a proletariat is created, entire families die from poverty without a picket or a yard.”

The poor harvest of 1880 brought the agrarian question to the attention of the reading public. The crop failure increased the price of land and bread prices rose, while the government printed money that caused its value to plummet. Russia faced a paradox: Europe’s breadbasket was experiencing a famine. The situation gave an important impulse to socio-economic thought. Arseniev noticed this in the Domestic Survey of Vestnik’s March 1881 issue: “The grain question has lately inspired the working-out of agrarian issues that have been mute for a while.” Still, Vestnik did not treat land hunger as the exclusive cause of the famine. Meanwhile, writer and landowner Alexander

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20 “Materialy revizii Arsenievym K. K. Samarskoi i Saratovskoi gub. (1880-1881).” IRLI, f. 359, op. 1, d. 63, l. 7 and 11.
Engelgardt, who contributed to the populist *Otechestvennye zapiski*, openly admitted in his famous cycle *Letters from the Village* that “the landowners’ production has no future, it must disappear, because there is no reason why *muzhik*-owners, who have their own lands, should work on others’ farms. This is nonsense.”

*Vestnik* and *Otechestvennye zapiski* were representatives of the moderate liberal and populist camps respectively and demonstrated a shade of difference on the land hunger issue. The *Vestnik* group did not consider the landed nobility responsible for insufficient land allotments and famines, nor did it treat land ownership as a zero-sum game. The populist representatives, on the other hand, seem to have descried injustice in the gentry’s ownership of land and took a step toward demands for absolute, versus proportional, redistribution of land. This is not to say that the two journals were antagonists. Arseniev wrote with great respect of Engelgardt’s *Letters* and called both state and society to heed the writer’s calls to alleviate the peasantry’s suffering by facilitating land purchases and increasing its contacts with the intelligentsia. However, Arseniev also wrote in March 1881: “Having eliminated land shortage, we will not eliminate the evil, but will only facilitate our battle against it.” He proposed selling “on the most favorable terms” state allotments to peasants, organizing resettlements, and facilitating land purchases through small credit institutions.

Resettlement had become a major issue in the late 1870s. By July 1881, *Vestnik* maintained that the landless and unemployed proletariat in the Russian Empire had

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increased to 3-5 million persons. Nikolai Iadrintsev wrote in June 1880: “When an economic crisis makes itself felt within a state, resettlement and colonization should attract special attention.” The controversy started over Prince Alexander Vasilchikov’s book *Land Ownership and Agriculture in Russia and Other European States* that came out of Mikhail Stasiulevich’s print shop in 1876 and was reprinted in 1881. Vasilchikov had a distinguished government career during which he walked the thin line between free speech and insubordination. His service in self-government institutions ingratiated him further to the progressive intelligentsia, of which he was a rightful member.

Vasilchikov answered his critics on *Vestnik*’s pages by arguing that the state could successfully regulate agricultural affairs only if it first reorganized two underdeveloped programs: small land credit and colonization. *Vestnik* defended Vasilchikov against liberal thinker Boris Chicherin and historian Vladimir Gerie who desried socialist tendencies in Vasilchikov’s proposals that they believed would undermine the nobility’s economic position and destabilize the political balance in the empire. In November 1881, Arseniev wrote that the second edition of Vasilchikov’s book was “not only a priceless literary work, but a courageous act” because the author admitted the problem of land shortage. Colonization was a way to solve it without infringing on the nobility’s

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property rights. In October 1880, Fyodor Voroponov argued that organizing colonization of the steppe regions should be the state’s priority.\textsuperscript{33}

*Vestnik* consistently proposed making resettlement a legal, controlled, and rational process. As Iadrintsev wrote, “the current movement resembles a national retreat before an invader rather than an economic migration driven by hopes for a better lot.”\textsuperscript{34} Voroponov proposed the closest thing to a program. It was a simple formula: state and local aid to migrants, zemstvo aid for purchasing neighboring plots, and short-term credit in addition to land-purchasing credits.\textsuperscript{35} Iadrintsev pointed to the United States where state-controlled settlement offices distributed land to newcomers. He also argued for a resettlement and colonization fund that would help migrants to relocate. These two measures, he believed, would be more beneficial than land credit and bank loans.\textsuperscript{36} Furthermore, Iadrintsev saw in colonization the guarantee of Russia’s territorial integrity, especially along the Chinese border, where the presence of “European civilization” would stem the tide of Chinese encroachments.\textsuperscript{37}

Redistributing the gentry’s lands was never mentioned on *Vestnik*’s pages. Instead, the journal emphasized three central goals: to enable peasants who were short of land to avoid slow starvation by raising the minimum level of subsistence in the country and stabilizing the village politically and economically. As Iadrintsev saw it, colonization eased capitalism’s “intensive” development by “extensive” means. It allowed the state to

\textsuperscript{34} N. M. Iadrintsev, “Polozhenie pereselentsev v Sibiri,” *Vestnik Evropy* 8 (1881), p. 602.
avoid the “disasters and catastrophes” of economic progress “by opening in a timely fashion the valve of life.”\footnote{N. M. Iadrintsev, “Nashi vyseleniia i kolonizatsiia,” \textit{Vestnik Evropy} 6 (1880), p. 465.} \textit{Vestnik} thus pursued a minimal agricultural improvement program. Both state and society had to help the village harmonize its functions with those of Russia’s changing economy, but the peasants and landowners were not necessarily on opposite sides of the economic fence. By synthesizing their interests, state policy could benefit both groups. Vasilchikov believed that small and short-term credit could form the basis of the state’s agricultural policy and indirectly benefit the landowners, many of whom were facing bankruptcy.\footnote{A. I. Vasilchikov, “Po povodu kritik i retsenzii na knigu ‘Zemlevladenie i zemledelie’,” \textit{Vestnik Evropy} 2 (1878), p. 809.} The \textit{Vestnik} liberals saw the well-being of the upper classes as a corollary of the peasantry’s well-being—a clear sign of the journal’s non-estate approach to agricultural issues.

Taxes became a particular concern of the \textit{Vestnik} liberals in the 1880s because the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-78 had increased this disproportionate burden on the peasantry. As Voroponov explained, the main problem with land taxes was that they were geographically “unjust”: highest in the non-black-earth regions; higher on the Poles than the Russians; lowest on the black-earth Russian landowners; and higher on the peasants of western and northern Russia.\footnote{F. F. Voroponov, “Nashi pozemelnye nalogi,” \textit{Vestnik Evropy} 5 (1878), p. 334.}

The writers shot the first shafts at the soul tax, which, Arseniev wrote, resembled an “old patch of a different color” on Russia’s modern garb.\footnote{K. K. Arseniev, “Vnutrennee obozrenie,” \textit{Vestnik Evropy} 5 (1882), p. 354.} He understood the
rationale behind passport fees, but opposed them. Peasants left villages by the thousands after the harvest season in order to feed their families, and the state took advantage of these forced migrations by validating passports. Unless a bribe was involved, the process took time and the delays constrained the movement of labor and cost precious months of employment. Distinguished jurist and faithful Vestnik contributor Anatoly Koni referred to the passport system as “the brake on the country’s economic development.”

The state abolished the salt tax, another liberal bugbear, in 1881. Marxist economist Ivan lanzhul, however, tried to curb the enthusiasm that this measure inspired by arguing that the abolition of a single tax was meaningless in itself. The state would find ways to compensate for the loss of revenue—only a complex program of tax reform would benefit the peasantry. In separate articles, Arseniev, economist Iulii Zhukovskii, and Alexander Pypin all favored decreasing the peasantry’s tax burden by increasing taxes on industry because it was clearly on a path of irreversible development. Zhukovskii proposed distributing the tax burden in the following way: 1/3 on the peasants and peasant property and 2/3 on movable property, industry, manufactures, trade, and the professions. Leonid Polonskii proposed a more radical solution: to

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implement income taxes and taxes on ranks.\textsuperscript{47} This sort of redistribution of the tax burden would become one of the liberal program’s socio-economic pillars.

To sum up, \textit{Vestnik}’s position on taxes was a version of “placing the responsibility on the strong,” that is, on industry and the wealthy classes that it was breeding. The writers had called for the abolition of the soul tax since the late 1860s. The state finally organized a commission in March 1879 to deal with this problem. It eliminated the tax in four consecutive stages in 1883, 1884, 1886, and 1887.\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Vestnik} was ahead of its time, as liberal journals ought to be. In May 1882, Arseniev sounded pessimistic about the achievements of Emancipation: “The mass of the people, emancipated in all other senses, remains enslaved financially and economically, enslaved to such a degree that it is as if in the past 20 years no reform has taken place in the sense of eliminating all the sources of tensions between the estates.”\textsuperscript{49} The assassination of Alexander II on March 1 and the Manifesto of 29 April 1881 did not bode well for reforms and forced the liberals to oppose the conservative policies under Alexander III. Yet, the \textit{Vestnik} group had even less in common at the time with the people who shared its concern for the peasants—the populists. The movement’s radical fringes had become particularly active in the 1870s and terrorism had been the first point of contention between the regime’s loyal liberal opponents and its radical enemies.

\textit{Vestnik Evropы} unequivocally condemned the series of attempted assassinations that took place in 1878, especially those by Vera Zasulich on January 24 and Sergei

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Kravchinskii on August 4. When Vestnik condemned his act, it became the first publication to engage an illegal organization in an open debate. Zemlia i Volia answered Vestnik’s condemnation in its last issue of 1878: “These press writers, in exchange for the reduction of censorship, are ready to become the state’s political policemen and detectives.”\textsuperscript{50} Leonid Polonskii blamed these “savage, indecent, and immoral” acts on their perpetrators’ disturbed psychological states.\textsuperscript{51} In response, Dmitrii Klements, a prominent populist and an editor of the underground Zemlia i Volia suggested that his liberal colleague attend a performance of Rossini’s William Tell or Serov’s Judith in order to understand the passion to achieve freedom that impelled the populist terrorists against insurmountable odds.\textsuperscript{52} Polonskii sarcastically reminded Klements that Tell had fought against a foreign occupation and Judith saved a city from a siege—neither pursued political and social reforms. Furthermore, history provided many examples of political assassinations stymieing the progress of freedom and order. Every self-respecting European writer, “even [German Social Democratic leaders] Liebknecht or Bebel,” would have condemned the murders, argued Polonskii.\textsuperscript{53} Klements asked whether the Russian populists had any alternative courses of action. “Instead of bread, the state gives society a stone, instead of a fish—a serpent!” William Tell’s legendary status was proof

of his act’s nobility. As an example of a successful assassination, Klements used Tsar Paul I whose death inspired “general exultation.”54

The populist revolutionaries were not unanimous on the issue of assassinations. Klements himself would later condemn terrorist tactics, and Land and Freedom split into The People’s Freedom and The Black Repartition in the summer of 1879 over the question of terrorism. The radical People’s Will group took up the revolver and the bomb as its tools, and its most outspoken theorist, Nikolai Morozov, justified these methods using the example of Giuseppe Mazzini’s brigades.55 The populist radicals saw the Russian autocracy as an occupying force and their goal as something akin to national liberation. According to Zemlia i Volia, there was no time to lose, the bourgeoisie was weak and before its constitution enslaved the people to a greater extent than “gentry monarchism” had, a political coup d’état had to liberate “the working democracy.”56

After the explosion in the Winter Palace on 5 February 1880, Arseniev continued Polonskii’s condemnation of political terrorism by examining the results of assassination attempts from the time of Julius Caesar to Alexander II. He noted that most attempts had failed and that the ones that succeeded often caused events directly opposite to those intended by their perpetrators. Also, an individual ruler rarely affected historical evolution, so eliminating one even as important as the tsar, would not change the status quo. “The order of things has been created over centuries and rests on too many points,

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which makes it impossible to hit all of them simultaneously, even if the most important one is struck.”

The lines read like passages from Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.

Arseniev condemned the seventh, and successful, attempt on Alexander’s life on 1 March 1881. He called it a “catastrophe” and reiterated his earlier emphasis on the insignificance of isolated actions against individual targets. “The order of things that has a thousand roots and points of rest can not be undermined, or exploded—it can be transformed only by the consistent and energetic work of many forces that take into account all the existing conditions and that the popular masses support, at least passively.”

Arseniev went on to praise Alexander’s reforms, although he was critical of the “reaction” that consistently waxed and waned between 1862 and 1881. He also argued that repressive measures could not stamp out terrorism. Every succeeding attempt proved that terror from above was ineffectual against terror from below. In response to *Vestnik* and other liberal journals, *Narodnaia Volia* wrote on 5 February: “Caught off guard by the unexpected confusion, [the liberals] started howling in unison with the conservatives, but they did not know against whom.” This was a late and empty accusation from a group whose actions isolated it from many sources of support and alienated it from almost all potential allies.

Like Anteus, the populists became enervated when they lost touch with the popular masses. The *Vestnik* group interpreted March 1881 as a catastrophic setback for

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Russia’s political development. In an anonymous pamphlet ironically entitled *The Black Repartition of Alexander II’s Reforms*, Mikhail Stasiulevich referred to the new conservative clique—Over Procurator of the Holy Synod Konstantin Pobedonostsev, publisher Mikhail Katkov, interior minister Count Nikolai Ignatiev, and education minister Dmitrii Tolstoy—as the “black” party that would conduct a “black repartition of the reforms.”60 Arseniev wrote in January 1882: “The catastrophe of 1 March put an end to a short, but brilliant, period of our modern history, and its consequences are still too apparent.”61 Anatoli Koni wrote in his biography of Count Loris-Melikov: “That fateful day—March 1, 1881—delayed by a quarter century the peaceful realization of a constitution.”62

By March of 1882, Arseniev could measure the depth of the chasm that opened between the authorities and society.63 And yet, the liberals still saw something infernally noble in the populist acts. Twenty five years later, *Vestnik* published the 1882-1884 correspondence between Konstantin Kavelin and Count Dmitrii Miliutin. In a letter dated 15 January 1882, Kavelin, one of *Vestnik*’s first contributors, wrote: “As pointless, aimless, and criminal as are the populist revolutionaries’ acts, you cannot deny them character, energy, and inventiveness in the pursuit of their goal. Whatever you may say, there lives in them a profound discontent that saturates all of Russian society more or less.”64 Liberal expectations of state reformism crumbled, and, Kavelin’s view

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notwithstanding, the populists bore the blame. As arrests thinned out the revolutionary populist camp, the arguments of their moderate colleagues acquired weight and led to increasing numbers of “scientific” populist treatises in the 1880s. With practical options for reform blocked, statisticians returned in increasing numbers to the fields and villages, while populist and liberal theoreticians made themselves comfortable behind their desks. Socialism as a theory never disappeared from the Russian intelligentsia’s intellectual horizon in the 1870s and 1880s, but terrorist activity had temporarily pushed its conceptual development into the background. After 1881, it made its comeback, and it became quickly apparent that terrorism was only the beginning of the liberals’ disagreements with the populists.

Socialism was not a newcomer to Russia in the 1870s. Alexander Herzen had already explored its potential, but the debate that began in 1878 had a more immediate and impatient feel to it. When Leonid Polonskii examined the reasons for the success of the German Social Democratic Party, he suggested that if it were to give up its uncompromising opposition to the state, it would become unpopular, but its popularity came at the cost of practical impotence. He supported Bismarck’s policy of “state socialism” that eliminated the destabilizing danger which came from the desire to abolish private property and enforce common ownership, the certain outcomes of which were internecine strife, chaos, and the collapse of civilization. Polonskii’s attitude to Bismarck was characteristic of the Vestnik group’s respect for the Iron Chancellor’s domestic policies, specifically the cooptation of socialism’s ideals by the state in the form of

welfare programs. Members of Land and Freedom, on the other hand, looked to such figures as Pugachev and Razin as Russian proto-socialists. Polonskii reminded the populists that Pugachev claimed to be descended from the tsars and reserved for himself autocratic powers. Even German Socialist Ferdinand Lassalle had described peasant uprisings in Germany as inherently reactionary. Polonskii accused Russian socialism of pursuing vague aims that “demanded senseless sacrifices from the youth for the sake of an unattainable Arcadia.”

Polonskii offered an alternative genealogy of liberty and reformism. He traced Russia’s liberal tradition to the era of Peter the Great and, more specifically, to economist Ivan Pososhkov (1670-1726) and later to publisher Nikolai Novikov (1744-1818), both of whom maintained that the necessary first step towards social progress was the abolition of slavery. Since then, the Russian liberals had argued for slow but consistent reforms. Meanwhile, “twelfth hour” upstarts such as the populists accused the liberals of supporting the autocracy and waiting for reforms to trickle down from the top with “mouths agape.” To discredit the socialists, Polonskii pointed to the internecine conflict within the First International between the anarchists and communists. In order to demonstrate the validity of their brand of socialism, the “new thinkers,” as Polonskii referred to the Russian populists, argued that their ideals had been latent in the masses for centuries and that it took only a spark to ignite this discontent. But if this was not true in Western Europe, which had not yet created a sufficient proletarian quorum for a revolution, it was even less applicable to Russia, whose peasant culture, commune and

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all, was inherently opposed to social leveling and egalitarianism, but instead encouraged in its members profoundly “statist” views.\textsuperscript{67}

\textit{Zemlia i Volia}, responding to Polonskii’s article in January 1879, accused the liberals of applying a double standard: welcoming the progress of human rights in the West and simultaneously supporting greater police controls in Russia.\textsuperscript{68} Populist Dmitrii Klements, who was a famous ethnographer (one of many revolutionaries who, having been exiled to Siberia, traveled widely and published works on native Siberian tribes\textsuperscript{69}), chose the following quotation for his response article: “Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in, you hindered” (Luke 11:52). In reaction to Polonskii’s “new thinkers” label, Klements called him the “new opponent” and argued that the Russian peasants owed the Emancipation Act to Nikolai Chernyshevskii and Nikolai Dobroliubov, both of whom, according to the writer, despised the moderate liberals. Klements responded to Polonskii’s accusations word for word. The Russian people were inherently anarchic, which explained the recurring disturbances in the country. Pugachev may not have been a socialist, but Polonskii’s suggestion that Bismarck was cast serious doubt on his understanding of socialism. Klements also accused \textit{Vestnik} of vacillating on Marxism—the journal published articles both for and against it.\textsuperscript{70} Where did it really stand? \textit{Vestnik}


was forced to choose a position on Marxism at least a decade before its “official” debate with Marxism began in the 1890s.

In addition to the ideological debates on *Vestnik*’s pages, Stasiulevich often published novels and short stories that reflected the journal’s position. Polonskii published his short story *You Have to Survive* in December 1878 under the pseudonym L. Lukianov. The plot involves a relationship between a corrupt bureaucrat Sakhanin, his student son who is desperate to change things, but with no idea how to proceed, and the son’s university friend, Gorlitsyn, a radical populist. During a conversation between the students, Sakhanin argues that in order to achieve populist ideals certain conditions have to be met, such as the transformation of a semi-feudal autocracy into a constitutional monarchy. He proposes that the friends set this as their initial goal. Gorlitsyn answers as if reciting the party catechism: “You are bourgeois to the bone marrow…. But we have no interest in the bourgeoisie’s interests and its settling of accounts with anyone.” 71

When the police arrest the young Sakhanin because of a suspicious package he carries—it turns out to be class notes on chemistry—he writes a note to his father from the detention cell: “Do not worry, I have not done anything yet; but we can’t live this way.” 72

Polonskii’s short story demonstrated not only the rift between fathers and sons, but also between the sons themselves, and it depicted the basic split between the radical populists and their more doubtful liberal pilgrims, each one a Hamlet. They had similar sources of discontent, but used different means to achieve different ends, and yet they developed

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with reference to each other. The plot accurately reflected the actual relationship between Russian liberals and populists.

Polonskii believed that broadening social participation could gradually deescalate the standoff between the authorities and society and eventually eliminate the radical opposition. He simultaneously urged the authorities to avoid repressing the loyal opposition. Such demonstrations of force against groups that did not directly threaten the state fed underground forms of opposition. The Russian people did not want radical changes, as the Decembrist Uprising had proved. Polonskii had argued this in the January 1879 Domestic Survey, but the censors considered his call for gradual reform too radical, and cut out the mutinous lines.73 Like other liberals, Polonskii saw in the “fanatical and savage” radical position “a living word, a free word, which calls things by their names,” yet “treats with irony the demands of the legal press for more leeway to give advice on successful police measures.”74 Meanwhile, the conservatives, into whose camp the radicals unjustly placed the liberals, offered “outrageous lies that deny everything that is true about Russia: social striving for what is best, the Russian commune, and the Russian intelligentsia.”75 Polonskii tried to situate the liberals between the radicals and conservatives. There was room for them on the theoretical continuum of the political gamut, but the moral niche did not exist. The liberals were caught between two extremes and the moral polarization enervated their perfectly sensible program of evolutionary

progress through political compromise and the consolidation of reformist forces with the population’s socio-economic interests.

Arseniev echoed Polonskii’s thoughts in the February 1879 Literary Survey in which he criticized the new Serbian socialists’ weekly The Guard. In a sterling example of barely veiled Aesopian language, Arseniev considered the pursuit of socialist goals premature for Serbia. The “capital” against which the Serbian socialists struggled in defense of “labor” was, in reality, labor’s closest ally in the struggle for political rights. Continuing his train of thought, Arseniev argued that “in semi-free and un-free countries, the first, elementary question is the achievement of political rights, of self-government.” Socialism was to him romanticism, poetry, and mythology. A more fruitful approach would be to focus on the Serbian people’s immediate needs and enlightenment. In this, the Serbian socialists would find many willing colleagues among the Serbian liberals. Although the article covered “foreign affairs,” it takes less than a leap of the imagination to see how perfectly Arseniev’s arguments applied to Russia. The censors must have overlooked the article and it was printed uncut.

Arseniev’s personal indecision demonstrated the complexity of the relationship between the liberals and the socialists. In his diaries, he admitted that he was “almost antagonistic” towards socialism from the 1860s on, but that he experienced doubts when he read Chernyshevskii’s fascinating articles and Louis Blanc’s historical works. Many liberals felt sympathetic towards socialist and populist aspirations, and yet their methods and extremist tendencies created too many obstacles. In their turn, the populist radicals

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were often intransigent about cooperating with the liberals. Some of the most prominent populist thinkers, such as Nikolai Mikhailovskii, also vacillated. In an article written for the November 1879 issue of *Narodnaia volia*, Mikhailovskii addressed these words to the revolutionaries: “You are afraid of a constitutional regime in the future because it will bring with it the hateful yoke of the bourgeoisie. Look around you: this yoke is already upon Russia.” Yet he wrote a year later: “In the practical struggle, it is insane not to benefit from alliances, be they accidental and temporary.” The difference between Arseniev’s and Mikhailovskii’s expectations demonstrated the broader liberal/populist incompatibility: each wanted the alliance to pursue their own aims.

To sum up, the most divisive issue in the 1870s between the liberals and populists was terrorism. According to scientist and member of The People’s Will Nikolai Morozov, the liberals sympathized with the underground organizations and were even ready to support their political—but not social—aims because the common goal was to undermine the autocracy. In the late 1870s, some zemstvo liberals and radical populists even talked of uniting against the state, but this could only happen if the populists stopped and condemned terrorist acts. As revolutionary populist Vladimir Debogoryi-Mokrievich wrote in his memoirs, “the terrorists refused this condition and the negotiations produced no results.” A. K. Soloviev’s attempt on Alexander’s life on 2 April 1879 buried the issue. The second point of contention was capitalism, which was somewhat ironic since both camps recognized its deleterious effects on the countryside, yet the interpretations

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78 *Narodnaia volia* 1 November 1879, no. 2. In *Literatura partii “Narodnoi voli”* (Moscow, 1907), p. 46.
about which aspects of capitalism were to blame created an unbridgeable chasm. The populists criticized state policies for encouraging private rapacity that inevitably found its way into the village. The liberals believed that the state’s industrial subsidies undermined medium and small businesses and stifled their competitiveness. And yet, the liberals accepted capitalism as *in situ*. After *Narodnaia Volia* admitted that the “achievement of the [socialist] aim by the act of 1 March 1881” had failed, capitalism was still tantamount to the plague for the radical populists.82

In February 1879, populist thinker Sergei Krivenko published in *Otechestvennye zapiski* an anonymous article in which he explored the fate of Russia’s *tiers état*. He maintained that the rapid development of the Russian bourgeoisie was “harmful and dangerous to popular morality and wellbeing.”83 A year later, Arseniev wrote a reply in which he argued that the western bourgeoisie had grown out of a freer political climate and could only appear in an environment that granted it political rights.84 He was suggesting that a constitution was a necessary prerequisite to the development of the bourgeoisie and that Russia could not have one by definition. The liberals stood for “rights and order” and pursued “peaceful progress.”85 Writing of the bourgeoisie in 1882, however, Arseniev argued that it had developed under the influence of enterprise, the arts and sciences, and had emerged from the masses. The implication was that its social roots were popular and that it owed less to political reforms. Never in history had it emerged

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85 Ibid., p. 865.
artificially and therefore the state’s policy of supporting industrialists would not produce the desired result. After March 1, Vestnik toned down even further its cautious political demands. Although Arseniev saw capitalism, the bourgeoisie, and political reforms as the essential elements of a slow process, he did not elaborate how this mechanism was supposed to work.

It was too early for that—the Vestnik group first had to clarify its relationship with the populists who claimed exclusive understanding of peasant needs and aspirations. The liberals could not afford to be ideologically separated and excluded from this section of the population since their urban and educated base of support was too narrow. The very important issue of the tiers état never acquired prominence on the pages of Vestnik as it had in Western Europe ever since Abbé Sieyès published his famous pamphlet during the French Revolution. This supports Arseniev’s claim that Russian liberalism had little to do with its Western counterpart and that it had its own genealogy rooted not in the bourgeoisie, the urban classes, and capitalist production methods, but in what was more prevalent in Russia—agricultural issues, the peasantry’s social status, and local self-government. In the early 1890s, events forced the agricultural issue onto Russia’s consciousness and conscience. Russia’s economic development policies since the 1860s had consistently placed industrial ahead of agricultural development, which culminated in the disastrous 1891-92 famine. In the process of covering the famine and examining the relief efforts, the Vestnik group began to articulate a practical liberal program.

Chapter 6

Economic Democracy as Famine Prevention

The famine of 1891-92 reawaked liberalism’s sensibility, sharpened its language, and clarified its aims. In his detailed examination of famine relief, Konstantin Arseniev not only specified the socio-economic responsibilities of local self-government, but argued for greater cooperation between the state and local institutions. Furthermore, he supported an imperial zemstvo organization to exchange ideas and debate broad domestic policies. Terence Emmons has identified the late 1890s as the turning point in the constitutional-reform movement as it tried to gather support from local self-government, but Arseniev’s proposals demonstrate that not all liberals treated the zemstvos as “seedbeds of democracy,” at least not in the western “liberal democratic” sense.87 Constitutionalism is conspicuously absent from the Vestnik materials considered in this chapter. Neither the gentry assemblies nor the zemstvos succeeded in becoming institutionalized centers of power in the political order. Did they ever intend to? The discussion of the food reserve policy seemed in itself to be an important concession from the state whereby local self-governing institutions acquired a limited, but important, say in imperial economic policy. The zemstvos were chronically under-funded and the peasantry seemed to be hopelessly mired in poverty. Financial concerns were much more important than political aspirations. The following chapter will demonstrate the evolution of Vestnik’s economic thinking through Arseniev’s articles examining the handling of famine relief, which laid down the rudiments of a zemstvo-centered economic

democracy. The commune was conspicuously absent from Arseniev’s articles because he conceived of rural democracy outside of the institution that populists and agrarian socialists saw as the foundation of egalitarianism and the state as the guarantee of stability.

The chapter will begin with a brief overview of the famine’s causes as enunciated in pre-revolutionary publications to which the *Vestnik* group had access. Late imperial economists and statisticians overwhelmingly recognized the lopsidedness of Russia’s economic development and looked to the zemstvo as a fly-wheel created to amortize modernization’s side effects. The *Vestnik* group absorbed this socio-economic view of local self-government but Arseniev enriched it in the process of examining ways to prevent future famines. His thinking on the all-estate volost, soup kitchens, public works projects, and the redistribution of the tax burden carried populist overtones. Arseniev’s participation in unofficial zemstvo gatherings in both capitals also demonstrated that the liberals and populists often spoke a common language when it came to local self-government and both placed the peasantry’s interests above those of the gentry and the bourgeoisie.

Richard Robbins has argued that the weakness of the famine relief operations during 1891-92 stemmed from the general inadequacy of local administration, especially the absence of firm institutional links with the peasant world, although the state had performed adequately to fill in the gaps. 88 However, Robbins’ evidence can also support the less sanguine conclusion that the government’s ad hoc committees and empowered

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representatives were temporary ploys to surmount fatal flaws of its own making with no intention of repairing them. This is the view the *Vestnik* group took in 1892. It emphasized the need for an all-estate volost, a non-estate self-government unit below the zemstvo, to further decentralize the economic administrative system and to make local self-government more cohesive. Arseniev saw the zemstvo as a strictly economic administrative unit. However, this attempt to micro-manage an enormous empire threatened the Russian state’s more traditional centralized and vertical mechanisms of coping with its territory.

The famine demonstrated that the ability of the state to interfere into local affairs was curbed by the problem of communications and poverty. To the readers of *Vestnik*, the dominant debate in the 1890s was not about political participation but about economic efficiency on the local level. According to Arseniev, only local self-government units could govern effectively, but in order to do so, two things needed to happen. First, the state had to loosen central control over local self-government and increase zemstvo responsibilities. Although the zemstvos took care of all local needs, the law did not recognize them as powerful local institutions. Arseniev saw them not only as administrative entities, but also as public institutions that resembled insurance or joint-stock companies whose members’ rights extended no further than their mutual economic interests and responsibilities. Second, Arseniev believed that the all-estate volost would act as a natural guarantee that greater local responsibility would not become a breeding ground for radicalism and, more importantly, for irresponsible financial policies. The peasantry’s inherent traditionalism and common sense would not allow that to happen.
Essentially, the atomization of socio-economic responsibility—but not political authority—would become optimal the closer it came to the peasant household and that meant including more peasants in local self-government. Beyond Arseniev’s practical suggestions, there was the greater question of rural poverty and the closely related issue of a general decline in Russian agriculture since Emancipation.

In the second half of the 19th century, “state capitalism” was not yet a contradiction in terms, and Europe was about to enter the era of the freest trade it had ever known. As John Maynard Keynes wrote of the years preceding the Great War:

> The inhabitant of London could order by telephone, sipping his morning tea in bed, the various products of the whole earth—he could at the same time and by the same means adventure his wealth in the natural resources and new enterprise of any quarter of the world—he could secure forthwith, if he wished, cheap and comfortable means of transit to any country or climate without passport or other formality.89

The communications infrastructure to which Europe owed this first wave of globalization was in large part the result of state involvement in economic enterprise throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. Russia was no exception to this pattern of state-directed economic development. The Finance Ministry channeled state funds into strategic sectors of the economy. The volume and direction of these investments formed modernization vectors that functioned within broader fields of state interests whose poles were determined by domestic conditions and international factors. The dominant development vectors in the Russian Empire after the Great Reforms aimed at industry and railways. The peasants had received their freedom, and the state expected them to be content with this much. As a result, the Finance Ministry paid less attention to its

policies’ social consequences in the countryside. Throughout its articles and surveys, the 
*Vestnik* group saw this as the main problem in Russia’s economic development. No 
highly placed bureaucrat could have doubted that agriculture was the linchpin of the 
Russian economy, yet its needs were taken for granted.

Esther Kingston-Mann has observed how state-funded statistics-gathering by 
provincial zemstvos marked the last third of 19th century and contributed to social 
awareness of rural development.90 By the 1880s, publishers economized on neither ink 
nor paper in printing compendiums of figures and analyses of everything from soil types 
to macroeconomic trends. Like a thirsty victim of a drought, Russian society gulped 
down numbers that quantified the Romanov Empire and how it was changing. This was 
the natural outcome of the process whose roots W. Bruce Lincoln identified among the 
enlightened bureaucracy of Nicholas I’s reign with their passion for statistical exploration 
and rational discovery.91 At the time, it was an effort to gain real control over the 
immense space of the Russian Empire by systematizing information. The statistical craze 
was a feverish catching-up process that was the first step in creating an economic 
Cartesian grid. It was a time-consuming affair, and in 1882, populist economist Vasilii 
Vorontsov complained: “There is nobody who can currently paint a full economic picture 
of Russia.”92 These words should not be taken lightly coming from the man whom Olga 
Crisp has credited with making the most comprehensive summary of the zemstvo 

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90 Esther Kingston-Mann, “Marxism and Russian Rural Development: Problems of Evidence, Experience, 
91 W. Bruce Lincoln, *In the Vanguard of Reform: Russia's Enlightened Bureaucrats, 1825-1861* (DeKalb: 
Northern Illinois University Press, 1982).
findings (together with agronomist and statistician Alexei Fortunatov).\textsuperscript{93} The enlightenment emanating from the Imperial Free Economic Society, of which two Vestnik contributors Vladimir Stasov and Konstantin Arseniev were members, was a drop in the ocean.\textsuperscript{94} Nevertheless, each book that emerged from the printing press was like another word in a rapidly growing vocabulary. Benjamin Disraeli is reported to have said that “there were three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics,” and, if his healthy skepticism held true for Great Britain in the 1870s, it was especially relevant to Russia. Statistics can illuminate or obscure, and this duality is a good place to start when considering quantitative evaluations of Russia’s economic performance after Emancipation.

Russia’s economic development figures for the period 1861-1890 reflect the uneven rapidity with which production increased in industrial sectors. In addition to the traditional textile and metallurgical enterprises, the coal, oil, chemical, and machine-building industries developed rapidly. The total number of workers in industrial enterprises with over 16 employees increased from 3,000 in 1866 to 66,000 in 1890.\textsuperscript{95} Qualitative changes in industrial enterprises, such as intensive mechanization, technological modernization, and new energy sources, accompanied their quantitative growth. Industrial production increased by 50 percent between 1883 and 1892. Production of pig iron increased by 250 percent. Extraction of coal and oil grew by 250


\textsuperscript{94} V. V. Oreshkin, \textit{Volnoe ekonomicheskoe obschestvo v Rossii 1765-1917} (Moscow, 1963), p. 22.

\textsuperscript{95} D. A. Timiriazev, \textit{Razvitie glavnikh otrasei fabricno-zavodskoi promyshlennosti v Rossii s 1850 po 1899 g.} (St. Petersburg, 1900), pp. 4-6.
percent and 1,400 percent, respectively. In the last 40 years of the 19th century, Russian industrial output, starting of course from a lower base, grew seven-fold compared to 5-fold in Germany, 2.5 in France, and just over 2 in Great Britain.

The development of large-scale industry paralleled the growth of small-scale manufacturing. The volume of internal trade trebled between 1871 and 1885 and exports more than doubled between 1861 and 1875. These developments began slowly to wean Russia’s internal market from heavy dependence on trade fairs and horse-drawn transportation. The railroad system became increasingly important and grew 18-fold between 1865 and 1890. Both Joseph Schumpeter and Alexander Gerschenkron have shown how much banking was crucial to industrialization. Russia’s banking system underwent rapid changes after 1861. Large volumes of credit moved into private hands. Newly established joint-stock companies concentrated and mobilized private capital. Meanwhile state banks more than quintupled their credit volume from 113 million rubles in 1860-63 to 620 million in 1884-1888. The financial growth statistics demonstrate a great thirst for capital and for energy resources and prove that industry had the driest throat.

Working with late 19th-century Russian economic statistics is a useful exercise in healthy skepticism. Do the figures demonstrate growth? They do. Such quantitative leaps

are impossible to fake. However, the absolute figures tell a relative story and the economy that produced them presented a much more complicated picture. A brief overview of finance ministry agendas before the 1890s demonstrates three things. First, having crossed the 1861 threshold, the Russian state had no coherent, long-term development program and became a hostage of socio-economic circumstances. Second, industrialization became the state’s principal aim and the agrarian question fell from prominence, jeopardizing the gains of the Great Reforms. Third, social issues fell far into the background of the state’s development programs. These were all problems that *Vestnik Evropy* consistently emphasized in its articles and surveys.

As Alexander Gerschenkron has famously argued, the degree of economic backwardness predisposes a country to the likelihood of a great developmental spurt, which is characterized by reliance on large plants and businesses, emphasis on producers’ goods, pressure on consumption levels, minimal influence of agricultural market demands, and the new institutional factors such as increasing centralization.\textsuperscript{101} According to this argument, the seven-fold growth in industrial output demonstrated the underdevelopment that caused Russia’s stellar take-off performance. The figures prove that Russia’s industrial-capital stage of development had begun quantitatively, but did capital-based production penetrate the economy homogeneously on the vertical and horizontal levels? It rarely does, and it certainly did not in an empire of Russia’s size. Although geography contributed to disproportionate development, it was insufficient to explain the transition’s socio-economic imbalance. One of the causes was Russia’s

institutional culture that depended on central initiative that took little heed of local interests.

The Finance Ministry played the central role in planning and implementation, and the bureaucracy’s top-heavy structure of responsibility hinged on the finance minister, whose personal experience and worldview determined the ministry’s development programs. These projects required implementers who simultaneously represented autocracy’s commitment to modernization and avoided any implications of political reinvention. This thankless job fell upon the interior and finance ministers. The Finance Ministry’s influence on state affairs steadily increased after 1861 and culminated in Sergei Witte’s tenure. Trapped between progressive economic reforms and an increasingly intransigent autocracy, forced to oppose conservative coteries and to fight political battles over economic issues, the finance ministers formulated Russia’s development strategy and tackled the intractable combination of agrarian, financial, tariff, tax, and labor problems. As often happened in monarchies, development often suffered turns and even reverses as a result of royal and ministerial successions.

The common denominator in Russia’s development policy planning was the vertical administrative structure of the Russian Empire that made it difficult for the center to appreciate or even be aware of local economic needs. This was a problem that Vestnik Evropy sought to cure by supporting zemstvo initiative and participation in the planning of economic reforms on the local level. For the first time since Russian rulers began to implement crash-modernization programs, the empire had a well established network of local institutions that could provide feedback to the center and help to implement its
directives on the ground. They could be used as feelers, extensions, and nodes of an
economic democracy that evaluated modernization from its local benefits, not its
exchequer balances. However, none of the post-Reform finance ministers took advantage
of the zemstvos. On the contrary, financial policy became increasingly vertical.

Mikhail Reitern (finance minister 1862-78) admitted to Alexander II that the
Great Reforms had “affected the state structure and society so profoundly that it would
take many sacrifices before Russia emerged from her transition and stood firmly on a
new foundation.” Reitern set the standard for evaluating modernization exclusively
from the center. He defined economic liberalism as the dominance of private initiative
under “direct state control.” His industrialization program was a precursor of Witte’s
and its basic elements survived until 1905. Reitern believed in forcing railroad
construction, creating a capitalist system of credit, and favoring heavy industry and a new
class of entrepreneurs. In response to the 1866 financial crisis, Reitern submitted to
Alexander II a financial reform program in which he emphasized Russia’s fiscal,
financial, and general economic integration into western European markets. The
document argued that Russia had entered the world economy whose effects on the empire
would henceforth increase directly with trade and investment volumes. Aware of Russia’s
international connections, he gave no heed to local interests.

103 Ibid., p. 43.
105 L. E. Shepelev, Tsarizm i burzhuaziia vo vtoroi polovine XIX veka: Problemy torgovo-promyshlennoi
Reitern’s successor Nikolai Bunge (finance minister 1881-1887), who detested political interference in economic affairs, was the first to walk the razor’s edge between encouraging economic reforms and preventing their socio-political consequences. He opposed the poll tax and collective responsibility for taxes. He took the first steps towards a modern taxation system that targeted personal income, inheritance, and investments. He supported a transition from commune-based to household agriculture and the implementation of a non-estate passport system. His ministry initiated labor legislation and opened the agrarian question for discussion. He was one of the few high-level administrators to defend the spirit and legacy of the Great Reforms. However, his views and policies inspired strong opposition from conservative circles who considered his “bourgeois” financial program “alien” to Russian traditions. In reality, it was further from “bourgeois” than had been Reitern’s because it paid more attention to the peasantry. Bunge believed that private enterprise, not the state, should direct economic growth. But high hopes for the progressive influence of private initiative that reached their zenith after Emancipation led to an orgy of speculation and resulted in a series of scandalous bankruptcies by the mid-1880s. In response, the state increased economic regulation thereby initiating a tendency that lasted well into the Witte years.

Bunge’s policies ran up against the conservative circle of M. N. Katkov, V. P. Meshchersky, and K. P. Pobedonostsev whose economic “program” favored the landed

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109 Ibid., pp. 388-389.
noblility, but also anticipated some elements of the Witte System. The conservatives favored protectionism and strict control over the stock exchange and private enterprise and they intended for state monopolies (especially on alcohol and tobacco) and the nationalization of railroads to become major sources of state revenue. Their program also included large agricultural subsidies for the gentry, the preservation of paper money, and keeping the peasant communes.\textsuperscript{110} The Katkov-Pobedonostev group favored labor legislation, but found Bunge’s pioneering efforts in this area too radical, although the laws passed in the 1880s were essentially paternalistic in their prohibition of labor organization and organized expression of grievances. In conservative eyes, workers were off-season peasants. As a result of the conservatives’ influence, Alexander III dismissed Bunge in January 1887.\textsuperscript{111}

His successor, Ivan Vyshnegradskii (finance minister 1887-1892), was closely associated with the Pobedonostsev-Katkov group, but he did not fulfill conservative hopes. He was concerned exclusively with financial stability—especially deficit reduction—to which he sacrificed everything else, including the economic interests of the landed nobility, not to mention the peasantry. He increased indirect taxes on alcohol, tobacco, sugar, and petroleum, which fell most heavily on the small consumer, and reorganized railroad tariffs to stimulate trade. He also favored a protectionist trade policy. Revenue from indirect taxes grew rapidly and Vyshnegradskii managed not only to eliminate the state deficit, but also to create a surplus of 194 million rubles by 1892. One poor harvest erased this costly financial achievement.

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., p. 381.
\textsuperscript{111} B. B. Gлинский, “Period tverdoi vlasti,” \textit{Istoricheskii vestnik} 8 (1912), pp. 682-683.
Between the Reitern and Vyshnegradskii tenures, financial stability and industrialization superseded social issues. Labor legislation, instead of being a *bona fide* social concern, was an outgrowth of the state’s political fears and the Finance Ministry’s institutional interests. The thirteen years of international peace under Alexander III were the most positive outcome of the state’s pursuit of financial stability and economic growth. What progress took place in the countryside proceeded at a snail’s pace. Although Emancipation had aimed at liberating the peasant, it produced unfavorable short-term effects. Collective financial responsibility, the preservation of the peasant commune, and limitations on migration were intended to filter out some of the worst excesses of capitalization, but they often produced the opposite effect and, according to most contemporaries and scholars, these artificial filters allowed the most pernicious forms of financial exploitation to penetrate the villages.\(^{112}\)

There were also great regional differences in how successfully rural communities adapted to the new economic conditions. For example, post-Emancipation money relations established themselves much more successfully in the southern black earth regions than in the north. Yet, the regional peculiarities did not negate the overall picture of relative rural decline compared to industrial growth. Towards the end of the 19\(^{th}\) century, the Romanov Empire was a tapestry of pre-Emancipation, proto-capitalist, and agrarian-capitalist regional economies. The economic changes also affected most of the landed nobility that began to lose property to merchants, businessmen, and sometimes

even to wealthy peasants. Its collective share of land fell from 78 percent in 1877 to 69 percent in 1887.\footnote{I. P. Taburno, \textit{Eskiznyi obzor finansovo-ekonomicheskogo sostoiania Rossii za poslednie 20 let 1882-1901} (St. Petersburg, 1904), p. 17.} Such was the economic road to the 1890s.

It is textbook knowledge that the famine of 1891-92 was an historic threshold for Russia.\footnote{For example, see Hugh Seton-Watson, \textit{The Russian Empire, 1801-1917} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. 512-513; Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, \textit{A History of Russia} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 405; and Catherine Evtuhov, David Goldfrank, Lindsey Hughes, Richard Stites, \textit{A History of Russia: Peoples, Legends, Events, Forces} (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004), p. 497.} As long as the state’s economic reforms had coincided with political reaction, the intelligentsia’s dissatisfaction aimed at the whole without distinguishing its parts. This combination sustained disillusioned, but unvanquished, populist sensibilities and simultaneously provided fertile soil from which Russian Marxism drew its strength. The volatile mixture of political conservatism, accelerating economic development, and liberal opposition boiled under reaction’s lid until the famine became an excuse to vocalize the discontent and to debate economic policies and patterns. As the events of 1891-92 demonstrated, the enormous potential that the zemstvos provided in softening the effects of modernization was left unrealized. For \textit{Vestnik}, the famine provided a chance to convince the public and the state to take advantage of it. The \textit{Vestnik} group chose to focus on famine prevention, not the allocation of guilt, and demonstrated a preference for economic empowerment over political liberalization.

Arseniev treated the zemstvo as the best barometer of social reactions to state policies. As eminent zemstvo historian, member of the Social Democratic Party, and eventual Menshevik, Boris Veselovskii has noted, the pulse of zemstvo life had weakened in the 1880s. Russian society and the press were almost indifferent to the role
of local self-government until 1886 when conservative encroachments on it galvanized a counter-reaction. The state crowned its infringement on local autonomy with the introduction of the land captains in 1889. By the Statute of 1890, the government changed the election rules to favor the gentry, made all administrative posts appointed, and allowed governors to block zemstvo decisions that they considered incompatible with state needs or blatantly contrary to local interests. Although few instances of actual encroachments on local self-government took place, the law made possible administrative arbitrariness. A struggle to define the role of the zemstvo was taking place.

Modern scholars such as Janet Hartley have reevaluated the state’s intentions in 1864 by exploring the limited extent to which the government allowed or wished to encourage a genuine decentralization or devolution of power to the provinces. The debate slowly gathered momentum as the 19th century drew to a close. At its root was the fundamental issue of the relationship between local government and the modernization of the Russian state. On the one hand, local government could be a tool to stimulate corporate identity, urban self-confidence, and economic and cultural progress across all sectors of society, including the peasantry. On the other hand, problems in local government could be interpreted as symbolic of the failure, or the unwillingness, of the tsarist regime to adapt to change and to establish an effective relationship between state and society. The state took the issue very seriously—the two statutes of 1864 and 1890 on the zemstvos comprised 120 and 138 articles respectively.

However, the state faced a dilemma. Relations were always tense between the center and the peripheries and conflict was always just below the surface. Instead of laying the foundation for economic democracy through the zemstvos, the state treated them as administrative extensions. The tsarist government wanted to stimulate provincial and urban institutions of self-government and thereby encourage the development of provincial society, but it needed to control local institutions and ensure above all that they perceived state obligations as greater priorities than local needs. The center feared the independence of local officials, attempted to co-opt them to carry out state policies, and subordinated them to appointed representatives and to ministries in the capital. Russian history had a long tradition of conflicting expectations between the center and local governments. Since the time of Peter the Great, the center determined the territorial boundaries of units of local administration, redrew and defined and abolished towns and designed coats of arms for them, decided the structure, social composition and areas of competence of all provincial and urban institutions, defined the membership and groupings of urban society, determined and altered the franchise for towns, noble assemblies and zemstvos, and set fiscal and other obligations of all institutions, including taxation and billeting of troops in civilian houses. In other words, the Petersburg bureaucracy was steeped in a rich tradition of centralism when it came to local government, which it would take time or tragic circumstances to begin to change.

During the 1880s, conservative bureaucrats wanted to turn the zemstvo into an extension of the imperial administration and to make local administrators state agents. Konstantin Arseniev fought tirelessly to draw his readers’ attention to the legal changes
underway, although the zemstvos themselves largely ignored the 1890 reform. He tended to idealize the 1864 institution as a locus of opposition to the autocracy. In January 1891, he warned that Russia stood to lose not the “terminally sick and dying” institution that the conservative press portrayed, but the original 1864 version that was strong and impervious to “modern influences,” by which Arseniev meant radicalism. What kind of “opposition” centered on the zemstvo did Arseniev mean? The answer goes to the heart of the unique liberal worldview that the *Vestnik* group articulated. Economic activity was its essential component and the zemstvo was the mechanism for reinvesting the wealth into the communities that generated it.

This was not the intention of the Finance Ministry. Although Bunge’s and Vyshnegradskii’s economic policies led to an unprecedented industrial boom in the 1890s, they had serious defects. By the last quarter of the 19th century, peasants constituted just over ¾ of the empire’s population. Nevertheless, throughout the 1880s, the Finance Ministry made it abundantly clear that financial stability, not peasant welfare, was its primary concern and it pursued it at all costs in order to attract large-scale foreign investment necessary for rapid industrial development. Massive agricultural exports maintained a favorable trade balance, which stabilized and strengthened the ruble, thereby paving the way for an eventual transition to the gold standard. Once this happened, the Finance Ministry believed, European investment would stimulate Russia’s heavy industry, which survived behind protective tariffs until then. Conscious that its policies were detrimental to the countryside, the Finance Ministry expected the peasantry

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to weather the hard times. By buying abundant grain cheaply immediately after the harvest, the state made a profit by selling it abroad. Simultaneously, prohibitive import tariffs raised the cost of foreign agricultural tools and other agronomic necessities, which had a detrimental effect on cottage production, too. Rural taxes subsidized industry, although the peasantry cared nothing about industrial strength, macroeconomic stability, and competition on foreign markets, let alone Russia’s place among the elite club of European powers. Russian industry flourished at the expense of the village. By the late 1880s, state policy split the national economy in two and made parasitism, not symbiosis, the *modus operandi*.\(^{118}\)

The zemstvos did opposed central interference, but this opposition did not originate from the peasants and did not aim to democratize rural economic interests. What opposition there was during the 1880s came from landowners who were also on the losing end of the Finance Ministry’s industrial favoritism. W. E. Mosse has argued that the zemstvos found an unexpected protector in the State Council, which in the 1880s contained “the nucleus of an informal liberal opposition.” On the issue of Land Captains, for example, the Council voted liberally, but Alexander III supported the minority opinion and signed the bill in July of 1889. Both he and the conservatives criticized the Council for excessive liberalism and support of the Great Reforms, but its outstanding success was the defense of zemstvo autonomy between 1880 and 1890.\(^{119}\) Why did it do so? Although the democratic “third element” began to affect local self-government in the


1890s, as Veselovskii has argued, it did not become dominant until the next decade. As
Russia entered the 1890s, it was the gentry’s interests that determined zemstvo agendas:
financial credit for the landowners, wholesale grain trade regulations, grain storehouses,
stricter punishments for unfulfilled labor contracts, and more favorable railroad tariffs.
Peasant interests remained in the background.120 Roberta Thompson Manning has
confirmed Veselovskii’s view by arguing that even in the period before 1905, the
zemstvo opposition was weak and timid, its rank and file motivated not so much by an
ideological commitment to democratic ideals, as by the corporate self-interest of the
gentry who dominated the institution.121 The central issue in the 1890s was not so much
the survival of local self-government, but whose interests it served and how it did so.

