THE NATIONAL MONARCHY AND ITS BROKERS.
A STUDY OF ADVISERS TO NICHOLAS II.

by

SOPHIA SOLOVYOVA

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2005

UMI Number: 3187475

UMI Microform 3187475

Copyright 2005 by ProQuest Information and Learning Company.
All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest Information and Learning Company
300 North Zeeb Road
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

_____	_____
Date	Professor Cynthia Hyla Whittaker Chair of Examining Committee
_____	_____
Date	Professor Joshua Freeman Executive Officer

_____
Professor Evelyn Ackerman

_____
Professor Mary Gibson

_____
Professor Kristin Roth-Ey

_____
Professor Susan Smith-Peter

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract
THE NATIONAL MONARCHY AND ITS BROKERS.
A STUDY OF ADVISERS TO NICHOLAS II.

by

SOPHIA SOLOVYOVA

Adviser: Professor Cynthia Hyla Whittaker
Abstract.

Historians and contemporaries have traditionally portrayed Nicholas II as a weak and incompetent ruler who vacillated between advisers and relied on others for making political decisions for him. Especially pervasive has been the notion that persons without official designation exerted much influence on the tsar. Some of the most frequently mentioned were his wife, Alexandra Fedorovna, Grigorii Rasputin, Vladimir Meshcherskii, Aleksandr Bezobrazov, and Mikhail Andronikov.

In this dissertation I examine the personality, philosophy, and manner of rule of Nicholas II, as mirrored in his relationships with advisers outside the administration. I also investigate the role of Nicholas II's unofficial advisers in helping the tsar to make decisions and providing him with political opinions.

One of the main arguments in this dissertation is that the role of unofficial advisers and their ability to influence the tsar have been exaggerated. Nicholas II had well-developed, firm beliefs and was never easily influenced by anyone's advice. In fact, advisers remained "influential" only as long as they shared the tsar's opinions. If their opinions differed, they often suffered rejection and the loss of favor. In other words, the tsar allowed those around him to echo his opinions, but never direct them.

Nicholas II used unofficial advisers to promote his already set convictions, to boost his confidence, and provide spiritual, political and psychological support. In

addition, the tsar's use of unofficial advisers reflected his attempt to overcome the contradiction between the theory and practice of autocracy. In theory, it was a system of government based on personal rule; in reality, Nicholas's authority and initiative were constrained by bureaucratic institutions and practices.

Historical interpretations that Nicholas II's political failures resulted from his susceptibility to unofficial advisers diminish the role and responsibility of the tsar in contributing to the crisis of 1917. The tsar's relationships with unofficial advisers, which allowed individuals without official responsibilities to function as illegitimate centers of power and to inject ambivalence and insecurity into the work of the ministers through political salons, intrigue, and slanderous press campaigns, constituted the most important negative factor in late imperial Russia's political environment. Most important, unofficial advisers reinforced Nicholas II's resistance to political change and inspired exaggerated rumors, ultimately contributing to the monarch's damaged reputation, belated and inadequate responses to political crises, and Russia's collapse in the Revolution of 1917.

Acknowledgements.

This dissertation could not be written without numerous people who sustained me in many ways over the years. My first adviser, Professor Abraham Ascher, encouraged me to pursue this topic and helped me in the beginning stages of research and writing. I was enormously fortunate to receive assistance from Professor Cynthia Whittaker who became my adviser after Professor Ascher's retirement. Professor Whittaker helped me reformulate my thesis and saw through the completion of the project. Despite her very busy schedule of a department chair, she read and corrected my numerous drafts with care and patience. Without her constant encouragement, inspiration, and resourcefulness this dissertation would not be completed.

Throughout the years I also benefited from stimulating conversations with Professors Richard Wortman, Mikhail Dolbilov, Thomas Kessner, and Susan Baker. I would like to thank members of my committee, Professors Evelyn Ackerman, Mary Gibson, Kristin Roth-Ey, and Susan Smith-Peter for their valuable comments. The Graduate Center of the City University of New York provided me with funding in the form of Teaching Fellowship and Writing Fellowship, for which I am most grateful.

I am deeply indebted to my friends and colleagues who supported me emotionally and intellectually during the years of work on the dissertation. My family in Estonia believed in me and encouraged me unfailingly during the years. For this I am especially grateful to my grandparents, Vladimir and Beatrisa Solovyova, my parents, Tatiana Vatuleva and Konstantin Soloviev, and my brother Vova.

Michael Fiorito, a very special friend, has helped me in many ways from the beginning of this project. My son, Thelonious, was just 6 months old when I started graduate school and has over the last nine years shared with me every aspect of graduate student life. His love, wisdom, and a great sense of humor sustained me in writing this dissertation. This work is dedicated to him.

Table of Contents

1: Introduction.

When Nicholas II ascended the Russian throne in 1894 at the age of 26 after his father's sudden death from nephritis, he was virtually unknown to Russian society, including government officials. As one of Nicholas's biographers noted, "…he had no political profile or program. No one knew what he really thought about political issues."[1] The tsar's youth and inexperience quickly became a source of concern and confusion among the ministers who observed that Nicholas was unprepared for his role and lacked maturity in his appearance as well as behavior.[2]

These first impressions proved prescient. Nicholas's muted or inconsistent responses to the political situations before him and his conspicuous association with advisers outside the administration contributed to frantic guesswork among officials and society at large about who was behind any new turn of policy, a new appointment or resignation, a manifesto or a speech. With time, Nicholas's political persona became thoroughly enveloped in rumors, making it increasingly difficult to separate the tsar's image from his personality and manner of rule. After months and even years of rule, the tsar remained a puzzle to many of his officials and members of his entourage. As late as 1908, a member of the State Council, Aleksandr Stishinskii expressed a widely held opinion that the emperor was a "sphinx who cannot be comprehended."[3]

---

[1] Dominic Lieven, *Nicholas II: Emperor of All the Russias* (London, 1993), 69.

[2] Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power. Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 322-323.

[3] Aleksandra Bogdanovich, *Tri poslednikh samoderzhtsa* (Moscow: Novosti, 1990), 459.

The members of the highest bureaucracy, who interacted with the tsar on a weekly or even daily basis, were the original source of the widespread notion that Nicholas allowed and even encouraged the presence of unofficial influences in government affairs and that the extent of such a practice set him apart from previous rulers. Many shared the opinions of the chaplain of the Russian army, Georgii Shavelskii, that Nicholas "was always under one influence or another, to which he always surrendered almost automatically, as a result of the first impression."[4]

Ministers were not without reason in fearing the existence of unofficial influences on the monarch. However, in most instances, officials all too readily exonerated Nicholas's failings as ruler by assuming his lack of awareness and predisposition to harmful outside influences. For instance, referring to outsiders, Finance Minister Sergei Witte remarked that it was "impossible not to experience great regret that such people could and can have access to such *pure* persons as our monarchs. Here, at work is enormous deceit on the one side and delusion on the other."[5]

Describing Nicholas's susceptibility to influence, contemporaries referred to a wide range of explicit and implicit acts of pressure and their impact on the tsar. In contemporaries' views, advisers could charm, persuade, manipulate, mold, and even dominate the tsar politically, ideologically, and spiritually. Leaving aside the more intricate considerations of hidden or implicit influence for future research, this study

---

[4] Georgii Ioannovich Shavelskii, *Vospominaniia poslednego protopresvitera russkoi armii i flota*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1996), 116.

[5] Sergei Iulievich Vitte, *Vospominaniia,* vol. 3 (Tallinn, 1994), 562.

focuses on the most widely known allegations of political influence on Nicholas by his wife, Aleksandra Fedorovna, Grigorii Rasputin, Vladimir Meshcherskii, Anatolii Klopov, Mikhail Andronikov, and Aleksandr Bezobrazov. Nicholas's relationships with his official and unofficial advisers are especially illuminating for an analysis of the characteristic patterns of the tsar's ruling manner and a deeper understanding of his political convictions.

The central argument in this dissertation is that, although Nicholas lacked a definite political program, he had well-developed, firm beliefs and was never easily influenced by anyone's advice. He carefully selected his "advisers" based on psychological affinity and ideological agreement, or on the general "coincidence" of their opinions with his. More than advice, Nicholas sought comfort and confirmation from those who surrounded him and to whom he delegated the expression of his political opinions.

The study also addresses an important aspect of Imperial Russia's political culture: the world of politically powerful "free-floaters," to use Alfred Rieber's apt expression, whose influence on the monarch often rivaled that of the bureaucratic elite.[6] In Imperial Russia the official and unofficial worlds were intimately intertwined and operated on the level of familial ties, personal favors, unspoken assumptions, and behind-the-scenes influences. To uncover the internal nature of the monarchy of Nicholas II, it is necessary to recreate the mechanisms by which the tsar, his official advisers, and the extra-administrative power-centers shared power in decision-making and personnel recruitment.

---

[6] See Alfred Rieber, "Bureaucratic Politics in Imperial Russia," *Social Science History* 2, no. 4 (Summer, 1978): 399-413.

Influential courtiers and unofficial advisers have been an integral part of most monarchical governments.[7] In fact, powerful imperial favorites such as Cardinal Richelieu in France, the Duke of Buckingham in England**,** and the Count Olivares in Spain constituted a "European phenomenon" in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[8] Political "free-floaters" whose power and influence far exceeded their official responsibilities and titular privileges, were long established in Russian political culture. In the eighteenth century, the presence of favorites marked every reign and fear of their negative influence over the rulers prompted a lively discourse and several attempts to create institutional checks against favoritism.[9] In the early nineteenth century, a series of major reforms created bureaucratic institutions with administrative and legislative responsibilities, such as the Committee of Ministers and the State Council. However, these institutions, designed to place limits on the rulers' powers, were frequently ignored or resisted by the tsars, including Nicholas II. The unifying agency was fulfilled by the tsar himself, who supervised the work of ministers during weekly one-on-one meetings. [10]

---

[7] Biographies of the democratically elected leaders also amply demonstrate the presence of unofficial advice from friends and relatives.

[8] J. H. Elliott and L.W.B. Brockliss, eds. *The World of the Favourite* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 4.

[9] See John Alexander's "Favourites, Favoritism and Female Rule in Russia, 1725-1796," in *Russia in the Age of the Enlightenment*, ed. Roger Bartlett and Janet M. Hartley (London, 1990); Cynthia Hyla Whittaker, *Russian Monarchy: Eighteenth Century Rulers and Writers in Political Dialogue* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press. 2003).

[10] In addition, until 1905, no central organ coordinated the work of the various ministries and committees or designed a long-term strategy for domestic and foreign policy.

Because of Nicholas's centrality to the process of decision-making and personnel recruitment, a minister spent a considerable amount of time and effort cultivating his relationship with him. In addition, he frequently depended on people close to the monarch to gain support, to empower his own position, or cripple that of his rivals.[11] The prestige these advisers gained from their close (real or advertised) relationship with the tsar allowed them to exert considerable power over ministers, influence important decisions, and manipulate appointments. They intervened in policy-making by organizing political salons, waging press campaigns, and using intrigue and slander.

Nicholas's resistance to what he considered the bureaucratic encroachment on his traditional privilege explains the active role that unofficial influences played in the last decades of the empire. The root of such an attitude was the transformation of Russian state institutions and legal procedures as a result of the Great Reforms of 1861-1864, which expedited the rise of a modern bureaucracy and the appearance of a legal consciousness among the members of state service, effectively sapping the autocracy of much of its direct personal power. Max Weber described the "ever-increasing indispensability of officialdom" in the nineteenth century and the process by which the absolute monarch was becoming "powerless opposite the superior knowledge of the bureaucratic expert." According to Weber, the rise of a Western

---

[11] L. E. Shepelev, *Chinovnyi mir Rossii: XVIII-nachalo XIX v.* (St. Petersburg, 1999), 44.

legal state was intricately connected to the concentration of enormous power in the hands of these bureaucratic experts.[12]

In Russia, the lack of independent political institutions and concentration of all power in the monarchy hindered the full development of a Western legal state.[13] Nevertheless, historian Heidi Whelan demonstrated that the State Council, the independent judiciary, and the bureaucracy challenged Alexander III on many issues, and personnel selection increasingly proceeded along routine bureaucratic channels. She concluded that in matters of policy and procedure it was the bureaucracy that possessed the initiative; only in certain matters, the ones he really cared about, did the autocrat exercise his unlimited prerogatives. "The reign of Alexander III marked the passage of decision making authority from an autocratic tsarist administration to a no less autocratic bureaucratic administration."[14] Andrew Verner's analysis of decision-making on the eve of the 1905 Revolution also showed that the majority of policy initiatives originated with the bureaucracy, while Nicholas II's role consisted of rejecting or confirming the ministers' proposals.[15]

---

[12] H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds. and trans. *From Max Weber. Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 234.

[13] See Walter McKenzie Pintner and Don Karl Rowney, eds. and trans. *Russian officialdom: the bureaucratization of Russian society from the seventeenth to the twentieth century* (University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

[14] Heide Whelan, *Alexander III and State Council: Bureaucracy and Counterreform inLate Imperial Russia* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1982), 8-9, 198.

[15] Andrew Verner, *The Crisis of Russian Autocracy: Nicholas II and the 1905 Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

The interdependence between the autocracy and the bureaucracy under Alexander III and Nicholas II solidified to the extent that neither could do much without the other. Yet, the resistance of Alexander III and Nicholas II to the bureaucratic encroachment on their personal power took different patterns. Alexander III's efforts to exert complete authority on the State Council, the main advisery legislative organ, and the Ministry of the Interior, in fact, challenged both institutions to take a forceful stand in legislation disputes and resulted in a vibrant working relationship with the autocrat. Nicholas II, on the other hand, paid the State Council much less attention than his father and virtually relegated it to the status of "a pensioner's home."[16] In addition, the tsar's ambiguity and vacillation in his relationship with the members of the bureaucracy fractured cooperation and unity between the monarch and the executive apparatus in the country. Nicholas's persistence in forging a personal rule based on his traditional authority produced in Leopold Haimson's words "a conspiracy of the tsar and his circle against his own government."[17]

Historians have traditionally portrayed Nicholas II as a weak, incompetent, narrow-minded, and self-contradictory man who stubbornly adhered to the idea of unrestricted monarchy but was unable to sustain personal rule.[18] Examples of these

---

[16] Whelan, *Alexander III*, 202.

[17] *Reformy ili revoliutsiia. Rossiia 1861-1917: Materialy Mezhdunarodnogo kollokviuma istorikov*, Valentin S. Diakin, ed., (St. Petersburg, 1992), 56.

[18] Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution* (New York, 1990), 57-59; Nicholas Riasanovskii, *A History of Russia* (New York, 1984), 396; W. Bruce Lincoln, *In War's Dark Shadow: The Russians before the Great War* (New York, 1983), 33-34.

studies include Richard Pipes's *The Russian Revolution*, Nicholas Riasanovskii's *History of Russia,* and W. Bruce Lincoln's *In War's Dark Shadow: The Russians before the Great War.* On the other hand, biographers, such as Robert Massie, Edward Radzinskii, and Aleksandr Bokhanov have described Nicholas II in favorable, at times hagiographic, terms.[19] They emphasized the tsar's moral stand, piety, patriotism, idealism, love of common people, and his political achievements in the face of unprecedented polarization of Russian society.

Historians, who have attempted a more balanced portrayal of the last tsar, such as Sergei Oldenburg, Marc Ferro, Dominic Lieven, Robert D. Warth, and Andrew Verner, generally divide into those who emphasize the fast-paced socio-economic transformations in late imperial Russia as a formidable challenge facing any ruler and those who stress Nicholas II's personal limitations and his direct responsibility for the collapse of the government. In Oldenburg's depiction, Nicholas appears as a strong-willed ruler, whose firm support of the ministers allowed for progressive legislative changes leading to improvements in the status of the peasants, abolition of the commune, and important financial reforms. The author considers the frequent charges of contemporaries that Nicholas was indecisive, weak, and susceptible to outside influences unsustainable. "One can say that Emperor Nicholas II himself was the main behind-the-scenes influence of his own reign."[20] Nicholas's gentle demeanor, style of interaction, and his fatalistic spirituality may have produced

---

[19] Sergei Oldenburg, *Tsarsvovanie Imperatora Nikolaia II* (Moscow, 1992); Robert Massie, *Nicholas and Aleksandra* (New York: Atheneum, 1967); Dominic Lieven, *Nicholas II: Emperor of All the Russias* (London, 1993); Aleksandr Bokhanov, *Nikolai II* (Moscow, 2000).

[20] Oldenburg, *Tsarstvovaniie Imperatora*, 207.

the impression of weakness on the contemporaries. However, when it came to the realization of his plans and desires, Oldenburg points out, the tsar would dismiss the ministers he no longer saw eye to eye with, without any consideration of their past accomplishments and the length of their service.[21]

Lieven's sympathetic account depicts a conscientious and deeply patriotic tsar trying to enact reforms to meet the demands of the population. Although Lieven admits that Nicholas may not have been fit to perform the role of an autocrat, he sees the main reason for the tsar's failure in the difficulties of ruling pre-revolutionary Russia, rather than the emperor's own limitations. Another recent biographer of Nicholas II, Robert D. Warth, places some emphasis on Nicholas's sense of ambivalence and insecurity about his role as impediments to efficient government. Yet, he believes that the monarchical form of government was too anachronistic to deal with Russia's modernization requirements and, as a result, was steadily losing its credibility with the population.[22]

Verner's study of Nicholas's government during the Revolution of 1905 is an attempt to apply psychology to the study of the monarchy. He sees Nicholas's unsuccessful attempts to imitate his father's political persona and the lack of his father's approval of him as the root of the tsar's estrangement from his role and his heightened sense of personal responsibility to preserve the autocracy by resenting any constitutional reforms. Verner interprets Nicholas's use of unofficial advisers as a strategy to maintain autonomy within the bureaucratic structure. Unofficial advisers,

---

[21] Ibid., 40.

[22] Robert D. Warth, *Nicholas II: The Life and Reign of Russia's Last Monarch* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1997).

the author writes, played an important role in the last reign not because the tsar aspired to trade "bureaucratic tutelage for unofficial connections," but because "the tsar used one to escape the other." Downplaying the complex interaction between Nicholas and the milieu within which he received ideological, political, and psychological support, Verner concludes that the tsar's relationship with his entourage was confined "to particular and personal cases, i.e. traditional acts of personal favoritism."[23]

Recently, the historians Boris Ananich, Rafail Ganelin, Mark Steinberg, Boris Khrustalev, Richard Wortman, and Sergei Kulikov, among others, have argued that the view of Nicholas II as a victim caught in the whirlpool of events is oversimplified and that the tsar's political opinions and actions displayed consistency and determination to safeguard autocracy throughout his reign.[24] And when Nicholas was pressured into accepting the constitutional order in October 1905, he never relinquished the effort to overturn his concession. Especially illuminating is Wortman's interpretation of the symbolic manifestations of the Russian monarchy's ideology. Wortman has argued that after the assassination of Alexander II, Alexander III and his conservative advisers replaced the European orientation of the monarchy with the Russian "national myth." They no longer conceived of the autocracy as an embodiment of the Western legal state operating through a reforming bureaucracy, as

---

[23] Verner, *The Crisis*, 68-9.

[24] B. V. Ananich and R. Sh. Ganelin, "Nikolai II," *Voprosy Istorii* 2 (1993); M. Steinberg and B. Khrustalev, eds., *The Fall of the Romanovs: Political Dreams and Personal Struggles in the Time of Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, vol. 2; Sergei Kulikov, *Biurokraticheskaia elita Rossiiskoi imperii nakanune padeniia starogo poriadka (1914-1917)* (Riazan' 2004).

it had been presented from Peter the Great to Alexander II, but rather as a personal and personalized authority of the Russian tsar. With intellectual roots in Ivan Aksakov's sentimental slavophilism and Mikhail Katkov's state nationalism -- including his belief in the efficacy of repression and violence -- the "national myth" depicted the monarch as "the highest embodiment of the Russian people, who were united with him organically by ties of nation and religion."[25]

Wortman shows that Nicholas II accepted the ideology of the "national myth" from his father's reign without significant changes. It was in the application of the national monarchy, or "scenarios of power," where the two tsars differed. Alexander III attempted to curtail the participation of civil society in the political process and to restructure the state apparatus by means of counter-reforms. He sought to "draw boundaries between the parts of the state that were subordinate to the monarch, and the others, contaminated by Western ideas, that resisted his absolute power."[26] The distinctiveness of Nicholas II's reign lies in a striking shift of the balance between the personal authority of the monarch and the institutions of the state. Thus, in Wortman's opinion, to a greater extent than his father, Alexander III, Nicholas's practice of autocracy and, one may add, his use of unofficial advisers reflect the tsar's attempt to bypass government institutions and establish a direct relationship with the Russian people. As the author aptly points out, for the tsar "institutions both of church and government receded into the background. Nicholas claimed a direct

---

[25] Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, vol. 2, 525.

[26] Wortman, "Reply to Mikhail Dolbilov," *Kritika* 2, no. 4 (Fall, 2001), 801.

though unspoken and invisible spiritual bond with the people - a shared sense of piety he believed had persisted from ancient Russia."[27]

Although the historiography of Nicholas's reign is extensive, the studies have focused predominantly on either the tsar's personal limitations or the structural inadequacies of the monarchical government he headed. No work has undertaken a systematic analysis of the role played by the tsar's close surroundings and his advisers throughout his reign. My dissertation fills this gap and explores the inner working of the monarchical government through Nicholas's personal relationships with his advisers in order to identify the limitations and contradictions imbedded in its functioning. This study contributes to the historiography of the period as well as a general reappraisal of the last tsar's personality and manner of rule. It challenges the view of Nicholas as a weak and unaware ruler lacking strong opinions and susceptible to outside influences. In addition, the significance of this dissertation lies in demystification of the "dark forces" by tracing the root of this phenomenon to the early years of Nicholas's rule when the tsar established precedents of engaging with unofficial advisers.

Overall, this dissertation explores the responsibility of Nicholas's unofficial advisers in setting a tone for his reign and encouraging or discouraging his political intransigence. Did the advisers attempt to change the tsar's opinions, broaden his views, and help him to make decisions? Or did Nicholas solicit their assistance in order to promote his already set convictions? To answer these questions, I examine several case studies that take a close look at the significant instances of Nicholas's

---

[27] Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, vol. 2, 365-66.

relationships with unofficial advisers, such as Anatolii Klopov, Vladimir Meshcherskii, and Aleksandr Bezobrazov. I discuss how these individuals achieved their position of authority, the nature of their advice to Nicholas, and the effect of their activities on government and Russian domestic and foreign politics. In addition to examining Nicholas's interactions with his official and unofficial advisers, I also depict a peculiar development which grew out of Nicholas's manner of rule in the last years of his reign, namely, the appearance of powerful outsiders who did not have a close relationship with the tsar, but who, by claiming it, were able to achieve a high degree of visibility and influence on the administration.

2. Nicholas II's Personality, Worldview, and Ruling Style.

The political and personal accounts left behind by Nicholas's contemporaries make up a substantial collection. The abundance of sources, however, does not simplify a historian's task of producing an accurate portrayal of the last tsar. In fact, the work is complicated by the significant disparity in the contemporaries' evaluation of virtually every aspect of Nicholas's personality. Russian Army Chaplain Georgii Shavelskii summed up the contradictory impression that Nicholas made on his contemporaries: "His personality was weaved of opposites. Next to every positive quality he displayed a negative one." Kind and good-natured on the one hand, Nicholas reputedly bore grudges. He would impulsively get attached to people, but would quickly get disappointed and turn away from them. His seeming sincerity and trusting nature were offset by secretiveness, suspiciousness and caution. Nicholas loved Russia immensely and could die for her if need be, but "at the same time he seemed to cherish his peace, his habits, his health, and in order to keep them up he, perhaps unconsciously, sacrificed the interests of the state."[28]

Memoirists generally tended to compliment Nicholas's intellectual abilities as well as the quality of his education. Finance Minister Sergei Witte, who disliked Nicholas and compared him unfavorably to Alexander III in his memoirs, considered the last tsar intellectually superior to his father. Chief of Imperial Chancellery Aleksandr Mosolov considered Nicholas to be a well-educated man.[29] In General

---

[28] Georgii Ioannovich Shavelskii, *Vospominaniia poslednego protopresvitera russkoi armii i flota*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1996), 116.

[29] Aleksandr Mosolov, *Pri dvore poslednego Rossiiskogo imperatora* (Moscow, 1993), 6.

Pavel Kurlov's opinion, the tsar was a "widely educated man who followed serious Russian and foreign literature, who could quickly comprehend the most complicated political questions and thoughtfully solve them."[30] From the age of ten, Nicholas's education was entrusted to General Grigorii Danilovich, a former principal of a military school. The general fostered in his student self-discipline and emphasized the traditional values of hard work, honor, moral duty, and, above all, military virtues. Mosolov remarked that Danilovich "trained [Nicholas] to adopt an impenetrable reserve, which was an essential trait of his character."[31]

The tsar received formal instruction from some of the most distinguished minds of his time, such as Nikolai Beketov in chemistry, Nikolai Bunge in finances and political economy, Konstantin Pobedonostvsev and Mikhail Kapustin in jurisprudence and law. Yet, as several contemporaries agreed, Nicholas's education neglected deep understanding, analysis, and critical thinking about contemporary philosophical and political issues. Alexander III consciously played down academic achievement and emphasized the importance of physical, religious, and moral instruction. The home schooling Nicholas received was reclusive and provided little opportunity for him to engage with children outside family and court, to be exposed to a variety of views or to participate in open discussions. Nicholas's education prepared him poorly for his political role and insufficiently acquainted him with the larger milieu that provided candidates for the highest government positions, which

---

[30] Pavel Grigorievich Kurlov, *Gibel' imperatorskoi Rossii: vospominaniia* (Moscow, 2002), 22.

[31] Mosolov, *Pri dvore*, 10-11.

undoubtedly hindered the tsar's ability to form relationships with potential allies and advisers.

Nicholas's training in statecraft prior to his assumption of power also appeared to be less than adequate. Alexander III appointed him to the State Council and the Committee of Ministers as well as made him chairman of the Committee on Famine Relief and of the Siberian Railroad Committee. In addition, Nicholas was expected to attend ministerial reports as part of his initiation into government. However, Nicholas did not exert himself much in this area, nor was he particularly encouraged to do so by his father. He occasionally and casually attended the meetings of the State Council and chaired two minor committees on famine relief and the Siberian Railway. His sister Olga recalled that Nicholas "had intelligence, he had faith and courage – and he was wholly ignorant about governmental matters. Nicky had been trained as a soldier. He should have been taught statesmanship, and he was not."[32] This estimation is also confirmed by Nicholas himself. "I am not prepared to be a Tsar," he confessed to his cousin, Grand Duke Aleksandr Mikhailovich, at the time of his father's death, "I never wanted to become one. I know nothing of the business of ruling. I even have no idea how to talk to the ministers."[33]

Military values were deeply imbedded in the culture of royal elite, but Nicholas's military training, despite his sister's assertions, appears to have been quite superficial. Although he served in the elite Preobrazhenskii regiment, the Guards

---

[32] I. Vorres, *The Last Grand Duchess*, (London, 1964), 67, quoted in Dominic Lieven, *Nicholas II: Emperor of All the Russias* (London, 1993), 39.

[33] Aleksandr Mikhailovich, *Once a Grand Duke* (New York, 1932), 169, quoted in Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power. Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 341.

Hussars, and in the Horse Artillery, he received no more than the socializing experience of a coming of age aristocrat and not the training of a military commander.[34] Later in life, Nicholas enjoyed spending time among the army officers, cherishing the memories of his service in the regiments as a youth. Palace commandant Pavel Benkendorff recalled that the tsar "liked to talk to the officers about the details of their service and of their life in the garrisons."[35] However, according to the military historian William Fuller, Nicholas's interest in the army was quite superficial. He lacked a deep understanding of the army's needs, "his military world was peopled by the officers of the Guards cavalry… His real passion was the outward form of military life – romance, color, reckless heroics, and pageantry—rather than its content."[36]

The traditional political values Nicholas absorbed as a result of his upbringing were at odds with modern ideas of legality and reform and could not accommodate the widespread demands for democratic political change. An influential contemporary source of conservative thinking on the role and place of the autocracy in Russian political tradition was Konstantin Pobedonostsev, the head of the Holy Synod and Nicholas's former tutor in jurisprudence. Although educated as a jurist, Pobedonostsev despised western democratic notions of popular sovereignty, legality, and reform and passionately defended the traditional view of the divine right autocracy. Western parliamentary systems were plagued with chaos, disunity, and

---

[34] Dominic Lieven, Nicholas *II: Emperor of All the Russias* (London, 1993), 37.

[35] Pavel K. Benckendorff, *Last Days at Tsarskoe Selo* (London, 1927), 116.

[36] William Fuller, *Civil-Military Conflict in Imperial Russia, 1881-1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 41.

corruption, in his view, and only the monarchy was able to overcome national fragmentation and instill a sense of obedience in the Russian population. Deeply distrustful of human beings' capacity to act in a reasonable and moral way, Pobedonostsev argued that the autocrat must be guided solely by God and his own conscience.

Mark Steinberg has noted that "at the heart of [Nicholas's] political philosophy was an inherited tradition of political myth – a body of idealized, justificatory, and inspiring images of the tsar."[37] Nicholas conceived of his relationship with the Russian people in a paternal and patrimonial sense. He believed in the inherent monarchism of the people and idealized their loyalty. Nicholas was convinced that not only educated society, but also government institutions created a wall between him and his people and prevented him from hearing their voice and knowing about their true needs and feelings. Imagined seventeenth-century Muscovite autocratic traditions served as the model for a direct and organic relationship between the ruler and his subjects, without any significant challenges from the bureaucracy and intelligentsia.[38] These sentiments corresponded to the deep-seated conviction in Russian society that his officials had kept the tsar unaware of the extent of people's suffering; had he known about the plight of the poor, he would have fulfilled all their wishes.

---

[37] Mark D. Steinberg, "Nicholas and Aleksandra. An Intellectual Portrait," in *The Fall of the Romanovs. Political Dreams and Personal Struggles in a Time of Revolution,* ed. Mark D. Steinberg and Vladimir M. Khrustalev (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 15.

[38] Wortman, "Nikolai II i obraz samoderzhaviia," in *Reformy ili revoliutsiia. Rossiia 1861-1917: Materialy Mezhdunarodnogo kollokviuma istorikov*, edited by Valentin S. Diakin (St. Petersburg, 1992), 19.

The myth of the existence of a bureaucratic wall that precluded a special and indestructible communion between the monarchy and people, as Steinberg has argued, became "a major obstacle to administrative and constitutional reform in Russia."[39] Mosolov explained Nicholas's reasoning as follows. "Two enemies collaborated to reduce the personal prestige of the tsar," he wrote referring to the bureaucracy the intelligentsia.

> Brick by brick, lie by lie, they built up a veritable prison wall around him, confining him to his palace and preventing him from leaving it to speak directly to his loyal subjects and to tell them as man to man how much he loved them. . . . The peasant masses loved the Tsar. The soldiers loved the Tsar. The townspeople, who crowded to see him pass from the moment when his motor-car came into sight, loved the Tsar. He would have been loved still more if the "wall" had not prevented him from doing his work as autocrat.[40]

During the anniversary celebrations of the Battle of Poltava in 1909, the tsar made several trips to the Russian countryside where he spent hours socializing with the peasant crowds. General Kurlov recalled how on one of these excursions Nicholas spent nearly three hours talking with the peasants, "charming everyone with his smile, and asking about their family, life and domestic needs."[41] An example of the tsar's yearning for expressions of popular devotion can be seen in his ties with various monarchical organizations, such as the notoriously anti-Semitic Union of the Russian people. The tsar met with the representatives of the Union without the

---

[39] Steinberg, "Nicholas and Alexandra," 18.

[40] Mosolov, *Pri dvore,* 130-1.

[41] Kurlov, *Gibel*', 25

proper protocol and despite the fact that his officials disapproved of those audiences, considering them uncomfortable and unclear.[42] There is no evidence that Nicholas had seriously considered the recommendations of the Union's leaders to do away with the Duma or the zemstvos. Yet, Nicholas was fond of receiving letters and telegrams with exuberant expressions of loyalty and adoration in which he saw fine examples of popular support.

Nicholas took seriously his responsibility to the Russian people to maintain law and order in the country and although he did not consider Russia a candidate for a constitutional regime, he took pride in a self-image as a reformer. Distancing himself from Peter the Great's heritage and his style of grand political transformations, Nicholas believed in incremental reforms, mostly limited to improvements in elementary education, sanitation, trade, and local government efficiency.

He distinguished rigidly between the "good" people – wise, moral, but naïve and grateful recipients of his largesse—he enjoyed encountering on his journeys and the "bad" people—Jews, revolutionaries, and those who participated in political strikes and rural disorders. The political demands of the liberals and *zemstvo* leaders irritated Nicholas. "Remember, that your calling is economic maintenance in the area of local needs." Nicholas reminded the representatives of the zemstvo and nobility during his trip to Kursk in August 1902. "If you successfully fulfill this calling, you can be assured of my heart-felt goodwill."[43]

---

[42] A. Mordvinov, "Poslednii Imperator. Vospominaniia Fligel'-ad'iutanta A. Mordvinova," *Otechestvennye arkhivy* 3 (1993), 74.

[43] Quoted in I. P. Belokonskii, *Zemskoe dvizheniie* (Moscow, 1914), 139.

Grand Duke Alexander Mikhailovich saw the tsar's reluctance to institute limited monarchy originating in his religious convictions and moral values. Nicholas was brought up with a deep faith in the divine origins of the autocracy, its absolute necessity for the well-being of Russia, and the monarch's moral responsibility for preserving it. He believed that it was his duty as ruler to answer to God for the actions of his people; delegating authority to others, in his mind, would be equal to disregarding his responsibility. As the tsar conveyed to Prince Petr Sviatopolk-Mirskii soon after the latter became minister of internal affairs, considerations larger than simply holding on to power prevented him from taking a step in the direction of popular representation. "You know, I don't hold on to the autocracy for my own pleasure," he confessed. "If it was simply a question of myself, I would happily get rid of all this."[44]

Nicholas's biographer, Dominic Lieven, has argued that the tsar sincerely believed that a representative form of government was foreign to the political culture and historic roots of Russia and would be "harmful to the people whom God has entrusted to [him]."[45] In addition, the birth of his son Alexis on August 12 1904, which came after ten years of marriage and four daughters, undoubtedly added to the pressure of maintaining the dynasty intact.

Both Nicholas and Aleksandra were deeply influenced by the ascetic idea of suffering and fatalistic reliance on God's will. Faith instilled a sense of optimism which, in the words of Grand Duke Aleksandr Mikhailovich, was "connected with

---

[44] Ie. A. Sviatopolk-Mirskaia, "Dnevnik," *Istoricheskie zapiski* 77 (1965), 247.

[45] Lieven, *Nicholas II*, 136-140.

some sort of fatalistic calm and carefree attitude toward the future, with an almost indifferent and apathetic approach to the dismal events of the present, of which there were plenty during his reign."[46] Submission to the will of God offered comfort and reassurance at times of crisis or difficult political decisions. As Mosolov wrote, the tsar "believed that no one can run counter to his fate. What is to happen will happen! Everything will come right in the end, for Providence is watching over us."[47] Others left similar impressions. During the revolutionary crisis of 1905, Nicholas's uncle, Grand Duke Sergei Aleksandrovich, noted that the tsar was in a blissful state of fatalism.[48] Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna, Nicholas's cousin, told French Ambassador Maurice Paleologue that the tsar was a fatalist: "When things are going badly, instead of somehow reacting to that, he instead convinces himself that God wanted it to be that way and relies on God's will!"[49]

God's will, traditional beliefs, trust that the people would remain ultimately loyal to their tsar, all of this comforted him and strengthened his resolve. But fatalistic spiritually was also a dangerously anachronistic position for a ruler of a modernizing nation. It blurred Nicholas's responses to political crises, encouraged political inflexibility and delusion instead of pragmatic realism. Finance Minister Petr Bark perceptively concluded in his memoirs that Nicholas's perceptions of his role, his attitude toward his responsibilities, his religiosity and his fantastical dream of

---

[46] Aleksadr Mikhailovich, grand duke, *Kniga vospominanii* (Paris, 1933-1934), 117.

[47] Mosolov, *Pri dvore*, 11.

[48] Steinberg, "Nicholas and Aleksandra," 14.

[49] Maurice Paleologue, *An Ambassadors' Memoirs* (New York, 1925), 130.

national monarchy, all combined in "a dream that was ever before him, for he lived in dreams."[50]

The ideological limitations of Nicholas's ruling style were coupled with the practical and conceptual ones. The tsar was widely considered incapable of effectively leading the government or directing the work of the ministers in a unified manner. Assistant Interior Minister Vladimir Gurko suggested that the tsar lacked the ability to distinguish between ruling and delegating orders: "…In his view, ruling the state came down to giving orders on particular cases."[51] Benkendorff observed that the tsar could not grasp "the principles necessary to conduct so great an empire. This explains his indecision, his limitations, and vacillations which lasted throughout his reign." Despite his natural intelligence, Nicholas seemed unable to "reconcile his decisions with the fundamental political principles which he entirely lacked."[52] Pobedonostsev recalled that the tsar "grasped isolated facts without relating them to the overall picture. He lacked the skill of forming a broad general opinion on an issue…"[53]

Contemporaries interpreted the tsar's lack of conceptual and practical skills necessary for efficient political leadership as apathy and estrangement from his role. A member of the State Council Aleksandr Koni recalled that when he attempted to

---

[50] Petr Bark, "Glava iz vospominanii [o Nikolae II]," *Vozrozhdeniie* 43 (1955), 9.

[51] Vladimir Iosifovich Gurko, *Features and Figures of the Past: Government and Opinion in the Reign of Nicholas II* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1939), 7-8.

[52] P. Benkendorff, *Last Days at the Tsarskoe Selo, 1 march - 1 august 1917*, 113, Bakhmeteff Archive, Columbia University Library.

[53] "Dnevnik A. A. Polovtsova," *Krasnyi arkhiv* 3 (1931), 131, quoted in Larisa Zakharova, "Krizis samoderzhaviia nakanune revoliutsii 1905 goda," *Voprosy Istorii* 8 (1978), 121.

engage the tsar in a sincere conversation about the political situation in the country Nicholas frequently remained silent or switched to a different topic.[54] Gurko observed that "to Alexander III's policy Nicholas brought considerable changes and, above all, showed a total lack of system and stability."[55] Minister of Agriculture Aleksandr Naumov also complained of the tsar's habit of avoiding pressing issues and exercising leadership. "Everything that he was told skidded off of him, and this man in such a time, it seemed, should have united everyone, deeply familiarized himself with everything, led. We all moved in different directions. There was no one to unite us."[56]

Adversely comparing Nicholas to his father, the ministers criticized the tsar for a lack of directness, strong will, and self-confidence—the qualities of a "real" autocrat. Unlike Alexander III, who appeared crude and insolent but always straightforward with his officials, Nicholas found a free exchange of opinions uncomfortable and preferred to act indirectly. Every new appointment started with a period of a honeymoon, when the tsar enthusiastically approved of the minister's actions and decisions. "But then clouds would begin to appear on the horizon. They would come all the sooner if the Minister was a man of principle, a man with a definite program."[57] Nicholas often expressed his disagreement with his ministers' views or dissatisfaction with their actions either through a third person or by

---

[54] Nikolai Koni, *Vospominaniia*, vol. 2 (Moscow, 1966), 383.

[55] Gurko, *Features and Figures*, 19-20.

[56] "Stenograficheskii dopros Ministra Zemledelia A. N. Naumova," GARF, fond 1467, op. 1, no. 325, p. 5.

[57] Mosolov, *Pri dvore*, 9.

replacing them with those who he hoped would be more compatible.[58] According to Mosolov, having made a decision to dismiss a minister, the tsar "was still perfectly able to give him a friendly reception, to thank him for his collaboration, and to shake hands warmly with him when he left – and then to send him a letter calling on him to resign."

> The tsar's contribution to a talk was never sharp or direct, never argumentative, never hot-tempered, never made in other than even tones. The minister would take his leave, delighted at having, to all appearance, carried his point. But he would be sadly mistaken. What he had taken for weakness was merely dissimulation. He had forgotten that the tsar was absolutely without moral courage; that he loathed making a final decision in the presence of the person concerned. Next day the minister would receive a letter from him – a letter of dismissal.[59]

Nicholas's manner of dismissing his ministers inevitably produced accusations of weakness, insincerity, and deceit. Disgruntled by his sudden dismissal as chairman of the Council of Ministers in 1906, Sergei Witte complained that Nicholas was a typical "oriental": "We talked for about two hours; he shook my hand, he hugged me. I returned home excited and happy and that same day received the notice of my resignation."[60] Kurlov explained in his memoirs that what was often misconstrued as weakness was the reflection of Nicholas's endurance and reserve. The tsar was able to tolerate a minister for a long time after he no longer saw eye to eye with him. Officials accustomed to Alexander III's forceful and boisterous

---

[58] V. Gurko, "Tsar' i tsaritsa," in *Nikolai Vtoroi: vospominaniia, dnevniki*, ed. B. V. Ananich and R. Sh. Ganelin (St. Petersburg, 1994), 356-7.

[59] Mosolov, *Pri dvore*, 9-11.

[60] Aleksandr Mikhailovich, *Iz knigi vospominanii*, 174.

personality mistook Nicholas's gentle treatment of them for approval of their performance. Stunned by their "sudden" dismissal, they spread rumors of Nicholas's weakness and susceptibility to unofficial influences.[61]

Gurko agreed with Kurlov that the image of Nicholas as a weak ruler stemmed from the softness and delicateness of the tsar's style. The minister felt that the tsar only appeared weak, while "deep down he was extremely determined and unshakable."[62] True, he was uncomfortable with imposing his will outright on his officials, but this did not mean that Nicholas lacked willpower; on the contrary, "he was distinguished by steadfast determination to carry out the plans that arose in his mind."[63]

Mosolov noted that early in his life "Nicholas II had made it a fixed rule that he was in no way bound by his position as monarch to do anything that he did not want to do." Yet, he combined this independent stand with his "natural timidity" and never outwardly showed signs of dissatisfaction or anger. Although the tsar

> had a great capacity for grasping his interlocutor's thought halfway through its expression, of appreciating every delicate distinction in a report, of giving their true value to details which had deliberately been slurred over. But he made a point of preserving the appearance of acquiescence. He never contested the statements made by his interlocutor.[64]

---

[61] Kurlov, *Gibel'*, 28.

[62] Gurko, *Features and Figures*, 14.

[63] Ibid., 6.

[64] Mosolov, *Pri dvore*, 6-10.

Bark explained that Nicholas's reserve strained the communication between him and his officials. The tsar often seemed phlegmatic and indifferent, as if nothing concerned him.

> But it only seemed that way. In reality many circumstances troubled, exasperated, and angered him. But he had the strength to preserve a mask of calm and indifference. One could only notice a peculiar shine in his glance, which became distant and seemed to disappear into the eternity.[65]

In questions he considered important, Nicholas could become resolute, inflexible, and even willful. He acted with conviction and a sense of direction no minister was able to shake. Bark compared Nicholas's perseverance to "a mountain stream that flows around stones and other obstacles and continues on its course towards the plain in spite of them."[66] In a conversation with Finance Minister Vladimir Kokovstov, Nicholas admitted to listening to different opinions and never rejecting anything immediately. However, even if the position was "painful, crushing the best dreams of my entire life, I will never make a decision with which my conscience does not agree."[67] Whether in questions of national importance or mundane issues Nicholas jealously guarded his right to say the final word. When in 1901 the State Council suggested the abolition of corporal punishment for the peasants, Nicholas wrote on the proposal that "this will happen when I decide."[68]

---

[65] Bark, "Glava iz vospominanii," 10.

[66] Ibid., 14

[67] Vladimir Kokovstsov, *Iz moego proshlogo*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1933), 177.

Other examples include his adamant refusal to lift restrictions on the activities of the Jews and his decision to place himself in the command of the army in 1915 despite the vehement protests of his ministers. Once Nicholas made up his mind, he never relented, often "going roundabout ways to carry them out, which gave an impression of duality of his personality…"[69]

Gurko suggested that Nicholas retained his father's ministers reluctantly, prevented from dismissing them only by his own inexperience and discomfort with taking a direct action. With time, however,

> constant compliance with the wishes of his ministers must have proved a strain on him. …Repeated frustrations of this nature tended to make him stubborn, and in the last years of his reign his insistence upon petty matters, usually concerning individuals, assumed a pathological character. The sentence, 'This is my wish!' was often on his lips.[70]

For Nicholas, heading the government was like commanding an army unit or administering a private estate. He complained to Bark that the cabinet of ministers lacked the discipline of a military regiment.[71] Ad-hoc appointments of ministers with contrasting views and programs suggest that for Nicholas personal sympathy was more important than professional qualifications. Demonstrations of personal loyalty on the part of the ministers required considerable skill and an investment of time.

---

[68] "Dnevnik A. A. Polovtsova," *Krasnyi arkhiv* 3 (1923), 90, quoted in Larisa Zakharova, "Krizis samoderzhaviia," 124.

[69] Gurko, *Features and Figures*, 6.

[70] Ibid., 221-222.

[71] Bark, "Vospominaniia," *Vozrozhdeniie* 157 (1965), 62.

This may explain why Nicholas experienced the best working relationships with the least effective and most unpopular ministers, such as Dmitrii Sipiagin, Nikolai Maklakov, Vladimir Sturmer, and Alexander Protopopov. Gurko felt that the tsar parted ways with a minister if the latter could not or did not wish to accept the tsar's authority as limitless in every circumstance.

> Such was the measurement of the degree of personal loyalty of a minister to the tsar. Because of this, in the majority of cases the difference of opinion between the tsar and his ministers came down to this: that the ministers defended the law and the tsar insisted on his omnipotence.[72]

On the other hand, Kurlov related an example that showed Nicholas's willingness to act according to the law even if it contradicted his own personal sympathies. The tsar had had an affectionate relationship with Minister of War Vladimir Sukhomlinov. Still, when Sukhomlinov was legally charged with corruption, Nicholas never used his power to interfere on his behalf. Only in his personal letter to Sukhomlinov, Nicholas assured the minister of personal goodwill and expressed hope that God would help him regain his innocence.[73]

If Nicholas's idiosyncrasies as ruler were one major factor hindering the effective relationship between the monarchy and the bureaucracy, the other factor was the structure and functioning of Russian imperial governments. The government structure in particular did not lend itself to a sense of corporate identity in the officials. Lieven's collective portrait of Russian officials shows the bureaucracy split into

---

[72] Gurko, *Features and Figures,* 20.

[73] Kurlov, *Gibel',* 27.

multiple competing groups, a situation which inevitably placed the responsibility for major political decisions with the tsar. Both the ministers and the tsar were frequently preoccupied with routine matters and had little time for developing overarching state policies. Tradition required Nicholas to hear and read reports that dealt with extremely narrow subjects, such as pensions, divorces, adoptions, and name changes.

The State Council, an advisery body consisting of over 100 members**,** whose opinions Nicholas requested on most issues, presented a cumbersome institution and consisted of appointed dignitaries whose average age was over sixty. Largely entrenched in the old traditions, or frequently unable to develop an opinion on issues, it slowed down ministers and created *volokita*, or dragging on. As Verner pointed out, "a general lack of perspective and a myopic predisposition against decisions on matters of principle characterized the day-to-day administrative process."[74]

The government's inefficiency, the bureaucratic myopia, and the difficulty the tsar experienced in implementing personal rule produced resentment in Nicholas toward state institutions. Characteristically, during the 100th anniversary of the State Council and the Committee of Ministers in 1902, Nicholas remained silent throughout the ceremonies, a response that differed markedly from his exuberant enthusiasm for the anniversary of the Pages' Corps which was celebrated around the same time. In July 1901, Aleksandr Polovstov, a senior member of the State Council, summed up Nicholas's attitude toward state institutions in his diary as follows.

---

[74] Verner, *The Crisis of the Russian Autocracy,* 47.

> In no field of policy is there a principled, well considered and firmly directed course of action. Everything is done in bursts, haphazardly, under the influence of the moment, according to the demands of this or that person and the intercessions emerging from various corners. The young Tsar feels more and more contempt for the organs of his own power and begins to believe in the beneficial strength of his own autocracy, which he manifests sporadically without preliminary discussion and without any link to the overall course of policy.[75]

Nicholas's ruling style reflected his personality, worldview, and a set of strategies he used to maintain a sense of autonomy within the bureaucratic structure. Patient and outwardly passive on the one hand, Nicholas was persistent and determined to stay the chosen course. He valued loyalty and at times was sentimental and even emotional with his ministers, but personal attachments never clouded his vision, made him change his strongly held views or go against the moral and ideological values he inherited from in childhood. The tsar's habit of going roundabout ways to achieve his goals, his paternalistic conception of his role, and his attachment to the sacral and personal elements of his power negatively affected his relationship with government officials.

Nicholas's ruling style was wrought with two principle contradictions. While the driving force behind the tsar's actions was his sense of responsibility to the people and a desire to improve their lives by means of incremental economic reforms, his conviction of the necessity of preserving the autocracy and his fatalistic attitude made it impossible to respond creatively to the demands of the modernizing nation. The

---

[75] "Dnevnik A. A. Polovtsova," *Krasnyi arkhiv* 3 (1923), 99, quoted in Lieven, *Nicholas II*, 99.

other contradiction that afflicted Nicholas's ruling style reflected a tension between the tsar's longing to overcome the bureaucratization of his role and to institute a national monarchy on the one hand and his heavy dependence on the assistance from the bureaucracy on the other.

3. Nicholas's Milieu and the Question of Influence.

The Victorian cultural upbringing Nicholas received emphasized the family as the primary focus of his life. The earliest formative influences on Nicholas were his parents, Empress Maria Fedorovna and Emperor Alexander III. His father's harsh demeanor and overpowering personality inspired adoration in the young Nicholas, while also making him accustomed to conceal any sign of weakness or vulnerability. Alexander's early death left a deep imprint on the tsar and his powerful image remained the model of political and moral astuteness for Nicholas throughout his whole reign. As Grand Duke Aleksandr Mikhailovich recalled, Nicholas perpetually agonized over the question: "how would Father act in this case?"[76]

Nicholas's mother, Empress Maria Fedorovna, took an active role in her son's education and upbringing. Her gentle nature, intelligence, and charm fostered a deep emotional bond between mother and son. Reflecting on the early period of Nicholas's reign, a member of the State Council Aleksandr Polovtsov wrote that the young tsar habitually shared with his mother the letters he received and discussed with her the business of the day.[77] Maria Fedorovna remained his confidant and an important political adviser through the years. A vivacious hostess of a powerful aristocratic salon in the Anichkov Palace, she exercised considerable influence over minor official appointments, awards, pensions, and decorations. Chief of Imperial Chancellery Aleksandr Mosolov could not recall a single instance when the tsar failed

---

[76] Aleksandr Mikhailovich, Grand Duke, *Kniga vospominanii* (Paris, 1933-34), 172.

[77] "Dnevnik A. A. Polovtsova," *Krasnyi arkhiv* 3 (1923), 174.

to grant his mother's requests on behalf of her protégés.[78] Yet, when it came to major political decisions, her authority with Nicholas was far from limitless, which is evident from the fact that the ministers Sergei Witte and Petr Sviatopolk-Mirskii, who enjoyed her protection, both lost their positions.

After Nicholas's marriage to princess Aleksandra in late 1894, family remained central in his life and continued to provide an affectionate environment and emotional support. The tsar's diary, which he kept faithfully all his life, reflects his intense, all-exclusive focus on his family. While it reveals few insightful reflections on the political events through which he lived or thoughts on challenges of ruling Russia, the diary chronicles family meals, rides, walks, and parties. Nicholas and Aleksandra enjoyed a special spiritual and loving relationship. They cherished their time together and preferred to live in isolation in the Alexander Palace at Tsarskoe Selo away from the stuffy atmosphere of St. Petersburg high society, which they despised for its pretentiousness, gossip, and loose morals. According to army chaplain Georgii Shavelskii,Aleksandra Fedorovna was the dominant influence in the family:

> The whole way of life of the family was shaped according to her views, her tastes, and further followed the direction she chose. The royal family lived in isolation, rarely interacted with the households of the royal family, and avoided such habitual entertainments and pleasures of the court, such as balls, trips, and banquets. With the exception of the most unavoidable ones they did

[78] Aleksandr Mosolov, *Pri dvore poslednego Rossiiskogo imperatora* (Moscow, 1993), 108.

> not attend any. The life of the empress was filled with family interests and mystical experiences.[79]

Nicholas and Aleksandra's circle of friends remained so narrow that it included almost exclusively the members of the royal family. It is within this group that the early attempts at influencing the monarch emerged. Nicholas's uncles were concerned that their nephew was too immature and inexperienced for the task of ruling Russia. "I feel that I ought to travel to St. Petersburg and tell Nicky lots of things, but I cannot make up my mind – I'll see!" wrote Nicholas's uncle, Grand Duke Sergei Aleksandrovich, to his brother Pavel in January 1895, two months after Nicholas became tsar. He lamented that he was torn between his responsibility to his deceased brother and unwillingness to appear impudent.[80]

Nicholas's cousin, Grand Duke Alexander Mikhailovich confirmed that during the first years of reign the tsar was besieged by his uncles' demands and advice. Their seniority and their habitual ways of treating Nicholas as an inexperienced youngster came through in their interactions. "They always demanded something," wrote the grand duke,

> Mikhail Nikolaevich imagined himself to be a great military leader. Aleksei Aleksandrovich commanded the marines. Sergei Aleksandrovich would have liked to turn the Moscow *gubernatorstvo* into his own private estate. Vladimir Aleksandrovich guarded the world of the arts. All of them had their own favorites among the generals, admirals, who needed to be promoted and appointed by special order; their own ballerinas, their wonderful missionaries,

---

[79] Georgii Shavelskii, *Vospominaniia poslednego protopresvitera russkoi armii i flota*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1996), 55-56.

[80] Quoted in "Nachalo tsarstvovaniia Nikolaia II i rol' Pobedonostseva v opredelenii politicheskogo kursa samoderzhaviia," *Arkheograficheskii ezhegodnik za 1972 god* (Moscow, 1974), 311.

> dying to save the soul of the emperor, their own miracle-working healers, asking for an audience, their own clairvoyants sent from above….[81]

It is unlikely that Nicholas heeded their opinions. Polovtsov's 1899 comment that the young tsar was "being convinced and re-convinced by anyone" probably referred to the tsar's attempts to avoid conflict in the family.[82] Very few of Nicholas's relatives had any influence in political matters. Most used their position to benefit themselves financially, promote their protégés, or have their personal requests granted. For example, in 1902, Grand Duke Aleksandr Mikhailovich convinced Nicholas to let him head the merchant marine, a highly lucrative enterprise to which he was appointed despite the ministers' resistance.[83]

With time, the tsar gained more confidence in his relationship with the senior members of his family. He carefully avoided serious political discussions with his uncles that would force him to reveal his opinions.[84] This was the case even with his closest relatives, like his cousin Aleksandr Mikhailovich married to Nicholas's favorite sister Ksenia. "We were always together and never tired of one another or our friendship. After dinner we remained together for a long time, looking through the reports submitted to the tsar by his ministers." Yet, as the grand duke complained in his memoirs, his occasional political conversations with Nicholas yielded no

---

[81] Aleksandr Mikhailovich, *Kniga vospominanii*, 35.

[82] "Dnevnik A. A. Polovtsova," *Krasnyi arkhiv* 46 (1931), 121.

[83] Larisa Zakharova, "Krizis samoderzhaviia nakanune revoliutsii 1905 goda," *Voprosy Istorii* 8 (1978), 126.

[84] Mosolov, *Pri dvore*, 77.

results: "I talked for hours. I referred to history, economics, Russian and foreign precedents. …But all my appeals were in vain."[85]

Following the tradition established by his father, Nicholas denied the members of the imperial family administrative positions in the empire and allowed them to take up only military careers. Aleksandr Mikhailovich criticized Nicholas for such a rigid approach, arguing that in contrast to the inefficient bureaucrats and disloyal nobles, the members of the royal family had retained deep faith in the monarchical principle and should serve as a natural link between the tsar and the Russian people.[86] Politically ambitious, the grand duke made several attempts to involve himself in politics, but, as was the case with most other members of the imperial family, he did not have much talent, education, or serious preparation for government work. Polovtsov described him as a "child" with little serious understanding of things and whose reasoning was dangerously immature.[87]

Nicholas and Aleksandra were also close to Nicholas's uncle, Grand Duke Sergei Aleksandrovich, the ultra-conservative governor-general of Moscow. Sergei's infamous reputation derived from his role in the Khodynka tragedy during Nicholas's coronation festivities in the summer of 1896, when nearly 1400 people were trampled by the crowd as a result of inadequate preparation for the event by the Moscow government. Sergei was married to Aleksandra's sister, Elizabeth, and the two couples often spent time together and corresponded frequently until Sergei's

---

[85] Aleksandr Mikhailovich, *Kniga vospominanii*, 194, 170.

[86] Ibid., 149-153.

[87] "Dnevnik A. A. Polovtsova," *Krasnyi arkhiv* 46 (1931), 122.

assassination in February 1905 by a socialist revolutionary. Sergei enjoyed a limited influence in appointments to the State Council, and Nicholas consulted him on the appointment of Nikolai Bogolepov as minister of education and Aleksandr Bulygin as minister of internal affairs.

Of all Nicholas's relatives, his uncle Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaievich, enjoyed the most authority with the tsar in questions of politics. He provided advice to the tsar at some of the critical moments of his reign -- in October, 1905, when he insisted on granting the October Manifesto, and in March 1917, when he advised his nephew to abdicate. Nicholas especially admired his uncle's expertise in military affairs. "He had no equal in the art of maintaining discipline, training soldiers, and preparing military reviews." He drilled his regiments to perfection and made sure every button on each solders' uniform was impeccable.[88]

Nikolai Nikolaievich was married to Princess Anastasiia of Montenegro, who together with her sister Militsa, became close to Aleksandra in the early 1900s and encouraged Nicholas and Aleksandra's fascination with the occult. In the first years of Nicholas's reign, the royal residence at Tsarskoe Selo became a temporary home to numerous prophets and holy fools revered for their gift of clairvoyance and alleged ability to predict the birth of the male heir. French Ambassador, Maurice Paleologue, described one holy fool by the name of Mitya Kolyaba, who had multiple handicaps including epilepsy, retardation, and deafness, among other afflictions. Credited with prophetic abilities by the monks of Optina Pustyn', Mitya was invited to Tsarskoe

---

[88] Aleksandr Mikhailovich, *Kniga vospominanii,* 140.

Selo and communicated with the royal couple through his "interpreter" "by guttural cries, stammering, grunts, roars, squeaks, and a wild waving of his stumps."[89]

In 1901, the Montenegrin grand duchesses introduced Nicholas and Aleksandra to one of the most notorious pre-Rasputin prophets, "Doctor" Philippe Vachod, a French hypnotist, who claimed to be able to predict the sex of Aleksandra's unborn baby. Philippe, who had been charged for unlicensed practice of medicine in France, was soon exposed by the head of the Russian department of foreign operations, Petr Rachkovskii. Nicholas, however, defended Philippe and, to make him appear legitimate, even arranged for him the license of a Russian army physician. Another French practitioner of magic, alchemy, and astrology, Papus, also introduced to Nicholas and Aleksandra by the Montenegrin sisters, conducted a session at Tsarskoe Selo where he evoked the spirit of Alexander III who provided counsel for his son.[90]

Outside the royal family, Nicholas's closest friendships were with army officers. Having spent his youth in various regiments of the Guards, he truly felt at home in that milieu. Later on in life the tsar continued to "rest his soul" among the soldiers and officers. He felt especially at ease there because, as General Pavel Kurlov recounted, any political conversations in the tsar's presence were strictly ruled

---

[89] Maurice Paleologue, *An Ambassador's memoirs*, trans. by F. A. Holt, 3 vols. (New York, n.d.), 1:346, quoted in Robert Warth, "Before Rasputin: Piety and the Occult at the Court of Nicholas II." *The Historian* 47 (May 1985), 326.

[90] Warth aptly called Nicholas's preoccupation with the occult "a symptom of a profound malaise, if not a clue to the political ineptitude of the sovereign himself." "Before Rasputin," 337.

out.[91] Even the tsar's closest friends from the military, such as General Aleksei Orlov, head of the emperor's military secretariat who had served with Nicholas in the Guards Hussars, and Admiral Fedor Dubasov, who accompanied Nicholas on his journey to the East in 1891, exercised no significant political influence on him.[92]

By virtue of their official position, the members of Nicholas's government had the potential to exercise the most significant influence on the tsar. This was the case because of the enormous power the autocracy delegated to the ministers as de facto leaders and experts in their respective departments. To a monarch, ministers were indispensable source of information, advice, and opinions on a particular area of politics.

Nicholas depended on his ministers in making decisions, which he frequently chose from the options presented to them by the responsible officials during one on one reports. According to Minister of Education Ilia Tolstoi,

> the right of a separate report enjoyed by the ministers appears to be the cornerstone of the bureaucratic autocracy, which has replaced the unlimited power of the monarch, who to an incomparably greater degree is bound in his actions by this bureaucracy than he would have been by any constitution.[93]

During the reports, Tolstoi observed, it was not the tsar, but the minister who had an opportunity to dominate the discussions and to influence the monarch by carefully

---

[91] P. G. Kurlov, *Gibel' imperatorskoi Rossii: vospominaniia* (Moscow, 2002), 23.

[92] See Dominic Lieven, *Nicholas II*: *Emperor of All the Russias* (London, 1993), 69; Mosolov, *Pri dvore*, 122.

[93] Ivan Tolstoi, *Memuary grafa I. I. Tolstogo* (Moscow, 2002), 253.

concealing something or by presenting an issue in such a way that would draw out the hidden emotional response of the monarch.

Thus, the reports, which in theory allowed Nicholas to exercise direct rule, in reality, deprived him of it because he frequently found himself entangled in a web of opinions and issue-specific facts. The minister's knowledge of technical details of his department and the tediousness of the narrowly-focused oral reports contributed to the tsar's fear of being confused or even manipulated by the reporting minister. "The ministers relied exclusively on considerations that were based on reason," wrote Mosolov.

> …They spoke in terms of figures and statistics, precedents, estimates and forecasts based on the principle of the weighing of probabilities; they referred to reports from officials, to the examples of other countries, and all that. The tsar could not have argued with them, and evidently had no desire to.[94]

Oral reports and conversations with the tsar called on the minister to exhibit insightfulness and sophistication. If done successfully, it was difficult for Nicholas not to give in to the ministers' firm pressure on him. Kokovtsov could not recall "more than two or three minor cases" when the monarch did not relent under the reporter's explanations.

In response to this situation, Nicholas instinctively, or at times quite consciously, used strategies to maintain autonomy from the ministers' influence and pressure on him. Often, Nicholas gave an impression of supporting the minister's plans, but soon after became resentful, especially if the minister exhibited confidence

---

[94] A. Mosolov, *At the Court of the Last Tsar* (London, 1935), 11.

and had strong political opinions. One of Nicholas's strategies was to remain reticent or ambiguous during reports. The tsar "talked very little," remembered Interior Minister Aleksander Protopopov about his reports to the emperor. "He was very nice, friendly. But he never himself talked about matters. He would say 'yes,' 'that's right,' 'I think so.' But he was extremely cautious with each word. He was very careful with words, very careful."[95] Even when Nicholas seemed extremely open and sincere, Kokovtsov noted that

> it was difficult to separate the form of the tsar's answer from the genuine emotions that was guiding it. The external manifestation of a thought differed from the substance of it, which could be entirely different. One could only notice those nuances, shades of meaning that revealed those impulses of the soul that betrayed the opposite.[96]

Government disunity was the necessary condition for Nicholas's exercise of supreme and unchallenged power. Tsars have traditionally resented the institution of united government, while bureaucratic rivalry and departmental separatism had been permanent fixtures of Russian domestic politics. Andrew Verner observed that

> in order to justify his preeminent position, the autocrat had to exploit or even manufacture conflict and opposition. … [Government unity] might deny him the opportunity to play off different factions against each other and in fact might run counter to the notion of personal arbitrage.[97]

---

[95] *Padenie tsarskogo rezhima. Stenograficheskie otchety doprosov i pokazanii dannyh v 1917 g. v Chrezvychailoi sledstvennoi komissii Vremennogo pravitel'stva*, edited by P. E. Shchegolev, vol V (Moscow-Leningrad, 1924 1927), 244.

[96] "Interesnaia nakhodka ('Delo Kokovtsova'), A. Sidorov, ed., *Voprosy Istorii* 4 (1974), 99.

Another reason for the ministers' limited influence was Nicholas's distrust of the bureaucratic elite. The tsar's suspicions of the bureaucracy sprung from the deep-seated conviction that officials were motivated primarily by personal ambition rather than selfless dedication to the well-being of Russia. Nicholas resented the most successful ministers, such as Sergei Witte, Petr Stolypin, and Vladimir Kokovtsov, considering their initiatives as encroachments on his autocratic prerogatives.[98] The tsar felt more at ease with the officials outside the decision-making apparatus or courtiers without official responsibilities, erroneously believing that their opinions were not contaminated by personal interest. Prince Sergei Volkonskii summed up this attitude as follows:

> lower ranks had a greater degree of the tsar's favor than the upper; the tsar's goodwill was in inverse relationship to the level of responsibility of a civil servant. In inverse relationship was also the length of his favor: the lowest ranked officials survived to pension age and became fixtures of the everyday scene, while the upper ranked officials experienced what Nikolai Purishkevich called 'ministerial leapfrog.'[99]

Hence, it was widely assumed that by virtue of their proximity to the ruler, lower rank officials, especially members of the imperial retinue, exercised much power and influence over the tsar. But this was not the case. The members of the retinue, which counted over a thousand people, possessed prestigious ranks that

---

[97] Andrew Verner, *The Crisis of Russian Autocracy: Nicholas II and the 1905 Revolution* (Princeton, N.J. 1990), 55.

[98] Vladimir Gurko, "Tsar' i tsaritsa," in *Nicholai Vtoroi: Vospominaniia, Dnevniki*, ed. B. V. Ananich and R. Sh. Ganelin (St. Petersburg, 1994), 358.

[99] Sergei Volkonskii, *Moi vospominaniia*, vol. 2 (Moscow, 1992), 169.

distinguished them from the rest of the bureaucracy. They wore special uniforms as well as participated in Court ceremonies and rituals. Their most cherished privilege was the right of private audience with the members of the imperial family.[100] In theory, therefore, they could use the right of private audience to exert significant influence on the tsar in questions of politics as well as private matters. Yet, according to Mosolov, the members of the royal retinue had neither a political role nor an intellectual influence on Nicholas and were mostly concerned with maintaining their position and the benefits that came with it.[101]

Sergei Kulikov has demonstrated that at least three factors precluding their political influence on the tsar. In the first place, Nicholas believed that policy issues must be discussed exclusively with those who professed considerable competency in the matter and avoided general political discussions with "non experts."[102] Shavelskii observed that Nicholas "pushed away anything irrelevant, which did not directly concern [the official's] department. They could only influence appeals, invitations to dinners, awards, appointments and resignations." In addition, the rules of court etiquette limited the choice of appropriate topics, and the tsar often set the tone for the conversation. Finally, Nicholas's busy schedule and the sheer number of the members of the retinue precluded an opportunity for a lengthy and in-depth political discussion during regular audiences with the tsar.

---

[100] Sergei Kulikov, *Vysshaia biurokratiia Rossii v gody Pervoi mirovoi voiny (1914-1917),* Ph.D. Dissertation (St. Petersburg, 1999), 221.

[101] Mosolov, *Pri dvore,* 126-7.

[102] Kulikov, *Vysshaia biurokratiia Rossii,* 230-1.

Only a small minority of the retinue, officials responsible for the everyday routine operations of the monarchy, interacted with the tsar on a regular basis. Such were Minister of Court Vladimir Fredericks, Mosolov, Marshal of the Court Pavel Benckendorff, and consecutive palace commandants and heads of the court police: Generals Vladimir Hesse, Vladimir Dediulin, Vladimir Voieikov, and Dmitrii Trepov. Yet, Mosolov warned that even the influence of these officials had been often grossly exaggerated.[103] The officials understood well that for the sake of the stability of their situation it was better to refrain from interference in politics or promote their views. For example, Benckendorff, a straightforward and principled official who was considered a personal friend by the royal couple "abstained from any sort of political activity and would not even discuss politics." As Mosolov explained "it was a matter of tactics, and there was much to be said for it."[104]

Perhaps closest to the tsar was minister of court, Fredericks, who, according to Mosolov, "was the only one who really enjoyed the Tsar's confidence." Fredericks reported to Nicholas twice a week, always taking care to make his reports brief and precise and to avoid lengthy memoranda. In addition, the royal family habitually invited Fredericks to family parties, meals, military reviews and other special occasions, where he was privy to many highly confidential familial and political matters. He reputedly concealed his opinions unless asked and never shared his knowledge about the members of the family with anyone.[105]

---

[103] Mosolov, *Pri dvore*, 101.

[104] Ibid., 120

One of Fredericks's most important duties included conducting negotiations between the members of the imperial family, a task he performed with utmost diligence and discretion. The minister's impeccable knowledge of procedure and etiquette and his sensitive mediation of disputes between the members of the imperial family won him Nicholas's confidence which lasted his whole reign. He was "the only man in whom the Emperor confided his difficulties in dealing with ministers and grand dukes. The Count had a special flair for the discovery of a good solution which brought all concerned into agreement with one another." Nicholas also "entrusted Fredericks with the duty of conveying his dissatisfaction to those who had incurred it."[106] Yet, as Nicholas's niece, Maria Pavlovna, noted, "old Fredericks talks to [the tsar] more frankly than anyone, he does not exercise any influence.[107]

Palace commandant Voiekov, married to the daughter of Fredericks, enjoyed a similar position of trust of the royal family, but he also exercised no major political influence. In contrast to Fredericks, Voeikov was ambitious, protective of the tsar' attention, and used his position to situate himself as a center of power. The tsar reportedly heeded his opinions on the candidates to minor government posts. Although many officials doubted Voieikov's intelligence, his closeness to Nicholas made him a target for all sorts of petitions and requests to the tsar.[108] According to

---

[105] Ibid., 9-10.

[106] Ibid., 108.

[107] Maurice Paleologue, *An Ambassadors' Memoirs* (New York, 1925), 130.

[108] Mosolov, *Pri dvore*, 121.

Mosolov, "he was very ambitious and his tactics consisted in gradually alienating from the tsar everybody who could interfere with his plans."[109]

In the first years of his reign, the tsar's inexperience in government work precluded him from acting independently and confidently in policy matters. Yet, from the beginning, Nicholas was reluctant to depend on the advice of his family members and used strategies to counter. As Nicholas became increasingly eager to escape the limitations of bureaucratic decision-making, he involved unofficial advisers in domestic and foreign politics of the empire. The presence of these advisers throughout Nicholas's reign constituted a significant political factor and needs to be explored in detail.

---

[109] Ibid., 11

4. Anatolii Klopov: An Outsider as Insider.

In the summer of 1898, rumors flooded St. Petersburg that Nicholas had secretly dispatched a minor civil servant by the name of Anatolii Klopov to examine and report on the situation in the countryside. For several months, Prince Sergei Volkonskii recalled, there was not a single salon or a drawing room that did not discuss the "Klopov affair." Gossip spread quickly in the provinces about the appearance of what many referred to as a new "Inspector General," sent incognito to verify official accounts.[110] Particularly outrageous to some was Klopov's visit to the excommunicated writer Lev Tolstoi on his estate at Iasnaia Poliana, where Tolstoi allegedly told Klopov that had he still believed in Orthodox rituals he would have blessed both him and the tsar with a cross for their activities.[111]

The unofficial, even clandestine, nature of Klopov's assignment incensed government members. Not only had the senior administrators received no warning about the expedition, but they also felt slighted by the fact that the monarch had entrusted such a significant role to a person of an inferior rank and status and without official bureaucratic responsibility. Interior Minister Ivan Goremykin rushed to submit a written complaint to Nicholas where he accused Klopov of consorting with socialists and populists. Later that year, Goremykin described his offended feelings to a colleague in the administration. The sovereign, he said,

> had secretly delegated some swindler, a Collegiate Assessor Khlopov, to collect information about the needs of Russia. Now, this 'goose' goes around with a letter from Gesse [palace commandant: all letters of the emperor passed

[110] A character from a well-known satire by Vasily Gogol, *Revisor*.

[111] Sergei Volkonskii, *Moi vospominaniia* (Moscow, 1992), 85.

> through him] in a special train and baffles everyone in the Tula province together with Lev Tolstoi. [Klopov] travels with a large retinue in everyone's view except that of the interior minister.[112]

Procurator of the Holy Synod Konstantin Pobedonostsev predicted unrest as a result of Klopov's activities.[113] Vladimir Gurko derisively called Klopov an idealist, "who dreamed of correcting those human vices that cannot be captured and eliminated by formal law."[114] By contrast, even in their private diaries not intended for publication officials referred to Nicholas as an uninformed victim of intrigue. Describing Klopov as an "ignorant fraud," a senior member of the State Council, Aleksandr Polovtsov, wrote that by virtue of his naiveté, Nicholas "carelessly let himself hear out" Klopov. The memoirist's unconscious slip of pen, however, betrayed a deeper understanding of the tsar's motives. In the very same sentence, Polovtsov unexpectedly described Nicholas as a more involved participant in the incident, who "under the pretense" of compiling statistical descriptions in the localities suffering from hunger, instructed Klopov to tour Russia and submit to the emperor "the true picture of the condition of the poverty-stricken population, concealed from the tsar by the ministers."[115]

Klopov has appeared peripherally in works on early twentieth-century government; but as a historical personality in his own right, Klopov has received

---

[112] "Dnevnik A. N. Kuropatkina," quoted in *Tainyi sovetnik Imperatora*, V. M Krylov et als, eds. (St. Petersburg, 2002), 9.

[113] I. V. Lukoianov, "Tainyi korrespondent Nikolaia II A. A. Klopov," *Iz glubiny vremen* 6, (1996), 70**.**

[114] Vladimir Gurko, "Tsar' i tsaritsa," in *Nikolai Vtoroi: Vospominaniia, Dnevniki*, ed. B. V. Ananich and R. Sh. Ganelin (St. Petersburg, 1994), 8-9.

[115] "Dnevnik A. A. Polovtsova," *Krasnyi arkhiv* 46 (1931), 118.

attention only recently.[116] Igor Lukoianov's 1996 article is the most substantial piece of research done on Klopov to date. The fact that Klopov wrote to Nicholas for almost twenty years (Lukoianov has estimated over 500 letters) is of undisputable interest to a researcher. However, the absence of any verifiable response from the tsar or any other tangible evidence of Klopov's influence on him certainly poses a limitation to an in-depth examination of their relationship.