*Vestnik Evropy* had opposed all encroachments on zemstvo independence consistently
since the 1870s. By the 1890s, it was at the forefront of tipping the scale in the favor of
peasant interests and justifying its case with economic arguments.

After a series of localized crop failures in 1889 and 1890, a broader one struck
sixteen of Russia’s European provinces in the autumn of 1891.122 Like a catalyst, the
ensuing famine reinvigorated criticism of the state’s economic aims. Reports about rural
conditions reinforced the moral imperative to question with unusual audacity the
autocracy’s policies. As the extent of the crop failure became apparent towards the end of
the year and as it became clear that its scale would cause starvation, the din of criticism

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121 Roberta Thompson Manning, “The Zemstvo and Politics.” In *The Zemstvo in Russia, An Experiment in
Local Self-Government*, ed. Terence Emmons and Wayne S. Vucinich (Cambridge: Cambridge University
122 Perm, Viatka, Ufa, Orenburg, Samara, Kazan, Nizhni Novgorod, Simbirsk, Penza, Saratov, Riazan,
Tula, Tambov, Orel, Voronezh, Kursk, and Kharkov.
grew. *Vestnik Evropy* was in its twenty-fifth year and ready to do battle for which it had prepared by cutting its teeth on its critique of the counter-reforms of the 1880s. The group’s stand on several important issues in the 1880s deserves a closer examination because it explains the attitudes and expectations with which it approached the events of 1891-92.

An article in an 1882 issue of Ivan Aksakov’s conservative *Rus’*, argued that Russian liberalism had no definition or program, and that there was no such thing as a “liberal party.” In response, Arseniev published a “liberal program” in the Domestic Survey of *Vestnik*’s April 1882 issue. Speaking for Russian liberalism, the first demands he listed were freedom of the press and freedom of conscience. Anticipating right-wing accusations of disloyalty to the state, he distinguished treachery from opposition and disagreement from calumny. Since the accusation published in *Rus’* had heavy Slavophilic overtones, Arseniev also condemned religious intolerance. Slavophilism, he argued, brought the Church too close to the State and made the Russian-Orthodox connection too exclusive. Personal freedom and the inviolability of the individual were next in Arseniev’s hierarchy—criticism of administrative arbitrariness had been *Vestnik*’s dominant theme from its inception in 1866.

However, another aspect of liberalism in 1882 was progress in education. Referring to conservative publisher Mikhail Katkov’s and education minister D. A.

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Tolstoy’s educational counter-reforms, Arseniev complained that only in Russia could classical languages become political weapons. In 1871, the Ministry of Public Education had recognized the classical gymnasium as the only direct institutional path to university education. Forty percent of the curriculum concentrated on classical languages. Biology, for example, was not taught. As Alexander Vucinich has argued, the new curriculum was “one of the most potent mechanisms that government had employed in its effort to stem the tide of ‘natural science materialism,’ interpreted as a major enemy of autocratic institutions.” 124 The liberals favored specialized, professional education instead. Arseniev wrote: “A national school, developing freely and open to all is the first, but by far not the only, condition of national well-being.” 125 He also called for a reorganization of local self-government through the establishment of the all-estate volost and the lowering of property requirements for zemstvo elections. 126 Anticipating accusations of liberal bias, Arseniev added that the liberal press was the first to criticize zemstvo excesses and mistakes.

The all-estate volost issue first came up in the early 1880s. Interior minister Mikhail Loris-Melikov established a commission under deputy interior minister, and former Pskov Governor, Mikhail Kakhanov to prepare a revision of local self-government. 127 The Kakhanov Commission (1881-85) proposed the creation of new and inclusive governmental units at the village and volost levels. Vestnik Evropy

126 For a basic introduction to the issue, see D. Kuzmin-Karavaev’s article “Vsesoslovnaia volost” in Novyi Entsiklopedicheskii Slovar (Brokgauz and Efron, 1911), XI.
wholeheartedly defended the commission’s proposals and the all-estate volost acquired a central place in Arseniev’s Domestic Surveys. He argued that the volost council should become the “center of gravity” of local self-government. It would answer to the district zemstvo, but also enjoy certain independence.128 Arseniev pictured the all-estate volost as an organic link between rural society and the state. It would act as the foundation for a harmonious administrative structure resting on a wide popular base.129 The Kakhanov Commission’s conclusions proved unacceptable to Alexander III’s government and interior minister D. A. Tolstoy dissolved the commission without implementing any of its proposals.130

Arseniev argued that liberalism’s economic goals aimed at: 1) upholding common property as a guarantee against rural pauperization through landlessness; 2) transferring more land to peasants with state and local help; 3) abolishing restrictions on the colonization of land; 3) establishing small peasant credit institutions; 4) abolishing passport control and collective responsibility for taxes; 5) lowering redemption payments where they exceeded the profit from the land; 6) abolishing the soul tax; and 7) lowering taxes on the peasantry by simultaneously raising them on the wealthier groups and cutting unproductive government spending. The liberals supported a government of laws, to which end Arseniev favored the establishment of an Imperial Council of Representatives, although he did not clarify whether it was to be elective or advisory.131

129 Vestnik Evropy 7 (1881), p. 366.
He warned, however, that it would take years of trial and error to make the new administrative bodies function smoothly and efficiently.

Arseniev’s axiom was that government should correspond to its time and place, but if national self-sufficiency implied an aggregate of pre-determined qualities, centuries-old views and static institutions, this was not what the liberals had in mind. They refused to see historically acquired peculiarities as a mystical messianic pact or as symbols of faith that placed Russia above other nations, but viewed them instead as facts that required constant attention and reinterpretation. Slavophil self-sufficiency implied a turn backwards, Arseniev concluded, whereas the liberal program presumed a development forward, but not along an arbitrarily chosen road.

Several assumptions underlay Arseniev’s program. His most important criticism of the Emancipation was its one-sidedness. Although he did not state it openly, his analysis suggests that the incomplete conceptualization and inconsistent implementation of the Reforms led directly to the crisis of 1881. Had he been an historical clairvoyant, he could have connected the dots all the way to 1905. His program’s practical impact was negligible at the time, but it indicated a direction in which liberal thought could develop: serfdom’s leftovers produced socio-political problems that impeded economic development. Although Arseniev was quite vague about the path along which this growth was to proceed at the time, he was convinced that the victory of gentry, industrial, and urban interests over those of the peasantry boded ill for the future, which made his argument sound very much like something from the pages of a populist journal. The principal aim was to avoid social polarization and to assure natural, stable and painless
economic progress. Arseniev believed that the Great Reforms had introduced more humane and democratic principles with which civil and criminal legislation failed to keep pace. Writing immediately after the assassination of Alexander II, Arseniev urged the state to encourage more, not less, civil participation in the reforms, which would eradicate the last vestiges of serfdom from whose tension political extremists drew their energy. Only with a complete overhaul of civil and administrative legislation and further reforms of self-government and local authority could the autocracy reestablish social stability. Arseniev denied that the majority of the population had any revolutionary tendencies.132

The 1882 program was a list of well intentioned but vague ideals. Nevertheless, the journal stood by them firmly throughout the 1880s. During the lull of Alexander III’s reign, Vestnik continued to defend the Great Reforms upon which the state methodically encroached. Arseniev wrote monthly commentaries on contemporary events after he took over the journal’s Domestic Survey in March 1880. He examined the problems and paradoxes of the new legislation pouring out of St. Petersburg. He covered changes in zemstvo organization, urban statutes, labor rights, and rural taxes. A look at any Domestic Survey from the 1880s demonstrates how meticulously he examined the pros and cons, the shades, overtones, and practical results of both imperial and local legislation. Traces of the program were always behind Arseniev’s thorough commentary, although the overwhelming detail and the legalistic language were overwhelming. It was not until the famine of 1891-92, however, that the liberal program’s ideals reappeared in

132 For a discussion of Vestnik Evropy in the Russian liberal movement of the time, see A. A. Alafaev, Russkii liberalizm na rubezhe 70-80-kh gg. XIX v.: iz istorii zhurnala “Vestnik Evropy” (Moscow, 1991).
an open and unmistakable form and crystallized in reaction to the disaster in the countryside.

A clash between the conservative and liberal press ignited the debate over the crop failure and neither side wasted a syllable in getting to the crux of the issue—the legacy of the Great Reforms. Under pressure of the approaching crisis, the debate entered the realm of pragmatism. As the zemstvos scrambled to assess the damage in their locales, it quickly became clear that emergency grain reserves were insufficient to feed the population through the end of 1891, which also meant that there would be no seed for the winter and spring sowing. Predictably, the first blows exchanged concerned local self-government, which became the central and most divisive issue in the debate. The Vestnik liberals were ready for a brutal engagement because they had monitored the zemstvo with particular care after the land captains were introduced in 1889.

In his memoirs, Arseniev admitted that only Pypin wrote more for Vestnik than he. From the moment Arseniev joined the journal in 1880 until 1901, he had contributed 235 Domestic Surveys and 203 Social Chronicles. By 1891, he had written “no fewer than 360 printer’s sheets [16-pages].”¹³³ He dedicated most of this space to registering arbitrary administrative encroachments upon zemstvo responsibilities and functions, repelling attacks by the conservative press, and systematically propagandizing the economic and cultural needs of local self-government. The survey’s format allowed Arseniev to monitor the minutest changes in legislation and to comment upon their results on a monthly basis. However, he saw himself as little more than a critic and his

work as “dry and boring.” He wrote: “I introduce little that is constructive, new, original.”134 Indeed, the surveys and chronicles are not page-turners, but they contain the rudiments of *Vestnik*’s liberal sensibility. A member of the Luga District and Petersburg Provincial zemstvos, Arseniev had first-hand knowledge of local self-government. He pushed for a four-year elementary school program, the abolition of corporal punishment for peasants, and the right for the zemstvo to petition the state directly for agricultural aid. Arseniev’s dedication to peasant interests justified the argument he made to populist Vasilii Vorontsov that Russian liberals were different from their western European counterparts who were primarily interested in defending their class interests.

Arseniev was also the link between the provincial and urban intelligentsia. Informal meetings of the “zemstvo circle” began to take place in 1883 in St. Petersburg. It included zemstvo members from many provinces, literary figures, statisticians, as well as trusted students. These gatherings brought together the progressive youth of St. Petersburg. Among the regular visitors were renowned ethnologist Sergei Oldenburg liberal economist and *Vestnik* contributor Nikolai Vodovozov, Marxist Peter Struve, and renowned mineralogist and social activist Vladimir Vernadskii. In the 1880s, there were between 30 and 40 regular members and the debates concerned local affairs but avoided politics. “The cream of the capital’s intelligentsia” made speeches.135 Arseniev and Pypin were both active participants. Arseniev remained a member of the “zemstvo circle” even after it evolved into what Victor Bartenev, a student member, called the “Political Club,”

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134 Ibid., p. 94.
which discussed the foundation of political parties. The liberals, he remembered, “tried to organize the youth for work in the zemstvo.”

In 1890, the meetings moved to Moscow to avoid surveillance and most of the Petersburg intelligentsia stopped attending, but Arseniev often traveled to the old capital. Far from Petersburg, the members began to address more immediate concerns such as educational reform, the legal status of the peasantry, and the possibility for greater inter-zemstvo cooperation. Soviet historian N. I. Pirumova compared Arseniev’s notes on the meetings to the Domestic Surveys and found that the debates during the zemstvo gatherings throughout the 1890s affected Arseniev’s choice of topics for the Surveys. He attended regularly because he believed that only participation in local self-government could overcome endemic Russian apathy. The famine of 1891-92 allowed Arseniev to blend his 1882 “program” with participation in local self-government and to develop an blueprint of an economic democracy that included all estates and classes.

An August 1891 issue of the ultra-conservative *Grazhdanin* blamed the zemstvo—and its entire 25-year history—for frivolously spending money on public schools instead of preparing emergency grain supplies. Arseniev responded that only zemstvo statistical works could ensure a successful campaign against the crisis. When

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Grazhdanin spoke highly of the grain depots that existed before Emancipation, Arseniev responded that at the time there was no alternative to storing things in boxes buried in the ground, which is what the depots essentially were. Modern historian of the 1891-92 famine Richard Robbins has identified two basic methods to combat famine: food storage systems and economic incentives to restore the balance of grain trading on the internal market. The first method had been in use since the dawn of human civilization. The second was a modern development. After Emancipation, Russia was in the process of shifting from the ancient to the modern. However, despite reforming the relief system statutes—the last one was undertaken in 1866—the local granaries remained empty. The peasants continued to be too poor and too burdened with taxes and other obligations to put aside the needed reserves.\footnote{Richard G. Robbins, Jr. *Famine in Russia, 1891-1892* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), pp. 14-16.} Arseniev clearly favored the economic approach to famine relief, but he had to remind the conservative critics that it was not within the zemstvo’s responsibilities to prohibit or encourage the production and sale of food within its bailiwick. The Finance Ministry could lower grain transportation tariffs, but only communication between the zemstvos of different districts and provinces could create a network sufficiently informed and efficient to deal with the impending calamity.\footnote{*Vestnik Evropy* 8 (1891), p. 866-869.} The term “famine” first appeared in the press in *Vestnik’s* August 1891 Domestic Survey—Arseniev did not think it too early to sound the alarm bells about mass starvation in the hardest-hit areas.\footnote{Ibid., p. 866.}
The debate naturally progressed to the role of the land captains in assessing local needs and directing the relief effort. In answer to another Grazhdanin article, Arseniev admitted that the scope of the 1891 crop failure was much worse than that of 1867, 1874, and 1880, so the most serious problem was local distribution of aid to villages and micro-distribution to households and individuals. Could the land captains fulfill this need? Grazhdanin maintained that they could, but, based on the experience with special emissaries in the south-western provinces in 1880, which Arseniev had covered at the time, he doubted that the land captains could do so efficiently without a significant number of aides. By 1891, the land captains were either approved or appointed, but Arseniev argued in favor of local, popularly elected officials who were closer to the peasantry. He believed that the need for an all-estate volost became especially acute in times of crisis when imperial institutions needed to communicate with the peasantry.143

In September’s Domestic Survey, Arseniev pointed out that the land captains were Interior Ministry appointees and since the Russian people were distrustful of new faces, a new appointee needed time to acquaint himself with the area and win the peasantry’s confidence. Local officials, on the other hand, had an advantage because they already knew their locale and people, found their salaries more adequate since they already had local economic roots, and cared about the effects of their policies on their reputation. Of the appointed land captains in the provinces, 50 percent were military men, 31 percent civil servants, and 19 percent land owners. It was important, Arseniev argued, that they act as administrators, fair and independent judges, rather than as executives of

143 Vestnik Evropy 9 (1891), pp. 426-428.
central commands. Military men, he maintained, inclined towards military discipline when they made their decisions. They were less likely to consider the merits of a case before them. A military mindset did not suit a land captain, Arseniev argued. Among the appointed landowners, there were many examples of those without rank or education whom the law of 29 December 1889 enabled governors to appoint temporarily. That this law was necessary demonstrated that certain areas had a dearth of hereditary landed gentry who fulfilled the requirements for land captain tenure. Locally elected administrators could easily fill these gaps with more qualified or at least more trusted men.  

Arseniev defended the zemstvos when Moskovskie vedomosti’s repeated Grazhdanin’s accusations that they had neglected grain stores in favor of education and public health in which they had had minimal success anyway. The conservative publication also cast suspicion on some cases of exaggerated local relief estimates echoing the suspicions of some state officials and provincial governors. Arseniev argued that inflated requests for monetary aid did not incriminate the zemstvos, since the institutions had limited information with which to work. He was also appalled at conservative support for the landed gentry’s requests for government aid during the famine—something unheard of during previous crises. Some landowners had demanded

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144 Ibid., pp. 370-378.
145 Moskovskie vedomosti was another conservative daily. Founded in 1756 as a publication of Moscow University, by the 1870s it came under the influence of M. N. Katkov, who was a faithful mouthpiece of officials who had second thoughts about the reforms’ momentum. The paper maintained its reactionary stance even after Katkov’s death in 1887. Louise McReynolds, The News Under Russia’s Old Regime (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 19-20, 25, 35, 72, 102.
this aid in the form of tax- and debt-postponement, instead of grain loans for food and/or sowing. Given famine conditions, he argued, local authorities had to distinguish between those facing starvation and those facing need.  

Arseniev very carefully navigated the treacherous waters of tsarist censorship. He emphasized the efficiency of local participation in the relief efforts but also admitted the importance of central participation, although he wanted to limit its directing role. He argued that state regulations should only prevent the misuse of funds and abuses of authority. He eagerly welcomed the increasing numbers of private relief organizations that had appeared and began working before the Ministry of Interior’s official permission of 1 September 1891. However, if the ministries attempted to autocratically coordinate distribution, block candidates, and stifle local initiative, the measures would become counterproductive, he warned.

When in an October issue of *Moskovskie vedomosti* influential member of the Moscow zemstvo D. M. Samarin proposed establishing a central committee to oversee the entire relief effort under Crown Prince Nicholas, Arseniev argued that it would become yet another distribution body, of which there were already too many with duplicate functions. Local distribution was the essential gap to fill and that required new local institutions. The committee could assure proportional distribution among the provinces, but its influence should stop at this administrative level.

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149 Dmitrii Fedorovich Samarin was associated for a long time with Ivan Aksakov, represented the interests of the landed gentry, and often demonstrated Slavophile sympathies in his writings. See *Entsiklopedicheskii
Arseniev believed that the state would do better to encourage local networks of relief institutions. The experience of the 1880-81 crop failure had proved their effectiveness, but they had to function with sufficient freedom to encourage individual enthusiasm and energy—a strict bureaucratic routine would stifle local initiative. Therefore, placing these institutions under the direct control of land captains and provincial government was counterproductive. The official character that central direction gave to relief committees impeded their efforts. Would it not be more reasonable to keep them unofficial in nature? Arseniev came back to the all-estate volost as the most viable alternative.150 “The more varied the sources of relief, the deeper and wider the aid movement, the more chances of its success,” he wrote in November 1891.151 Regardless of how large the scale of private relief, it could never match what the state offered through the zemstvos, whose resources needed to be increased as much as possible. To this end, the establishment of a progressive income tax was the optimal solution. In the mid-1880s, the government’s proposal to withhold a percentage of all civil servant, non-governmental, estate, and stock-based organization salaries above 2,000 rubles met with a storm of protest in the conservative press and was therefore shelved. Many zemstvos had supported an all-estate tax since 1870.152 It was time to resurrect the idea.153

150 Vestnik Evropy 11 (1891), p. 354-357.
151 Ibid., p. 424.
In its reaction to Count Leo Tolstoy’s plea for private assessments of grain reserves in every volost, Moscow’s conservative press searched for signs of a conspiracy against the state’s directing role in the relief effort. Tolstoy did not question the state’s abilities, Arseniev argued, he merely proposed a faster and more efficient way to estimate local needs. Moskovskie vedomosti insisted that peasants would mislead private citizens by giving incorrect information. Arseniev answered that the essential issues were the speed and efficiency of relief—good works could be done in addition to, not against, state participation and direction. Besides, he noted, peasants often misled official representatives, too. Tolstoy’s proposal did not imply an idée subversive or seek to “systematically discredit the government.” For conservatives, any trace of “social initiative” was like a red flag to a bull, argued Arseniev. If nothing else, Tolstoy’s proposal could serve as an alarm clock to awaken direct personal involvement beyond financial contributions. Those sowing distrust and suspicion were killing what little hope there was for social initiative in a culture already saturated with a tendency to act only when commanded and suspect private initiative.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 872-873.} It is remarkable how similar Arseniev’s arguments sound to the arguments made in favor of “spontaneous self-initiative” used by populists Nikolai Danielson, Vasilii Vorontsov, and Sergei Iuzakov.\footnote{Theodore H. von Laue, “The Fate of Capitalism in Russia: The Narodnik Version,” American Slavic and East European Review 13:1 (1954), pp. 11-28.} The crucial difference was of course that Arseniev spoke of educated members of society, not peasants. Yet, this was one of the many conceptual intersections that the liberals had with the populists.
Arseniev supported thorough investigations instead of extraordinary measures against crimes committed during the famine. More openness, more light, and fewer obstacles to uncovering “unpleasant facts” would make the legal system function properly, he argued. Samarin had proposed that local authorities implement obligatory statistics-gathering with a thorough explanation of the penalties for false information. Why not employ elected zemstvo officials for this task, asked Arsenev? They would be more effective executing it out of moral duty rather than obligation. Legal reform had clearly not developed sufficiently for the state to take into its hands such extraordinary powers. This would alienate the population further, and encourage more audacious evasions of the law.156

Arseniev came out in favor of public works projects, but only under the condition that they were voluntary and transparent. He argued for a local, not a national, scale. Peasants should not be taken away from their homes, but encouraged to stay. Local dirt roads should be the first to be repaired because potholes were the most serious impediments to transporting grain in the spring. The tasks had to be of the simplest and non-specialized kind, such as working with spades and transporting materials for the spring. Arseniev considered grand projects like the laying of roads between volost capitals, construction of railways, repairs to river beds, excavation of river ports, and soil amelioration as too complex and less urgent than repairs to local roads and bridges.157 Such unreasonable projects frequently resulted from zemstvo misunderstanding of the

156 Vestnik Evropy 12 (1891), pp. 874-880.
extent of the Interior Ministry’s offers to fund public works and slowed down the
distribution of imperial funds.

As Richard Robbins has argued, the basic idea of public works was a sound one
and the measure had been used to advantage in the past, but the existing administrative
structure provided no apparatus for managing such projects. As a result, everything had
to be worked out from the top down in a very short time and handled through the regular
administrative channels and turned over to a small group of sanovniki, or high-placed
officials, who could not adequately coordinate all the aspects of public works projects.158
Although the many specially appointed officials were able men, the center’s dependence
on them was proof of its inability to institutionalize functional administrative links,
although the foundation for it existed, as Arseniev consistently argued.

Arseniev held up as an example the Nizhnii Novgorod Relief Commission’s
thorough publications of findings and reports from the local areas. He wrote: “In a time
like this, the role of the saving hand should not constitute a monopoly, no obstacles or
snares should be placed between the needy and those ready to help.”159 The Nizhnii relief
effort was remarkable for its transparency and the voluntary and free way in which the
provincial authorities, the zemstvos, and private forces came together at a time of need.
Arseniev praised Nizhnii Governor N. M. Baranov for admitting that he had found it
possible to share his burdens with comrades, not subordinates. The Samara provincial
government followed the opposite path by taking into its hands the entire relief effort and

pp. 111, 123.
159 Vestnik Evropy 1 (1892), p. 388.
turning the zemstvos into executive outgrowths. As a result, its achievements lagged far behind Nizhnii’s. Cooperative efforts between the Samara governor and the zemstvos, Arseniev argued, would have been much more effective had he approached them in the first stages of the crisis.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 388-390.}

When it came to private involvement in the relief effort, Arseniev practiced what he preached. A large portion of his 1891-1892 correspondence deals with the allocation of relief funds that his friends and colleagues sent to the Vestnik office in St. Petersburg, which offers an interesting insight into how the relief effort worked on the local level. Beginning in December 1891, Arseniev corresponded regularly with V. I. Vernadskii who oversaw relief efforts in Tambov province from Moscow where he organized regular zemstvo “discussions” and “lunches” and supplied Arseniev with minutes that made their way into the Domestic Surveys.\footnote{N. I. Pirumova, Zemskoe liberalnoe dvizhenie. Sotsialnye korni i evoliutsiia do nachala XX veka (Nauka: Moscow, 1977), p. 192.} Their man in Tambov was a certain retired V. V. Keller who traveled all over Morshanskii District and reported to Vernadskii specifically where the funds were needed.

In December 1891, Vernadskii and Arseniev channeled the funds through the Literacy Committee, which organized a commission to help local preschoolers.\footnote{IRLI, f. 359, no. 184, 19 December 1891.} By January 1892, Keller reported that Boiarovka village no longer required relief and he asked Arseniev’s permission to redirect funds to Lipovka.\footnote{IRLI, f. 359, no. 184, 18 January 1892.} On 12 January 1892, Vernadskii informed Arseniev that unfortunately most of the activity at the Literacy
Committee revolved around publishing requests for aid in local papers and constant meetings about how to phrase the appeals. He added: “It is horrible when you feel how your work is constrained and tied down.” Better news came from Morshanskii District in February when Keller informed Vernadskii that private aid increased and came in the form of local landowners hiring peasants to do extra work on their estates. However, the gentry demanded that the peasants work in harsh conditions and for little money. Still, this was better than nothing. “It seems that the result will be the enslavement of a certain part of the peasantry and the undoubted gain of large landholders,” Vernandskii wrote to Arseniev.

The better the operation was organized, the more people donated: “It seems to me that there are a lot of good people in Russia and the problem is that they can not find each other due to enforced silence and fear.” Arseniev did not refuse any donations: he received 8 rubles from a veterinarian in Kharkov province and Pypin forwarded him 10 rubles from General A. N. Ostrogorsky, one of D. A. Miliutin’s closest advisors. In April 1892, Arseniev sent to Voronezh province 250 rubles for soup kitchens and the local executor promised to forward to Russkie vedomosti a description of how the funds were allocated both for transparency and as an advertisement for potential donors.

Arseniev’s direct involvement in the famine relief effort is another testament to the hands-on attitude characteristic of the Vestnik group. In this, he followed in Stasiulevich’s and Pypin’s footsteps. That he was so closely involved in the day-to-day

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164 IRLI, f. 359, no. 184, 12 January 1892.
165 IRLI, f. 359, no. 184, 18 February 1892.
166 IRLI, f. 359, no. 37, 23 April 1892; IRLI, f. 359, no. 419, 26 February 1892
167 IRLI, f. 359, no. 152, 1 May 1892.
affairs of famine relief lends his articles emotional depth and moral integrity. Arseniev’s personal correspondence makes clear that he was well informed of what went on in the provinces, which most likely contributed to his views on the interaction between the authorities and civil society. When he composed the Domestic Survey for the journal, he drew on his correspondence as well as his bureaucratic experience to present his readers with a full picture of the relief effort. Few analysts were as qualified as Arseniev to examine its social, economic and political implications.

In the first months of 1892, the debate between Vestnik Evropy and other publications shifted from zemstvo issues to the peasantry’s relations with the state. An article in Novosti argued that the peasants owed the state their labor and that their demands on it had exceeded what the “logic of things” had dictated. Arseniev replied that the editorial’s first mistaken assumption was to oppose the state to the people: “The state is the people organized; the people is a living force that makes up the state. One can not be one’s own creditor or owe oneself a debt.” The peasantry repaid annually not only its redemption debts but also the empire’s foreign debt, since these were not “covered by the profits of state enterprises,” which the rural population had helped to create and subsidized. In reality, Arseniev argued, the entire peasant population lived on the poverty level, but due to Russia’s size, the land acted like a sponge that absorbed local poverty by distributing it equally among its many inhabitants.

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168 Novosti was short for Novosti dnia i birzhevaia gazeta, which O. K. Notovich ran beginning in 1880. It had a liberal orientation and a westward slant, but it was inconsistent in its editorial policies, drawing on many contributors, as Notovich tried to fill each issue with material. Louise McReynolds, The News Under Russia’s Old Regime (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 132-133.

169 Vestnik Evropy 2 (1892), pp. 853-858.
In Arseniev’s opinion, the famine had uncovered a systemic problem in the Russian economy, which only a program of reforms on the scale of the 1860s could remedy. He proposed two avenues of action. On the one hand, Russian agriculture’s systemic backwardness required long-term and complex legal reforms. On the other, the famine’s immediate aftermath demanded urgent and energetic cooperation between the state, society, and individuals. Most importantly, only a commitment to reforms from above could begin to address the problem of rural poverty. Instead, Arseniev complained, the conservative press attacked zemstvo inefficiency while ignoring the fact that local authorities did not have sufficient powers of enforcement because recent laws had severely curtailed them.

Arseniev emphasized that tax collections and redemption payments took place directly after the fall harvests when grain prices were lowest. The local police had conflicting loyalties. Although zemstvo boards urged the police to enforce contributions to relief granaries, officers of the law obeyed the Ministry of Interior, which enforced local revenue quotas. The governors focused on fulfilling their provinces’ arrears, so the peasants were forced to settle their debts before they could dispose of their grain for other purposes. Consequently, after each harvest the granaries remained empty, while in the winter and spring, the prices for seed often doubled or even tripled.170 Arseniev saw the Russian economy as an organism with a chronic illness that had become acute in 1891-

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170 Ibid., pp. 859-865.
92. In such a case, one treated first the aggravated condition, i.e. the famine, and afterwards attacked the source of the initial weakness, the national economy.  

Arseniev agreed with the parallels that Nizhnii Novgorod Governor N. M. Baranov drew between the zemstvos during a famine and the military service corps during a war. The quartermaster always got blamed for shortfalls in provisions, the governor had argued, although it was much more difficult to feed armies than to move them. That was probably why there had been so many famous field generals, but so few quartermaster-generals. In addition, multi-million-men armies did not have families with them, as did the peasants. Often when an army moved, it used the enemy’s supplies, and the service corps preparations ahead of time. The provincial and local zemstvos lacked all of these conditions and did not deserve the criticism directed at them by the conservative press.  

Robbins has argued that although the zemstvos did tremendous work in combating the famine, they did so as state extensions and the land captains played a crucial role in coordinating state and local efforts. Without imperial funds, private efforts were woefully insufficient. Arseniev combined praise with caution. As he defended Leo Tolstoy’s soup kitchens and expanded his proposals for the scope of private relief, he also argued that private aid was not mutually exclusive but quite compatible with state aid. The state would assure a minimum subsistence, while private efforts could take care of other needs such as extra food for children, heating, clothing, shoes, and other

171 Vestnik Evropy 3 (1892), p. 400.
172 Vestnik Evropy 2 (1892), pp. 867-868.
necessary items. Perhaps this would entail some waste of funds, but the alternative—total state control—would kill private initiative. Arseniev compared Tolstoy’s soup kitchens to practical schools. Most provincial governments had no time to learn how to establish them, but individuals could visit privately-run soup kitchens, learn through observing them or working in them, and then transplant the institutions. Soup kitchens were conceptual centers from which threads ran in all directions. With time, private aid could develop into areas such as child care, care for the sick and elderly, aid to domestic and cottage industry, and the repurchase of cattle and implements. Arseniev cautiously added: “Having come out in full support of total freedom for private aid, we in no way mean to overlook state efforts, which dwarf private initiative (72 vs. 4 million rubles).” Ever circumspect, Arseniev did not want to give the censors any excuses to descry belittlement of the state’s contribution to the relief effort.

In its own way, public participation in the famine relief constituted a new “going to the people” movement and the former has not received sufficient scholarly attention. This time, however, the moral duty manifested itself in material aid, not calls to revolution. Cooperation between state and society was essential, Arseniev wrote—one effort had to reinforce the other. State aid was quantitatively indispensable, but private aid was morally necessary. The essential private contributions, however, were not the small donations, charity balls, or the “annoying solicitation lists,” but the quiet, small deeds that demanded personal sacrifices and took place hourly all over the stricken areas. With more than a hint of populism, Arseniev encouraged Russians to abandon the city

lifestyle, to move into the rural wilderness, to devote all of their time to learning about the rural situation and the population’s needs, to hear the children’s cries, and see the mothers’ tears and to live with the gaunt faces. All of these constituted a personal investment in the struggle against the famine. Thousands were doing it quietly, Arseniev argued, finding their reward and support in no more than the persistent execution of their moral duty: “Whoever has seen at least one of [these helpers] will have no doubts about our present and future.”

Arseniev believed that the crop failure would not have struck with such force had rural productivity been higher and the population better equipped to deal with food shortages. This clearly demonstrated that zemstvo influence on economic life had to increase. Arseniev held up Moscow Province as an example of spreading enlightenment among the peasantry. At the source of the rural crisis lay not the peasant’s conservative nature, he argued, but the absence of know-how and money. Better crop yields required more fertilizer, which required more cattle, which required larger pastures and grass-sowing. The economy was a like an organism that had multiple sources of strength and nourishment.

Moscow Province had established the Provincial Economic Council and the Provincial Economic Bureau in 1890. The Council had a division for agronomy and for cottage production. Its principal goal was to establish a beneficial proportion between crop lands and pastures and to maximize the yields of both. The chief agronomist and his assistant oversaw the project. The provincial agronomist participated in zemstvo

175 Ibid., pp. 921-923.
meetings and monitored grain sales and trade in implements. He published a guide to
grass seeding and the amelioration of pastures, lectured on agronomy to local instructors,
and took measures to combat the winter crop worm. His assistant rented a plot of land in
the Klin District for an experimental field to use as a model. The agronomical section
educated and popularized technical novelties in the areas of implements, seed quality,
crops, and grass sowing. The peasants were already reacting favorably, but they needed
more funds. The Moscow zemstvo, an excellent example to imitate for its practical
contributions, provided what Arsenev believed was lacking most in agriculture: know-
how and funds.176

In the late spring of 1892, specialized studies of the famine’s causes began to
appear in print, some of which proposed reforms, which Arseniev examined in detail. He
wrote specifically of two major works, *The State of Provisions* published by the Moscow
provincial zemstvo and the *Harvest of 1891 in Nizhni Novgorod Province*, published by
that province’s zemstvo. According to Arseniev, both works agreed that the peasantry’s
general impoverishment began long before the recent crop failure. The economic
organism’s immunity had already been depleted to a minimum, which is why it
succumbed so rapidly. A series of crop failures, unemployment and decreasing wages,
the shrinking of pastures, epizootics, and fires brought on the chronic malady. How could
the state break the vicious cycle?177 In his memoirs, Arseniev recorded a zemstvo “lunch”
he had attended in the summer of 1892 in St. Petersburg, which explored possible

176 *Vestnik Evropy* 3 (1892), pp. 392-399.
answers: “land shortage, the peasants’ legal status, their ignorance and alienation, and all forms of help within the zemstvo’s powers.”178

In the summer of 1892, Arseniev asked whether Senate audits and inspections were expedient ways to examine the causes of the calamity and to propose preventive measures for the future? From one point of view, Senate commissions were the best ways to organize and digest the enormous quantity of useful material collected locally over the past few years. On the other hand, private institutions, such as the Free Economic Society, would do a better job if the state supported them. However, reorganizing statistics on paper would achieve nothing, Arseniev argued, and only a live exchange of opinions among expert witnesses would bring results. He maintained that audits would be useful, but insufficient by themselves. Their success would depend above all on the attitude with which they were conducted. They would have to explore institutions and norms, not the conduct of individuals. Once again, Arseniev noted that their objective had to be the preparation for large-scale economic reforms. He also proposed to examine the shortfalls of current laws. But all this would yield results no earlier than in two years, which was too long to wait.

In the immediate wake of the famine, Arseniev sought closure—an event that would allow zemstvo representatives to exchange opinions about crisis management and perhaps to work out a preventive program. To this end, he proposed a conference in St. Petersburg to host provincial administration and zemstvo officials from all regions of the empire, regardless of their recent crop situation. The free exchange of ideas would

determine the famine’s causes and work out measures against a similar calamity in the future. This, Arseniev felt, was the most practical preventive policy. In this, he anticipated the demands of what is called the “liberation movement,” but these closing thoughts, not the main thrust of his argument.

Alexander III’s death in 1894 inspired a revival of the reform movement in the zemstvos symbolized by nine addresses asking for institutionalized consultative zemstvo representation in the capital, which Nicholas II curtly refused. This precipitated the development of inter-zemstvo contacts on a national level. The unsanctioned colloquia were intended as a substitute for the suppressed annual zemstvo conferences—the first and only one of which took place in Nizhnii Novgorod in the summer of 1896—and their permanent bureau. According to Terence Emmons, these were the institutions out of which Russia’s political parties would later emerge, but the conclusions that Arseniev drew from the famine relief experience did not contain a strong political component.

According to official state figures, of almost 150 million rubles used in the relief effort, 126.5 million came from the state budget, about 7 million from the Imperial Provisions Fund and approximately 15 million from private contributions. Could the relief effort have cost less? Arseniev did not think so, because the laws according to which relief functioned no longer suited the rural economy. Information-gathering techniques were imperfect, local authorities did not possess sufficient independence to implement effectively rapid relief, and the laws requiring the storage of emergency provisions were hopelessly outdated.

179 Vestnik Evropy 6 (1892), pp. 824-827.
In January 1892, the minister of interior had ordered a revision of the national food-stuffs statute. The “Official Report of the Special Committee on Famine Relief,” published in June 1892, admitted that there was a shortage of local institutions to make and execute on-the-spot decisions. Arseniev had predicted all along that this was a serious handicap. One man could not know thousands of people in every volost, Arseniev argued. He had to depend on his appointed aides, the starshina and the starosta, who were often incompetent and indifferent. Central rule proved even more ineffective by alienating the suspicious peasantry, which complicated information-gathering. The amount of responsibilities placed upon the land captains’ shoulders overwhelmed them. The typhus epidemic’s rapid and unpredictable spread in the wake of the famine also demanded functional local organizations to assess the infection’s initial signs and to organize channels for outside medical help. When this was not done, or when the epidemic was covered up, the same reason was responsible: insufficient local organization to provide instant aid.181 Richard Robbins wrote of the same phenomenon: “The lack of local personnel made the task of aiding the poor extremely difficult and increased the possibility of error and abuse.”182

When conservatives argued that the self-governing all-estate volost pre-dated the legal-administrative reforms and made no sense after the entire edifice of local government had changed and that it went against estate privilege and administrative guardianship, Arseniev disagreed—since “the sun had shown its spots,” it was time to

181 Vestnik Evropy 7 (1892), pp. 401-404.
continue the reforms. The volost would answer directly and exclusively to the district zemstvo, an arrangement that would still leave both within the center’s control.\footnote{Vestnik Evropy 7 (1892), pp. 406-407.}

According to Boris Veselovskii, the issue of smaller self-government units as well as inter-zemstvo contacts reappeared on the zemstvo agenda in 1891 as a result of breakdowns in local famine relief.\footnote{B. B. Veselovskii. Istoria zemstva za sorok let (Cambridge, England: Oriental Research Partners, 1973), II, p. 375.} Still, throughout the 1890s, communication was a one-way process as the center requested information from the provinces only when it needed it. In his most meaningful act, the new minister of agriculture A. S. Ermolov sent out a questionnaire to all provincial zemstvos in 1894 asking the deputies to comment on broad issues of agriculture.\footnote{Thomas S. Fallows, “The Russian Fronde and the Zemstvo Movement: Economic Agitation and Gentry Politics in the Mid-1890’s,” Russian Review 44:2 (1985), p. 126.} He continued this tradition in the 1890s and G. M. Hamburg has compared the results of these local committee meetings to the French 

\textit{cahiers de doléances}—the only example of a systematic attempt to consult rural society.\footnote{G. M. Hamburg, “The Russian Nobility on the Eve of the 1905 Revolution,” Russian Review 38:3 (1979), p. 335.}

In the summer of 1892, the Ministry of Interior ordered governors and relief committees to examine central questions concerning the emergency grain supply, many of which had direct bearing on local administration. Which local institutions should oversee the reserves? Which should compute and maintain grain elevator levels? What was the most effective organization of local distribution? How to identify the neediest households? How to maintain exact household statistics? The ministry even organized provincial conferences composed of local officials, zemstvo members, and other

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\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{183} Vestnik Evropy 7 (1892), pp. 406-407.
\end{thebibliography}
knowledgeable individuals to discuss these problems. After reviewing the results, Robbins found that there was general agreement on one point—in the future, institutional arrangements governing relief operations ought to link the zemstvos and the state in such a way as to facilitate a joint operation. Few government officials claimed that the state alone could manage local relief and few zemstvo members suggested that local self-government could handle the job by itself.  

However, the Special Committee Report of June 1892 drew insufficiently on this strong sense of mutual dependence. It proposed the establishment of district-level institutions to oversee reserves in times of plenty as well as specially appointed provincial and district commissions in times of crop failures. Further, the zemstvo boards would oversee the grain stores, the land captains would supervise lists of the needy, and governor-appointed individuals would oversee the distribution of relief. Arseniev argued that this system moved even further away from the local level. How could the committee that examined so many local failures come to such a conclusion, he asked? How could it have missed that the relief problem’s center of gravity was on the local level, and that only proximity could fix the problem?

Arseniev argued against the ordinary/extraordinary separation of relief structures. Extraordinary situations demanded not extraordinary measures, but elastic bodies that could immediately increase their cadres in response to pressing needs, a capability that only local institutions possessed. Their tradition of glasnost and proximity to the land guaranteed distribution that was more efficient.

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Conservatives had argued that zemstvo efficiency was unpredictable and therefore undependable because personal abilities dictated too much. There was only one solution: to seek the right men. To this, Arseniev replied that the quartermaster’s office, which the conservative press proposed as an alternative, lacked the local sense of responsibility. If the governor’s administration was more competent in maintaining reserves, he argued, then it should take over full responsibility for doing so. If not, local, experienced hands should implement relief during times of crisis. Nobody was born a zemstvo member, Arseniev wrote, peasants and nobles acquired this experience through devotion to their locales. The exceptions to this rule validated it. Was it not clear from the famine that the key to effective relief lay in attracting fresh, new forces and creating new regulations for their activity? Small, local self-governing bodies should constitute these forces during ordinary times and private associations in times of crisis.

The conservative press also cautioned against grain loans for fear that peasants may interpret them as grants. In order to discourage this attitude, local authorities ordered forced inventories of peasant households. What message did these “verification of lists” send to the village, Arseniev asked? He argued that when officials ransacked cellars, barns, and stoves, they treated the peasant not as head of a household, but as a shadowy and suspicious beggar. He turned into a defendant and his possessions into exhibits awaiting official judgment: were they essential or superfluous? The authorities bred mutual suspicion and increased the demoralization that hunger had already caused.

Arseniev proposed broad agricultural credit and comprehensive insurance programs as pillars of a new agricultural policy. Communes would repay the initial loans
with time. Some of the credit that aimed at general agricultural improvement would pay for itself indirectly as it decreased peasant tax arrears. In the long run, the zemstvos, being instruments of economic policy, would have to take upon themselves a major part of this reform’s implementation. Creditworthiness must not be the exclusive condition for loans. Many peasants after the famine were without collateral, but not indigent. They had sold their cattle, but were healthy and perfectly capable of working off their loans. The state should neither treat them as beggars, nor question their right to aid.

However, legal revisions were insufficient by themselves to prevent similar calamities from happening in the future. Arseniev argued that an income tax was necessary to ease the burden on the peasantry. Bunge’s ministry had considered it, but abandoned the plan under conservative pressure. Novosti led the new opposition by arguing that all property, inheritance, and businesses were already taxed, so the new excise would fall on bureaucrats and professionals and would become a tax on intellectual productivity. Moskovskie vedomosti doubted that the state could accurately calculate private income. Arseniev proposed to exempt low incomes from taxes and to take into consideration family size, constancy of employment, stable income, and the implementation of progressive rates. This meant that an owner of one acre of land would pay nothing on it, whereas an owner of 100 acres would pay proportionately more. As for intellectual labor, a tax should apply for its remuneration above a certain sum. High incomes, Arseniev argued, often paid for “needless luxuries, fantasies, and schemes,” so fixed income from capital and property would be taxed higher than wages. In other words, the tax system would reward productive labor. Most western European
governments, except for France, already had this arrangement by the 1890s. For Arseniev, supporting a more just distribution of taxes was proof of Russian liberalism’s universal appeal—it did not favor the “third estate” at the expense of the peasantry.

With the tax proposals, Arseniev had restated his 1882 program in full, but this time the detail was much richer and the accent fell on economics. He looked to the West for examples of how to organize and implement taxation. He looked to Russia’s own experience with local self-government to justify a continuing policy of decentralization and economic democratization. Arseniev saw clearly the fundamental paradox in center-local relations. Could local government institutions—either corporate or ‘all-estate”—flourish given both the pressures from the center and the low rural economic and cultural levels that inhibited the growth of an educated and politically conscious provincial society? The process would not be easy, but Arseniev believed in learning by doing.

A peasant looking at the storm clouds that passed over Russia in 1891-92 saw no silver lining. The meager harvest and the ensuing famine had increased the peasant tax arrears and cost approximately 163 million rubles in aid. The famine, like the defeat in 1856, reminded the world of Russia’s economic weakness and demonstrated the social costs of forced modernization. While industrial productivity increased on average by 50 percent between 1883 and 1892, agricultural production remained the same. Most contemporaries and later scholars agreed that the village footed the bill for Russia’s rapid

188 Vestnik Evropy 7 (1892), pp. 405-410.
industrial development. The rural population was so heavily taxed that it had no agricultural or financial reserves to amortize the poor harvest of 1891. It was widely believed, and readily argued by Vyshnegradskii’s critics, that his policies caused the disaster in the countryside. The Tsar dismissed him for health reasons—in fact the minister’s health was bad—and freed the last rung of the ladder for Sergei Witte, who not only followed his predecessors’ policies, but accelerated them. As economic historian Olga Crisp has put it, Vyshnegradskii only harnessed Russia’s productive forces—it was Witte who extended them.

Sergei Witte (finance minister 1892-1903) had a thorny path ahead of him, a quest full of battles, great hopes, and failures. When he came into office, he had no intention of balancing industrialization with agricultural development. Meanwhile the complexity of Russia’s socio-economic situation brought forth many alternative theories—Witte took the financial helm just as the debate about the courses of socio-economic development began in the wake of the 1892 famine. Rifts between the theoretical camps deepened and the debate became increasingly polarized, which gave to the 1890s the fervor of conscience and intellectual acerbity characteristic of ideological battlefields.

As Arseniev’s contributions demonstrate, in reaction to the famine of 1892 the Vestnik group distinguished itself by evaluating Russia’s economic development since the 1860s through the lens of achievements in local self-government, which, Arseniev firmly believed, were crucial components of economic well-being. The economic

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democratization that he envisioned would eventually replace the peasant commune.

Sergei Witte came into office with completely different standards by which to evaluate progress, but his agricultural learning curve became steeper as his tenure continued. By the time he fell from office in 1903, his views on the peasant problem coincided in many instances with those of the Vestnik group. For example, he appreciated not only the importance of agricultural development, but the peasantry’s legal status and ownership rights as its foundation. State and society, at least its liberal members, were not locked in hopeless opposition—there were points of convergence. However, the differences between Witte’s views and Vestnik pointed back to the zemstvo.

Chapter 7
The Battle over the Zemstvo in the 1890s

The zemstvo’s economic responsibilities were at the center of Arseniev’s thinking in the early 1890s. The Vestnik arguments also suggest that the dominant debate during the decade was not about the zemstvo’s political promise, but about its role as an administrative tool as a result of which it became a battleground of very powerful and uncompromising interests. The central issue was no longer whether local self-government was viable, but what, or whose, purpose it served. For the liberals, the zemstvo was an alternative source of civic and economic education. This was not how the Finance Ministry saw things in the 1890s and Witte’s attempts to simultaneously strong-arm and appease local self-government forms an integral sub-plot in the dominant debate during the 1890s over the zemstvo’s role during modernization. For Witte, local self-government
was inconvenient because of its opposition to the Finance Ministry’s plans. He explained his views on this subject in detail when he published *Autocracy and the Zemstvo* in 1899.

Witte’s symbiosis with the Russian liberals in the 1890s has been understudied by historians and this chapter is a brush stroke to fill in this blind spot. His views on peasant issues converged with those expressed in Leonid Slonimskii’s articles which argued that the peasant commune did not have to be artificially preserved or forcefully eliminated, but given the legal opportunities to evolve. Slonimskii’s crusade to “eliminate the peasantry’s special status” focused on land rights, not on increased participation in local self-government, which was Arseniev’s emphasis. The two strands formed the double helix of *Vestnik* liberalism. Witte chose to update the peasantry’s legal status and to begin implementing a series of other reforms that the *Vestnik* group had lobbied for years, but he stopped short of empowering the peasantry’s self-government. As a progressive bureaucrat, Witte unintentionally implemented Slonimskii’s rural program point for point. The finance minister’s *Memorandum on Peasant Affairs* was a word for word gloss on Slonimskii’s central suggestions for reform. Therefore, the fate of Witte’s agricultural reforms is a good indicator of how probable it was that Slonimskii’s program would have succeeded in late 19th century Russia. Witte was a liberal test case and his failure was indicative of the Russian state’s unwillingness to deal with rural stagnation before the 1905 revolution.

Frederick Starr has argued that “undergovernment” historically characterized the Russian provinces. He divided into two categories reformist thoughts and actions vis-à-vis provincial rule. On the one hand, decentralization granted provincial bureaucrats more
powers and initiative without turning functions over to local public control. On the other, self-government empowered as far as possible local elective bodies to manage public affairs in the provinces and districts. Witte did not conflate the two categories and understood decentralization as giving local bureaucrats more power and autonomy in using the zemstvos as executive agents. Whatever powers local officials or bodies might exercise would necessarily be delegated to them from above and be subject to revocation. Konstantin Arseniev argued that smaller, all-estate local units could make the local administrative structure more organic by absorbing the peasants into it en masse. Leonid Slonimskii made a complimentary argument that endowing them with clear property rights would guarantee the social stability of this lowest administrative rung. This was a unique Russian approach to administration. The Russian government failed to achieve it and paid the ultimate price. Dorothy Atkinson has argued that there was peasant resentment of the zemstvo as a tax authority even before 1905 and with the conservative reaction of the gentry deputies after 1905, peasant apathy intensified. William Rosenberg traced this hostility all the way to 1917 when peasant indifference and hostility eroded the zemstvos even before the Bolsheviks abolished them. The zemstvo thus proved to be a failure as an instrument of political amalgamation, but

smaller all-estate units could have worked as socio-economic integrators, as Arseniev had argued since the early 1880s.

What interests competed for control of the zemstvo? Roberta Manning has argued that the “gentry crisis” which gained force in the 1890s caused the rise of tensions between the zemstvos and the state. Alienated by the “newly modernized and upgraded norms of official life,” and threatened by a bureaucracy whose pursuit of great power status and economic modernization was undercutting its economic base, the nobility increasingly eschewed traditional careers in government service to return to the provinces and take up local affairs and sought to turn the zemstvos into its rural fortifications. At the same time, the state bureaucracy tried to use the zemstvos as means to extend government into the rural areas that were traditionally “undergoverned” and left to peasant assemblies and the gentry’s elective institutions.197 Manning’s argument implies that the two goals were incompatible and their clash resulted in the great political conflict of the period between 1890 and 1905. The gentry’s “counterassault” adopted a liberal veneer, which concealed the real institutional and socio-economic tensions until it was stripped off by the revolution of 1905.

W. E. Mosse has also argued that the gentry were on the defensive within state administration. The professional bureaucrats, many of them legally trained, slowly took over the commanding heights of the Russian economy. The State Council was neither an aristocratic body, nor predominantly landowning, but composed largely of hereditary

non-landed nobles, so that by the end of the 19th century, the civil bureaucracy in the central agencies was “an essentially self-perpetuating group” drawing its recruits from among the sons of non-noble officials and nobles divorced from the land.198

The zemstvo was the nobility’s last stronghold by the 1880s and this explains why Witte was initially distrustful of local self-government. Thomas S. Fallows has argued that the zemstvos constituted the last vestiges of a Russian *Fronde* and were sources of anti-Witte agitation in the 1880s and 1890s before the liberation movement emerged from their social matrix.199 Ironically, Witte defended the peasantry’s interests in order to justify his policies to his opponents within the government. Had he succeeded he would have broken whatever was left in the 1890s of the gentry opposition’s backbone. In this light, Witte’s belated appreciation of peasant interests was a tactical move. His realization that massive peasant impoverishment could undo his “system,” as the famine did Vyshnegradskii’s in 1892, also suggested ulterior motives. Witte, like his predecessors, still operated on the assumption that the peasantry was a silent, patient, and eternal economic base at the expense of which the state could experiment with modernizing schemes. Nevertheless, Witte’s thinking about the peasantry followed remarkably similar lines to that of the *Vestnik* group even if the motives differed. By the late 1890s, it seemed that Russian society in general was turning back to the peasant problem, which was evident also in the emphasis placed on equating the landed gentry’s interests with those of the rural population during formal and informal zemstvo and agriculturalist

meetings that took place starting in 1895 and in which Arseniev and Pypin participated.200

The definition of the zemstvo’s local functions, accountability, and its broader role in Russian society became caught up in political issues by the mid-1890s when Russia’s constitutionalist movement sought its Archimedean point. George Putnam has argued that during this decade “idealistic liberalism in defense of individual liberties and cultured creativity against the pressures to conform to the ideas and behavior of the majority, seemed at best an untimely statement of noble principles and at worst an expression of the self-interest and uneasy conscience of the privileged.”201 It is impossible to apply this characterization to the Vestnik group because it emphasized economic activity as the key to social participation. Moreover, there was always something of John Locke’s distrust of enthusiasm in the group’s political sensibilities. The Vestnik liberals were active zemstvo members who experienced firsthand the pressures under which this institution evolved in the 1890s. As the gentry and the Finance Ministry faced off on issues of control over local self-government, the rift created a window for the Vestnik cause of increasing the peasantry’s participation in the zemstvos. However, by the end of his term Witte emphasized property rights over zemstvo participation, thereby anticipating Stolypin’s reforms, splitting the liberal agenda, and favoring productivity over economic independence.

200 Ibid., pp. 128-137.
As hard as he tried to avoid dealing directly with rural issues, Witte kept running up against the agrarian question because his “system” depended on peasant taxes. It took Witte half of his tenure to appreciate the problem. In an 1890 letter to Nikolai Vorontsov-Dashkov, the finance minister admitted, “the commune has a traditional character in Russia and it is not worth destroying it under any circumstances because autocracy depends on it.”202 As he later admitted in his memoirs: “When I was appointed finance minister, I was acquainted with the peasant question in a very shallow manner… In my first years, I strayed and experienced a certain sympathy for the commune reminiscent of Slavophilism. But once I became the mechanic of a complex machine called the finances of the Russian Empire, I would have been a fool not to understand that the machine would not work without fuel. The fuel is Russia’s economy, and since the peasantry is the predominant part of the population, [I had to] explore this area.”203

The new finance minister was not the only one who paid insufficient attention to rural problems. In their review of the year 1892, all the major dailies concentrated on industrial and protectionist concerns. Only Russkie vedomosti overcame short-term amnesia and placed agricultural concerns on its front page. “Our economic situation in the preceding year,” the article read, “was under the depressing influence of the agricultural crisis. The crisis has demonstrated the danger of allowing the rural economy to develop naturally.”204

202 RGB, f. 531, op.1, d. 72, l.1.
204 “Poslednie dva neurozhainykh goda vydviniul na pervyi plan interesy selskogo naselenia i zemledelcheskoji promyshlennosti,” Russkie vedomosti, 30 January 1893.
Vestnik Evropy was, of course, the other exception. Leonid Slonimskii focused on the peasantry’s legal and economic conditions. Slonimskii pointed to two principal problems in 1892. In his review of the anonymous (A. S. Ermolov’s) The Poor Harvest and the National Misfortune, Slonimskii wrote: “Nowhere else does such a consistent and systematic disorder exist between theory and practice, between ideas and facts, between goals and results as with us.”

He was especially critical of new calls for further research into rural conditions when the central problem had been identified long ago and demanded action, not further study. In reaction to major economic and social disasters, he argued, Russian intellectuals produced torrents of abstract theoretical proposals that dried up as soon as the initial excitement ended. At the center of agricultural concerns remained the commune, which he saw as a remarkably protean institution that easily adapted to climatic and socio-economic circumstances. Therefore the object of agricultural reform was neither to eliminate nor to preserve it, but to give it the legal and economic incentives to adapt itself to local conditions, to dissolve in some places and evolve in others. There were instances when statisticians mistook “the evolution of the communal-land idea” for private ownership.

Slonimskii’s central argument was that the commune was not an ethical institution that sustained a moral economy and that such an interpretation demonstrated ignorance of the peasantry’s geographical, financial, and economic conditions and interests. This was the insight that Sergei Witte lacked when he became finance minister. However, once his natural acumen for details and figures became liberated from his

illusory optimism about industrial self-fertilization, it led him to the same conclusions in the late 1890s.

Witte’s first major policies in 1893 concerned State Bank reform, negotiations with Germany over tariffs, and the preparation of the monopoly on alcohol. The press validated Slonimskii’s predictions—the peasant question all but disappeared from the daily press squeezed out by macroeconomic problems. As Richard Robbins has noted, during the 1890s the Ministry of Agriculture was reduced to gathering information on rural conditions while the Finance Ministry determined the direction of the state.\footnote{Richard G. Robbins, Jr. \textit{Famine in Russia, 1891-1892} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), p. 180.}

Witte’s first agricultural move was a formalistic one: a review of rural statutes. He supported the law of 14 December 1893 requiring the approval of a two-thirds majority for individuals to leave the commune. He was also a staunch supporter of the commune as a traditional pillar of socio-political stability in Russia and in this he echoed the position of some contributors to \textit{Birzhevye vedomosti} and \textit{Novoe vremia}.\footnote{\textit{Birzhevye vedomosti}, 10, 13, and 17 November 1893; and \textit{Novoe vremia}, 26 March, 21 November, 9 December 1893.} By contrast, other articles saw in the commune the “bane of the industrious and of agricultural progress.”\footnote{\textit{Novoe vremia}, 21, 31 August, 2 September 1893.}

In general, the treatment of the peasant question in the dailies was vague, inconsistent, and confused. The only issue upon which the papers agreed—it seemed almost by default—was the elimination of restrictions on colonization to compensate for the Peasant Bank’s poor performance and the peasantry’s inability to accept its terms of
mortgage.\textsuperscript{210} \textit{Novoe vremia} advocated resettling only the poorest peasants and argued that only an “expert administrative hand” could organize this properly.\textsuperscript{211} In Sergei Witte, Russia had such an administrative expert, but, in the early stages of his tenure, Witte’s economic views reflected the general social confusion evident in the dailies regarding the peasant question.

Leonid Slonimskii in August 1893 summarized the views he had worked on throughout the 1880s and early 1890s. He suggested a realistic approach to the agrarian question that the state could take without compromising its ideology. His article took the form of a book review of \textit{Sketches of Our Post-Reform Economy} in which populist economist Nikolai Danielson blamed Russia’s agricultural problems on the capitalization of her agricultural market and the outflow of large portions of that capital into industry. Slonimskii saw it differently: “Economists do not notice the constant destructive influence of traditional jurisprudence and assign this influence to some conscious, malicious plan, that the industrial class or ‘capitalism’ pursues in modern times.”\textsuperscript{212}

Slonimskii agreed with Danielson that a new production-for-market economy had established itself in Russia, but, unlike Danielson, he did not see its commercial effects as the main problem. Instead, he pointed to the judicial confusion it had created. Laws that used to apply to consumer classes, roughly one-fifth of the population, now applied to the peasantry also. The commune now undertook monetary exchanges and suffered financial penalties. It had to take into account supply and demand trends, negotiate contracts and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{210} Russkie vedomosti, 29 May, 2, 22 June, 3, 10 July 1893; Birzhevye vedomosti, 4 and 7 December 1893.
\item \textsuperscript{211} Novoe vremia, 14, 21, 29 March 1893.
\item \textsuperscript{212} L. Z. Slonimskii, “Ekonomicheskiiia reformy i zakonodatelstvo,” \textit{Vestnik Evropy} 8 (1893), p. 735.
\end{itemize}
orders, and deal with mortgages and foreclosures. The French and Italian civil codes anticipated the legal aspects of the rural economy, including microeconomic exchanges, loans, and mortgages. In Russia, Emancipation left the old legal apparatus intact and it had become outdated. Therefore, the problem was not the appearance of “western European capitalism” in Russia, which Slonimskii considered a positive development, but the state’s tardiness in updating the legal structure to accommodate it, especially when it came to agriculture.

The first major legal revision that the Finance Ministry undertook under Witte concerned the passport system, which exerted an enormous drag on the free movement of labor. In February 1894, Witte and interior minister P. N. Durnovo submitted to the State Council a joint project that aimed to eliminate the anachronistic socio-economic division between the taxed and un-taxed estates and groups. All classes, with the exception of the clergy and military, would henceforth pay taxes and receive passports good for five years (10 years for privileged classes). Although it partially fulfilled the liberals’ expectations for tax reform, the passport project did not undermine the commune. The State Council approved the law and scheduled its implementation for the first day of 1895.

Despite his support for the commune, Witte also took practical measures that weakened it. When he justified the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railroad to Alexander III in 1893, he used as one of his arguments that the railway would bring to

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213 Ibid., pp. 736-737.
214 Ibid., p. 756.
life Siberia’s vast lands and decrease land shortage in parts of European Russia.\textsuperscript{216} Crown Prince Nicholas, who was Chairman of the Siberian Railroad Committee at the time, took Witte’s position. In addition to solving the land shortage in central Russia, colonization would also remove troublesome peasants to the empire’s borders, strengthen Russia’s strategic position in the Far East, and contribute to the Russification of the borderlands. In 1894, Witte increased migrant allowances by taking money from the Siberian Railroad Fund, set up medical and feeding points along the Cheliabinsk-Tiumen section, and sent groups of surveyors beyond the Urals to prepare land plots for the colonizers.\textsuperscript{217}

Still, Witte’s early legal reforms failed to give Russian agriculture the full freedom to accommodate itself to the new economic circumstances. Leonid Slonimskii had explored the legal aspects of the agricultural problem in a series of five articles published between 1883 and 1890. Although academic and dry at times, they shed precious light on a strain of liberal thinking about Russia’s eternal agrarian question. Furthermore, Slonimskii’s articles on the legal problems of Russian agriculture provide an insight into Witte’s misinterpretation of the agrarian question and the half-measures to solve it that characterized the first half of his tenure.

In a critical study published in January 1883, Slonimskii formulated what he believed was the central concern for post-Emancipation Russia, ownership of land, but he justified this with legal, not economic arguments. In the 18\textsuperscript{th} century, the new science of political economy wrested the question away from jurisprudence, but, with time, both

\textsuperscript{216} For an excellent discussion of the strategic purpose behind the railroad’s construction, see Steven G. Marks’ \textit{The Road to Power: The Trans-Siberian Railroad and the Colonization of Asian Russia, 1850-1917} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).
shirked the responsibility for providing any clear solutions to it. According to Slonimskii, by the second half of the 19th century, a dualistic attitude towards land ownership emerged among economists. Some thought of it as an “unjust monopoly” and theoretically condemned it. Others justified its de facto existence for practical reasons of political stability. Most economics textbooks defined “property” as “the right of a worker to the products of his labor,” but this definition did not accommodate land ownership. To solve this problem, some economists proposed collapsing the three constituents of productivity—nature (land), labor, and capital—into two by making land a form of (natural) capital. Nevertheless, these elusive games with definitions did not produce a constructive solution.

In order to avoid the semantic trap, some thinkers removed the debate on the origin of property from economics altogether. Konstantin Pobedonostsev, a lawyer by education, was one of them. He justified his position by comparing the debate to the one concerning the immortality of the soul and free will. Slonimskii condemned Pobedonostsev’s definition as a form of escapism that prevented human action in the realm of rational and man-made law. Slonimskii outlined the artificial dilemma in both political economy and legal theory. While some writers considered private property a de facto necessity and accepted it in the form in which it existed in Europe, others denied its philosophical legitimacy wholesale. Slonimskii proposed a “third way”—to examine the historical evolution and metamorphoses of the institution of private property.218

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218 L. Z. Slonimskii, “Pozemelnaia sobstvennost v teoriiakh ekonomistov i sotsiologov,” Vestnik Evropy 1 (1883), p. 239.
This tertiary path he found in the German historical economists Karl Knies, Johann Karl Rodbertus, and Adolph Wagner, although Slonimskii criticized the excesses of this school as exchanging “absolutism” for a “complete absence of principles.” His article appeared on the pages of *Vestnik Evropy* the same year as Witte published *The Principles of Railroad Tariffs for the Transportation of Goods* in which he also praised Adolph Wagner and Gustav von Schmoller for emphasizing the relativity of economic systems to historical eras. Slonimskii was less enthusiastic about Germany’s Younger Historical School than Witte, but he also admitted that the separation of individual interests from social and state interests was a necessary distinction. However, “the theorists of state socialism,” as Slonimskii referred to Wagner and Adolph Samter, made a mistake when they equated state and social interests and empowered governments to achieve things that only social utopias could accomplish. Slonimskii gave the historical economists credit for “relativising” the property question, but criticized them for leaving its development to “historical factors, as if that would naturally resolve the land ownership debate.”219 Witte on the other hand found this relativity liberating because it untied his hands to implement his version of modernization.

Slonimskii proposed approaching land ownership with a conceptual distinction. On the one hand, land was a spatial entity where people and things existed. On the other, it could be a source of revenue. In the first case, land had a political and social character, whereas the second instance concerned private and economic rights. Confusing these two aspects caused misunderstandings and conceptual muddle. Private ownership of land

219 Ibid., p. 245.
could only embrace its economic aspect, but could in no way touch upon its spatial character as a place of residence. The goal was therefore to clearly delineate the extent of private-economic property rights and socio-political spatial interests. The debate about land ownership often took on the form of a two monologues, Slonimskii argued, because proponents of private property saw in their position the principle of individual liberty, while those who saw land as a common human habitat failed to perceive its inherent economic utility.\footnote{For a discussion of the differences between early modern conceptions of communal property and modern “absolute property,” see John Brewer and Susan Staves, ed., \textit{Early Modern Conceptions of Property} (New York: Routledge, 1995).}

Slonimskii traced the problem’s roots to the Roman jurists, who created universal principles and then deductively fit specific laws under these broad categories. They conceived of property law as absolute and then included land ownership under it instead of “analyzing the facts, determining the real circumstances, and then creating the definitions.”\footnote{L. Z. Slonimskii, “Pozemelnyi vopros v Evrope i Rossii,” \textit{Vestnik Evropy} 3 (1885), p. 179.} The Europeans later divided items into real estate and personal property, but Slonimskii found that in the 1880s the Italian and French legal codes considered cattle, agricultural tools, seed, fertilizer, hay, bee hives, domestic pigeons, and fish in ponds, to be “functional” real estate. The confusion stemmed from the artificial division of property into real estate and private. Slonimskii argued for eliminating this anachronistic distinction and creating a separate category for land ownership. “The treatment of land as a form of private property, as one of the forms of capital, has proven destructive for owners, agriculture, and popular welfare all over Europe,” he wrote. By equating capital and land, European law facilitated the use of land for strictly financial
operations, although agricultural productivity could never compete with returns on capital. Slonimskii proposed therefore that “special land-tenure and inheritance laws regulate ownership giving significant space to the element of public interest.”

In medieval Europe, the nobility’s land rights depended on political power and also created them, whereas the peasantry’s use of the land was limited to labor and conditioned upon the payment of rents in one form or another. With the disappearance of feudalism, the peasantry began to receive full land rights. This was the process sweeping Western Europe in the 19th century. Russia was no different in how land ownership came into being through the right of labor and de facto occupation from the bottom and through political, state-apportioned right from the top. As in Europe, the political form’s triumph annulled all prior de facto use in favor of state interests.

However, Slonimskii noticed an unexpected agricultural trend in late 19th-century Europe. In France, individual ownership of land was yielding to larger possessions and the amount of land in independent farmers’ hands shrank as their number increased. In Prussia and Austria, individual farmers could not compete with latifundia and began to organize themselves into agricultural associations for the purpose of pooling together resources—“where the commune’s last traces had disappeared, its pale shadow was artificially recreated.” The European peasantry had had the chance to establish its private rights to land before resuscitating agricultural societies, whereas in Russia, Emancipation preserved the commune for tax purposes without restructuring the legal

222 Ibid., p. 189.
223 Ibid., p. 192.
principles underlying land ownership.\textsuperscript{225} Slonimskii suggested two reforms. First, he held up the American Homestead and Exemption Laws that prevented creditors from seizing peasant lands and property essential to labor and survival. Second, he suggested that taxation become a function of peasant income, not of property value.\textsuperscript{226}

Slonimskii maintained that by 1890, most Western European economists had agreed that three central problems undermined agriculture. First, the legacy of Roman law did not distinguish between land ownership and other private property. Second, agricultural communes yielded to “one-sided individualism.” And, third, land credit and tax law—especially concerning arrears—was outdated.\textsuperscript{227} Capitalism took advantage of agriculture because the law did not protect the rural laborer from claims on his property and the debtor from the creditor. Slonimskii suggested that agricultural law should become an entity unto itself, like commercial and railway law. The first step in this direction was to peg small agricultural credit to productivity and profits, as commercial and industrial credit was, not to property. The second step was to prevent justice from being a tool in the hands of creditors who, “armed with formal documents,” used the courts to strip peasants of their last possessions. The law had to place human survival above “capital yield,” and the courts had to consider the circumstances of every case. The “narrowly formalistic” interpretation of credit documents was inappropriate in an empire

\textsuperscript{225} This is a well known argument carried on by contemporary western scholars. See Janko Lavrin, “Populists and Slavophiles,” \textit{Russian Review} 21:4 (1962), pp. 307-317.
in which the majority of the population was illiterate. It was up to the state to introduce these changes, Slonimskii believed.

At no point did Slonimskii’s views threaten the gentry’s land rights. Nevertheless, he argued that in the mid-1880s the gentry’s attitude toward Emancipation switched from acquiescence to opposition. It had become abundantly clear to many landowners by this time that the economic foundation had forever disappeared from under their feet. The disgruntled din from the countryside grew louder in defense of “one-sided estate interests” that ignored the peasantry’s interests. Slonimskii accused the gentry of abandoning its natural ally, the peasantry, although the money economy threatened both. Unlike the German Junkers, the Russian landed nobility lacked the practical understanding of agriculture and was disorganized and impulsive in the pursuit of its interests. As a result, it simultaneously defended private property rights and opposed peasant ownership of land, protected its possessions and acted as an ally of commercial-industrial interests, demanded gentry privileges and supported protective tariffs. Therefore, the artificial antagonism of landowner and peasant existed for those who treated their land as a guarantee for bank loans and those who rapaciously sold commodities for immediate gain.

Slonimskii’s conclusion was that the agricultural crisis was a result of the nobility’s incapacity to run successful agricultural businesses and that the situation would not improve until the gentry changed its attitude towards the land and agricultural

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228 Ibid., pp. 331-337.
labor. Slonimskii’s views on the landed nobility were very close to those of Witte. When the finance minister listed the groups opposed to his plans for agricultural reforms, the landed nobility was high on that roll. He wrote that his attempts to curb the nobility’s privileges and the strength of communal land ownership “aroused against me all those nobles who hold to the principle that the Russian Empire exists in order to feed them.”

By the mid-1890s, Witte’s views on the source of Russia’s agricultural problems and the main obstacle to reform merged with what Slonimskii had argued on Vestnik’s pages. Indeed, it was not unusual to read on the pages of liberal dailies the landed nobility’s last rites and sacraments. Novosti wrote of the gentry’s doom and implied that credit was a wasted effort—only a new “economic course” could facilitate the “inevitable mobilization of land ownership.” Birzhevye vedomosti welcomed the influx of foreign capital that slowly transformed Russia into a semi-industrial country and demanded an end to “all indulgences for the gentry.” The paper presented its development formula: “the necessity of enlightenment, the encouragement of individual initiative, and the decrease of allowances.” Russkie vedomosti maintained that “the differentiation of the population, especially of the peasantry” was one of the reasons for land hunger. The paper was adamantly against gentry land ownership. Novoe vremia argued that Russia’s old estate structures had undergone an irreversible transformation that made

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230 Ibid., p. 333.
232 Novosti, 21, 31 October 1896.
233 Birzhevye vedomosti, 29 April, 9 May 1897.
234 Russkie vedomosti, 2, January, 7, 17 May, 21 June 1897.
property, not estate, the determinant of social status.\textsuperscript{235} It called for less state involvement in economic affairs and more private initiative, and it specifically opposed any leniency towards the landed gentry that had “no prospects.” The gentry’s future was to merge with the capitalists.\textsuperscript{236} \textit{Novoe vremia} supported the free and independent peasant landowner and consistently argued that “in the economic sense, a separate gentry question did not exist.”\textsuperscript{237} Suvorin’s daily maintained that the redemption payments exceeded by far the peasantry’s financial capabilities and asked the state to change its policy towards the countryside.\textsuperscript{238}

The poor harvest in the central provinces, malnutrition, and outbreaks of cholera reinvigorated calls for agricultural reforms in the second half of 1897. A burst of journalistic concern emerged. \textit{Novosti} proposed an income tax, which the \textit{Vestnik} group had consistently supported since the 1870s.\textsuperscript{239} \textit{Novosti} also turned against defenders of the commune preferring to see it as a “healthily flexible” institution capable of adapting to circumstances. In its present form, however, it could no longer save the peasants from ruin.\textsuperscript{240} \textit{Russkie vedomosti} also called for the elimination of indirect taxes, the brunt of which fell upon the peasantry, and supported the income tax.\textsuperscript{241} \textit{Novoe vremia} was the most outspoken on the peasantry’s plight, which the paper considered the most important economic issue: “The gentry has received new privileges, but nothing has been done for

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{235} \textit{Novoe vremia}, 27 February 1897.
\item \textsuperscript{236} \textit{Novoe vremia}, 6, 16 May 1897.
\item \textsuperscript{237} \textit{Novoe vremia}, 9 September 1897.
\item \textsuperscript{238} \textit{Novoe vremia}, 23 September, 2 December 1897.
\item \textsuperscript{239} \textit{Novosti}, 5 November 1897.
\item \textsuperscript{240} \textit{Novosti}, 2 December 1897.
\item \textsuperscript{241} \textit{Russkie vedomosti}, 18 December 1897.
\end{itemize}
the peasants.”242 Although industry was progressing, “almost everything was created by hands involved in agriculture.”243 The paper denied the gentry any economic role in agriculture and argued that the “untouchability” of the commune was no longer a guarantee against land hunger.244 Novoe vremia journalist Alexander Molchanov traveled around rural Russia and published articles with titles such as “Without Bread, Without Sustenance” and “Around the Harvest-less Provinces.” Novosti regularly published Alexander Engelgardt’s letters and articles in which he criticized the Finance Ministry’s policies, but stopped short of endorsing rural capitalism, but the editors balanced the famous writer’s contributions with opposite views. Journalist Vladimir Bystrenin reported that “under the ‘cover’ of the commune, variegated peasant groups had long ago evolved” and now struggled for economic survival.245 Birzhevye vedomosti called for a complete “reorganization of rural life into a capitalist mode, against the commune, and for introducing Russian agriculture to Western European culture.”246

By 1898, the press was clearly concerned with the state of Russia’s agriculture and in favor of further reforms. First of all, the pervasive discussion of agrarian issues indicates that the Marxist vs. populist debate was peripheral to more immediate and serious agricultural concerns. Second, the variety of solutions makes the Marxist vs. populist debate appear ideological and reductionist. Politics behind agricultural policies determined the real fault lines in the 1890s. The papers agreed on one thing, however.

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242 Novoe vremia, 1 January 1898.
243 Novoe vremia, 21 February 1898.
244 Novoe vremia, 20, 23 February 1898.
245 Novosti, 5 July, 15 January 1898.
246 Birzhevye vedomosti, 2 September 1898.
With remarkable unanimity they wrote off the landed gentry not only as an economic force, but also as an estate. Preserving the gentry was no longer an issue—a new, money-based elite was emerging in Russia. Obviously the landed nobility was not as mercurial in assessing the inevitability of own demise, and its last hope were its allies within the highest bureaucratic echelons against whom Sergei Witte was to wage the riskiest battle of his career.

By the mid-1890s, the finance minister faced stiff opposition from deputy interior minister V. K. Pleve and agriculture minister A. S. Ermolov. Witte’s defense strategy was based on two core beliefs. First, he maintained that the decline of prices on grain was not a global phenomenon but the result of Russia’s unpredictably bad harvests to whose aftereffects primitive agricultural technology and low productivity contributed significantly. Second, he believed that the main culprit of Russia’s agricultural woes was neither land hunger, nor the tax burden, but the peasant’s legal status—an argument that Leonid Slonimskii had been developing for a decade and a half. Witte came to believe that this legal muddle retarded the development of capitalism. For example, peasant rights of use of their allotments were different from their rights of possession over their property, which led to a form of legal schizophrenia. Ironically, the progressive idea of turning “a peasant from a half-man into a man” Witte borrowed from K. P. Pobedonostsev.\textsuperscript{247} In a letter to Nicholas II in October 1898, Witte argued that the

\textsuperscript{247} S. Iu. Witte, \textit{Vospominania} (Moscow, 1960), II, p. 524.
peasantry in its current state could not act as a support for the autocracy and that the peasants’ legal disorder was the “joy of all outspoken and hidden” enemies of the state.248

An outsider in Petersburg’s social and bureaucratic circles, Witte did not believe, as deputy interior minister Viacheslav Pleve did, that the nobility was autocracy’s firmest foundation. Instead, he envisioned a broadly and popularly based autocracy and to this end he argued for opening the noble ranks to the bourgeoisie and equating the peasantry with other estates.249 Witte’s peasant reform emphasized the estate’s legal status and education. The material aspects of peasant life remained beyond the Finance Ministry’s planning and therefore did not affect the gentry’s property.250 What was behind Witte’s abrupt turn to the legal question? It was a way to justify Russia’s agricultural problems that took the pressure off the Finance Ministry’s policies and placed it on the shoulders of the Agricultural and Justice Ministries. Witte was still a convinced proponent of industrialization to which end he had willingly sacrificed agricultural interests throughout the 1890s. To admit the shortcomings of his “system” would have undermined his position in the government. The legal aspect of agriculture was sure to deflect attention from foreign capital, European loans, and industrialization. It also guaranteed a slow and gradual reform process with the usual series of interminable commission and committee meetings to study the question.

Meanwhile, in 1898, Witte set out to eliminate collective responsibility for taxes. A. A. Polovtsev, a State Council member and Witte’s ally on agrarian questions, wrote

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248 Ibid., II, p. 527.
249 Ibid., II, pp. 526-527.
250 I. M. Strakhovskii, “Krestianskii vopros,” Nuzhdy derevni po raportam komitetov o nuzhdakh selskokhoziaistvennykh promyshlennostei (St. Petersburg, 1904), I, p. 100.
that the finance minister “was convinced that with the elimination of collective responsibility communal possession would also disappear.” The Finance Ministry and the Ministry of Internal Affairs both considered the peasants within their bailiwick, which significantly slowed down the reform process, as ministers blocked each other’s initiatives. Witte tried to bypass the problem by proposing to the State Council the creation of an inter-ministerial commission to prepare the agrarian reform, but interior minister I. N. Durnovo blocked this idea and Nicholas took no action on Witte’s proposal. That Witte’s loyalties remained with industry is borne out by one of his 1898 reports to the Tsar: “In exchange for agriculture being dependent on harvests, its dependence on the stimulating development of industry must come.” Witte firmly believed that industrial growth demanded “sacrifices,” which meant higher taxes on the peasantry. Witte lost the first round against his opponents who blocked his legal reforms. Meanwhile, financial concerns attracted his attention to problems of local self-government.

As Thomas Fallows has pointed out, zemstvo expenses grew rapidly from the mid-1890s on and “began to compete with state expenditures for the diminishing supply of revenues from the peasantry.” As a result, the central authorities, the Finance Ministry above all, began to consider ways to restrict the zemstvo’s welfare activities. After the introduction of land captains, the Ministry of Internal Affairs was kept au courant of

252 Ibid., p. 118.
zemstvo affairs while the Finance Ministry sent its own agents to oversee tax collections into the provinces. Vyshnegradskii had already established tax inspectors in the districts in 1885 and gave to provincial treasury directors the right to submit their remarks on the zemstvo budget to the governor’s office in 1890.

The beginning of Witte’s tenure as finance minister coincided with an increase in public works projects, many of which were holdovers from the famine. Throughout his tenure, the new finance minister tried his best to channel as many funds as possible into state coffers and to limit expenditure on items not contributing to industry. The zemstvos were already in debt to the state after the famine and Witte placed a tight rein on further treasury subsidies for public projects. In 1893, the Finance Ministry sent provincial officials to supervise zemstvo tax assessments. A law passed in 1895 ordered the zemstvos to deposit most of the funds not used for operating expenses into the treasury. In 1898, the Finance Ministry drafted Russia’s earliest progressive tax reform that freed all rural dwellers from industrial taxes thereby depriving the zemstvo of its claims on the handicraft taxes of peasants hiring no outside labor.254

Meanwhile, the press targeted only the Finance Ministry’s annual budgets and reports—as opposed to anything that emerged from the Agriculture or Interior Ministries—when it criticized what most intellectuals perceived as a downward turn in agriculture towards the turn of the century. Novoe vremia maintained that only the state could change the rural situation for the better, but the paper refused to prescribe any

remedies. Instead, Suvorin’s daily compared Russia’s agricultural development to “Riurik’s times.” \textsuperscript{255} Writer Konstantin Golovin characterized the situation in the following terms: “The doctors say that he is healthy, but the patient can’t get up.” \textsuperscript{256} By 1899, Witte also admitted the primacy of the agricultural question, as \textit{Russkie vedomosti} reported. \textsuperscript{257} However, he must have had tactical reasons for emphasizing the peasantry’s plight in order to overcome zemstvo opposition to his ministry’s projects and to avoid further inter-ministerial wrangling. Modern scholars such as Thomas Fallows have justified Witte’s caution—the increasing level of government interference in zemstvo affairs after 1890 and the rise of a unified zemstvo opposition was prompted primarily by internal rivalry between the Finance and Interior Ministries. \textsuperscript{258}

Having lost the first round to his conservative opponents, Witte reemphasized his views on the agrarian problem in his 1899 Report on State Revenues and Expenditures. That poor harvests did not produce such disastrous results in any other European country, Witte argued, demonstrated that the Russian peasantry had not developed an economy that could amortize low yields. Witte said nothing about the tax burden, but pointed once again to the peasantry’s vague legal status. \textsuperscript{259} He specifically targeted such institutions as corporal punishment, incarceration as a component of tax-collection, and outdated self-

\textsuperscript{255} Novoe vremia, 2 September 1899.
\textsuperscript{256} Novoe vremia, 26 November 1899.
\textsuperscript{257} Russkie vedomosti, 11 March 1899.
\textsuperscript{259} “Vsepoddanieishii doklad ministra finansov o gosudarstvennoi rospisi dokhodov i raskhodov na 1899 g.,” \textit{Vestnik finansov promyshlennosti i torgovli}, 1 (1899), p. 6.
government and court institutions.\textsuperscript{260} Exactly what he meant by the latter he did not specify. By the turn of the century, Witte developed a broad agricultural reform program based on six points: 1) a gradual reform of communal land holding; 2) the elimination of collective financial responsibility; 3) the abolition of corporal punishment; 4) limitations of land captains’ powers; 5) the elimination of the peasantry’s legal isolation; and 6) a reorganization of peasant self-government, courts, and the codification of local laws. Except for the conspicuous absence of an educational component, which was hardly within the Finance Ministry’s competence, the finance minister’s program was, point for point, the one that the \textit{Vestnik} group had pursued all along. As long as political issues remained taboo, the views of Russia’s progressive bureaucrats and liberals were converging under the pressure of economic necessity. Unfortunately, there is no hard evidence that Witte ever read \textit{Vestnik Evropy}.

Still, the zemstvo remained the apple of discord. In 1899, Witte published \textit{Autocracy and the Zemstvo} in which he argued that the principle of local self-government contradicted the monarchical principle. He vigorously denounced the zemstvo for its costliness and fiscal irresponsibility. He also prevailed on Nicholas II to replace interior minister Ivan Goremykin with deputy finance minister Dmitrii Sipiagin, which, according to Thomas Fallows, allowed the two ministries to “settle in an alliance that seemed to zemstvo leaders to mark the beginning of a conspiracy against them.” In June 1900, Witte and Sipiagin produced laws placing a 3 percent per annum limit on the increase of zemstvo budgets and removing the zemstvo from the organization of food relief. By

\textsuperscript{260} “Vsepoddaneishii doklad ministra finansov o gosudarstvennoi rospisi dokhodov i raskhodov na 1899 g.,” \textit{Vestnik finansov promyshlennosti i torgovli}, 1 (1899), pp. 8-9.
March 1902, the symbiotic ministries extended their influence over rural affairs by preparing a law eliminating collective responsibility for taxes.\textsuperscript{261}

Witte clearly understood the dramatic authority with which the right to tax and spend empowered the zemstvo. As Janet Hartley has pointed out, in the 1890s the most heated conflicts between central and local administrations concerned taxation and, in particular, the right to raise income to provide for education and healthcare.\textsuperscript{262} In Arseniev’s scheme, the state and the zemstvos would cooperate and develop together what projects local authorities would undertake. The state did not yet propose social legislation—the local administration took care of that. It was a cooperative effort and a unique form of social welfare on the local plane. There would be no opposition between the state and local administrations. In reality, the Finance Ministry’s financial interests often collide with those of the zemstvos.

In 1900, the effects of the general European economic recession finally reached Russia. Witte’s position became precarious and his influence began to wane in favor of his conservative opponents. The amount of economic analysis on the pages of the liberal dailies significantly decreased, which demonstrated their symbiosis with the Finance Ministry. Simultaneously, conservative publications, such as M. N. Katkov’s \textit{Moskovskie vedomosti} and Prince V. P. Meshcherskii’s \textit{Grazhdanin}, launched a crusade against the liberals and Witte.


Vestnik also cut down on its coverage of current economic issues. In the late 1890s, Leonid Slonimskii had engaged the Marxists in a debate about economic development and he would not return to peasant issues until 1904. One exception was his article against the conservative press, a staple Vestnik rubric, in May 1900. Slonimskii addressed a series of articles by writer Dmitrii Tsertelev in Moskovskie vedomosti that blamed the “nomadic petty bureaucratic intelligentsia” for severing the ties between the people and the Tsar. In an editorial article, Grazhdanin’s editor made a similar point by arguing that ministries had stamped out the last vestiges of independent activity within the empire. The conclusion was that the zemstvos and juries should be abolished and governors, aided exclusively by the land captains, should take over all local affairs. The conservatives even accused the landed gentry of collaborating with the bureaucrats by participating in local self-government.

Slonimskii defended Russia’s “newest” bureaucracy by arguing that each year the ministries “absorbed the best intelligent minds” and the majority of university graduates joined state chanceries. Every ministry, especially Finance and Agriculture, boasted many honest, bright, experienced, and talented writers and thinkers who made priceless contributions to their subjects and disseminated crucial practical knowledge among the public. It was best to leave agricultural development policy in their care (as opposed to the gentry), the countryside to the zemstvos, and justice to the juries, Slonimskii concluded.

264 Ibid., pp. 242-243.
265 Ibid., p. 244.
The trickle of economic coverage from the dailies indicated that despite its economic achievements, Russia remained a traditional and arbitrary autocracy whose policies were factors of court preferences. *Birzhevye vedomosti* all but stopped covering economic issues in 1900 and redirected its attention to education and foreign affairs. Between 1900 and 1903, the few articles that addressed the commune defended it. The paper abruptly changed its position in the spring of 1903, when it was clear that Witte’s days were numbered, and began to defend individual homesteads and *arteli*. *Russkie vedomosti* concentrated its attention on the industrial crisis and identified two explanations for it: the influx of foreign capital and the peasantry’s weak purchasing power. The paper maintained that Russia’s agriculture should depend on private, small-scale rural production units in the form of the commune, which the paper believed was worth preserving.

*Novoe vremia* began 1900 by declaring free labor the central economic issue “because the Russian people feels itself constrained by rusted fetters on the international market and even at home.” “Give it this freedom,” the paper demanded and admitted that agriculture was in a poor state while the economy was essentially healthy. By 1902, Suvorin’s daily gave up on attempts to influence the Finance Ministry’s industrialization and financial policies and proposed “raising [the interests of] agriculture above

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267 *Birzhevye vedomosti*, 20, 22, 24 February, 4, 15, 16 March, 5, 27 April, 3 April, 1 May 1903.
268 *Russkie vedomosti*, 9, 15 December 1901; 20 February 1902.
269 *Russkie vedomosti*, 26, November 1900.
270 *Novoe vremia*, 1 January 1900.
A debate about the role of the commune took place on the pages of *Novosti* between staff writer and agricultural specialist Vladimir Bystrenin who considered it a drag on the peasant economy and writer Leonid Obolenskii who saw its positive socio-economic functions. Leonid Polonskii of *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti* attempted to moderate by arguing that the peasants would choose their own socio-economic institutions. Writer Mikhail Engelgardt joined the debate as a defender of the commune and writer Nikolai Levitskii argued that small peasant cooperatives were more efficient than larger ones. The debate covered familiar ground and added nothing new to the peasant question. In February 1901, an editorial article commemorating the thirtieth anniversary of the Emancipation came to the hackneyed conclusion that the reform “failed to produce a stable gentry or peasant economy” neither of which had a bright future.

By 1902, the poor harvests of 1899 and 1901 and the peasant disturbances in 1902 once again forced the state to consider agricultural reforms, which it had ignored for a decade. It went about it in the typical way, however, by setting up two independent bodies—the Special Committee on the Needs of Agriculture under Witte and the Editing Commission on the Question of Peasant Jurisdiction under interior minister D. S. Sipiagin. The commissions worked independently of each other and could not escape the ideological predilections of their parent ministries. In 1893, interior minister I. N. Durnovo had organized it so that peasant reform was de facto within his ministry’s

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271 *Novoe vremia*, 28 January 1902.
272 *Novosti*, 27 May, 3, 20 June, 3 July 1900.
274 *Novosti*, 19 February 1901.
Witte, on the other hand, was fighting for his career, which the industrial crisis threatened but a successful agricultural reform could salvage.

In January 1902, Witte submitted a proposal to set up a joint committee to discuss reforms. All state ministries connected to agriculture, Finance, Interior, State Property, Agriculture, and others, would be represented. Witte admitted in this report that the peasantry’s conditions of life improved disproportionately with the “the development of state needs” and that “the Russian people’s material and spiritual well being depended on the state of agriculture.” Nicholas approved the creation of the Special Committee on the Needs of Agriculture under Witte and would personally endorse its decisions. Simultaneously, 82 provincial and 536 uezd and local committees reported on regional agricultural needs. The Finance Ministry published these findings in 54 volumes based upon which Witte composed in 1904 his famous Peasant Affairs Memorandum.

After his appointment as committee chairman, he met personally with Nicholas in order to work out what points the committee would explore. During this meeting, Witte made clear to the Tsar that large-scale financial aid was out of the question because of Russia’s enormous military budget while lowering import tariffs was also not an option because it would undermine industry. Witte tried to convince Nicholas to grant his commission the authority to reform the peasantry’s legal status—“civil, personal, and property rights”—subjects that the Interior Ministry jealously oversaw. He also tried to

275 I. V. Chernyshev, Agrarno-krestianskaia politika za 150 let (Prague, 1918), pp. 18-19.
277 Pravitelstvennyi vestnik, January 24 (6 February), 1902.
279 Ibid., p. 115.
convince Nicholas to take personal charge, as Alexander II had, of discussing legal reform, but the Tsar refused both requests. Witte’s commission could therefore explore only the technical and economic aspects of the reform and submit nothing more than objections to the Interior Ministry’s proposals for legal changes.

The ministers excluded the zemstvos from the committees’ inquiries into agrarian problems. As a result, in 1902 the Russian liberals’ attention began to shift from the zemstvos to forming alternative organizations with broader programs. According to Gregory Freeze, this is when liberals “outside the zemstvo began to matter.” According to Terence Emmons, the proportion of constitutionalists in the Beseda circle, the unofficial meetings of liberals and constitutionalists, grew rapidly at the same time. The pressure of the mounting social crisis and accelerating government repression and incompetence mobilized the men of the 1880s into political opposition, abandoning the gospel of small deeds and the path of strict legality. Beseda facilitated the political communication within zemstvo ranks and between zemstvo men and the intelligentsia, which led to the creation of the Union of Liberation, the Union of Zemstvo Constitutionalists, and eventually the Constitutional Democratic Party. Beseda was the group in which a number of prominent zemstvo men took their first steps outside the zemstvo institutions in seeking the realization of their political goals. Witte was in a bind. By excluding zemstvo representatives from direct participation in the committees and appealing directly to the peasantry’s interests, he eliminated the local self-

280 Ibid., p. 117.
government obstacle. However, the payoff was the creation of a liberal backlash that pointed towards 1905.

The press welcomed the formation of Witte’s Special Committee on the Needs of Agriculture. Suvorin’s Novoe vremia wrote that the state had to turn its attention to the village and resuscitate it in order to bolster the “metal currency.”

The daily called the committee’s formation “a decisive step towards helping agriculture.” When the committee began to work, Novoe vremia closely monitored its proceedings. The daily suggested that the committee consider all landed gentry problems only within the broader context of the agricultural reform. “Everything that was done for the landowner should also be done for the peasant,” it demanded.

State Bank Director and long-time contributor to Novoe vremia A. P. Nikolskii argued for the abolition of the commune, the extension of universal civil and criminal rights to the peasantry, and peasant self-government.

Throughout 1902, the paper vacillated between calling for the commune’s elimination and preserving but transforming it. Suvorin, who was closest of all the Petersburg editors to Witte, registered the finance minister’s level of favor in the Winter Palace and adapted the daily’s coverage accordingly. In May 1903, an editorial article entitled “Good Symptoms” contained the following text: “In the immediate future, Russia is unable to create a broad and developed industry working for foreign markets. Therefore, our economic organism has no alternative but the stability of the village.”

According to Novoe vremia, it took Witte a long time to understand this, but he finally

283 Novoe vremia, 12 July 1902.
284 Novoe vremia, 25 January 1902.
285 Novoe vremia, 4, 27 January 1902.
286 Novoe vremia, 23 March 1902.
appreciated it, and that was the mark of a great man.\textsuperscript{287} What an elaborately disguised compliment it was! \textit{Russkie vedomosti} also welcomed the Special Committee, but wrote that only glasnost and cooperation with “local forces” would guarantee its success.\textsuperscript{288}

That was in January of 1902. By the spring, the daily was critical of the Special Committee and, by summer, it staunchly defended the commune.\textsuperscript{289}

The assassination of Dmitriii Sipiagin on 2 April 1902 created even greater problems for Witte. Sipiagin had become interior minister with Witte’s support and usually cooperated with him, although A. A. Polovtsev mentioned in his diary that on the eve of his assassination, Sipiagin drifted into the conservative camp and “convinced the Tsar of the necessity of preserving the commune and the herd principle.”\textsuperscript{290} V. K. Pleve, who replaced him, was Witte’s staunch opponent.\textsuperscript{291} The new interior minister belonged to the conservative camp of K. P. Pobedonostsev. Pleve and Witte had already clashed in the Special Committee on the Needs of the Gentry in 1897 and on the issue of agrarian reform in the Committee of Ministers in 1898.

Pleve represented the conservative point of view according to which all agrarian problems boiled down one issue—exorbitant taxes. He sought to make the Peasant Bank, which was under the Finance Ministry’s oversight, a tool of agrarian policy rather than a lending institution and to bring it under the Interior Ministry’s control.\textsuperscript{292} Pleve also supported planned and orderly colonization, which he did not see as a threat to the

\textsuperscript{287} \textit{Novoe vremia}, 11 May 1903.
\textsuperscript{288} \textit{Russkie vedomosti}, 29 January 1902.
\textsuperscript{289} \textit{Russkie vedomosti}, 2 April, 6, 9, 12, 24 July 1902.
\textsuperscript{290} “Dnevnik A.A. Polovsteva,” \textit{Krasnyi Arkhiv} 3 (1923), p. 126.
\textsuperscript{291} S. Iu. Witte, \textit{Vospominania} (Moscow, 1960), II, p. 531.
\textsuperscript{292} “Zapiska V.K. Pleve o reforme Krestianskogo banka,” \textit{Osvobozhdenie}, no. 20-21, 18 April 1903. 3.
peasant commune. In the end, the debate over the direction and emphasis of agrarian reforms returned to the question of the state’s patronage of industry, which the conservatives opposed. Pleve’s committee spearheaded the legal reform. In his memoirs, Witte admitted that “after 1902… the Special Committee dragged out its sorry existence and dealt with secondary economic questions.” Senator and State Council member F. G. Terner, who contributed articles on state agrarian policies to Vestnik Evropy, wrote in his memoirs that “the Witte committee collected a mass of priceless material regarding the situation of the peasantry and worked out some problems, but only a few of these were seen through to their conclusion.”

The Manifesto of 26 February 1903 proclaimed the peasant commune inviolable, but simplified some terms of withdrawal from it. It also maintained the estate structure and forbade peasants to sell their allotments. The only change concerned the commune—whereas the Law of 14 December 1893 artificially preserved the commune, the manifesto eased its constraints. While submitting the 1903 budget to the State Council, Witte admitted that in 1902 rural taxation “had reached its extreme limit” and that increasing it further would have deleterious effects on the economy. In August 1903, Nicholas dismissed Witte by appointing him Chairman of the Council of Ministers. In his new post, Witte had very little influence over state policy, which was precisely Nicholas’ intention. Yet Witte pushed through a law he had prepared in 1902 abolishing collective

294 F. G. Terner, Vospominaniia zhizni F.G. Ternera (St. Petersburg, 1911), II, pp. 133-134.
295 Polnoe Sobranie Zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii, Sobranie III (St. Petersburg, 1903), XXIII, otd. 1, pp. 113-114.
296 Vitte i Gosudarstvennyi Sovet o finansovom polozhenii Rossii (Stuttgart, 1903), p. 6.
tax responsibility that had forced “the strong to bear the responsibility for the weak, the industrious for the lazy.” He considered collective responsibility “the greatest injustice” that demoralized the peasantry and prevented any form of rights and civic responsibility from taking root.\(^{297}\) The abolition became law on 12 March 1903.\(^{298}\) Witte thus anticipated Stolypin’s wager on the strong.

Leonid Slonimskii returned to the peasant question in January and February of 1904.\(^{299}\) It is rare that a man can paint a picture with statistics, but Slonimskii’s gift for language enabled him to produce a very bleak canvas of rural conditions. Between 1893 and 1903, the exchequer annually exceeded its collections by 1.3 million rubles above its 1893 estimates. Instead of coming from rising profits, the excess came at the peasantry’s expense. Indirect taxes increased from 3 rubles per capita in the 1870s to 5 rubles in 1901. Meanwhile, the price of goods (kerosene, sugar, tea, coffee, rice, herring, vodka, etc.) rose while the price of agricultural commodities fell. Protectionism was behind this artificial imbalance.\(^{300}\) Slonimskii agreed with the prevailing view among zemstvo representatives that the center was taking too much from the provinces and leaving little to invest in basic and professional education. A survey of local demands narrowed them down to three principle issues: 1) ending protectionism of industry; 2) easing the tax


\(^{298}\) *Polnoe Sobranie Zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii, Sobranie III* (St. Petersburg, 1903), XXIII, otd. 1, pp. 133-134.

\(^{299}\) This was a review article of four works: A. A. Radzig, *Finansovaia politika Rossii s 1897 g. Sbornik statei* (St. Petersburg, 1903); M. S. Tolmachev, *Krestianskii vopros po vzgliadam zemstvos i mestnykh liudei* (Moscow, 1903); A. E. Voskresenskii, *Obshchinnoe zemlevladienie i krestianskoe malozemelie* (St. Petersburg, 1903); A. A. Rittikh, *Zavisimost krestian ot obshchiny i mira* (St. Petersburg, 1903).

burden; and 3) implementing the income tax. “Agriculture,” Slonimskii concluded, “demanded not privileges but equal treatment.”\textsuperscript{301} Members of local self-government pointed to protectionism and economic factors, not the peasantry’s legal status, as the most serious impediment to agricultural progress. On the question of land hunger, Slonimskii looked to Western European states that preferred partial land hunger to mass shortages of plots. Yet he criticized opponents of the commune for going to the opposite extreme in their demands that land be treated like any other form of property.\textsuperscript{302} Overall, Slonimskii was skeptical of bureaucratic reform plans that identified isolated factors as kernels of the agricultural crisis and he reiterated his belief that the first step in the variegated process of reform was the elimination of the peasantry’s “special status.”\textsuperscript{303} Once again, his view coincided with Witte’s.