The way out of the deficiency of sources may lie in an analysis of the reasons Klopov's personality, ideas, and rhetoric appealed to the tsar. In other words, why did Nicholas turn to Klopov in the first place? Was he seeking more 'genuine' knowledge and advice on the state of affairs in the country from a person outside the administration, someone closely familiar with the concerns of the peasantry? Was he interested in public opinion, a segment of which Klopov represented? Or was this an act of symbolic defiance on the part of the tsar against the restrictions imposed on his authority by the bureaucratic institutions? The episode takes on added significance not only for the understanding of Nicholas's style of rule, but also for the public reception of his political persona. Why did Klopov, a minor civil servant with limited access to the tsar, cause such an overwhelming reaction in society? Finally, what were the long-term implications and ramifications of the "Klopov scandal" for Nicholas's reputation as ruler and his relationship with the government?

---

[116] Aron Avrekh, *Tsarizm nakanune sverzheniia* (Moscow, 1989); Iurii Solovev, *Samoderzhavie i dvorianstvo v 1902-1907gg* (Leningrad, 1981), Valentin Diakin, *Russkaia burzhuaziia i tsarizm v gody pervoi mirovoi voiny, 1914-1917* (Leningrad, 1967).

Born in 1841 to a merchant family of modest means, Klopov graduated from Moscow University in physics and mathematics and occupied a minor position in state service for several years. After a brief tenure as a high school teacher and private tutor, he returned to state service in 1872 as a statistician in the ministry of transportation. In the early 1880s, still loosely affiliated with the ministry and retaining a portion of his salary, Klopov undertook independent statistical research focusing on the grain trade in the Volga region. The quality of his research was acknowledged by some private companies as well as the local officials who used Klopov's statistics in their reports. Starting in 1886, Finance Ministers Nikolai Bunge and Mikhail Ostrovskii regularly subsidized his research and his assistants. In 1892, one of Klopov's proposals found its way into a report submitted to Alexander III, who expressed interest in the suggestions and even ordered a further investigation of the proposed measures. No actions, however, were apparently taken.[117] Encouraged by his success, Klopov wrote letters to prominent members of society, court, and the bureaucracy, such as the editor of *Novoe vremia* Aleksandr Suvorin, Minister of Court Ivan Vorontsov-Dashkov, and Assistant Minister of Internal Affairs Viacheslav Plehve, reporting on various aspects of village life and petitioning for financial assistance to continue research.[118]

Among the social and economic realities Klopov encountered in the countryside in the late 1890s and early 1900s, the most troubling was the economic decline of the peasantry. The gross inadequacies of the Great Reforms of the 1860s

---

[117] Lukoianov, "Tainyi korrespondent," 66.

[118] Ibid., 64-65.

were especially evident in the treatment of former serfs in the emancipation provisions. Presented to society as an extraordinary gesture of tsarist benevolence and the altruistic spirit of their noble masters, the manifesto left the peasants without equal civil rights, outside court reforms, and burdened with excessive redemption dues and taxes on consumer goods.[119] In the decades following the reforms, the peasants' economic condition became severely exacerbated by population growth, unequal citizenship status, increase in peasant taxes and redemption payments, and communal landownership which stifled individual entrepreneurship and productivity, albeit providing an invaluable safety net in times of crisis.

The peasants were not the only ones affected. Although the terms of the emancipation favored the landowners, they complained of inadequate compensation for the loss of their land and the effect on their lifestyle. Centuries of dependence on the serfs made it psychologically difficult for them to adjust to the demands of a modern economy, and a lack of entrepreneurial experience prevented estate owners from embarking on financially profitable enterprises. In the next fifty years, from 1863 to 1915, the nobles sold 60 percent of their land. As a result, 50 out of 78 provinces were unable to fill their noble quota in the *zemstvo* assemblies, which in turn translated into the declining influence the estate exerted on local affairs in the countryside. The decline of the financial and social status of the nobility became a dominant political issue in the decades following the peasant emancipation. Despite its numerous attempts to extend economic assistance to the noble landowners, the government was unable to reverse the trend.

---

[119] Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power. Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 70.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Minister of Finance Sergei Witte, the most powerful and ambitious official in the government, headed the economic development of Russia. Witte's efforts to modernize the empire through state-sponsored rapid industrialization while keeping intact its autocratic structure, received support from Alexander III and Nicholas II. But the minister's policies also earned him numerous adversaries. The liberals criticized the finance minister for his treatment of modernization in purely economic terms and failure to give attention to political reforms. Witte also amassed enemies among the landed nobility and his colleagues in the administration for his industrial priorities which exacerbated the agricultural problems by causing a decline in grain prices.

The plight of the rural population became especially acute during the years of partial crop failure in 1897, 1898, and 1901 and brought a high degree of public awareness to the issue. Nicholas, who had begun his reign in 1894 by reorganizing a Ministry of Agricultural and State Domains, professed a special interest in the problems of the countryside.[120] The government set up commissions to review peasant legislation, distributed questionnaires to investigate the needs of the rural population, and organized provincial conferences, but failed to find an effective solution to the crisis.

Klopov's energetic and exuberant personality brought him in contact with a number of prominent *zemstvo* activists during his travels. Several of his acquaintances were members of prominent aristocratic families with connections in the elite world of St. Petersburg. One of them, Prince Petr Volkonskii, a Red Cross

---

[120] David Macey, *Government and Peasant in Russia, 1861-1917: The Prehistory of the Stolypin Reforms* (DeKalb, Ill., 1987), 31.

representative in the Riazan' and Tula gubernias, introduced Klopov to Grand Duke Nikolai Mikhailovich, who in turn introduced him to his brother, Grand Duke Aleksandr Mikhailovich, Nicholas's closest friend at the time.

Aleksandr Mikhailovich persuaded Nicholas to interview Klopov, as an "independent source," and a representative of public opinion in the clash between the Tula *zemstvo* and the local governor. The conflict generated much publicity when in May of 1898, the Tula *zemstvo* leader and a member of an influential noble family, Vasilii Bobrinksii, published a letter in *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti* criticizing the local administration for its inability to deal effectively with crop failure and accusing it of falsely reporting to the capital that the situation was under control.

Klopov's first audience with Nicholas took place on June 4, 1898. Significantly, it was not entered in the *Kamer-Fur'ierskie* journals, the log of the tsar's daily activities, which was a standard procedure. Fifty-seven-year-old Klopov must have overwhelmed Nicholas with his passionate devotion to the autocrat and his sense of mission. One of Klopov's assistants recalled that the tsar later confessed to have never been at ease with anyone as much as he was with this sincere person.[121] Klopov's awkwardness and rustic simplicity appealed to Nicholas's image of the common folk. According to Volkonskii, Klopov was capable of talking to the tsar as an equal, having in the most intimate manner "grabbed a button on Nicholas's suit and pressed the tsar against the wall."[122] Another contemporary recalled that Klopov got so nervous when he first saw the tsar that he clumsily dropped his briefcase, and

---

[121] A. D. Pogruzov to A. S. Suvorin, 3 September 1898, RGALI, f. 459, op. 1, d. 3359, p. 2ob, quoted in Lukoianov, "Tainyi korrespondent," 68.

[122] Volkonskii, *Moi vospominaniia,* 85.

all of his papers with plans and statistical records scattered around the room. He rushed to pick them up and noticed with embarrassment that Nicholas was on his knees helping him.[123]

Klopov revisited his first audience with Nicholas in a letter he wrote to the tsar a year after their meeting. The central theme of the letter depicts the monarch breaking through a bureaucratic "wall" with the help of a common person and thus inaugurating a new relationship between the monarchy and society. "What had transpired in [the royal residences of] Tsarskoe and Livadia," Klopov remarked in his customary metaphorical style, "can be called the dawn of a new era in the life of Russia, the beginning of a great historic cause, the cause of liberating our dear Monarch and suffering motherland from the yoke of the bureaucracy." Klopov believed that the ministers and courtiers spared the tsar the unpleasant truth about the hardships of the Russian people, while it should have been the opposite: by virtue of his position, the monarch could do more than anyone else in the empire and therefore needed to be informed more accurately than anyone else about the aspirations and grievances of his subjects. It was Nicholas's historic mission to destroy the bureaucratic "wall" that surrounded him and reclaim a personal bond with the people sanctified in both history and the Orthodox faith. The tsar's isolation from his people, Klopov insisted, led to people's alienation from their monarch and the monarch's own lack of understanding of his people's daily needs. "That is why," Klopov

---

[123] [Sergei] U[urusov], *Imperator Nikolai II. Zhizn' i deiatel'nost' Venzenosnago Tsaria*, (Nice, 19..), 87.

concluded, "the reports of the ministers and governors, positioned too far from the pulse of the life of the people, are not sufficient."[124]

Klopov's idea of traveling clandestinely in the summer of 1898 to inspect the conditions in the affected provinces resonated with Nicholas's distrust of his bureaucratic intermediaries and the *zemstvo* liberals in charge of the countryside.

> The main impetus for sending me," Klopov wrote a year after the trip, "was, on the one hand, the Monarch's wish to hear the opinion of a person completely neutral, who had made a name for himself researching the economic life of the Russian people, and to whom the government had entrusted many times such tasks, and, on the other hand, it was also the Monarch's desire to assist those affected by hunger.[125]

The goal Klopov set out for himself was not simply to "provide the Monarch with any kind of advice, but deliver [to the tsar] the 'raw material' from competent people—those who know the needs of the people first hand—the raw material for an unbiased and comprehensive analysis of the various issues concerning people's lives"[126]

Klopov presented himself as a vital source of knowledge for the tsar and a means to overcome isolation and powerlessness which resulted from the lack of reliable information. It was the tsar's moral duty to establish an unmediated relationship with the Russian people by reaching out to those who, like Klopov, knew Russia first hand. Although the idea of conducting an unofficial investigation of the

---

[124] Klopov to Nicholas II, July 1899, *Tainyi sovetnik imperatora*, 46-47.

[125] Ibid., 47.

[126] Klopov to Nicholas II, 31 August 1899, 52.

countryside was his own, in his letter Klopov attributed the initiative to Nicholas. "What provoked the Emperor," he asked rhetorically, "to call on me, such a small and insignificant person?"[127] By placing the elevated and distant "emperor" next to "a small person" in the same sentence, Klopov underscored the symbolic distance and physical proximity of the ruler and himself, a representative of the common folk, who communicated to the tsar the needs of his people. Klopov's formal style and archaic expressions on the one hand and his sprinklings of grammatical errors and extreme humility on the other bring out well the sense of rural simplicity he embodied.

Less than a week after meeting Nicholas, on June 10, 1898, Klopov received a letter signed by the palace commandant Vladimir Gesse, allowing him to inspect the records of the local administration pertaining to their activities in famine relief. Klopov's task was to inspect the region of Povolzh'e on the Volga River. The tsar authorized him and his assistants the use of a separate railroad car, an unlimited pass for travel on any route in Russia, and a five thousand-ruble stipend. Klopov gathered a team of approximately twenty volunteers who represented a socially and geographically diverse group: landowners, minor bureaucrats from various departments, students, *zemstvo* representatives, lawyers and at least one peasant.[128] As part of the investigation into peasant conditions, Klopov collected information from the local administration and interviewed the population.

Klopov's conclusions were alarming: the peasant situation had deteriorated severely over the past twenty-five years. The rural administration had been unable to

---

[127] Klopov to Nicholas II, n.d. July 1899, 46.

[128] Lukoianov, "Tainyi korrespondent," 68-69.

solve the problems of the high rate of child mortality caused by poor diet, infectious diseases, and widespread cases of syphilis, poverty, and ignorance in the village. Instead, the government fostered, what Klopov called, the people's dependency on the "*podachki*" – temporary relief assistance during hard times.[129] Since peasant poverty was directly related to the impoverishment of the gentry landowners, whose main source of income came from peasant rents, Klopov concluded that there was no other task more "burning, pressing, and of greater significance to the state, than the improvement of peasant welfare." So much so, that the solution of this problem would constitute "the most dazzling page in the history of Nicholas II's reign, who alone as an autocratic ruler and the representative of the divine principles of Truth and Love could assure the success of such undertaking."[130]

Klopov's investigation lasted less than two months when he was recalled to St. Petersburg. Klopov transferred his assignment of inspecting Povolz'e region to a former leader of the nobility who had connections with the local landowners. Klopov's investigation and his written instructions to the landowners apparently provoked an inordinate amount of resentment among the local officials.[131] It took a whole year for the animosity to lose its force, Klopov told Nicholas, and for people to realize that his only goal had been to work for the well-being of Russia. Recalling the barrage of accusations that surrounded his expedition and remained long after

---

[129] Klopov to Nicholas II, n.d., 1899*,* 14-15.

[130] Ibid., 16.

[131] Klopov to Nicholas II, 10 February 1901, 69.

attached to his name, Klopov wrote to Nicholas of his fears that the tsar would question Klopov's "mission" and even withdraw his trust in him.

The speed with which the expedition was cancelled aptly demonstrates Nicholas's dependence on the opinions of bureaucrats and high society. Defending the initiative, Klopov rhetorically asked why the autocratic tsar did not have the right to give directives to anyone he wished: "If the tsar was truly unlimited why should his will be subject to control and criticism?" The audiences [Nicholas granted Klopov] did not undermine the prestige of the monarch," Klopov assured Nicholas, but "provided the tsar with an opportunity to manifest his lofty sentiments for the population affected with crop failure"[132]

Despite the failure of the expedition and the ensuing scandal, Nicholas did not curtail Klopov's activities. He assigned the researcher 100,000 rubles for 1899 and renewable railroad passes for his temporary and permanent assistants. The register of Klopov's daily expenditure from June 10 to December 31, 1898 demonstrates the enormous extent of his activities.[133] He traveled to different towns and villages every few days to meet with the local activists, petitioned to open village schools, for pension funds for soldiers, etc. Informing Nicholas about the peasants' grievances, Klopov acted in the manner of a self-appointed amateur anthropologist. To compile data and develop analysis for his letters to the tsar, Klopov maintained a network of contacts among the local "experts" and the *zemstvo* representatives. He frequently enclosed letters from the local people, such as provincial teachers, doctors, and the

---

[132] Klopov to Nicholas II, n.d. July 1899, 47-50.

[133] RGIA, fond 1328, op. 1 no. 1082, p. 1-2; GARF, fond 549, op. 1, no. 64, p.19.

zemstvo representatives. "I speak for a whole group of people which is steadily expanding," he wrote to Nicholas, "and which includes, in part, the reds and the youth."[134]

In his correspondence with the tsar, Klopov dramatized his mission to inform the ruler "of the truth" and at the same time expressed concern about upsetting the monarch with sad news and overstepping the boundaries of trust. Klopov magnified his role by repeatedly pointing out that he merely responded to the monarch's own expressed wishes to receive Klopov's reports on the urgent questions of the day. In one of the letters he engaged in an imaginary dialogue with himself. "Do I have the right to remain silent especially at the time when thousands of people suffer these days?" Klopov asked himself, his rhetorical style harking back to the older tradition of advising a tsar. "No, Sovereign, in such a time it is sinful to be silent," he concluded. "… Duty and conscience demand that I forget my personal concerns and fears and even with risk to myself relate my thoughts to You sincerely."[135]

Despite Klopov's perseverance and careful avoidance of overtly political topics, it was exceedingly difficult for him to sustain Nicholas's interest. In August 1899, he followed Nicholas to Copenhagen pleading for an audience:

> I think that a private, sincere conversation between the Monarch and his subject of my age… placed by him in such a singularly felicitous position and who asks nothing for himself, could not cause any harm and, on the contrary, would be of beneficial consequences for our motherland.[136]

---

[134] Klopov to Nicholas II, 29 September 1902, 142.

[135] Klopov to Nicholas II, 15 April 1899, 17.

[136] Klopov to Nicholas II, 31 August 1899, 49

Klopov intended to talk to the tsar away from the gossip and rumors of St. Petersburg, hoping that Nicholas, enjoying a quiet family life, might be more open to his influence. Promising to keep the conversation simple and light and refrain from any particular requests, Klopov sought to acquaint the tsar with several issues of utmost importance in the life of Russia. He failed to receive an audience, but was soon cheered by a sign of Nicholas's attention to him—a free pass for travel on all Russian railroads.

Nicholas's refusal to meet with Klopov may have been a wise decision to distance himself from an old scandal. It is also likely that the tsar was cooling off to the statistician, perhaps even beginning to resent his involvement. Yet, he did not cut off Klopov entirely. On May 11, 1900, Nicholas assigned Klopov an annual grant in addition to his pension. That same year, Klopov received money from the tsar for the purchase of a small estate. The statistician frequently described his sense of discouragement and even despair at having received no response to his letters to Nicholas. "I have not received any response to my correspondence, know absolutely nothing about the impression my letters make, not even know whether they are being read at all. I was almost inclined to retire," he wrote and added,

> on the other hand, Your Majesty's renewed attention and care for me (grants of money and issuance of tickets), the urgency of the moment, new student unrest, which disrupted the normal flow of life, Your present day emotional state, and, finally, the difficulty for you to send me some kind of response – did not allow me to put down my pen, while my gratitude to Your Majesty, my consciousness and heart protested against such an action.[137]

[137] Klopov to Nicholas II, 18 March 1901, 81.

But despair turned into joy as Klopov learned the news that the tsar had issued new railroad tickets and renewed financial assistance for his research.[138] Klopov also described how learning about the tsar's praise of his activities from Grand Duke Aleksandr Mikhailovich reassured him and convinced him that that Nicholas in fact read his letters and valued his efforts.[139]

Klopov exuberantly expressed joy and moral fulfillment at the opportunity to communicate directly with the sovereign. Above all he stressed his sense of gratitude at the chance to speak sincerely: "In [my letters to you] I did not sing praises. And yet, you did not deny me the right to write to you directly and sincerely. Such tolerance of a Monarch toward some Klopov, an excitable and bizarre eccentric, 'St. Basil', etc, as the bureaucrats dubbed me, inspired in me a feeling of respect for you."[140] Meetings with Nicholas imbued him with a sense of confidence in a long-lasting personal service to the tsar and a determination to strive for the realization of the program "mapped out at Tsarskoe."

But despite all his enthusiasm and expectations, the program Klopov referred to – informing the tsar of the needs and aspirations of the rural population by those who stood "outside the circle surrounding the sovereign" and communicated directly with the people – was appealing to Nicholas in theory, but unacceptable in practice. The tsar resisted every attempt to introduce an element of public voice into the system of government. When Klopov suggested creating an independent committee, his

---

[138] Klopov received funding every year – from 3 thousand to 12 thousand. RGIA, fond 565, op. 14, no. 123, p. 175.

[139] Klopov to Nicholas II, 18 March 1901, 81.

[140] Klopov to Nicholas II, 14 November 1904, 297.

proposal was found untimely by the tsar. Klopov later put forward a plan for organizing a small circle of permanent local experts to advise the tsar, a proposal, which again, as he put it, "met with difficulties."[141] On behalf of his benefactor, Grand Duke Aleksandr Mikhailovich, Klopov also attempted—unsuccessfully—to persuade Nicholas to involve members of the royal family to serve as intermediaries between the local specialists and the tsar. Lukoianov has noted that Aleksandr Mikhailovich, in fact, envisioned and tried to implement with Klopov's help a new independent entity for the collection of information about the state of affairs in the country with the view of working on reforms.[142] Discouraged by the lack of success, Klopov confessed to Nicholas that the very act of suggesting all these measures made him feel fear and discomfort, as if he were "stepping over the boundaries of something forbidden and demanding something unusual."[143]

In 1902, however, it seemed as if Klopov's appeals to Nicholas on behalf of the peasantry were beginning to be answered. While in the previous years, the tsar avoided a comprehensive involvement in the immensely complex question of agricultural reform, in January 1902, he appointed Witte to head the investigative Special Conference on the Needs of Agriculture whose goal was to research all

---

[141] Klopov to Nicholas II, 30 July 1899, 42.

[142] Lukoianov, *Tainyi korrespondent,* 71; Sergei Sharapov, the slavophile editor of *Novoe vremia*, criticized Klopov's attempts to engage the grand dukes in public work. "They are completely cut off from us by their upbringing and rigid etiquette," Sharapov wrote, adding that the grand dukes were not accountable in the same way the other administrators were and, as a result, were used to hiding behind their status and family. S. Sharapov to Klopov, 26 May 1902, RGIA, fond 560, op 22, d. 258, p. 27-28.

[143] Klopov to Nicholas II, 30 July 1899, 42-44.

aspects of rural life and propose measures for improving the conditions of the village. The central committee of the conference made up of high level government officials was supplemented by the local committees.[144] These provincial committees also consisted mainly of members of the bureaucracy, but the provincial governors and marshals of nobility were allowed to appoint members of the *zemstvo* executive boards as well as all others they deemed useful. The elected *zemstvo* assemblies were not engaged in the work of the committees. Nicholas had never fully trusted these institutions whose very compatibility with autocracy had just recently been a subject of a controversial polemic between Witte and Goremykin. However, although the elected *zemstvo* leaders were critical of such an arrangement, as David Macey pointed out, "in view of the interior ministry's opinion a mere ten years earlier that such "consultations" were a threat to the preservation of the autocracy, the mere convocation of these committees was indeed a notable occasion. . ."[145] Witte regarded the creation of the local committees as "the first opportunity in Russia to freely express an opinion."[146]

Klopov praised the tsar for taking an important step in the direction of agricultural improvements, but he also warned Nicholas that without engaging the local people the conference would not succeed. "Honestly, Your Majesty," exclaimed Klopov in despair,

---

[144] Sergei Vitte, *Vospominaniia,* vol. 2 (Tallinn, 1994), 509.

[145] Macey, *Government and Peasant in Russia*, 55.

[146] Vitte, *Vospominaniia*, vol. 2, 509.

> I really don't see any danger to the government if it calls on the local people to help solve such questions, as how to reorganize the commune, how to avoid yearly fires of thatched roofs, how to replace the wooden plough with the modern one, how to establish credit, how and where to keep supplies of grain, how to increase the level of village teachers… The *zemstvo* assemblies will not discuss, for example, the questions of our foreign policy or talk about reforming state government…[147]

Klopov's forebodings that without public involvement the bureaucracy would not be able to adequately solve the problems of the village were soon realized. Only a few months after setting up Witte's Special Conference, Nicholas appointed Viacheslav Plehve, the new minister of interior and Witte's adversary, to head the Editing Commission and to review peasant legislature. As rivalry between the Ministry of Finance and the Internal Ministry increased, so did antagonism toward the government on the part of society and distrust of the liberal opposition. Although the Special Commission collected volumes of information, by the beginning of 1903 with the most significant topics taken off its agenda, it significantly slowed down its activity and lost its authority. A comprehensive reform of peasant legislature had to wait until Petr Stolypin undertook it anew in 1907.

Klopov had not been the sole influence behind the monarchy's initiative in the sphere of peasant reform. By 1902 a consensus about the urgency of agricultural reform had emerged. In part, it was a combination of public awareness heightened by the years of crop failure and the appearance of a group of enlightened bureaucrats with an expertise and interest in agriculture. Yet, it is also impossible to deny completely the impact of Klopov's ideas and his untiring enthusiasm on Nicholas.

---

[147] Klopov to Nicholas II, 4 August, 1902, 140-141.

Klopov also played a role in transmitting a broad range of public opinion. As the government became more active in the sphere of agricultural reform, Klopov shed some of his abstract language in letters to Nicholas and began to plead for concrete reforms, such as expansion of the *zemstvo* rights and abolition of the peasant's mutual responsibility and redemption payments.

Klopov's views were hardly unique: he embraced a whole spectrum of opinions and sensibilities expressed by the liberal *zemstvos* and the conservative press. The conservative periodicals, such as *Grazhdanin, Novoe vremia,* and *Russkoe obozrenie*, led a lively discussion on the political and agrarian crises that had gripped the empire. The journalists and editors saw the inefficient and corrupt bureaucracy as the root of the problem and proposed remedies that ranged from better informing the tsar of "the truth" about the state of affairs in the country through petitioning the emperor and engaging elected local people in the work of the ministries and the State Council to partial political decentralization. In fact, the Manifesto of 26 February 1903 which promised to enforce local self-government, the *Ukaz* of 18 February 1905 on the right to petition to the emperor, as well as the proposals to convene the *Zemskii Sobor* – all to a certain extent originated in these debates.[148]

Klopov's role in the sphere of high politics in the early 1900s was of peripheral importance, yet his prolonged correspondence with the monarch was highly unusual. As Lukoianov has pointed out, only close friends and relatives enjoyed a more or less open access to the royal couple, while everyone else was

---

[148] Vladimir Vedernikov, "Krizis konservativnoi ideologii i ego otrazhenie v pechati (1895-1902)," *Vestnik Leningradskogo universiteta. Istoriia. Iazyk. Literatura,* no. 2 (1981): 104-106.

required to petition the tsar through the formal bureaucratic institutions, such as the Ministry of the Imperial Court, Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Imperial Chancellery. Klopov bypassed these official institutions and enjoyed a rare chance to write directly to Nicholas. His letters were delivered to the tsar either by one of the grand dukes or duchesses or the palace commandants. Moreover, despite his substantial disagreements with Klopov on a number of political issues, Nicholas consistently subsidized his exploratory trips and statistical research in the Russian countryside for a number of years, issued him a yearly pension, and granted money for the purchase of an estate.[149]

No letters from Nicholas to Klopov have survived; it is possible that the tsar never wrote to Klopov. Yet, the fact that Nicholas continuously sponsored him indicates his need to receive alternative opinion from someone like Klopov.[150] The tsar turned to Klopov as a source of information because he felt that Klopov's advice was broader and more reliable than the one coming from his official government and because it was untainted by bureaucratic politics and dependence on a salary. A substantial element of Klopov's appeal to Nicholas lay in the absence of radicalism or combativeness either in his proposals or in his rhetorical style, especially in the first years of his correspondence. Klopov believed that gradual advances in education, sanitation, and local industry and trade would eventually raise the social, cultural and economic level in the country. "Don't even think that I want to propose a radical

---

[149] Klopov purchased an estate in the Novgorodskaia gubernia near the town of Liuban'. *Tainyi sovetnik*, 9.

[150] Klopov continued to write to Nicholas until 1917 and had at least four more audiences with him in 1914 and 1917.

reform of our political structure," he wrote to Nicholas. "No, in the end, all I am talking about is some improvement in and rationalization of the activities of the local and state administration."[151]

Klopov presented himself as a medium for channeling the spirit and desires of the Russian people; this enabled him to "touch on questions, no matter how sensitive, in other words, to continue being the barometer of contemporary life."[152] His personality, old age, and selfless determination appealed to Nicholas's sense of moral duty, work ethic, and sacrifice. In the midst of government officials he never completely trusted and by whom he occasionally felt intimidated and restricted, Nicholas found Klopov's repetitive and verbose style trustworthy and comforting, even though he did not always agree with his opinions. Perhaps one of the most important factors of Klopov's long-term success was his affectionate attitude toward the tsar, transmitted through the loving tone of his epistles, and sincere appreciation for the role of unofficial adviser which Nicholas granted him. "Sensing what you are suffering especially now from loneliness amidst the lackeys and all the hypocrisy and lies," Klopov wrote, "I feel love for you as a great sufferer, as my brother in Christ. I love you so much that you have become the dearest person and, as strange as it may seem, the closest person for me."[153]

Did Nicholas's conversations with Klopov about the need for alternative, extra-bureaucratic, sources of information indicate the monarch's readiness to heed

---

[151] Klopov to Nicholas II, November 1901, 92.

[152] Klopov to Nicholas II, 12 January 1901, 63.

[153] Klopov to Nicholas II, 14 November 1904, 297.

public opinion and reform state administration? Klopov certainly represented a collective image and expressed opinion of a large segment of the population. But the limited scale and brevity of Nicholas's engagement with Klopov's ideas and projects undermines the suggestion of a serious political initiative on the part of the tsar. Nicholas eagerly accepted Klopov's mediation because it offered, although on a minor scale, a realization of Nicholas's vision of a national monarchy and a mythical pre-Petrine Russia as well as an escape from pressing political reality. Klopov's expedition can best be interpreted on a symbolic level as the first in the chain of attempts by Nicholas to bypass his official administration and to attain some degree of direct personal rule over his domain.

The tsar turned to Klopov also in a symbolic response to the "Witte system" and what it represented – a strong united government of experts which had de facto ejected Nicholas from active ruling. Witte's imposing demeanor and lack of concern for couching his political ambitions in demonstrations of loyalty and conformity to the tsar's unspoken wishes further alienated Nicholas from the bureaucratic establishment and turned his anti-bureaucratic sensibilities into a concrete action. More importantly, Nicholas's relationship with Klopov shaped in part the public perception of the tsar's political persona and the bureaucracy's attitudes toward him. The Klopov episode established a precedent of the tsar's attempts to circumvent the official government in gathering information and soliciting advice and planted seeds of insecurity and mistrust in the members of society and the bureaucratic elite.

5. "Our Secret and Defensive Union": Nicholas and Prince Vladimir Meshcherskii.

In the early 1900s, the name of Prince Vladimir Meshcherskii inspired awe, fear, and contempt among government officials and members of high society. Contemporary diaries and memoirs are replete with rumors about the enormous influence he exerted on Nicholas as well as on the bureaucratic elite. A member of the State Council, Aleksandr Polovtsov, complained in his diary that instead of his ministers, the tsar sought advice from Meshcherskii who had convinced him "not to listen to and consult anyone, but follow exclusively divine persuasion and if the contemporaries do not like his decisions, it does not mean anything…. That is why the emperor does not listen to anyone and does not consult with anyone."[154] Former Prime Minister Sergei Witte wrote in his memoirs that

> For his whole life, Meshcherskii had been only concerned with his protégés; he made a trade out of politics, which he unscrupulously used for his own benefit and for the benefit of his protégés. Hence, I cannot say anything about Meshcherskii other than that he is the most dreadful person. Everyone who has had anything to do with him knows that.[155]

The ministers resented the prince as an outsider, a dangerously unpredictable element in their midst, but they could not ignore him. As Minister of Interior Viacheslav Plehve explained to the Minister of Education, Vladmir Glazov,

> Meshcherskii, to tell the truth, is trash….; but it is important to pay attention to his opinions as a representative of a certain segment of society. On many occasions he could be harmful, but he can be neutralized and we can talk

---

[154] "Dnevnik Aleksandra Polovtsova," *Krasnyi arkhiv* 3 (1923), 136.

[155] Sergei Iu. Vitte, *Vospominaniia*, vol. 3 (Tallinn, 1994), 562.

> about it later. I can only say that he is a vain man and you can get him by soliciting a decoration for him or a position [for one of his protégés].[156]

Russian historiography confirms Meshcherskii's political influence. Historians Valentin Diakin and Iurii Soloviev have concluded in several monographs on pre-1905 government that Meshcherskii played a dominant role in defining domestic policy, especially in peasant legislature and education.[157] Igor Vinogradoff, the editor and publisher of Nicholas's letters to Meshcherskii, also attributed powerful political influence to the prince in 1902-1903 and 1913-1914.[158] Referring to the mystique of Meshcherskii's reputation, the historian Walter Mosse observed that his influence "foreshadowed that of later adventurers like Prince Andronikov and Rasputin."[159]

This chapter investigates the nature of Meshcherskii's relationship with Nicholas and the extent of his influence on the tsar and the government. I will examine the possible channels for access the prince had at his disposal, the methods he employed, and the reasons for his ultimate failure. An analysis of Meshcherskii's role provides valuable clues not only to the process and methods of decision-making

---

[156] V. L. Glazov, "Dva razgovora: iz dnevnikov V.L. Glazova," edited by S. F. Platonov, *Dela i dni* (1921), 216-217, quoted in Edward H. Judge, *Plehve: Repression and Reform in Imperial Russia, 1902-1904* (Syracuse, NY, 1983), 152.

[157] Iu. Soloviev, *Samoderzhavie i dvorianstvo v 1902-1907* (Leningrad, 198169; *Krizis samoderzhaviia v Rossii,1895-1917*, edited by B.V. Anan'ich, R. Sh. Ganelin, et al., eds. (Leningrad, 1984).

[158] Igor Vinogradoff, "Some Russian Imperial Letters to Prince V. P. Meshcherskii (1839-1914)" *Oxford Slavonic Studies* 11 (1962): 123-127, 151 n175.

[159] W. E. Mosse, "Imperial Favourite: V. P. Meshchersky and the Grazhdanin," *Slavonic and East European Review* 59, no. 4 (1981), 546.

but also to the intentions and the ruling style of the tsar himself. It also revisits the claim of Meshcherskii's reputation as influential adviser to Nicholas and concludes that rather than seeking advice from the prince, the tsar saw in him someone with whom he shared a political vision and whom he could trust and talk with freely.

* * *

Meshcherskii came from two well-established and moderately wealthy aristocratic families, the Meshcherskiis and Karamzins, who were connected through marriage alliances with the most illustrious members of the Russian aristocracy, such as the Golitsyns, Potemkins, Demidovs, and Obolenskiis. The Meshcherskiis also maintained social ties with the leading figures in St. Petersburg literary circles. In the 1830s, Meshcherskii's grandfather, Nikolai Karamzin, one of the most famous nineteenth-century historians—best-known for his multi-volume history of Russia—and his wife hosted a literary salon frequented by Aleksandr Pushkin, Petr Viazemskii, Vasilii Zhukovskii, Ivan Turgenev, Fedor Tiutchev, and Iurii Samarin, among others.

In the late 1850s and early 1860s, Meshcherskii's parents continued a more politicized version of the salon, which became known for its opposition to the liberal trends prevalent in St. Petersburg during the 1860s and the Great Reforms of Alexander II. Meshcherskii's family connections extended into the bureaucratic world as well. The children of the future Minister of Internal Affairs, Petr Valuev, were playmates of Meshcherskii, and Valuev himself was instrumental in securing an

entry-level position for Meshcherskii at the ministry in 1857, which points to the fact that had he so wished, a career in the government was available to him.[160]

The prince first met Alexander II and tsarina Maria Aleksandrovna in the summer of 1861 at the estate of his aunt, Tatiana Potemkina. Later that year, the twenty-two-year-old "Vovo" Meshcherskii was invited to the royal family's Lidavia Palace in the Crimea and introduced to the teen-aged sons of the tsar, Grand Duke Nicholas, who was 18, and his 16- year-old brother Aleksander. It was Tsarina Maria Aleksandrovna—at the time allied with the more conservative and nationalist forces in Russian society— who had selected the well educated, lively, and intelligent young prince to become the grand dukes' companion. Her choice could not have been better: Meshcherskii was not only well-versed in literature and politics but also possessed the gifts of eloquence and charm. The prince soon developed a close relationship with tsarevich Nicholas. After his premature death in 1865 of spinal meningitis, Meshcherskii spent much of his time and effort cultivating a friendship with the new tsarevich Aleksandr.

In the winter of 1867-1868, Meshcherskii and Konstantin Pobedonostsev hosted weekly social gatherings where Aleksandr had the opportunity to engage in conversations on literature and politics "among interesting people." Discussions sometimes lasted until two or three in the morning. The participants were a mixture of bureaucrats and members of the conservative intelligentsia, among them Fedor Dostoevsky, Mikhail Katkov, Ivan Aksakov, and Sergei Urusov.[161] Meshcherskii

---

[160] See A. S. Kartsov, "Kniaz' V. P. Meshcherskii: semeinye sviazi," *Iz glubiny vremen* 6 (St. Petersburg, 1996), 119-135.

used these evenings not only to make connections and increase his own authority as a political broker, but also to influence the worldview of the young tsarevich and to acquaint him with potential candidates for government positions.[162]

Intense collaboration between tsarevich Aleksandr and Meshcherskii contributed to an emotional attachment between the two men. Alexander II was, by many accounts, not an affectionate father and seemed especially put off by his second son's lack of intelligence, simple manner, and boorish appearance. The psychological distance between Alexander and his father was reflected in their political differences. Meshcherskii filled the void left by the father's absence. Not surprising, therefore, it was not his liberal father, but Meshcherskii, who guided Alexander's political maturity during his formative years. One may speculate that it was during the first period of his close friendship with Meshcherskii, from 1865 to 1872, when Alexander

---

[161] Vladimir Meshcherskii, *Moi vospominaniia,* vol. 2 (St. Petersburg, 1897-98), 99.

[162] To supplement their daily interaction in the spring and summer of 1868, at the initiative of Alexander, the prince kept a journal where he recorded political opinions as well as his reflections on his young friend's educational and spiritual accomplishments. "Both here and in much else I recall with special pleasure one of the most important signs of your development – the repeated victories of reason and goodness over their most powerful enemy, pride. Have you noticed this yourself?" Meshcherskii praised his royal student. But a few pages later, the prince boldly summed up "the unsatisfactory elements I have encountered in you." Among those were Alexander's failure to assert himself and his views in opposition to the emperor, to "acquire *greater faith in yourself* … [this lack of confidence] may be serious obstacle to you in carrying out your intentions and plans." The prince passed these entries to Aleksandr who, in turn, reflected on Meshcherskii's ideas on the large margins and returned them to the author. The format of the journal conveyed a sense of intimacy and sincerity, an impression echoed by Alexander's enthusiastic responses to Meshcherskii's correspondence: "I trust these journals will benefit us both, because we shall be able to discuss at great length the things which interest us and which are sometimes much easier to expound in writing than orally." (see Igor Vinogradoff, ed., "Further Russian Imperial Correspondence with Prince V. P. Meshcherskii," *Oxford Slavonic Papers* 11 (1964): 101-11.)

developed an antipathy toward the liberal reforms of his father, an antipathy which later grew into the political foundation of his reign.