Witte summarized his conclusions on the agrarian question in his famous \textit{Memorandum on Peasant Affairs}, which \textit{Vestnik finansov} published in 1904. The memorandum was later reprinted in all major publications. According to Witte, neither unfavorable economic conditions nor the economic and general cultural backwardness of the peasantry retarded agricultural development. Instead, he identified the peasantry’s peculiar legal situation as the main culprit. He agreed with the conclusions of local committees that the rural economy would improve once legal reforms “encouraged the development of economic entrepreneurship and initiative.” “Technical and economic”

\textsuperscript{301} Ibid., p. 245.
\textsuperscript{303} Ibid., p. 772.
measures would have an “insignificant” impact on the rural economy.\footnote{S. Iu. Witte, Zapiska po krestianskomu delu (St. Petersburg, 1904), p. 47.} Witte suggested reorganizing rural self-government along an all-estate structure. The village communities would decide on questions of communally held land. All-estate territorial administrative units would oversee everything else. The latter would cooperate with the zemstvo and act as its local extension under the supervision of the land captains. With time, the commune would turn into a cooperative and the all-estate volost zemstvo would take over its administrative functions. The peasant volost court would become the basic all-estate link in the legal structure. According to longtime member of the Moscow City Duma and zemstvo activist Dmitrii Shipov, in 1902 Witte had admitted to him that the zemstvo was part of Russia’s historical development but that bureaucratic inertia simultaneously separated it from the masses and obstructed its functions from above.\footnote{D. N. Shipov, Vospominaniiia i dumy o perezhitom (Moscow, 1918), p. 187.}

Witte’s \textit{Memorandum} contributed to his reputation for being a political chameleon. In this document, he questioned and condemned the three basic conservative assumptions about the commune that he had earlier espoused. First, he denied that the commune prevented the formation of a rural proletariat. On the contrary, it “proletarianized” the countryside because communal redistributions could not accommodate Russia’s rapid demographic growth and increasing land hunger.\footnote{S. Iu. Witte, Zapiska po krestianskomu delu (St. Petersburg, 1904), pp. 82-83.} Second, he denied that the commune preserved socio-economic stability. Instead, its “leveling traditions” undermined the concept of property and encouraged “socialistic concepts.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 85-86.}

Third, Witte no longer saw the commune as a guarantee against rural inequality. Instead,
new legislation, such as prohibitions on land ownership by non-peasants, limits on the area of land-holdings, and land credit, would protect the peasantry from bankruptcy and loss of property.308 Witte condemned communal, collective, and family ownership in favor of “private property.”309 Towards the end of the document, Witte sounded like a liberal: “I am convinced that the future of the Russian Empire depends on the development in the population of the understanding of legality and property.”310 The memorandum would have fit perfectly on the pages of *Vestnik Evropy*.

However, Witte’s Committee never got the chance to present its conclusions. Nicholas abruptly annulled it on 31 March 1905. Witte gave two reasons for this. He believed that the Special Committee moved too fast in its support of private property, which “they [i.e. his opponents] found to be dangerous.”311 Witte identified “them” in his memoirs as State Council member I. L. Goremykin, deputy interior minister D. F. Trepov, and “the de facto dictator” interior minister A. G. Bulygin—the men responsible for surreptitiously undermining the Special Committee.312 The increasing instability in January 1905 forced the government to seek short-term measures to assuage popular discontent in the wake of the Russo-Japanese War and the fallout of Bloody Sunday. Witte’s legalistic approach to the peasant problem no longer sufficed. The time had come for radical regime-saving measures. The price of delaying reforms forced itself onto the status quo. According to Witte’s memoirs, interior minister Trepov admitted to him in the

308 Ibid., p. 87.
309 Ibid., p. 95.
310 Ibid., p. 90.
fall of 1905: “I am a landowner myself and I will be glad to give away half of my lands without compensation if I were convinced that only this way I could keep the other half.”313

Seen through the lens of zemstvo membership, the reasons for Witte’s inconsistent attitude towards local self-government become clearer. As G. M. Hamburg has argued, the gentry’s opposition to the state after 1880 may have seemed illogical and paradoxical, but it had economic causes behind it. First, the chronic agrarian crisis precipitated a drop of prices on crops that was not followed by a corresponding decline in the costs of production. Second, the growth of agricultural labor costs forced both peasants and the gentry to mortgage their estates in order to avoid selling them during the depression in the 1880s. And third, the peasant question directly impacted on the gentry’s affairs and by 1896 it became a matter of debate even among the normally conservative gentry leaders.314

There is, unfortunately, no direct proof that Witte read Vestnik Evropy, although he knew about it and knew Arseniev personally, as his memoirs prove.315 It is likely that some articles were brought to his attention, but highly unlikely that he based his policies on them. He had no shortage of advisors and the pressures of economic conditions forced him to deal with Russia’s agricultural problems anyway. The novelty is in the context. The discussion of agrarian issues in the dailies demonstrates that forty years after the Great Reforms, Russia was finally beginning to deal with the root of its economic

315 S. Iu. Witte, Vospominaniia (Moscow, 1960), II, pp. 342, 357.
problems and this became a point of convergence between the loyal opposition and the state. However, the zemstvo issue remained an unbridgeable gulf. Directed by necessity, Witte’s solution to Russia’s agricultural problems was tactical and only satisfied Slonimskii’s side of the Vestnik program. The zemstvo issue, Arseniev’s side, remained an unbridgeable gulf, which pointed to the way Stolypin would co-opt and implement his reforms—from the top down. The Vestnik program remained unfulfilled as a whole. The state’s conduct betrayed a deep suspicion of the rural masses, and this distrust, in its turn, was rooted in the populist conviction that they were unable to help themselves.

Chapter 8
Vestnik Liberalism as Mature Populism

Alexander Pypin had maintained throughout the 1880s and 1890s that Russian liberalism and legal populism had common ends. He arrived at this conclusion by examining populism as a cultural phenomenon. In the process, he justified what Konstantin Arseniev had asserted repeatedly—that Russian liberalism carried within it a social strain that separated it from its western counterparts. However, the different means of helping the peasantry made reconciliation between the liberals and populists impossible by the 1890s.

Pypin’s examination of populism as a cultural phenomenon exposed a plethora of opinions and disagreements on the most important socio-economic group in the Russian Empire: the peasantry. But despite the amount of criticism that Pypin directed at the populists, he did not mean to discredit them. On the contrary, he tried to eliminate what he believed were artificial ideological boundaries between populist and liberal values, to
reestablish a common ground, and, by reconciling the two worldviews, to unite them in a common pursuit to defend peasant interests. Therefore, he hardly deserves the “anti-populist liberal” label that some modern Russian scholars have used to describe him.316

His central concern was that prominent populist thinkers, such as Vasilii Vorontsov, had created an artificial distinction between two social theories that had emerged from the same humanistic literary tradition in the 1850s. However, in the process of defining populism, Pypin uncovered the real ideological difference that the liberals could not overlook—the populists were in essence paternalistic in their view of the peasantry even though they idealized it. This view was incompatible with the Vestnik program of economic democratization. Vestnik liberalism was therefore a mature form of populism that had shed its most elitist component.

Pypin’s work throws into question several commonly held assumptions about populism. First, he successfully debunked the exclusivity of populist concern for the peasantry, which the Vestnik liberals shared. Second, the arguments between Pypin and populist writers demonstrate that the populist-Marxist debate was only one of the factors in the formation of populist values. It may not have been the most important one even because separating oneself from those conceptually closest to you is always harder and demands more introspection. The subtlety of argumentation that the groups’ common roots inspired contributed much more to the formation of intellectual shades than the populist-Marxist wrangling over the primacy of classes and ultimate goals of economic development. Third, Pypin’s visceral dislike of populist “self-sufficiency” (samobytnost)

demonstrates that Vestnik’s “Westernism” had less to do with aping foreign models than with preventing cultural isolation—a distinction worth pondering for contemporary Russian liberals and their opponents. Fourth, the populists have acquired the reputation for championing the rights of native populations and traditions against the blind forces of modernization, which anticipated the Third Way movements of the 20th century. However, Pypin’s articles show not only that this was not true for all populist writers, but that the liberals were far ahead of the populists in articulating civil rights.

Alan Wildman argued that towards the end of the 1880s liberalism, rebuffed by the state’s reactionary chauvinism, found an outlet in love for the “people” and “national foundations” as “society” emerged in the wake of the famine. According to Wildman, this galvanized a populist-liberal amalgam. There is evidence to support this claim. In his memoirs, Viktor Bartenev described his student days in St. Petersburg and the private meetings in which prominent populists such as Sergei Iuzhakov and Vasilii Vorontsov participated. In the late 1880s, they mixed easily with liberals and zemstvo members. Konstantin Arseniev was a frequent participant in such evenings and was often “unanimously elected as discussion moderator.” Not even the “radical youth” opposed his candidacy. Bartenev wrote, “In those days, I never heard any of my radical friends say the words ‘bourgeois liberal’ with the sectarian anger with which they were said later.” He explained this good will by indiscriminate “state repressions.”

Pypin’s examination of populism demonstrated that there was more to Wildman’s “amalgam” than civil behavior at social functions. On the one hand, the liberals and populists shared a deep concern for the peasantry, but on the other, Pypin refused to buy wholesale the rhetoric of the populists. The Vestnik group maintained the individuality of its views on the agricultural question by emphasizing the methods, not the desirability, of capitalist modernization. The liberals explored ways for the peasantry to coexist with capitalism and pointed to the zemstvo as the only viable medium by which Russian educated society could influence the rural population and create constructive, if not consistently positive, feedback for the state.

It is a common assumption that the populists were the first to ask the difficult questions about Russia’s development strategy. Vasilii Vorontsov opened his most famous work The Fates of Capitalism in Russia (1882) with a deceptively simple proposition: “Russia’s organization of production is much more complex than the western-European.” The creative impotence of Russian capitalism was an accusation that ran like a red thread through all of Vorontsov’s works. The mode of production that had created Western Europe could only act as a “form and level of exploitation” in Russia. As Theodore von Laue pointed out, the populists’ central economic argument was whether the impoverished Russian population, i.e. the domestic market, could absorb the products of industry? The populists maintained that it could not and therefore

319 V. P. Vorontsov, Sudby kapitalizma v Rossii (St. Petersburg, 1882), p. 9.
subsidizing heavy industry was an economic dead end. Imitating the English and German economies was a dangerous project. Vorontsov, the “Jeremiah of populists” as von Laue called him, warned of the corrupting effects of foreign ready-made ideas.\textsuperscript{322} However, the Vestnik materials have shown that the populists were by no means the only ones to predict the dangers of aping foreign development models.

Populism defined the peasant-come-to-the-factory nature of the Russian worker. Vorontsov emphasized the peasant cottage industry as a preparatory stage for factory work and a source of migratory labor.\textsuperscript{323} In this, the populists were ahead of the curve—as Boris Veselovskii argued, support for the cottage industry did not become a serious zemstvo concern until the 1890s.\textsuperscript{324} Nevertheless, the populist concern for the human being behind the statistic was an important component of the modernization process that the Witte System ignored. The populists asserted that instances of successful remolding of peasants into workers amounted to drops in the bucket compared to the flow of fresh rural recruits. Could urban environments assimilate workers without offering equivalents of the rural social security net? The populists emphasized the deeper yearnings of humans caught in the demographic flux, the spiritual incompleteness, absence of harmony, and “de-humanization of labor” as the sources of peasant resentment against industrialization. Von Laue described the peasant mindset during industrialization: “You could sense the protest deep down against their pointlessly complicated lives, a kind of disconsolate

\textsuperscript{323} V. P. Vorontsov, \textit{Sudby kapitalizma v Rossii} (St. Petersburg, 1882), pp. 113-117.
yearning for another life.”325 The Vestnik materials demonstrate that the populists were not the only ones to draw attention to the plight of the peasantry and the migratory workers. Moreover Arseniev’s and Slonimskii’s proposals for reform were more practical than what the populists proposed. For example, none of the Vestnik liberals argued for any form of centralization, as did the “maximalist” populists such as Nikolai Danielson.326

Arthur Mendel argued that, in opposition to the Marxists, the populists “passionately defended free will and the right, power and duty of the individual” to stand firmly against the objective forces of nature and history.327 This is a hindsight judgment. The Vestnik materials demonstrate that in the 1890s, the populists appeared to the liberals as obscurantist as the Marxists seemed indifferent. In the 1890s, Pypin saw only the liberals as carrying on the torch of conscious and progressive efforts to humanize the painful but necessary modernization process. The liberals fully shared the humanist sensibility that the populists claimed as exclusively their own.

However, Westernism was also an important component of the liberal worldview. Mikhailovskii described Pypin’s idée fixe as “the unity of [bourgeois] civilization.” He wrote of Pypin: “He belongs to one of the few bona fide westernizers we still have who believe in the unity of European civilization and who have sharpened their analytical knife primarily by criticizing nationalistic teachings, especially those of the

327 Ibid., p. 158.
Slavophiles.” Pypin saw both through and beyond the tropes that the populists had created about Russian culture.

Alexander Pypin’s concern for the peasantry and his empathy for the populist cause carried no feeling of guilt. Arthur Mendel argued that the populists’ suspicion of constitutionalism contributed to their inability to win converts and this set the unfortunate precedent of counterpoising economic to political democracy. Economic democracy was what the Vestnik group propounded, but it expected increased decentralization of state power in favor of the zemstvos to compensate for the absence of political rights. In his analysis of populism, Pypin pointed to its messianic overtones, which were simultaneously misguided and alienating to potential allies, especially to the liberals. Populism’s opposition to capitalism created an insurmountable obstacle that the Vestnik group’s worldview did not. Pypin praised populism for its dedication to the peasant cause and the observations of its proponents, but not for its conceptual alternatives. For the sake of practical results, it was liberalism, not agrarian socialism that was the logical extension of populism in Russia.

Alexander Pypin first addressed populism on the pages of Vestnik Evropy in the 1880s. This early date is significant because most Western scholars of Russian social history have identified the intense populist-Marxist polemic of the 1890s as a milestone in both groups’ ideological crystallization. The appearance of important publications during this decade lends much support to this argument. In 1894, Peter Struve’s Critical

Notes on the Development of Capitalism in Russia and George Plekhanov’s On the Question of the Development of a Monistic View of History were published. The journal New Word (Novoe Slovo, 1894-1897), although short-lived and initially a populist publication, became Russian Marxism’s official publication in the spring of 1897. After it closed, Life (Zhizn’, 1897-1901) and The Beginning (Nachalo, 1899) took turns in carrying on the mantle. However, before the Marxist-populist clash took place in the 1890s, liberals already engaged in a debate with the populists of Otechestvennye zapiski, Russkoe bogatstvo, and Nedelia. Pypin was a major contributor to the polemics that stemmed from the fact that populism in the 1880s was still a vague phenomenon that confused contemporaries, inspired widely divergent judgments, and attracted radically different adherents. Pypin turned his attention to populism in order to explain this confusion.

He explored the populism’s genealogy by analyzing its literary sources. In its broadest sense, he applied the term ‘populist’ to people who were “especially devoted to the study of rural life and who actively aided the inhabitants of the countryside.” According to this broad definition, many luminaries of Russian culture belonged to this group beginning with 18th-century economist Ivan Pososhkov. In a narrower sense, Pypin applied the term to a literary and social group that appeared in the late 1850s and early 1860s. Composed of journalists, literary figures and researchers, this group took pride in its special connection with the rural population and its exclusive understanding of popular

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interests. In the absence of conceptual clarity, however, the proponents of populist ideas often ended up on opposite sides of the political fence, sometimes identifying liberalism with the bureaucracy, at other times attacking Slavophilism, and occasionally agreeing with Mikhail Katkov’s Moskovskie vedomosti.

Pypin traced populism’s origins to the preparation for the Great Reforms, but he followed its long intellectual pedigree back to Russian social thought and literature, which left a dual legacy. On the one hand, the liberal-emancipatory tradition derived from Nikolai Gogol, Vissarion Belinskii, and Alexander Herzen. On the other, a mystical-sentimental strain produced the Slavophiles from whom the populists inherited the idea of self-sufficiency and the intellectual’s moral duty to the people. Populism inherited from both the Slavophiles and the westernizers a critical approach to reality and a belief in the importance of popular rights and in the natural advantages of the Russian commune. Like their predecessors, the populists demanded reforms and encouraged social autonomy. The majority of these ideas initially developed under the influence of German philosophy, currents of socialist thought, and the political events. Another important influence on the populists was Russian literature between the 1830s and 1850s that inspired them to study and associate closely with the people. Populism’s roots were not homogenous. It drew on a plethora of pre-existing currents of thought, some of which, such as Slavophilism and westernism, had little in common and did not represent

332 A. N. Pypin, Istoriia russkoi etnografii (St. Petersburg, 1890-92), II, p. 375.  
335 A. N. Pypin, Istoriia russkoi literatury (St. Petersburg, 1907), IV, p. 628.
coherent schools of thought. The safest general characterization about populism, according to Pypin, was that it was not statist.

Pypin identified three periods in the evolution of populist thought. The first coincided with the preparation and execution of Emancipation when populism developed under the influence of ideas from the 1840s, which became popular and were openly expressed during the thaw of Alexander II’s first years on the throne. Social concern for the peasantry took on judicial and economic forms as it addressed the issues of peasant allotments and the commune. Closely related to these was the problem of national education. Pypin believed that the populists’ passion for their subject set them apart from their conceptual predecessors, but the populists could not support the historical arguments they made in the 1860s with solid scientific arguments.

Pypin identified Nikolai Uspenskii, Alexander Levitov, Fyodor Reshetnikov, Vasilii Sleptsov, and Gleb Uspenskii as the most influential non-revolutionary populist writers of the 1860s. They distinguished themselves by fully supporting the reforms and helping the rural population by spreading education and encouraging local self-government, something the Vestnik group considered the pillars of social progress. However, Pypin also noted that their views did not entirely coincide with the general populist spirit and, as an example, he used Levitov’s refusal to idealize the rural lifestyle or to descry in the peasant worldview a form of “ready wisdom.” A strict sense of realism

338 For excellent treatments of these writers see also Cathy A. Frierson, Peasant Icons: Representations of Rural People in Late Nineteenth-Century Russia (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) and Richard Wortman, The Crisis of Russian Populism (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967).
distinguished him and the other writers of his time from the heady days of people-worship in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s.\footnote{A. N. Pypin, “Narodnost i narodnichestvo,” \textit{Vestnik Evropy} 2 (1888), p. 388; “Belletrist-narodnik shestidesiatykh godov,” \textit{Vestnik Evropy} 8 (1884), pp. 672-673, 683; \textit{Istoriia russkoi etnografii} (St. Petersburg, 1890-92), II, p. 407.}

Practical activity—and sometimes fate—exposed many of these writers to the realities of the peasant world, and destroyed the bookish illusions they entertained as young men. Gleb Uspenskii headed a local bank in Samara Province. Alexander Levitov studied medicine and when he was exiled to Shenkursk in Archangel Province, he worked off his student stipend as a local doctor. After he completed his term, he made his way on foot to his native Tambov Province working odd jobs along the way to feed himself. Fyodor Reshetnikov worked as a local court clerk and a scribe in the provincial revenue chancery until he became a poorly paid Finance Ministry official.\footnote{A. N. Pypin, “Teorii narodnichestva,” \textit{Vestnik Evropy} 10 (1892), pp. 708-710.} Overall, Pypin evaluated the populists of the 1860s positively. He found their attempts to engage the peasantry noble. Their practical dedication saved them from many excesses, theoretical exaggerations, and the “unbridled idealization” of the peasantry that characterized their successors.\footnote{Ibid., p. 709.}

The 1870s formed the second period in populism’s evolution distinguished by mass participation and various practical activities. The “to the people” movement impressed Pypin most of all. He saw in it a deep-seated instinct for social unity consciously fulfilled through a collective effort to work for the common good. The value of this phenomenon was that it brought the intelligentsia into direct contact with the
people. In the process of studying rural life, the *intelligenty* understood the importance of national education. Pypin was aware that youthful naïveté and many political and socio-economic misconceptions lay behind the movement “to the people.” Yet, Pypin’s optimism—a necessary component of the liberal sensibility—allowed him to look beyond the chaos of mistakes and to descry the slow process of reinterpretation and reconciliation between educated society and the village. In the context of the 1870s, Pypin especially praised the work of writers and ethnographers Fillip Nefedov, Nikolai Naumov, Alxander Ertel and Pavel Zasodimskii. Pypin highly praised their honest depiction of the peasantry’s social and economic relations. He also welcomed the honest and gritty descriptions of rural hardship and the belief that the intelligentsia could improve the peasant’s lot. Pypin believed, as did his colleagues, in a mutual process of enlightenment. Popular education would bring the peasantry closer to the intelligentsia. In its turn, the intelligentsia, through a torturous process of debunking its preconceptions and illusions, would understand the peasant worldview and rural needs. Inciting and organizing revolution in the villages was not part of his program.

In 1875 and 1876, zemstvo statistician Peter Chervinskii published a series of articles on rural conditions in *Nedelia*. Chervinskii would go on to become one of Russia’s premier statisticians in the late 1870s when he developed a method of quantifying and qualifying local conditions by actually visiting every locale. This became known as the “territorial” or “chernigovskii” (he worked for Chernigov Province)

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statistical method.\textsuperscript{344} At the time he wrote the articles, however, he still operated with vague populist ideas. Chervinskii maintained that a Russian social movement could evolve into an independent force due to the inspiration it drew from the village but only as long as it developed in the “spirit and interests of the peasantry: the only serious social group.” Pypin called this idea “shallow” and accused Chervinskii and the populists of generalizing and oversimplifying matters with empty phrases that had no historical content and demonstrated a weak grasp of social history. Pypin accused him of using “undefined concepts” and “anecdotal” evidence instead of solid proof to support his theories and called the articles “typical of populism.” Chervinskii’s criticism of the intelligentsia also alarmed Pypin who considered the populists to be themselves representatives of the Russian intelligentsia. He also believed that the intelligentsia was sympathetic to the plight of the peasants. The desire for “self-sufficiency,” as Chervinskii put it, was not a rural goal, Pypin argued, but the misguided aim of the populist intelligentsia itself.\textsuperscript{345} He was beginning to notice a peculiar mix of rural posing and elitist rhetoric in certain populist attitudes that mistakenly aspired to socio-economic uniqueness and undeserved exclusivity.

The third and final period in Pypin’s scheme included the 1880s and 1890s when populism underwent profound changes and became variegated and uneven in its ideological shades that ran the gamut from the folksy \textit{Otechestvennye zapiski} to conservative \textit{Rus’}. Pypin identified several directions in which the practical activities


\textsuperscript{345} A. N. Pypin, \textit{Istoriia russkoj etnografii} (St. Petersburg, 1890-92), II, pp. 387-389.
flowed in this era. Of these, he considered the in-depth studies of rural economic life and service in rural schools and other institutions as the most effective populist contributions. At the same time, he considered completely unproductive all attempts to derive populist theory from the worship of “enlightened rural simplicity.”  

During the 1880s and 1890s, Pypin found populist ideology mediocre, vague, and incomplete. The populists had no concrete point of view on socio-political problems and constituted neither coherent groups nor a party. This accusation cut against Theodore von Laue’s assertion that by the 1880s, the populists had split into two schools: the critical (Nikolai Mikhailovskii) and doctrinaire (Nikolai Danielson, Vorontsov, and Sergei Iuzhakov). The doctrinaire populists used Marx to argue that capitalism had no future in Russia, or in any other agricultural country for that matter, and that it was alien to Russia and detrimental. The difference between Pypin’s and von Laue’s views demonstrates the defining influence the clash with the Marxists had on clarifying the populist position since even as astute an observer as Pypin concentrated his attention on populism’s (lack of) positive doctrines as its defining element in the early 1890s. Arthur Mendel was closer to the truth when he characterized “legal populism” as a “milk-and-water philosophy” resembling a state of mind more than a systematic body of thought until the 1890s.

347 A. N. Pypin, Istoriia russkoi etnografii (St. Petersburg, 1890-92), II, p. 408.
Pypin wrote that populist ideas came from an unsubstantiated belief that the rural population forged its own lifestyle, economic conditions, and even developed theories related to radical socialism. He also criticized the populists for denying the applicability of all western political forms to Russia. However, his greatest complaint was that populism went out of its way to separate itself from its theoretical predecessors and from Russian liberalism as a whole with which it shared concepts and a moral sensibility. In this, Pypin described undeserved self-satisfaction, nascent intolerance, and exclusivity characteristic of the Slavophiles. He found this particularly ironic, since the latter argued for increased popular autonomy, while the “new populists” favored state protection. The liberal populists supported increasing peasant allotments, whereas the proponents of self-sufficiency, such as Peter Chervinskii, historian Mikhail Koialovich, and writer Nikolai Zlatovratskii, opposed it. While statisticians were busy studying rural conditions, the populist theorists inundated the public with words. Men with authentic sympathy for the plight of the countryside supported popular education while the “self-sufficients” opposed it.350

Populist attacks on the intelligentsia baffled Pypin. This animosity placed the populist thinkers into the company of the reactionaries. Populist thinkers often applied the term “intelligentsia” indiscriminately to all educated members of society and then argued that they had lost all ties to the people since the time of Peter the Great. Pypin argued that the real intelligentsia never severed its ties with the people but instead studied popular culture, examined rural conditions, and tried to improve them. This is why he

repeatedly refused the populists the privilege of exclusive knowledge of popular thought patterns and sensibilities. Besides, he believed that knowledge of Russian folk ways was at the time insufficiently developed for anyone to lay claim to it.  

In 1882, populist Joseph Kablits, who wrote under the pen name Iuzov, tried to define “populism” once again in his 1882 work entitled The Foundations of Populism, which was a compendium of articles he had published in the newspaper Nedelia. He accused the intelligentsia of forcing upon the peasants ideas that were alien to their customs and mindsets. The Russian peasantry based its worldview on emotion and feeling rather than reason and understanding, Kablits argued. In the second part of The Foundations of Populism (1893), his anti-intelligentsia rhetoric reached its climax. In a biography of Kablits written for the Brockhaus and Efron encyclopedia, Slonimskii described in this outpouring of passion the suffering of an aging romantic who tried to “create the illusion of a struggle for past ideals.” In his review of the first part of Foundations, Pypin accused Kablits of “self-sufficient mysticism” and argued that the author’s hatred of liberalism had exceeded all reasonable bounds. For Pypin, the Russian intelligentsia included such luminaries as Mikhail Lomonosov, Alexander Radishchev, Nikolai Karamzin, Alexander Pushkin, Mikhail Lermontov, Ivan Turgenev, and many others. How could one of populism’s prominent thinkers accuse the Russian intelligentsia of self-delusion and intentional misguidance of the peasantry? According to Pypin’s inclusive definition of a populist as anyone “especially devoted to the study of rural life”

351 A. N. Pypin, Istoriia russkoi etnografii (St. Petersburg, 1890-92), II, pp. 395-399.
and active aid to “the inhabitants of the countryside,” populism was a broad intellectual current indeed, but that was exactly what Pypin set out to demonstrate. Despite the rhetoric, populist demands were quite similar to those of the Russian liberals.\footnote{B. P. Baluev, \textit{Liberalnoe narodnichestvo na rubezhe XIX-XX vekov} (Moscow: Nauka, 1995), p. 77.}

In a review of ethnographer Alexander Prugavin’s \textit{Popular Demands and the Intelligentsia’s Duty in the Realm of Education and Upbringing} (1895), Pypin challenged the author’s thesis that the intelligentsia “owed it” to the people to become involved in its education. He found the implication of debt unacceptable because he considered the intelligentsia’s interests inseparable from those of the population.\footnote{A. N. Pypin, “Prugavin A.S. Zaprosy naroda i obiaazannosti intelligentsii v oblasti prosveshcheniiia i vospitaniiia. 2-e izd. SPb., 1895,” \textit{Vestnik Evropy} 3 (1895), pp. 386, 393.} He had earlier argued that only a combination of state efforts and broad social support could solve the problem of popular enlightenment.\footnote{A. N. Pypin, “Narodnaia gramotnost,” \textit{Vestnik Evropy} 1 (1891), pp. 255-256, 278-279.} On this point, he anticipated the 20th-century development economics belief that an educational system is not a luxury but a necessity for successful modernization and the Prussian, Swiss, Dutch, and Scandinavian examples proved this.\footnote{Rondo Cameron, “Some Lessons of History for Developing Nations,” \textit{The American Economic Review}, 57:2 (1967), pp. 318-319.}

Pypin expected to find a competent theoretical explanation of populism in the work of Vasilii Vorontsov, whose writings on rural economic development Pypin held in high regard. After graduating from medical school, Vorontsov had served as a zemstvo doctor for eight years before turning his interests to economics.\footnote{Pavel Kalinnikov, ed. “Vorontsov Vasilii Pavlovich,” \textit{Russkii Biograficheskii Slovar Project}, 6 March 2007, http://rulex.ru/01030853.htm.} However, Vorontsov’s series of articles entitled “Attempts to Create a Foundation for Populism” in \textit{Russkoe
bogatstvo disappointed Pypin.³⁵⁹ Vorontsov insufficiently defined “culture” and “intelligentsia,” mistakenly traced populism’s origins to the 1870s, instead of the 1850s-60s, and ignored its theoretical sources.³⁶⁰ Pypin disagreed that the “communal form” was “an exclusive characteristic” of the Russian people and argued instead that commune-based agriculture was an historical stage of development in almost all communities.³⁶¹ Unlike Vorontsov, Pypin seriously doubted the capability of the peasant commune to withstand the evolution of capitalism in Russia. He admitted that it was still difficult to predict exactly how “economic conditions and the role of capitalism” would develop in Russia, but he was convinced that the village could not preserve its self-sufficiency or adapt without undergoing significant, and sometimes painful, socio-economic changes.³⁶²

The debate between Pypin and Vorontsov demonstrated how conceptually separate the liberals and populists had become by the 1890s. In the field, a liberal and populist would have worked side by side; on paper, they could not agree on anything. Pypin disagreed with Vorontsov’s identification of economic interests—“privileges on the one hand and oppression on the other”—as exclusive determinants of social problems. Such a reductionist approach indicated, Pypin argued, that Vorontsov completely misunderstood the “internal development of our social history.”³⁶³ Pypin also pointed to contradictions in Vorontsov’s treatment of the intelligentsia, which the latter

³⁵⁹ The articles appeared in Russkoe bogatstvo beginning in February 1892.
³⁶³ Ibid., pp. 730, 740.
had described as serving the interests of a privileged social minority, following narrow bourgeois teachings, and expressing lofty humanistic and emancipatory principles. Pypin admitted his confusion: was Vorontsov describing two camps of the intelligentsia or the same group of thinkers at different times? In his turn, Vorontsov maintained that Pypin, as most other critics of populism, had set himself the goal “not so much to explain the subject, as to destroy an enemy,” and, in accordance with this aim, he had created an opponent whom he made intentionally grotesque. This prevented Pypin, Vorontsov argued, from understanding and logically examining populist views.

Overall, according to Pypin, populism’s development followed a declining trajectory. When it first appeared during Emancipation, legal populism aimed to “serve the people selflessly.” Its adherents conducted useful scientific and social research in rural areas and created brilliant literary descriptions of life in the village, but in the ensuing “dark ages” of Russian history (the period of counter-reforms), with their characteristic absence of independent and free criticism, legal populism became increasingly corrupt while a strain of it became violent. It fell into “self-content mysticism” and the feigned democratic views of its proponents, writers who were in essence retrogrades, watered down its initially coherent message and noble practical goal. These men took populism down the wrong path in their crusade against the liberal

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364 Ibid., p. 731.
intelligentsia from whose representatives the movement had initially appeared and with which it shared basic moral and philosophical concepts.366

Pypin’s criticism echoed Mikhailovskii’s disillusionment with populism by the 1890s. As Arthur Mendel argued, Mikhailovskii began to express despair and pessimism against which he had earlier cautioned others. He experienced nostalgia for the period of active populism of the 1860s when morals were consistent with goals and the dichotomy between moral and effective activity did not exist.367 What populism may have gained by defining itself against Marxism, it lost in what Mikhailovskii valued above all—the struggle for individuality.

Pypin identified two major errors in populist thinking. First, the populists paid insufficient attention to the history of the Russian people, which caused them to make serious mistakes in their evaluations of its course and potential. Second, they believed that Russia did not need European civilization, that it was “unnecessary and inapplicable to us.” According to Pypin, populism shared this attitude with “the worst representatives of obscurantism.”368 However, he never identified religious overtones in populist thought. The populists were interested neither in paternal monarchism, nor in Orthodoxy, nor in religion altogether.369 The *Vestnik* liberals and the populists had in common the total absence of any religious justifications for protecting the peasantry’s interests. This underlines the non-spiritual character of progressive thought in the 1890s and the

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Orthodox Church’s conspicuous absenteeism in the modernization project. A keen observer of Russia, Sir Donald Mackenzie Wallace who traveled extensively, also observed this tendency. He wrote that during the reform enthusiasm in the 1860s ecclesiastical affairs were entirely overlooked because to many of the reformers Orthodoxy seemed “an old-world superstition which tended to retard rather than accelerate social progress and which consequently should be allowed to die as tranquilly as possible.”

In general, Pypin characterized populist ideology as a “mass of theoretical confusions” caused by an absence of a thorough conceptual groundwork. As a result, liberals often misunderstood populism’s noble goals, while the movement’s conceptual muddle alienated potential adherents. Pypin was especially supportive of the populists’ desire to closely approach and get to know the peasantry, which their projects in rural areas demonstrated. He also argued that the movement should aim beyond private and accidental initiatives in order to attract more adherents, develop, and implement a broader program. In order to fulfill its noble aims, however, populism had to become a theoretically clear and socially mature movement. Only this could help it to achieve the organizational and logistical force required to establish a constant and close interaction between the educated classes and the masses. This movement already existed in the guise of Russian liberalism of which the Vestnik group saw itself as a leader. Liberalism was populism matured, which, having come out of its adolescent solipsism, took account

of the immense complexity of Russia’s socio-economic conditions and tried to do something about them through the zemstvos.

**Conclusion**

When it came to social justice on the pages of *Vestnik Evropy*, the zemstvo was at the center of the debate. It also happened to be in the center of economic and political battles between the ministries, state agencies, the estates, and zemstvo members in the 1890s. The zemstvo was simultaneously the battleground and the prize. The *Vestnik* writers saw no promise for socialism in Russia and it saw the commune as a temporary economic necessity during the transition to capitalism. They distrusted and argued against enforced modernization and envisioned the zemstvo as a negotiating link between rural interests, the intelligentsia, and the state.

Sir Donald Mackenzie Wallace, whose *Russia on the Eve of War and Revolution* was widely regarded throughout the Anglo-Saxon world as the standard work on the country before the Great War, considered the zemstvo incommensurate to the older institutions of a similar kind in Western Europe. The first edition of his work came out in 1877 and he reedited and enlarged it in 1905 and again in 1912. Mackenzie Wallace’s evaluation of the zemstvo in comparison with British local self-government is a strange amalgam of misinterpretation and incisiveness that deserves to be quoted in full:

> Our institutions have all grown out of real, practical wants, keenly felt by a large section of the population. Cautious and conservative in all that concerns the public welfare, we regard change as a necessary evil, and put off the evil day as long as possible, even when convinced that it must inevitably come. Thus our administrative wants are always in advance of our means for satisfying them, and we use vigorously those means as soon as they are supplied. Our method of supplying the means, too, is peculiar.
Instead of making a tabula rasa, and beginning from the foundations, we utilize to the utmost what we happen to possess, and add merely what is absolutely indispensable. Metaphorically speaking, we repair and extend our political edifice according to the changing necessities of our mode of life, without paying much attention to abstract principles or the contingencies of the distant future. The building may be an aesthetic monstrosity, belonging to no recognized style of architecture, and built in defiance of the principles laid down by philosophical art critics, but it is well adapted to our requirements, and every hole and corner of it is sure to be utilized. Very different has been the political history of Russia during the last two centuries. It may be briefly described as a series of revolutions effected peaceably by the autocratic power. Each young energetic sovereign has attempted to inaugurate a new epoch by thoroughly remodeling the Administration according to the most approved foreign political philosophy of the time. Institutions have not been allowed to grow spontaneously out of popular wants, but have been invented by bureaucratic theorists to satisfy wants of which the people were often still unconscious. The administrative machine has therefore derived little or no motive force from the people, and has always been kept in motion by the unaided energy of the central government. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that the repeated attempts of the Government to lighten the burdens of centralized administration by creating organs of local self-government should not have been very successful.  

The remarkable thing about this passage is how pessimistic the otherwise open-minded and optimistic Mackenzie Wallace was about the zemstvo’s origin and prospects. His description of how Britain’s administrative “aesthetic monstrosities” evolved over time echoed Edmund Burke’s descriptions of organic British development in *The Reflections on the Revolution in France*. On the one hand, Mackenzie Wallace was right, before the Great Reforms neither a province nor a district was considered to be a public unit and both were artificial creations that did not have indigenous forms of local self-government. On the other hand, this artificiality was exactly what the zemstvo had the capability to overcome. Although the state tried to manipulate it, its attempts came up

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against local economic interests, social make-up, location, and public opinion. By the
1890s, the zemstvo was both a battleground and a prize no longer amenable to the
vagaries of “philosophical art critics.” No comparable officially sanctioned European
institutions of self-government brought together all the social estates. Great Britain had
corporate institutions, guilds, and provincial administration, but none of these possessed
the zemstvo’s potential for social inclusion.

Russia’s political mechanism, unlike Europe’s, evolved along the ground, i.e. on
the local level, after the Great Reforms. As scholars of Imperial and post-Soviet Russia
have focused on grand politics, they have held Russia up to European parliamentary
political standards. However, Russia’s civil society evolved intentionally below the
empire’s political radar. As the Vestnik writers demonstrate, the zemstvos were hubs of
social activity that sent threads throughout the empire and into the capitals, but these
connections do not appear if the observer looks for a parliamentarian political structure.

The readers of Vestnik Evropy saw a different picture. When they opened the
journal, they opened a window onto a rich world of local politics that functioned in extra-
parliamentary ways. Vestnik Evropy was therefore a window not as much on the West,
although it was also that, but on the kaleidoscope of local politics and civil society within
Russia. It was an information carrier that ran to and from the provinces along a network
of subscribers. The journal soaked up news from the provinces that was interpreted by its
editors and then sent back to the provinces in the form of programmatic articles. In the
process of examining rural issues, the Vestnik group articulated an economic
democratization program unlike anything that the populists had proposed in that it sought
to empower the peasantry not to “save” it. In the process of dealing with macro-economic issues, the *Vestnik* group engaged the Marxists and articulated their own understanding of Russia’s place in the world economy without losing sight of modernization’s local effects, which the next four chapters will examine.
Part III: *Vestnik* and Marxism: Humane Modernization as a Liberal Ideal

**Introduction**

The liberals and populists were not the only ones grasping for solutions to the agrarian question in the late 19th century. For Marxists, the rural economy was an obstacle to progress. Esther Kingston-Mann has described Russian Marxism as “peasantophobic” and found it to be consistent with “the conflict model of behavior and a general belief of late-19th-century Europe that peasants and peasant institutions were obsolete from an historical point of view.”¹ In Russia, the fate of the worker was also the fate of the peasant, and the *Vestnik* group’s concern extended from the ploughman and the cottage artisan to the factory laborer. However, the journal covered labor issues much less than it did agricultural problems, reflecting Russia’s economic priorities. The writers engaged Marxism not on issues of the workers, but on the ideological plane. The liberals’ disagreements with the Russian Marxists formed as important a part in the articulation of liberal values as did the polemics with the populists.² In the debate with Marxism, however, broader issues, such as the ultimate aim of modernization and the nature of global economic trends, became central along with the value and role of the individual in these processes.

The following chapters will complete the definition of *Vestnik* liberalism by examining the reference points that the journal offered to its readers and in relation to

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² It is traditional to argue that Russian Marxism and populism developed through opposition to each other. See Leszek Kolakowski’s *Main Currents of Marxism* (London: W. W. Norton, 2005), p. 611, which is an excellent overview of Marxism in general. Richard Kindersley’s *The First Russian Revisionists: A Study of Legal Marxism in Russia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 5, also makes the traditional assertion. Kindersley’s excellent study focuses on the “legal” Russian Marxists.
which they made value judgments about things that were not readily amenable to moral evaluation. Economic modernization is a complex affair that contains ambiguous tendencies, which rarely bring universal benefits. As Friedrich Engels put it, “everything civilization brings forth is double-edged, double-tongued, divided against itself, contradictory.”

The Vestnik group developed a matrix of values to guide its readers through the turbulent late Imperial times. Through its polemics with the Marxists, the journal delivered lightly veiled criticism of the state’s economic programs and articulated questions that exposed the costs of modernization. The Vestnik group accepted capitalism’s growing pains, but it refused to see modernization as a Procrustean bed upon which all excess flesh was cut away and shortcomings were corrected at the expense of the victim’s life. The journal focused on the human beings behind modernization’s figures and vectors, but it did not oppose the state directly. Vestnik Evropy addressed society and exposed social ills and was a Russian mirror much more than it was a window to the West.

Published in the Imperial capital and containing “Europe” in its title, Vestnik Evropy avoided the usual reference points upon which Russian liberals and their historians have focused: Western precedents or parallels, natural rights theories, neo-Kantian idealism, Christianity, socialism, and Marxism. The Vestnik liberals did not subscribe to any of these, although they engaged them intellectually. The Vestnik reference point was the multitude of local imperial units down to the individual producer. Modernization could only be valid as long as society participated in it. The Vestnik

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labeled defined Russia on its own terms, not in terms of the West. This made their job extremely difficult because of the overwhelming variety of local conditions within the empire, but this was precisely why local self-government was always at the center of Vestnik thinking. Vestnik liberalism evaluated modernization from the local perspective and this was its unique characteristic. The following chapters will explain what this meant and contextualize this definition.

The ninth chapter will examine the liberal concern with economic progress before Marxism became an intellectual force in Russia. By engaging pre-Marxian urban socialism, the Vestnik liberals articulated an economic development model devoid of the convergent development assumption that presumed that countries evolved toward and along the same standard. The idea of universal and convergent progress—versus plurality—saturated Victorian anthropology and bled into Western economic theory, especially Marxism. What were the principle values that its readers gleaned from the Vestnik strain of liberalism? It evolved with and in reaction to Marxism and populism by developing an alternative view of socio-economic goals and the mechanisms with which to achieve them. Unlike the populists, the Vestnik group accepted the inevitability of capitalism. However, Russian liberalism, as the Vestnik group saw it, had nothing in common with its “classical” European counterparts that subscribed to laissez-faire. Instead, the Vestnik liberals saw the market as an organism with a tendency to degenerate and in need of correction.

Although technological, scientific, and economic developments in the 19th-century often eclipsed ethical concerns, the Vestnik liberals resisted this positivist
tendency’s extremes. They did not treat the economic sphere as a means to achieve state interests. On the contrary, the idea of self-government and responsibility—versus economic efficiency or raison d’état—stood at the center of Vestnik’s economic views. The previous chapters have demonstrated how the group contested the populists’ self-proclaimed exclusivity in their concern for the peasantry’s socio-economic interests. The Vestnik group approached Marxism as a critical tool at best, but never as an ideology that justified sacrifices. Reacting to Marxism and populism, the Vestnik group produced a peculiar socially oriented market model that welcomed state involvement in directing modernization as long as it also amortized its effects by empowering the population on the local level. Historians of Russian liberalism have often emphasized social loyalties and political vectors (that were mostly discovered in hindsight) over its economic components. The following chapters aim to correct this imbalance.

The tenth chapter will demonstrate how the Vestnik liberals used this model in relating Russia’s agricultural crisis to the global economy. Under state protection, Russian capitalism evolved with rapacity witnessed only in European colonies. Although the Vestnik liberals criticized the Finance Ministry’s misguided development vectors, and especially protectionism, the journal did not target capitalism as a whole. Leonid Slonimskii argued that the Finance Ministry’s aping of the outdated trade balance theory was the main culprit behind rural poverty. The Russian state played the role of a colonial office that profited at the expense of the Russian population. Obsessed with trade balance sheets, its greatest failure, argued Leonid Slonimskii and Konstantin Arseniev, was to negotiate the complex balance between agricultural producers and the global market. This
was the root cause of rural poverty in Russia. It took Witte half of his tenure to appreciate this problem and to seriously address it.

The eleventh chapter will re-examine Sergei Witte’s symbiosis with the press. The Vestnik materials suggest that Russia had a much more developed civil society than most scholars have believed. On the one hand, it evolved on the local level, on the other, Witte’s prudent and fascinating use of the dailies demonstrated how important public opinion was becoming in Russia and to what lengths the finance minister had to go to justify his policies and sell the sacrifices that they demanded.

Western and Soviet scholars have largely covered the Witte System and the Marxist-populist debate in isolation from each other. Theodore Von Laue combined them in one article, but did not explore the interconnection further in his seminal work on the Witte System. Ananich and Ganelin have given this aspect of Witte’s biography minimal attention. Arthur Mendel rarely referred to the Witte System and only as the background of the search for development alternatives. Until now, nobody has examined the role of the liberal press, especially Vestnik Evropy, in this debate, although the journal was a forum where its contributors examined Witte’s aims, analyzed Marxist and populist ideologies, and developed their own theory of socially responsible modernization. The Witte System was more than an economic juggernaut, it was also a socio-cultural force that affected the intellectuals around it as a magnet affects iron filings, but scholars have understudied this effect. Among the alternative visions that the Witte System bred, Vestnik Evropy was an important reference point in its own right.
Russian and Western scholars have also paid insufficient attention to the press as a mechanism with which Witte attempted to mold public opinion and influence the bureaucracy. The finance minister ran up against the predicament that progressive reformers had faced all over Europe since the 18th century: how to induce progress and to enlighten uninterested subjects. The solution that Witte chose was characteristically Russian in terms of enforcement yet surprisingly inventive in terms of manipulating public opinion—something new under the Tsars. His biography, conceptual loyalties, and his original approach to the press played important parts in the process of implementing the System.

By the time the Witte System had run its course in 1903, the moderate Russian liberals became wary of the state’s modernization project. For example, the second issue of Liberation (Osvobozhdenie, 1902-1905) in 1903 referred to the Witte System as “autocracy’s grandiose economic diversion.”\(^4\) While the Liberation editors implied that economic reforms had derailed political gains, the Vestnik liberals believed that modernization, as the Russian state was implementing it, undermined local self-government—the seed of an independent and flourishing civil society.

The twelfth chapter will explain Leonid Slonimskii’s theory that by the 1890s populism became an outgrowth of Marxism and that the Marxist-populist debate was itself a red herring. It distracted attention from the more important issue of taxation that retarded local economic development and prevented popular participation in modernization. The Vestnik group argued for coordinating central modernization projects

with local needs and evaluating success from the bottom up. In the process of criticizing Marxist ideology, Slonimskii exposed it as an apologia for forced industrialization and offered a new and practical definition of a moral economy for the 20th century. However, Slonimskii defined morality not in religious terms, but in terms of an economic democracy rooted in local self-government. In other words, a moral economy was one that took care of interests that its participants defined.

Slonimskii also questioned the validity of associating capitalism exclusively with the “West.” He worked out a development program at the center of which stood neither *homo economicus*, nor the peasant commune, but the individual—a crucial modern concept that the Witte System neglected or treated as a tool, at best. Exploring how the individual negotiated with a modernizing state in the absence of political institutions was the unique contribution that the *Vestnik* group made to the Russian liberal tradition. It arrived at this goal through a collective effort. The *Vestnik* editors did not develop positive definitions of individual freedom, but approached the individual externally, through local self-government rights. Simultaneously, by protecting the individual’s socio-economic rights from the encroachments of Russia’s modernization project, of which the Witte System was the apex, the *Vestnik* group narrowed in “from the outside,” so to say, until a personal sphere of local socio-economic activity gave the individual room for self-definition.
Chapter 9

The Liberal Challenge to the Ideology of Progress

*Vestnik* liberalism engaged with urban socialism at the same time as it did with its rural strain in the 1870s. However, the socialist concern for the workers was at this time in its inchoate stage, which allowed the liberals to express their views with less haste. Before Marxism became an intellectual force in Russia, the *Vestnik* group was already exploring the worker question, but historians have largely overlooked the evolution of this concern. Both Konstantin Arseniev and Leonid Slonimskii echoed the populist warning about capitalist excesses, but the liberals never considered stemming the capitalist tide. Unlike the Marxists, they did not believe that the state was an outgrowth of the bourgeoisie and Slonimskii explored socialism as a political tool, not a reform program, which was a unique interpretation at a time when socialism’s star was rising in Europe and the Second International from 1889 onward influenced continental politics. The critique of Marxism, which began with methodology, not ideology, appeared and then yielded to immediate and practical concerns until debates over ideology resumed in the 1890s.

Slonimskii did not create a coherent economic reform program by the 1890s, but his articles from the 1870s and 1880s constituted a conceptual framework through which Russians could begin to contextualize their socio-economic situation. Slonimskii was skeptical of convergent development assumptions and his fears were justified during the age of New Imperialism when Russia was falling to the periphery of the economically developed nations. His search for the definition, evaluation, and justification of progress
took him into the realms of economics, sociology, and even literature, exposing his readers to a multi-disciplinary examination of the 19th century’s guiding concept while he struggled to find the balance between self-generated socio-economic development and state-enforced modernization.

Long before the Marxist-populist debate in the 1890s, Russia was already in the process of developing in the pages of Vestnik Evropy a rich tradition of developmental thinking beyond the rural community. By the early 1890s, Slonimskii had challenged the strictly economic definition of civilization, questioned the convergence hypothesis deeply imbedded in Victorian evolutionary thinking, explored the causes and effects of socio-economic progress outside the Marxist structure, demonstrated a preference for local self-government over atomized individualism as expressed through direct democracy, and began to explore the role of the state in influencing social processes. This chapter will trace Vestnik’s exploration of these issues and the Aesopian language in which this was done. By 1891, Slonimskii had articulated the terms that would comprise the liberal worldview. The famine of 1891-92 would give the process of articulation urgency and impart to it a strong economic charge.

The labor question in Russia would not become a subject of state legislation until the 1880s. However, the Vestnik group’s attention to the conditions and interests of labor in the 1870s demonstrated its foresight and awareness of international socio-economic trends. In the 1870s, a wave of strikes rolled through Russian towns, including St.