With Alexander's help, in 1872 Meshcherskii began publishing a political literary periodical, *Grazhdanin*, which became, by many accounts, one of the best-edited and most powerful right-wing periodicals in Russia. As one Meshcherskii's obituaries noted, it was possible to be furious with *Grazhdanin* but it was impossible not to read it.[163] Before the 1905 Revolution when significant freedom of press was granted, the papers around the country routinely reprinted from *Grazhdanin* information to which they themselves had no access.[164]

As a publisher, Meshcherskii benefited greatly from his friendship with both sovereigns. In the 1870s, his *Grazhdanin* had been an oddity, a peripheral periodical with a tiny readership, but by the end of the 1880s, *Grazhdanin* had become an important daily. Boosted by government subsidies, *Grazhdanin* was virtually independent of public opinion and market pressures. With Alexander III and subsequently Nicholas II as his de facto censors, Meshcherskii wrote with little ethical or political restraint. Promoting his protégés to various posts of the bureaucracy, he assured for himself vital sources of opinions and rumors at the top, which made *Grazhdanin* the only paper with credible insider information about the

---

[163] "Kniaz' V. P. Meshcherskii (Nekrolog)," *Istoricheskii vestnik* 137 (August 1914), 583-596.

[164] In addition to his journalistic activities, Meshcherskii wrote numerous novels satirizing the mores of high society. He exposed the lack of professionalism, indolence, and reactionary views of the bureaucracy; his portrayals enjoyed some popularity and were praised for accuracy and insight.

workings of the State Council, the individual ministries, and about court gossip. As Vladimir Kokovtsov observed,

> when one follows the events of our domestic life on the pages of *Grazhdanin,* it is possible to reproduce the whole kaleidoscope of changing 'favorites' and 'dethroned' people, and one can notice during certain especially critical moments a certain correspondence between the actual changes in the life of these people with the opinions expressed about them in Grazhdanin[165]

By the late 1880s numerous contemporary diaries referred to Meshcherskii as one of the most successful power brokers in the empire. In addition to his access to the emperor, the prince gained advantage from his position as the host of an influential political salon, "frequented by ministers, officials of all ranks, generals, bishops, journalists, all of those for whom the protection of the host could open opportunities to receive various positions, including diplomatic posts."[166] Meshcherskii's salon not only offered an important political forum for like-minded people, but also served as a center of alternative political debate. With the tight censorship of the press under Alexander III, the elite salons became the only available means for political discussion outside bureaucratic circles. Salons also promoted their own candidates to the highest echelons of the bureaucracy.[167] Meshcherskii's circle was credited with the placement of Dmitrii Tolstoi and Ivan Durnovo as ministers of interior under Alexander III, Ivan Vyshnegradskii, as minister of finance,

---

[165] Vladimir Kokovtsov, *Iz moego proshlogo*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1933), 259.

[166] A. P. Izvolskii, *Vospominaniia* (Moscow, 1989), 163.

[167] A. Kartsov, *Obshchestvenno-politicheskaia deiatel'nost' kn. V. P. Meshcherskogo (1860-1890gg),* Ph.D dissertation (St. Petersburg, 2000), 29.

Alexander Krivoshein, as minister of communications, and Tertii Filippov, as state controller.[168] Meshcherskii also promoted his protégés to the State Council and several gubernatorial posts throughout the empire.

The bond between Alexander III and the prince deepened over the years and even the homosexual charges against Meshcherskii in the 1880s did not prevent Alexander III from continuing his friendship with the prince. In 1887, the prince's affair with a young soldier gave rise to a scandal that led to his isolation in society and within his own family. Although the prince managed to avoid legal proceedings, the scandal quickly spread. Vladimir Soloviev, a well-known philosopher and poet, called Meshcherskii a "Prince of Sodom" in a poem that circulated throughout St. Petersburg.[169] Pobedonostsev, Meshcherskii's old ally and a contributor to *Grazhdanin*, turned against the prince and urged Alexander III to break any relationship with him. Many former protégés and acquaintances avoided Meshcherskii's house and cancelled their invitations to him.

Paradoxically, among the few people who remained loyal to the prince was Alexander III himself. While he went along with the demands of his wife and society and ceased his open social relationship with Meshcherskii, he continued the friendship by accepting Meshcherskii privately. Why did Alexander, who was

---

[168] Aleksandr Polovtsov observed in his diary that the appointment of Vyshnegradskii was the first "personal" appointment that went against the standard procedure; it was the first instance of a high-level administrative promotion through behind the scene politics. "Dnevnik A. A. Polovtsova," *Krasnyi arkhiv* 4 (1923), 111.

[169] Igor Vinogradoff, ed., "Some Russian Imperial Letters to Prince V. P. Meshcherskii (1839-1914). Part II. The Emperor Nicholas II," *Oxford Slavonic Studies* 11 (1962), 151 n. 167; M. N. Ostrovskii, "Svedenia o fiziologicheskih porokah raznyh lits, prozhivavshih v Peterburge," RGIA, f. 1683, op. 1, no. 119, p. 10.

generally perceived as the very ideal of a Christian patriarch, choose to close his eyes to what religion and society then considered an odious sin? One might speculate that the long-term friendship between the two men and the important ideological and psychological function played by the prince undoubtedly contributed to the tsar's tolerance. Contemporaries attributed Alexander III's tolerance of Meshcherskii to the tsar's general loyalty to his friends, especially friends whom he had known since youth and whom he associated with his adored late brother Nikolai. Years later, Nicholas II responded to Interior Minister Petr Sviatopolk-Mirskii's rueful comment about the tsar's friendship with Meshcherskii: "I know that he is a debauched person, but didn't he also visit Father?"[1]

By 1892 Meshcherskii's intimate friendship with Alexander III was in a decline; by the time of the tsar's death two years later, the prince found himself entirely out of favor.[170] Nicholas, who inherited the throne in late 1894, remained influenced by his mother's exceedingly negative opinion of Meshcherskii and was not disposed to resuming his father's old friendship with the prince.[171] Pobedonostsev strongly cautioned Nicholas against the prince's suspect morals and propensity for spreading gossip about the members of the government.[172] Pobedonostsev warned that it was necessary to distance Meshcherskii's opinions expressed in his editorials

---

[170] Vladimir Meshcherskii, *Moi vospominaniia*, vol. 3 (St. Petersburg, 1897 -98), 375; According to Witte, in the last years of his life Aleksandr III almost never saw the prince, but Meshcherskii regularly sent him his reflections on the major political events of the day. The emperor also occasionally wrote to the prince. Vitte, *Vospominaniia*, vol. 3, 550.

[171] Vitte, *Vospominaniia*, vol 3, 584.

[172] "Dnevnik A. A. Polovtsova," *Krasnyi arkhiv* 6 (1934), 183.

from the official views and policies of the government and, especially, from the preferences of Nicholas himself.[173]

As heir, Nicholas had frowned on Meshcherskii's efforts to influence the government through his periodical, *Grazdanin*. The tsar remarked on the margins of an excerpt from the prince's 1892 article "On the Governors" that he "would understand if such a proposition came from the minister of internal affairs, but it does not suit *Grazhdanin* to come up with such projects."[174] After coming to power, Nicholas undercut Meshcherskii by canceling the government subsidy to *Grazhdanin*, which his father had established and without which the periodical could not exist. Only the pleas of Meshcherskii's old protégé, Finance Minister Sergei Witte, won Nicholas's agreement to one last payment of 80,000 rubles which enabled the daily to reorganize into a much condensed weekly, or, as Witte put it, "a sheet."[175] Nicholas returned Meshcherskii's letters unopened and forbade the prince to write to him under any circumstances.[176]

A desperate Meshcherskii approached several officials to petition the tsar on his behalf, but Nicholas would not change his mind. As a last resort, to underscore his former position as a trusted confidant and an intimate friend of Nicholas's father, Meshcherskii delivered his old correspondence with Alexander III to the tsar, but

---

[173] "Pis'ma K. P. Pobedonostseva k Nikolaiu II," (Moscow, 1925), 311-313.

[174] "Vypiska iz stat'i 'O gubernatorakh,' pomeshchennoi v gazete *Grazhdanin* 28 marta 1892g," GARF, fond 601, no. 819, p. 1.

[175] Vitte, *Vospominaniia,* vol. 3, 554.

[176] Ibid., 553.

again he was unsuccessful. For the next six years Meshcherskii remained out of favor with the emperor. A decreasing number of subscribers to *Grazhdanin* as well as in the guests of his political salon reflected his diminished powers.

Meshcherskii's good fortunes returned in 1901, when a distant relative, Vladimir Sipiagin—appointed in October 1899 as Nicholas's interior minister—succeeded in persuading the tsar to meet with the prince. Nicholas appointed Sipiagin at a time of uncertainty and widespread opposition to the regime. By century's end, demands for civil rights and political participation sparked disorders in the countryside and sporadic strikes in the cities. In 1899, university students, by far the most radicalized segment of educated society, made insistent calls for political reforms. By 1901 a nascent liberation movement called for a constitution. In addition, a terrorist campaign took the lives of three ministers and several low-level officials between 1898 and 1904. Yet, apart from his bureaucratic experience, Sipiagin possessed neither professional expertise, nor a broad political vision to handle these crises. Assistant Minister of Internal Affairs Aleksei Obolenskii lamented the lack of professional knowledge and enlightened opinion in Sipiagin, who had "substituted it with fawning perfected to the level of a virtuoso."[177] Aleksandr Polovtsov commented with sarcasm in his diary that

> while lacking intellectual abilities, convictions, and any traces of civil courage, [Sipiagin] had managed to convince the tsar that upon his appointment everything would change: the zemstvo would retain its name only, the central government represented by the bureaucracy would reach everywhere,

[177] "Dnevnik A. A. Polovtsova,"*Krasnyi arkhiv* 3 (1923), 97.

adherence to different faiths would disappear, and the ethnic parts of Russia would be immediately Russified.[178]

In contrast to the other members of the administration, Sipiagin spent an inordinate amount of time entertaining the tsar and accompanying him to hunting parties and meals. To emphasize his anti-Western orientation and fondness for seventeenth-century ambiance, which Sipiagin shared with the tsar, the minister occasionally used antiquated forms of address in his reports to Nicholas.[179] The minister also had his St. Petersburg quarters redesigned in old-Russian fashion, filled the rooms with icons and furnished them with antiques and a painting of the coronation of the first Romanov tsar, Mikhail. His multi-course dinner parties featured rare delicacies and oversized portions of traditional Russian dishes. In appearance and style – Sipiagin was tall and heavy with large facial features and decorated with numerous talismans and charms around his neck – he strove to resemble a seventeenth-century Muscovite noble.[180]

In Sipiagin, Nicholas acquired a minister who understood and shared his wishes for a national monarchy, a ruling style and a system of government that would allow him to experience a more immediate relationship with the nation. Without a well-defined political program of his own, Sipiagin conceived of his role as the tsar's

---

[178] Ibid., 99.

[179] Larisa Zakharova, "Krizis samoderzhaviia nakanune revoliutsii 1905 goda," *Voprosy Istorii* 8 (1978), 131.

[180] Nicholas II himself was fond of charms and talismans which he carried with him, including a lock of Rasputin's hair. See Robert Warth, Before Rasputin: Piety and the Occult at the Court of Nicholas II." *The Historian*, 47 (May 1985), 332.

most important adviser and the executor of his orders. Witte perceptively described Sipiagin's notions of autocracy and his own role in the administration in a letter he addressed to Sipiagin in 1900:

> I am nobody, I only report, the tsar will decide, ergo no rules are needed; those who demand rules want to limit the tsar; those who doubt that it is the tsar and not I who make decisions, doubt the ability of the tsar to decide; those who doubt the correctness of decisions, doubt the correctness of tsar's decisions…. – here is the basis of your arguments.[181]

In early 1900, Meshcherskii approached Sipiagin with a series of letters offering the new minister the friendship of an older brother and the support of a secret adviser. Alexander III, Meshcherskii preached, "had entrusted you with the fate of his loyal son." Emphasizing Sipiagin's sacred mission and the hallowed responsibility of his task, the prince offered the minister his intimate knowledge of the "psychological world of human intrigue."[182] The arguments worked, and shortly after he secured access to Sipiagin, Meshcherskii received a new chance to influence Russian political development and personnel selection. The prince's first major triumph was the appointment of General Victor von Wahl as governor of Vilna.[183]

A year later, Sipiagin succeeded in convincing Nicholas to receive Meshcherskii, thus setting off a new period of power and influence in the prince's career. On January 6, 1902, the 30th anniversary of the founding of Meshcherskii's periodical, *Grazhdanin*, the tsar ordered the renewal of the annual subsidy to 24,000

---

[181] "Letters of S. Iu. Witte to D.S. Sipiagin," *Krasnyi arkhiv* 5 (1925), 31.

[182] Meshcherskii to Sipiagin, n.d. 1900, RGIA, f. 721, op. 1, no. 65, p. 7.

[183] Aleksandra Bogdanovich, *Tri poslednikh samoderzhtsa* (Moscow: Novosti, 1990), 263; Victor Von Wahl became assistant minister of internal affairs in 1902.

rubles.[184] Meshcherskii immediately began to recreate an aura of secrecy and celebrity around his relationship with the tsar, exaggerating his own influence on the ruler and inflating the tsar's confidence in him. He showed Witte the letters he received from Nicholas, in which the tsar addressed him in the familiar 'ty' and the finance minister found this a sign of rare favor.[185] Around the same time, Witte confided to the Bogdanoviches, the family of a conservative general and influential salon host in St. Petersburg, that after meeting with Nicholas for an hour, Meshcherskii had persuaded the tsar of the need for a more severe domestic policy: "Meshcherskii said that we should expect reaction in the tsar, that he will now show sternness."[186]

Meshcherskii's political sensibilities and ideological preferences can best be garnered from his three-volume memoirs and his numerous editorials in *Grazhdanin*. For the prince, the epoch of Nicholas I was marked by a deep unity that existed between society and the autocracy, and the Crimean War amply demonstrated the support that existed in all classes for the government's actions: "In none of the drawing rooms, in none of the minds did one feel or hear any mood, other than patriotic readiness to face this war, despite all the danger."[187] This spirit had helped Russia survive the disaster of the war. "The spiritual peace of the whole of Russia and her every inhabitant, from the young to the old, our feelings and our thoughts -

---

[184] "Dnevnik A. A. Polovtsova," *Krasnyi arkhiv* 4 (1923), 276.

[185] Vitte, *Vospominaniia,* vol. 3, 554.

[186] Bogdanovich, *Tri poslednikh samoderzhtsa,* 280.

[187] Meshcherskii, *Moi vospominaniia*, vol. 2, 21.

were they not the fruits of the Nicholaevan reign and, in particular, its spirit?"[188] But these healthy and formidable foundations of the Russian state, were replaced with self-accusation, anti-patriotism, and nihilism that permeated educated society during the reign of Alexander II. In Meshcherskii's opinion, liberalism was inconsistent with Russian traditions and was nothing more than a fad to which Alexander II's government had succumbed.[189] One of the most dangerous sources and disseminators of liberal ideas, he continued, was the bureaucracy, which formed a pervasive conspiratorial web around Alexander II demanding 'groundless' reforms. The tragedy, according to Meshcherskii, was that Alexander II could not identify the voice of the people and, in effect, relinquished his autocracy by allowing the liberals to dismantle the glorious reign of Nicholas I.[190]

The national monarchy, the prince reasoned, could not exist in isolation and must rely on broad support from the rural population, the peasantry and the landed gentry. What concerned Meshcherskii most was the withering away of the gentry's former influence and their traditions as well as their economic decline; he considered the landed nobility to be the only reliable pillar of the monarchy and its historical link with the vast peasant population. In addition, influential nobility would effectively deter the impact of the radical intelligentsia on the peasantry. With the bureaucracy hardly inclined to bail out the nobility and ill-equipped to deal with the mounting problems of the empire, it was up to the tsar to reestablish the monarchy's weakening

---

[188] Ibid., 30.

[189] Ibid., 146.

[190] Ibid., 507.

ties with the noble estate, both in financial and political terms. It was only when the traditional authority and influence of the nobility was restored, Meshcherskii reasoned, and the bureaucratization of the government apparatus was halted, that the autocrat would be able to exercise personal power in the country.

It would be an exaggeration to suggest that what attracted Nicholas to Meshcherskii in the first place was the prince's politics. To wield a significant ideological influence on the tsar, the prince would have had to develop a comprehensive and consistent political doctrine. Meshcherskii, however, was neither original nor radical in his ideas. Broadly based in the conservative camp, he switched alliances and changed opinions as they suited him at the moment. To his credit, it must be mentioned that he was not a right wing radical and, in fact, despised the Black Hundreds.

Meshcherskii's vision of the national monarchy appealed to Nicholas's own anti-bureaucratic sensibilities and his longing for a personal rule. But it was the psychological factor that sealed the friendship between the two men. Here the prince played his cards exceedingly well. Like thirty years before in his relationship with the young Alexander III, Meshcherskii filled the role of the absent father. He did it knowingly, confidently, and with much zest. Meshcherskii's daily editorial pieces – the Journal [*Dnevnik*] sections of *Grazhdanin*—were intended primarily for the emperor and served as the backdrop for their correspondence.

In early 1902, Meshcherskii began printing installments from his recent memoirs in *Grazhdanin*, in which he highlighted his close relationship with Alexander III. Exalting the late tsar as a model father and autocrat, the prince

intended this publication, one might argue, for one particular audience, Nicholas II. Nicholas closely followed the daily installments and confessed in his letters to Meshcherskii to have found a "consoling coincidence" between their thoughts.[191] In addition, the prince published a series of articles on the nature of the autocracy and the spiritual continuity between Nicholas and his father, Alexander III. Utilizing archaic style in his writing, Meshcherskii described the mystical quality of their connection:

> And the son sayeth to the father – 'Thou art alive and all that thou didst love I love, all that Thou didst desire for the good of Thy people I desire ….Thy duty shall be my duty, Thy inspiration my inspiration, Thy faith shall be my faith, Thy name shall be my protection and my guiding star.[192]

Nicholas responded enthusiastically that he "began to believe in himself."[193] He thanked Meshcherskii for his editorials about his father: "I reread several times with special attention and a sort of happy sensation the description of that change to which you were a witness – the change that occurred in my adored father in 1881." Finally, Nicholas described the fateful significance of their union – Meshcherskii served as the link between the father and son and conferred the father's authority and blessing upon the son. Once again I am pleased to recognize," wrote Nicholas,

> that our contact is not due to chance. It is a direct result of the training given me by my dear Father and the heritage of all that was dear to him, which made

---

[191] Nicholas II to Meshcherskii, 13 March, 1902, Vinogradoff, *Some Imperial Letters,* 129.

[192] *Grazhdanin,* 26 February 1902, quoted in Vinogradoff, "Some Imperial Letters," 150, n. 155.

[193] Nicholas II to Meshcherskii, 28 February 1902, 129.

> up the legacy of his reign, has passed on to me in its entirety and fills my whole soul. You appeared and at once revived and reinforced that legacy.[194]

In 1902 and 1903, the height of their friendship, frequent letters passed back and forth between Meshcherskii and Nicholas in secret through the unfailing palace commandant, Vladimir Gesse. Nicholas's individual growth and development as ruler became a recurring theme in their correspondence. With uncharacteristic abandon Nicholas threw himself into the relationship which, although short-lived, was perhaps one of the most passionate friendships of his life. "Forgive me, my dearest friend," wrote the tsar, "for making you wait so long for answers to your fervent letters."[195] Nicholas patiently allayed Meshcherskii's frequent demands for attention and reassurance of their friendship. "Do you really doubt the strength of our union just because I have remained quiet for awhile? You shouldn't, I am not like that. Once I have become friends with someone, it is not easy to tear me away from them."[196]

Nicholas's letters alternated with invitations to Meshcherskii to "stop by" dressed casually.[197] Meshcherskii frequently visited the tsar around ten o'clock at night. Nicholas enjoyed their conversations and always thanked the prince for a pleasurable evening in an offhand morning note dispatched to Meshcherskii by a messenger. Chief of Imperial Chancellery Aleksandr Mosolov, wrote in his memoirs

---

[194] Nicholas II to Meshcherskii, 22 March 1902, 124.

[195] Nicholas II to Meshcherskii, 26 November 1902, 135.

[196] Nicholas II to Meshcherskii, 20 October 1902, 134.

[197] Nicholas to Meshcherskii, 11 July 1902, Meshcherskii archive, n.p., Bakhmeteff Archive, Columbia University Library.

that during his whole period of service he could never recall an instance when the tsar had not granted the prince's wishes. Nicholas invariably marked "To be carried out!" on all of Meshcherskii's written requests on behalf of his protégés.[198]

Mixing psychological counseling and political opinions, the prince played on Nicholas's need for his father's approval, a desire to become like his father, to embody the image of the "real" autocrat. Alexander III's premature death at the age of forty-nine thrust his heir into the whirlpool of political life for which he felt grossly unprepared. Emotionally exhausted from his obligations, Nicholas longed for the comfort and peace of mind he had enjoyed during his father's reign. It was perhaps that kind of reassurance and inspiration that the 62-year old Meshcherskii offered the 32-year old tsar. The prince's former position as his father's trusted friend and political confidant no doubt helped validate Meshcherskii's words in Nicholas's eyes: "Somehow I have grown in my own eyes. It may sound ridiculous but it is a fact. With your peculiar instinct you have looked into my soul and all you say of me in one of the *dnevniks* [journals] is quite true. Go on writing about everything, as you have been doing up till now."[199]

Nicholas exchanged opinions with Meshcherskii on appointments and important political as well as theoretical matters. The tsar allowed the prince to get involved in the whole array of projects: reform proposals, organization of committees, speech writing, and *rescript* drafting, among others. However, their correspondence does not reveal evidence that Nicholas sought guidance or advice from the prince.

---

[198] Aleksandr Mosolov, *Pri dvore poslednego Rossiiskogo imperatora* (Moscow, 1993), 186

[199] Nicholas II to Meshcherskii, 22 March 1902, 124.

The tsar needed an ally, a friend, and a sounding board to develop ideas and make decisions, but he never related to Meshcherskii as a novice to a master, and he never relinquished control over the situation.

Nicholas's attitude to their relationship was well expressed in one of his letters to the prince: "I think of you often, and I am most delighted and calm at the thought that I have such a secret and trusted friend in you."[200] In another letter, the tsar reassured Meshcherskii that he ignored all rumors about the prince and confirmed that "certainly, [our] defensive union remains forever solid and secret for both of us. Please trust this."[201] A week later Nicholas added that the Empress Alexandra Fedorovna knew and approved of their "secret union."[202]

But Nicholas's efforts to conceal his relationship with the prince from the eyes of the public quickly failed. Since Meshcherskii's own authority and powerful reputation depended to a large extent on his intimate relationship with the emperor, the prince could not afford to be secretive about his most important friendship. Flamboyant by nature, Meshcherskii enjoyed flaunting his influence and having reached its peak, he could not resist mentioning his relationship with Nicholas on the pages of *Grazhdanin.* The tsar became visibly annoyed at such a breech of trust: "We have just recently concluded secret and defensive union," he reminded Meshcherskii

---

[200] Nicholas II to Meshcherskii, 5 April 1902, 130.

[201] Nicholas II to Meshcherskii, 8 August 1902, 133.

[202] Nicholas II to Meshcherskii, 16 August 1902, 134.

curtly stressing confidentiality in their friendship, "and you are already bragging that you saw me."[203]

The prince's tattered reputation was only part of the reason Nicholas insisted on secrecy in their relationship. More important, the tsar aspired to a self-representation and self-perception as a strong and autonomous ruler who, like his father, heeded no one but his own consciousness and intuition and derived influence from divine inspiration. Meshcherskii was intended to serve as Nicholas's invisible assistant, a secret flashlight, obscured from everyone else's view. This discrepancy between Nicholas's expectations of secrecy in his friendship and Meshcherskii's own needs to exaggerate and promote his connection with the emperor eventually produced a veritable chain of rumors and misperceptions crediting Meshcherskii with virtually omnipotent power and Nicholas with naiveté and weakness.

Historian Natalia Chernikova observed that society's impression of Meshcherskii's influence on domestic policy and the ruler was exaggerated because the prince expressed his views publicly through his newspaper. By contrast, Nicholas's opinions and actions were concealed behind the closed doors of his office and mediated by bureaucratic intermediaries and, thus, open to interpretations and guesses.[204]

One example of these erroneous impressions was the 1902 dismissal of Minister of Education Petr Vannovskii. The widespread opinion among the

---

[203] Nicholas II to Meshcherskii, 14 May 1902, 132.

[204] N. V. Chernikova, "Kniaz' Vladimir Petrovich Meshcherskii i revoliutsiia (1904-1907 gg.) in A. Iu. Minakov, ed., *Konservatism v Rossii i mire*, vol. 2 (Voronezh, 2004):150-178.

administration and society held that Vannovskii's removal from office was the upshot of Meshcherskii's intrigues, while in fact it resulted from the partnership between the tsar and the prince. Moreover, Nicholas's active opposition to his minister of education and his reforms preceded Meshcherskii's involvement in the incident by several months.

Nicholas had selected the elderly Vannovskii, former minister of war, to lead the department of education on March 24, 1901. The appointment followed nearly two years of widespread student unrest, which combined political and educational demands. In particular, the students also voiced objections to the restrictive University Charter, which denied them the rights of association at the university and made the professors and rectors government appointees rather than elected by the autonomous academic councils at the universities. The government responded to the student disorders with partial adjustment of their claims mixed with repressive measures such as expulsion from the university without the right to be readmitted and conscription into the army. These actions slowed down the student movement temporarily but in the winter of 1900-1901 it flared with renewed zeal and culminated in the assassination of Minister of Education Nikolai Bogolepov in early 1901.

The official guiding *rescript* ordered Vannovskii to develop a program of reform in order to "revamp" the school system using his experience, reason and heart-felt concern for the youth.[205] But the appointment of a general to this position communicated to society that Vannovskii's mission encompassed more than educational reform and that he would use his military experience to act decisively in

---

[205] "Pis'mo Nikolaia II P.S. Vannovskomu," *Byloe* 2 (1918), 80.

order to stamp out student unrest. Unexpectedly, however, Vannovskii took a more liberal stand on the issue of student disorders. He urgently cautioned the government against the use of coercive measures in the universities and punitive action against the students.[206] Like many other officials who believed that the students entered the university already aggrieved by the dry classical curriculum of high school, he also found the rigid and unimaginative system of education that focused on the memorization of ancient texts to be partly responsible for the early radicalization of the young people.

The preliminary exchange of opinion between the tsar and the new minister about Vannovskii's role and strategy produced no major disagreements between them, at least from the point of view of the latter. Vannovskii later claimed that Nicholas had agreed with his ideas on education from the outset and promised full support in their realization. But the minister's impressions were completely misguided. When Vannovskii and his assistants developed a comprehensive reform of a unified middle school, their proposal left the tsar deeply disappointed.

Nicholas's vision of the educational reform becomes clear from the list of topics he intended to introduce for discussion at the State Council. Among them he specified the need to reduce the number of university students, to close women's higher courses in St. Petersburg and, if necessary, in other cities, and to bar the opening of new universities in St. Petersburg, Moscow, Kiev, Kharkov, and Odessa. He envisioned a middle school that would prepare the majority of its students for civil service and trade, while the minority would continue with university studies. Such a

---

[206] "Dnevnik A. A. Polovtsova," *Krasnyi arkhiv* 3 (1923), 135.

reform would cut down the student population, Nicholas concluded, and "order would be restored by itself and become firm."[207] Thus, by the time Meshcherskii arrived on the scene Nicholas had developed strong opinions about the direction he wanted the school reform to take and the way the student movement should be handled.

On December 13th, 1901, less than nine months after Vannovskii's appointment, Nicholas summoned him to a meeting at Tsarskoe Selo with ministers Witte, Sipiagin, Aleksandr Ermolov, Aleksei Kuropatkin, and Konstantin Pobedonostsev, among others, to discuss student disorders and Vannovskii's handling of the issue. In the course of the meeting the tsar read a draft of a *rescript* in which he expressed his deep dissatisfaction with Vannovskii's inability to end student disorders. Nicholas insisted that he had instructed Vannovskii to put more emphasis on the spiritual and religious nurture of the students, while the minister stressed the educational aspect of the reform.[208] The tsar announced that he had decided to halt further work on the reform and to close all educational institutions where unrest continued. In all others, he intended to allow the students ten days to end disorders or face dismissal from the university without the right of reentry to any institution of higher learning. Leaders of unrest were to be held responsible according to the full severity of the law.[209]

The tsar exhibited resoluteness and uncharacteristic straightforwardness when he expressed his dissatisfaction with Vannovskii's performance before a group of ministers. In the end, however, Nicholas relented and, under the pressure from the

---

[207] "Zametki Nikolaia II o narodnom obrazovanii," *Byloe* 2 (1918): 64.

[208] "Pis'mo Nikolaia II P.S. Vannovskomu," 80

[209] *Krizis samoderzhaviia v Rossii*, 131.

ministers, agreed to allow Vannovskii to stay on and complete the reform of the middle school despite his strong disagreement with him.[210] But although Nicholas appeared as if he had been convinced by his government, he remained entrenched in his position and was prepared to persevere in his fight against Vannovskii and his reform. This time, in order to achieve his goals, the tsar enlisted the services of Meshcherskii.

The subsequent campaign to drive Vannovskii out of office bore the stamp of Nicholas's approval if not direct encouragement, and this is clear from the events that followed. Meshcherskii was well aware of Nicholas's disappointment with Vannovskii's "lenient" approach to student unrest and that the tsar's dissatisfaction deepened when his favorite minister, Sipiagin, was assassinated by a disgruntled former university student in April, 1902. State Council member Aleksandr Polovtsov believed that Nicholas indirectly blamed Vannovskii for Sipiagin's death.[211] Shortly after, the prince initiated a press campaign against Vannovskii on the pages of *Grazhdanin.* He argued that only a return to classical education and restrictions on the number of students admitted to the universities would effectively de-radicalize the institutions of higher learning.

Meshcherskii's suggestion that a requirement of two ancient languages for admission to the university would lead to a considerable decrease in the number of students impressed Nicholas as an excellent solution to dampen student unrest. Impressed with Meshcherskii's ingenuity, the tsar even toyed with the idea of

---

[210] Ibid.

[211] "Dnevnik A. A. Polovstova," *Krasnyi arkhiv* 3 (1923), 136.

offering the prince the post of minister of education. Well aware of Nicholas's attitude toward officials, it would have been short-sighted for Meshcherskii to consider such an offer and jeopardize his more powerful position as courtier.

The tsar agreed with Meshcherskii's idea of strengthening the classical curriculum, but not because of his own background or interest in classics. According to the memoirs of one of the later ministers of education, Aleksandr Schwartz, the tsar was not much interested in the educational reform itself. "Our ministry was entirely alien to him," wrote Schwartz, "he was interested mostly in disorders or in individuals whom for some reason he knew and remembered. He very rarely gave me any special commissions or instructions."[212] Rather, Nicholas saw the educational system as a tool to inculcate patriotism and loyalty to the regime, and this objective was connected in his mind with a classical curriculum.[213]

The tsar also received an opinion on Vannovskii's reform program from his informal correspondent, Anatolii Klopov. "When Vannovskii was appointed minister, the first impression in society was far from positive," he reported to Nicholas, "everyone feared his old age, lack of expertise and experience, and the fact that he had been a military man all his life. Having visited the minister, however, Klopov was impressed with his clear understanding of the needs of the middle school and his own vision of curricula reform which would spare students from learning two classical languages. Klopov did not succeed in converting the tsar to his position.

---

[212] Aleksandr Schwartz, "Moi vospominaniya o gosudare," f. 338, op. 1, d. 3.4, p. 2, Otdel rukopisei Rossiiskoi Gosudarstvennoi biblioteki, quoted in Dominic Lieven, *Nicholas II: Emperor of All the Russias* (London, 1993), 89.

[213] The tsar's insistence on classical curriculum enjoyed some support among ministers.

We learn of this from one of Nicholas's letters to Meshcherskii: ". . . I have enclosed another letter from a person who writes to me but without success in influencing me. It is Klopov, whose name had once resounded throughout Russia. You'll see from this letter how much his opinion differs from my convictions."[214]

Sometime in February or early March, 1902, Vannovskii reported to the tsar that the work on the reform proposal had been completed and that he intended to introduce it at the State Council. Nicholas cautioned the minister that he would meet resistance there and should not count on his own support either. It is not clear whether or not the State Council was opposed to Vannovskii's proposal. More important, the minister never got a chance to have it examined by that institution. Nicholas decided the issue single handedly. In a private letter to Vannovskii, the tsar explained his disagreement with the minister's proposals for reform and reaffirmed his decision not to pander to popular demands. "A hasty revision of the present status of the middle school, a rushed creation of a new project, and its submission to the State Council," wrote Nicholas, "all of this bears the character of so-called public opinion. It is from this angle that I view this problem and that is why it appears dangerous to me."[215]

Nicholas's unwillingness to submit Vannovskii's proposal to the State Council presents an interesting problem. The State Council was a consultative institution and by law the sovereign could adopt either a majority or a minority opinion or he could write his own opinion and make it the law. In most cases, the

---

[214] Nicholas II to Meshcherskii, 13 April 1902, 130-131.

[215] "Pis'mo Nikolaia II P.S. Vannovskomu," 80-81.

tsars preferred to side with the majority opinion of the Council and thus convey their loyalty to consensus opinion. Why was Nicholas indisposed to following the established practice this time? Perhaps, Nicholas suspected that support existed in the State Council for Vannovskii's reform proposal and was reluctant to go against the majority opinion, thus defying the most significant legislative institution of the state. Yet, he was also pulled in the direction of personal responsibility for ruling Russia. "The awesome responsibility before God and before Russia lies on me, the burden of which I carry *consciously alone*," Nicholas explained in his letter to Vannovskii. "But in my opinion, it is only possible to carry such a responsibility when one is the master of his own wishes and actions."[216]

On April 5, Nicholas sent the prince the good news: Vannovskii was finally let go. He commissioned Meshcherskii to "scribble" a draft of a short *rescript* announcing Vannovskii's resignation. The guidelines were precise and clear. "It must express gratitude to the old man, who had taken upon himself such a burden solely out of devotion," instructed the tsar and added: "but not a word about the school and the school reform, because in that area he got muddled up."[217] A week later, Nicholas commissioned Meshcherskii to prepare a plan for the committee that would develop the school reform.[218]

The official *rescript* that announced Vannovskii's resignation said nothing about the difference of opinion between the minister and the monarch. Instead, it

---

[216] Ibid., 81.
[217] Nicholas II to Meshcherskii, 5 April 1902, 130.

[218] Nicholas II to Meshcherskii, 18 April 1902, 131.

cited the elderly minister's health problems. Such handling of the issue left Vannovskii deeply resentful. "I really passionately got involved in the problems of the school and think that it began to shed its former dreariness and deathly qualities, it began to revitalize, get inspired," Vannovskii complained to Polovtsov, "After such a hurtful incident I will stay at home and will no longer appear either in the [State] Council or in any of the palaces."

Like many others, Vannovskii attributed his defeat to Meshcherskii, who only a few days prior to the minister's resignation had boasted that Vannovskii would be dismissed "as a consequence of [Meshcherskii's] conversation with the tsar."[219] In *Grazhdanin,* the prince publicly expressed gratitude for St. Vladimir of the 3rd Degree conferred on him by Nicholas on the occasion of his birthday, augmenting the impression in society that Meshcherskii's position of favor with the tsar remained solid.[220]

As Vannovskii's successor, the tsar appointed the former professor of classics at Warsaw University, assistant minister of education, Grigorii Saenger, known for his translation of Aleksandr Pushkin's poem *Eugene Onegin* into Latin. Despite his impeccable credentials as classicist, Saenger had the reputation of a liberal, which explains why Nicholas continued to involve Meshcherskii in work on the school reform. "Saenger makes the best impression on me," wrote Nicholas to Meshcherskii on April 13, "try to get to know him; you may be able to help me

---

[219] "Dnevnik A. A. Polovstova" *Krasnyi arkhiv* 3 (1902), 135.

[220] Vinogradoff, *"Some Imperial Letters,"*153, n.211.

here."[221] But only five days later, the tsar hastened to call the prince off: "Perhaps it is better that you don't meet with Saenger for now."[222] Instead, Nicholas commissioned the prince to write a guiding *rescript* to Saenger. "The rescript needed some editing," Nicholas wrote to Meshcherskii, "but in general I like it. I am thinking of publishing it in May"[223]

Despite the encouraging comments, the *rescript* was still in editing stages all May. Nicholas returned it to Meshcherskii several times with precise instructions on the changes he wanted the prince to make. On May 14, the tsar informed the prince that he had decided to leave out the details about the middle school reform. Nicholas explained that he was reluctant to make public his opinion on the reform before submitting the proposal to the State Council. "Wouldn't [the Council] feel restrained by my directions?" he solicited Meshcherskii's opinion.

At the end of May, Nicholas made still more changes. "I crossed out the beginning; it might be good to also throw out the part concerning the universities. It is imperative to emphasize nurture. In any case," he concluded, "I have copied your original draft and given it to Saenger. It will serve him as guidance for the future reorganization of the school."[224] A week later, the tsar confirmed that he preferred the original draft of the *rescript* "especially if we add the thoughts on the necessity of religious and moral upbringing, about nurturing a sense of responsibility, discipline,

---

[221] Nicholas II to Meshcherskii, 13 April 1902, 130-131.

[222] Nicholas II to Meshcherskii, 18 April 1902, 131.

[223] Nicholas II to Meshcherskii, 23 April 1902, 131.

[224] Nicholas II to Meshcherskii, 26 May 1902, 132.

and order."[225] Finally, on June 2, the editing process was complete. "As you can see, I haven't made a single change," Nicholas informed Meshcherskii, "heart-felt thanks for your efforts and help."[226]

The *rescript*, published on June 10, reiterated Nicholas's vision for the middle school reform. It emphasized moral and religious aspects of education, discipline, order, and loyalty to the throne. Instead of Vannovskii's proposal for a unified middle school system, Nicholas instructed Saenger to create two separate systems, of which only one would prepare students for university. Universities were also expected to bring up students in the spirit of duty and order.