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5 In this it was not alone, as Reginald Zelnik has shown in his minutely researched Labor and Society in Tsarist Russia: The Factory Workers of St. Petersburg, 1855-1870 (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1971).
Petersburg, with high concentrations of factories.⁶ Beyond Russia’s borders, Europe was already struggling with the labor issue, the memory of the 1871 Paris Commune was fresh, and sections of the First International were operating across the continent. No Russian intellectual could overlook these facts and their implications.

The *Vestnik* group’s initial thinking about the labor question developed under the influence of Russia’s humanistic literary tradition. Arseniev wrote in 1878 that Western Europe’s failure to adequately deal with the agrarian question had led to labor problems. He called the labor question Western civilization’s “Achilles heel” to the cure of which humanity’s best minds were applying themselves.⁷ The Russian liberals were a step ahead of their European counterparts, Arseniev believed, because they had the advantage of preventing the problems that they were witnessing in the West. This was the populist argument and populist Nikolai Danielson was the first translator of *Capital* into Russian because he believed that the book was an analysis of how not to develop. The difference was that Arseniev proposed a concerted search for preventive measures without escapist overtones.

In the 1870s, the *Vestnik* group’s thinking about the labor question resembled in many ways the moderate intelligentsia’s consensus that human beings deserved better. The early date, however, was significant as Marxism was a distant blip on Russia’s intellectual radar. *Vestnik* published an account of the Siberian gold mine workers in March 1880 that described the owners’ “inhuman attitude” towards them and the total

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absence of protective legislation.\(^8\) *Vestnik* warned that “the inadequacy of the workers’ conditions”—low wages, long hours, poor working and living conditions—facilitated the spread of socialist ideas.\(^9\) Leonid Polonskii was appalled by the working conditions of women and especially children whom he called “juvenile martyrs calling to the state for protection.”\(^10\) He also argued that there was nothing to fear from “the state’s initiative to better the living conditions of the working mass.”\(^11\) However, Polonskii believed that leaving the working class exposed to economic conditions was “unsafe” not only because it led to social “strife” but also to “a full economic decline.”\(^12\) The censors cut out this section of Polonskii’s Domestic Survey, which demonstrated that the Russian state, like Western governments, was aware of the labor problem and sensitive to criticism of its inaction but still, unprepared to tread on the interests of the factory owners.

By the end of the 1870s, *Vestnik* exposed its readers to another way of thinking about the labor question when journalist Pavel Abramov published a programmatic article that shifted the responsibility for the labor question onto society. “Education and the amelioration of workers’ lives,” he wrote, “despite these questions’ importance to the state, has so far attracted insufficient attention of the Russian public.”\(^13\) Faithful to the liberal view, Abramov did not interpret the workers’ ignorance, indolence, poor hygiene, and alcoholism as inherent characteristics—something state officials did. All of these were acquired characteristics rooted in the absence of education, the low wages, and poor

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living conditions. He thus defined a tripart approach to the labor question for the Russian liberals to tackle. Arseniev added to this list of grievances and solutions the question of living quarters and he proposed building cheap, multi-storied apartment houses.

*Vestnik* also looked to Western European solutions. It urged the Russian government to follow the Germans who had placed the labor question “on the broad foundation of ‘state socialism’ according to Lassalle’s principle and have begun to officially put Lassalle’s name forward as a support of state policies towards the workers.” Bismarck’s “state socialism” successfully redirected radical opposition movements towards socio-economic reforms. Arseniev welcomed Bunge’s June 1882 laws regulating child labor and establishing factory inspectors as “a first step towards solving the problem” in dealing with which Western Europe had already developed a tradition. The labor question became a project for society and the state and this inevitably raised the question of the individual’s role in the process of modernization and his relationship to the state.

In the 1880s, the Russian state’s attitude to the labor question resembled its attitude to local-self government in that both objects of legislation became battlegrounds between ministries. The clash between the Finance Ministry and the Ministry of Interior culminated during Witte’s tenure. This was yet another reminder that the search for

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14 Ibid., p. 325.
development alternatives should always be examined with reference to the Witte System.\textsuperscript{18}

In the 1870s, \textit{Vestnik} was still only articulating the vocabulary of the labor issue. The journal supported the full Europeanization of Russia when it came to the workers: fewer working hours, especially for women and children; wage increases; better working and living conditions; universal primary education; evening and vocational schools for workers; a basic insurance system; and factory inspections.\textsuperscript{19} When Leonid Slonimskii began to publish in the journal in 1878, he brought to the economic debate a thorough legal foundation and a broad contextual view of Russia’s place in the world. Well acquainted with Western economic theory, he examined the Russian development debate with reference to prominent European and American theoreticians. His appearance marked the moment that the journal fully lifted its head above Russian conditions and took notice of the fascinating debates beyond the empire’s borders. Slonimskii became a regular contributor and editor at the same time as Marxism made its way into Russia bringing with it the spirit of scientific inquiry into sociological questions that until then had been the bailiwick of literary figures, bureaucrats, and religious philosophers.

The westernizers had known of Marx as early as the 1840s. Writer Paul Annenkov, a regular contributor to \textit{Vestnik}, was personally acquainted and corresponded


with him. In their turn, Marx and Engels took notice of events in Russia from the early 1850s. In 1852, Engels was feverishly studying Russian and the basics of other Slavic languages. Early on, he predicted that the Panslavists would “turn the ancient Slavic communal ownership into communism and portray the Russian peasants as Communists.”\(^{20}\) In 1858, Marx examined the economic situation in Russia on the eve of Emancipation—he predicted the disappearance of the landed gentry as a class and prophesied a “Russian year 1793.”\(^{21}\) From then on, Marx carefully monitored internal Russian developments for which purpose economist Nikolai Danielson regularly sent him books and journals in Russian.

Ironically, it was not Marx the historian (the mind behind the *German Ideology*) and not even the revolutionary (the voice of the *Manifesto*), but Marx the economist that Russians came to know first with the translation of *Capital* in 1872. In a letter, Marx wrote “my good friends the Russians” against whom “I had waged a battle for 25 years” are “my first benefactors.”\(^{22}\) Little did he know that the book was intended to be a how-not-to-do manual. Marx even sent the publisher, N. P. Poliakov, a photograph of himself as requested. Poliakov presented the first volume after it had been translated to the Petersburg censors and they passed it with the following justification from D. Skuratov:

As was to be expected, there are many places in the book that demonstrate the socialist and antireligious attitudes of the notorious president of the International society. However, regardless of how strong and cutting Marx’s remarks are about the treatment of workers by capitalists, the censor does not think that they will cause great harm because they drown in a mass of abstract, partly obscure.

\(^{21}\) Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Sochinenia*, 2nd ed. (Moscow, 1975), XII, pp. 605, 701.
political-economic argumentation, that constitutes the book’s substance. It can be said with certainty that few people in Russia will read it, and fewer will understand it.23

How right he was! The censors added that Marx did not accuse any specific persons or class of capitalism’s excesses, but treated it as a lawful stage of historical development. Marx covered English capitalism almost exclusively, so the book was inapplicable to Russia “whose development is happening otherwise, and where free competition is limited by state interference.”24 The censors were absolutely correct in treating Capital as economic analysis that neither called for the overthrow of governments, nor left any room for personal influence on socio-economic development. However, the censorship committee was unaware that the book was the tip of an iceberg—a crowning “scientific” justification for a socio-political program that had preceded it. The censors also underestimated the Russian intelligentsia’s gift for selective interpretation, which, in all justice to this tendency to treat every text as an Aesopian riddle, resulted from the stifling intellectual climate of Nicholas I’s reign.

Simultaneously, the general dearth of economic ideas in Russia made Marxism increasingly popular as it seeped in from Europe. By 1871, economist Nikolai Ziber, who would become one of Vestnik’s regular contributors, published his dissertation as a separate book entitled D. Ricardo and K. Marx in Their Socio-Economic Researches. The volume sold well, although Ziber focused exclusively on the theory of value, not on its revolutionary implications. He saw Marx as a talented economist and follower in the analytic tradition of Adam Smith and David Ricardo. Revolutionary Marxism had not yet

23 “Sochineniia Karla Marksa v russkoi tsenzure (Arkhivnaia spravka),” Dela i dni 1 (1920), pp. 323-324.
24 Ibid., p. 324.
appeared in Russia when, in March 1872, the first volume of *Capital* came out in translation and quickly sold out all 3,000 copies.

The book’s popularity was a result of two factors. On the one hand, conservative liberals such as Boris Chicherin blamed the stifling atmosphere of Nicholas’ regime for pushing the Russian youth towards this “senseless propaganda” aimed at destroying everything at a time when the government was finally in the process of emancipating “20 million subjects from 200 years of slavery.” “Priceless gifts rained onto Russia from above,” he wrote, “the dawn of a new life was upon us, while on the bottom, serpents born in the darkness of the previous reign prepared to exterminate this great historical event, to poison the roots of the still small forces growing out of the ground.”25 The second factor involved the groups that used Marx as anti-capitalist propaganda, especially on the pages of the populist *Notes of the Fatherland*. In his review of *Capital*, Mikhailovskii recommended the book as “truly educational for the Russian reader” because it illustrated the pitfalls of western capitalist development from which it was not too late to save Russia.26

In 1872, economist and professor of Petersburg University Illarion Kaufman published an article in *Vestnik* examining Marx’s theory in the new translation. His verdict was positive on the side of theory, although he found fault with how Marx used statistics to support his arguments. Marx was so happy with the appearance of the first translation that he removed from the second German edition references to the “Muscovite

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Herzen,” the “Russian Kalmyks,” and “the knout.” In the epilogue, he praised Nikolai Ziber’s dissertation *D. Ricardo’s Theory of Value and Capital*, called Chernyshevskii a “great Russian scholar and critic,” and quoted parts of Kaufman’s *Vestnik* review article.27

For the original’s tenth anniversary in 1877, Pypin’s close friend, economist Julius Zhukovskii, published a review of *Capital*. He wrote highly of Marx’s lively style (!) and emphasis on “facts culled from official documents” instead of long and outdated quotes from previous economic literature. He also welcomed the fact that Marx had moved away from Hegel’s assumption that the German state—with its pseudo-constitutional structure in the 1870s—was the end result of “the Good becoming self-conscious of itself.” However, Zhukovskii argued, Marx had gone too far in applying Hegel’s assumption of inherent and constant antagonism to the process of production, which he had separated into components in an attempt to find in their interaction the “mystical source of a new Nile.” The metaphysics upon which he had based his economic theory was confusing to readers who were unused to “dialectical games” and the text’s clarity suffered from the endless repetition of Hegelian steps. Marx’s point could have been made, Zhukovskii argued, much clearer had he stuck to the facts and jettisoned the philosophy.28 Zhukovskii was not alone in criticizing Marx for disfiguring facts and

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trends to fit into his a priori construction. Boris Chicherin and finance minister Nikolai Bunge agreed in their evaluations.29

The analysis of Marx’s thought in Russia began with criticisms of his methodology. Leonid Slonimskii dedicated his first article in Vestnik Evropy to this issue in 1878. Slonimskii bemoaned the decomposition of Ricardian political economy with its “logical order and harmonious unity” into several incompatible methodological schools in the late 19th century and argued that economics had become a methodological free-for-all in which economists used induction, deduction, direct observation, abstraction, economic history, and philosophizing as they saw fit. This impeded the progress of the discipline that was supposed to purify itself by learning from past mistakes and filtering out impurities from preceding theories. Marx, however, was one of the worst “selectionist” offenders.30

Present-day scholars echo Slonimskii’s criticism. According to Mark Blaug, for example, von Thünen was the “founder of marginal cost analysis of the 19th century.”31 Instead of examining his predecessor’s theories, however, Marx plagiarized from him, which, according to Slonimskii, placed the author of Capital into the ranks of “literary economists.”32 Slonimskii’s first article demonstrated a tendency among Russian economic thinkers in the late 19th century to focus on information-gathering and on the specifics of production and agriculture. In an economy whose capabilities were still

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29 See B. N. Chicherin, “Nemetskie sotsialisty. II. Karl Marks,” Sbornik gosudarstvennykh znanii, VI (1878), p. 3 and N. Kh. Bunge, Ocherki politiko-ekonomicheskoi literatury (St. Petersburg, 1895), pp. 139-140.
poorly understood and barely quantified, Slonimskii reflected loyalty to statistics and figures as the basis for economic theorizing. Economic theory based on Hegelian dialectics, such as Marx’s and Rodbertus’, appealed much less to Russian economists at the time.

The Vestnik liberals were somewhat more detail-oriented in conceptualizing modernization and they called their readers’ attention to the national education system and the clear articulation of ownership rights as preconditions for economic progress. Indeed, Marxist dialectics and the abstruse intricacies of “mean value” were far from the Russian economists’ concerns in the late 1870s and 1880s. Having criticized Marx’s “literary economics,” Slonimskii dedicated his next article to a more practical issue—Johann von Thünen’s argument that mass education was an essential component of economic progress. Although von Thünen was a pessimist about Europe’s future in which he described constant economic struggles, he proposed education as a way to reduce the inevitable economic animosities by raising the workers’ intellectual and moral levels. In this, Slonimskii saw the promise for Russia’s own proletariat as it slowly emerged out of the peasant masses. In Russia, of course, this meant educating the peasants first and only the state had the resources to organize and maintain a national education system.

Slonimskii began to think along these lines in 1878, long before the liberal concern for national education reached critical mass in the 1890s. For example, The Economic Evaluation of National Education (1896, second edition in 1899) was a

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milestone in defining the liberal attitude toward the importance of a national education system. Born of a collective effort, the book argued on the basis of statistics that state investments in education were not “acts of philanthropy,” as economist Ivan Ianzhul put it in the Introduction.34 Economist Alexander Chuprov argued in his chapter that economic development progressed in direct proportion to professional education.35 In the 1870s, Slonimskii was well ahead of his time in emphasizing the importance of the human factor in economics and this formed the nucleus of his idea of humane modernization, although his views would evolve over the next thirty years.

Throughout the 1880s, while Konstantin Arseniev monitored the evolution of self-government and factory legislation, Leonid Slonimskii explored sociological questions with an eye toward the unspoken assumptions behind European intellectual trends. Socialism fascinated Slonimskii not as an ideal, but as a political tool and he argued that wise European statesmen used it to offset the bourgeoisie’s interests by bringing broader social groups into the process of government. Prussia, Austria, Italy, and England, “the most monarchical governments of Western Europe,” were also the most tolerant of socialist ideas, Slonimskii argued, because their leaders “directed changes along purely economic lines around the ancient pillars of political organization.” The landed aristocracy and the clergy used socialist rhetoric to wrest from the wealthy bourgeoisie its political achievements—hence “Christian” and “conservative” socialism. The European monarchies sought support from the poorest classes, which Slonimskii

explained historically: “The monarchy emerged from the feudal period with a bourgeois hue; it may emerge from the bourgeois era with a national-socialist shade.” Written in 1884, these lines were several decades ahead of their time.

Some Russian statesmen in the 1880s were already thinking along European lines. Finance minister and economist Nikolai Bunge wrote that it was the state’s obligation to ensure a wide distribution of profits but to direct them into production rather than consumption. He believed that socialism “could not be eliminated—only directed.” According to Bunge, the theory’s strength lay in its attempt to coordinate all social forces and direct them toward achieving social well-being. Socio-economic stability was a practical affair, not a scientific endeavor, Bunge believed, and in this he foreshadowed Eduard Bernstein’s evolutionary socialism. It is no surprise then that Bunge’s ministry spearheaded factory legislation in the 1880s.

Slonimskii’s literary tastes seem unrelated to the topic of sociology and economic theory, but they give a valuable insight into his consistently skeptical attitude toward moral authority and scientific ideology. Slonimskii’s suspicion of precise judgments in the realm of economic theory was a form of healthy skepticism. However, he also had to defend scientific inquiry as a self-correcting intellectual activity against conservative critics. Although the name of Leo Tolstoy has become synonymous with Christian humanism, in his lifetime, the author was a lightning rod for liberals who did not share his extreme religious views. Slonimskii respected Tolstoy as a writer, but disapproved of

his obscurantism and criticism of rationalism and the intelligentsia. Slonimskii described in the sage’s followers a tendency to submit rather than examine. He also argued that Tolstoy was clearer when he “taught without understanding the teaching’s message,” but once he began to moralize, he descended into “incomprehensible scholasticism.” In Slonimskii’s mind, Tolstoy’s Christian idealism resembled too closely socialist utopianism in that both emphasized the end over the process.

One of the economic schools the self-certainty of whose doctrines Slonimskii roundly criticized was the so-called Paris group that centered on the Journal des économistes and the Collège de France. In his description, even 20th-century political economist Joseph Schumpeter, who entertained no socialist sympathies whatsoever, called these men—Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, Gustave de Molinari, Yves Guyot, and Léon Say—“laissez-faire ultras” and “anti-étatistes” who “indulged in a belief to the effect that the main business of economists is to refute socialist doctrines and to combat the atrocious fallacies implied in all plans of social reform and of state interference of any kind.” The school stood “staunchly by the drooping flag of unconditional free trade and laissez-faire” and cared less for the “purely scientific aspects” of economic analysis, but spent more time on articulating an ideology. Slonimskii targeted this doctrinaire approach in an 1888 review article of Molinari’s The Economic Morality. Slonimskii pointed to bourgeois, or “trade-industrial,” economists as the party most guilty of ideological excesses in seeing free

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competition as a natural law permeating all human social structures from prehistoric tribes to the modern bourgeois family. As a result, all social issues became hostages of the “immutable state of things” and state becomes the guarantor of the “correct exploitation of the territory and its population.”

Slonimskii agreed with Molinari’s criticism of protectionism as a system that forced men to view “foreigners as competitors and enemies,” treated economics as a zero-sum process, and fanned “narrow nationalism.” However, Slonimskii disagreed with Molinari’s conclusion that the moral thing for the state to do was to withdraw from economics altogether. This was not what the Russian liberals expected it to do. Slonimskii maintained that Molinari criticized protectionism only as economically inefficient and failed to notice the logical connection between the economic siege mentality and the dangerous “armed peace” mentality that permeated laissez-faire economics itself. Free trade, according to Slonimskii, was insufficient to guarantee what its proponents promised it would bring—“solidarity between nations and the unity of enlightened humanity.”

The free traders overlooked the role of spiritual, intellectual, and cultural ties that were essential to harmony.

Slonimskii’s review article was a typical example of Aesopian language, which journalists used to examine and criticize the Russian state’s policies and the bureaucracy’s perceptions. Molinari’s books were never popular in Russia, Russian economists rarely referred to him in their work, and the Russian intelligentsia never espoused laissez-faire views. Bunge and Vyshnegradskii’s policies went in all but the

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42 Ibid., p. 330.
43 Ibid., p. 333.
free-trade direction. In other words, Slonimskii had nobody to convince and no argument to debunk, so why did he publish a fifteen-page review article of a book that nobody had read? The answer lies in what is absent from Vestnik’s pages—the specific individuals and institutions of the highest, imperial ranks. Of course, Arseniev mentioned bureaucratic personalities when it came to appointments and obituaries, but all the articles that dealt with policy issues treated the state and the ministries as black boxes and review articles of works such as Molinari’s were the safest way to analyze state policies. As the fate of the first Russian translation of Capital had demonstrated, the censors could not possibly find fault with materials that explored foreign issues.

Slonimskii’s review was an important landmark in his intellectual evolution. It demonstrated his distrust of ideology in economic affairs and reemphasized the social orientation of Vestnik liberalism that envisioned the state as more than an impartial economic judge or leveler. The review also demonstrated that Slonimskii drew no cultural line and recognized no gradient between Russia and the West—the West was itself full of lines and gradients. His attitude demonstrated intellectual optimism—perhaps the only universal characteristic of liberalism—that did not treat change as destabilization or irreparable corruption, an attitude, which combined with alarmism and the urgency to act usually brought disastrous consequences. Most importantly, Slonimskii refused to see economics as the ultimate standard of human activity on the international as well as the personal level—there was much more to civilization than its earnings reports and the density of railroads.
In between the lines, Slonimskii was searching for new standards to define, evaluate, and justify progress. Furthermore, he began to question the convergent development assumption and to ask whether Russia could achieve western production levels without compromising its cultural values. Marx himself had not been clear on the issue. In the Introduction to the first edition of *Capital*, he wrote: “The country that is more developed only shows to the less developed the image of its own future.” However, as Bertram Wolfe has noted, the “progressive” epochs that Marx had earlier outlined in the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* could be seen as a typological listing, not a developmental scheme. Marx also used the term “pregnancy” in reference to economic systems, but he never defined exactly what he meant by it. In a letter to *Otechestvennye zapiski* from November 1877, Marx already warned Russians not to apply Western European schema regardless of historical circumstances.44 When Slonimskii criticized the ideology of progress, he did not target Marx himself. In the 1880s, it was even too early to aim at the Russian Marxists. Through Marxism, he criticized economic ideology in general and, in particular, the Finance Ministry, which aimed to replicate foreign economic achievements without the domestic conditions to do so.

Slonimskii searched below the ideological abstractions for the human being. Attempting to define the individual’s place in Russia’s modernization project, Slonimskii turned his attention from economics to sociology, but found that it was a discipline in the making. He distrusted Herbert Spencer’s “natural savage” postulate and disagreed with

Victorian anthropologists who theorized about their prehistoric ancestors by examining contemporary primitive societies in New Guinea, Africa, or New Zealand. According to historian of Victorian anthropology George W. Stocking, from the 1860s on “savages no longer stood on the fringes of human history, but their inferiority reduced them to the missing links in the evolutionary chain, they were subjects of study not in and for themselves, but as tools to cast light about how the ape developed into the British gentleman.”

The assumption of convergent evolutionism alarmed Slonimskii because he recognized the dangerous conclusions it could produce if applied to “backward” countries, classes, or social groups. The Anglo-Saxon socio-economic model was a standard to which even Marx subscribed. Indeed, in his eulogy, Engels gave Marx credit for extending Darwin’s theory to the study of the inner dynamics and change in human society. Slonimskii did not have to look far for examples of how social Darwinism, which permeated Victorian ethnography, turned into practice as New Imperialism. Eminent economic historian J. A. Hobson wrote of the British Empire in his classic 1902 work *Imperialism*: “So easily we glide from natural history to ethics, and find in utility a moral sanction for the race struggle. Now, Imperialism is nothing but this natural history doctrine regarded from the standpoint of one’s own nation.”

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Popular evolutionism was a dangerous underestimation of cultural variety, Slonimskii believed, and sociology had become a bin for theories that did not fit into any other discipline. However, he believed that only objective scientific inquiry could justify the plurality of social forms of organization. Nikolai Mikhailovskii’s “subjective method” baffled Slonimskii who saw nothing original in this idea. He argued that Mikhailovskii had developed his views through pure negation of Herbert Spencer’s idea of increasing complexity as an indicator of evolution. Count Leo Tolstoy then built on Mikhailovskii’s foundation and arrived at his “simplification” ideal. As long as sociology and economics used subjective methods of inquiry, Slonimskii argued, they would produce wildly inconsistent and impracticable results, while with his “objective analysis of value, labor, and capital,” Slonimskii wrote, David Ricardo had “helped the workers’ cause immeasurably more than all the subjective defenders of labor taken together.” At this point, Slonimskii included Karl Marx in this list of distinguished objectivists. Socialism, according to Slonimskii, was persuasive precisely because it critiqued “objective economic arguments” developed by “representatives of the bourgeois, trade-industrial” school of political economy.

The outcome of Slonimskii’s critique of sociology was that the science was in its infancy and produced neither clear research proposals, nor results. It was in a state of impotence for which it compensated with “pointless fantasy comparable to man growing wings.”

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50 Ibid., pp. 292-293.
ethnographers and sociologists were the starting point of a major intellectual project to conceptualize progress in a radically different way. Denying the assumption of socio-economic convergence demanded one of two things: a new non-Western reference point or a pluralistic development model. In the late 1880s, Slonimskii began to explore conceptualizations that would allow backwardness and otherness to balance—one can almost say cancel—each other out. This new way of looking at things would show that Russia could progress by tapping into its native potential and thereby avoid the cultural stigma of falling short of a foreign standard.

Social theory, Slonimskii believed, demanded a multilateral analysis of current social trends and a synthesis of global historical trends. “Sociology built on polyps and ichthyosaurs,” he wrote in reference to Mikhailovskii and other Russian “amateurs,” “does not and cannot exist.” Slonimskii agreed with the positivist belief in the intellectual supremacy of the scientific attitude as the most direct path to social progress. However, he did not share Mikhailovskii’s utopianism dominated by the equalitarianism of a rural community built on simple cooperation. None of the Vestnik editors believed that the peasant commune was a higher type of social organization at a lower stage of development and none wanted to elevate this particular type of social organization to a higher stage of development. In this, Slonimskii was completely in harmony with Konstantin Arseniev’s preference for the all-estate volost and economic democracy over outdated communal form of micro-administration and distribution.

Slonimskii found in American economist Henry George a solid sociological theoretician and wrote a lengthy review of his *Progress and Poverty*. Slonimskii welcomed George’s exploration of the paradox contained in the book’s title and agreed with the author’s conclusion that the “struggle for existence” justification prevalent in the late 19th century was in essence “optimistic fatalism.”

Instead, George postulated that “equality and social justice” was the second condition for progress after association. The root of social inequality for George was the private ownership of land, which absorbed all surplus capital from its laborers and produced unjustified profits for its owners. Evaluating George’s economic theories, Joseph Schumpeter has written: “The abolition of this *Bodensperre* [“land-fence”] is (substantially) what his Liberal socialism that made a hit with many minds amounts to.”

Slonimskii agreed with George’s diagnosis, but considered his solution—to confiscate land rents and redirect them into state coffers—to be simplistic. It assumed, Slonimskii believed, that state and society were synonymous. Progress must start from an internal social principle, Slonimskii concluded, from the ability to understand one’s capabilities and to develop them accordingly. This was an anarchist argument. At the end of his review, Slonimskii targeted bookishness and rote learning that produced “rows of executives” for the state but stunted intellectual progress in society.

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56 Ibid., pp. 350-351.
Slonimskii was echoing John Stuart Mill’s argument about the healthy effect of dissenting opinion and free inquiry. “So essential is this discipline to a real understanding of moral and human subjects,” he quoted Mill, “that, if opponents of all-important truths do not exist, it is indispensable to imagine them and supply them with the strongest arguments which the most skilful devil’s advocate can conjure up.”57 That Mill wrote a treatise on liberty without a single reference to Parliament or to the Magna Charta was a testament to the British political system’s success—he could afford to shift his focus to the tyranny of majority opinion as the greatest threat to the freedom of thought. In Russia, of course, political progress was still a function of state-society relations. Having articulated his views on economic and sociological ideals and ideologies, Slonimskii turned his attention to political progress in Russia.

As usual, he began his examination of Russia from outside by identifying the two principles of late-19th century Western political culture: the blending into one another of state and society and the triumph of individualism. By depriving the individual of a social network, the second principle reinforced the first. In the economic sphere, Slonimskii argued, individualism led to the triumph of “rapacious instincts over the moral and social” ones, but this was not an original criticism. Much more interesting was his diagnosis of the political consequences—the decline of local autonomy, the extreme empowerment of the state mechanism, and state centralization.58 He wrote:

However, without the cultivating influence of self-government, citizens with full
rights represent a very unstable mass, which self-serving and popular leaders
direct from one side to another, sometimes against the real interests of society.
Without the habit of discussing the local needs of their communities and
provinces, people are that much less likely to practice the delicate calculation and
consistency of more abstract questions and goals of national policy. They follow
accidental moods that take hold of society and which certain journalists support;
they fall prey to apparitions of external dangers and conflicts, which the press
inflates in its pursuit of novelty and effect.\footnote{Ibid., p. 250.}

Published in \textit{Vestnik}'s September 1889 issue, these lines had a double meaning.
On the one hand, they were a barely veiled criticism of the land captains whom the state
introduced by the statute of 12 July 1889. On a deeper level, however, Slonimskii was
articulating a form of civic participation outside politics in the Western sense. His views
also challenged the Russian statists, represented by the late Konstantin Kavelin, who had
argued that Russia’s historical progress consisted in the gradual dissolution of patriarchal
bonds and their replacement by the juridical order of the centralized State, which gave
more room for individual freedom.\footnote{Andrzej Walicki, “Russian Social Thought: An Introduction to the Intellectual History of Nineteenth-
Century Russia,” \textit{Russian Review} 36:1 (1977), p. 13.} Slonimskii distrusted the combination of
republicanism and executive centralization. This was not a recipe for progress.

He identified nationalism as this combination’s worst symptom, which, he argued,
had undergone a “great metamorphosis in the last forty years” from popular to state-
sponsored, “from revolutionary to conservative and even reactionary.” Having
successfully co-opted national pride, Slonimskii argued, the European states were in the
process of doing the same to socialism.\footnote{L. Z. Slonimskii, “Natsionalizm v politike,” \textit{Vestnik Evropy} 11 (1889), p. 286.} The militancy of modern nationalism led to a
siege mentality and the conviction that all national interests, especially economic ones,
functioned in a zero-sum field wherein one party’s success was another’s direct loss. This was the root of protectionism. Self-avowed “economic heretic” J. A. Hobson described this mentality:

The assumption that there is only a given quantity of trade, and that if one nation gets any portion of it another nation loses just so much, shows a blind ignorance of the elements of international trade. It arises from a curiously perverse form of separatism which insists upon a nation keeping a separate account with every other nation, and ignoring altogether the roundabout trade which is by far the most important business of an advanced industrial nation.\(^62\)

Protectionism eventually led Slonimskii to reexamine the old debate about the nature and functions of the state in foreign and domestic affairs and to “establish the limits of state activity in the interests of free social development.”\(^63\) He made his starting point a critique of German economist Lorenz Stein’s theory of “organic government.” In the 1870s and 1880s, Stein had produced important analysis that linked up the development of socialist ideas with the realities of social movements and changes.\(^64\) Slonimskii disagreed with this conclusion. “The full harmony and unity of the tax collectors and the payers’ interests,” he wrote, “is pure fantasy,” especially given the arms race in the late 19\(^{th}\) century. At the root of balanced state-society relations, he placed the right of a parliament to refuse revenue.\(^65\) Slonimskii called “mystical” all assumptions about the “unity and organism” of the state as the highest form of “personality,” an idea that had characterized German political thinking since G. W. F.


\(^{65}\) Ibid., p. 730.
Hegel’s historical writings. Slonimskii was suspicious of identifying state goals with social interests to the extent to which the Germans had done.

“As towards the end of the previous century,” Slonimskii wrote, “Europe’s best minds were obsessed with exaggerated hopes in the field of political reforms, so at present a tendency reigns to expect too much from the state in terms of social reform.”66 Slonimskii pointed his readers to government official, diplomat, philosopher, and university founder Wilhelm von Humboldt. Taking for his chief aim the “highest and most proportional development of all human skills,” Humboldt had argued that a good state was a midwife, not a revenue absorber.67 Slonimskii agreed with the logical primacy of personal development and its independence from the state. Humboldt had also argued that the state should have only negative functions, such as protection of its citizens from mutual injury, but unlike J. S. Mill, he saw the primary source of tension in individual-state, not individual-society, relations. As far as Slonimskii was concerned, this view was much more applicable to Russia. He also agreed with Mill that the role of the state was not a theoretical question that could be solved, but a practical question that admitted of degrees and depended on conditions. Slonimskii believed that state involvement had to maintain a balance between suppressing individual initiative and turning “a workers’ democracy into a workers’ army.”68

Slonimskii could not have chosen a better time to address state involvement in economic affairs because the famine of 1891 brought to light all the deficiencies of

67 Ibid., p. 306.
68 Ibid., p. 329.
Russia’s economic development since the Emancipation. The famine gave to Slonimskii’s project greater economic emphasis. He had successfully challenged the ideology of progress by exposing the inconsistencies in its proponents’ arguments, but as of 1891, he had not offered his readers a constructive alternative. Russia’s place among the world economies, however, demanded that the liberals address production as well as economic democracy and redistribution. As the famine unfolded, Slonimskii turned his attention to global economic trends as he conceptualized Russia’s place on the international agricultural market and the causes of her agrarian population’s poverty.

Chapter 10

Globalization and Rural Poverty in the 19th Century

In the last quarter of the 19th century, the state of Russia’s agriculture became an important and divisive issue. The debate focused on the causes and existence of the agrarian crisis, which most intellectuals at the time, including the Vestnik group, accepted as a given. Identifying its objective causes has been an important issue for economic historians. However, the debate about perceived agricultural backwardness was in itself an important social and political catalyst regardless of whether it can be quantitatively verified. The Vestnik Evropy members did not identify the same causes and propose the same solutions for it as did the Marxists.

In many ways, the criticism of the Finance Ministry’s policies that Vestnik put forth was closer to the populist point of view. However, the Vestnik articles argued that the gentry-peasantry opposition was a false problematic. Although the agricultural economy as a whole was the cause and remedy for Russia’s relative economic
backwardness, this did not translate into any form of social or cultural retardation, the writers argued. The real problem was the state’s misguided coordination of agrarianism and global economic demands. The Finance Ministry, not the intelligentsia, was aping the West in its loyalty to the outdated trade balance theory, which the large merchant conglomerates clothed in the language of patriotism and sold to the state. The state was pursuing a colonial policy towards its own population as protectionism became a cover for a rapacious stripping of domestic resources that were exported with state subsidies at the cost of domestic poverty. Large exporting interests stood behind outdated ideologies and even used modern ones, including socialism.

The debate that started with a discussion of the famine relief efforts also analyzed the state of Russian agriculture and ended with a reconsideration of the economic theories behind the Finance Ministry’s policies. From particulars, the discussion on the pages of Vestnik moved to more general issues. It could not have happened at a more auspicious and important time. The famine made possible Sergei Witte’s rise to minister of transportation and precipitated finance minister Ivan Vyshnegradskii’s fall from power. Witte replaced him de facto in August of 1892 and was officially appointed as finance minister in January 1893. However, instead of reconsidering his predecessor’s policies, Witte implemented them with greater resolve and rapidity, producing the industrial boom of the 1890s and further polarizing Russian society. In response to the Witte system’s head-spinning changes, the Russian Marxists and populists faced off in a bitter and fascinating debate about the empire’s economic development. In reaction to both, the Vestnik liberals further developed their own socio-economic ideas, forging an alternative
vision of Russian development. They did not focus exclusively on the peasantry, but
agreed on many points with the populists. They were not bound by Marxist ideology, but
recognized the inevitability of industrial development, the social modernization that
accompanied it, and the global implications of both. Konstantin Arseniev, Prince Dmitry
Drutschoi-Sokolinskii and Leonid Slonimskii brought Russia into the world and saw it as
an integral participant in globalization’s wave.

Russia’s agricultural problems were divisive in the late 19th century and remained
so for historians. Was the rural economy imploding in the closing decades or was it
undergoing a temporary slow-down? Two prominent Marxists in the “crisis camp” were
M. I. Tugan-Baranovskii and V. I. Lenin.69 Soviet scholars I. D. Kovalchenko, L. V.
Milov, and B. I. Mironov agreed.70 After the Second World War, the agrarian crisis also
became important in Western historiography. The most prominent supporters of the
crisis theory were Alexander Gerschenkron and Lazar Volin.71 However, a group of
revisionists cast doubt on the theory’s validity. They argued that the end of the 19th
century was a period of substantial agricultural progress in other countries. Why was the
long-term deterioration of peasant living standards limited to Russia? Paul Gregory,

69 M. I. Tugan-Baranovskii. Zemelnaia reforma: ocherk dvizheniia v polzu zemelnoi reformy i prakticheskie
vyvody (St. Petersburg, 1905); V. I. Lenin’s 1893 essay “Novye khoziaistvennye dvizheniia v krestianskoi
zhizni. Po povodu knigi V. E. Postnikova – ‘luzhno-russkoe krestianskoe khoziaistvo’” in Polnoe sobranie
sochinenii (Moscow, 1967), I, and The Development of Capitalism in Russia (Moscow, 1977), ch. 2.
70 I. D. Kovalchenko and L. V. Milov. Vserossiiskii agrarnyi rynok XVIII-nachalo XX veka (Moscow,
Economic History (Cambridge: University Press, 1941-), VI, part 2, pp. 706-800; Lazar Volin. A Century of
Steve Wheatcroft, Richard L. Rudolph, and James Y. Simms shifted the burden of proof to the proponents of agricultural decline.\(^{72}\)

Several assumptions supported the crisis theory. Arcadius Kahan has argued that Russian agriculture had for centuries developed in an extensive manner typical of an economy with a vast frontier. Having become part of agrarian culture, this mode of expansion acted as a constraint on intensive methods of production.\(^{73}\) The crisis argument hinged on three principal points: 1) post-Emancipation land allotments were too small to support the peasants who worked them; 2) the village commune was a severe obstacle to productivity; and 3) the redemption debts made it impossible to accumulate the required reserves to raise productivity.\(^{74}\)

Alexander Gerschenkron saw the commune as the main culprit. He emphasized the state’s tax-collecting and policing interests as well as the gentry’s demand for cheap labor, which the commune’s inadequate land allotments guaranteed. The commune’s restrictive culture prevented western European agricultural methods from penetrating the villages and allowing labor to naturally seek its highest return. The formal rules of


redistribution discouraged productivity improvements and created a gigantic “free rider” problem whereby productive peasants bore the tax responsibility for the less productive ones. Redemption payments prevented the development of sufficient savings with which the peasants could purchase land. As a result of all these factors, the growth of agricultural output fell short of the population’s growth, producing general rural poverty, which the famine of 1891-1892 demonstrated.\textsuperscript{75}

Konstantin Arseniev had identified the incomplete nature of the Great Reforms as the main reason for Russia’s socio-economic tensions, but he did not support the abolition of the commune. As early as the 1882 program, he proposed carrying the reforms to their logical end, but he failed to see Russia in a broader economic context and did not touch on general economic theory. Two other regular \textit{Vestnik} contributors did place Russia’s economy and her agrarian crisis into global and historical contexts.

In October 1891, Prince Dmitrii Drutskoi-Sokolinskii, a landowner and frequent contributor to \textit{Vestnik}, addressed the famine in one of his “Articles from the Countryside.” He argued that systemic problems of Russia’s rural economy caused the famine. In 1891, as the peasantry was still coming down from the weak harvests of 1889 and 1890, it discovered just how difficult it was to repay government loans received when grain prices were high and due when they were low. As a result, the repayments were often double the initial loans. Instead of borrowing in 1891, the peasants of Drutskoi-Sokolinskii’s district of Penza Province hoped for a delay of tax payments and

increased winter employment opportunities. Unfortunately, the state denied the province an extension because its payments on the previous year’s debt did not fall short by a sufficient amount, so the employment opportunities never materialized. However, Drutskoi-Sokolinskii’s real concern was to explain why the effects of the crop failure were so severe. Why were the peasants so poor? Previous crop failures were insufficient to explain this. It was not the size of allotments, whose value, regardless of the harvests, continued to decline, although it should have increased according to the supply-demand law. The landowners were not responsible either, as they were also deeply in debt to the banks. Drutskoi-Sokolinskii suggested that the causes were much broader, deeper and, therefore, not immediately apparent.76

Grain was Russia’s main export, but its domestic price was low, which suggested overproduction. The state had approved the relocation of peasants to Siberia and this indicated a paradox in Russia’s agricultural economy—despite the overproduction of goods, peasants still experienced severe deficits in foodstuffs. The situation in the countryside had become so poor by the early 1890s that popular imagination began to idealize the pre-Emancipation era as the land of Cockaigne. According to official statistics that Drutskoi-Sokolinskii reviewed, the peasantry’s overall quality of living noticeably declined between 1866 and 1891, while state revenues steadily rose. According to the fundamental rules of economics, the author argued, labor and capital

flew from unprofitable business and this is exactly what was happening to Russian agriculture at the end of the 19th century.\textsuperscript{77}

The gentry also suffered from the land’s depreciation, for which public opinion consistently and unjustly blamed the nobility itself. In reality, Drutskoi-Sokolninskii argued, the peasantry and the gentry were companions in misery and the enmity between them was a misconception. The same went for gentry-zemstvo relations, which many also presumed to be antagonistic. Provincial zemstva were almost entirely composed of the gentry, and in the district zemstva, although the nobility was not as prevalent, it played the leading role in decision-making. It was too early to draw a line between the gentry and the zemstvo. If the zemstvo’s effectiveness had recently decreased, it was for lack of funds, which was apparent across the board. The gentry fared no better than the peasantry and, from Drutskoi-Sokolninskii’s personal experience, in order to maintain its solvency, the nobility sold everything it could, including grain on the stalk, as collateral for loans. The rampant development of rural usury and the emergence of the kulaks were effects that observers too often mistook for causes. Worse, there was no relief on the horizon because falling domestic grain prices precipitated the decline of rural standards of living.\textsuperscript{78}

Drutskoi-Sokolninskii turned to A. S. Ermolov’s \textit{The Poor Harvest and the National Disaster} (1891), in which the author suggested that Russian agriculture was experiencing the effects of the global economy’s new phase wherein the forms of agricultural production and trade were in the process of adapting to new conditions and

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., pp. 704-715.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., pp. 715-727.
rules. Between 1886 and 1888, Ermolov had been the vice-president of the Imperial Free Economic Society. The year after publishing his famous book, he was appointed Head of the Ministry of State Properties, which then became the Ministry of Agriculture. He remained agriculture minister until 1905. According to Soviet historians, the official appointment of Ermolov was a ploy by the state to gain control of the Free Economic Society, but it is unclear why this institution should have been targeted since the bulk of unflattering socio-economic research at the time emerged from local statistical committees.

Regardless, in 1891, Ermolov argued that abundant harvests no longer provided a way out of rural insolvency because global grain prices were fluctuating too wildly. European producers experienced the same problems, and even American farmers, who were mostly responsible for the overproduction of grain, suffered from its effects. Russia had no international competition in rye production, but plenty in the wheat market, and it was unlikely that world prices would rise. Russia was trapped in the 19th-century version of the resource curse. The state depended on agriculture for its solvency and the population for its survival. The two interests were at odds. Moreover, Russia faced global competition and had to adapt its agricultural methods accordingly. Ermolov argued that, armed with the “light of knowledge,” Russians needed to study their natural environment, identify the peculiarities of their economic system and define their attitude to the Western world in order to find a “point of origin and a firm base” from which their agriculture

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80 V. V. Oreshkin, Volnoe ekonomicheskoe obshchestvo v Rossii 1765-1917 (Moscow, 1963), p. 47.
Drutskoi-Sokolninskii praised Ermolov’s dedication to rational agriculture and proposed his own incentives to increase the production and distribution of Russian grain. The state could encourage foreign governments to lower their tariffs; it could lower domestic trade costs by building railroads and selectively decreasing transportation tariffs (something it did only during crop failures); and raise the peasantry’s standard of living. In the end, Russia’s economic success depended on the peasantry’s well being. Without its improvement, all other attempts to raise productivity would fail.

The breadth of Drutskoi-Sokolninskii’s view constituted a link between Arseniev’s concentrated examination of local conditions and an even broader glance at late-19th century economic trends and the macroeconomic patterns that underlay them. Drutskoi-Sokolninskii’s suggestion that more than hopeless domestic conditions contributed to rural poverty opened new conceptual planes for understanding Russian backwardness. Was it self-induced or contingent? Inevitable or temporary? Arseniev and Drutskoi-Sokolninskii argued that famine relief and general poverty reduction were two sides of the same coin. By the end of 1891, Arseniev was urging the devolution of responsibility to local self-government, Leonid Slonimskii had already published articles in support of land-ownership reforms, and Drutskoi-Sokolninskii was exploring Russia’s agricultural problems in a broader economic perspective. Now Slonimskii took the final

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81 A.S. Ermolov, *Organizatsiia polevago khoziaistva* (St. Petersburg, 1891), pp. xii-xiv.
step in examining the Finance Ministry’s policies through the combined prism of international markets and the history of economic thought.

In February 1892, Slonimskii published an article examining the soundness of pursuing a positive trade balance, which, the Finance Ministry maintained, had grown at an encouraging rate in 1891. The Ministry’s annual report stated that Russia had exported 682 million rubles worth of goods and imported only 342 million. The report explained the figures:

In the last three months of [1891], the positive balance amounted to 113.8 million rubles, an 11-million increase from the same period last year. Grain exports increased by 3 million compared to last year’s fourth quarter figures. The rush to export grain before its prohibition and the fall in imports (by 31 million rubles from last year, of which 25 million decreased in the last three months) account for this difference.83

Slonimskii concluded from this that if one were to judge economic welfare by international trade balances then the famine had enriched Russia. By the same logic, Russia should have made enormous cumulative profits ever since the 1877 import tariff tipped the balance in favor of exports. Why then, asked Slonimskii, were the results not evident in the villages? Or were they simply mirages of financial minds? The very fact that famine years were more profitable by international trade standards should have caused suspicion. Tariffs on foreign industrial goods kept competitors off the Russian market. What exactly did the state gain by excluding the latest Western technology? If a negative trade balance implied impoverishment, as protectionists argued, then England and France had been on the path to insolvency since the 1860s because their imports had

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annually exceeded their exports. Russia, on the other hand, had a positive annual balance throughout the 1880s, yet it suffered the most when foreigners “owed” it money. France had on average run an annual trade deficit of one billion francs between 1885 and 1890. Its budgets over the past 30 years showed increasing export deficits. According to the trade balance theory, it should have been drained of its currency a long time ago and become a global debtor. However, its precious metals imports consistently grew and exceeded the outflow of capital by enormous sums. England’s situation was even more “serious” because it had consistently run a 4-billion-franc annual trade deficit since 1885.

According to Russian protectionists, the amount of money had to increase with a positive trade balance, but in reality, everybody, including the most avid advocates of the present economic system, admitted that the Russian economy became poorer and sank further into debt. By the end of the 19th century, almost all advanced Western nations ran a negative trade balance. Tongue in cheek, Slonimskii asked whether it would have been better to “go poor” with England and France than to maintain the present course. After all, despite her positive trade balances, creditors did not pour their investments into Russia. Was it possible, he asked, that the trade balance theory had outlived its utility?84

The theory relied on the belief that precious metals constituted real wealth and protectionism was the tool that controlled the metal flow. The theory of metal currency lost its raison d’être with the appearance of paper money, but Russia was still using it to pursue illusions, Slonimskii argued. In reality, the value of Russian stock abroad

84 Ibid., pp. 794-797.
depended on the general stability of her credit, which the government itself constantly upset through loans and inconsistent shifts in economic policy.

Slonimskii used the sugar industry as an example of how the state achieved a positive trade balance. Sugar cost 5 rubles a pood in Russia and 2 rubles and 60 kopecks a pood in London.85 The state returned the excise duties to producers in order to encourage exports. This eliminated competition on the international market and increased the state’s profit from sales, but eventually the difference in the loss from the return of the excise tax to producers had to be covered, and this burden fell on the peasantry. The policy of encouraging exports made sense in cases of overproduction and in times when supply plummeted due to crop failure, but when these conditions ended, the privileges should have been withdrawn. Otherwise, the financial burden fell on the ordinary tax-paying population. Prohibitive import tariffs decreased the state’s income from trade and forced the tax payers to make up for the shortfall. The greatest proportion of the burden fell onto the poorest groups. A divergence of interest appeared between revenue collection and industrial profits. Import tariffs had a doubly negative effect by simultaneously increasing the burden of taxes and the cost of domestic products. It was time, Slonimskii argued, for the state to implement incentives and privileges only for successful businesses, instead of stunting the economy in order to support industry’s survival. A moderate tariff increased state income, a prohibitive one shrunk it. The protectionist doctrine aimed at preventing a flood of foreign goods onto the domestic market, while the state’s financial interests demanded increased exports and higher

85 A pood was an old Russian measure of weight equivalent to 16.38 kilograms.
revenues. Slonimskii identified this as the essential dilemma of finance minister Ivan Vyshnegradskii’s economic policy.86

The Russian buyer, not the foreign producer or exporter, paid the import tariff. Russian peasants sold their grain in advance in order to cover their tax arrears. They made little money and could not afford to buy foreign goods. Meanwhile, the products of peasant labor contributed to Russia’s positive trade balance. Slonimskii took the protectionist argument to its logical conclusion—a predatory sell-off of Russia’s natural resources with no purchases from abroad would create the greatest trade balance in the world. On the other hand, he argued, a protectionist would complain of a ‘very poor’ trade balance if the rural population consumed the products of its own labor, bought cheaper domestic and advanced foreign goods, and raised its general standard of living.87

The Finance Ministry’s obsolete mercantile belief that national welfare was directly related to the amount in state coffers perpetuated this situation. Slonimskii argued that many writers had already questioned the validity of mercantilist thought, but their criticism had been forgotten or ignored. David Hume wrote in the middle of the 18th century that the price of goods and labor fluctuated according to market conditions and no country could lose or hoard capital indefinitely—money was like a liquid that could not accrue above a certain level. Slonimskii quoted Hume: “Nations suffer material losses not from the outflow of capital to foreigners, but from the decline of their productivity, their energy, and entrepreneurship.” He also invoked Jeremy Bentham: “[If a] merchant chooses to send money to Paris, it is because he thinks it profitable for himself; but the

87 Ibid., pp. 802-805.
acute politician finds that one man’s profit is a whole nation’s loss. To interfere with
individual gain is therefore to prevent collective detriment.” Inflated fears and illusory
alarms were the fabric of protectionism. Slonimskii quoted French politician and
economist Yves Guyot:

The proponents of protectionism periodically predict the complete ruin of France
caused by imports of American pork, Russian bread, or English cotton or metal
goods. In the past forty years, the entire industry was expected to disappear,
wages to decrease to zero, and the population to immigrate. Fields would grow
fallow and all shops would close. However, none of this has happened.\(^{88}\)

Slonimskii concluded that it was time to abandon the “dangerous siren” that had
caused much grief under the harmless and deceptive name of “international trade
balance.” If logic and common sense were helpless in this case, he concluded, perhaps a
more convincing argument could have been that Russia maintained a superb trade
balance during the less than excellent year of 1891.\(^{89}\)

In March 1892, Slonimskii tackled the protectionism question from another angle.
This time he criticized the Finance Ministry’s slavish imitation of western practices. The
mistake its economist-practitioners made was to sacrifice the essential and life-giving
economic activities for the sake of secondary and needless industrial gains. The
bureaucrats were making great exertions in the pursuit of doubtful and illusory financial
aims. Slonimskii argued that the merchant-industrial class, which everywhere held
positions of prominence and power, had succeeded in presenting its own interests as
national ones and always convinced several honest and committed writers to consider it
their patriotic goal to support the unfair claims that industry was making upon the state.

\(^{88}\) Ibid., p. 808.
\(^{89}\) Ibid., pp. 805-809.
However, what was advantageous for the energetic French or English entrepreneur often proved ruinous to a sparsely populated empire with a lot of empty land in which agriculture had not yet reached the “rudimentary rational stage.” The Russian economy, argued Slonimskii, developed rather slowly and there was a large internal demand for industrial products. Yet the state constantly searched for foreign markets, just as the English and Germans did who felt constrained within their borders.

The Finance Ministry spoke of competition for the Persian and Chinese markets while it ignored domestic demand, Slonimskii argued. Foreign trade attracted much attention in academic circles and inspired a lot of articles and debate and many people monitored it meticulously. The Finance Ministry’s budgets included balance of trade forecasts in their calculations, but few people in the government paid much attention to domestic trade, the state of the rural economy, peasant solvency, and tax arrears. It would have made more sense to examine Russia’s rural economy in detail, but since foreign trade was the main English preoccupation, many took it into their heads to make it Russia’s, too. Slonimskii’s lines would have fit straight into a populist text.

Even if Russian agricultural exports ceased, the grain would find a sufficient domestic market among millions of peasants. If this happened, the material and moral level of life would inevitably rise. Exporters would restructure their businesses to grow products for the domestic market and land would not be exploited as ravenously. Slonimskii lamented the fact that in Russia economic problems attracted attention only when they developed into disasters or scandals that involved high-placed government officials.

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officials in institutions open to public criticism. Some problems became public knowledge only when they proved to be obstacles to the interests of powerful groups or classes. Since neither condition was true for rural usury, the absence of small loans, and inordinate redemption payments and taxes, these problems persisted unnoticed for decades. And so the rural population was trapped in a cycle of poverty and the soil lost its fertility from year to year while exports grew.  

At the root of Slonimskii’s argument lay the accusation—never expressed directly—that the Finance Ministry saw the state as a gigantic merchant office for which export and import figures determined success. It is not from an excess of energy and entrepreneurship that Russia pursued foreign markets, but from fear that British and German business may make a profit there, leaving Russia on the sidelines. Meanwhile, Russian industry was so underdeveloped that it had not the capacity to satisfy domestic demand. This was similar to populist Vasilii Vorontsov’s argument.

Slonimskii used the example of trade with Persia to illustrate misguided patriotism’s unfortunate effects on Russian trade. Until 1883, the transport of European goods from Baku to the Persian town of Tabriz was not taxed. The trade itself brought up to 1 million rubles annually to the region. In 1883, however, under Katkov’s influence, the state imposed a tariff, and the trade route switched to the Turkish Black Sea port of Trebizond, bringing wealth to the city and ruining Caucasian towns that stood along the Baku-Tabriz road. Nothing, however, was done to make the Russian route more attractive to trade after the tariff was imposed. The road was poorly maintained and the Russian

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91 Ibid., pp. 348-350.
system of transport was much less efficient than the Turkish. As a result, after 1883, Russian exports to Persia declined dramatically. Sugar was the exception because the state subsidized its export. In general, Russian merchants preferred government subsidies to expanding into new markets, but placed the blame for bad profits on the inability to prevent foreigners from competing with Russian trade. Protectionists ignored the fact that only products that have saturated the domestic market should be exported and yet they constituted the majority of exports even across the borders with Asia. Why were there no monetary incentives to sell sugar to Penza or Saratov provinces, asked Slonimskii? State subsidies to the sugar industry’s Persian trade amounted to 2 million rubles annually. Meanwhile, exports raised the domestic price of sugar. If conservative newspapers saw grain loans to the peasants as risky, then why did financial incentives to the sugar industry not raise similar concerns? Russia had its own “little Persias all over the empire.”

Slonimskii concluded that the interests of the merchant class were completely incompatible with those of the rural population. He challenged the argument that Dmitrii Mendeleev had made in his famous book The Sensible Tariff (1891) in which he argued that imports of English coal would stunt the growth of the Russian coal industry. Mendeleev’s own statistics proved otherwise, Slonimskii argued. Between 1876 and 1887, domestic coal extraction grew steadily despite the 1884 tariff: 112 million poods in 1876, 176 million in 1879, 213 in 1881, 243 in 1883, 261 in 1885, and 277 in 1887. If Donetsk were to become a “new England,” it would take the entrepreneur ship of several

92 Ibid., pp. 351-359.
generations. Russian protectionists placed all their hopes on tariff policies, which they expected to produce strong industries through quantitative growth. However, they paid no attention to the qualitative factors of entrepreneurship and production. Mendeleev had himself admitted that Russia’s troubles began with insufficient technical know-how that could only come through competition with foreign producers and a substantial increase in domestic demand. Only competition could make an industry more efficient. In its absence, the usual problems would persist: rapacious exploitation of resources, constant crises, inefficient and unpredictable supply, and increasing demands for more privileges and state favoritism. “Protection of domestic industry” was a vague and elastic formula under whose cover members of the entrepreneurial elite systematically perverted the principles of the Russian economy, concluded Slonimskii and opened a new chapter in the debate of Russia’s socio-economic future. 

Behind the agrarian crisis debate loomed broader and deeper questions. The famine placed into question Russia’s entire economic development trajectory. Why did crop failures in western states not lead to mass starvation? Were prosperous industrial nations supposed to suffer famines? In socio-economic terms, the famine thrust the peasant question back into the center of state and public attention. What was the condition of Russia’s peasantry? How alienated were the peasants from the state, the zemstva, and society even after the Great Reforms? Slonimskii argued that further legal reform was essential to close the rift between the peasantry and the rest of Russian society. In terms of the relief effort, the famine resurrected the administrative debate.

93 Ibid., pp. 362-364.
Were coordination and control two sides of the same coin? What was the general social expectation: reform or increased cooperation? Was the discussion of the grain supplies an important concession from the state? Was a good Tsar a cooperative reformer? Should state and society function closer together or should the state redefine and expand areas of civil activity? Arseniev answered these questions by defending local self-government rights.

The *Vestnik* group welcomed internal modernization and saw the Russian Empire as an element of the global economy, but the authors also realized that Russia was not riding the frothy crest of economic development. Instead, a tidal wave was carrying the country’s helpless rural population. Modernization has always threatened traditional peasant lifestyles. Rural historian Eric R. Wolf defined the peasants not as a group dependent on the cities and he examined them sociologically through their relations to power-holders.94 The peasantry’s central dilemma, according to him, was how to balance the utilitarian and ceremonial needs of their households with the obligations that the external world imposed.95 As the 19th century drew to a close, these obligations increased exponentially in Russia.

Sociologist and historian of the Russian peasantry Teodor Shanin has called the peasant “an intellectual nuisance” who makes “the economist sigh, the politician sweat, and the strategist swear, defeating their plans and prophecies all over the world.”96 This description applied to Russian reformers before and after 1917. Shanin was the first to

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95 Ibid., p. 15.
characterize Russia at the end of the 19th century as a “developing society.”97 He defined this as a “process of social reproduction of extensive and extending inequality both on an international and a local scale.”98 In other words, by 1900 Russia stood at the “weaker pole” of global institutionalized power expressed in terms of capital and science and was vulnerable to the exploitation of the opposite and more powerful pole. Developmental capitalism was socially regressive and dependency was not synonymous with modernization.

The advantage of Shanin’s “dependent development” thesis was that it explored Russia’s complex relationship with the West in a more satisfactory way than either side in the old Slavophile-Westernizer controversy by arguing that Russia was neither unique in pursuing its own special historical path nor backward and following the trail blazed by the West. It also explained how the evolution of different kinds of capitalism was possible. The Vestnik group anticipated these issues. Slonimskii argued that state-supported industrialization facilitated severe agricultural crises. Shanin wrote that the state increasingly treated rural society “as a milking cow and a dumping place of ‘modernization’ [while] ‘growth’ happened elsewhere.”99 However, Shanin believed that “dependent development” accumulated mutually reinforcing weaknesses and produced a “disarticulated society”—the peasant economy remained outside the capitalist economy.100

98 Ibid., p. 185.
99 Ibid., p. 199.
100 Ibid., pp. 184-185.
Unlike Shanin, Arseniev believed that the peasantry was perfectly capable of articulating its interests in the language of socio-economic needs through the medium of local self-government. Shanin explored ways in which a social group could become a community of its own and part of a society. His definition of peasants reflected this binary function: “small agricultural producers who, with the help of simple equipment and the help of their families, produce mainly for their own consumption and for the fulfillment of the holders of political and economic power.”\(^{101}\) The peasantry’s relation to the land as a specific form of economy and the peasantry’s relation to global society through political and economic dependency were equally important elements of Shanin’s definition. The *Vestnik* group argued that the Russian state in the late 19\(^{th}\) century consistently failed to coordinate this complex relationship. The group was in the process of articulating a socially responsible economics program that fit neatly into market-capitalism nor into state-planning models.

This was not entirely what Sergei Witte had in mind when he became finance minister in 1892. He was a statist and his views left little room for local self-government and even less for individual initiative in the process of modernization. However, as with the peasant question, Witte followed a steep learning curve. His use of the liberal press to achieve his goals was an unprecedented step for a Russian bureaucrat of his rank. The headline articles in the papers of the time demonstrated the mind-boggling complexity of economic issues and the competing sides in the debate about Russia’s future.

The press was well informed about the impending changes in the Finance Ministry in August 1892. Novoe vremia proposed the creation of a Ministry of Industry and Trade and suggested that Witte head it. 102 Russkie vedomosti wrote that the changes were important, but not unforeseen. 103 In July 1892, Novosti was highly critical of Russia’s finances for which it blamed the Finance Ministry, not “accidental causes.” It called for “serious economic reforms” instead of “budgetary combinations.” The chief problems were the stifling “bureaucratism” and the protective tariff, which existed “at the expense of the treasury.” 104 Osip Notovich’s Novosti praised Witte and also supported him as the new industry and trade minister, as did Birzhevye vedomosti. 105 A month later, Novosti wrote: “We are left to hope that the new people will impart a new direction to financial policy.” The paper pointed to Serbia as a state that dealt rationally and successfully with economic reforms, “created a real, not a fictitious, budget, undertook a land-survey, eliminated monopolies, implemented administrative reforms, moved to the gold standard, reformed the railway and mail systems, and increased aid to cattle-raising and farming.” 106 All four papers were reservedly supportive of Witte, and, since they had been aware of the impending ministry shuffle, prepared articles on Russia’s economic policy and development prospects. These materials occupied much more space after August 1892 than they had in the first half of that year.

102 Novoe vremia, 18 August 1892.
103 Russkie vedomosti, 8 September 1892.
104 Novosti, 18 July 1892.
105 Novosti, 22 August 1892; Birzhevye vedomosti, 19 August 1892.
106 Novosti, 28 August 1892.
Novoe vremia approved the elimination of the deficit and the protective tariff that Vyshnegradskii had achieved, but it was not complimentary about his tenure as a whole.\textsuperscript{107} He had barely touched upon the taxation, banking, and trade issues: the country needed a more comprehensive economic policy that would “combine the old with the new.”\textsuperscript{108} Birzhevye vedomosti argued that the state should not force the repayment of famine loans because “the smallest mistake in collection could completely undermine the population’s already weak economic condition.”\textsuperscript{109} Birzhevye vedomosti was not as hard on Vyshnegradskii as its competitors. The paper welcomed Witte, emphasized the difficult problems he would have to solve, but spoke positively of Vyshnegradskii’s support for industry.\textsuperscript{110} It favored an increase in indirect taxes and reported that Witte shared the editors’ conviction that the most important economic policy was to develop trade and support commercial interests.\textsuperscript{111} Moscow-based Russkie vedomosti was by the far the most critical of Vyshnegradskii’s tenure and was not optimistic about the ministerial shuffle. Its editors believed that Witte would inevitably place budgetary interests above popular well-being.\textsuperscript{112} They were right.

\textit{Vestnik Evropy}’s reaction to the new bureaucratic appointments was laconic. Konstantin Arseniev dedicated three sentences to it in the Domestic Survey of the October 1892 issue:

We agree [with Vyshnegradskii’s defenders] in one thing only: that a complex and immensely difficult task lies ahead of his successor. We cannot take upon

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{\textit{Novoe vremia}, 4 September 1892.}
\footnote{\textit{Novoe vremia}, 6 September 1892.}
\footnote{\textit{Birzhevye vedomosti}, 5 August 1892.}
\footnote{\textit{Birzhevye vedomosti}, 4 September 1892.}
\footnote{\textit{Birzhevye vedomosti}, 21 September 1892.}
\footnote{\textit{Russkie vedomosti}, 16 September 1892.}
\end{footnotes}
ourselves clairvoyance and the ability to predict how he will solve it; we do not possess the gift of prophecy, which is the monopoly of the hired admirers of all official acts and official actors. S. Iu. Witte was in charge of the Transportation Ministry for too short a period to give an indication of how he will perform in his new position and his service in the South-Western Railroad Company and the Finance Ministry proves no more than that he is closely acquainted with the railway business.\textsuperscript{113}

It was not the journal’s aim to cover daily affairs. The editors had already spent two decades defending the socio-economic achievements of the Great Reforms. Witte was not concerned with winning over the thick journals, and, although the censors monitored them, they remained, for the most part, beyond the Finance Ministry’s field of vision. This independence allowed each journal to position itself in reference to the Witte System, but no other journal explored it from as many conceptual angles as did Vestnik. The general attitude of the press explains the favorable conditions under which Witte could implement his reforms. The roots of his social loyalties, the origin of his worldview in the European context, and his relationship with the Russian liberal press deserve to be reexamined.

\textbf{Chapter 11}

\textbf{Selling Sacrifice: the Witte System and the Press}

Theodore Von Laue’s \textit{Sergei Witte and the Industrialization of Russia} (1963) has been the dominant study of the finance minister’s persona and the evolution of his economic views. Published at a time when preoccupation with third-world backwardness extended to economic history, the book saw modernization as a catching-up process. Cold War sociology compared the capitalist to the communist systems and modeled

\begin{footnote}{\textit{Vestnik Evropy} 8 (1892), pp. 828-829.}
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modernity in terms of autonomous private initiative, liberal constitutionalism, sovereign nation-states, and mature, post-industrial societies. Von Laue read these back into imperial history and explored the degree of Russia’s divergence from the standard model. He identified statist intervention and social underdevelopment as the preeminent features of late imperial history.

The *Vestnik* materials cast doubt onto these assumptions. On the one hand, the *Vestnik* sources suggest that Russian civil society was much more developed than von Laue had assumed. On the other, they demonstrate that state involvement in economic affairs was not antithetical to modernization—the issue was, instead, the vector of the state’s involvement. According to von Laue, the inability of the agrarian elites, ignorant peasant masses, and semi-feudal merchants, but not the bourgeoisie, to shoulder modernization necessitated state intervention in the national economy. Such industrialization from above limited and constrained entrepreneurial initiative, valued economic power over constitutional liberty, and amplified statist, authoritarian, and, ultimately, totalitarian tendencies.  

The *Vestnik* materials amply demonstrate that there were alternatives to this point of view—local self-government could share the burdens of progress had the state given it the responsibility to do so.

Von Laue also portrayed Sergei Witte as an amalgam of old patriarchal Russia on the periphery of the capitalist world and new westernized Russia thirsty for the gains of the advanced world. There is much to commend this view. Having grown up in the maelstrom of the Great Reform era, Witte brought his time’s stress and strain to policy-

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formation. As one recent Russian scholar has put it, he “at once symbolized the authoritarian and autocratic system’s potential and impotence.”115 However, as Frank Wcislo has argued, the texts that Witte authored before 1892 exuded “an air of confidence, optimism, and unprecedented possibility—a mood reminiscent of what Eric Hobsbawm has called the Age of Empire.” By contrast, his ministerial and post-ministerial writing became increasingly cynical and occasionally apocalyptic. Wcislo has suggested that Witte should be “reread” not as “the great industrializer,” but “simply a Russian, and a European, of the later nineteenth century.” 116

Seen from this angle, Witte could have been a liberal had it not been for his government post—his learning curve on agricultural matters demonstrated thinking along liberal lines. However, the dilemmas between individualism and individuality as well as local independence and central direction were issues with which he struggled throughout his government career, although nothing in Witte’s background predetermined him to prefer one to the other. His biography deserves a reexamination to uncover the sources and development of these inner conflicts.

Tropes about Witte abound and many have been resurrected in the post-Soviet era. This chapter will place Witte, as the Vestnik liberals placed Russia itself, into the European context without the prejudicial time-lag assumption. More specifically, it will explore Witte’s influence on and interaction with the liberal press, which only G. N.

Dragan has explored, but from a Marxist perspective and in a top-down way. Not only does this challenge the image of the autocratic minister, but it also sheds light on the active ingredients of late Imperial society. This chapter will relate the evolution of Witte’s views on economic development to his experience with the press. It will also demonstrate that by the late 19th century, the fourth estate formed multiple points of convergence and influence between state and society.

The *Vestnik* liberals did not treat Russia’s socio-economic changes at the end of the 19th century as qualitatively different in the broader European context. As historian Norman Stone has argued, Europe as a whole was experiencing a profound economic transformation whose effects were poorly understood. The chief reason for the socio-economic shifts was the erosion of Europe’s agrarian base. Stone has argued that until 1870, the advantage in economic life lay with agriculture and the “terms of trade” (the quantity of manufactured goods needed to buy a given number of agricultural commodities) tended to favor the farmer. In the early 1870s, however, the terms of trade began to shift against agriculture and commodities in general. The prices of raw materials and food declined in relation to manufacturing prices. Food prices declined everywhere. European producers of grain, meats, and vegetables had competed with each other and doubled their output by the middle decades of the century. An agile man could survive in these conditions, Stone has argued, but this meant hard work, for which the European gentry were not prepared because their expectations were too high. The agricultural

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decline affected the peasants as well because the decline in prices went on with only brief interruptions from the early 1870s until the mid-1890s. Reformers and liberal economists encouraged farmers to take an enlightened view of credit, to invest their money in cooperative or rural savings banks, instead of stashing it in socks, but their arguments fell on deaf ears.\textsuperscript{118}

The Witte System's vectors do not appear exceptional in this context. The Russian state began to place increasing bets on industrial development soon after 1861. The Witte System crowned this gamble and at the same time marked its ebb. Witte swam with the European current, but how did he succeed in applying European principles to the Russian Empire? At the beginning of his tenure, Witte did not anticipate the social consequences of forced modernization. Through his close but unstable involvement with the press, Witte tried to influence public opinion and cull support for his policies. In its turn, the press gave the Witte System extensive coverage and analysis. Both Western and Russian historians of the late Imperial era have not detected the significance of this symbiosis.

Periods of openness and reform occupy as prominent a place in Russian history as do periods of self-satisfied and delusional isolationism. Peter the Great's monopoly on violence was the principle component of his successful modernization attempt, but his reforms were an enlightened autocrat's personal project forced upon unwilling subjects. The reign of Alexander II marked the next reformist milestone in terms of social breadth. Its success is more difficult to explain because many members of the landed gentry

willingly went along with transformations that undermined their economic well-being. Enforcement yielded to collective psychology—Russian society was morally ready for the changes and the shestidesiatniki reformers had matured under the stifling regime of Nicholas I that had marked serfdom’s climax and swan song. The public reaction to the loss in the Crimean War had a visceral and moral component that created a window of opportunity for Tsar Alexander II and his enlightened bureaucrats to implement reforms on the crest of public support, or, at least, the nobility’s guilt-ridden complacency. This was a unique confluence in Russian history: public feeling and state interests had never overlapped so thoroughly.

The Witte System stood between Peter’s enlightenment enforcement project and the lucky concurrence of interests that Alexander II had so shrewdly exploited. As a result of the famine of 1891-92, Russia’s backwardness once again impressed itself upon the educated public’s consciousness and this begins to explain some of Witte’s success. However, public opinion was much more divided on the issue of remedies. Should the state pursue macroeconomic westernization or the development of indigenous manufacturing industries and agriculture? In order to bend public opinion in his favor, Witte used the press in unprecedented ways. According to contemporaries, daily newspapers covered Witte’s desk at the Finance Ministry. Renowned surgeon Nikolai Veliaminov, the Witte family’s physician for over 20 years, wrote that Witte woke up
early, arrived at the office by 9 am, and drank a cup of tea while perusing the daily press.¹¹⁹

Long before Alexander III placed him in charge of the Finance Ministry in August 1892, Witte understood that public opinion was no longer negligible in Russia. Not one to miss a chance for self-adulation, Witte wrote in his memoirs: “All of the press has to admit that, until now, never in Russia had it enjoyed such freedom as it enjoyed when I was minister.” He maintained that he had never persecuted publications when they criticized him and that the press lost its freedom under his successor Peter Stolypin.¹²⁰ Witte’s status as an outsider explains this fascinating symbiosis with the press.

Born in Tiflis in 1849, Witte was the youngest brother of five siblings—Alexander, Boris, Olga, and Sophia. He wrote in his memoirs that his parents’ attitude to him was “quite lukewarm” and he compensated for this by transferring his love and respect to his eldest brother Alexander who became a mentor to his siblings.¹²¹ Alexander had dedicated his life to the army, but despite looking up to him, Sergei absorbed nothing of his military mindset. On the contrary, throughout his life, Witte consistently avoided military solutions to state problems, although this made him no less confrontational on the personal level. In 1898, the well informed French financial agent in Petersburg, Maurice Verstraete, reported to French foreign minister Théophile Delcassé: “Despite his

¹²¹ Ibid., III, p. 22.
combative temperament, he may be, quite possibly, the most peaceful man in Europe at this moment.”122

Witte devoted few lines to the rest of his siblings except for Boris who studied law for which Sergei had no respect whatsoever. He wrote in his memoirs: “Goremykin is a jurist and [Pobedonostsev] is one also. And it is widely known that jurists support each other as closely as do lyceum students, just like Jews in their kahal.”123 Witte’s disrespect for the intricacies of legal procedure manifested itself in a phrase he uttered as Prime Minister in 1906: “Some Romans once said that the right to private property was inviolable, and we have been repeating this like parrots for two thousand years; in my opinion, everything is violable if the common good demands it.”124 Incidentally, Leonid Slonimskii agreed with the outdated application of Roman property law to land ownership. However, he never extended this criticism to “everything.” In general, Witte was given to severely criticize all views that did not fit into his system of values and conceptual framework. He often referred to what he disagreed with as “spiritism” or “mysticism.”125

Under the influence of his relatives, the Fadeevs, Witte internalized Slavophilism and Orthodoxy early in his life, but eventually shed their conservative components. Whatever Panslavist tendencies his uncle Rostislav Fadeev may have imparted to him, they contained no element of opposition to the state. Nevertheless their influence never

125 S. Iu. Witte, Vospominaniia (Moscow, 1960), III, p. 25.
entirely disappeared and contributed to Witte’s belief in Russia’s “Great Power”
destiny. Witte’s character evolved in the atmosphere of the Caucasus region and
Odessa where he came to study at Novorossiisk University in 1866. In Odessa, he and
Boris experienced a maturity leap when their father died and left the family with
enormous debts and his two teenage sons uncertain of their future. Realizing their
precarious situation, they finally applied themselves to preparing for the admission
exams, which they passed. They then moved their mother and sisters to Odessa. At the
time, the city was a major cosmopolitan business center infused with a commercial
mindset and awash in money. Theodore von Laue believed that Witte also “absorbed the
spirit of modern technology in Odessa, the most open-minded and capitalist city of the
empire.” Witte felt so at ease there that he considered Ukraine his second home for the
rest of his life and returned to Kiev and Odessa as often as he could.

At Novorossiisk University, Witte specialized in theoretical mathematics, which
he jealously distinguished from the quantitative field. The quantifiers focused on
calculations and formulas. Buried in numbers, he believed, they were oblivious to the big
picture. The theorists, however, cared little for mathematical busy work and focused on
the philosophy behind the number-crunching process. Witte criticized Vyshnegradskii for
lacking “winged thought and winged imagination” without which “even in the most
mundane economic affairs, if they are on a large scale and of national importance, one
could create nothing of importance.” Witte condescendingly referred to Vyshnegradskii

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127 S. Iu. Witte, Vospominaniiia (Moscow, 1960), III, p. 79.
as a number-cruncher, while he considered himself a mathematician. This big-picture attitude helped Witte’s grand conceptualization of reforms. On the other hand, it also contained the dangerous antecedents of total disregard for the social consequences of state policies. The recourse to abstract, one could say mathematical, necessity and formulaic explanations were how Witte justified the suffering his “system” caused in its initial stages. Alas, the Marxists did not have a monopoly on the ends-justify-the-means approach to the growing pains of socio-economic evolution. Witte took very little interest in politics during his student years, although he remained loyal to monarchism and Orthodoxy. He shared none of his classmates’ respect for radical writers such as Dmitrii Pisarev, Nikolai Dobroliubov, and Nikolai Chernyshevskii, and chose instead to focus exclusively on the sciences and mathematics.

Witte intended to pursue an academic career upon completing his studies in 1870, but his mother and uncle Rostislav Fadeev convinced him that it was “a career unfit for a nobleman.” Witte capitulated with surprising ease and joined the chancellery of the Novorossiisk and Bessarabian Governor in 1871 and later joined the administration of the Odessa Railroad under Count Bobrinskii. Witte was an outsider who became acquainted with the business of railroad management from the ground up: he began his career as a small station manager, but rapidly worked his way up under Bobrinskii’s protection. Witte soon asked to be temporarily released from his duties in order to pursue a railroad engineer’s education in St. Petersburg, but Bobrinskii refused to let him go and justified

132 Ibid., II, p. 88.
his decision with the argument that railroads would only become efficient and profitable when non-engineering specialists took part in their administration. Bobrinskii’s assessment demonstrated profound insight into the future of Russian railroads, and, indeed, the commercial side soon became the most important aspect of the railroad business and eventually in imperial economic policy as a whole. Witte was one of the very first railroad administrators who did not come from the engineering profession that prided itself on its corporative exclusivity—its members who wore a military railway uniform with engineering insignia looked down on those who did not.

Witte’s first administrative innovation was the “American system” of locomotive exploitation. In Europe and Russia, each engineer was “attached” to a locomotive, so when the man had to rest, the machine was out of use. The US system kept locomotives running by assigning different engineers to them. Witte justified his innovation by appealing to increased efficiency for which he cared much more than he did for tradition or for the engineers’ corporate culture. His uncompromising attitude on the issue was an indication of self-assurance bordering on insulting intransigence that would alienate him from colleagues and make enemies throughout his career. In his memoirs, Witte argued that love of tradition was an integral part of patriotism, but that a man had to leave room for rationality, too: “Only by coordinating the heart and reason can a man, or a state, survive.” He reorganized the administration of the South-Western Railroad by centralizing it and proudly noted in his memoirs that he was the first and only director,

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134 Ibid., III, pp. 140-141.
135 Ibid., I, p. 82.
which he officially became in 1886, who did not have an engineering background.\textsuperscript{136} He was an outsider in charge.

Witte moonlighted for Odessa newspapers while serving in the railroad administration during the 1870s.\textsuperscript{137} He had also worked for Zaria, Ivan Aksakov’s conservative \textit{Rus}, and the \textit{Novorossiiskii telegraf}. In his 1884 book on railroad tariffs, he noted that the press had often attacked the railroad concerns without checking all the facts. Yet he defended the press because, in the long run, its coverage of railroad inefficiencies and questionable business practices resulted in state inspections. The voice of the press was a guarantee of transparency before the state, if not always the public.\textsuperscript{138} He concluded his book: “It can be expected with certainty that the administration of our railroads by private companies will constantly improve under the influence of the press and public opinion.”\textsuperscript{139} As an outsider running Russia’s most lucrative railroad, he began to understand how to use the press to outmaneuver opponents and to justify his policies to his superiors.

In the 1880s, Witte also began to publish separate programmatic works in which he developed his views on modernization in reference to European economists. Witte’s reform project rested on the fundamental idea that the nation was an essential link between the individual and humanity. In this hierarchy, the state’s modernization policies exclusively favored the nation. This idea was in total harmony with the views of early

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Ibid., III, p. 181.
\item S. Iu. Witte, \textit{Printsipy zheleznodorozhnykh tarifov po perevozke gruzov} (Kiev, 1884), pp. 167-168.
\item Ibid., p. 295.
\end{enumerate}
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19th-century German economist Friedrich List who was a great influence on Witte’s thinking. Upon this assumption rested the components of the Witte System that pursued a combination of foreign loans, the conversion to the gold standard, an accelerated development of heavy industry, and railroad building. The tools to achieve these goals were protectionism, taxation, financial reforms, a favorable climate for foreign investments, the nationalization of the most lucrative private railroads (although Witte himself worked for one), and expansion into Asian markets. The Witte System was part of a broader assumption that economic progress could preserve social and political stability.

Until the mid-1880s, Witte still entertained vague Slavophile ideals about protecting Russia’s “true structure” and preventing her “people from turning into factory automatons, capitalist robots, and machines.”140 However, by the decade’s end, Witte came to believe that Russia could successfully compete with more advanced nations only after she had developed her own industry. “Only economically independent peoples have the power to fully exercise their political clout,” he wrote.141 To justify the financial strain that protectionism placed on the Russian population, Witte would write to Nicholas II in 1899: “Great goals demand great sacrifices.”142 Continental economic theory heavily influenced the evolution of Witte’s views and this inspiration came from the recently unified German state.

141 “Vsepoddaneishii doklad ministra finansov ‘O polozhenii nashei promyslennosti’ ot fevralia 1900 g.,” Istorik-marksist 2-3 (1935), p. 133.
In the second (1884) edition of *The Principles of Railroad Tariffs for the Transportation of Goods*, Witte expressed sympathy for the views of German economists Gustav von Schmoller (1838-1917) and Adolf Wagner (1835-1917). Schmoller, who led the Younger Historical School in Germany, did not like “Smithian” recipes and believed that economic facts should speak for themselves. A high level of historiography, respect for facts, a lack of respect for theoretical economics, and the supreme importance attributed to the state characterized the Young Historical School. Schmoller always protested against “isolating” analyses of economic phenomena and preferred instead to see them in historical context. He referred to his school as historico-ethical. In the tradition of Roger Bacon, the accretion of monographs on regional and specific economic issues would eventually demonstrate to the right mind the appropriate national economic patterns and laws.\(^\text{143}\) Schmoller imparted to his school a distrust for excessive theorizing, which he associated with Manchesterism’s free trade support.

Witte’s other interest, Adolf Wagner, was a politically conservative reformer and a leader in the fight for *Sozialpolitik*, a form of socially responsible legislation. He was a “theorist” in the sense that he opposed “historicism,” but he emphasized the relativity of economic systems to historical eras with his “historico-legal” and “economic” categories of institutions, forms of behavior, and processes.\(^\text{144}\) Wagner approved of direct taxation,

\(^\text{144}\) Ibid., p. 851.
including inheritance taxes, and espoused a policy that went beyond taxing for revenue but treated taxation as a means to correct income distribution.\footnote{Ibid., p. 945.}

Frank Wcislo has argued that \textit{The Principles} provide an essential insight into Witte’s evolution from a “railway man” to finance minister because his experience as a railroad administrator was the seed of his assumptions about Russia and its place in Europe. Witte understood that railroads would transform Russia’s commercial-industrial culture and intensify the benefits of an international economic order of which the Russian Empire was an integral component. His basic argument was that freight rates could be manipulated and prices held artificially low to encourage commerce, especially in grain, and the accompanying development of regional markets, business volume, and profits. Therefore, the theoretical exposition of freight rates inevitably attended to not only the technology that the expert manager administered, but also the entire network of commercial and industrial relationships, the culture, with which it interacted.\footnote{Frank Wcislo, “Witte and the Industrialization of Russia,” \textit{Russia in the European Context, 1789-1914: A Member of the Family}, ed. Susan P. McCaffray and Michael Melancon (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 74-76.} Indeed, Witte saw himself as the ultimate economic manager and the empire as his household.

However, \textit{The Principles} also demonstrate the struggle Witte experienced between contextualizing the Russian Empire and nurturing its indigenous socio-economic qualities. Witte agreed with Schmoller’s and Wagner’s “realistic” economics rooted in “enlightened opportunism” and the “relativity of economic organization, which should answer the spirit of the time, place, and all the social conditions of a given society.” He also believed that state involvement in economics should not go “beyond what the time
demands,” and this meant that Russia had to abandon the “Manchester” approach that made her excessively dependent on foreign influences. At the same time, the treatise opened to readers Witte’s observations of the late-19th-century commercial-industrial culture—what he called the interplay of the economic, political, and intellectual forces—as well as his thinking about the ways in which it should, and inevitably would, change.

Still, Witte argued that “a Russian Bismarck” ought to begin by rebuilding and strengthening the Orthodox Church and spreading Russia’s peasants evenly over the Empire’s plentiful fertile soil. Familiar with the arterial networks interconnecting commercial-industrial culture, Witte was equally attuned to the complex relational balance and flow of market exchanges, which he knew to be the lifeblood of commerce and industry. He repeatedly emphasized the railroad’s potential to generate commerce and wealth. The product of daily experience, these views of increasingly profitable commercial markets provoked Witte, whose propensity to think broadly and synthetically was his greatest intellectual strength, to consider the cultural topography that surrounded him, that is, the national and international context of railroad technology.

The Principles was Witte’s attempt to justify railroad practice in terms of the technology’s capacity to foster “the general good” in ways that bore significance for both

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147 S. Iu. Witte, Printsipy zheleznodorozhnykh tarifov po perevozke gruzov (Kiev, 1884), pp. 72, 84.
state and society. He envisioned a public world of industrialists, wholesale merchants, entrepreneurs, consumers, and shippers increasingly integrated by the new technology. As Wcislo has argued, the railroad was a “prominent feature of national economies throughout Europe and the international order centered upon it in an age of Empire.”

Witte thought of Russia as a commercial archipelago badly in need of a communications network. He made explicit connections between the commercial topography that surrounded him and the capacity of the railroad to transform it. By integrating the economy, railways would even lead to a social transformation and turn the Romanov Empire into a “social” and “non-estate” monarchy. However, the integrationist element in Witte’s thinking was about to undergo a transformation.

By the time Witte came to read him, Friedrich List was German national hero whose name was synonymous with the Zollverein, the customs union of the German states and the embryo of German national unity. List had the grand vision of a national situation in which the present was nothing but a state of transition and this led him to see economic development as a succession of “phases.” List had a strained relationship with the social consequences of industrialization. Writing in the 1830s and 1840s, he paid little attention to the condition of the working class and the amount of able-bodied unemployed all over Europe. This neglect stood out particularly well in contrast to Friedrich Engels’ *Condition of the Working Class in England*, published in 1844. List

151 Ibid., p. 80.
seemed to be much more concerned with tariff policies and railway projects than with peasant, artisan, and factory worker grievances.  

As a way to decrease unemployment and indigence, List avidly supported immigration from the German territories to the United States, where he had spent seven years between 1825 and 1832. So fully Americanized had he become that he advocated financing railroad construction by the issue of banknotes, a practice for which there was only an American precedent. List was unconcerned about peasants who could not make ends meet and small-scale workshops that could not compete with new factories. He believed that both groups belonged to a moribund phase of economic development that was already yielding to a predominantly industrial economy. List thought that it was right for the state to assist private initiative but wrong to set up nationalized enterprises. Joseph Schumpeter wrote of List: “He was a great patriot, a brilliant journalist with definite purpose, and an able economist who coordinated well whatever seemed useful for implementing his vision.” These lines also describe Witte. Perhaps most importantly, List was an optimist at heart. He felt intuitively that the dominant fact about capitalism was its power to create productive capacity and he saw vast potentialities looming in the near future.

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158 Ibid., p. 572.
In 1889, Witte published a brochure entitled *The National Economy and Friedrich List* in which he agreed with List’s criticism of classical political economy for its cosmopolitanism, disregard for national characteristics, and “lifeless materialism.” List was a particularist who considered moral and political factors important to a nation’s economic development. Witte wrote: “One of the main [problems with contemporary political economy] is that the majority of economists do not separate economic concepts in their relation to separate individuals, nations, and humanity. Meanwhile the same economic theories and conclusions can be correct in relation to an individual, but completely wrong in relation to a nation or quite erroneous in relation to humanity, etc.”

Leonid Slonimskii followed the same argument in his articles about European economics in the 1880s.

Witte also agreed with List that industry, not agriculture, should comprise a nation’s economic backbone. This was especially true for Russia because her agricultural exports to Europe would inevitably fall in value due to trans-Atlantic competition. However, he disagreed with List’s belief that agriculture should receive the same kind of protection as industry. Witte wrote that agricultural protectionism was undesirable and that the rural economy would benefit much more from the development of local industry and the intensification of farming techniques through better education and technological modernization. For Witte in the late 1880s, agriculture, in which three-quarters of the Russian population were involved, was clearly a secondary and distant consideration. He

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160 Ibid., p. 45.
161 Ibid., p. 23.
had a commercial worldview and urban sensibilities. Gurko described him as “a typical city-dweller, that is, a merchant, an industrialist [to whom] everything close to the earth was alien and did not matter much.” Despite his practical intelligence, Witte had a vague understanding of agricultural needs and his general dislike of the landed nobility added to his neglect of rural interests. Prince S. S. Oldenburg wrote that Witte “was always removed from the needs of the village.”162

What made List’s works so attractive to Witte? The answer lay across the Russian Empire’s western border. Witte had witnessed the unification of Germany under Bismarck and its head-spinning ascent into the first ranks of continental powers. Witte’s new “Listian” nationalism looked up to Germany as the model Rechtsstaat, in which the autocracy championed popular needs. Liberal Western democracy, on the other hand, was a sign of the inefficiency and lethargy of the central administration. Von Laue has written that Witte fused into one reality the present and the future, the available and potential wealth, in his conceptualization of reforms. The postponement of present advantages for future benefits became an acceptable justification for social suffering.163 For Witte, List’s theories and Bismarck’s leadership had reinforced each other and led to Germany’s amazing economic success. Count Pavel Shuvalov, the Russian ambassador in Berlin, passed on to Witte Bismarck’s famous remark about him: “This is the first time I have heard of a man in the past few decades who has a will and knows what he wants.”164 Bismarck had correctly foreseen a great political career, but it came at the cost of a

162 S. S. Oldenburg, Tsarstvovanie Imperatora Nikolaia II (Moscow, 1992), p. 163.
torturous internal balancing act, which makes it worth reconsidering whether a “devout monarchist,” as Witte described himself in his memoirs, was necessarily also a conservative.

Parallel to publishing books and brochures in the 1880s, Witte also wrote articles for the conservative newspaper *Moskovskie vedomosti*. As Witte biographers Ananich and Ganelin have noted, he agreed with the paper’s conservative ideology, but was critical of the absence of a constructive economic program on its pages.\(^{165}\) He chose *Moskovskie vedomosti* for career purposes because he knew that the paper enjoyed support from high state officials. He also became close to the archconservative Prince V. P. Meshcherskii and published articles on the pages of his reactionary newspaper *Grazhdanin*. In his memoirs, Witte distanced himself from Meshcherskii: “[He] persistently sought to befriend me, but I tried to get away from it.”\(^{166}\) In reality, this was not entirely true. Witte’s copious correspondence with Meshcherskii demonstrates that throughout the 1880s Witte repeatedly asked to be published in *Grazhdanin*. In the early 1890s, he used its pages to reply to criticism published in the moderate (by comparison) dailies, such as Suvorin’s *Novoe vremia* and Osip Notovich’s *Novosti*. As Witte established himself in power, however, his correspondence with Meshcherskii decreased to a trickle.\(^{167}\) As with *Moskovskie vedomosti*, Witte used *Grazhdanin* for career purposes and then distanced himself from it. Both papers’ conservative editors also refused to

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support his programs once they understood that his economic reforms undermined the gentry’s interests.

Witte joined the highest ranks of the Russian bureaucracy at the end of Alexander III’s reign, which had instituted the counter-reforms, avoiding political change but implementing far-reaching economic reforms. Although he defended autocracy, Witte wrote of the counter-reforms in his memoirs: “Alexander ascended the throne covered in his father’s blood. It is understandable that he took the path of counter-reforms. With many of them I do not agree, and I find that they later produced deleterious effects.”

He admitted this often in his memoirs, but he usually modified this attitude by adding that monarchy was the only system under which he could have achieved concrete results in Russia. Prominent lawyer and liberal thinker Vasilii Maklakov wrote: “Witte judged principles by their results, but did not evaluate life based on its consistency with principles.”

By the time he came to Petersburg in the early 1890s, Witte’s view of the autocracy already differed from that of its conservative supporters and liberal critics. He saw it neither as the basis of Uvarov’s famous ideological formula, nor as an obstacle to reforms. Only autocracy could push through unpopular and painful changes, he believed. Every form of government had relative advantages and disadvantages in his opinion, but was crucial for Russia’s future to force through the necessary economic reforms without hesitation: “In the main questions of state business, it is not the systems of action that are important, unless they are clearly misguided, but the elimination of

169 Ibid., I, p. 231.
170 V. A. Maklakov, Vospominaniia (Riga, no date), p. 22.
vacillations from side to side, which inflict bloody wounds to the state organism.”¹⁷² He was in perfect harmony on this point with his greatest supporter, Alexander III.

What did Witte bring to the position of finance minister? Self-assurance was perhaps the most distinguished trait that developed in the recesses of his character. It was a result of his early experiences in the Caucasus and Odessa, especially after his father’s premature death and the financial straits into which this plunged the family. He shared this experience with Vestnik’s founder Mikhail Stasiulevich whose family fell apart when he was a teenager. However, Witte’s loyalty to the throne was not blind. It was a function of two things: his outsider status and the monarchy’s performance. He was a monarchist who had shed his Slavophile convictions by the mid-1890s under the pressure of circumstances.¹⁷³ In August 1892, he came into the Finance Ministry with the intention of industrializing Russia with the rapidity and thoroughness only an autocrat’s support could guarantee. Witte found himself in the right place at the right time to implement the reform projects he had developed throughout the 1880s—the Finance Ministry was the center of power during Russia’s push for industrialization and the minister held in his hands the strings that controlled the empire.

Many circumstances in Witte’s life conspired to keep him an outsider in Petersburg. His first wife died shortly after he was put in charge of the Transportation Ministry. His eye soon fell upon Matilda Lisanevich, a woman of Jewish background

¹⁷² S. Iu. Witte, Vospominaniia (Moscow, 1960), I, p. 188.
trapped in an unhappy marriage, and he paid her husband 30,000 rubles for a divorce.\textsuperscript{174} The story caused a scandal in high society. Nevertheless, Alexander III supported his minister and allowed the marriage to proceed, which it did in the Transportation Ministry’s chapel.\textsuperscript{175} Although the newlyweds would lead a happy life, the Court never accepted Lisanevich who was forever surrounded by gossip and false accusations.\textsuperscript{176} After Witte pushed through the gold standard and the financial reform, “Matildores” became a byword for the new banknotes and the Finance Ministry’s border guard in the Far East was called “Matilda’s guard.” Throughout his life Witte never lost sight of his alienation experience and surrounded himself with a talented staff whose loyalty he valued above all else.

Those who knew Witte pointed to the appearance and manners that set him apart from Petersburg’s polished and educated society. Diplomat, and eventually foreign minister, A. P. Izvolskii described Witte’s unusual appearance: enormous height, unusually long arms, undistinguished face, brusque manners, and an Odessa accent.\textsuperscript{177} Warsaw Governor-General V. I. Gurko also pointed out Witte’s simple language, absence of eloquence, and abrupt manners. Yet Gurko admitted that for all his faults, Witte never failed to produce a deep impression on his interlocutors.\textsuperscript{178} Alexandra Bogdanovich, wife of General Eugene Bogdanovich who was a member of the Interior Ministry committee, kept a salon and described Witte as “more of a merchant than a bureaucrat” who once

\textsuperscript{174} B. V. Ananich and R. Sh. Ganelin, \textit{Sergei Iulievich Vitte i ego vremia} (St. Petersburg, 1999), pp. 405-406.
\textsuperscript{175} S. Iu. Witte, \textit{Vospominaniiia} (Moscow, 1960), III, p. 354.
\textsuperscript{176} Ibid., III, p. 356.
\textsuperscript{177} A. P. Izvolskii, \textit{Vospominaniiia} (Minsk, 2003), p. 86.
admitted to one of her salon guests that “nothing would have convinced him to leave the south except for the prospect of quick money.”\footnote{A. V. Bogdanovich, \textit{Tri poslednikh samoderzhtsa. Dnevnik} (Moscow-Leningrad, 1924), pp. 102-103.} The historian and liberal politician Pavel Miliukov left a very interesting description: “The Court environment in which Witte had to function and seek support for his activity was always against him. Everybody saw him—and he saw himself—as an outsider, an alien from a different, more democratic environment, and therefore a suspicious and dangerous person. Witte, in his turn, looked upon this environment with poorly disguised contempt, and it answered him with forced politeness and with concealed hatred while he was in favor.”\footnote{P. N. Miliukov, \textit{Vospominaniia} (Moscow, 1990), I, p. 321.} Witte’s appearance reminded writer Boris Glinskii “of an English statesman.”\footnote{B. B. Glinskii, “Graf Sergei Iulievich Vitte (Materialy dla biografii),” \textit{Istroicheskii vestnik} CXL:4 (1915), p. 222.} The opposition to Witte did not limit itself to gossip. He was the target of two assassination attempts by right-wing groups and in both instances the police and judicial investigations ended inconclusively because of “insufficient evidence.”\footnote{M. N. de Enden and Victoria B. Emmons, “The Roots of Witte’s Thought,” \textit{Russian Review} 29:1 (1970), p. 11.}

In this antagonistic environment, Witte wasted no opportunity to eliminate competitors for high government positions. He played on Vyshnegradskii’s dislike for transportation minister A. Ia. Giubennet to dislodge the latter from his post and simultaneously undermined a competing candidate A. A. Vendrikh. He then went after Vyshnegradskii himself by suggesting to Alexander III that the “old man was ready for retirement,” stood in the way of the Emperor’s projects, and was psychologically unstable.
and unwell.\textsuperscript{183} Gurko saw Witte as a utilitarian and wrote: “In general, at the basis of Witte’s attitude towards people lies a deep disdain for humanity.”\textsuperscript{184} However, Witte had the priceless administrative gift for choosing loyal aides who created a thick buffer around him, as he openly admitted in his memoirs.\textsuperscript{185} His colleagues later became finance ministers: E. D. Pleske, I. P. Shipov, V. N. Kokovtsov (who was also Prime Minister), and P. L. Bark. Witte convinced scientist D. I. Mendeleev to head the Chamber of Weights and Measures. Miliukov wrote of Witte’s talent: “He could attract anyone he found along the way and get rid of anyone he did not need—people, knowledge, advice, backstage intrigues and the betrayals of friends, jealousy and opponents. He was very good at reading people he needed at any given time, to organize their work, to force them to work for him and towards his vision at any given time. He needed this ability because the things he did were on such a large scale.”\textsuperscript{186}

The social costs of forced modernization were barely on Witte’s conceptual horizon in the summer of 1892. However, this changed as waves of social reactions rolled back to the center through the press. The Finance Ministry also put out feelers in the form of economic societies and gentry meetings. True to his protean principles, Witte demonstrated a sharp learning curve. No great political leader’s views remain static for long periods, but Witte was notorious for his changeability. Easily adaptable to circumstances and brooding on no internal discontent or hatred, he compromised when he

\textsuperscript{184} V. I. Gurko, \textit{Cherty i siluety proshlogo: pravitelstvo i obschestvennost v tsarstvovanii Nikolaia II v izobrazhenii sovremennika} (Moscow, 2000), p. 49.
\textsuperscript{186} P. N. Miliukov, \textit{Vospominaniia} (Moscow, 1990), I, p. 321.
realized that life did not accommodate his *idée fixe*. Most importantly, Witte understood the connection between Russia’s domestic and foreign policies to an unprecedented degree. His adaptability demonstrated a high level of cognitive complexity that allowed him to balance economic development, political bargaining, international affairs, and careerism in all of their manifestations. Vyshnegradskii had left a mixed legacy of financial achievements and agricultural ruin.

As Witte concentrated power in his hands, he drifted away from the conservative press and sought support for his projects elsewhere. In this, as in many other things, the finance minister demonstrated how gracefully his loyalties could accommodate his career interests and respond to his mind’s learning curve. In the early 1890s, Witte turned to the more moderate and progressive “bourgeois” press. He had a wide choice of such papers. *Novoe vremia*, *Russkie vedomosti*, *Novosti*, and *Birzhevye vedomosti* were Russia’s most popular dailies. By 1897, A. S. Suvorin’s *Novoe vremia* and S. M. Propper’s *Birzhevye vedomosti* sold 50,000 copies each, V. M. Sobolevskii’s *Russkie vedomosti* had 40,000 daily subscribers, and O. K. Notovich’s *Novosti* trailed with 20,000.187 Witte used all of these, but his favorite became Alexei Suvorin’s *Novoe vremia*, not least because it was the most popular Russian daily that was also sold abroad and considered the voice of Russian public opinion in Europe. In his memoirs, Witte wrote of the paper’s moral “squirminess” and the accommodating “whatever you would like” principle behind its editorial policy, but characterized it in the following way: “[It is], by and large, a talented and influential newspaper. Relatively honest and patriotic. It is really one of our best

papers.” As Witte assumed financial control over the empire, the flood of economic suggestions that came from the dailies suggested both the complexity of the journey ahead and the variety of allies from which the new finance minister could choose.

The newspapers proposed various directions for the new finance minister to follow. In September 1892, Novosti published a series of articles on “How to Repair and Strengthen Our Financial Conditions.” The paper expressed its hope that Witte would create “new ways to bring the European financial market closer to the Russian and to develop national industry and trade.” The paper argued against protectionism and favored importing foreign capital. Novosti also argued for an overall banking reform to remove limits on direct loans to producers and peasants. The banking industry had heavily favored large-scale merchant firms and middle-men at the time because banking legislation made this more profitable, but their formalism also stifled the free flow of capital within Russia’s economy. The biggest problem was that real estate was insufficiently used as collateral for small loans.