Nicholas lamented in the *rescript* that his "instructions on these issues have remained, unfortunately unrealized to this day." The tsar's complaint about his inability to demand the execution of his orders provides clues to the nature of Meshcherskii's relationship with Nicholas. It becomes clear that the monarch experienced difficulty in making his views "realized" by the administration and required an assistant to support him through the process.

Throughout the next two years, until 1905, Nicholas continued to engage Meshcherskii in government work. In addition to the student unrest, the peasant riots in the early 1900s presented the government with a serious challenge. The monarchy's inability to provide assistance to the agricultural sector with direct subsidies and affordable credit stemmed partly from its own precarious financial situation. The government's priorities lay in the industrialization and military

---

[225] Nicholas II to Meshcherskii, 30 May 1902, 133.

[226] Nicholas II to Meshcherskii, 2 June 1902, 133.

modernization of the empire. Minister of Finance Sergei Witte envisioned solving the problems of peasant impoverishment by means of eliminating the land commune and inducing rapid industrialization, which, he predicted, would draw together excess population into the cities and satiate land hunger. Both projects, however, required a long-term transformation of the empire's social and economic structure. In the meantime, the government's fiscal policies aroused widespread criticism and were held responsible for rural poverty and unrest.

In the summer of 1902, Meshcherskii convinced Nicholas to send him on a four-week tour of nine central and *privolzhskie* (in the Volga region) provinces, the areas of the recent peasant uprisings, in order to interview the nobles, inspect everything and everybody and report it all to the tsar.[227] Ever since the failed Klopov expedition of 1898 (discussed in chapter three), Nicholas had been anxious to learn "the truth" about the troubled countryside not from official reports or rumors but from a clandestine observer, a personal incognito royal envoy who could be trusted to see things with Nicholas's eyes. Meshcherskii seemed an ideal candidate for the task. "I very much approve of your idea to take a trip around Russia during the summer," the tsar wrote to the prince instructing him to write him about everything he saw and heard.[228]

The news of the prince's mission quickly spread throughout the government circles of St. Petersburg, inspiring widespread indignation over such an overt delegation of unofficial authority to Meshcherskii. A member of the State Council,

---

[227] Nicholas II to Meshcherskii, 26 May 1902, 132.

[228] Nicholas II to Meshcherskii, 26 May 1902, 132.

Aleksandr Kireev, recorded in his diary on July 8 that "an absurd rumor [had spread] that Meshcherskii was sent to tour Russia, interview the nobles, examine everything and everybody and give his opinion to the tsar. . . now this gossip is being confirmed. Still, one does not want to believe it!!!"[229]

In the description of the trip published in *Grazhdanin* in the fall of 1902, Meshcherskii assured his readers that St. Petersburg's panic over the ensuing crisis was overestimated. "When I was departing, it seemed to me that I was going to some country doomed by St. Petersburg chatter to immediate demise." Meshcherskii wrote sarcastically in a *Grazhdanin* editorial. "It seemed to me that I would hear the screams and shouts of incredible hatred, moans of the dying, fraternal war. . ." Not only had the peasantry calmed down, the prince claimed, but the nobles' participation in the liberal movement must not worry the authorities because the landowners remained deeply committed to the old order.[230] Meshcherskii's analysis of the agricultural crisis differed drastically from the descriptions of peasant grievances by Nicholas's other unofficial correspondent, Anatolii Klopov. It also ignored the widespread dissatisfaction among the nobility with the government's inefficient policies that only exacerbated its precarious financial position and a steadily declining social status in the provinces.

---

[229] A. A. Kireev, "Dnevnik," 8 June 1902, Otdel rukopisei Russkoi gosudarstvennoi biblioteki, f. 126, box 13, p. 155, quoted in Solovev, *Samoderzhavie i dvorianstvo,* 67.

[230] "Dnevnik," 9 July 1902, *Grazhdanin* 54, p. 16, quoted in Solovev, *Samoderzhavie i dvorianstvo*, 68.

Nicholas was apparently satisfied with the outcome of Meshcherskii's expedition and found the prince's reporting reassuring. "I sincerely thank you for the last letter and the synopsis of the trip. I found, as always, many good ideas which I share," Nicholas wrote to the prince.[231] With the tsar's encouragement Meshcherskii also compiled a 40-page report on the condition of the peasantry and the ways for improving its standard of living. He criticized the government for pandering to the peasantry with reforms such as the emancipation of 1861, which altered the traditional way of life in the country. The government, he felt, should improve the material life of peasants by facilitating the acquisition of property insurance, livestock, and agricultural tools and assisting them with developing the local crafts industries. The prince also recommended placing stricter administrative controls over the rural population by strengthening the authority of the government-appointed land captains and governors.[232]

Meshcherskii understood well that the autocracy would have to grant significant economic and political concessions in order to eliminate the crisis. The prince himself was rather skeptical about the effectiveness of reforms promoted by the cumbersome and heartless bureaucracy. Instead, he proposed issuing a manifesto as an act of royal charisma, a solemn address from the throne that would captivate and lead the wavering population. As Meshcherskii wrote in *Grazhdanin*, the manifesto was intended to "create an expectation of something hopeful ahead."[233]

---

[231] Vinogradoff, "*Some Imperial Letters,"* 133-134.

[232] Soloviev, *Samoderzhavie i dvorianstvo*, 69-70.

The idea was to cleverly deploy liberal rhetoric in order to convince the public that the government was prepared to collaborate with society, but to do so within the framework of autocratic practices and principles. Meshcherskii's ideas emerged in the Imperial Manifesto of 26 February 1903, the most significant of the pre-1905 political statements made by the monarchy.

To pave way for the manifesto, Meshcherskii published a number of editorials in *Grazhdanin* in April 1902 where he described liberalism as fully compatible with the principles of the autocracy.[234] Elevated above party and class conflicts, the prince argued, the autocracy was in a unique position to offer equal protection and to guarantee essential freedoms to all its subjects. He attacked the liberal opposition for its lack of support for the regime. The monarchy, Meshcherskii wrote, "respects liberty under the condition that it is not mere willfulness, which, in itself, is a breach of liberty."[235] Liberty to Meshcherskii also meant gradual de-bureaucratization of the empire and delegation of responsibility to the local people, who possessed common sense, the necessary expertise, and were best suited to find solutions to their local needs.

Meshcherskii's correspondence with Nicholas indicates that the work on the manifesto began almost one year prior to its publication. On April 18, 1902, Nicholas informed the prince that he had read the draft and approved of the idea.[236] However,

---

[233] Quoted in Soloviev, "K istorii proishozhdeniia," 193.

[234] Soloviev, "K istorii proiskhozhdeniia," 199.

[235] Quoted in Soloviev, "K istorii proiskhozhdeniia," 200.

[236] Nicholas II to Meshcherskii, 18 April 1902, 131.

in mid-May Nicholas forwarded the manifesto to Viacheslav Plehve, his new minister of the interior, who advised the tsar to postpone the publication until 21 October, the anniversary of Nicholas's accession to the throne, when all the preparatory work on the reforms outlined in the manifesto would be completed.[237]

Plehve's relationship with Nicholas illustrates the type of interaction the tsar sought with his officials. Plehve's personality and police background call to mind Nicholas's recent pledge to Meshcherskii to keep things as they had been under Sipiagin. Back in April, the tsar wrote to the prince of his determination to exercise a more active role in the government. "What is necessary at this time is not only firmness, but also severity and, believe me, it has appeared in my soul. The legacy of my dear Sipiagin is entirely in me. …Everything must be like before, I told [Plehve], like it was under Sipiagin."[238] A man of ceremony and aplomb, Plehve, according to his assistant, Kryzhanovskii, used archaic forms of expression and often impressed his listeners with witticisms, but his speech was utterly devoid of either thoughtfulness or creativity.[239] Plehve lacked Witte's sophistication and intelligence as well as Sipiagin's suppleness and approachability, but he possessed an invaluable ability to predict Nicholas's emotional responses to political issues. For example, Plehve won the tsar's confidence by demonstrating his unswerving support for Nicholas's Far Eastern plans (discussed in chapter five).

---

[237] Nicholas II to Meshcherskii, 14 May 1902, 132.

[238] Nicholas II to Meshcherskii, 5 April 1902, 130.

[239] S. E. Kryzhanovskii, "Plehve," Kryzhanovskii fond, 7, Bakhmeteff Archive, Columbia University Library.

But Plehve's most valuable tactic – the one he shared with his predecessor, Sipiagin—was his ability to work with Nicholas's favorites. Most government officials realized that unofficial influences on the tsar were unavoidable and many cultivated them for their own benefit. But few were as adept at it as Plehve. "Autocrats outwardly listen to their ministers," Plehve believed, "while almost always people on the side find easy access to their hearts."[240]

Plehve did his best not to defy Meshcherskii openly even though, according to Minister of War Aleksei Kuropatkin, he "considered Prince Meshcherskii's influence on the tsar harmful, the influence which, however, is only suspected and of which Meshcherskii boasts."[241] In any case, the tsar reads "Meshcherskiis's] reports and forms certain opinions which one must take into consideration," Plehve told the minister of education, Vladimir Glazov. "Although the tsar is a gentle person, he can at times be stubborn and, although it is possible to change his views, it is necessary to sustain them so as to not cause hidden discontent."[242]

Plehve's diplomatic knack earned him Nicholas's trust. The tsar not only consulted Plehve about the appropriateness of the publication of the manifesto, but also expected Meshcherskii to involve the minister in the work on the manifesto and

---

[240] Vladimir Gurko, *Features and Figures of the Past: Government and Opinion in the Reign of Nicholas II* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1939), 278, quoted in Edward Judge, *Plehve: Repression and Reform in Imperial Russia, 1902-1904* (Syracuse, NY, 1983), 152.

[241] Quoted in Solovev, "K istorii proishozhdeniia," 135.

[242] Ibid., 136.

discuss with him "all the questions you intend to write me about."[243] With the tsar's encouragement, Meshcherskii and Plehve collaborated on Nicholas's political speeches for his tour of the Kursk provinces in October 1902. "I am asking you to put together a few words, which I would like to say to the *volost'* elders in Moscow or Kursk," the tsar instructed Meshcherskii, "I find this idea quite interesting. For the people the language must be simple and clear."[244] Bearing an unmistakable stamp of Meshcherskii's advice to Nicholas to broaden the support for his rule, the speeches promised to involve the nobility and the zemstvo assemblies in the work on local peasant legislation.[245]

Although Meshcherskii had assisted Plehve in securing the appointment and expected to find in him a long-term ally and benefactor, it soon became evident that their visions of domestic politics were at odds.[246] Both advocated reform of the local government in order to ease the burden placed on the central administration and expedite decision-making, but Plehve's political program of decentralization was similar to the prince's only in name. Meshcherskii argued for the creation of a collegiate council on local affairs, consisting of representatives of several ministries, which would ensure the speedy communication of the local needs to the capital. In

---

[243] Nicholas II to Meshcherskii, 26 May 1902, 132.

[244] Nicholas II to Meshcherskii, 16 August, 1902, 134.

[245] *Krizis samoderzhaviia v Rossii,* 136.

[246] Vitte, *Vospominaniia,* vol. 2, 191; Gurko, *Features and Figures,*120; While it is difficult to assess who played the crucial role in appointing Plehve, it seems clear that Meshcherskii made his voice heard because on April 2 Nicholas informed the Prince in a letter that he was considering Plehve's candidacy.

addition, his decentralization proposal focused on delegating more power in the provinces to the local nobility and thus diminishing bureaucratization. Plehve's priority was to strengthen the authority of the ministry of internal affairs by investing the provincial governors with more power. Drawing on the counter-reforms of the late 1880s and early 1890s which had significantly reduced the autonomy and altered the social composition of the local elected governments, the zemstvo assemblies, Plehve envisioned a reform of the *gubernias* which would extend the powers of the governors and the governor-generals, in effect making them the local rulers, or as Nicholas appreciatively commented on one of Plehve's reports on the proposal, "masters."[247]

These and other political differences between Meshcherskii and Plehve resulted in a bitter rivalry between them and at the same time in further postponement of the publication of the manifesto. On November 26, 1902, Nicholas gave Plehve's version of the manifesto to Meshcherskii requesting the prince to polish it and send it back with an explanation of the changes. But the manifesto was still in the stage of revision at the beginning of 1903. "I decided not to publish it tomorrow," Nicholas informed the impatient Meshcherskii on January 5, 1903, "because the matter is very serious, and I am still studying it. Take care, believe, and hope."[248] Meshcherskii blamed Plehve for the delay. At the end of January, Meshcherskii sent Nicholas his diary in which he described his conversation with Senator Sergei Platonov about the fate of the manifesto. Platonov portrayed Plehve as an insensitive and deceitful

---

[247] *Krizis samoderzhaviia v Rossii*, 137-8.

[248] Nicholas II to Meshcherskii, 5 January 1903, 136.

minister, who held the manifesto in his deathly clutches. "It does not benefit Plehve," wrote Meshcherskii relating Platonov's words, "for the tsar to reveal himself in all his might. … The Manifesto would elevate the tsar and compromise Plehve; that is why he will prevent its publication or damage it." The prince described how he stayed awake through the night pondering over Platonov's truthful words and concerned that the tsar had fallen under the evil influence of his minister.[249]

In *Grazhdanin*, Meshcherskii attacked Plehve as a proponent of bureaucratization. He criticized the increasing number of assistants the minister of internal affairs required and the new authority the position commanded. "In the old days," wrote Meshcherskii, "the minister of internal affairs had time to take up clay sculpting, while the minister of education found the time to learn Greek. Nowadays, the paperwork increased so much that the minister [of internal affairs] is in constant need of additional assistants."[250]

But Meshcherskii's efforts to chip away at Plehve's authority did not produce the desired result. Nicholas continued to consult both men and to pass versions of the manifesto between them, while remaining actively involved in the editing process himself. Historian Boris Ananich compared the three drafts of the manifesto deposited in the State Archives in Moscow and suggested that Nicholas himself may have made the final corrections to Meshcherskii's draft and that those corrections were reflected in the published version.[251]

---

[249] RGADA, f. 1378, op. 2, d. 29, p. 1-2ob; *Krizis samoderzhaviia v Rossii*, 139.

[250] "V pechati," *Novoe vremia*, 27 January 1903, 3.

Finally, on February 25, 1903, Plehve received the final draft from Nicholas who informed the minister that he intended to publish it the next day. The final text of the manifesto, prepared with the collaboration of Plehve's assistants, Vladimir Gurko and Dmitri Liubimov, was a much more conservative version of Meshcherskii's original text. The clause dealing with the establishment of freedom of speech and conscience in accordance with "the spirit of the Church and State order" was the first to go. "The article on freedom of speech I crossed out completely," the tsar had informed Meshcherskii at the end of the editing process on January 14, 1903, "It would be untimely."[252] The manifesto was purged of rhetoric as "to bring the people's needs closer to the throne," "satisfaction of the needs of public welfare," and "confidence in the free social forces." All references to "the people" had been replaced by "the fatherland" and "the state." Valentin Diakin noted that elimination of the numbering of the articles of the manifesto made the individual statements appear less defined.

Entitled "The Provisions for the Perfection of the State Order," the manifesto sought to communicate to society the government's resolve to strengthen the bonds between the monarchy and the people and oppose the revolutionary movement.[253] It emphasized the government's determination to safeguard the interests of the landed gentry and the peasantry, and promised to engage the "worthiest people" of the empire in the work on the peasant legislation, while isolating those who sought to

---

[251] Ananich, 161

[252] Nicholas II to Meshcherskii, 14 January 1903, 136.

[253] On the manifesto, see Iu. B. Solovev, "K istorii poishozhdeniia," 198.

introduce political changes alien to the cultural roots of the Russian people, such as popular representation and a constitution. The manifesto also announced the elimination of mutual responsibility for tax collection in the peasant commune, and promised to facilitate exit from the commune for the individual peasants.

Designed to create an atmosphere of reconciliation between the monarchy and society, the manifesto achieved quite the opposite. In fact, it played a role in further radicalizing the population and advancing the ensuing crisis that would engulf the country two years later. To members of the educated society the manifesto was a sign of the monarchy's deep resentment at initiating substantial reforms. The date of the publication, the anniversary of Alexander III's birthday, communicated to the country Nicholas's determination to maintain continuity with the reign of his father. Confusion reigned over the interpretations of the individual statements and the very purpose of the document, which simultaneously promised to involve the representatives of society in the work of the government and to step up the prosecution of the dissenters.

The work on the manifesto, a process which brought together three components of the autocratic apparatus—the tsar, the ministers, and a member of the unofficial elite—is an elaborate illustration of government decision-making under Nicholas II. It demonstrates the interconnectedness of the three sources of authority and indicates the limits of both the ministerial power and unofficial advice. Nicholas's involvement in the work on the manifesto sheds new light on the monarch's practice of his power. Far from being a passive ruler resentful of his responsibilities, Nicholas exhibited genuine interest in government work. By

engaging both Plehve and Meshcherskii, the tsar was able to solicit advice from official as well as unofficial sources and to remain the ultimate editor of the manifesto.

Despite their closeness to the tsar, both Meshcherskii's and Plehve's political power and influence had distinct boundaries. In part, the limitations were dictated by the forms of autocratic rule which challenged the ruler to achieve and maintain a degree of autonomy from his official and unofficialadvisers in order to have control over the policies**.** The personal rule to which Nicholas aspired required a high-level of fragmentation of the decision-making and advice-giving structures and perpetuated an erratic and confused method of government. This explains why Nicholas often made Meshcherskii and the bureaucracy compete with each other over policy negotiations.

The bureaucracy's claim that the prince exerted a dominant influence on decision-making in 1902 and 1903 was only partly true. As an independent center of power, Meshcherskii was motivated by political, ideological, as well as financial concerns. He employed the several methods of influence at his disposal, such as taking sides during a controversial political decision the government was discussing, placing his protégés in influential positions in the empire, or attacking in the press those who crossed his path. The bureaucracy feared public attacks on its members in the press, considering them detrimental to their careers even if the criticism was obviously spiteful and the charges proved to be false. To avoid the trouble of unnecessary rumors and gossip or the threat of a prolonged press campaign, various ministers including Stolypin, Witte, Krivoshein, and Sviatopolk-Mirskii, among others, agreed to occasionally grant Meshcherskii's requests as a form of

"inexpensive insurance against the attacks and insinuations of *Grazhdanin.*" Stolypin told Kokovtsov that he satisfied Meshcherskii's request for a 200,000-ruble subsidy in 1908 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of his career as a journalist in order to "remove his anger from our path so that he does not bother us with his intrigues. Trust me, it will benefit Russia more than these 200,000 rubles"[254]

The prince appeared at a critical point in Nicholas's individual and political development and played a significant role as the tsar's confidant. Nicholas's friendship with Meshcherskii and the prince's encouragement of Nicholas's personal rule contributed to the tsar's resoluteness and increased political independence. In the prince, Nicholas acquired an ideological ally and an assistant in dealing with officials. Yet, we find no instances where Meshcherskii succeeded in significantly changing the tsar's already set opinions. Throughout their relationship, Nicholas clung to his beliefs and, as we shall see in the next chapter, he parted ways with the prince as soon as he no longer enjoyed the "coincidence" of their opinions.

By the end of 1903, the correspondence between Nicholas and Meshcherskii revealed the beginning of a rift between them. The prince was no longer entirely accommodating to Nicholas's idiosyncrasies. Resentful of the tsar's fascination with the occult, Meshcherskii cautioned the Nicholas about the rumors in society of the influence of Philippe and his hypnotic séances during which the ghost of the deceased Alexander III called for the disregard of the principles of the Orthodox Church and used dark magic to induce the birth of a son. This gossip was ubiquitous, Meshcherskii warned, and the people were afraid that their tsar would be completely

---

[254] K. A. Krivoshein, *Aleksandr Vasil'evich Krivoshein. Sud'ba rossiiskogo reformatora* (Moscow, 1993), 158-9.

confused and bewitched.[255] As in religious matters, in questions of foreign policy Meshcherskii also became an albatross by strongly opposing Nicholas's plans for Far Eastern expansion (discussed in chapter 5).

The prince's role in helping Nicholas reassert himself in his own eyes had been accomplished; no longer stimulated by his ideas, the tsar turned to new issues and sought new advisers. In one of his letters to the prince, Nicholas thanked him for his "truthful words," confessing that he grew angry with Meshcherskii as he read them, but later realized that the prince was right and should continue to write him sincerely. However, while the tsar expected the prince to "warn me and highlight issues for me," he then had to step back and let Nicholas make his own final decisions. "It is totally ridiculous if you think that I am going to fulfill all of your orders," the tsar wrote sarcastically referring to Meshcherskii's prodding in foreign policy matters. "I have my own opinion and my own will, and you will soon see that."[256] Meshcherskii's opposition to the tsar in religious and foreign policy matters and his demands that Nicholas heed his advice drove the tsar further away from him. The final break between them would come in 1905 when Meshcherskii temporarily expressed support for constitutional concessions to the public.

---

[255] Meshcherskii to Nicholas II and Aleksandra Fedorovna, 1 November 1902, RGADA, f. 1378, op. 2, no. 17, p. 1-4.

[256] Nicholas II to Meshcherskii, 1 May 1903, 136.

6. The Russo-Japanese War: Nicholas and Aleksandr Bezobrazov.

By 1901, the ministers in charge of Russia's foreign policy became disconcerted by the seemingly increasing influence on Nicholas of Aleksandr Bezobrazov, a retired Guard's captain without any official position in the administration. Finance Minister Sergei Witte complained in a private letter to War Minister Aleksei Kuropatkin that Bezobrazov visited "no less than two times a week -- *for hours at a time* [with Nicholas] – he, of course, talks all sorts of nonsense and shady plans." "Bezobrazov is stirring up some sort of trouble," Witte warned and added, "it is hard to get at the truth given the Sovereign's character."[257]

Nicholas's conspicuous support of Bezobrazov and demonstrations of personal trust contributed to the widespread accusations of Bezobrazov's powerful influence in foreign policy. The impression of Bezobrazov's omnipotence quickly resonated throughout society. Gossip and rumors filled the void wherever the facts were missing. Having recently arrived from abroad, Bezobrazov's wife was stunned to discover just how influential her husband had become with Nicholas: "I simply cannot comprehend how [Aleksandr] can play such an enormous role; don't they realize that he is half-mad?"[258]

What came to be known as the Bezobrazov Affair, one of the most infamous instances of extra-administrative interference during Nicholas's reign, occurred on the eve of the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-1905. Officials blamed inconsistency and

---

[257] M. N. Pokrovskii, ed., *Russko-Iaponskaia voina: iz dnevnikov A. N. Kuropatkina i N. P. Linevicha* (Leningrad, 1926), quoted in David M. McDonald, *United Government and Foreign Policy in Russia 1900-1914* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 31.

[258] Sergei Vitte, *Vospominaniia*, vol. 2 (Tallinn, 1994), 174.

lack of firmness in Russia's Far Eastern diplomacy on Bezobrazov's interference. Minister of Foreign Affairs Vladimir Lamsdorff expressed the prevailing view that "the complete disorganization of our political activity in the Far East, the occult intervention of a pack of irresponsible adventurers and intriguers had to lead us to a catastrophe."[259] So widespread were the charges against Bezobrazov and his colleagues in the aftermath of Russia's defeat that a special commission was set up to investigate their allegedly damaging role in the events leading to the war.

Nicholas did not emerge unscathed from the incident. Paradoxically, however, contemporaries spared him of major responsibility for the diplomatic failure in the Far East. They accused Nicholas of weakness and indecisiveness but largely exonerated him as a victim of intrigues who was confused by the seductive rhetoric of Bezobrazov and his colleagues.

The amount of influence Bezobrazov wielded on Nicholas in the years before the war and the question of his responsibility for provoking the military conflict with Japan has been a matter of contention in Russian historiography. Some historians of the Russo-Japanese war, such as Boris Romanov, John Albert White, and, most recently, David McDonald, consider Bezobrazov and his colleagues to be the major culprits in the outbreak of the war. McDonald sees the increasing influence of these unofficial advisers, "who played a key role in events leading to the Russo-Japanese War," as a symptom of a deep crisis in Russian government.[260] Others, like Andrew

---

[259] Lamzdorf to Prince L. P. Urusov, Urusov Collection, box 1 (n.p.), Bakhmeteff Archive, Columbia University, quoted in McDonald, *United Government,* 73.

[260] McDonald, *United Government,* 10-11; John Albert White, *The Diplomacy of the Russo-Japanese War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964); Boris Romanov,

Malozemoff, have argued that Bezobrazov's influence was most effective in the inter-ministerial rivalries, but that in the sphere of foreign policy he had little authority.[261]

Historians Ian Nish and David Schimmelpennick van der Oye have also cautioned against exaggerating Bezobrazov's role in the diplomatic prelude to the war. They have pointed out that several government officials shared Bezobrazov's position and that Bezobrazov had been out of favor for at least four months when the war began. Nish has argued that the complexity of the diplomatic situation on the eve of the war in both countries rules out any single explanation for the causes of the war. The impetus for the conflict came from the extremists in both countries, and strategic considerations played a pivotal role.

Schimmelpennick van der Oye describes the ideological climate in Russia in the years prior to the war and demonstrates that powerful imperialist tendencies emanated from numerous sections of society and the bureaucracy, and most importantly, the tsar himself. Thus, the responsibility for the outbreak of the war cannot be limited to Bezobrazov's ideological influence. The relationship between the tsar and the Bezobrazov group, Schimmelpennick van der Oye believes, is instructive because it illustrates the significance of the non-bureaucratic aspect of decision-making in Imperial Russia as well as Nicholas's anti-institutional leanings.

Russia in Manchzhuria, 1892-1906. Trans. By Susan Wilbur Jones (Ann Arbor, 1952).

[261] Andrew Malozemoff, *Russian Far Eastern Policy, 1881-1904: With Special Emphasis on the Causes of the Russo-Japanese War*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958).

"Bezobrazov was symptomatic of the emperor's increasing tendency to bypass his ministers for advice on important questions of state."[262]

If, as Nish and Schimmelpennick van der Oye suggest, Bezobrazov's views conformed to the overall political climate in the country, and his projects were in many respects similar to those of several other members of the administration, what was the nature of his influence on the tsar and why were his rhetoric and ideas so attractive to Nicholas? Did Nicholas turn to Bezobrazov because he genuinely sought alternative political advice? Or did the tsar intend to use him, along with Anatolii Klopov and Vladimir Meshcherskii, to express his already set opinions? This chapter further probes the implication of the Bezobrazov Affair for identifying Nicholas's ruling style and strategies. Set in the context of Nicholas's entire reign, the tsar's relationship with Bezobrazov and his colleagues offers valuable insight into the tsar's conception of his authority and his seemingly arbitrary behavior.

Nicholas's interest in the Far East had awakened several years prior to his acquaintance with Bezobrazov. In fact, Russia's Far Eastern orientation was one of a set of foreign policy objectives Nicholas inherited from his father's reign. Under Alexander III, Russia's priorities lay in Europe, where Russia's western frontier was considered weakened by rivalry between Germany and France. In addition, the Balkans, where a portion of population shared a religion and elements of language and culture with the Russians, had historically been an object of Russian nationalist

---

[262] David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Towards the Rising Sun. Russian ideologies of empire and the path to war with Japan* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2001), 190.

sentiment. Russia also regarded itself the heir to the Ottoman Empire's possessions in Asia Minor, especiallyConstantinople.

In the early 1890s, some members of the administration became interested in pursuing spheres of influence in the Far East, especially the Chinese province of Manchuria. China, significantly weakened by the second half of the nineteenth century, had several imperialist powers, including Germany, the US, Britain, and Japan, vying for parts of its territory. On the border of China, Russia found itself well positioned to participate in this process. Russia made its first inroads into Far Eastern affairs in 1891, when Witte introduced his project of building the Trans-Siberian Railway across the Chinese province of Manchuria, connecting the Russian Far East with the better developed western and central regions of the empire. Witte envisioned a gradual and "peaceful" penetration of China with the view of setting up spheres of influence to promote the economic development of Russia.

Already in his first years as head of the Russian Empire, Nicholas and some of his officials identified the Far East as an area that would bear his reign's stamp in the history of territorial expansion. Several practitioners and specialists in the Far East had fostered this view. In the late nineteenth century, the region's untapped economic and cultural potential inspired a movement among prominent Russian scholars, explorers, geographers, and politicians, such as the chemist Dmitri Mendeleev, the explorer Vasilii Semyonov-Tyan-Shanskii, and the geographer Nikolai Przhevalskii. These men argued persuasively that the focus of the new era in the development of Russian economy and power should shift to the Pacific.[263]

---

[263] see Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Towards the Rising Sun.*

Przhevalskii was the representative of what Schimmelpennick van der Oye has called "conquistador imperialism," an opinion that China had become weak, and its territories lay open for easy annexation by the Russian Empire.[264] The editor of *Sankt-Peterbursgskie vedomosti*, Esper Ukhtomskii, Nicholas's old acquaintance and companion on his travels to the East, argued that Russia was culturally closer to China than to the West and should occupy itself more in Eastern affairs. Nicholas had been attracted to these opinions ever since his voyage to the Far East in 1890, when he traveled across the vast and underdeveloped landmass of Russian Siberia and, according to one historian, became "seized by the spirit of the pioneer and his juvenile imagination played with grandiose ideas."[265]

The opportunity for direct involvement emerged in 1896, when Russia assisted China in paying its war indemnity and pressured Japan into giving up occupation of the strategically important Port Arthur. In return for these favors, Russia requested and was granted permission by the Chinese government to build a railroad across northern Manchuria. Russia's involvement in Chinese affairs exacerbated its rivalry with Japan, the rapidly industrializing dominant imperialist power in the region. But Witte's skillful diplomatic maneuvering significantly alleviated Japan's resentment and enabled Russia to maintain its hold in Manchuria.

By 1898, Witte had become the central figure in the Russian government. His ministry of finance not only controlled the development of commerce and industry, but also exercised authority in questions of foreign policy in various parts of the

---

[264] Ibid., 210.

[265] Constantin de Grunwald, *Le Tsar Nicholas II* (Paris, 1965), 123, quoted in Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun*, 21.

empire. This included the Far East where the minister established various financial companies, the most significant of which was the Russo-Chinese Bank, to support and invigorate commerce in Northern Manchuria along the railway, which was completed in May 1899.[266] Despite Witte's claim that the building of the railroad was a peaceful enterprise and in accordance with the agreement of the Chinese government, its purpose was partly political rather than strictly economic.

Witte envisioned the gradual expansion of Russian economic and political influence beyond the railroad zone in the future: first, the colonization of Russia's Far Eastern provinces, then, possibly areas of China and Korea. As he explained in one of his reports to Nicholas, "Given our enormous frontier with China and our exceptionally favorable situation, the absorption by Russia of a considerable portion of the Chinese Empire is only a question of time…"[267] But the minister was determined to exercise caution and avoid confrontation with Japan or China, realizing that any military conflict in the Far East would be catastrophic for an economically and socially strained Russia.[268] The ministers Lamsdorf and Kuropatkin shared Witte's views.

In the early 1900s, the tsar's support for Witte, Kuropatkin, and Lamsdorf had been visibly eroding as Nicholas became attracted to the ideas of Bezobrazov and his colleague, Vladimir Vonlianliarskii. The two men, closely connected through past military service to Grand Duke Aleksandr Mikhailovich and former Minister of the

---

[266] McDonald, *United Government,* 12.

[267] *Memoirs of Witte*, (New York, 1967), 122.

[268] John White, *The Diplomacy of the Russo-Japanese War*, (Princeton, 1964), 26.

Imperial Court Ivan Vorontsov-Dashkov, had acquired a forestry concession on the Korean side of the Yalu river. But more than economic, Bezobrazov's and Vonliarliarskii's ambitions were political. In early 1898, they presented a proposal to Nicholas to use the concession as an umbrella company loosely modeled on the British East India Company, which under the disguise of a business enterprise would become a political tool in Russia's colonization of Korea and the exploitation of that country's natural resources. Bezobrazov's enterprise, which he called the East Asian Development Company, would have a monopoly on all activities in North Korea and Manchuria and report directly to the emperor. In addition, the company would be a barrier to Japanese expansionism and protect Russia's influence in Manchuria.

The idea appealed to Nicholas for two reasons. First, Russia's virtually unchecked and centuries-long expansionist drive across the continent had significantly slowed down and, by the late 1800s, the empire had not participated in the competition for colonies, which had long become a standard practice of national enrichment in the West. At the same time, Nicholas also found attractive the image of sovereign promoting loyal subjects who advanced the economic well-being of the country. Neither Nicholas nor Bezobrazov emphasized the economic aspect of the plan as a route to self-enrichment. Nicholas, by many accounts, was never concerned with the accumulation of private wealth, and Bezobrazov, whom even Witte considered the more honest man of the group, sincerely believed that he was acting in the best interest of the country and the monarchy.[269]

---

[269] Vitte, *Vospominaniia,* 173, Vladimir Gurko*, Features and Figures of the Past: Government and Opinion in the Reign of Nicholas II* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1939), 264.

It was not the originality of Bezobrazov's idea that attracted Nicholas. In fact, the structure of Bezobrazov's enterprise, its monopoly status, and its purpose was quite similar to Witte's Russo-Chinese Bank. The major difference between Bezobrazov and Witte lay in what they represented to Nicholas in relationship to his conception of his authority and his role as the Russian autocrat.[270] Witte and his colleagues in the administration represented the bureaucratic structure with its de facto institutional restraint on Nicholas's theoretically unlimited authority. As professional experts and executives of the imperial will, the officials carried the most political responsibility and were often suspected by their critics outside the administration of undermining Nicholas as the ultimate decision-maker. A powerful politician and a man of strong personality and opinions, Witte, more than anyone else, was blamed by his rivals in the government and outside of it for usurping the tsar's authority. Nicholas, who resented Witte for his highhanded approach and the authority he had amassed at the expense of other ministries, shared these attitudes.

Bezobrazov and his associates, on the other hand, posed as an alternative power-center and a rival to the bureaucracy. By supporting his unofficial advisers, Nicholas reaffirmed his claims to unrestricted autocracy. Moreover, Bezobrazov's charisma, enthusiasm, and his humble and easy attitude toward the tsar contrasted favorably with Witte's arrogance or Kuropatkin's honest pessimism. Nicholas found an informal communication with Bezobrazov and his colleagues—padded with exuberant flattery— stimulating and encouraging. As Viacheslav Plehve remarked on the rise of Bezobrazov to prominence, "…the Sovereign had been extremely

---

[270] McDonald, *United Government,* 32.

displeased with the ministers' opposition. One must not contradict him abruptly. That is why the Sovereign had turned to Bezobrazov."[271]

In their letters and conversations with Nicholas, Bezobrazov and his associates frequently contrasted their loyalty and patriotism with the inertia, corruption, and power-hunger of the bureaucracy. They blamed Russia's domestic and foreign problems on the ministerial fragmentation and incessant inter-departmental rivalries. Above all, they criticized the officials for misleading or inadequately informing the tsar, thus denying him his right of exercising unlimited power. As personal servants of Nicholas and the guardians of the "autonomous" imperial will, Bezobrazov and his colleagues aspired to a position and status with the tsar that would elevate them above the official administration. Like Klopov, they saw their "mission" in liberating Nicholas from the bureaucratic web which had ensnared Russia and undermined her strides towards great power status.

Bezobrazov's anti-ministerial rhetoric appealed to Nicholas's own desire to purify his authority, loosen the restraining power of bureaucratic institutions, and thus recreate the myth of a national monarchy. A senior member of the State Council, Aleksandr Polovtsov, observed in his diary in July 1901 that "the young tsar feels more and more contempt for the organs of his own power and begins to believe in the beneficial strength of his own autocracy, which he manifests sporadically, without preliminary discussion and without any link to the overall course of policy."[272]

---

[271] "Dnevnik A. N. Kuropatkina," *Krasnyi arkhiv* 2 (1922), 68-69, quoted in McDonald, *United Government,* 68.

[272] Dominic Lieven, *Nicholas II: Emperor of All the Russias* (London, 1993), 99.

In a letter to his wife, Bezobrazov depicted himself as His Majesty's "personal secretary." There is no evidence to suggest that he used the same language in his communications with the tsar; however, it is possible to assume that the ethos was representative of their interactions. The image of a "personal secretary" toiling in the background while leaving his master freedom of creative activity and visibility had a special appeal to the tsar. In reality, Nicholas never had a secretary. Following the tradition established by Nicholas I, he personally read and answered most of the letters addressed to him, both private and state-related. He spent much of his time going through the trivia: his diaries and letters almost always ended with lamentations at the amount of "reading" he had to do that day. Many of the private requests made to the tsar concerned such matters as name changes, permission for divorce or marriage, presentations at court, and appeals for financial assistance. Yet, despite the mundane nature of most appeals, Nicholas refused to assign the responsibility to deal with the correspondence to an official secretary. The idea of having an intermediary was distasteful to Nicholas not only because he enjoyed the image of a "toiling tsar" at work on behalf of his subjects, but also because an official personal secretary would doubtlessly inspire rumors that he served as a funnel, a gatekeeper letting the emperor see only papers the secretary found necessary. As Mosolov explained,

> It would have been necessary to take a third party into his confidence and the tsar hated to confide his ideas to anybody. There was another danger – the secretary might magnify his position, impose his own personality, try to influence his master… who was not prepared to consult anything but his own consciousness. He wanted to be alone, alone with his conscience.[273]

---

[273] A. Mosolov, *At the Court of the Lat Tsar. Being the Memoirs of A. A. Mosolov, Head of the Court Chancellery 1900-1916* (London, 1935), 12-13, quoted in Andrew

A personal secretary of the Bezobrazov type was an entirely different figure – a secret, devoted person who provided a refreshingly un-bureaucratic inspiration, familiar political advice, and emotional support. Playing down his obvious personal and political ambitions, Bezobrazov presented himself as a loner with no other loyalties or interests but those of the tsar. His self-promoted detachment from the interests of any group made him an ideal assistant for an emperor who envisioned himself as an instrument of God's design with which no minister or public figure could tamper. "I have no friends and I have never had them," Bezobrazov explained to his wife,

> Because I am too independent to get close to anybody and too freedom-loving to control or be controlled by anybody.... There is only one person in this world whose opinion I am compelled to respect - it is my sovereign's. Besides, he is extremely likable and I can even say that I love him; in any case, I can give my life for him; this is my duty.... I have a plan and a program, and I am determined to pull our state and society out of the swamp.[274]

Nicholas's support of Bezobrazov increasingly confused and frustrated the ministers, whose authority depended on the tsar's consistent show of confidence. Already riddled with power struggles and affected by a lack of coordination and unity, the government found itself mired in jumbled decision-making resulting from the erratic behavior of the tsar, who continued to be either uncommitted or unpredictable

---

Verner, *The Crisis of Russian Autocracy: Nicholas II and the 1905 Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 67.