Alexei Suvorin’s Novoe vremia proposed a high protective tariff, state support for domestic industry and trade (as long as it stopped short of creating monopolies), and the elimination of Jewish influence on the state’s financial policies through railroad magnates such as Ginzburg, Varshavskii, and others. The paper also asked for more “space for

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189 Novosti, 3, 5, and 22 September 1892.
190 Novosti, 4 September 1892.
191 Novosti, 2 October 1892.
192 Novoe vremia, 4 September 1892.
publicity and glasnost” about the process of setting state budgets.\textsuperscript{193} \textit{Novoe vremia} argued that the famine had affected every sphere of Russia’s economy.\textsuperscript{194} Articles examining Russo-German trade relations maintained that “an improvement of the agricultural population’s well being is the same thing as opening new markets for [industry].”\textsuperscript{195} The article also suggested that helping agriculture would help industry and trade only if state aid went beyond the landed gentry. However, high tariffs on German goods had to remain.

Suvorin’s paper was at odds with \textit{Novosti}, which argued for lowering protective tariffs because they had failed to increase the extraction of lead, copper, or zinc. \textit{Novoe vremia} accused \textit{Novosti} of selecting its statistics: extraction of oil and coal had increased, and the oil industry as a whole was a result of protectionism.\textsuperscript{196} \textit{Novosti} responded: “Protectionism has sung its swan song. It is bleeding the population’s paying powers and is becoming increasingly entangled in its own nets.”\textsuperscript{197} Protectionism had caused an increase in sugar prices, facilitated the growth of syndicates, and attracted capital from abroad, although its supporters feared the influence of foreign money.\textsuperscript{198} The crucial question about protectionism, \textit{Novosti} maintained, was who benefited from it—exactly the question that Slonimskii had asked.\textsuperscript{199} Some publications favored certain industries and magnates while others took the rural population’s side. For example, \textit{Russkie vedomosti} was categorically against protectionism, which favored no more than a

\textsuperscript{193} \textit{Novoe vremia}, 26 September 1892.
\textsuperscript{194} \textit{Novoe vremia}, 30 September 1892.
\textsuperscript{195} \textit{Novoe vremia}, 15 September 1892.
\textsuperscript{196} \textit{Novoe vremia}, 19 October 1892.
\textsuperscript{197} \textit{Novosti}, 27 October 1892.
\textsuperscript{198} \textit{Novosti}, 13 November 1892.
\textsuperscript{199} \textit{Novosti}, 27 November 1892.
“handful of mining magnates.”\textsuperscript{200} Monopolies were direct outcomes of the Finance Ministry’s “uncontrolled and pointless” protectionist policy “to which it ironically referred as ‘national’.”\textsuperscript{201}

\textit{Novosti} and \textit{Novoe vremia} parted on the issue of private stock company investments in state enterprises, especially when it came to the State Bank. Suvorin believed that giving “reign over Russia to a joint stock company, to people on the make” would benefit the capitalists, not Russia.\textsuperscript{202} \textit{Novoe vremia} reflected the dominant feeling among state bureaucrats and educated society that capitalism had to be controlled. Russia could profit from the European precedent by avoiding the negative social effects of modernization. This line of argument was not exclusively populist. However, \textit{Novosti} caustically hinted at the other, more important, reason for Suvorin’s lukewarm support for the western capitalist model of development: his fear of competition in the journalistic market, which grew out of the fact that everything he had achieved he owed to the traditional system of state favoritism.\textsuperscript{203} Russia’s new bourgeoisie, \textit{Novoe vremia}’s principle readers, had gained much after Emancipation and was not yet ready to see the state create competitive groups. As a result, Suvorin disagreed with Alfonse Rothschild’s proposal that the state leave employer-labor relations to work themselves out, and S. F. Sharapov, a conservative and nationalist, defended state price controls in \textit{Novoe

\textsuperscript{200} \textit{Russkie vedomosti}, 8 August 1892.
\textsuperscript{201} \textit{Russkie vedomosti}, 18 August 1892.
\textsuperscript{202} \textit{Novoe vreamia}, 10 December 1892.
\textsuperscript{203} \textit{Novosti}, 10 October 1892.
Control over capitalism’s unpredictable forces was the state’s responsibility, but leveling the field especially favored those already tilling it.

*Novoe vremia* opposed an increase in indirect taxes, arguing that it would fall heaviest on the poorest social groups. Instead, it supported direct taxes, especially the apartment tax “that would lie more evenly” upon the population than the “unkind memory of the soul tax.”

The paper supported the policy of creating budget surpluses through regular taxes in preparation for a major financial reform, but it criticized the surplus achieved in 1891 during the famine because this policy retarded overall economic growth, as Slonimskii had also argued. *Novoe vremia* hoped that Witte would introduce a new growth-inducing policy.

In November, Finance Ministry economist A. N. Guriev published a series of articles in *Novoe vremia* justifying a real estate tax by its fair distributive nature. He appealed to the European precedent of progressive taxation rates and the elimination of taxes on the poorest groups. This was also something the *Vestnik* group supported.

*Novosti* was more patient on the issue of taxation. It supported the income tax, but considered its implementation premature until the famine’s consequences were overcome. It also argued for gradual income tax implementation parallel with the abolition of other forms of taxation.

*Birzhevye vedomosti* supported the income tax, but only after the Finance Ministry conducted “a deep and exhaustive study of the country’s
economic conditions.” This Aesopian language implied postponing implementation indefinitely. Instead, the paper supported the real estate tax as a substitute. This would hit the gentry hardest, but leave the fledgling urban middle class in possession of a greater proportion of its gains. Defending the interests of its readers, the paper complained about insufficient credit for small merchants. Large-scale trading companies received the lion’s share of the loans and left individual merchants with nowhere to turn for capital. 

Russkie vedomosti consistently argued for income taxes to reduce the burden on the poor. The paper held up the British income tax as an example worth emulating. The paper argued that if indirect taxes remained at current levels, the poor would eventually fall into hopeless debt or stop buying the taxable goods altogether. However, the paper did not support the real estate tax because it would go directly into state coffers and deprive the town zemstvos of one of their sources of income.

Novoe vremia argued for the establishment of local small credit institutions under the control of local authorities. This arrangement would take into consideration local conditions but also make sure that the borrower’s social position did not influence the loan’s availability and size. The paper also supported the commune’s right to approve renting of land to prevent “miroedy and kulaks” from taking advantage of indigent

209 Birzhevy vedomosti, 18 August 1892.
210 Birzhevy vedomosti, 30 October 1892 and 26 November 1892.
211 Birzhevy vedomosti, 29 September 1892.
212 Russkie vedomosti, 8 and 16 September 1892.
213 Russkie vedomosti, 10 October 1892.
214 Russkie vedomosti, 16 December 1892.
215 Russkie vedomosti, 21 November 1892.
216 Novoe vremia, 3 September 1892.
peasants. On the other hand, *Novoe vremia* condemned the passport system and communal financial responsibility as obstacles to peasant entrepreneurship. The paper also criticized the State Bank for the insufficient amounts of loans it offered to the peasants who did “more to develop the Central Asian region than did the merchants.” The famine demonstrated that the state had to take resettlement into its hands and open the gates to Siberia, which would decrease the amount of unemployment and poverty in European Russia. Colonization, not increased volumes of trade, was the optimal Siberian development strategy. If the state encouraged Siberian industry, the new settlers would buy its products creating a self-sufficient market that could eventually produce a surplus. Despite supporting state control, *Novoe vremia* criticized the tendency for petty dirigisme and bureaucratic control over local enterprise that discouraged private initiative. The paper’s overall evaluation of the state of agriculture was “critical” and it argued that the Finance Ministry’s dominant investment vector should target the village, not “the factory or the warehouse.”

*Novosti* showed much less interest in the state of agriculture. In a series of articles published in late September and October 1892, the paper identified the following sources of peasant impoverishment: overpopulation, soil exhaustion, the commune, and industrial

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217 *Novoe vremia*, 8 October 1892.
218 *Novoe vremia*, 18 October 1892.
219 *Novoe vremia*, 27 October 1892.
220 *Novoe vremia*, 4 August 1892.
221 *Novoe vremia*, 4 August 1892.
222 *Novoe vremia*, 19 August 1892.
223 *Novoe vremia*, 26 November 1892.
224 *Novoe vremia*, 16 December 1892.
underdevelopment. However, Notovich’s paper proposed no constructive program to deal with the problems. Birzhevye vedomosti believed that agriculture was on the verge of collapse, as the title of a series of articles demonstrated: “The Critical Condition of Our Peasant Economy and Measures for Its Improvement.” In December 1892, an article heading read: “Repeated Harvest Shortages in Russia’s Most Fertile Areas Can No Longer Be Considered Accidental, But Stand In Direct Relation To Soil Exhaustion, Which Is A Result Of The Rapaciousness Of The Entire Agricultural System.” The article proposed peasant colonization to relieve land-hunger and soil amelioration loans for the gentry. Writer N. Volosatov criticized the Peasant Bank for mixing commercial, state, and philanthropic functions instead of consistently pursuing its original purpose “to improve the agrarian situation by increasing landholders’ acreage.”

Russkie vedomosti shared this concern for the peasantry, which it considered the poorest socio-economic group whose well-being was an indicator of Russia’s overall economic performance. At the end of September 1892, the paper wrote: “It has become impossible to deny the seriousness of the peasant economy’s disorder and to postpone taking measures against it.” The solution was to increase peasant allotments and reduce taxes. “No matter what example you choose from our rural life, everywhere is evident the soil tiller’s helplessness, the absence of state support for the most important interests

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225 Novosti, 27 September and 3, 6 October 1892.
226 Birzhevye vedomosti, 28 October 1892.
227 Birzhevye vedomosti, 12 December 1892.
228 Birzhevye vedomosti, 11 September 1892.
229 Russkie vedomosti, 23 September 1892.
of agriculture.”230 The paper related the peasantry’s problems directly to industrial protectionism. Technological improvements were not the answer. The crucial factors were agrarian relations and taxes.231 *Russkie vedomosti* barely ever mentioned the gentry’s agricultural interests and problems, as if to imply that they were no longer relevant. In general, the paper did not criticize the Finance Ministry directly, but concentrated its effort on calling attention to the peasantry’s needs.

In early October 1892, Suvorin published a “Small letter” in *Novoe vremia*, in which he disagreed with the belief that Russia’s best years were ahead while Europe was in decline. He concluded: “We only have to work and to adopt trustingly from Europe all that has to do with science, the arts, crafts, and enlightenment in general.”232 *Novoe vremia* defended the Russian people’s entrepreneurial spirit and work ethic and placed the blame for Russia’s economic backwardness on state policies.233 The reader could glean also a similar implication between Slonimskii’s lines. Suvorin personally defended the “new” capitalist life against criticism from Prince V. P. Meshcherskii’s *Grazhdanin*:

“I do not see a single reason to hate the new life and I see every reason for it to strengthen and develop.”234 Suvorin’s next letter clarified his ideas about Russia’s socio-economic vector by referring to the gentry’s impoverishment as historically inevitable. “It would have become poor anyway because it has lost its slaves,” he wrote. “Now capital is the strongest engine of contemporary life, and the time of the gentry’s privileged status has

230 *Russkie vedomosti*, 4 December 1892.
231 *Russkie vedomosti*, 10 December 1892.
232 *Novoe vremia*, 9 October 1892.
233 *Novoe vremia*, 20 October 1892.
234 *Novoe vremia*, 21 October 1892.
passed. Only education, persistent labor, competition with other estates, and state service remain for it.” In this, Suvorin echoed Witte’s own attitude to the landed nobility.

*Birzhevye vedomosti* expressed similar views. It was not Emancipation that had ruined the gentry, but its inability to “understand its calling.” In the past, the gentry’s privileges had been proportional to its merits, “but each historical era has its boundaries.”

This brief examination of the daily press uncovers several patterns. *Novoe vremia* supported a western European model of capitalist development, although it also favored state involvement in the economy that would protect small entrepreneurs and prevent the rise of monopolies. The village demanded special attention. *Novoe vremia* supported the commune, but opposed communal responsibility for taxes. The paper supported an increase in small peasant loans and colonization. *Novosti* fully supported industry, but opposed protectionism and favored foreign investment, which would undermine the old bourgeoisie and open the road for younger entrepreneurs. *Novosti* never stated it openly, but its positive view of foreign investments may have disguised the hope that foreign influence would liberalize Russia’s domestic conditions. *Birzhevye vedomosti* supported the merchant class and criticized all forms of subsidies for industry. The paper called attention to the plight of the peasantry and supported the commune, but also argued for more open resettlement policies. *Russkie vedomosti* criticized Vyshnegradskii’s ministry, but did not believe that the ministerial shuffle would significantly alter the state’s basic economic vector. The paper did not spend much time on analyzing protectionism but emphasized instead the connection between agricultural problems and taxation. It tried to

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235 *Novoe vremia*, 21 December 1892.
236 *Birzhevye vedomosti*, 1 November 1892.
work out a feasible combination of communal principles, small-scale peasant ownership, and industry.

Despite their differences, the four major newspapers agreed that the famine had marked a milestone in socio-economic degeneration. Educated society was ripe for a conceptual shift and the economy required fundamental reforms. The general consensus was that Russia had reached a point when transformation was inevitable. The press both reflected and spread this sensibility, creating the window of opportunity that Sergei Witte needed in the first years of his tenure as finance minister. That the four most influential dailies defended diverse interests and proposed different solutions was natural, but, more importantly, the variety of competing interests also played into Witte’s hands because it never forced him to deal with a united opposition in public opinion. He chose his allies and set his enemies against each other as he pleased. He also selected collaborators for specific policies without compromising his overall vision of reforms.

Witte was less a consensus builder, than a puppet master, which explains why he never targeted a specific socio-economic support base but instead used whatever and whoever suited his purpose—hence his symbiosis with the press. No man was closer to the finance minister than Alexei Suvorin, the owner and chief editor of Novoe vremia, and it was indicative of Witte’s political and personal maneuvering that this relationship was precarious from beginning to end. In his diary entry for 26 January 1893, just after Witte was officially appointed finance minister, Suvorin wrote: “Witte has become unrecognizable. When someone is reporting to him, he looks up, as if he is thinking about things not of this world and about the majesty of his calling. When people address him,
he does not notice. The Tsar, they say, loves his authoritative manner. Witte’s theories are correct, but he did not plan correctly and wants to swing from the shoulder, like Peter the Great.”

Business interests, not moral indignation, were most likely behind Suvorin’s acrimony—a trend that would continue until Witte’s dismissal in 1903. A. V. Bogdanovich entered the following in her diary in April 1893: “Suvorin is outraged because Witte is paying off all the newspapers with the interest from his popularity by subsidizing them.” On 26 April 1894, writer Sophia Smirnova-Sazonova described in her diary Suvorin’s rage when he found out that publicist K. V. Trubnikov, who had owned Novoe vremia until 1876, had accused Suvorin’s paper of receiving State Bank subsidies, which Suvorin feared would hurt his publication’s reputation and popularity. Moreover, Suvorin was always afraid that Witte would find an alternative media support. In September 1894, Smirnova-Sazonova reported that the Foreign Trade Bank had offered to buy Novoe vremia, an offer behind which, Suvorin believed, stood Witte who “dreamed of having his own newspaper.” In a letter to Smirnova, Suvorin wrote: “I am told that Witte would be part of the board that the Foreign Trade Bank intends to establish [for the purpose of running the paper]. Now I think of the plutocrats who made this offer with hatred.” Suvorin eventually turned down the one million rubles and the right to remain chief editor for five years. Instead of selling himself wholesale, he opted

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238 A. V. Bogdanovich, Dnevnik. Tri poslednikh samoderzhitsa (Moscow-Prague, 1924), p. 179.
240 IRLI, f. 285, op. 1, ed. kh. 23, p. 517.
241 IRLI, f. 285, op. 1, ed. kh. 217, p. 93.
to retail his services for greater long-term advantages. Simultaneously, Witte’s relationship with Trubnikov and Suvorin taught the minister that the press was not easily controlled. He also realized that buying a newspaper was not an option because its official nature would soon become public knowledge causing its reputation to plummet.

Witte’s protean loyalties negate the idea that his reforms favored one socio-economic group over another. It was clear that the peasantry bore the brunt of the financial burden and that the gentry was also on the losing end of modernization. However, it is impossible to maintain that the reforms were “bourgeois,” not least because the term “bourgeois” has so many contradictory connotations. Instead, the Witte System should be examined through the formation of its component parts because it was never planned to favor classes.

One of the most important influences on Witte was chemist Dmitri Mendeleev who had begun to develop his theories about industrial development in the early 1860s while studying the oil business. Mendeleev argued for the rapid development of the Russian chemical industry, studied the Pennsylvania oil fields during a trip to the US in 1876, and explored the oil deposits in Azerbaijan. Vyshnegradskii had brought Mendeleev into the Finance Ministry’s planning commissions and by the time Witte came to power, Mendeleev switched from practical exploration to economic analysis and theory. He took part in working out the 1891 trade tariff and the 1895-97 currency reform.

Mendeleev tackled economic questions with very broad theoretical strokes. What he wrote to Alexander III in an 1888 memorandum could have come from a Marxist’s
pen: “Russia has outgrown the agricultural period and stands on the industrial threshold. Only [industrial] improvement will allow the further development of the country’s agriculture, education, wealth, strength, and general capacity.” Mendeleev and Witte agreed that capitalism could triumph in Russia only under strong state direction and that only industrial strength defined national wealth—agriculture was outdated. The state needed to take the lead in bringing Russia’s industry out of its “inchoate development.” Mendeleev used the example of the Greek and Roman decline to prove the inherent weakness of agrarian economies. His program boiled down to four principle points: economic independence through rapid industrial development, state direction of all efforts toward this goal, protectionism and economic freedom, and free competition on the domestic market. Mendeleev was clear on agriculture’s fate: “The defense of the interests of Russian agriculture is nothing more than a narrow understanding of the most important conditions of contemporary international relations, and all efforts to restrain our country’s development to the agricultural epoch, which has passed, are futile.”

Biographer Michael Gordin has recently suggested that Mendeleev proposed an evolutionary economic model that was fundamentally opposed to emergent Marxist doctrine. His model was based on the notion of the constant circulation of vital economic

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244 D. I. Mendeleev, Zavetnye mysli (Moscow, 1995), p. 337.
245 D. I. Mendeleev, K poznaniiu Rossi (St. Petersburg, 1912), p. 96.
coordinators such as labor, statisticians, and capital throughout the Russian Empire. The model’s aim was to modernize the Empire gradually along a universal evolutionary path, eschewing the Marxian notion of conflict, using analogies between scientific concepts—such as the movements of gas molecules—and social and political structures such as scientific societies and agricultural unions. However, Vincent Barnett has argued that protectionism was “the doctrinal bedrock” of Mendeleev’s economic thinking although he also suggested that protectionism should be in harmony with autochthonous conditions rather than against them. Protectionism was the spark that ignited the dormant potential. In both cases, the state was the scientist directing this complex experiment and coordinating its many components.

Witte also believed that industrial development would bring together Russia’s socio-economic archipelago, but both he and Mendeleev seriously underestimated the enormous social strain that the scale and rapidity of economic modernization would produce. This lack of forethought, however, does not appear as shocking in light of Russia’s experience with shock therapy in the 1990s when the same shortsightedness plunged the country into even greater socio-economic difficulties. The lesson in both cases was that for every stage in a country’s socio-economic development, there is an appropriate set of reforms, and only the maximum preservation of social stability in its demographic and psychological manifestations determines the ultimate success of modernization. Witte’s British friend and advisor E. J. Dillon wrote: “Witte’s method

consisted of a set of economic, social and political reforms gradually adopted. For one thing, he would have educated the entire people, and endeavored to qualify the state, or a department of it, to discharge the function of social direction.” Theodore von Laue believed that in this function of social direction, which Witte stumblingly and hesitatingly adopted too late, lay both the triumph and the weakness of the finance minister’s historic role.249

On 30 October 1893, Witte approved a document that outlined the Finance Ministry’s functions and reform program. Although Dmitry Mendeleev was behind the program’s conceptual framework, Witte’s personal signature on this collection of practical suggestions gave them official status.250 The document made clear the Finance Ministry’s main social concerns. Its first part described the state of the Russian economy in 1890 and concluded that for the first time in Russian history industry had developed to the point at which it was directly affecting the economy. This implied that the state would have to become closely involved in directing it.251 The point was to channel the empire’s “natural and cultural” forces toward developing all the particularities of its “natural and economic composition.”252 Russian industry had not developed in the slow and gradual European fashion wherein each technological step produced an appropriate and gradual socio-economic adaptation. Russia had to traverse a great distance in a fraction of time

251 “Iz predstavlenia Ministerstva finansov Gossovetu ‘Ob izmeneniakh shtatov departamenta torgovli i manufaktur,’ 30 oktiabria 1893 g.,” Aktualnye problemy arkhivovedeniia i istochnikovedeniia, sbornik nauchnykh trudov (Moscow, 1983), p. 122.
252 Ibid., p. 128.
and therefore the state, i.e. the Finance Ministry, would have to direct the modernization program. Time was not on Russia’s side.

Since Russia’s size and geo-economic variety precluded an efficient central control system, the state had to create local councils to address local industrial and trade issues. Witte did not trust the zemstvos to fulfill this function. He believed that local administration and business members should become members of special collegiate institutions that would report to a central consultative body under the Finance Ministry. However, the 1893 document did not delineate the exact composition of these collegiate bodies, the requirements for membership, their exact rights, functions, or responsibilities to the local administration, and yet the proposal outlined the basis for a systematic input from local businessmen on questions of general and specific economic reforms. The 1893 document essentially circumvented the zemstvos and created a parallel channel through which the center would exchange information with the periphery in order to provide snapshots of the results from regions that differed in their climatic, social, and cultural conditions.

The 1893 document also demonstrated Witte’s willingness to hear unofficial opinion. However, information rarely possesses inherent practical implications and moral value. Instead, the use to which men put it speaks volumes about their intentions and character. Was Witte’s intention to accommodate public opinion? Hardly. However, he could always use what was at his fingertips as a weapon against his enemies in internecine state and ministry struggles. He could also use the information selectively to

253 Ibid., p. 135.
mobilize “public opinion” to justify his projects. To paraphrase economist Andrew Lange, Witte used information and statistics as a drunkard uses lampposts—more for support than illumination. When it came to the zemstvo, for example, Witte did not brook independence and opposition. His attitude was that of an administrator, not a statesman who had to take into account political and social forces. As Stuart Tompkins put it, Witte saw the government as a business organization with a center that controlled village spontaneity and directed industry.  

Financial specialist Vladimir Kovalevskii wrote of his superior: “Society in his eyes was important either for taking a pulse and diagnosing or for collecting and examining facts about an enormous and variegated state. Society’s role was purely solicitous.” Witte’s interpretation of Emancipation’s legacy provides an important insight into his socio-economic thinking. In the 1893 program, he emphasized only the economic effects of 1861: the rural penetration of money-based economic relations, railroad construction, demographic movement, urban growth, and the appearance of new industrial centers.

Did Witte fail to predict modernization’s social effects or was he intentionally reticent? Why did he not include his thoughts on the social question in the 1893 reform program? One reason is that it would have uncovered the extent to which the Finance Ministry would have had to become involved in state affairs. Social issues went beyond its bailiwick and plunged it into the thick of the labor question, technical and commercial developments.

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256 “Iz predstavleniya Ministerstva finansov Gossovetu ‘Ob izmeneniakh shtatov departamenta torgovli i manufaktur,’ 30 oktiabria 1893 g.,” *Aktualnye problemy arkhivovedeniia i istochnikovedeniia, sbornik nauchnykh trudov* (Moscow, 1983), p. 131.
education reform, passport reform, and even foreign affairs. The Ministries of Interior and Agriculture jealously guarded their turf and Witte’s encroachments caused numerous conflicts. Yet the Witte System could not succeed without a complex reform program. When Witte came into office, he did not believe that agriculture could pull itself out of its economic stupor. He also believed that it was the least responsive of all the economic sectors to top-down reforms. This is why he believed that it was futile to force rapid agricultural reforms. Profitable agriculture was neither the basis nor the cause of stable economic development. It was its outcome, he believed, and this was why he emphasized macroeconomic reform and industrialization over rural development.\(^{257}\) He looked to other sectors of the Russian economy to rationalize.

Witte’s 1898 reform placed taxation on a more coherent principle. The 1893 program had stated, “the system of taxing the industry is based purely on external principles that are not always case-specific or detailed, which rarely makes it equalizing and makes it inconsistent with the volume, turn-over, and profitability of enterprises, and does not increase state revenue directly as trade and industry increase.”\(^{258}\) The main idea was that enterprises, not individuals, would become the objects of tax estimates, which would now vary with production volumes and profitability—stock companies had to pay taxes. Nonetheless, industry did not loose its overall favored status and the 1898 reform did not significantly increase its share of the tax burden.

The deeper significance of the tax reform was its vector. The Finance Ministry made it abundantly clear which socio-economic group it did not favor—the peasantry.


\(^{258}\) Ibid., p. 123.
States’ taxation policies have always been important indicators of their social loyalties. Taxation in Russia had historically maintained a social distinction between taxed and privileged (non-taxed) groups. The new taxation policy essentially adapted the taxation principles from the era of serfdom to the Finance Ministry’s industrialization goals. The state skimmed off all rural savings and redirected them into industrialization. However, the peasantry was not the only social group dissatisfied with Witte’s financial reforms. Loud outcries came from representatives of the gentry’s interests.

Witte’s visceral loyalties lay with the bureaucracy to whose ranks he belonged. In the last quarter of the 19th century, the desire to join the ranks of the nobility had become so strong that gentry spokesmen in the 1880s demanded that higher entry qualifications fence off the “true” nobles from the bureaucrats who were diluting their ranks. In an 1897 meeting of the Special Committee on the Needs of the Gentry, Witte declared: “In fifty years, a new, affluent class will appear, one similar to that which directs the affairs of France—the bourgeoisie. And the gentry will become completely indigent.”259 Owner and chief editor of Novoe vremia, Alexei Suvorin, described in a diary entry for 29 November 1896 a meeting with the Head of the Orel Province Gentry Assembly, Mikhail Stakhovich, who had just left an audience with the Tsar to whom he had conveyed the feeling of the Orel Province gentry: “The gentry thinks that Russia has become poor and it considers it an agricultural state, as opposed to Witte, who considers it industrial.”260

The nobility was in the process of splitting along social lines and the antagonism between landowner and lawyer-bureaucrat increased. In 1898, a commission charged

with examining the plight of the gentry demanded for the estate’s preservation state subsides, the abolition of entry into noble ranks through state service, the strengthening of the gentry’s privileges in the service, and participation by provincial assemblies of the nobility in the selection of new members. Tsar Nicholas and Viacheslav Pleve supported these demands, but Witte, who considered the class moribund and bet on the “new men” of capitalist farming methods, opposed them.261 At stake was the future development of the post-gentry and, ultimately, post-agrarian Russian state, as Witte saw it. Building on the foundations laid by Witte, Stolypin would eventually force the issue.262

In the battle against the gentry, Witte not only circumscribed the zemstvos, blocked their funds, and limited their responsibilities, but also manipulated the press. Although he kept editors and newspaper owners at a distance when his affairs went well, he sought their protection when he was under attack. In early 1895, he persistently requested to meet with Suvorin, who demonstratively dragged his feet. Smirnova-Sazonova explained Witte’s impatience in her diary: “Witte’s affairs must be going badly. Like Krivoshein, he is grasping at Suvorin. Tsion has published a pamphlet abroad critical of him. The entire nobility is against Witte, especially since he took measures against gambling on the stock exchange. Witte gave Tsion’s book to Suvorin to read, hoping, it appears, that he would write something about it.”263 Renowned physiologist and secret police agent Ilya Tsion had been highly critical of Witte’s financial policies

263 IRLI, f. 285, op. 1, ed. kh. 25, p. 391.
and expressed his views in a series of mordant pamphlets, such as the one to which Smirnova refers—*M. Witte and Russian Finances* (1895).\(^264\)

Smirnova also noted in her diary on 18 February 1895 that Suvorin became fully involved in the Tsion affair because his name had also appeared in the brochure.\(^265\) An article denouncing the book appeared in *Novoe vremia* on 18 February 1895. In exchange, Suvorin asked Witte for a concession to sell his printing-house publications along the Warsaw Railroad. Suvorin, an open anti-Semite, moved rapidly to monopolize this market because Jewish owner and chief editor of *Novosti*, Osip Notovich, was selling his newspaper there below St. Petersburg prices. Suvorin could not offer a lower price and asked Witte to speak to the transportation minister about the matter, which Witte did. Although Witte was married to Liubov Lisanevich and was quite sensitive to anti-Semitism, he did not hesitate to help Suvorin who justified his actions in his diary with the following words, “I was embarrassed to ask him for this, and only the desire not to let this railway fall into the hands of the Jews made me do it.”\(^266\)

Ironically, Suvorin and Witte did not see eye to eye on the issue of the financial reforms, which *Novoe vremia* criticized.\(^267\) Witte argued with Suvorin in his correspondence, but never moved against the newspaper.\(^268\) Instead, he asked Suvorin to publish articles in favor of the ruble’s devaluation. A. Iu. Rothstein, Witte’s close supporter and the chairman of the Petersburg International Bank, published one in April

\(^{265}\) IRLI, f. 285, op. 1, ed. kh. 25, p. 393.
\(^{267}\) See the articles published in March 1895.
\(^{268}\) IRLI, f. 285, op. 1, ed. kh. 25, p. 565.
1895. The financial reform issue, however, remained a point of disagreement between the minister and the publisher. When direct personal influence on Suvorin failed, Witte exerted pressure on *Novoe vremia* through other ministries. In April 1896, he complained to Nicholas II about sarcastic articles regarding the financial reform that the paper had run. Nicholas mentioned this to interior minister I. L. Goremykin who called Suvorin in for an appointment during which he politely asked him to tone down the criticism of the Finance Ministry. Witte’s hand behind this unofficial warning did not escape Suvorin’s notice.\(^{269}\) The editor gave in and, as a reward a month later, Witte gave Suvorin the official conclusions of the Khodynka coronation tragedy investigation. The file was marked “Personal and Completely Confidential.”\(^{270}\) After Witte succeeded in pushing the gold standard through the State Council in January 1897, he asked Suvorin to publish in *Novoe vremia* an article by Finance Ministry economist A. N. Guriev explaining and justifying the ruble’s devaluation. Suvorin agreed, but in return asked Witte to cancel all the censor’s warnings that *Novoe vremia* had accumulated, which the finance minister succeeded in doing.\(^{271}\) Witte’s cooperation with *Novoe vremia* increased between 1897 and 1900 although the paper criticized foreign capital investments, protectionism, and the absence of a coherent agricultural policy.

Russia’s industrial development demanded greater stocks of money in relation to capacity and productivity. In other words, the state needed to increase the ratio of monetary to non-monetary assets. This shift in the demand for liquid assets, i.e.

\(^{270}\) Ibid., p. 242.
\(^{271}\) Ibid., p. 276.
monetization, was one of the more important features of an economy emerging from primary production. The state’s budget requirements, not rural solvency, became the basic taxation principle. Pravitelstvennyy vestnik admitted as early as 1893 that tax policies were to “rationally aid” economic success and the development of productive capabilities. The Finance Ministry shifted the burden of state revenue onto indirect taxes and Witte still justified this decision in 1912 by arguing that direct taxes alone could not produce the “colossal sums that modern budgets require.” “Meanwhile,” he wrote, “the same national masses contribute enormous sums into state coffers often unbeknownst to themselves by overpaying for products through indirect taxes.”

Indirect taxation clearly favored industry in presenting the village—as well as the landed gentry—with the modernization bill. Did this make Witte’s taxation policies semi-feudal? It did if “feudal” implies a disproportionate tax burden on the peasantry. The essence of Witte’s reforms lay not in their rationalization of revenue collection, but in the direction of its investment, which was industry.

Taxation became a method of socio-economic discrimination. In 1899, Witte argued that peasant productivity, which happened in concentrated spurts during sowing and harvesting, would find a more beneficial application if it were channeled into and organized through industry. As a result, indirect taxes on alcohol, sugar, kerosene, tea,

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274 S. Iu. Witte, Konspekt lektsii o narodnom i gosudarstvennom khoziaistve (St. Petersburg, 1912), p. 472.
275 “Vsepoddaneishii doklad ‘O neobkhodimosti ustanovit, i zatem neuklonno priderzhivatsia opredelennoi programmy torgovo-promyshlennoi politiki imperii’ ot fevralia 1899 g.,” Materialy po istorii SSSR 6:4, pp. 177-178.
and cotton accounted steadily for over 50 percent of state revenue between 1892 and 1901. Meanwhile, direct taxes on land in the form of redemption payments produced chronic deficiencies.\textsuperscript{276} In his report “On the State Inventory of Incomes and Expenditures for the Year 1894,” Witte had argued that in addition to maintaining traditional agricultural programs, under-funded as they already were, the state had to increase its involvement in industry by nationalizing railroads.\textsuperscript{277} As von Laue has suggested, Witte calculated that it was cheaper in the end to buy foreign capital than foreign goods.\textsuperscript{278}

In order to attract foreign investment, however, Witte had to produce more than profitable balance sheets—he needed to convince international investors. For this purpose, his manipulation of the press extended beyond Russian borders. During the depression of 1901, the Finance Ministry maintained a special allocation for bribing French editors. Witte set up the Commercial Telegraph Agency (CTA) to collect information for the ministry’s \textit{Torgovo-promyshlennaia gazeta}.\textsuperscript{279} Witte also had his subordinates publish favorable articles abroad. For example, Russian economist A. N. Miklashevskii, who worked at the Finance Ministry and played a prominent part in the implementation of the gold standard, traveled to the United States in the mid-1890s to examine its financial structure. He published his findings in six articles in

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\item \textit{Vestnik finansov. promyshlennosti i torgovli}, 1 (1894), p. 12.
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Ekonomicheskoe obozrenie between 1897 and 1900.280 While in the US, Miklashevskii published an article in The Economic Journal explaining the advantages of the Russian monetary reform, the weakness of bimetallism, and the evolution of the reform since its first serious proposal in 1895. Miklashevskii did not hide the fact that the popular reaction in Russia was discontent.281

Another one of Witte’s agents, Arthur Raffalovich, lived abroad and wrote extensively on Russian and European finances. Beginning in 1891, he published an annual global financial report Le Marché Financier. In 1894, he became the Finance Ministry’s agent, or lobbyist, in Paris, which became the chief source of foreign investment in Russia.282 In 1901, Raffalovich published an article justifying Witte’s monopoly on spirits in the Journal of the Royal Statistical Society. He repeated the Finance Ministry’s argument that the monopoly’s objective was not to increase revenue, but to improve the moral and economic situation of the population by regulating the consumption of alcohol.283 The new policy promised to keep Russia solvent and foreign investors interested.

Under the influence of the European depression that began in 1899 and reached Russia in 1900, the modernization program’s industrial vector shrunk. State Comptroller

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P. L. Lobko echoed in his 1902 budget report populist Nikolai Danielson’s ideas.\textsuperscript{284} Lobko argued that it was time to curb the grafting of industry and that only a “flourishing agriculture” could develop an internal market sufficiently wealthy to absorb industrial products.\textsuperscript{285} The crisis also seemed to justify the warnings about hyper-dependence on European financial markets. The Ministry of Agriculture and State Possessions, the Finance Ministry’s fiercest opponent, published in 1902 a brochure in which it called for re-channeling state subsidies from heavy industry to cottage enterprises “that do not require trade tariffs.”\textsuperscript{286} Witte began to defend his policies in 1898 by pointing out that the reason for Russia’s agricultural depression lay outside the economic sphere. Global agricultural trends, excessive allocations to other ministries, and the costs of popular education were the culprits. The crux of the problem, however, lay in the fundamental organization of the agrarian world: personal and property rights. Because the peasant was legally “half a person” with poorly defined rights to the land, rural productivity could neither grow nor change qualitatively. Witte concluded that Emancipation had failed to solve this crucial problem.\textsuperscript{287} This was a careful admission that agricultural problems were real, but that they did not directly implicate the Finance Ministry. In this, Witte echoed Slonimskii’s arguments for rural legal reform. Although Witte had defended the commune in the early years of his ministry, it was no longer the pillar of upon which the stability of the Russian economy rested.

\textsuperscript{285} \textit{Vsepoddaneishii otchet gosudarstvennogo kontrolera za 1902 g.} (St. Petersburg, 1903), pp. 44-45.
\textsuperscript{286} N. V. Ponomarev, \textit{Obzor kustarnykh promyslov Rossii} (St. Petersburg, 1902), p. 124.
\textsuperscript{287} “Vsepoddaneishii doklad ministra finansov o gosudarstvennoi rospisi dokhodov i raskhodov na 1898 g.” \textit{Vestnik finansov, promyshlennosti i torgovli}, 1 (1899), p. 9.
Witte brilliantly manipulated the press to cover his policies throughout the 1890s in as positive a light as possible. The variety of opinions in the media, in turn, allowed him to find allies as belatedly turned his attention to the rural consequences of his reforms, but spun them away from the Finance Ministry. The social consequences of the Witte System did not bring about the finance minister’s downfall. Neither rural poverty, nor the uprisings it had caused; neither the industrial working conditions, nor the occasional disturbances they had produced; neither class struggle, nor the opposition from disgruntled estates were the direct causes of Witte’s dismissal. All ministers spent a large portion of their time and energy in repelling attacks from opponents within the government and challengers inside their own ministries. Witte’s self-assurance changed to uncertainty and concern at the turn of the century. When Ilya Repin painted him, Witte was still conscious of his power, but had an anxious tinge on his brow.

During Tsar Nicholas’s serious illness in 1900, Witte had declared his support for Grand Duke Michael as successor, which angered the Empress Maria Fedorovna who never forgave Witte’s betrayal. Domestic and foreign policy issues also conspired to bring him down. In his memoirs, he identified two central causes for his dismissal: the disastrous Far Eastern policy and the standoff with the Ministry of Interior under V. K. Plehve. By the summer of 1903, Witte knew his days were numbered. Senator A. F. Koni ran into him at the Sestroretsk resort and left the following description: “I could barely recognize the finance minister’s figure in this bent-over and baggy frame, in the extinguished gaze and alarmed expression. I could tell that he was deafened by the inner
storm’s roar and that he was happy to see a person who had never done him harm among an army of enemies.”288 In August 1903, Nicholas II dismissed Witte.

Witte never lost his pragmatic respect for public opinion. Before he began to negotiate a loan with Paris in 1904, he ordered Raffalovich to communicate with French bankers and report on the state of French public opinion.289 In December of that year, Raffalovich published what amounted to an advertisement of Russian solvency in The Economic Journal. He argued that sound finance demanded constant and sustained efforts such as Vyshnegradskii, Bunge, and Witte had maintained and that the Japanese had attacked Russia when it was economically and financially at its strongest. He concluded: “She was excellently prepared, and, through the superiority of her financial machinery, she can calmly contemplate the prolongation of the campaign.”290 During the Russo-Japanese War, when Witte was Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers to which Nicholas II appointed him immediately after his dismissal from the Finance Ministry, he played a leading role in the establishment of Russia’s first wire service—the St. Petersburg Telegraph Agency (PTA).291 By the time Witte went to negotiate the Portsmouth Peace in August 1905, he knew perfectly well how to turn the negotiations in Russia’s favor. He brought with him his close friend and renowned journalist Emile Joseph Dillon as “publicity advisor.”292 Witte knew that American public opinion valued extrovert leaders, so he courted the press by behaving openly and willingly giving

Witte’s experience with the Russian press had prepared him for the Portsmouth Conference. The Japanese were not nearly as forthcoming. Incidentally, Dillon, fiercely loyal to Witte, during the Revolution of 1905, he “sedulously reported what was occurring, and warned that, without such a progressive leader as Witte, Russia would be consumed by a bloody peasant upheaval; he subsequently bitterly assailed Tsar Nicholas II for dismissing Witte in 1906.”

After Witte came into office at the Finance Ministry, he quickly learned to distinguish friends from enemies in the press world and to use both. Until 1894, he relied on reactionary publications such as Grazhdanin and Moskovskie vedomosti, but distanced himself from them once he understood that the conservative landed gentry, the majority of these publications’ readers, did not support his reforms. The editors made this abundantly clear to him. Characteristically, Witte turned back to Meshcherskii and Grazhdanin only in 1902-03 when his tenure was in jeopardy, and they became even closer after his dismissal. By the mid-1890s, however, at the height of his power, Witte realized that moderate bourgeois papers were better allies. He understood that an official Finance Ministry publication could only communicate statistics and print official declarations: the educated public would never trust editorial material from a government newspaper, so he exerted pressure on some independent papers and subsidized others, but never controlled any publication. Each of the four major papers supported some policies, but disagreed with certain principles that underlay the Witte System. In the late 1890s,

295 A. S. Suvorin, Dnevnik (Moscow, 1999), pp. 465-466.
Witte altered his approach yet again. Instead of trying to win over editors, he negotiated positive coverage of specific programs, such as the gold standard in 1895-97 or the question of foreign investments in the spring of 1899. By this time, Witte had penetrated to the center of his situation’s paradox—any publication that fully supported the state would lose the educated public’s respect and this would render it useless to Witte.

Chapter 12
From Marxist Apologetics to a Moral Economy

In context with Konstantin Arseniev’s emphasis on local self-government and Alexander Pypin’s attempts at rapprochement with populism, Leonid Slonimskii’s articles on Marxism and the Russian economy completed the definition of Vestnik liberalism. Instead of criticizing capitalism as the Marxists did, the liberals targeted the Finance Ministry’s development vectors and, above all, its taxation policy, which redirected money from the regions into central coffers and then distributed it to industrial enterprises. The fundamental characteristic of Vestnik liberalism was its emphasis on popular participation in modernization. Vestnik liberalism was not a Western, philosophic, legal, or even an economic phenomenon. Its defining component was much simpler—it evaluated modernization from the local perspective. The zemstvos were the building blocks and basic reference points of Russia’s civil society.

Behind the debate that unfolded on the pages of the dailies about Russia’s economic development lay the fundamental question about the state’s relationship to its subjects. The political side of this rapport was taboo, but the economic repercussions of state-enforced modernization, which affected the lives of millions, begged questions
regarding the state’s responsibilities and the population’s loyalties. The Vestnik group’s most original contribution to Russian liberalism came in the form of its evaluation of the Witte System and its analysis of Marxist economic theory. In the 1890s, Leonid Slonimskii saw Russian Marxism as little more than the justification of rapid modernization and he argued that—just as Witte had initially—the Marxists also underestimated its social price. Instead of being analysts, they were apologists.

The Vestnik materials confirm the well known fact that Marxism and populism co-evolved in the 1890s. However, they also suggest that late 19th-century populism was rooted in Marxism and operated within its conceptual framework. Neither the populist nor the Marxist approaches, the Vestnik liberals believed, could accommodate the growing pains of Russia’s modernization. In the process of exploring economic theory and the realities of the Witte System, the Vestnik group came up with a unique socio-administrative development amalgam that rested on a symbiosis of an enlightened bureaucracy on the top and active local initiative from the bottom. This was a new and practical definition of a moral economy for the 20th century.

Leonid Slonimskii first approached Russian Marxism by criticizing populist Nikolai Danielson’s 1893 book Sketches of Our Post-Reform Communal Economy wherein the author attempted to prove that capitalist production was making inroads into Russia and had to be stopped. Slonimskii disagreed with Danielson’s argument that the peasants had owned the means of production before Emancipation and that capitalism began to alienate them from their labor after 1861. In his desire to demonstrate the evils of capitalism as described by Marx, Danielson attributed to Russia’s new money-based
economy all the characteristics of developed capitalism on which he blamed every imaginable entrepreneurial and moral abuse. Danielson, Slonimskii concluded, accurately identified Russia’s economic problems since Emancipation, but Marxist theory completely failed to explain them.296

Slonimskii reminded his readers that it was not capitalism that had caused Russia’s economic woes, but serfdom, the rotten structure of which the Crimean War had exposed. This was remarkably similar to the present-day liberal argument that it was not the “liberal experiments” of the 1990s but the Soviet planned economy that had plunged Russia into economic ruin and necessitated the painful post-Soviet reforms.297 Correcting historical memory was thus Slonimskii’s first project. Simultaneously, he argued that economic science could not accommodate prophets such as Marx.298

Indeed, Slonimskii argued, Russia had never had a coherent economic policy—personnel changes determined tactics and strategies while protectionism favored specific people, but not social groups, let alone classes. Slonimskii referred to a brochure by Russian engineer Karl Weber entitled The Needs of Our National Economy that had been published in 1892 but had gone unnoticed. The pamphlet’s author had pointed to the resilience of the cottage industry that was flourishing all over Western Europe, including England. In England and Germany, small privately owned mills, weaving, carpentry, and many other cottage forms of production “blossomed next to large-scale production.”299

299 Ibid., p. 374.
Russia, however, the populists were wrongly convinced that the evolution of capitalism was undermining the cottage industry. In Saxony, Weber wrote, peasant crafts flourished because the state encouraged them, invested in trade schools, and supported basic education. It was the state’s inattention to cottage industry, not capitalism per se, Slonimskii argued, that was undermining the Russian peasantry’s non-agricultural sources of income.

On the one hand, Slonimskii saw behind the populists’ economic alarmism a misjudgment of how shallow was the capitalist veneer on Russia’s economy. In the 1890s, he argued, the Romanov Empire resembled a socio-economic museum whose exhibits ran the gamut from advanced technological urban achievements to provincial villages based on subsistence agriculture. He suspected all economic ideologies, including Marxism, and emphasized the political and cultural factors of Russian statecraft as the driving forces behind economic development. Marxism, which was about to flood Russia’s intellectual sphere in 1894, was for him one of many schools of economic thought. In this he agreed with economist Alexander Chuprov who had identified as early as 1874 three major trends in economics—Manchesterism, socialism, and historicism—and concluded that “a balanced look at all three schools shows aspects of the truth in each.”

In his obituary for Marx, Chuprov praised *Capital* for its useful research on “the meaning and origin of cooperation, on English factory legislation, on the accretion of capital, and on the demographic laws in a capitalist economy.”

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Indeed, most Russian intellectuals in the last quarter of the 19th century were tolerant of Marxism. For example, writer and economic historian Vladimir Sviatlovskii wrote: “For the young mind, Marx is undoubtedly important as a stage. Marx is a school—a token of the mind, the development and sharpening of one’s social worldview. And, above all, Marx is the emancipation from the constraints of teleology and pettiness, it is the implementation of a fine understanding of the materialistic structure of history, law, and sociology.”302 Some of the brightest stars in Russia’s Silver Age firmament, such as Sergei Bulgakov, Peter Struve, and Mikhail Tugan-Baranovskii, went through a Marxist stage in their intellectual development. Tugan-Baranovskii wrote: “We need to go further than Marx, but through Marx, having used all that Marx has given to us.”303

In 1894, Peter Struve published *Critical Notes on the Question of Russia’s Economic Development* in which he welcomed the transition from the natural to the exchange economy and examined the immense cultural changes that this entailed. Capitalism facilitated the development of agriculture as well as industry, he argued, and created an increasingly interconnected market across the empire. These arguments echoed Witte’s and Mendeleev’s ideas. In the late 19th-century, “legal” Marxism became synonymous with capitalism. Unlike the populists, against whom he argued in his work, Struve identified the natural rural economy, not nascent capitalism, as the principal cause

302 V.V. Sviatlovskii, *Ocherki po istorii ekonomicheskikh vozrenii* (St. Petersburg, 1913), p. 275.
of poverty in Russia. The state’s responsibility in this process was to “clear the soil for economic progress and soften its social effects.”  

Slonimskii described in Struve’s work the same economic gullibility he had criticized throughout the 1880s. He objected to Marxist dialectics that left little room for individual action and even state policy and he argued that Russian “capitalism” manifested itself in “crude kulachestvo” both in the rural and industrial worlds. Despite Struve’s attempt to debunk populist economic theories, Slonimskii noticed that the Russian Marxists themselves had insufficiently articulated their worldview. “Does this not demonstrate,” he asked, “that we are dealing here not with a scientific debate, but with petty literary sectarianism, which revolves around a teacher’s words?” Struve’s greatest mistake, according to Slonimskii, was that he first decided that capitalism would triumph in Russia and then promised to prove this factually in his “next brochure.” The irony of this reversal was not lost on Slonimskii. This “historical” approach to practical subjects was in tune with Marx and Engels—they had also developed historical materialism in the 1840s, but published the economic support for it in the 1860s. In the 1890s, the Russian Marxists were the great supporters of the Witte System and Slonimskii observed that their economic theories obscured their ethical aims. He would have agreed with Mikhailovskii’s criticism that their actions were not consistent with their moral goals. But how would anyone evaluate these?

304 P. B. Struve, Kriticheski zametki k voprosu ob ekonomicheskom razvitii Rossii (St. Petersburg, 1894), pp. 282-285.
Slonimskii compared the 1890s to the 1860s as a thaw marked by great intellectual interest in cultural, philosophical, social, and economic questions. In the beginning of the 1890s, publisher Florentius Pavlenkov successfully sold a translation of Henry Thomas Buckle’s *History of Civilization in England* in twenty thousand copies. Buckle’s history was the poster child of Victorian materialism, progressivism, and rationalism. Buckle argued that climate, soil, food, and the aspects of nature were the primary causes of intellectual progress—the first three indirectly, through determining the accumulation and distribution of wealth, and the last by directly influencing the accumulation and distribution of thought, the imagination being stimulated and the understanding subdued when the phenomena of the external world are sublime and terrible, the understanding being emboldened and the imagination curbed when they are small and feeble. Another assumption that Buckle made was that the great division between European and non-European civilization turned on the fact that in Europe man was stronger than nature, and that elsewhere nature was stronger than man, the consequence of which was that in Europe alone had man subdued nature to his service. The popularity of such ideas in Russia was a turning point.