[274] "Nikolai II i samoderzhaviie v 1903g. Iz itogov perliustratsii," *Byloe* 2 (1918), 213.

in his support. Nicholas's style placed significant limitations on the work of the ministers, who were forced to frame their actions and decisions in response to his unspoken desires and assumptions. The ministers' frustration is expressed in Kuropatkin's anxious diary entry: "Witte, Lamzdorf, and I follow Bezobrazov's actions with anxiety and worry especially about the Sovereign's personal correspondence with this… adventurer."[275]

By 1902, the Far East had become the sphere in which the official and unofficial sources of authority collided. Witte, in particular, was the major target of Bezobrazov's vigorous anti-ministerial campaign. He had refused to lend assistance to the Yalu concession project back in 1899 and 1900 and fought against this unofficial and, as he argued, illegitimate entity. To defeat their powerful rival, Bezobrazov and his colleagues attacked not only his policy in the Far East, but also the finance minister's blueprint for Russia's industrial development which, they claimed, had undermined the agricultural sector. They bombarded Nicholas with alarming criticism of Witte, emphasizing their personal loyalty to the monarch and expressing doubts about that of the officials.

By encouraging Bezobrazov's activities at his ministers' expense, Nicholas was in effect creating a parallel system of authority for Far Eastern policy. As the tsar switched sides between the Bezobrazov group and his government and played the two against each other, Russian foreign policy became ever less coherent and clouded by a sense of arrogance and haughtiness toward a supposedly inferior enemy.

---

[275] "Dnevnik A. N. Kuropatkina," *Krasnyi arkhiv* 2 (1922), 34, quoted in McDonald, *United Government,* 45.

For the next two years Nicholas continued to vacillate between his official government and his unofficial advisers. In January 1902, he unexpectedly lent support to Witte's insistence to liquidate the East Asian Development Company and temporarily abandon Korea in order to avoid complications with Japan.[276] Nicholas's failure to "assert" himself with the ministers deeply disappointed his unofficial advisers. "For seven years Bezobrazov and I waited for the sovereign to use the power in his possession," complained Bezobrazov's associate, Vonliarliarskii, in his memoirs, but "the sovereign remained strictly a legalist and did not wish to rule the state 'autocratically.'"[277] Bezobrazov bitterly remarked that the tsar "had his own method of doing things," a method of "consistent gradualism" which "left much tar in the honey and spoiled the whole business."[278]

Despite their ideological affinity, Nicholas's style of decision-making, his half measures, and his tendency to hesitate after a decision had been made frustrated Bezobrazov and his colleagues, just as they confused the members of the bureaucracy. Both sides considered the tsar's vacillations as signs of weakness, indecision, and a tendency to be easily swayed. What they failed to recognize, however, was that for Nicholas it was not the matter of making a choice between his government and his unofficial advisers or replacing one with the other. His wavering had a different agenda behind it: a stubborn resistance to being tied to any one group of advisers and

---

[276] Sergei Iu. Vitte, *Vospominaniia,* vol. 2 (Tallinn, 1994), 214, 553.

[277] McDonald, *United Government,* 34.

[278] Quoted in Boris Romanov, *Ocherki diplomaticheskoi istorii Russko-Iaponskoi voiny 1895-1907* (Moscow, 1947), 215.

an intention to play them off one another in order to maintain autonomy within the government structure.

Later that year, however, Nicholas again shifted his support to the Bezobrazov group. In early November 1902, with tsar's agreement, Bezobrazov traveled to Port Arthur in order to survey the situation and report his findings to St. Petersburg. "Bezobrazov departed in a magnificent special train" wrote Aleksandr Abaza, Bezobrazov's cousin and associate, to his wife, "totally royal ambiance! It was necessary to let everyone see that the tsar makes this a matter a high priority." But as Abaza suggested, the significance of Bezobrazov's trip lay not only in the matters of foreign policy; but it signaled Nicholas's increased independence from the formal channels of government.

The tsar's show of support emboldened Bezobrazov and his colleagues. They now expected to acquire more responsibility in political decision-making and hoped to be placed above the bureaucracy. "The departure of this train is a big turn in Russian politics not only in the Far Eastern, but also domestic affairs," continued Abaza. "This is a turn to the firm and definite course after a long period of vacillations and hesitancy during which bureaucratic and ministerial autocracy hoped to override the autocracy of the tsar!"[279] Abaza's optimistic predictions were apparently quite accurate. In January 1903, Nicholas ordered Witte to open a two-million-ruble line of credit to Bezobrazov to cover the expenses of his trip to the Far East. Witte had to keep the transaction in complete secrecy. This unusually large sum allowed Bezobrazov to present himself in the style of the royal envoy. An

[279] "*Nikolai II i samoderzhavie*," 218.

official at Mukden reported to St. Petersburg that "Bezobrazov arrived… surrounded by a halo of two million rubles accompanied by a glittering suite… After many dinners and the like and generous financial gifts and donations to Chinese and Russians alike… he finally left for Port Arthur and Peking for further talks."[280]

On March 26, 1903, the members of the government convened to discuss Bezobrazov's memorandum on Russian policy in the Far East which he had sent from Port Arthur. Bezobrazov urged reneging on the agreement with China to withdraw Russian forces from Manchuria. Instead, he recommended occupying the territories bordering on Korea as a platform from which to extend Russian influence into Korea. The Yalu concession, officially chartered by the government, he argued, should serve as a vehicle for consolidating all Russian activities in Korea and Manchuria. Finally, Bezobrazov proposed appointing one official in charge of the Far East under the direct supervision of the tsar and eliminating the involvement of the ministers whose conflicting priorities made foreign policy in the Far East inefficient.[281] Bezobrazov's absence, however, was a significant factor and allowed the ministers to tone down his brazen suggestions. They rejected turning the Yalu concession into a government charter and preserved its private character. They also voiced concerns about the rise of adventurism in foreign policy and the intervention of outsiders in the work of the government. At least for the time being, Nicholas seemed convinced of the need to proceed more cautiously in order to avoid conflict with Japan. But it would only be a

---

[280] Dmitriev-Mamonov to Finance Ministry, 2 February 1903, RGIA, f. 560, op. 28, d. 275, p. 8, quoted in Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun,* 188.

[281] Edward H. Judge, *Plehve: Repression and Reform in Imperial Russia, 1902-1904* (Syracuse, NY. 1983), 161.

matter of time – four months to be precise – before the tsar implemented in full Bezobrazov's last and most far-reaching proposal and appointed a personal viceroy to be in charge of Far Eastern diplomacy.

After Bezobrazov's return in early April 1903, the collision between the official and unofficial authorities in charge of Far Eastern policies came to a head as the risk of war with Japan increased in urgency.[282] Having overwhelmed Nicholas with fresh impressions and ever more grandiose ideas and plans, Bezobrazov pressed for a forceful stand and criticized the ministers for their inefficiency and excessive, "cowardly" caution. Kuropatkin's diary is replete with charges that Bezobrazov's influence on the tsar made his job impossible, because on the questions of the military budget and the relocation of the troops, Nicholas consulted Bezobrazov. He also learned that Bezobrazov had attempted to prevent him from traveling to Japan, complaining to Nicholas that "he was a coarse soldier and could spoil everything there."[283]

Witte approached Vladimir Meshcherskii and begged the prince to write to the tsar in order to caution him about the dangers of engaging Bezobrazov in foreign policy. But even Meshcherskii was powerless. He showed Witte an ambiguous letter from Nicholas stating that "on May 6 everyone will know my opinion on the subject." On May 6, 1903 Nicholas made Bezobrazov a state secretary, a rare title conferring extensive powers and privileges to report directly to the Emperor, by an extraordinary

---

[282] McDonald, *United Government,* 44.

[283] "Dnevnik Kuropatkina," 48.

decree.[284] As a special gift, the adviser also received a portrait of the tsar signed, "From a grateful Nicholas."[285]

The next day, at a conference at Tsarskoe Selo, Bezobrazov reported on the trip and his ideas. He stressed that until the Yalu region was occupied by Russian troops, Manchuria could not be guaranteed for Russia. To prevent war, Bezobrazov insisted, it was necessary to avoid any compromise with Japan and to increase Russian military forces in Manchuria to about seventy thousand troops. His position evidently corresponded to that of the tsar. According to the journal of the meeting, Nicholas announced that as far as the Far East was concerned, "concessions always lead to new concessions."[286] Witte complained that the Far Eastern affairs would likely swallow huge amounts of capital and create financial difficulties for the population in the European parts of Russia, but his objections were drowned out by the heady attitude of the tsar and his unofficial supporters.

Unlike Witte and Kuropatkin, who actively opposed Bezobrazov, Interior Minister Viacheslav Plehve took a different position. He recognized the danger of Bezobrazov's presence and his influence on the emperor. Yet knowing well Nicholas's anti-bureaucratic sentiments and his inclination to listen to unofficial advisers, the minister decided to utilize Bezobrazov's influence rather than fight it outright. As Edward Judge has suggested, "the fact that Bezobrazov was a favorite exerted much pressure on any minister whose loyalties and future lay in the long-term

---

[284] Vitte, *Vospominaniia,* vol. 2*,* 226-7.

[285] Boris Glinskii, ed., *Prolog russko-iaponskoi voiny: materialy iz arkhiva grafa S. Iu. Vitte* (Petrograd, 1916), 8.

[286] Ibid., 9.

with the Emperor's choice."[287] Instead of antagonizing the tsar and losing him to the favorite, Plehve believed that it was necessary to saddle him with a bureaucratic post which would make him less attractive and his position less different in the tsar's eyes. "Once he is appointed member of the Special Committee for Far Eastern Affairs," Plehve explained referring to Bezobrazov, "not only am I certain that his attitude to the Far Eastern problem will change but I also think that his word will carry no greater weight with the tsar than the word of any other committee member."[288] As a result of his strategy, Plehve not only succeeded in neutralizing Bezobrazov's influence on Nicholas, but also defeated the powerful Witte and emerged in the middle of 1903 as the dominant minister in the Russian government.

Because of his support of the Bezobrazov group, Plehve's role in Far Eastern affairs had been controversial. Witte had claimed in his memoirs that Plehve favored a "small, victorious war" as a means to forestall the revolutionary upheaval, to boost patriotic spirit, and invigorate nationalism. Historians have pointed out, however, that Plehve was not a major architect of the war.[289] He had no experience or much interest in foreign policy and his priorities focused on the consolidation of local administration in all areas of Russia, including the Far Eastern provinces.

Soon after the conference of May 7, Bezobrazov again traveled to the Far East. In June, however, the support he received from the tsar began to decline. Nicholas confided to Kuropatkin that Bezobrazov's critiques no longer inspired him, in fact, he

---

[287] Judge, *Plehve,* 164.

[288] Glinskii, *Prolog*, 143-4.

[289] Ascher, *Revolution of 1905. Russia in Disarray*, 44.

found them grating.[290] Siding with the ministers once again, Nicholas informed Abaza that he had decided to give up Korea. In addition, after a series of conferences held in Port Arthur by Kuropatkin, Alekseev, Bezobrazov, and the Russian ambassadors to China and Korea it was decided to convert the Yalu concession into a private commercial company without any ties to the state.

But although Nicholas had temporarily shelved his support of the Bezobrazov group, his interest in the Far East remained strong, reignited by populist aspirations and a desire to establish a national monarchy. In 1902 and 1903, as the political situation in Russia became increasingly volatile, Nicholas embarked on what Richard Wortman called "demonstrations of godliness." He visited churches and monasteries and sought and exhibited personal union with the people. Nicholas enjoyed himself in the company of the peasants; as he wrote to his wife, it was "much easier to talk to simple folk."[291] To provide inspiration and legitimize his rule in his own mind and to those around him, the tsar clung to the symbolic manifestations of popular affection, attempting to substitute paternalism for political leadership, myth for reality**.**

In early 1903, Nicholas ordered Pobedonostsev to proceed speedily with the canonization of Seraphim Sarovskii despite the protests from the Holy Synod, which insisted on its autonomy in matters of sainthood confirmation. In July of that year, the tsar undertook an expedition along with the members of his family and his retinue

---

[290] "Dnevnik A. N. Kuropatkina," 19 August 1903, Krasnyi arkhiv 2 (1922), 58, quoted in Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun*, 189.

[291] Andrei Maylunas and Mironenko, Sergei, eds., *A Lifelong Passion: Nicholas and Alexandra, Their Own Story* (London, 1996), 221-22, quoted in Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power. Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 382.

to the Far Eastern city of Arzamas, the location of the Sarov Monastery. Half a million pilgrims accompanied the royal expedition. The sight of people's piety and the simplicity of the worshipers, along with new reports of cures at Seraphim's grave, imbued the tsar with feelings of unswerving popular affection for the monarchy.

Several canonizations had already blessed his reign, but Seraphim's was the largest and the most significant of them. Nicholas and Alexandra, who after the birth of their four daughters were anxious for a male heir, pinned their hopes on the patronage of the new saint. Canonization also signified the consecration of the Russian mission to Asia. The main proponents of Sarov's canonization also actively promoted Russia's Far Eastern expansion. Among them were prominent members of the Russian Orthodox Church, such as Father Leonid Chichagov, who had been involved in the preparation of the materials for the proof of sanctity and canonization, and the popular priest Father John of Kronstadt. This widely publicized event, as Robert Nichols put it, "acted as a condenser for a number of strong atmospheric currents in the religious and political life of the late empire and crystallized Nicholas II's understanding of himself as a monarch, resolving him on a course of action ending in war with Japan in 1904."[292]

The Sarov pilgrimage produced a complete turnaround in Nicholas's attitude towards his role. It boosted his self-confidence as well as his belief in the invincibility of Russia. Nicholas delayed the official response to renewed Japanese peace proposals regarding Korea and Manchuria. He acted, as Witte recalled, "as if

---

[292] Robert Nichols, "The Friends of God: Nicholas II and Alexandra at the Canonization of Serafim of Sarov, July 1903," in *Religious and Secular Forces in Late Tsarist Russia*, ed. Charles E. Timberlake (Seattle, 1992), 207.

we were certain that the Japanese would endure everything without daring to attack us."[293] Soon after his return to St. Petersburg, on July 30, Nicholas, following Bezobrazov's earlier advice, proclaimed the establishment of the new "Viceroyalty of the Far East," a step that served to destabilize further the relationship between Japan and Russia. On July 31, the tsar appointed Bezobrazov's protégé, Admiral Aleksei Alekseev, viceroy of the region by a special decree without consulting the State Council or the Committee of Ministers. The viceroy's responsibilities included not only administrative and military supervision over the Russian Far East but also the conduct of diplomatic relations with China, Japan, and Korea. Nicholas instructed Alekseev to step up military preparedness in Manchuria and to consolidate "supreme and responsible control in the Far East over all departments" in his own hands.[294] Ministers Kuropatkin and Witte learned about the appointed viceroy from the morning papers. Witte remarked in his memoirs that "from that time on I considered my cause lost and a disastrous war inevitable."[295]

In effect, what the creation of the viceroyalty entailed and what appeared so attractive to Nicholas was a separate system of authority in charge of the Far East and with it, an unmediated relationship between the ruler and the subjects. As Bezobrazov explained, this method of government provided "the greatest intimacy between center and periphery… not by a bureaucratic route, but by a direct transfer to

---

[293] Witte, *Memoirs*, 123.

[294] Judge, *Plehve,* 163.

[295] Witte, *Memoirs*, 123.

the locality of the combined authority of the departments."[296] Nicholas made the next significant step in the direction of consolidating personal rule by dismissing Witte as minister of finance on August 15th. The tsar had long resented his highhanded manner and his extended authority, but he had also depended on his most talented and experienced minister. He now felt ready to dispense with Witte and take full control over Far Eastern policies. As McDonald noted, "The creation of the viceroyalty combined with Witte's dismissal seemed intended to establish in institutional form what Plehve had called "duality of actions" – two separate and competing administrative structures between which Nicholas could act as *tertior gaudens* at his own pleasure."[297]

Bezobrazov's influence with Nicholas did not outlive that of Witte. By August, 1903, the tsar no longer seemed taken by his rampages against the bureaucracy. With his line of credit expired, Bezobrazov left Russia. It might have seemed to the ministers that the tsar was finally turning away from the risky Far Eastern policies advocated by Bezobrazov. It is more likely, however, that Nicholas remained wedded to his own ideas, but he no longer needed Bezobrazov's assistance in implementing them. With his official government weakened and the unofficial advisers gone, Nicholas, in fact, came closest to being the sole decision maker in Far Eastern policies, with Viceroy Alekseev as his personal agent in Port Arthur.

Nicholas spent the end of August through November of 1903 in Western Europe, perhaps unconsciously stalling the last phase of negotiations with Japan at a

---

[296] McDonald, *United Government,* 62

[297] Ibid., 68.

time when Russia's relationship with the Japanese was steadily deteriorating, and Russia's policy in Manchuria was causing confusion and apprehension in Europe. According to Witte, "By that time the influence of the Foreign Ministry on Far Eastern affairs had been almost completely eliminated. His Majesty conferred directly with Viceroy Alekseev, without resorting to Count Lamsdorff's offices."[298]

On December 15, 1903, at the last conference before the war, the tsar finally agreed to renew negotiations with Japan on Manchuria. But his conciliatory gesture came too late in the process. On January 26, 1904, the Japanese navy attacked the Russian forces at Port Arthur. Despite the warning signs, no measures were taken to strengthen or prevent a possible attack.[299] Nicholas did not want war, something he repeated numerous times and demonstrated by his belated acceptance of Japan's demands on January 24, after Japan had broken diplomatic ties with Russia. But he continued to delude himself to the very last moment that Japan would not attack Russia.

Nicholas's ruling style and the strategies he employed emerge with clarity in the Bezobrazov affair. The seeds of Nicholas's imperialist ideology and his desire to escape the confines of bureaucratic practices and to move toward personal rule had been planted prior to the arrival of Bezobrazov. In the beginning of his reign, the tsar supported Witte's assertive program of economic and political expansion in the Far East. But with Witte in control, Nicholas felt increasingly barred by a bureaucratic "wall" from exercising his personal authority.

---

[298] Witte, *Memoirs*, 124.

[299] Romanov, *Russia in Manchuriia*, 9-10.

To reassert himself in foreign policy, Nicholas turned to Bezobrazov and his colleagues, whose rhetoric reflected his own apprehension about the ambiguous nature of his authority. It was not the novelty of Bezobrazov's ideas that inspired Nicholas. Rather, the tsar sanctioned Bezobrazov's authority in an effort to bridge the gap between the theory of unlimited autocracy and the practice of ruling through the institutions and officials who constrained his will and stifled his independence.

Despite widespread opinion among contemporaries, Nicholas was not an indecisive ruler and a confused victim of Bezobrazov's intrigues. He adapted strategies to counteract his officials and devised ways to exercise his autocratic prerogatives. Using Bezobrazov as a tool to counter his ministers, Nicholas successfully dismantled Witte's powerful and extended authority. Then, by withdrawing confidence from his other officials, appearing allusive and inconsistent in the show of support, the tsar significantly weakened the rest of his government in charge of foreign policy. As a result, Nicholas dealt a decisive blow to the official Far Eastern policy and created a situation which eventually brought Russia into a disastrous military conflict with Japan.

The most significant and far-reaching outcome of the Bezobrazov affair was the appearance of a host of exaggerated and alarming rumors that undermined Nicholas's political persona and society's confidence in the monarchy. Demonstrations of trust toward Bezobrazov and his colleagues at the expense of his official administration confirmed in the public mind the tsar's tendency to fall under the influence of "an evil outsider" and ignore his government. The powerful precedents of outside interference in domestic and foreign policy established in the

early years of his reign paved the way for the arrival on the political scene of Grigorii Rasputin and Mikhail Andronikov, among others, whose presence contributed to the government's insecurity and ineffectiveness and helped exacerbate the crisis that enveloped the monarchy in the years of World War I.

7. Nicholas and his Advisers in the Period of Revolution and Reform: 1904-1911.

The political crisis that engulfed Russia by the end of 1904, starting with the constitutional demands of the urban middle class and spreading to the rest of the population soon after, required a strong and sincere response from the monarchy. The government's failure to resolve the crisis successfully and to prevent it from escalating into a full-blown revolution resulted, in large part, from Nicholas's inability to offer straightforward and resourceful leadership. As in the earlier years of his reign, contemporaries found the tsar ambiguous and unpredictable. Even his most important appointments and decisions were not a reliable indicator of his political direction. "In general, one can say about our tsar that he is an enigma," wrote the wife of a conservative general, Aleksandra Bogdanovich, in 1907: "Today he is rightist; what he will be tomorrow is shrouded in mystery."[300] Officials were deeply disappointed by Nicholas's inability to embody strong power and his tendency to solicit unqualified unofficial advice. "The sovereign," commented a member of the State Council, Aleksandr Kireev, "is unstable to such a degree that it is impossible to depend on him."[301]

Nicholas's evasiveness, poorly articulated views, and his habit of lending an equal degree of confidence to officials of different political orientations frequently

---

[300] A. V. Bogdanovich, *Tri poslednikh samoderzhtsa* (Moscow, 1924), 429, quoted in Mikhail Loukianov, "Conservatives and 'Renewed Russia,' 1907-1914," *Slavic Review* 4 (2002), 767.

[301] A. A. Kireev, "Diary," 22 December 1908, f. 126, box 14, p. 343ob., Otdel rukopisei Rossiiskoi Gosudarstvennoi Biblioteki, quoted in Loukianov, "Conservatives and 'Renewed Russia,'" 767.

produced an impression on the ministers and unofficial advisers that the tsar's opinions may not have fully solidified and that there was still a good chance to sway him toward what they considered beneficial. But while Nicholas frequently exhibited ambivalence in his conversations with government members and advisers, it did not mean that his opinions and intentions were in flux. Far from being indecisive, the tsar, as will be evident from this chapter, always acted within the framework of an autocratic worldview, the tenets of which he defended with all the fervor and guile he could muster. He drew on his official and unofficial advisers as allies to facilitate his goal of safeguarding personal power and parted with them as soon as they deviated from the roles he assigned them.

* * *

In the years before the Revolution of 1905, the monarchy made significant attempts to emphasize its national character and to reaffirm its position as the central symbol of imperial unity and grandeur. The Manifesto of 26 February 1903 proclaimed the monarchy's intention to reinforcing ties with the people by strengthening local self-government. The widely publicized canonization of Seraphim Sarovskii in the summer of 1903 inspired a magnificent vision of unity between the tsar and the million-strong force of peasant pilgrims who attended the ceremonies. Finally, the drive for Far Eastern expansion and the war with Japan produced a brief but powerful burst of patriotism which touched virtually every section of the population.

However, the government's efforts to establish a more harmonious relationship with society contrasted sharply with its repressive political actions and

attitudes during Viacheslav Plehve's tenure as interior minister from 1902 to 1904. Plehve especially targeted the zemstvos—the organs of local self-government—banning free discussions and denying appointments to prominent leaders. These actions convinced the public of the government's fundamental distrust of society and its unwillingness to grant the nation basic political freedoms. Consequently, they stimulated a rapid growth of a broadly based liberal movement determined to break the government's intransigency and wrench from it civil rights and participation in legislation, if necessary, by radical means. While the left was disillusioned with the lack of political transformation, the conservatives, threatened by Russia's rapid economic modernization, blamed the regime for its inadequate commitment to the preservation of traditional social and political values. Finally, members of all social groups were disenchanted with the government's inability to enact effective measures to deal with Russia's pressing social and economic problems.

A general consensus that Russia's domestic politics needed a change in orientation emerged in the aftermath of Plehve's assassination in July 1904. So low was Plehve's reputation that observers, such as the Austro-Hungarian ambassador Count Aloys Lexa von Aehrenthal, found "only totally indifferent people or people so cynical that they say that no other outcome was to be expected."[302] Nicholas was perhaps one of the few people who genuinely mourned his minister's death. "In the person of the good Plehve," the tsar recorded with uncharacteristic sincerity in his

---

[302] Abraham Ascher, trans. and ed., "The Coming Storm: the Austro-Hungarian Embassy on Russia's Internal Crisis, 1902-1906," *Survey: A Journal of Soviet and East European Studies*, 1964, no. 53, 154-55, quoted in Abraham Ascher, *Revolution of 1905. Russia in Disarray,* 54.

diary, "I have lost a friend and an irreplaceable minister of internal affairs."[303] Plehve's confidence as administrator, his steadfast commitment to safeguarding order, and his reliance on police methods in dealing with disturbances appealed to the tsar. The two men's attitudes on reforms were also highly compatible: both viewed them as patches reinforcing the foundations of the existing structure rather than designing real changes.

Numerous members of the administration, including such high level officials, as Sergei Witte, Aleksandr Lamsdorff, and Vladimir Gurko, hastened to voice their criticism of Plehve's actions. Prince Vladimir Meshcherskii, in his periodical *Grazhdanin*, was among the first critics to attack Plehve's designs for strengthening the bureaucracy and his commitment to indiscriminate use of repression and violence in dealing with domestic problems. In a letter written on the eve of Plehve's assassination, Anatolii Klopov urged the tsar to ease the repressive measures because they inevitably played into the hands of the revolutionaries. "The monarch's strength is based on the spiritual connection of the people with the throne," preached Klopov, "on the one hand, the love and loyalty of the people to the monarch, and on the other hand, the monarch's concern for the well-being of his people." It was necessary to balance disciplinary measures with creative reforms that would demonstrate to the people the government's earnest desire to improve its subjects' standard of living. To accomplish this task, Klopov advised dividing the ministry of internal affairs into two departments: one responsible for the maintenance of security and order in the empire

---

[303] *Dnevnik Imperatora Nikolaya II* (Paris, 1980; reprint of 1923 Berlin edition), 161, quoted in Dominic Lieven, *Nicholas II*, 132.

and the other for domestic reforms and a rationalization of village life and agricultural productivity.[304]

But the widespread denunciations of Plehve and his policies seemed to have had little effect on the tsar's attitude toward his former minister or changed his political perspective. In fact, Nicholas's own candidates for the position, the conservative General Victor von Wahl, one of Plehve's assistants, and Boris Shturmer, also a high-level bureaucrat in the ministry of internal affairs, were expected to continue the policies of their predecessor. The third contender for the post was Witte, who had a year ago lost his influential post as minister of finance and was appointed to a prestigious, but powerless position of chairman of the Committee of Ministers. To increase his chances, Witte engaged Klopov to write to Nicholas on his behalf. In the past, Klopov had been critical of Witte's narrow view of agrarian problems. However, as the statistician told Nicholas, "we need a minister of internal affairs who would be able to sense the needs of the people," but there were no administrators of such caliber. Witte, a man of talent, energy, and experience, Klopov insisted, was the only one who came close.[305] Klopov did not succeed in influencing Nicholas, who had always resented Witte's powerful personality and his boorish manners that only slightly veiled the minister's contempt for the monarch.

After a month of indecision, Nicholas withdrew all candidates on the insistence of his mother, the dowager tsarina, Maria Fedorovna, who persuaded him that the political situation in the country required a change, or at least an appearance

---

[304] A. A. Klopov to Nicholas II, 22 July 1904, *Tainyi sovetnik Imperatora*, eds.V.M. Krylov et als. (St. Petersburg, 2002), 267-8.

[305] Klopov to Nicholas II, 28 July 1904, 271, 6 August 1904, 274, August 1904, 275.

of a change. The protégé of her circle of influential aristocratic families, Prince Petr Sviatopolk-Mirskii, a prominent member of St. Petersburg high society, became the new interior minister on August 26, 1904. Governor-General of Vilna at the time of his appointment, Mirskii had served as assistant minister under Sipiagin, but had resigned over a disagreement with his superior's politics.[306]

Mirskii's reputation as a liberal bureaucrat who supported the zemstvos and advocated tolerant policies toward the minorities as well as a working relationship with the liberal opposition, made him an odd choice for the most important bureaucratic post in the administration. The appointment was unusual not only because Nicholas's prior pattern of selection to the post of interior minister did not predict a turn toward political liberalization, but also because Mirskii's benefactor, Maria Fedorovna, in Mirskii's own estimation, was "even less of a constitutionalist than her son."[307] Many contemporaries mistook this appointment for a genuine conciliatory gesture on the part of the monarchy, while others suspected it to have come out of desperation from a besieged autocracy. Mirskii himself was utterly skeptical about his prospects for success. "At the present time in Russia, under such a monarch, I think, no minister would be able to accomplish anything," Mirskii's wife recorded in her diary, reflecting conversations with her husband; she added that a minister's success was also endangered by St. Petersburg gossip which "could ruin the reputation of a saint, let alone a common mortal."[308]

---

[306] Ie. A. Sviatopolk-Mirskaia, "Dnevnik," *Istoricheskie zapiski* 77 (1965): 241.

[307] Ibid., 252.

[308] Ibid., 240.

Mirskii's modesty and integrity—his wife described him as genial, benevolent, and open-hearted—carried an appeal with Nicholas.[309] The tsar was impressed by the fact that Mirskii did not seem to seek power and even tried to dissuade the tsar from appointing him interior minister claiming that he had few qualifications for the job and his political convictions differed from those of the tsar. It would be the happiest day of his life, Mirskii assured the tsar, when Nicholas freed him from this position.[310] The prince's diffidence may have been part of the etiquette, but it also allowed the tsar to take an active part in a major appointment. Appointing ministers at times contrary to their will, denying them resignation, and retaining the right to dismiss an official when he wanted to, was for Nicholas his father's model of powerful authority and the one he was eager to emulate.

In general terms, the tsar agreed with Mirskii that some reforms were needed to appease the public. The war effort, in particular, called for immediate unity between the monarchy and society. But what Nicholas had in mind were insignificant concessions, and he never became deeply committed to supporting Mirskii's political program. During their first interview, the minister expressed his views on the need to establish religious tolerance, expand and strengthen local self-government, and grant greater freedoms to the press. Mirskii informed the tsar that he strongly favored the participation of the elected zemstvo representatives in the legislative work of the government on a consultative basis. Unless a real reconciliation between the government and society was achieved, Mirskii concluded, Russia would soon be

---

[309] Ibid.

[310] Ibid., 242.

divided "into those who are under police surveillance and those who are carrying it out."[311] Nicholas tentatively approved of Mirskii's ideas and assured him of his support. "The tsar agreed with everything," Mirskii's wife recorded in her diary, "and even rejoiced when P. [Mirskii] talked about religious tolerance and freedom of consciousness and said that those had always been his views."[312] But the excitement and hope expressed during the first conversation between the emperor and his future minister only obscured the lack of clear understanding between them, let alone any agreement on the political direction the government should take.

Mirskii did not intend to overhaul the autocratic system of government; he merely wished to address the widespread desire of the public for broad civil liberties and a limited participation of the representatives of the zemstvos and municipal dumas in the State Council on a consultative basis. Mirskii's position was certainly a progressive one, but it was by no means radical. The minister's wife reflected his position in her diary. "As I understand, the desire of the prevailing majority of well-intentioned people is this: without touching the autocracy, to establish in Russia legality, religious tolerance, and participation in legislation…"[313] In fact, Mirskii's views were akin to a broad range of contemporary opinion, from conservative monarchists, such as Aleksandr Kireev, a senior member of the State Council who wished to preserve the autocracy, to Dmitri Shipov, a leader of the liberal zemstvo movement, who accepted the unfeasibility of issuing a constitution in present

---

[311] Sviatopolk-Mirskaia, "Dnevnik," 241-2, quoted in Dominic Lieven, *Nicholas II: Emperor of All the Russias* (London, 1993), 135

[312] Sviatopolk-Mirskaia, "Dnevnik,"242.

[313] Ibid., 258.

circumstances. By the time Mirskii became minister of the interior, the idea of popular representation had became a staple in the zemstvo circles. Many moderate conservatives believed that limited and regulated representation would alleviate bureaucratic despotism.

Mirskii's appointment just months before the outbreak of the 1905 Revolution was a significant event and was perceived by the public as a step toward some accommodation of the demands of the liberal opposition. "Nowadays everyone is talking about representation, constitution, autocracy, bureaucracy," Mirskii's wife wrote, reflecting the widespread excitement in her diary. "Even two months ago, the idea of representation seemed only a 'senseless dream,' and now it is being discussed as if it were a guarantee of the near future."[314] The legal press, such as *Russkie vedomosti and Pravo,* issued bold statements openly calling on the government to introduce comprehensive liberal reforms including popular participation in legislation.[315]

Grazhdanin lavishly greeted Mirskii on his appointment, and Meshcherskii's editorials expressed enthusiasm for the personal qualities and political astuteness of the new interior minister. The prince expected Mirskii to restore harmony and trust between the monarchy and the people by implementing the provisions of the Manifesto of 26 February 1903. In fact, only a month prior to Mirskii's appointment, the prince called on the monarchy to communicate its trust in the people. When

---

[314] Ibid., 254.

[315] Abraham Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray* (Stanford University Press, 1988), 57.

Mirskii proclaimed "confidence" as the symbolic leitmotif of his political program, the prince was overjoyed.

> In the hands of an intelligent and impeccably honest minister [the return to the Manifesto] will begin from the beginning—the establishment of a firm rule and a firm course, so that the people's benefits from liberalism will not be illusory and bogus, but real, definite, and solid, and informed by the wise and freedom-loving deeds of the Russian Sovereign and not the concessions of a minister in his struggle with the enemies of the people.[316]

With the usual exuberance that marked his letters to the tsar, Klopov celebrated Mirskii's appointment as an inspiring declaration of unity between the monarchy and the people and a sign that society would be called upon to assist the government in designing and implementing reforms. Russia was reliving a time of joy and hope, Klopov informed the tsar, because the head of the ministry of internal affairs was a person "uncontaminated by a bureaucratic mindset, commanding widespread popularity due to his kindness, neutrality, and absence of conceit." The government's "confidence in society and its desire to stimulate popular initiative is not only heard from the height of the throne but also from [the person] who is the executive of the royal will…"[317] Klopov also visited Mirskii and urged him to embark boldly on political reforms without any fear for the fate of the monarchy.[318]

---

[316] "Dnevnik," 14 September 1904, *Grazhdanin* 74, p. 17, quoted in N. V. Chernikova, "Kniaz' Vladimir Petrovich Meshcherskii i revoliutsiia (1904-1907 gg.) in A. Iu. Minakov, ed., *Konservatism v Rossii i mire*, vol. 2 (Voronezh, 2004), 150-178.

[317] Klopov to Nicholas II, 12 October 1904, 278-279.

[318] Igor Lukoianov, "Tainyi correspondent Nikolaia II A. A. Klopov," 78.

But Klopov's letters from this period also conveyed to Nicholas a sense of anxiety in society over the fate of Mirskii and his program: "They say that all the new trends are short-lived, that everything will again come down to repairs, palliatives, compromise; that the government will not agree to the restructuring of our domestic life because of the distrust that still reigns between the rulers and society." Comparing Mirskii's political fate with that of Petr Vannovskii, a former minister of education, Klopov warned Nicholas that the "representatives of the old order" would sabotage the monarch's wishes to establish an amiable relationship with society. He urged the tsar to commit openly and whole-heatedly to Mirskii's program and support him against the enemies of change.[319]

Klopov's forebodings proved accurate. A contradiction between the expectations aroused in society by Mirskii's appointment and the monarch's intransigent stand on the preservation of the autocracy had disastrous consequences. Arguably, in late 1904 the monarchy still had a real chance of forestalling further radicalization of society by moving openly and steadfastly toward collaboration with society.[320] Its failure to do so stimulated an even greater opposition to the monarchy and the spread of the revolutionary movement.

Mirskii's appointment produced so much confusion that after only a little over a month in office, on October 9, 1904, Nicholas ordered his new minister to issue a formal *rescript* explaining to the public that "no [political] changes were forthcoming." However, after a conversation with Mirskii and much to the minister's

---

[319] Klopov to Nicholas II, 18 October 1904, 282-284.

[320] Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905. Russia in Disarray*, 55-73.

relief, the tsar backed down and agreed to have Mirskii write a public address to the governors instead of a formal *rescript* in his name. In mid-October, the tsar presented Mirskii with a draft of the formal letter to the governors written on the minister's behalf by Meshcherskii. Downplaying the reforms, the address emphasized the government's primary intentions of strengthening its authority and capacity to maintain order in the country.[321]

Defending his reform position before Nicholas, Mirskii insisted that zemstvo radicalism would wane when people found useful application for their energies. The election principle, he said, echoing Klopov, was fully compatible with autocracy: "All people have their own interests, whether party or estate, and the autocrat is outside those interests, [he] cares only about the well-being of all and listening to everyone has to balance the interests of all."[322] Mirskii described the granting of representation as a gesture of royal mercy that would astound everyone. The sovereign, he told Nicholas metaphorically, should encrust the scepter of the autocracy with the jewels of his generosity. "The scepter is still iron cast…. But it is necessary to gild it."[323]

Mirskii harbored serious reservations about Nicholas's support in implementing his reform program from the very beginning of his tenure. "In all the talks of the zemstvo leaders," Mirskii concluded, "[the tsar] sees only an egotistical

---

[321] "Proekt [tsirkuliarnogo] pis'ma ministra vnutrennih del [kn. Sv. Mirskogo] gubernatoram s politicheskimi ustanovkami [sostavlennyi kn. Meshcherskim] (1904), RGADA, f. 1378, op. 2, no. 22, p. 1-2

[322] Sviatopolk-Mirskaia, "Dnevnik," 247.

[323] Ibid., 245.

desire to acquire rights and a scorn for the needs of the people."[324] Although the tsar remained very congenial, Mirskii told his wife that Nicholas was likely to "get tired of all this very soon."[325] Mirskii's conversations with Nicholas also alerted him to the tsar's deep-seated resentment of popular representation, public opinion, and liberal reforms. "Why should they expect me to be a liberal?" Nicholas exclaimed to Mirskii. "I cannot stand the word."[326] "What do I care about public opinion?" the tsar said on another occasion, remarking that he was disgusted with the word "intelligentsia" and even sarcastically suggested that it should be crossed out of the Russian dictionary.[327]

The minister hardly realized, however, just how deeply Nicholas's resentment of the idea of popular representation ran. Like many of his peers, Mirskii believed that Nicholas's opinions had not yet set, and there was still a good chance of convincing him to enact the proposal. He attributed the resistance on the part of the tsar to outside influences. "I am sure that you are liberal at heart," Mirskii probed hesitantly during one of his conversations with the tsar, "but you enact all those measures against your convictions, as a result of someone's influence on you." As if confirming his minister's forebodings, Nicholas gave an ambiguous response.[328]

---

[324] Ibid., 260.

[325] Ibid.

[326] Ibid., 259.

[327] Vitte, *Vospominaniia,* vol. 2 (Tallinn, 1994), 313.

[328] Sviatopolk-Mirskaia, "Dnevnik," 259.

But contrary to Mirskii's view of the tsar as a passive victim of incompetent advice and harmful influence, Nicholas, in fact, actively sought out support in opposing his new minister. One of the people the tsar relied on was Meshcherskii, although by the second half of 1904, the prince's influence with Nicholas had declined as a result of his opposition to Aleksandr Bezobrazov on the eve of the Russo-Japanese War.[329] (discussed in chapter 4) By attacking Mirskii in *Grazhdanin*, Meshcherskii sensed a chance to recover some of his lost influence with Nicholas. In November 1904, the minister allowed the liberals to hold an unofficial zemstvo congress in St. Petersburg, although he was well aware of Nicholas's negative attitude to such an event. The result of this seminal meeting was a petition in which the liberals declared their wish to participate in government and a constitution. Soon after, *Grazhdanin* unleashed a devastating campaign against Mirskii. Meshcherskii also wrote and publicly circulated at least two anonymous letters signed by "the friends of order" in which he criticized Mirskii's close association with the liberals. The prince claimed that instead of following the Manifesto of 26 February 1903 as his guiding principle, which was what Nicholas had expected of him, the minister's liberal political tone ignited the passions of the intelligentsia and demonstrated to society that the government with Mirskii at its head had acted against the autocrat's principles and ignored his wishes.[330]

---

[329] After the war broke out, however, the prince tried to mend fences with Nicholas by publishing a series of articles in *Grazhdanin* where he voiced his support of the war and described a resurgence of patriotism among the Russian people willing to die for their monarch.

[330] "Proekt [tsirkuliarnogo] pis'ma," 1-2.

Meshcherskii was not Mirskii's only opponent Nicholas could rely on. The governor of Moscow, Grand Duke Sergei Aleksandrovich, and the influential head of police, Dmitrii Trepov, both close to the tsar, openly criticized Mirskii's lenient approach to the enemies of the political order. Still, by mid-November Nicholas's position on Mirskii's reform proposal was difficult to identify. In fact, Mirskii continued to be under the impression that the tsar's attitude to the idea of representatives was quite positive. The source of his worries was Sergei Aleksandrovich, who had recently arrived from Moscow and was expected to set Nicholas against Mirskii and his reform proposal. A week later, however, the minister's apprehensions were eased when Nicholas informed Mirskii that Sergei Aleksandrovich was about to resign and insisted that Mirskii stayed on to complete the reforms.[331]

In early December 1904, the government convened three meetings to discuss Mirskii's ten-point program for the incremental liberalization of society, which was to be published as an *ukaz*. Characteristic of Nicholas's manner of rule that frequently left his ministers confused, the tsar told Mirskii that he had not intended to request Witte's presence at the conference. Mirskii mistook this statement for an indication of Nicholas's disagreement with Witte, known for his negative views on the elected zemstvos. Only on Mirskii's insistence that it was improper to discuss major reform projects without the presence of the chairman of the Committee of Ministers, the tsar changed his mind and invited Witte to attend the conference. Nicholas further expressed his support of Mirskii by announcing that he by no means intended to

[331] Sviatopolk-Mirskaia, "Dnevnik," 254.

invite Konstantin Pobedonostsev, another formidable opponent of representation, to the conference. However, this only added to the confusion, because, as his wife remarked in her diary, "the first face that [Mirskii] saw at the station [at Tsarskoe Selo] was precisely that of Pobedonostsev."[332]

After lengthy debates and several changes to the wording of Mirskii's proposal, the majority of ministers voted in favor of the provision on representation, and Nicholas agreed with the majority. Pobedonostsev, Witte, Sergei Aleksandrovich, and Finance Minister Vladimir Kokovtsov remained opposed to Mirskii's program, arguing that representation was incompatible with the doctrines of the autocracy. Witte especially emphasized that by granting the provision Nicholas was making the first step in the direction of bringing society to participate in the work of the government, which in effect meant a constitution.[333]

The final draft, which was to reflect the changes decided on at the meeting, was assigned to Witte. During the next meeting on December 8, all members of the conference signed Witte's draft of the *Ukaz*.[334] Aleksei Bobrinskii, a zemstvo leader, enthusiastically remarked in his diary that

> the conference had decided on a semi-constitution, agreed to convene representatives from the country, the participation of the elected representatives in the State Council, and a whole lot of liberal reforms. The sovereign was delighted; Grand Duke Sergei befriended Mirskii; Witte,

---

[332] Ibid., 261.

[333] Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905. Russia in Disarray*, 70-71

[334] Vitte, *Vospominaniia,* 317.

> Pobedonostsev, Vorontsov –all merged into one voice. In sum, this was a historical moment and all of this will be reflected in a manifesto on the 11th![335]

But Bobrinskii's enthusiasm turned out to be premature. A day after the final meeting of the conference, Nicholas invited Witte to his office and in the presence of Sergei Aleksandrovich asked him once again to spell out his opinion on the representatives. The tsar announced that the words "elected from public institutions" bothered him and suggested that "elected" be replaced with "appointed." Witte responded that it would in that case be wiser to eliminate the paragraph on representatives from the *ukaz* altogether. Nicholas agreed with the minister's advice and crossed out the section on popular representatives. According to Witte's memoirs, Nicholas told him that "under no circumstances will I ever agree to a representative form of government, for I consider it harmful to the trust God gave me over the people, and therefore I will follow your advice and expunge the point."[336]

What prompted Nicholas's radical departure from his earlier commitments expressed at the conference before members of his government? The tsar may have come to this decision independently, but was uncomfortable at opposing the majority directly during the discussions. On the last day of the conference, the tsar told a member of his entourage that he had arrived at a heart-felt conclusion that only the autocracy could save Russia. He added that peasants would not understand the

---

[335] R. Sh. Ganelin, *Rossiiskoe Samoderzhavie v 1905 godu: reformy i revoliutsiia* (Sankt-Peterburg: Nauka, 1991), 130.

[336] Vitte, *Vospominaniia*, vol. 1, 273-4, quoted in Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905. Russia in Disarray*, 71.

constitution and "would only interpret it as if the tsar got his hands tied up…![337] Nicholas may also have been influenced his conversations with his mother and his uncle, Grand Duke Sergei Aleksandrovich, in the days following the conference. During lunch with Mirskii, Maria Fedorovna expressed her apprehension of any political innovations. She also praised the speech of Mirskii's opponent, Vladimir Kokovstov, at the meeting and referred to the behest of Alexander III to resist constitutionalism.[338]

Rafail Ganelin's suggestion that the failure of Mirskii's reform was a direct result of Witte's desire to solidify his waning power is only partly convincing. It is true that Witte had never been a proponent of constitutionalism and believed that a strong autocrat and united government were the best solutions for Russia's troubles. But the more immediate reason for Witte's advice to Nicholas becomes clear from the following episode related in the diary of Mirskii's wife. It appears that Witte, eager to regain his political influence after his fall from power the previous year, actively allied with Meshcherskii to counter the minister's reform program. On the eve of the meeting, Witte visited Meshcherskii and asked him about his position on the issue of the representatives. In reply, the prince showed him a note from the tsar pleading: "my dear friend, help me."[339] Thus, Witte, having advanced knowledge about the tsar's reservations, gave advice that echoed the decision Nicholas had already been inclined to make.

---

[337] O. N. Trubetskaia, *Iz perezhitogo*, 293, quoted in Ganelin, *Samoderzhavie v 1905*, 39

[338] Sviatopolk-Mirskaia, "Dnevnik," 264.

[339] Ibid., 260.

Most persuasive is Daniel Turnbull's argument that Nicholas had never seriously considered the enactment of the legislation on representatives and that his calling on Witte for advice served as a legitimizing act. Witte's views on the question of representation had been widely known, and his advice was, therefore, predictable. Turnbull wrote that "Witte imparted a sense of official sanction to a decision that Nicholas had already come close to making while disregarding the advice of his highest officials."[340] Thus, it becomes clear that the tsar possessed definite opinions about the direction domestic politics should take and carefully implemented them while creating a false atmosphere of legality and pluralism. All along, Nicholas sustained a sense of suspense by giving credence to the widespread view that he was under someone's constant influence.

Mirskii's program was published in the form of the *Ukaz* of 12 December, 1904. The document announced a number of liberal reforms and promised to expand the rights of the zemstvos and municipal institutions in local affairs and to promote legality in every aspect of governmental procedure, but it lacked the critical provision on representation. Realizing that a hollow political statement similar to the Manifesto of 26 February 1903, would only serve to infuriate society, Mirskii requested permission to resign, having reputedly uttered despairingly: "Everything has failed. Let us build jails."[341]

The failure of Mirskii's reform proposal to introduce popular representation in legislature served as a rude awakening to those who hoped to steer the monarchy onto

---

[340] Daniel Turnbull, "The Defeat of Popular Representation, December 1904: Prince Mirskii, Witte, and the Imperial Family," *Slavic Review* 1 (Spring, 1989): 54-70.

[341] Sviatopolk-Mirskaia, "Dnevnik," 261.

a more liberal course. Nicholas's initial approval of Mirskii's reform followed by a sudden reversal of his decision perturbed members of the government and society and convinced them of the tsar's unreliability, susceptibility to negative influence, and even a desire to increase the personal element in his rule. Mirskii blamed the failure of his reform proposal on the tsar's weakness of character and his inability to recognize unqualified advice. "It is evident that someone is pushing [Nicholas] in this direction [to preserve the autocracy at all costs]," Mirskii told his wife in October 1904, "and he is unable to comprehend the situation."[342] Other officials believed that Nicholas's uncle and mother exerted a dominant influence on him. Still others assigned the responsibility for the failure of Mirskii's reform effort to the machinations of Sergei Witte. Witte, on the other hand, blamed Nicholas's resistance to reform on the intrigues of the emperor's entourage. "The Sovereign rules by means of the palace camarilla," wrote Witte in his account of the debates around Mirskii's proposal, "which considers itself to be the salt of the Russian soil and believes that everything must be done for its own sake and, in any case, through it."[343] Witte especially singled out the influence of Aleksandra Fedorovna, who he believed "rules [Nicholas's] will and his inclinations."[344] Almost no one perceived at the time that in resisting the proposal, Nicholas, in fact, acted on his own strongly held convictions.

---

[342] Ibid., 247.

[343] Vitte, *Vospominaniia*, vol. 2, 313.

[344] Ibid., 314.

Disappointment throughout society, as Klopov reported to Nicholas, was widespread. The public, Klopov warned the tsar, expected the manifesto to be clear and sincere in tone and content: "If it reminds people by its murkiness of the Manifesto of 26 February 1903, I can confidently say that it will not pacify anyone and only complicate our life."[345] In his letter of December 23 to Nicholas, Klopov regretted that there was no sign of popular representation in the *Ukaz*. "There are rumors that there had been a point in the *Ukaz* about it," Klopov wrote despairingly, "but that it was eliminated at the last minute. This fact can have very sad consequences…"[346] But while Klopov was reluctant to admit that Nicholas played an active role in opposing Mirskii's reform proposals, other observers were more perceptive. The British ambassador to St. Petersburg, Sir Charles Hardinge wrote to Marquess of Landsdowne that Mirskii was "severely criticized by the autocracy as having been the first interior minister to draw aside the veil, and to show the world that it is the Emperor who offers so decided an opposition to constitutional reform."[347] In a conversation with Witte two years later, Mirskii blamed Nicholas for the failure of his reform proposal. "All the misfortunes that had occurred resulted because of the personality of the sovereign," conceded the former minister. "The sovereign, who could not be trusted in anything, because whatever he approves today he will reject tomorrow, cannot establish peace in the empire."[348]

---

[345] Klopov to Nicholas II, 2 December 1904, 303.

[346] Ibid.

[347] Sir Charles Hardinge to Marquess of Landsdowne, 4 January 1905, *British documents, vol. 3, Office of Foreign Affairs*, 1.

Mirskii's diagnosis of the fundamental predicament the regime faced – distrust of its supreme authority in the eyes of the public and bureaucracy– was correct. The tsar was steadily losing political credibility. Worse, having antagonized the liberals by refusing to allow popular representatives in the government, Nicholas had incited an ever more radicalized middle class opposition to the regime. This was especially significant because with the expansion of the workers' movement, the government could no longer count on the support of its traditional allies.

In the months that followed, Nicholas and his government vacillated between repression and promises to grant some of society's demands. Richard Wortman explained such wavering behavior of the monarch by suggesting that the tsar acted out of his "twin beliefs in his obligation to rule forcefully and in the bond between himself and the Russian people."[349]

The growing alienation between the monarchy and the people and the real fear behind the veneer of the national myth was soon exposed by the event known as Bloody Sunday. On January 9, 1905, hundreds of unarmed workers and their families marched to the Winter Palace to personally present the tsar with a petition for basic civil rights and improvement of labor conditions. The procession was organized by Father Georgii Gapon, a popular priest engaged by the interior ministry to promote police trade unions in St. Petersburg and mobilize support of the expanding workers' movement. Disillusioned in the efficacy of police-sponsored unions, Gapon convinced the workers to approach Nicholas personally and to relate to him the plight

---

[348] Vitte, *Vospominaniia,* vol. 2, 328.

[349] Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power. Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 397

of the poor. The petition carried by the demonstrators included economic as well as political demands, but it conveyed no antagonism or ultimatums to the authorities. Its dramatic preamble read:

> O Sire, we are many thousands here (there are more than 300,000 of us), but we are human beings in appearance only, for we, with the rest of the Russian people, do not possess a single human right, not even the right to speak, think, gather, discuss our needs, and take steps to improve our conditions. We are enslaved, enslaved under the patronage and with the aid of Thy officials.[350]

Although the government received ample warning of the ensuing demonstration, it responded with appalling ineptness and cruelty. Instead of the mounted Cossacks with whips usually sent to disperse crowds, the government dispatched infantry troops armed with rifles against the demonstrators, which even high level bureaucrats, including the former head of police, Petr Durnovo, found deeply troubling.[351]

Bloody Sunday produced a blow of enormous proportions to the reputation of the autocracy, destroying Nicholas's image as the symbol and the embodiment of the nation. It also demonstrated to society how distrustful and fearful, despite the official rhetoric, Nicholas and the government were toward the people and how utterly unfamiliar with their deepest concerns. Accusations of the monarch's direct responsibility for the massacre immediately echoed throughout Russian society. Many contemporaries believed that Nicholas, who was away from the Winter Palace

---

[350] Walter Sablinsky, *The Road to Bloody Sunday: Father Gapon, His Labor Organization, and the Massacre of Bloody Sunday*. Ph. D. diss. (University of California, Berkeley, 1968), 503-9, quoted in Ascher, *Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray*, 87.

[351] Lieven, *Nicholas II*, 140.

at the time, personally acquiesced in the massacre. Foreign diplomats recorded similar impressions. "The strikers were among the most loyal subjects of the Emperor," wrote Sir Charles Hardinge. "Had the Emperor received a deputation… he would have obtained the admiration and undying loyalty of the workmen."[352]

Within a few weeks, triggered by the events of Bloody Sunday, the dire political situation in the capital and throughout the country translated into the full-scale Revolution of 1905. Industrial strikes became widespread, exacerbated by the war with Japan and worsening economic conditions in the cities. In St. Petersburg alone, over 160,000 workers refused to go to work. Disorders soon spread to the provinces.[353] Demands for political reforms and civil liberties, such as freedom of speech, press, association, and an eight-hour working day, soon turned disparate protests into a mass movement that launched the beginning of the Revolution of 1905. Opposition of every political shade denounced the monarchy's ineffectiveness in dealing with Russia's social and political problems. By the spring, professional and political unions were formed to organize and channel the revolutionary struggle.

The direction of events had become extremely precarious for the regime, but its response only worsened the situation. On the recommendations of Minister of Imperial Chancellery Aleksandr Mosolov and Minister of Court Vladimir Fredericks, Nicholas appointed the Moscow police chief, General Dmitrii Trepov, as governor-general of St. Petersburg.[354] Trepov's reputation among contemporaries had suffered

---

[352] Sir Charles Hardinge to Marquess of Landsdowne, 17 January 1905, 19.

[353] Ascher, *Revolution of 1905. Russia in Disarray*, 94.

[354] Ibid., 104-5.

from his close association with the unpopular Grand Duke Sergei Aleksandrovich during the Khodynka tragedy of 1896. (see chapter 2) The new post exacerbated further his negative perception by the public. Widely despised as a dictator and the leader of the palace camarilla, Trepov immediately became the scapegoat for the tsar's actions and shifting political orientations. "It was Trepov who now decided what was worthy of the emperor's attention and what was not," Witte wrote bitterly in his memoirs.

> After all, didn't His Majesty have more than enough to read? And if one of the documents that passed through Trepov's hands provided material for getting rid of an undesirable minister, it could be touched up in a beautiful and humble style to make the point very evident. In addition, Trepov was now able to influence the Emperor's political views.[355]

Trepov's personal qualities—sincerity, resoluteness, and simple style—appealed to the tsar. According to Witte, Trepov communicated his trustworthiness by his "brave appearance, fear-inspiring eyes, and blunt straightforwardness of his soldierly speech." He liked clarity and his conclusions were free of any complexities.[356] In October 1905, Nicholas wrote to Trepov that he was "the only one of my servants on whom I can rely completely."[357] As Dominic Lieven noted, Trepov became close to being Nicholas's personal secretary. He enjoyed the tsar's special confidence as his most trusted assistant and confidant. Nicholas sought

---

[355] Witte, *Memoirs*, 513-15, quoted in Lieven, *Nicholas II,* 120.

[356] Vitte, Vospominaniia, vol. 2, 332.

[357] Nicholas II to Trepov, 16 October 1905, GARF, f. 595, d. 45, p. 6-7, quoted in Andrew Verner, *The Crisis of Russian Autocracy: Nicholas II and the 1905 Revolution* (Princeton, N.J. 1990), 238.

Trepov's assistance in countering the united government as well as Witte, his new prime minister, whom Nicholas despised. "Trepov is absolutely indispensable to me," Nicholas wrote to his mother in February 1906, "he is acting in a kind of secretarial capacity. He is experienced and clever and cautious in his advice. I give him Witte's bulky memoranda to read, and he reports on them quickly and concisely. This is of course a secret to everybody but ourselves."[358]

Trepov's "rare honesty and straightforwardness," as Nicholas once summed up his adviser's most appealing traits, call to mind Nicholas's initial attraction to Klopov. Like Klopov, Trepov stood outside the bureaucracy and like Klopov, Trepov represented a broadly monarchist position. He was a flexible man who, being a devout monarchist, attempted, according to Andrew Verner, to "expose Nicholas to different opinions in good autocratic fashion and to protect the autocrat from being dominated by any one person or group."[359] But Trepov possessed what Klopov lacked – the military virtues of resoluteness and force that comforted and encouraged Nicholas and, in effect, brought about Klopov's symbolic replacement with Trepov as the tsar's informant and adviser.

In May 1905, Nicholas appointed Trepov assistant minister of internal affairs responsible for police and security in the capital, but the revolution only gained in strength. Unrest spread in many regions of the empire, affecting not only peasants and workers, but soldiers, sailors, and national minorities. Mass organization of the whole society against the regime grew rapidly. In September, violence in the

---

[358] Edward Bing, ed. *Letters*, *The Secret Letters of the Last Tsar* (Toronto, 1938), 212, quoted in Lieven, *Nicholas II,* 119.

[359] Verner, *Crisis of Russian Autocracy*, 255.

countryside and demonstrations in urban centers spread throughout Russia. Finally, on October 20, the general railway strike paralyzed the country's economy and plunged it into a catastrophic political crisis.

Alarmed at the escalating chaos, most members of Nicholas's administration, including Trepov, became convinced that only radical reforms would pacify the population. Witte, summoned to deal with the crisis, told Nicholas that the tsar had two options – to grant civil and political liberties in the form of a constitution and announce elections to a national Duma or to appoint a dictator to deal with the crisis by force. Although he realized the momentous nature of the events, Nicholas resorted to his habitual fatalism and passivity. Reluctant to tamper with autocracy to the end, the tsar procrastinated, hoping that some violent solution would put an end to disorders. He even tried to persuade his uncle, Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich, to serve as military dictator. Only after the grand duke's refusal did Nicholas finally agree to a scaled down authority and on October 17, 1905, issued the October Manifesto establishing the new legislative organ, the State Duma, and announcing basic civil rights. The State Council became the upper house of the Parliament with half of its members elected. The offshoot of the October Manifesto was the creation finally of a united government in Russia, with a Council of Ministers whose activities were coordinated by the prime minister.

By declaring the establishment of a constitutional regime in the country, the October Manifesto became the ultimate achievement of the 1905 Revolution and a milestone in the development of democracy in Russia. The autocracy lost its centuries-long monopoly on Russian politics, but despite the fundamental changes in

the system of rule, the power shift remained incomplete and the political settlement ambiguous and inadequate to a broad segment of society. While the promises of the Manifesto satisfied the more moderate members of the middle and upper classes, the bulk of the liberal and radical opposition demanded greater concessions, including redistribution of land and further social and economic reforms. Furthermore, as a result of the new political arrangement, the tsar retained enormous powers. He remained in control of the executive, the armed forces, foreign policy, as well as forty percent of the state budget. It was Nicholas's prerogative to convene and disband the Duma, exercise veto over legislation, and to pass laws by decree when the Duma was not in session, with the subsequent approval by the Duma. The title of autocrat remained inscribed in the Fundamental Laws, as a symbolic reminder of Nicholas's traditional prerogatives as Russia's ruler.

The unfinished nature of the agreement would continue to plague the relationship between government and society in the years to come. As liberals grew increasingly skeptical of the government's ability and willingness to establish a legal order, the labor movement, having gained considerable experience and confidence in the course of 1905, gradually adopted more militant rhetoric and tactics under the influence of the radical left.[360] Strikes, demonstrations, and violence against estate owners continued unabated and disorders spread to the armed forces and the navy – all of which convinced Nicholas that his retreat from the autocratic position had been premature. The tsar felt anger, regret, and guilt for having surrendered to the pressures of opposition and betrayed his sacred vows to bear sole responsibility for

[360] Ascher, *Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray*, 342-343.

the wellbeing of his people. In a letter to his mother, he justified the compromise he had made:

> From all over Russia they cried for it, they begged for it, and around me many – very many – held the same views. I had no one to rely on except honest Trepov. There was no other way out than to cross myself and give what everyone was asking from me. My only consolation is that such is the will of God, and his grave decision will lead my dear Russia out of the intolerable chaos she has been in for nearly a year.[361]

Nicholas's resentment of what seemed to him the unnecessary loss of his autocratic authority was fueled by numerous telegrams and letters he received from various conservative and right-wing individuals and organizations confessing loyalty and calling on Nicholas to reassert his authority. "I receive many moving telegrams from everywhere with gratitude for granting freedom," Nicholas wrote despairingly to his mother ten days after the issuance of the October Manifesto, "but with a clear indication that people desire to preserve the autocracy. Why had they remained quiet before – these kind people?" For Nicholas, those were the true Russian patriots who represented the real aspirations of the people, while, as the tsar told Maria Fedorovna, "nine-tenths of the troublemakers are Jews… But not only the kikes suffered; so did the Russian agitators, engineers, lawyers, and all kinds of other bad people."[362] Nicholas made his attitude to the new political order public when in December, 1905,

---

[361] Edward J. Bing, ed., *The Secret Letters of the Last Tsar* (Toronto, 1938), 187-8, quoted in Lieven, *Nicholas II,* 149.

[362] "Perepiska Nikolaia II i Marii Fedorovny," *Krasnyi arkhiv* 22 (1927), 169-170, quoted in Andrew M. Verner, *The Crisis of Russian Autocracy,* 260.

he openly received a delegation of the anti-Semitic Union of the Russian People and accepted honorable membership for himself and his son, Tsarevich Aleksei. Nicholas also pardoned hundreds of the group's members who participated in the anti-Jewish pogroms. Further alienating the liberals, the tsar appointed the conservative Petr Durnovo as the new interior minister, authorizing him to launch a brutal campaign of reprisals against opposition. "Terror must be answered by terror." Nicholas exclaimed in a letter to his mother. "Now, Witte himself has realized this."[363]

In the first months of 1906, Nicholas became increasingly reluctant to admit the constraints on his power. As has already been mentioned, he insisted that the words "autocratic" and "unlimited" be preserved in the new edition of the Fundamental Laws. This demand reflected Nicholas's attitude toward the newly elected Duma. The opening ceremony and the exchange of statements between the tsar and the representatives—all displayed mutual antagonism and contrary expectations. As Richard Wortman noted, for Nicholas, the Duma was "an extension of the tsar's autocratic will and that its deputies were obliged to earn his confidence."[364] Nicholas's first experience with the public representatives was wrought with conflict and immediately alienated him from the new institution. The Duma convened in April 1906, and, dominated by the oppositional Constitutional Democratic Party, soon set itself up in a nonworking deadlock with the government. Its demands for amnesty for political prisoners and partial expropriation of the big estates on behalf of the peasants were unacceptable to the monarch.

---

[363] Verner, *The Crisis of Russian Autocracy*, 272.

[364] Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, vol 2, 401.

Nicholas's feelings of having been betrayed by his officials, Witte in particular, translated into a desire to exercise greater control over the government. In April 1906, the tsar replaced Witte with the elderly and servile Ivan Goremykin, a minister without strong political opinions or imagination, with whom he felt confident and in control. "Goremykin will not act behind my back, making concessions and agreements to damage my authority," Nicholas explained his action referring to what he viewed as Witte's wrenching constitutional concessions from him through manipulation and trickery. "I can be perfectly confident that I shall not be given any surprises or made to face any *faits accomplis.*"[365]

The more pressure, disappointment, and, perhaps, shame Nicholas felt over the political concessions he had granted that had changed Russia's political traditions, the less tolerant he became toward the advisers and confidants he had relied on in the recent past. Klopov was the first of his unofficial advisers to fall out of favor when, in 1905, he intensified his urgent calls for reform and criticism directed at Nicholas. The absence of letters in Klopov's archive for the period of 1906-1908 and only three for the period from 1908-1913 suggests that the tsar might have been displeased with Klopov. Subsidies to the statistician also decreased for this period. No subsidies seem to have been issued for 1905 and 1906 and in the subsequent years monetary grants fell to three thousand as compared to ten to thirteen for the earlier years.[366]

---

[365] A. Kokovtsov, *Out of my Past* (Stanford, 1935), 127, quoted in Robert D. Warth, *Nicholas II: the Life and Reign of Russia's Last Monarch* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1997), 112.

[366] RGIA, fond 565, op. 14, no. 123, p. 175.

The Revolution of 1905 irreversibly damaged the position of Nicholas's other influential adviser, Meshcherskii.[367] Although he remained profoundly monarchist, toward the second half of 1905 the prince began to express enthusiasm about the idea of popular representation and constitution. What were the causes of Meshcherskii's sudden change of heart? Witte related his conversation with the prince a few days before the issuance of the October Manifesto. Meshcherskii looked dismal, Witte wrote, and told him that there was no other way out of the crisis but to grant a constitution. However, after October 17, Witte remarked sarcastically in his memoirs, when the thunderstorm had subsided, Meshcherskii "began smashing at the new laws and singing old tunes anew."[368]

But Witte's simplified account does not reflect accurately Meshcherskii's ideological permutations. True, the prince hoped that granting a constitution would assure peace in the country. More importantly, however, Meshcherskii expected a representative institution to set limits on what he saw as the despotic power of the bureaucracy which had in effect undermined the national monarchy by mediating the relationship between tsar and the people. For that reason, when the Duma was elected, Meshcherskii viewed it, not unlike Nicholas, as a component of the national

---

[367] After Mirskii's resignation Meshcherskii again appeared to be in demand. At Nicholas's request, the prince drafted a *rescript* in the monarch's name with the political program for the new minister of internal affairs, Alexander Bulygin. The *rescript* expressed the monarch's love of his people and unwillingness to exert his wrath and inflict repressions on them. It promised to continue with the reforms outlined in the Manifesto of 26 February and the *Ukaz* of 12 December 1904 and in the spirit of the national monarchy made vague promises to care for the needs of the people, curtail the excesses of the administration, and expand local autonomy.

[368] Vitte, *Vospominania*, vol. 3, 561.

monarchy and called on the representatives to recreate the broken bond between the tsar and the people. No matter how radical and uncompromising the popular deputies were, Meshcherskii feared that revocation of the Duma would bring back increased bureaucratic control.

Meshcherskii's enthusiastic defense of the new constitutional order was short-lived. He soon became disillusioned with the antagonistic Duma, and once the monarchy reasserted itself in the face of the waning revolution the following year, the prince switched positions and called on the tsar to preserve the spirit of the autocracy and to resist the deputies' demands. He warned Nicholas that although the tsar had expressed his desire to remain

> an autocrat, just like in the old days,… the rumors persist that your government considers itself constitutional. Even worse than constitutional, since on November 13th the Duma will receive the status of Constituent Assembly, an institution before which the government of the Russian tsar will capitulate.

It was best to ignore the demands of the Duma, Meshcherskii advised, since the Russian people did not desire any European constitution and appeared to be completely indifferent to it. As for the elected representatives, the prince continued, Nicholas II should announce to them in the spirit of his great grandfather, Nicholas I, that he was "the Russian tsar and my power is my business, entrusted to me by God to be the father and leader of my beloved people."[369]

Thus, impulsively responding to events, enthusiastic and hopeful one minute and critical and dooming the next, Meshcherskii changed his recommendations so

[369] RGADA, f. 1378, op. 2, no. 18, p. 5-6.

often during the Revolution, he was not able to hold Nicholas's ear for long, and after 1905 no longer enjoyed any substantial degree of direct influence with Nicholas.[370] Meshcherskii continued his attempts to reach the tsar through his editorials in *Grazhdanin,* but it was not until 1913 when he finally managed to regain his friendship with Nicholas.

Trepov's death from a heart condition in September 1906 spared him from what he and others at court considered as his imminent fall from grace. Although Nicholas had granted Trepov extensive powers, he never forgave him for overstepping the strict parameters of his ideological convictions. In June 1906, in the midst of unending unrest, Trepov personally undertook a negotiation with leaders of the liberal opposition about the creation of the "ministry of confidence," a cabinet of ministers that would enjoy the Duma's approval. Initially influenced by Trepov, the tsar approached a leader of the Octobrists, Dmitrii Shipov, with an offer to head a new government. But Nicholas soon abandoned the idea, which left him resentful of his closest adviser.[371] Trepov's insistent appeals to Nicholas to avoid dissolving the Duma also caused the tsar's displeasure.

Nicholas dissolved the Duma on July 9, 1906, siding with his new interior minister, Petr Stolypin, and, thus, expressing preparedness to move toward a stronger stand on the issues of domestic policy. He had appointed Stolypin, a former governor of the Saratov province, in April 1906 to restore order and combat political crisis in

---

[370] N. V. Chernikova, "Kniaz' Vladimir Petrovich Meshcherskii i revoliutsiia (1904-1907 gg.) in A. Iu. Minakov, ed., *Konservatism v Rossii i mire*, vol. 2 (Voronezh, 2004), 150-178.

[371] Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905: Authority Restored* (Stanford University Press, 1992), 192.

the country. A strong and charismatic personality, Stolypin had effectively dealt with peasant disorders in his province by using force while insisting on the strict maintenance of legality. Nicholas expected the new minister to use his skills and experience in combating unrest to pacify the country and keep political opposition at bay—tasks Stolypin accomplished successfully. Immediately after assuming the new post, Stolypin advised Nicholas to establish field court-martials to fight terrorism and political crimes. On August 19, 1906, his proposal became law and resulted in 2,700 executed and more than 22,000 thousand exiled over the next three years. On June 3, 1907, after several failed attempts to cooperate with the second Duma, the tsar insisted that Stolypin dissolve it and call for new elections. In a letter to Stolypin instructing the minister to go forward with the dissolution of the Duma, Nicholas insisted that "there must be no delay, not one minute of hesitation! God favors the bold!"[372] The minister also altered the electoral law to ensure the predominance of the provincial conservative nobility in the Duma.

Ironically, having infuriated the liberal opposition by the blatantly unconstitutional action of June 3, Stolypin also failed to win over the conservatives. The rightists' rejection of the new regime stemmed, to a large extent, from their ideological disagreement with its key component: limitations on the autocracy imposed by the elected institutions. Suspicious of the impact and direction of Stolypin's agricultural reforms, they also expressed an overall negative attitude

[372] Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, 406.

toward economic modernization that caused the landlords to lose their economic foothold and social status in the countryside.[373]

Nicholas made little effort to support the prime minister against powerful groups on the right that undermined his authority throughout his years in office. While satisfied with Stolypin's skill at pacifying the country in crisis, the tsar remained uncommitted to his minister's long-term goals. In contrast to Nicholas's vision of a national monarchy based on a personal connection between the tsar and people, Stolypin's idea was to create a "united nation apart from the tsar"— a nation of private property owners unified by an "all-class" zemstvo.[374] Nicholas made it obvious that he did not sympathize with the direction of Stolypin's reforms by openly associating with Stolypin's enemies among the right-wing extremists, receiving their delegations, accepting presents from them, and granting acquittals in the legal procedures against them.[375] Furthermore, the tsar interpreted Stolypin's efforts to rationalize the administration and enforce united government as usurping his supreme authority and allowed others to publicly articulate such sentiments.

Characteristic of Nicholas's manner of rule and also highly symptomatic of the deterioration of the regime, was the appearance of Mikhail Andronikov, who, with Nicholas's implicit consent, fought some of the most notorious campaigns against Stolypin. Andronikov, whom historian Iurii Soloviev aptly described a "celebrity of the St. Petersburg political world," received his education at the

---

[373] Ascher, *Stolypin,* 225-230.

[374] Wortman, *Scenarios of Power,* vol. 2, 408.

[375] Ascher, *P. A. Stolypin. The Search for Stability in Late Imperial Russia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 261-262.

prestigious school for young aristocrats, the Pages' Corps, where he had reportedly acquired impeccable manners and fluency in several modern languages. The prince occupied no significant official post in the administration. He held a nominal unpaid position at the Holy Synod, which, as he put it, allowed him to acquire the titles and occasionally to put on a uniform.[376]

He launched his "career" by finding creditors for his wealthy or well-connected protégés and with time the prince accumulated an impressive list of grateful acquaintances in various ministries, departments, the State Council, and the State Senate. Andronikov spent his days maintaining his contacts and soon became a unique source of confidential government information and rumors. An unsurpassed flatterer, Andronikov would be the first to offer congratulations to an official, usually the director of some department, on the receipt of an award or another special occasion. He flavored his greetings with small offerings, such as an expensive pen, fresh fish, or an icon, which, he insisted, could not be rejected. Etiquette obliged the recipient to send a thank-you note, which, in turn, led to Andronikov's personal visit to his department and, eventually, friendship with him. Seeing their superior on friendly terms with the prince, the subordinates facilitated the processing of all paperwork pertaining to Andronikov's requests.