Slonimskii noticed that in the 1890s, as in the 1860s, antagonism between materialistic and moral issues, economic and social interests, and moral and utilitarian ideas came to the fore. Works on ethics became popular once again: two editions of philologist Vasilii Modestov’s translation of Spinoza’s *Ethics*, the late Konstantin Kavelin’s *The Goals of Ethics*, and Tolstoy’s moral writings. Parallel to this interest in ethics, materialism also attracted followers and a new ban on Marx’s *Capital* increased its
popularity. However, Slonimskii argued, economic materialism in Russia took a wrong turn under German influence.\textsuperscript{307} The application of Marxist concepts to Russia obscured the main lines of Russian development.\textsuperscript{308}

Having challenged the ideology of progress and protectionism, Slonimskii now began to deconstruct Marxism. His principal criticism of \textit{Capital} was that it focused narrowly on industry at the expense of “the primary importance of land ownership and agriculture,” still crucial issues even in highly industrialized countries. Furthermore, Slonimskii argued, capital per se was an essential element of exchange economies and had “nothing in common with capitalism.” Alienation from the means of production was also hardly a novel phenomenon.\textsuperscript{309} Since Russian writers followed German economic intellectual trends, they blindly focused on the primacy of industrial issues. The Russian followers of Marx treated his “hypotheses as truths and examples as proofs.” This bred scholastic debates about vocabulary while the useful economic research, which rational materialism should have encouraged on all levels, was proceeding on the zemstvo level through its statistical committees.\textsuperscript{310}

In 1896, Slonimskii examined the problems with Marx’s “mean value” theory and all of its implications for the exploitation of labor. By juxtaposing long quotes from \textit{Capital} with everyday common sense examples, Slonimskii demonstrated the limited value of Marx’s argument that “commodity fetishism,” consumerism in modern terms,

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\item \textsuperscript{307} Leonid Slonimskii, “Marks i ego shkola,” \textit{Vestnik Evropy} 3 (1896), pp. 290-292.
\item \textsuperscript{309} Leonid Slonimskii, “Marks i ego shkola,” \textit{Vestnik Evropy} 3 (1896), p. 300.
\item \textsuperscript{310} Ibid., pp. 304-306.
\end{itemize}
obscured the true economic forces behind social inequalities. More importantly, Slonimskii implied that the “capitalist system” was no system at all. If surplus value did not arise, as Marx had argued, the exploitation of workers was not the result of a “system,” but a by-product of industrialization that had nothing to do with surplus value, a concept that Marx’s contemporaries Albert Shäffle, Karl Knies, Adolph Wagner, and Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk roundly criticized anyway. Historian Jacques Barzun succinctly expressed the essence of Slonimskii’s argument: “If labor, however essential to the creation of many values, is nevertheless not their scientific measure, any more than utility, then economic science had better give up its title, and resume its more descriptive name of political economy.” Slonimskii echoed what Mihailovskii had written about Marxism in 1894:

The very foundations of economic materialism, repeated as axioms innumerable times, still remain unconnected among themselves and untested by facts, which particularly deserves attention in a theory which in principle relies upon material and tangible facts, and which arrogates to itself the title of being particularly “scientific.”

This was a far cry from Georgii Plekhanov’s argument that Marx’s scientific generalizations had been based on rigorous logic and open to empirical verification. Plekhanov, sometimes called the father of Russian Marxism, had argued, echoing Engels, that Darwin and Marx made complementary contributions to rendering the philosophy of history inseparable from science while Darwinism and Marxism added new substance

and vigor to materialistic philosophy.\textsuperscript{315} The connection between the two was not lost on Slonimskii either, but he viewed Marxism as a variation on Victorian anthropology, which assumed convergent, not pluralistic, development. However, he never doubted the inevitability and benefits of capitalist development for Russia. There was only a surface similarity with the populists, whose anti-Marxist campaign was directed against his philosophy of history, which the populists wanted sharply separated from Marx’s basically sound and valuable analysis of West European economic processes.\textsuperscript{316} The 	extit{Vestnik} liberals, on the other hand were prepared “to go further than capitalism, but through capitalism, having used all that capitalism” could give, to paraphrase Tugan-Baranovskii.

The “social question does not fit into the value question,” Slonimskii argued.\textsuperscript{317} He was less interested in Marxist doctrine than in the Finance Ministry’s policies, which had been paving the way since the 1880s for pegging the paper ruble to the value of gold. When Witte assumed control of the Finance Ministry, the country split into two camps on the issue and Witte’s supporters split further on the issue of bi- (gold and silver) versus mono-metalism (gold) as the basis of the ruble’s exchange value. When Witte began to promote mono-metalism in the spring of 1895, he faced a storm of criticism from the press. Brochures predicted that the gold standard would “encourage betting on the stock market and pernicious speculative tendencies among the public” and “benefit the stock

markets and our enemies.” Slavophile and populist voices warned of an “invasion of foreigner entrepreneurs who will buy up all of Russia.” St. Petersburg University financial law professor L. V. Kholodkovskii gave a speech before the Imperial Free Economic Society in which he warned that gold would leak out of Russia to the last ounce.

Witte spent the winter of 1895 and the spring of 1896 proving to the State Council, its various subcommittees, and the public that the financial reform would benefit industry but have no negative impact on everyday consumers and the peasantry. In the State Council, he came up against members of the gentry who believed that the depreciated paper ruble had worked to their advantage. The liberal dailies supported the reform. Only Suvorin’s Novoe vremia published articles both for and against the gold standard. On the eve of the final decision on 3 January 1897, Witte asked Suvorin to show the reform in a positive light and, in exchange for the editor’s acquiescence, gave him a copy of his speech before the State Council’s Finance Committee allowing Suvorin to quote it anonymously in the paper.

Slonimskii interrupted his examination of Russian Marxism in May 1896 to explore Witte’s monetary reforms and the transition to the gold standard. This allowed him to leave the stratosphere of economic abstractions and apply his economic acumen to

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318 I. Bortkevich, O denezhnoi reforme, proektevannoi Ministerstvom finansov (St. Petersburg, 1896), p. 31.
concrete problems. In the process, he confirmed his suspicion that Russian Marxism was an apologia for forced economic modernization. As always, he turned to Western European examples and found that France, Germany, and the United Kingdom kept silver reserves along with gold ones even though, as highly industrialized nations, they could afford a monometallic gold-based currency. In Russia, gold coins were too valuable for everyday rural exchange and the precious metal had a tendency to increase in price.

Slonimskii perceived that only “large-scale industry, bankers, and Russian Marxists” supported Witte’s reform.\(^{323}\) As the European and American examples had demonstrated, monetary reform was an issue too important to be left to the Finance Ministry. Slonimskii argued that the Russian rural population, which would never be able to afford gold coins anyway, would eventually have to compensate for the flight of gold reserves westward.

The crux of the argument was that any financial reform had to benefit the lowest and the most populous social groups and, to this end, Slonimskii called for a silver-pegged currency to be disseminated widely among the peasantry. The source of rural problems was not capitalism per se but the Finance Ministry’s failure to anticipate the impact of its monetary policies on the village. However, the populists overlooked such details, Slonimskii observed, because they were busy sparring with Marxist abstractions.

Slonimskii’s articles dealing with Marxism in the mid-1890s may confuse the modern reader because instead of dealing with Marxists, they targeted Nikolai Mikhailovskii, Nikolai Damielson, and Vasilii Vorontsov whose populist theories Alexander Pypin was examining concurrently. Slonimskii approached Russian Marxism

through the prism of populism, but, unlike Pypin who tried to trace populism’s intellectual pedigree, Slonimskii saw it as a pure reaction to Marxism that treated capitalism and the peasant economy as mutually exclusive, zero-sum economic processes.\textsuperscript{324} So powerful had been \textit{Capital}’s influence on the populists that Slonimskii called them Marxists. As a matter of fact, as Arthur Mendel has argued, by the mid-90s, publishing Marxist articles became so profitable that even populist \textit{Russkoe} bogatstvo’s members were declaring their support for Marxism.\textsuperscript{325} "The defenders of Russia’s self-sufficiency,” Slonimskii wrote, “stand firmly on the foundation of Marx’s teachings, but deny only the applicability of his philosophic-historical formula to our conditions.” Tongue in cheek, Slonimskii noted that “capitalist enterprises such as printing houses” were already producing books in which the populist authors “ruminated about when capitalism would finally establish itself in Russia.”\textsuperscript{326}

Slonimskii examined an 1880 article by Danielson published in \textit{Slovo}, which had treated the Emancipation Manifesto as a socio-economic divide that brought capitalism to Russia and allowed it to take over the instrument of the state—“instead of becoming the beginning of beginnings, as its lawgiver intended, [the Manifesto became] the beginning

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\textsuperscript{326} Leonid Slonimskii, “Karl Marks v russkoj literatury,” \textit{Vestnik Evropy} 9 (1897), pp. 301-303.
\end{flushleft}
of the end.” Slonimskii’s counterargument resembled Tugan-Baranovskii’s ideas about the relationship between cottage crafts and factory production:

The factory-industrial production per se is not antagonistic to peasant agriculture; on the contrary, it influences directly and indirectly the increase in agricultural activity, facilitates the transition to more intensive systems of production and offers various side-earnings to peasants and rural communities. The antagonism arises only when one-sided policies favor large industrial enterprises, which, as a result, acquire a predatory, speculative nature; therefore, the key issue is the state’s economic policy and the level of its accommodation of popular interests. Legislative acts can not eliminate the capitalist principle, but the conditions and methods of its manifestation depend on legislation and state power.

Vasilii Vorontsov, for whose statistical findings Slonimskii had great respect, had also assumed the validity of Marx’s argument in *The Fates of Capitalism in Russia* (1882). This “populist-Marxist” text, according to Slonimskii, “pushed all of our economic writing into a doctrinal struggle with phantoms” and “un-provable and unfounded assumptions.” Vorontsov’s call to reorganize industry along communal principles was utopian. Instead, Slonimskii argued, the working class in any nation would achieve real results only by having its enlightened members negotiate better labor conditions from the state. Populism in the 1880s had lost touch with Russian reality by trapping itself in the “vicious circle” of the struggle against Marxism.

Accordingly, Slonimskii turned his attention to the state of Russia’s factory workers by bringing to his readers’ attention three recent studies. A. A. Mikulin’s *Sketches from the History of the Application of the Law of 3 June 1886 Regarding the*

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328 See chapter 7 of M. N. Tugan-Baranovskii’s *Russkaia fabrika v proshlom i nastoiashchem* (St. Petersburg, 1898).
330 Ibid., p. 754.
Hiring of Workers in Factories and Plants of Vladimir Province (1893) demonstrated what any late 19th-century work on labor would in many parts of Europe. The conditions were inhuman, cases of personal injury were high, the pay was poor, and many workers returned to the village for the summer months. E. M. Dementiev’s *The Factory, What It Provides to the Population and What It Takes From It* (1897) argued that although factory work contributed to winter earnings, the conditions of work made this alternative costly in terms of physical and psychological health. Doctor L. B. Bertenson’s *The Baku Oil Enterprises and Plants from the Sanitary-Medical Perspective* (1897) described in detail and quantified the skin diseases, eye infections, respiratory problems, and dental decay that petroleum workers suffered. Did these findings incriminate capitalism per se, asked Slonimskii? No, but they showed that the state owed it to the workers to change the patriarchal structure of labor relations and to increase regulation.  

Factory legislation in Russia took its first steps in 1880 when the State Council established the procedure for passing laws in the wake of worker unrest in the 1870s.  

The legislation favored the more technologically advanced Petersburg factories over their more primitive Moscow competitors that relied on landless, poor, and uneducated peasants, children and women in day and night shifts. Alexander II made the historical decision in 1880 not to accept a program of reforms, as the Valuev Commission had suggested, but to consider factory legislation piecemeal as different ministers thought necessary and brought to the emperor’s attention. This allowed the Finance Ministry to

332 V. P. Litvinov-Falinskii, *Fabrichnoe zakonodatelstvo i fabrichnaia inspeksiiia v Rossii* (St. Petersburg, 1904), pt. 2, p. 20.
become involved in factory legislation, which would otherwise have been a rural affair since the Interior Ministry treated workers as peasants in factories. It also involved the Ministries of Interior, Justice, and Education causing inter-agency conflict.

The first law limiting child labor was under discussion for two years and when it finally came out in 1884, it charged the zemstva, not the factory owners, with constructing and maintaining local schools for children.\(^{333}\) This was an added strain on local self-government budgets, which forced them to ask the Finance Ministry for increased funding, but spared industrial enterprises from contributing. It also created the office of factory inspectors to monitor compliance with the law. Petersburg owners also initiated the 1885 law limiting night work, which the Moscow entrepreneurs unsuccessfully opposed.\(^{334}\) The law of 1886 regulated employer-employee relations. In the process of regulating labor, the Russian state looked to Germany—not England or France—which was also a late-comer to industry and wherein the landed gentry was still powerful. Bismarck’s Germany was the first European country to institute obligatory state insurance for workers in the 1880s with the object of avoiding endless legal battles between employers and workers and to weaken the appeal of the Social Democratic Party.

Konstantin Arseniev had welcomed enthusiastically the state’s attempts to regulate labor relations.\(^{335}\) Witte’s predecessor Nikolai Bunge justified it by arguing that it stemmed the tide of socialism among the workers and even spearheaded the Finance

\(^{333}\) Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii, sobranie III (St. Petersburg, 1885), II, no. 931.
\(^{334}\) Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii, sobranie III (St. Petersburg, 1885), V, no. 3013.
\(^{335}\) “Vnutrennee obozrenie,” Vestnik Evropy 8 (1882), pp. 722-726.
Ministry’s involvement in settling labor disputes as long as no illegal actions had taken place. Tugan-Baranovskii described Bunge as “a pioneer, who had created an immensely important part of social policy, which Russia had not known before.”

Ivan Vyshnegradskii took the side of the entrepreneurs and loosened labor legislation’s constrictions on industry. By the time he came to power, Witte appreciated the state’s difficult position between conservative and business opposition to factory legislation and the revolutionary tendencies that its absence instigated. So strong was the opposition to the government, especially from Konstantin Pobedonostsev who described in it “socialist sympathies,” that the project on compensation for injury that Witte had submitted to the State Council in 1893 did not become law until 1903. The conservatives and the Ministry of Interior preferred to micro-manage labor affairs, while the rules, regulations, and exceptions governing different industries presented a picture of overwhelming complexity. Witte’s ministry hired E. M. Dementiev, whose work Slonimskii reviewed, to present his findings on the state of labor in the Central European provinces. The law of 1897 aimed to curb the length of the working day, but was only applied to Petersburg manufactures. Nevertheless, its legal definitions brought Russia up to Western European standards, but relegated the labor question to the administrative sphere, not the court system. Still, Witte emerged from the factory legislation debates as a liberal compared to his opponents.

336 M. I. Tugan-Baranovskii, Vitte i Bunge kak ministry finansov (Moscow, 1922), p. 147.
338 Ibid., I, p. 367.
339 E. M. Demetiev, O normirovke rabochego vremeni na fabrikakh. Doklad 1895 g. (St. Petersburg, 1895).
Despite his undisguised preference for industry, Witte changed his views on the peasantry in the late 1890s because of peasant uprisings of 1896-97 as well as his regular conversations with N. Kh. Bunge, who managed to convince his young successor that the commune was the main obstacle to rural development.\(^{341}\) As a result, Witte pushed for the abolition of the passport system in 1894, submitted a project for a transition to personal peasant property in 1898, and abolished communal responsibility in 1903. Although he demonstrated a learning curve throughout the 1890s, industrial development and financial reform remained central in the Finance Ministry’s development agenda.

By 1897 Witte’s policies had produced surface results and he wrote, perhaps wishfully, that Russia could no longer be considered a purely agricultural country. That year industrial output reached 2 billion rubles, while agriculture produced only 1.5 billion worth of goods. According to Alexander Gerschenkron’s figures, industrial growth averaged 8 percent over the decade and peaked at 9 percent between 1894 and 1899.\(^{342}\) Witte had something to be proud of, yet he admitted in the same 1897 report that in terms of satisfying popular demand, and in comparison with foreign production, Russian industry was still far behind its Western counterparts.\(^{343}\) By 1900, however, Witte’s enthusiasm cooled and he wrote in his budget report for that year, “The solidity of state

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\(^{343}\) “Vsepoddaneishii doklad ministra finansov o gosudarstvennoi rospisi dokhodov i raskhodov na 1897 g.” *Vestnik finansov, promyshlennosti i torgovli*, 1 (1897), p. 6.
finances, regardless of their organization, depends upon the well-being of the population, the majority of which is the peasantry.”

When Slonimskii turned his attention to the state of Russia’s economy in the wake of the peasant uprisings in 1897, he described it with pessimism unusual on Vestnik’s pages but entirely appropriate at a time when numbers eclipsed real achievements and gloss masked as success. Wherever Slonimskii turned in 1898, he saw “rapacity and speculation, barbarity, intellectual darkness” while a national education system “remained a question.” The achievements of which Witte’s Ministry boasted in its annual reports did not grow naturally out of the rural population’s development, Slonimskii argued. Meanwhile, “optimists of a new type,” i.e. Marxists such as Mikhail Tugan-Baranovskii and Sergei Bulgakov, “console themselves with the thought that out of a national disaster new and more perfected forms of life will arise.” Russia was becoming an exporter of natural resources and her “role on the world market could not be considered respectable.”

This was exactly what Witte tried to prevent from happening. When he defended his tariff policies in an 1897 report to Nicholas II, he had argued that an untimely abolition of the tariffs would be a political mistake and cause profound problems for the country. To return to an agrarian economy “would be equal to an economic catastrophe.” Other countries protected their agriculture too, Witte argued, and

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344 “Vsepoddaneishii doklad ministra finansov o gosudarstvennoi rospisi dokhodov i raskhodov na 1900 g.” Vestnik finansov, promyshlennosti i torgovli, 1 (1900), p. 8.
346 “Vsepoddaneishii doklad ministra finansov o gosudarstvennoi rospisi dokhodov i raskhodov na 1897 g.” Vestnik finansov, promyshlennosti i torgovli, 1 (1897), pp. 6-7.
therefore, the Finance Ministry would decrease certain tariffs only after developments in
specific industries merited it and only in exchange for reciprocal decreases in foreign
tariffs. He reemphasized this point in the “Secret Memorandum on the Industrialization
of Imperial Russia,” which he submitted to Nicholas II in the spring of 1899: “A
government with an unsteady commercial and industrial policy is like a businessman who
constantly reorganizes his production.”347 By 1900, most industrialized western nations
had also introduced protective agricultural tariffs. Witte argued that for the Finance
Ministry not to do the same would “imply an open, undisguised exploitation of our
productive capabilities on conditions inappropriate to the status of a great power.”348 If
Russia remained an exclusively agricultural exporter, she would forever depend on the
whims of nature, Witte argued.349

Slonimskii recognized the similarity of the Finance Ministry’s thinking and the
Marxist urgency to overcome backwardness. However, when he examined the businesses
that Witte’s protective tariffs encouraged he noticed something peculiar. The most
lucrative enterprises in Russia belonged to foreigners who also ran them, while the
Russian “bourgeoisie” had “no faith in tomorrow,” no trust in “legally defined rights,”
and “lacked access to knowledge and enlightenment.”350

Slonimskii’s central argument was that that modernization from above could only
produce surface gloss. Like a parasite, the Russian bourgeoisie was feeding off economic

348 “Vsepoddaneishii doklad ministra finansov o gosudarstvennoi rospisi dokhodov i raskhodov na 1897 g.”
Vestnik finansov, promyshlennosti i torgovli, 1 (1897), p. 7.
349 A. I. Chuprov, Vliianie urozaev i khlebnykh tsen na nekotorye storony narodnogo khoziaistva (St.
Petersburg, 1897), pp. 1-6.
development, but did not contribute to it. The Russian Marxists were overlooking the cultural components that were necessary for socially stable capitalist development. The Vestnik group, on the other hand, believed that the rural population had to participate in modernization in order for it to produce long-term economic and cultural benefits in the village. Blind economic forces could not produce all this, there had to be a conscious agency balancing development. When in 1906, the Finance Ministry ordered a statistical study of the Russian population in the process of considering an income tax, it defined the “middle estate” as persons making no less than 5,000 rubles a year and found that only 60,228 men fit this category.\footnote{Opyt priblizitelnogo ischisleniia narodnogo dokhoda po razlichnym ego istochnikam i po razmeram v Rossii (St. Petersburg, 1906).} In an empire with roughly 157 million people, the financially defined “bourgeoisie” thus constituted approximately .01 percent of the population. This was clearly not the force behind a socially responsible transition to enlightened capitalism.

Industrial apologists, such as Tugan-Baranovskii, pretended to stand above ideological constraints but in doing so reminded Slonimskii of Monsieur Jourdain from Molière’s Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme “who spoke prose without knowing it.” Slonimskii constructed his review of The Russian Factory in the Past and Present around debunking Tugan-Baranovskii’s central Marxist thesis that existence determined consciousness. The reviewer reminded his readers that Russian history had known many long periods of seemingly “natural and necessary” “self-satisfied stagnation” until external events forced it to implement reforms. Tugan-Baranovskii’s thesis that class-based antagonism determined reform vectors was simply inapplicable to contemporary Russia—the
bourgeoisie was hardly absorbing the cultural lessons of Western capitalism. Slonimskii concluded that Tugan-Baranovskii’s book contained many interesting facts about Russia’s factories but succumbed to industrial ideology masked as Marxism.352

Meanwhile, Russia’s conservative press identified the zemstvo as the cause of modernization’s ills in the 1890s. Moskovskie vedomosti and Grazhdanin mounted a relentless crusade against local self-government and blamed all social ills on the “nomadic intelligentsia of petty administrators.” They argued that no ministry could supersede “independent social life in the country” by which Slonimskii took them to mean not the zemstvos but a combination of the gentry, the governors with their bureaucracies, and the land captains. In response, Slonimskii upheld the liberal formula of “self-government, glasnost, and public control.” Since the last two remained unfulfilled in Russia, he praised the central bureaucracy for absorbing from the universities the country’s brightest minds and hiring talented scientists, statisticians, and writers.353 Slonimskii thus articulated a socio-administrative amalgam for successful modernization. Self-government encouraged all socio-economic classes to formulate local needs while a responsive and enlightened central administration, aware of foreign economic developments and intellectual trends, directed modernization with constant reference to its effects on the ground.

The centrality of Russia’s bureaucracy in the process of modernization was the natural outcome of a top-heavy, vertical administrative system, which the zemstvo network could make more efficient with time, as the Vestnik group argued. Statistics

352 Leonid Slonimskii, “Promyshlennaia ideologiia,” Vestnik Evropy 6 (1898), pp. 768-783.
clearly demonstrated the Russian empire’s administrative priorities. On the whole, Russia had about 103,000 central and local bureaucrats by 1906, which constituted less than 1 percent of the population. However, the amount of ministry staffs demonstrated the breakdown of forces. The General Staff employed 30,587 people, the Finance Ministry was in second place with 12,951, the Interior Ministry employed 8,838, the Ministry of the Emperor’s Court and Lands—1,762, the Holy Synod—532, and the Foreign Ministry—452.354 As historian E. V. Tarle pointed out long ago, Witte believed that progressive social trends manifested themselves in parallel movements within the bureaucracy while social stagnation led to an equal bureaucratic tendency.355 The Finance Ministry grew rapidly under Witte and became a government within a government complete with its own troops that guarded tracks beyond the Imperial borders. Slonimskii complained that its combined responsibility over finances, revenue collection, trade, and manufacturing forced it to favor industry at the cost of the exchequer. The Finance Ministry would have paid more attention to agriculture, he argued, had the functions been separated.356 Indeed, such suggestions surfaced in the early 1890s, but Witte refused to delegate any of his power and took firm control of Russia’s economy. His success depended on his educated and talented administrators.

354 Opıt pribızıtelnıı ischısleniıı naronogo dokhoda po razlıchnym ego istochnikam i po razmeram v Rossiı (St. Petersburg, 1906), p. 129.
One of Witte’s great achievements as finance minister was the expansion and reorganization of technical, professional, and vocational learning.\footnote{For an excellent overview of the professions in Russian history, see Harley Balzer’s “Introduction” to Russia’s Missing Middle Class: The Professions in Russian History (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1996).} In 1885, of 22,300 directors of industrial enterprises in Russia, only 1,600 had received middle- or higher technical education and one-third of these were foreigners, which meant that only 5 percent of the Russian managers were educated while 93 percent learned their trade on the job. Witte himself did not belong to this category and believed that managerial education was one of the most important components of economic modernization. With Alexander III’s support, he convinced the State Council in 1893 to approve a far-reaching commercial education program under the Finance Ministry’s direction. The education minister at the time, I. D. Delianov, had earlier refused Witte’s request. In 1896, the State Council agreed that Russia’s entrance into the global market necessitated a network of institutions crowned by a “highest commercial education establishment.” The bureaucracy would pick from these its future commercial, financial, and administrative specialists. Witte submitted five proposals to the State Council, which included schools for women. As Witte biographer S. D. Martynov has argued, the “democratization of education” and “a broad encouragement of social participation in support for education” characterized the Witte epoch.\footnote{S. D. Martynov, Gosudarstvo i ekonomika. Sistema Vitte (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 2002), pp. 345-346.}

In his memoirs, Witte described a new type of university that would impart “scientific development, not scientific knowledge” and graduate well rounded
Economist Alexander Posnikov, who was a co-founder of the Petersburg Polytechnic Institute, wrote in a 1915 edition of Vestnik Evropy that unlike the institutions of higher learning under the Education Ministry, the Finance Ministry’s institutes “elected their own professors and teachers.”

The Polytechnic Institute was situated in a woodsy place called Sosnovka twelve kilometers from the center of St. Petersburg. It was close enough to be a capital institution and sufficiently far from social and political trouble. It had four departments: commerce (economics), electro-mechanics, metallurgy, and ship-building. Although Witte intended it to be a self-contained learning community, it quickly became a seedbed of Russian liberalism. Peter Struve, Semyon Frank, and Tugan-Baranovskii, among others, became faculty members after 1905.

On the pages of Vestnik, Slonimskii welcomed practical education and continued his battle against the last glimmers of populism caused by the publication in 1901 of a collection of essays in the honor of Nikolai Mikhailovskii and a separate brochure critical

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of his social theories by Nikolai Berdiaev. Slonimskii drew a parallel between the Russian intelligentsia’s obsession with Hegel in the beginning of the 19th century, Darwin and Spencer during its middle, and Marx towards its end. The populists had mocked liberal principles, such as “individual inviolability, the abolition of corporate punishment of peasants, the lightening of their financial burden, the freedom of conscience and opinions, social self-government, independent courts, etc.”, and looked down upon the attempts by the liberal press to expose daily administrative and social abuses. “The populists were solving the world’s social problems by referring to Marx and Engels, correcting Spencer’s sociology, and arguing about subjective ideals and the struggle for an integrated individuality.” Slonimskii turned his readers’ attention to Russian history. The fate of capitalism, which had originated in ancient Novgorod trade, he argued, was not a question of economic conditions, but depended on cultural and social forces. The zemstvos, which the populists distrusted, “had been encouraged even in Ivan the Terrible’s time”—quite a stretch. Having suggested far-fetched historical precedents for capitalism and self-government in Russia, Slonimskii concluded that the current practical economic conditions necessitated a form of liberalism “appropriate to persistent national demands.”

Even though by the early 20th century, Russian Marxists had begun to rethink the orthodoxy by contextualizing it historically and geographically, Slonimskii did not believe that these revisions produced a sufficiently practical economic theory for Russia.

Tugan-Baranovskii’s *Sketches of the Newest History of Political Economy*, which came out in 1903, was a pioneering revisionist work. The author began by explaining that the economic situation of the 1840s had led Marx to assume that the impoverishment of the working class would increase until a breaking point, but the 19th century had proved him wrong. The trade-unionist movements proved as valuable for the cause of the working classes as socialist participation in bourgeois legislatures and cabinets. Marx’s greatest contribution to economic theory, Tugan-Baranovskii maintained, was to explain the concentration of production under capitalism and the social and political effects this would have, but time proved that this trend was inapplicable to agricultural production. As Alexander Gerschenkron put it, “Marxism works for some periods, but not for others.”

Slonimskii criticized Tugan-Baranovskii for departing too little from orthodox Marxism—political economy had to go further, abandon its trade-industrial focus, and look beyond “theories of exchange.” “The foundations of national economies have little to do with commodity trade,” Slonimskii argued, “but lie much deeper; they depend first of all on agricultural relations, which determine a country’s economic life and give the national economy a general tone regardless of the industrial system.” He feared that the political economy textbooks and courses ignored this because Russian economists still followed Western examples. Were they to explore rural problems, Slonimskii argued, they would be justified in creating “a special path” of economic research. It was no

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longer a question of “reworking, cleaning, and transforming” Marxism, as Tugan-
Branovskii had argued in his Preface.\(^{366}\) Economic theorists would do better to start with
“the groundwork of economic life—the foundations of the agricultural economy and
landownership relations.”\(^{367}\)

At least as far as Witte’s new universities were concerned, Slonimskii’s fears
regarding the state of economic education in Russia were unfounded. The Petersburg
Polytechnic Institute faculty demonstrated why. Alexander Posnikov cooperated with
Witte in working out the institute’s curriculum. He was a respected economist who had
written extensively on small agricultural credit and the commune. A graduate of Witte’s
alma mater, Novorossiisk University, he was also the editor of the liberal and pro-peasant
*Russkie vedomosti* between 1876 and 1897. Together with renowned economist
Alexander Chuprov, he published in 1902 *The Influence of Harvests and Grain Prices on
Certain Aspects of the Russian National Economy*.\(^{368}\) Chuprov’s son, also named
Alexander, taught statistics at the institute and published the article on “Moral Statistics”
for the Brokhaus and Efron Encyclopedia of which Konstantin Arseniev was chief
editor.\(^{369}\) Economist Ivan Ivaniukov belonged to the historical-realist school that treated
economics as a relative science determined by geography and history. He also worked
closely with *Russkie vedomosti* and published frequently in *Vestnik Evropy*. His *Political
Economy as the Study of the Process of Economic Development* (1891) took an

evolutionary approach to its subject and argued for state involvement in the economy and extensive social reform programs. Count Andrei Gagarin was appointed Dean and was unanimously re-elected to the position. He proved to be so liberal that it took a criminal prosecution on what appeared to be trumped up charges (a police search of a dormitory had uncovered explosive materials in the attic) and a Senate vote to remove him in 1909. Witte had created a highly professional institution with a distinguished faculty well aware of agriculture’s importance to Russia’s economy. He could not have left a greater liberal legacy.

However, as he was constructing this bequest, his star was setting. Russia entered an economic recession at the turn of the century and Witte became the scapegoat. His dismissal in August 1903 elicited a mixed response from the liberal dailies. *Birzhevye vedomosti* bemoaned his departure, not the least because Witte had left Russia’s rural problems unresolved. Suvorin’s *Novoe vremia* echoed this concern, criticized Witte for “over-developing the state sector,” and yet hoped that E. D. Pleske, his successor, would continue his policies. *Novosti* treated Witte’s dismissal as a tragedy: “It is hard to imagine something greater, brighter, more vibrant, than the eleven years during which Sergei Iulievich Witte directed our Finance Ministry.” Nevertheless, the paper considered protectionism the leading cause of the economic crisis that began in 1900.

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372 *Birzhevye vedomosti*, 18 August 1903, 5 November 1903.
373 *Novoe vremia*, 22 and 24 August, 7 September 1903.
374 *Novosti*, 18, 19, and 30 August 1903.
375 *Novosti*, 28 and 31 August 1903.
Where Novosti accused Witte of being inconsistent, Russkie vedomosti wrote the opposite. The paper supported his policies and argued that his failures were not entirely his fault and that “changes were necessary in many other aspects of our domestic life.”\(^{376}\) As all the other papers, a month later Russkie vedomosti published a series of articles condemning the “Witte System” as a whole.\(^{377}\)

In Vestnik’s October “Domestic Survey,” Konstantin Arseniev minced no words about evaluating Witte’s mixed legacy. He argued that Witte’s tenure crowned the 20-year process of “the return of government,” as Mikhail Katkov had put it, which the Great Reforms had temporarily interrupted. In the 1890s, the Finance Ministry had headed the administrative crusade with Witte at its helm. Government superseded self-government and Witte never camouflaged his distrust of the zemstvo. In 1899, his interference prevented the expansion of self-government institutions to the empire’s western provinces. The top-down approach that produced greater profits in the railroad business, argued Arseniev, was unacceptable when it came to governing a country. The zemstvos made possible the network of peasant schools, the “army of doctors” that had brought modern medicine to the rural areas, and the statistical analysis “based on personal observation and penetrating to the depths of local life.” Arseniev praised Witte’s Committee on the Needs of Agriculture and its attention to the peasant’s legal status. Arseniev also spoke highly of Witte’s educational legacy, although it almost completely ignored rural schools in favor of middle and higher education.\(^{378}\)

\(^{376}\) Russkie vedomosti, 2 and 18 August 1903.
\(^{377}\) Russkie vedomosti, 16 September 1903.
\(^{378}\) “Vnutrennee obozrenie,” Vestnik Evropy 10 (1903), pp. 776-780.
In the same issue, Arseniev praised Witte’s specialized education in favor of the “numbing ultra-classicism” that had become a political weapon in the 1870s. After Witte’s dismissal a rumor swept through St. Petersburg that the Education Ministry would take over all the higher education institutions. By preventing competition between schools, Arseniev argued, this would stifle innovation, discourage educational experiments, and stunt the culture of knowledge in Russia. Only decentralized education wherein ministries ran specialized institutions allowed specialization and competition for students. Witte’s contribution to this was priceless.379

A month after Witte’s dismissal, Leonid Slonimskii used the publication of Problems of Idealism as an occasion to evaluate the country’s economic achievements and Russian Marxism as a whole. He wrote the book off as pointless idealistic musings that completely ignored the economic injustices, judicial abuses, and administrative arbitrariness that took place in the real world. “The lyrical excesses of idealism are as groundless as the sorry theoretical attempts of Marxism,” wrote Slonimskii. He saw the flight to metaphysics as a natural consequence of Marxist idealism, which had little to do with positivist sensibilities or materialism. Finance ministers Reitern and Bunge had already made capitalist development the official state doctrine and Vyshnegradskii took it to excess when the Russian Marxists first appeared on the scene in the 1890s to “prove that capitalism was a reality.” Slonimskii maintained that Russian Marxism was a form of idealistic apologetics—a Panglossian illusion—separated by one degree from “the

indifference of metaphysical idealism.”380 He failed to recognize that, like the Vestnik liberals themselves, the contributors to Problems of Idealism were also attempting to re-articulate individual freedom and intellectual independence in an apolitical society.

Capitalism per se was not the central concern for the Vestnik liberals. They focused instead on the vectors of Russia’s economic development. In his evaluation of the Witte System, Slonimskii demonstrated the central feature of Vestnik liberalism—that it interpreted modernization through its effects on the local level. He was critical of Witte’s financial legacy above all. Reviewing the latest literature on the peasant question, he identified the “steady decline of the peasant economy” as the most characteristic aspect of Russia’s development. Indirect taxes on goods such as salt, sugar, matches, and kerosene, among other items, in addition to the redemption payments, squeezed enormous revenues out of the rural population.

Slonimskii evaluated the Witte System not from the central point of view, but from the local level. The increasing “centralization of revenue,” he argued, has left “the province less civilized and poorer.” The local agricultural committees that Witte had created to collect information under the auspices of the Committee on the Needs of Agriculture asked for no special privileges. They demanded from the center equal treatment in economic terms: less preference for industry, lower taxes on the peasantry, and a gradual implementation of an income tax. They demanded the creation of a smaller local self-government unit and “the abolition or limitation of the functions” of the land captains. They demanded that the state grant full civil rights to the peasants who could be

incarcerated for non-fulfillment of labor agreements, criminally prosecuted for profligacy and drunkenness, held in jail on a bread-and-water diet, and corporally punished. Last, but not least, the committees demanded a broader and more inclusive basic education system. All of this necessitated local initiative and participation, therefore Slonimskii argued that should the state “open the valves that are repressing local social forces,” the Russian “provinces will become transformed within one generation.”

Leonid Slonimskii’s examination of Marxism restated and supplemented what Konstantin Arseniev and Alexander Pypin were also arguing on the pages of Vestnik—that a socially stable and economically successful modernization program would produce long-term results only if the state extended the rights and responsibilities of local self-government and made the Russian population a participant in modernization, not a subject of economic experiments. Ideological justifications for reform—be they populist, Marxist or other—were the inventions of the intelligentsia and the bureaucracy, but they had little to do with reality regardless of the objectivity to which their proponents laid claim. The social stability that would come with popular participation would compensate for the slower rate of economic development, but would make it less likely that social backlashes would reverse it or that revolutions would erupt in its wake.

Conclusion

The Vestnik group is difficult to place on the late imperial intellectual firmament as scholars have defined it. The journal did not belong to the populist camp. Although its strain of liberalism shared the populist concern for the peasantry, the liberals argued for

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direct local empowerment and did not treat the rural population as a dark mass desperate
for messiahs. *Vestnik* did not subscribe to Marxist ideology either. It welcomed
capitalism, but did not treat it as a passing phase of a socialist teleology that demanded
sacrifices. The *Vestnik* materials prove that the populist-Marxist extremes are an outdated
and inaccurate schema of Russia’s late Imperial intellectual field. The binary
Slavophile/Westernizer structure has proved a seductive oversimplification of an entire
century’s intellectual development. In the 1950s, Theodore von Laue extended it to the
populist/Marxist debate and the tradition stuck.\(^{382}\)

What explained the popularity of Marxism in the 1890s? Alan K. Wildman
argued that in the late 1880s, the state’s reactionary chauvinism had rebuffed the liberals
and sent them into the proverbial intellectual desert. After the famine of 1891-92,
populism found a response among the intelligentsia and Marxism began to crystallize into
a pronounced tendency. By this time, however, Marxism had all the advantages. Social
Democrats had led the Lodz strikes of 1892 and for Russia Marxism acquired the idea of
being part of a grand European movement. The period of the revolutionary
intelligentsia’s isolation was over and it abandoned populist exclusivity and
provincialism. Russia finally marched in step with Europe. A vital ideological force at the
time, Marxism compelled other intellectual tendencies to define themselves and muster
forces.\(^{383}\)

\(^{382}\) Theodore H. von Laue, “The Fate of Capitalism in Russia: The Narodnik Version,” *American Slavic and
\(^{383}\) Allan K. Wildman, “The Russian Intelligentsia of the 1890’s,” *American Slavic and East European
*Vestnik Evropy* was an alternative reference point for conceiving of and evaluating modernization in Russia. The *Vestnik* liberal intelligentsia considered the Marxists to be latecomer idealists relegated to the intellectual sidelines as the Witte System fulfilled their hopes of an industrialized and urbanized Russia. Slonimskii saw little activity in Marxism of the 1890s and treated it more as a handmaid of the Finance Ministry than a messianic and worldly call to arms. Andrzej Walicki has argued that legal Marxism was “an ideological ally of Witte’s program.”384 While the Marxists mused about Russia’s long-term development prospects, the liberals proposed concrete avenues of activity for the intelligentsia through local self-government. Not only was this practical, but it also accommodated the individual who could see the fruits of his labor in everyday life. The liberals turned down the dialectical Promised Land in favor of immediate and incremental, if not so romantic, rewards.

According to Arthur Mendel, Marxism’s great achievement and cause of popularity was its ability to transform the forces that had crushed populism into assuring harbingers of ultimate success. Marxism’s victory was the victory of dialectical determinism, which scientifically guaranteed socialism’s victory. The dialectic freed the Russian Marxist from the pointless struggle against capitalist tendencies that had sapped populism’s strength. The way to socialism lay not through opposition to capitalism, but through its encouragement. Scientific socialism came armed with data to justify the unavoidable suffering. Inevitable victory was Marxism’s invaluable gift and the populists

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could not compete with this promise. However, as Mendel admitted, Marxism “allowed no payment of the debt to the people.”

The Vestnik group articulated a form of humane modernization that accommodated the population by empowering it economically through the zemstvos and smaller units of self-government, such as the all-estate volost. A careful reader of the journal developed a complex but integrated view of the Russian Empire’s geographical differences, economic capabilities, and local needs. Unlike Marxism, Vestnik liberalism was detail-oriented, but not escapist. Konstantin Arseniev’s examination of local affairs and Leonid Slonimskii’s analyses of landownership laws and the peasantry’s legal status uncovered the judicial complexities that underlay Russia’s transition period. The Marxists as well as Witte were much less concerned with this aspect of economic development.

Walicki has also argued that Marxism began to refine the intelligentsia’s consciousness through binary reference points that created room for choice—social and political struggle, political freedom and a socialist order, and the constitutional state and bourgeoisie supremacy. However, they were all too superficial to inspire the intelligentsia with a genuine respect for law. Educated members of society, Walicki argued, still “showed a profound and amazing indifference to rationalizing the civil legal system and the functioning of the criminal courts.” Marxism proved useless in upholding legal standards or creating an active legal sense among the people and made it extremely

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386 Ibid., p. 164.
difficult to strike the right balance between the long-term interests of law and the immediate demands of the political struggle. It also made it impossible to prevent the politicization of law.\textsuperscript{387}

The *Vestnik* materials confirm Walicki’s evaluation of Marxism’s legal implications and provide an alternative idea for legal education through increased participation in local self-government and the extension of full civil rights to the peasantry. The *Vestnik* group did not allow politics to eclipse the more realistic achievements of local self-government. The journal acted as the cultural keystone that crowned the zemstvo network and provided its readers with a monthly snapshot of it. The *Vestnik* project intended to substitute the central point of view on modernization for many local ones. The empowerment of the rural population would allow it to articulate its interests and amortize modernization’s worst side effects. Humane modernization as a liberal ideal was a question of perspective.

Conclusion

This dissertation has argued that *Vestnik Evropy* was an institution and an important synapse of Russia’s social matrix that both Russian and Western historians have unjustly overlooked for decades at the expense of a more accurate understanding of Russian liberalism’s variety, vitality, inclusiveness, and practicality. The *Vestnik* materials also challenge a number of widely held tropes that have proven debilitating to the sustainability of liberal values in Russia today.

The American Enterprise Institute’s Russia specialist Leon Aron has defined the country’s contemporary liberal forces as “right-of-center, pro-market, pro-reform, and pro-Western.”1 Although the “right of center” label is relative, the other three would apply to the *Vestnik* group in the late imperial era. In 2005, the Republican Party of Russia (RPR), one of Russia’s oldest liberal parties founded in 1990, held a conference on the outskirts of Moscow. Moving away from jeremiads—the staple of post-Soviet Russian liberals—the RPR attempted to articulate a coherent political program called “Free Individual, Honest Government, Dignified Life.” Section one of the platform, titled “The Quagmire of Authoritarianism,” ascribed “all the systemic failures of Russia in recent years” to the Kremlin’s seeking a “monopoly of power.”2 The party viewed the Kremlin’s turn to recentralization of national politics and the economy as a dead-end street, leading to creeping authoritarianism, rampant corruption, political crises, economic slowdown, and even disintegration. One of RPR’s chief complaints was that...

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the muzzling of Russian television and the increasing pressure on the print media, the restrictions on demonstrations and referendums, and the abolition of the elections of the heads of the regional administrations (governors) have all resulted in the sharp weakening of “democratic control” over the government. Unelected bureaucrats took charge of the state, which has become the master of society, instead of its servant or at least a partner. Except for the gubernatorial elections, RPR focused on macro-elements of Russia’s political woes, leaving local politics out of the program.

Leon Aron has argued that two elements prevent “democratic fatigue,” i.e. social indifference towards liberal values. First, the majority of the people should be able to tolerate the perennial antagonisms and uncertainties inherent in free political contests and free market competition. Second, the people must have trust in their own ability to contain and manage these free-for-alls through self-rule. To develop this trust, however, the Russians will have to overcome the drag of a 70-year legacy. The Soviet state largely extirpated civil society with its local networks that forged the habit of personal responsibility for one’s neighborhood, professional association, district, town, and region. The result was a “moral void,” as Aron has argued. A century ago, Vestnik Evropy was local self-government’s voice and the chief proponent of personal involvement in local affairs. Contemporary Russian liberals can extract valuable lessons from its history.

Vestnik’s editors intended it to act as a keystone of Russia’s zemstvo network and, in the absence of an imperial zemstvo institution, Vestnik was the closest thing to it. The Duma eventually proved to be the state’s competitor. Throughout its existence, Vestnik

remained the focus of a loyal opposition that yearned for reform without directly challenging the state or undermining social stability. The journal propounded a dual reformist approach. On the one hand, it encouraged direct participation in local self-government whose rights it staunchly and consistently defended against administrative encroachments. It was a mark of its editors’ integrity that their lives were examples of such civic involvement. This challenges the idea that Russian liberalism was either a cabinet, bookish, and intellectual endeavor or a scattering of hopeless idealists involved in small deeds that dissolved like raindrops in an ocean. *Vestnik*’s focus on local affairs made its strain of liberalism a quintessentially Russian phenomenon that invalidates attempts to measure it by Western standards. By no means did this imply intellectual isolationism—quite the opposite.

The second part of *Vestnik*’s approach to Russia’s difficult socio-economic changes was to look beyond its borders at global trends, foreign achievements, and to stay intellectually engaged with the rest of the world, especially Europe. In the populists, the *Vestnik* editors noticed a dangerous tendency to disregard inevitable macro-economic trends and escape into utopian socio-economic schemes. Moreover, *Vestnik* vehemently opposed the populists’ disdain for intellectuals and their myth of exclusive concern for the peasantry. In the Marxists, the journal’s contributors saw apologists for capitalism’s excesses that the Finance Ministry’s policies had created and were stimulating. The journal also described in Russian Marxism a tendency to ape foreign examples instead of articulating a sustainable development program for Russia.
Ultimately, *Vestnik Evropy* argued that although the Russian state was the prime mover of modernization, it could not implement it successfully without society’s participation, at least as an amortization mechanism for modernization’s inevitable growing pains. The journal articulated a modern definition of a moral economy, which meant an administrative mechanism that integrated the state administration with institutions of local self-government and evaluated modernization from the local level, not according to trade balances and macro-economic factors. The great irony about “The Herald of Europe” was that despite its title, it was a window on Russia in a much greater degree than it was a mouthpiece of a Europeanized bourgeoisie. Contemporary Russian liberalism insufficiently emphasizes local self-government and personal involvement in it, which Russia’s most popular, but ineffective, liberal party, Yabloko, repeatedly demonstrates.

The Kremlin and Russia’s liberal democratic opposition considered the 2005 Moscow Duma elections to be a rehearsal for the crucial 2007 national Duma poll. The liberal Yabloko Party, which the older intelligentsia supports, and SPS (the Union of Right Forces), whose constituency tends to be younger and more affluent, urban, college-educated entrepreneurs and professionals, aimed at turning the municipal election into a referendum on democracy. The Yabloko-United Democrats’ electoral platform opened with an indictment of the Putin regime for attempting a wholesale destruction of the main democratic institutions: a sovereign parliament, media free from political censorship, an independent judiciary, honest elections, and an autonomous private economy. “In the twenty-first century,” the platform read, “the authoritarian model of governance is
doomed—it will result in Russia’s falling behind its international competition and may even lead to the country’s disintegration.” The Moscow election would help to determine if society had a chance to “oppose the restoration of the nomenklatura-bureaucratic state, defend freedom and justice, and protect the citizens against authoritarianism, arbitrariness, favoritism, and corruption.”4 On the democratic agenda were the return to the direct election of the regional governors; firm guarantees of freedom of speech, dissemination of information and demonstrations; military reform and the elimination of the draft; the independence of the courts; an end to the manipulation of election results; and the inviolability of private property and freedom of entrepreneurship. Although all of the above are noble goals, the liberals have positioned themselves against the state, which has successfully challenged the opposition parties on the local level by strategically solving local problems before elections. This demonstrates that local affairs should be the primary testing ground of liberalism’s sustainability in Russia. Instead, the Russian liberals have chosen to focus on universal rights and comparisons of Western achievements with Russia’s shortfalls, which insults and alienates the electorate. Vestnik Evropy not only bridged the gulf between state and society by delineating independent but related spheres of activity for them, but also related without groveling before its Western neighbors.

The central problem of contemporary Russian liberalism is its chronic inability to organize a common front. Meanwhile, the Kremlin has played the liberal parties against each other. Grigori Iavlinskii has been the most intransigent of the liberals and unwilling

4 Yabloko-United Democrats, Predvybornaia programa partii Yabloko na vyborakh v Moskovskii gorodskuiu dumi (Moscow: Yabloko-United Democrats, 2005), p. 5.
to unite with other liberal forces, yet the Central Election Committee consistently registers Yabloko as the default liberal party in federal and local elections because it is fated to lose in isolation from its ideological partners. The Russian liberal opposition would do well to begin with the time-tested tradition of publishing a single journal on whose pages the parties could debate differences and settle quarrels. This was the niche, which *Vestnik Evropy* filled in the late imperial era. Unfortunately, no such publication currently exists and the liberal movement suffers from it.

The third incarnation of the journal—Karamzin’s having been the first and Stasiulevich’s the second—appeared in 2001 as a quarterly. At the journal’s source stood former Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar and Head of the All-Russian State Library of Foreign Literature Ekaterina Genieva. The journal advertises itself as a publication “for Russians who feel like Europeans” and this appeal clearly indicates how unconnected the latest reincarnation is to Stasiulevich’s *Vestnik*.\(^5\) The new *Vestnik* covers international affairs and cultural issues, Russian literature and translations, but it does not offer the same running commentary on domestic affairs, nor does it take a stand on Russian politics.

This dissertation has argued that in the late imperial era *Vestnik Evropy* was simultaneously a window into the world of local self-government, a consistent defender of its rights, and a proponent of personal involvement in the zemstvos. The journal deserved its reputation as the “flagship of Russian liberalism” because it was the most loyal protector of the zemstvos, which were Russia’s best hope for eventually developing

\(^{5}\) See http://magazines.russ.ru/vestnik/.
a parliamentary regime. However, *Vestnik* also stood for a set of extra-parliamentary liberal values that provided the individual sufficient room for self-expression and self-fulfillment on the local level and this deserves emphasis. Was this a form of escapism? It would have been had *Vestnik* gone no further than encouraging immersion in local affairs, but the issues it covered went well beyond zemstvo politics. The journal’s economic analysis helped its readers to articulate questions about the state’s modernization program that pointed towards alternative developmental schemes and challenged the prevalent model of state-society relations. The journal never questioned Russia’s belonging to Europe. The journal never took the “us versus them” approach to relations with the West that characterizes so much of contemporary “patriotic” thinking in Russia. *Vestnik Evropy* focused its readers’ attention on Russia’s domestic status quo, but never allowed them to lose sight of the extended family of Western nations to which Russia belonged. This made comparisons to its Western neighbors possible without encouraging inferiority complexes. Immersion in local self-government eliminated the conflict between private and political life and integrated the individual as he consciously absorbed society and acquired extra-parliamentary social significance. The same happened on the international level in relation to the West. Modernization according to the *Vestnik* model meant society understanding itself through local self-government, which became a constructive act by itself that nurtured individuality within a pluralistic environment. *Vestnik* liberalism made possible non-convergent evolution without the stigma of backwardness.