Andronikov befriended various service personnel, especially the couriers who delivered letters of appointments and notices of awards and decorations. He offered them drinks and delicacies while finding out the contents of their packages and

---

[376] *Padenie tsarskogo rezhima. Stenograficheskie otchety doprosov i pokazanii dannyh v 1917 g. v Chrezvychailoi sledstvennoi komissii Vremennogo pravitel'stva*, ed. P. E. Shchegoleva, vol. 1 (Moscow-Leningrad, 1924-1927), 392.

hurried to congratulate the recipient of the imminent delivery, thus, creating an illusion that he was privy to the highest source of information at the court. Armed with the latest gossip, Andronikov appeared to be one of the most powerful sources of behind-the-scenes information on the bureaucracy and court. Government officials, including members of the bureaucratic elite, sought Andronikov's attention, invited him for dinners, and corresponded with him.[377]

Throughout Stolypin's tenure, Andronikov sent letters to various officials and powerful people, in which he portrayed the prime minister at the very center of Russia's troubles, both domestic and international. In a letter to Fredericks on March 25, 1911, Andronikov claimed that Stolypin hid behind the authority of the tsar while making Nicholas morally responsible for the policies before the country. The minister had completely usurped the imperial authority and emasculated the emperor,

---

[377] Like Meshcherskii, the prince intimidated the administration by spreading rumors about individual ministers. Even those ministers who enjoyed a spotless reputation, like Aleksandr Polivanov, felt obliged to receive Andronikov. Most bureaucrats were either impressed and intrigued by Andronikov's ubiquitous presence or resentful and fearful of his extraordinary connections, but it was difficult to avoid him altogether. Vladimir Voeikov, the palace commandant who enjoyed a close relationship with Nicholas, initially dismissed Andronikov's overtures. When the latter attempted to interest him "with other people's business and to find out my opinions about the highest bureaucrats and ministers," Voeikov later wrote, "I took his chit-chat with utmost indifference." Andronikov, however, did not take rejection lightly. He continued to pursue Voieikov through his connections in the government, particularly Kokovtsov. At a dinner party, Kokovtsov advised Voeikov that a person as well informed as Andronikov could also be of great service to the commandant. Such high-level pressure convinced Voieikov to meet with Andronikov who at their first meeting produced a heap of notes detailing rumors about various ministers from his briefcase. Thereafter, Voieikov frequently assisted Andronikov in delivering the prince's letters to the tsar and the grand dukes as well as creating the necessary environment for the favorable reception of Andronikov's ideas. V. N. Voeikov, *S tsarem i bez tsaria* (Helsinki, 1936), 35.

the prince reported: "They say that now everything is possible. What Stolypin wants, the tsar will do."[378]

Andronikov's enmity of Stolypin had political causes, but the prince was particularly incensed by the prime minister's independence and unwillingness to heed outsiders like himself. He first attempted to engage Stolypin in a "conversation" about the political situation in August 1906, only four months after the latter became chairman of the council of ministers. Although he failed to gain the minister's attention, Andronikov nevertheless spread rumors around St. Petersburg salons and drawing rooms that Stolypin had come to trust him completely and authorized him to defend the government's views in society.[379]

When Andronikov's attempt to personally influence Stolypin failed, the prince undertook a massive campaign against him in the press. He stirred opinions at the top by circulating compromising letters about the prime minister among the influential people at court. A good example of such correspondence was Andronikov's letters to the tsar's influential uncle, Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich, aimed at diminishing Stolypin's political authority and undermining Nicholas's confidence in the minister. The reasons that inspired him to write this time, Andronikov explained, was the disturbing rise of Stolypin's popularity. This popularity was not the result of real achievements or services the minister had rendered to the people and the tsar, but the result of a dangerous self-aggrandizing political propaganda that promoted the prime minister's celebrity status. The tone of the second letter was forceful and accusatory,

---

[378] Ascher, *Stolypin*, 296-98

[379] S. E. Kryzhanovskii, "Andronikov," Kryzhanovskii archive, box 2, Bakhmeteff Archive, Columbia University Library.

at times lapsing into sarcasm. Andronikov depicted Stolypin shielding the emperor and pushing him into the background while appropriating for himself the preeminent position as leader in the eyes of the people. This situation, the prince remarked, inspired popular bewilderment and temptation. "Is the emperor still reigning or has he abdicated and assigned Stolypin as his substitute – such is the frightening question that has lately resounded throughout Russia," warned Andronikov.[380]

As an example of such behavior, Andronikov described the prime minister's recent tour of Siberia in September, 1910. The instructions issued to the local authorities detailing the protocol for receiving Stolypin and his assistant Aleksandr Krivoshein conveyed the pomp that surrounded these officials on their journey. "Such instructions have never been issued even on behalf of the grand dukes," Andronikov exclaimed and wondered if the display of deference and demonstration of affection during the actual receptions had certainly exceeded the level the instructions had called for. Similar celebrity-style receptions accompanied Stolypin's tour of the European part of Russia where he inspected the newly established private peasant farmsteads.

Stolypin, Andronikov continued, had erected his own throne and installed his own dynasty by appointing his relatives to the most important positions in the administration. Soon, all independent voices in the administration would be forced out and Stolypin's people would replace them. "In these circumstances Stolypin's despotism will acquire a full range, and the monarch will be ever more isolated and lacking means to know the truth and regulate the activities of the governing

---

[380] Andronikov to Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich, GARF, fond 472 op. 40 104/2682, d. 7, p. 273-77.

mechanism." A most dangerous development of all, Andronikov preached, was the fact that the monarch's personal initiative was being continuously neglected. For example, the tsar had approved of the *poteshnye* [a youth training army] and called for widely applied military training in civil educational institutions, but the ministry of education immediately paralyzed the implementation of his majesty's wishes. In fact, Andronikov speculated, the bureaucrats did this purposely and virtually unnoticeably in order to cool down the tsar's desire for personal initiatives.[381]

Ironically, Andronikov's numerous attempts to make inroads into the royal family and to establish a personal relationship with Nicholas and Aleksandra enjoyed little success. He frequently sent letters to the royal couple with his opinions and commentaries on the political situation in Russia, offered advice, and complained about ministers' inefficiency and lack of imagination. Yet, although he ignored Andronikov's recommendations, Nicholas never disallowed Andronikov's correspondence and even occasionally accepted presents from him, which was an indication that the prince's views appealed to the tsar.[382]

As Nicholas's relationships with his advisers before and during the 1905 Revolution demonstrate, the tsar possessed strong political opinions and was never easily influenced by those who attempted to sway him in a direction that contradicted his deeply held convictions. Although his political persona projected ambivalence and indecisiveness, Nicholas was determined to rule in a forceful autocratic manner

---

[381] Ibid.

[382] In a letter of February 12, 1910, Mosolov informed the prince that the fresh salmon he had sent to the tsar was well received. Soloviev, "Politicheskaia smert' P. A. Stolypina," in *Gosudarstvennaia deiatel'nost' P. A. Stolypina*, edited by N. K. Figurovskaia and A. D. Stepanskii (Moscow, 1994), 138.

and whenever circumstances forced him to make concessions to society, he sabotaged the new arrangement tenaciously. Nicholas's implicit consent to Andronikov's activities was symptomatic of the tsar's attempts to disrupt the post-1905 political settlement and especially the establishment of the united government headed by the prime minister, which devalued his supreme authority.

The seeds of the "Andronikov" phenomenon go back to the beginning of Nicholas's reign when the tsar established precedents by engaging with Klopov, Meshcherskii, Bezobrazov, and others outside the administration. Andronikov differed from Nicholas's early unofficial advisers in that unlike them, he did not possess an explicit mandate for his activities from the tsar. The widespread notion of Nicholas's susceptibility to unofficial influences affected the political climate of the government and gave rise to a new phenomenon—the appearance of adventurers, like Andronikov, who built their "careers," in part, on the false claim of close connections with the court and an ability to influence the tsar. Their meddling injected chaos and insecurity in government affairs. As will be clear from the next chapter, widespread fears in society that the monarchy had been taken over by the so-called "dark forces" contributed to a steady erosion of its reputation and became a significant factor in its downfall during the Revolution of 1917.

8. Nicholas and his Advisers in the Last Years of the Monarchy: 1912-1917.

During Peter Stolypin's five-year tenure as prime minister, the political regime in Russia underwent a considerable consolidation of institutional power and a greater rationalization of policy-making. The rise of a "united government"— a system of unified decision making which made each minister accountable to the prime minister instead of the tsar—the establishment of the State Duma, and the elevation of the State Council's authority infused a new spirit into the political culture of the empire. Stolypin's strong leadership and political vision had, to a large extent, constrained Nicholas's penchant for a personal exercise of autocracy. But in the period after Stolypin's assassination in September 1911, Nicholas attempted to recuperate his lost autocratic prerogatives, threatening to disintegrate the political structure the prime minister had put into place. Expressing resentment at the lack of control over his government, the tsar had reportedly complained to Minister of Court Vladimir Fredericks: "I no longer have the right to do what I find useful; I am becoming fed up with that."[383] As will be clear from the discussion that follows, Nicholas's strong resistance to the post-1905 political settlement exacerbated the radicalization of Russian society and fed the revolutionary fervor that engulfed the country by 1917.

* * *

Nicholas's renewed political activity in the aftermath of Stolypin's death was directed implicitly at the "united government" and its chairman whose authority he

[383] David M. McDonald, *United Government and Foreign Policy in Russia 1900-1914* (Harvard University Press, 1992), 187.

undermined by allowing, if not encouraging, ministerial disunity and dissent in the Council of Ministers. Vladimir Kokovtsov, who succeeded Stolypin as chairman, strongly adhered to his predecessor's vision of reforms and strove to maintain a unified government. Yet, he lacked Stolypin's authority and diplomacy in dealing with the Council and the Duma and incurred opposition from council members on a number of domestic issues, such as the bill for the abolition of the state monopoly on the sale of alcohol, conservative financial policy, as well as foreign policy matters connected to Russia's diplomacy in the Balkans. Notably, much of the reason for Kokovtsov's political defeats had to do with the fact that during his many confrontations with his colleagues, the prime minister received virtually no support from Nicholas.[384]

Nicholas's disregard for the principle of "united government" and his lack of support for Kokovstov's efforts to maintain it lent authority to the chairman's opponents in the Council. Ministers unwilling to comply with the requirements of united government frequently wrote to Nicholas directly or through those with direct access to the tsar, such as Fredericks, Chief of Imperial Chancellery Aleksandr Mosolov, or Palace Commandant Vladimir Voeikov. When Kokovstov complained to Nicholas of the repeated offences by ministers, the tsar "commiserated with Kokovtsov over the violation of ministerial unity, while taking no measure against the offending party."[385]

---

[384] Ibid.

[385] Ibid., 179.

An example of how difficult it became for Kokovtsov to enforce the principle of united government can be gleaned from his August, 1913, letter to Fredericks. In July, the tsar had authorized Voeikov to head a reform program designed to improve the physical development of the population in the empire and report to him directly on the issue. Not only was Voeikov's assignment outside his sphere of responsibility, but, as Kokovstov reminded Fredericks, the privilege of direct reporting granted by the tsar to Voeikov contradicted the law which required each minister to brief the prime minister as well as all concerned ministers prior to reporting to the monarch. In effect, it reverted to the pre-1905 system where each minister was directly accountable to the tsar. Kokovstov argued that Voeikov's new task should bring him in closer contact with the cabinet of ministers and appealed to Fredericks to advise Voeikov to exercise extreme caution when using his privilege of personal report to the tsar.[386]

Nicholas received ideological and psychological support and encouragement to recuperate his supreme authority from none other than Vladimir Meshcherskii, who in 1913 had regained some of his former influence with the tsar.[387] The prince's editorials in *Grazhdanin*, overtly subservient and lacking any subtlety in their exaltations of the autocracy, inspired grateful letters from Nicholas. "It was with

---

[386] N. Kokovtsov to V. Fredericks, 14 August 1913, GARF, fond 472, op. 40 104/2682, d. 7, p. 243-5.

[387] In fact, he never completely disappeared from the political scene. One of the most fascinating aspects of Meshcherskii's reputation and influence in the government circles was that they carried on long after the prince's intimate friendship with Nicholas ended in 1906. Partly because of the expectations that sooner or later Meshcherskii would again be in favor, numerous officials continued to seek his attention and employ his connections for personal and career advantage.

tremendous pleasure that I read that wonderful and heartfelt article of yours, 'A Great and Holy Day,'" wrote Nicholas on March 3, 1913, having been especially impressed by one of Meshcherskii's accounts. "It is the symbol of faith of every honest and thinking person. You have rarely written such a deeply felt piece. I would like to see you very much and ask you to come and see me on Thursday at 6."[388] "The old friendship has completely returned," Nicholas reassured Meshcherskii a month later, "if I do not answer straight away, the reason is still the same – lack of time. I will try to find a few minutes to console my old friend."[389]

Voicing his opinions in a debate over the nature of the political order in post-1905 Russia, Meshcherskii reiterated and enhanced the tsar's political views. "I always considered it impossible," wrote the prince, "to allow within the Russian state, under the auspices of the Autocratic Monarch, the existence of two supreme legislative powers, one of which does not ratify the laws, the State Duma, and the one that ratifies the laws, the Autocrat."[390] The State Duma did not amount to a representative institution, Meshcherskii observed ambiguously, "and since we have no representative order, neither do we have any representatives; what we have is members of the State Duma elected by the people." By drawing a distinction between the "representatives" and "elected," Meshcherskii defined the Duma as a populist supplement to the autocratic regime. Only a handful people, he added, had

---

[388] Nicholas II to Meshcherskii, 3 March 1913, Igor Vinogradoff, ed., "Some Imperial Letters to Prince V. P. Meshcherskii (1839-1914)." Oxford Slavonic Studies 11 (1962), 139.

[389] Nicholas II to Meshcherskii, 13 April 1913, 140.

[390] *Grazhdanin*, "Dnevnik," 2 January 1913, 15.

failed to recognize that Russia had no constitution, while the majority of Russians had fully comprehended the nature of the regime: autocratic order with the participation of the elected members of the State Duma and the State Council in the legislative work.[391]

Several months later, Meshcherskii continued to argue that the existence of the Duma did not limit the full scope of Nicholas's autocratic prerogatives:

> The State Duma and the State Council are called legislative organs not because they issue laws, but because they prepare them to be presented for a consideration to the autocratic power. Only the autocrat issues laws and that is why he is the only legislator and he is the sole holder of legislative power.[392]

Meshcherskii also urged Nicholas to assume a real leadership role in the Council of Ministers and not to allow the prime minister to exercise supremacy in government. "Russia's salvation is in the power of its tsar," he wrote, "On the day that the tsar is not strong, Russia will die."[393]

Nicholas made a definitive step in the direction of regaining personal control over the administration when in 1912 he appointed Meshcherskii's protégé, a young and entertaining governor of Chernigov province Nikolai Maklakov, as his new interior minister. Maklakov's political position was very close to Nicholas's. With a mandate from the tsar, the new minister was prepared to lash out against the civil and

---

[391] *Grazhdanin*, "Dnevnik," 16 November 1913, 10

[392] *Grazhdanin*, "Dnevnik," 24 February 1914, 13.

[393] *Grazhdanin*, 23 February 1913, 12, quoted in Dominic Lieven, *Nicholas II: Emperor of All the Russias* (London, 1993), 183.

political rights newly acquired by society after 1905. In particular, Maklakov intended to target the freedom of the press by issuing a restrictive censorship law.[394]

Meshcherskii's *Grazhdanin,* along with the rest of the conservative press, hailed Maklakov's appointment as a reflection of the emperor's personal choice. Praising the new minister's independence from political factions and his readiness to serve as the executive of Nicholas's political initiatives, Meshcherskii portrayed Maklakov as an honest and noble man destined to pull the ministry of internal affairs out of its slumber. Unlike most government officials, such as Kokovtsov, who were concerned solely with their own private interests and maintaining their positions, Meshcherskii reported, the new interior minister had demonstrated political independence and complete devotion to the state and the idea of the autocracy.[395]

With Maklakov as his sounding board and collaborator, Nicholas began to resist the new political order with renewed vigor. In October 1913, Nicholas wrote to Maklakov that his old wish had been to alter the law which authorized the State Duma veto power on any legislation. "This provision," the tsar explained to his minister, "considering the fact that we have no constitution – is entirely senseless." He added that "the presentation to the sovereign of the opinions of the majority and the minority for his choice and confirmation will be a good way of returning to the previous, more tranquil course of legislative activity, and which is moreover in the

---

[394] Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power. Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 504; Lieven*, Nicholas II*, 185.

[395] *Grazhdanin* "Dnevnik," 1 January 1913, 5.

Russian spirit."[396] Nicholas's intention to limit the Duma's status to a consultative institution represented a complete return to the pre-1905 political regime. Only staunch opposition from the other ministers dissuaded Maklakov from bringing the reform to discussion in the State Council.

Emboldened by Nicholas's assertiveness and renewed attention to him, Meshcherskii plunged himself into the midst of bureaucratic intrigues. In the summer and fall of 1913, on behalf of Kokovtsov's enemies in the administration, Meshcherskii led a press campaign against the prime minister, whom he accused of undermining the autocracy and usurping Nicholas's prerogatives. Claiming that the Prime Minister's loyalty lay ultimately with the Duma and the zemstvos and not the monarch, and that he, therefore, could not be the proper executor of His Majesty's will, *Grazhdanin* urged a return to the pre-1905 system of the committee of ministers functioning under the authority of the tsar. The cabinet of ministers led by the prime minister was a western invention, wrote Meshcherskii, and had no place in Russia.

It is clear from the previous discussion, Meshcherskii's opinion pieces merely echoed Nicholas's own resentments of the united government and the power of the prime minister, rather than fed the tsar with new ideas. However, since *Grazhdanin* had been widely seen as not simply reflecting, but influencing the views of the tsar, Meshcherskii's press campaign against Kokovtsov damaged the prime minister's authority among the government officials as well as the public. In fact, Kokovstov, who during his ten years of service had never incurred any disapproval from the

---

[396] V. P. Semennikov, ed, *Monarkhia pered krusheniem* (Moscow, 1927), 92 quoted in Robert Warth, *Nicholas II: the Life and Reign of Russia's Last Monarch* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1997), 168.

monarch, became convinced that the heavy barrage of alarming articles in *Grazhdanin* brought about Nicholas's loss of faith in him as prime minister and led to his dismissal in January 1914. Referring to *Grazhdanin* in his memoirs, Kokovstov observed that the enormous influence of the newspaper "makes one want to get close to those who so skillfully predict events and maybe, albeit indirectly, have an opportunity to influence them." Yet, when the minister complained to the tsar about *Grazhdanin's* continuous harassment, Nicholas denied reading any of the compromising articles. "Whatever the newspapers write," he reassured his prime minister, "their influence and in particular the influence of *Grazhdanin*, is not what you think it is, and as far as I am concerned, their influence is nonexistent."[397]

Kokovstov was almost right about the nature of Meshcherskii's role in the campaign against him. What he failed to recognize, was that the prince and the ministers who campaigned against their chairman merely echoed Nicholas's own views in questions of foreign and financial policies. Nicholas supported War Minister Vladimir Sukhomlinov's argument that Kokovtsov's authority did not extend over the army budget and the army's relationship with the Duma. The tsar also agreed with Minister of Agriculture Aleksandr Krivoshein's charge that Kokovtsov's frugal monetary policy prevented the implementation of reforms in the countryside.[398] In particular, Kokovtsov, who had preached restraint and compromise in Russia's Balkan diplomacy in view of the country's unpreparedness for war, had come up against Nicholas's support of those in the Council of Ministers, who, like

---

[397] V. N. Kokovtsov, *Iz moego proshlogo* (Paris, 1933), 259.

[398] Lieven, *Nicholas II*, 183.

Krivoshein and Sukhomlinov, supported a forceful stand in the Balkans vis-à-vis Austria-Hungary and Germany.

As David McDonald argued persuasively, campaigns against Kokovtsov also facilitated the tsar's efforts to gain personal leadership in government. The evidence of Nicholas's role in Kokovtsov's dismissal emerges in the tsar's correspondence with Meshcherskii in the fall of 1913. In September, Nicholas indicated his intention to replace Kokovtsov. "Regarding your question about the fate of K[okovstov]," Nicholas informed the prince, "I repeat that I am always preoccupied with this thought and hope to be able to find a solution to the situation. . . " But having "allowed" Meshcherskii to advise him in this direction, Nicholas, nevertheless, maintained his independent stand with his informal adviser. Unwilling to be bound by any promises, Nicholas told the prince that he "cannot give any kind of promise that I will definitely fulfill."[399]

Shortly after Kokovtsov's dismissal in January 1914, in his letter to his confidant and protégé Krivoshein, Meshcherskii praised Nicholas's resolve in the Kokovtsov affair. Instead of the vacillating and weak ruler reflected in memoirs of government officials, in this letter Nicholas appeared as if he had undergone a personal evolution. "His Majesty revealed so much resoluteness, thoughtfulness, so much creativity and subtlety in details," Meshcherskii told Krivoshein, "that he appeared like a new person to me."[400] The struggle to oust Kokovstov was not an

---

[399] Nicholas II to Meshcherskii, 8 September 1913, 141.

[400] "Iz zakulisnyh vliianii. Kniaz' V. P. Meshcherskii i A. V. Krivoshein," *Russkoie Proshloe*, 83-84.

easy one and, Meshcherskii admitted, it made him anxious that the tsar might in the end remain loyal to his prime minister. To his relief, the papers soon announced the appointment of Ivan Goremykin as Kokovstov's successor. "Kokovtsov's evil designs have collapsed…!" Meshcherskii exclaimed. "My efforts were not in vain. How I thanked God." The appointment of the elderly and obsequious Goremykin as the new prime minister, as Wortman pointed out, " represented the end of the principle of "united government" and made the tsar, once more, the dominant figure in the government."[401]

Success in the Kokovtsov affair allowed Meshcherskii to exercise influence in yet another major appointment. As the prince informed his long-time ally and client, Krivoshein, he had paved the way for the little known Petr Bark for the position of minister of finance. "His Majesty has been enamored by Bark; thanks to you for pointing out such a fine person, who is able to carry out the task given to him by the tsar!" The prince further noted that Bark had received a warm welcome in the press and the business spheres and that he, Meshcherskii, "wrote about him secretly to [his connections in] Paris."[402] Two weeks later, Meshcherskii reported to Krivoshein that Bark had made a good impression everywhere. "His Majesty was very happy with Bark's first two reports, their clarity, succinctness, and absence of various phrases, full of evidence of expertise. As a result, hurray to you and to us!" concluded the prince.

---

[401] Wortman, *Scenarios of Power,* vol. 2, 507.

[402] "Iz zakulisnyh vliianii," 83-84

It soon became apparent that the new finance minister turned out to be more independent-minded than Meshcherskii had assumed him to be and refused to follow the guidance of his benefactor. Bark may have considered it prudent to distance himself from Meshcherskii's controversial reputation. This development left the prince bitterly disappointed. "I noticed signs that [Bark] fears rumors of my influence on him," he complained to Krivoshein. Meshcherskii also reported that his early impressions of Bark had begun to fade as he observed the minister's lack of energy and initiative. "[Bark] fails to comprehend that His Majesty does not like to be fed with [dry written] reports alone," Meshcherskii wrote to Krivoshein, "He demands vigorous and independent expression…"[403] But despite Meshcherskii's continued criticism of Bark to Nicholas, the tsar retained his finance minister until the end of his reign, which points to the fact that Meshcherskii's advice mattered exclusively when and if he reverberated the existing opinions of his patron.

Meshcherskii's long-term partnership with Krivoshein exemplifies the close connections between the unofficial and official advisers to the tsar. In one of his letters to the minister, the prince emphasized a special bond that had brought them together as "brothers in spirit, heart, and consciousness… who can speak the truth to [Nicholas]."[404] Their correspondence, which lasted from 1906 until the prince's death in 1914, reveals a steady exchange of information and opinions pertaining to the highest levels of government as well as the work of various departments and ministers.

---

[403] Ibid.

[404] Ibid.

When in 1908 Krivoshein was promoted to the post of minister of agriculture at the initiative of Stolypin, Meshcherskii's congratulatory notice on the pages of *Grazhdanin* created an impression of the prince's involvement in the appointment. As Krivoshein's biographer pointed out, Meshcherskii's strategy was two-fold: to win over the newly appointed minister, thus making him obliged to satisfy the prince's requests, and at the same time, to exploit his friendly relationship with Krivoshein in order to enhance his own reputation as a career broker.[405] Since then, Meshcherskii and Krivoshein frequently obliged each other with numerous mutual favors on behalf of their respectful protégés and in 1910, Krivoshein had arranged for Meshcherskii's *Grazhdanin* a grant in the amount of 75,000 rubles and a 30,000-ruble monthly subsidy which allowed the periodical to exist until the death of its editor four years later.[406]

By 1913, as head of the influential ministry of agriculture, Krivoshein gained authority for his success in the implementation of Stolypin's reform. On good terms with the zemstvo leaders and the Duma deputies, he also managed to please Empress Aleksandra and enjoy special trust of the tsar. Using every occasion to promote Krivoshein with Nicholas, Meshcherskii actively encouraged the minister to agree to head the government: "Take action, I beg you" wrote Meshcherskii in March 1913, "the time is right! I saw the Master yesterday in Tsarskoe Selo and, finding him

---

[405] K. A. Krivoshein, *Aleksandr Vasil'evich Krivoshein. Sud'ba rossiiskogo reformatora* (Moscow, 1993), 157-8.

[406] "Iz zakulisnyh vliianii," 82.

refreshed and in a good mood, I related to him the content of your letters."[407] In the fall of 1913, after a lengthy conversation with Krivoshein on the requirements of Russia's financial policy, Nicholas offered the minister to head the ministry of finance as well as the Council of Ministers, in essence to replace Kokovtsov. Krivoshiein declined the offer because, as he explained to one of his colleagues, "to have the title of prime minister and not to have the authority in reality – requires either geriatric indifference to everything or extreme thirst for power, which after Stolypin nobody has been allowed to have or will ever have."[408]

The ideological rift between the new regime and Nicholas's conception of his authority, which centered on the person of the monarch connected through personal ties to his people, played out on a symbolic as well as political level. Between 1909 and 1913, the government staged several jubilee celebrations to commemorate some of the pivotal events in Russian history, the most significant of which were the Battle of Poltava in 1709, the Battle of Borodino in 1812, and the election of the Romanov dynasty in 1613. In addition to the formal festivities, the celebrations included publication of books and pamphlets, theater performances, and widely publicized tours by the royal family. For the tsar, the celebrations were a means for staging the national myth and symbolically reaffirming the monarchy's ties with the people. As Richard Wortman has demonstrated, the symbolism behind the celebrations signified

---

[407] Meshcherskii to Krivoshein, 4 march 1913, quoted in Krivoshein, *Aleksandr Vasil'evich Krivoshein*, 160.

[408] Krivoshein, *Aleksandr Vasil'evich Krivoshein,* 59.

the tsar's identification with the autocratic and imperial past while drawing "the lines more sharply between the monarch and the new political nation."[409]

This aspect of the events was especially evident in the symbolic presentations connected to the tercentenary celebrations in May 1913, marking the beginning of Romanov rule. These celebrations became an important symbolic event for Nicholas in sustaining his mythical self-image as an unlimited ruler who enjoyed his people's boundless affection. "The institutions of the bureaucracy in this framework were portrayed as a mere encumbrance, 'a dividing wall,' between tsar and people. Nicholas II believed that he had succeeded in breaching this wall."[410] One of the most significant publications produced on the occasion of the anniversary was the tsar's biography authored by a member of his suite, General Aleksandr Elchaninov, and entitled *The Reign of the Sovereign Emperor Nikolai Aleksandrovich*. This was the first time in Russian history that a biography of a living monarch was written. It both promoted and served to mirror the self-image by portraying Nicholas as a hard working monarch who personally took care of the important matters of the state and made all decisions. The biography also promoted his image as a leader who deeply understood and attended to the needs of his people.[411]

The idea of personalizing the monarch's life and making his image accessible to the people evidently belonged to Prince Mikhail Andronikov, who also performed the role of the intermediary between Nicholas and the publishing house, *Sel'skii*

---

[409] Wortman, *Scenarios of Power,* 425.

[410] Ibid., 448.

[411] Ibid., 489-501.

vestnik. In May 1912, a year prior to the publication of the biography, the prince addressed a letter to Fredericks advising the minister of court that

> people want to know about the personal life of their monarchs in order to love them; they want to establish between themselves and the monarchs not a cold, legalistic, but a live and personal connection; they want to see their monarchs not only as rulers but, first and foremost, as kind and fine people, the models of family life and the people's benefactors.

In contrast to European monarchs, Andronikov wrote, the Russian imperial family lived in seclusion and not a single detail about their life found its way to the people. In order to prevent slander and gossip about the royal family and to promote a positive image of the monarchy in the press, the prince proposed the creation of an independent public relations organization affiliated with the ministry of imperial court. Such an agency would report on the sovereign's philanthropic activities as well as his governmental functions.[412] Although Andronikov's idea never materialized, it reflected the desire of Nicholas and those close to him to strengthen the monarch's symbolic position as the center of the nation vis-à-vis the Duma.

Anatolii Klopov, who made his comeback in 1913, as Nicholas's unofficial correspondent, also attempted to emphasize Nicholas's spiritual ties with the Russian people and at the same time to channel the tsar's populist sensibilities. Having shed some of the overtly radical overtones of the 1905-1906 period, Klopov returned to his earlier anti-bureaucratic critiques in his letters to the tsar. In particular, he again evoked the image of the 'bureaucratic wall' that, he claimed, prevented Nicholas from

---

[412] Andronikov to Fredericks, May 1912, RGIA, fond 472; op. 40 104/2682, d. 7, 319-327.

taking personal action. In late December, he succeeded in convincing the tsar to provide the attendees of the All-Russian Congress of Teachers, which had convened in St. Petersburg, with an opportunity to view two performances in the imperial theaters. Describing the teachers as true Russian patriots who, despite their poverty and the risk of losing their jobs, had arrived in the capital from the remote corners of the empire to assist the government in its school reform efforts, Klopov told Nicholas that his generosity had brought much joy to the participants.[413] "It has demonstrated to Your government that You take great interest in the cause of national education," while it also raised the spirit of thousands of humble workers who provided instruction in the villages throughout Russia.

Klopov defended the reputation of the teachers, considered by many as a radical element in provincial Russia, by pointing out that despite all the talk and apprehension in the press and political circles, there were no incidents requiring police interference during the congress. Neither were there any political speeches and all the deliberations were peaceful and tactful, even during the discussions of the teachers' most urgent professional and personal grievances. Having attended one of the performances in the Mariinskii Theatre, Klopov described the exuberant tone of gratitude the teachers expressed to the tsar. Klopov now urged Nicholas to make a personal appearance at the closing ceremony.[414] Although he did not attend the closing ceremony, Nicholas did follow Klopov's advice and sent a warm farewell address to the teachers.

---

[413] A. A. Klopov to Nicholas II, 31 December 1913, *Tainyi sovetnik imperatora*, eds. V.M. Krylov et als. (St. Petersburg, 2002), 419.

[414] Klopov to Nicholas II, 2 January 1914, 423.

Inspired by his successful reporting on the teachers' congress and his ability to influence the tsar directly, on January 2, 1914, Klopov requested an audience with Nicholas. Less than two weeks later, he received a formal invitation from the ministry of the imperial court to visit the tsar on March 15, 1914. Klopov urged Nicholas to display more compellingly his support and understanding of the people's needs. The greatest crisis of contemporary life in Russia, Klopov reported, was an almost universal discontent on the part of the population: there was neither any excitement about life, nor much hope in the future. He saw the reason for this state of affairs in that reforms, which had traditionally served as means of communication between the tsar and the people, had been halted. While the October Manifesto had inspired optimism in the country, causing even the Socialist Revolutionaries to temporarily cease their terrorist campaign, the subsequent curtailment of reforms promised by the government had raised a wall between the monarch and the people. "The rudder has been turned backwards," Klopov told Nicholas, and now "the Manifesto is destroyed, destroyed are the people's demands." What remained was the bureaucratic "wall," against which the tsar's will was being broken without leaving a trace. Klopov urged Nicholas to destroy the "wall" brick by brick by displaying confidence in the people and their representatives in the Duma.[415] Recalling the audience in one of his letters to Nicholas, Klopov confessed that it had left an

[415] Klopov received his next audience with the tsar only a month later, on April 10, 1914. He continued his attempts to reveal to the tsar the conditions in the country and the faults of the bureaucracy and urged Nicholas to undertake personal initiative on behalf of the people.

indelible impression on him and that the tsar's warm reception helped him to relate to the monarch all that had been stored in his soul.[416]

But Klopov's appeals to Nicholas to provide true leadership to society as a whole and to embrace its representative institutions were lost on the tsar. By 1914, the tsar had become increasingly disdainful of educated public opinion while erroneously convinced of the peasant population's complete devotion to the monarchy and their desire to retain the autocratic system of government. His confidence increased during trips to the provinces. After visiting Kiev and Sevastopol, Nicholas described his exhilaration at seeing and experiencing union with the people. "The mutual love between the tsar and the Russian people is great and deep!" Nicholas mused, "It is a force that has nothing like it in the world."[417] By contrast, Nicholas's relationship with the Duma deteriorated in this period. Put off by the deputies' uncompromising attitudes, he reluctantly received delegations and consistently failed to reprimand the ministers who had exhibited hostility to the Duma.[418]

Even as a wave of violent industrial strikes shook Russia in the first half of 1914, Nicholas persisted in viewing himself as the object of popular support and affection. McDonald has argued that the tsar's mythical conception of his authority and a vision of himself as a national leader shaped his response to the July crisis in the Balkans. Nicholas ignored Minister Petr Durnovo's memorandum, which

---

[416] Klopov to Nicholas II, 427.

[417] Nicholas II to Kokovtsov, RGIA, fond 966, op. 2, no. 11, p. 5.

[418] McDonald, *United Government,* 168-188.

expressed the prevalent conservative opinion that Russia would suffer a devastating domestic crisis if it engaged in a prolonged war. He paid no attention to Meshcherskii's pacifistic pleas and failed to heed Grigorii Rasputin's warning that Russia would suffer "great destruction and grief without end" as a result of the war. Instead, Nicholas sided with the minority opinion in his government as expressed by Foreign Minister Sergei Sazonov and Krivoshein, who urged a more forceful stand in defense of Serbia.[419] On July 20, the day of the declaration of war, the sight of cheering crowds singing the national anthem in front of the Winter Palace confirmed the tsar's feelings of unity with the people. Wortman observed that "Nicholas's sense of reality was little more than a reflection of his own self-image and sense of political destiny."[420] Such perceptions continued to color the tsar's actions and decisions when early manifestations of optimism and support for the war began to fade, and victories against the Austrians and the Germans in the first nine months of the war turned into defeats in the spring and summer of 1915.

Nicholas's strong sense of responsibility and moral duty received expression in August 1915, when the tsar dismissed the popular Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich and, amidst vigorous protests of his government, assumed the supreme command of the army. Eight members, including Fredericks, Bark, and Krivoshein signed a letter urging Nicholas to reconsider his decision. The ministers' concern that failures at the front would undermine the tsar's authority in the country and that his

---

[419] Mark D. Steinberg, "Nicholas and Aleksandra. An Intellectual Portrait." In *The Fall of the Romanovs. Political Dreams and Personal Struggles in a Time of Revolution,* eds. Mark D. Steinberg and Vladimir M. Khrustalev (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 13.

[420] Wortman, *Scenarios of Power,* 503.

absence from the capital would discredit the government's legitimacy, only irritated Nicholas. In a letter to his wife, he complained that the common people supported his decision while the ministers refused to understand him.

> The proof—numbers of telegrams which I receive from all sides, with the most touching expressions. All this shows one thing to me clearly: that the ministers, always living in town, know terribly little of what is happening in the country as a whole. Here I can judge correctly the real mood among the various classes of the people: everything must be done to bring the war to a victorious ending and no doubts are expressed on that score. I was told this officially by all the deputations whom I received some days ago, and so it is all over Russia. Petrograd and Moscow constitute the only exceptions – two minute points on the map of the fatherland.[421]

Aleksandra was one of the few who wholeheartedly supported Nicholas's decision to assume the supreme command of the army. The ministers' warnings made little sense to her not because of her strong opinions of her husband's military talents, but because she believed that Nicholas had to take every opportunity to demonstrate leadership and maintain his position as the symbol of the nation. Just as she had resented Witte's and Stolypin's popularity, the empress grew jealous of the reputation that Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich enjoyed as commander-in-chief. The tsar also received support from his uncle, Grand Duke Nikolai Mikhailovich, who wrote to Nicholas referring to Nikolai Nikolaevich, that "his popularity alarms me in a dynastic sense, especially in view of the excited state of our public opinion,

---

[421] Nicholas II, *The Letters of the Tsar to the Tsaritsa, 1914-1917* (London, 1929), 90, quoted in Lieven *Nicholas II*, 215.

which is becoming more and more evident in the provinces."[422] Aleksandra and Nikolai Mikhailovich's encouragement of Nicholas to assume military leadership, however, merely iterated Nicholas's own decision to assume supreme command of the army, which, according to Bark's perceptive remark, constituted the culmination of the path the tsar had followed during his entire reign, hoping to attain personal leadership:

> Having taken the path of his own personal policy, having assumed the supreme command and determined the course of internal affairs despite the opinions of the majority of the Council of Ministers, the Emperor had taken upon himself the whole burden of responsibility for the administrative machine. The Council of Ministers, as a united government, had ceased to exist and the ministers had been turned simply into bosses of the departments, whom the Emperor summoned separately to hear their reports on current affairs.[423]

Nicholas's assumption of the supreme command contributed to a short-term stabilization of the front, but it did little to improve Russia's position long term. Russia's low levels of industrial development, constant disruptions of food and ammunition supplies, as well as the incompetence of military commanders frustrated the war effort. In no small part, the prohibition of alcoholic beverages which went into effect on the eve of the war causing the government to lose almost thirty percent of its income, added to the list of popular grievances. Military defeats, rising

---

[422] V. P. Semennikov, ed., *Nikolay II i velikie knyaz'ya* (Moscow, 1925), 68-9, quoted in Lieven, *Nicholas II,* 212.

[423] Bark, "Vospominaniia," *Vozrozhdenie* 175 (July 1966), 71-2, quoted in Lieven, 221.

casualties, low morale of soldiers at the front, labor strikes, and escalating inflation in the cities rapidly eroded the monarchy's authority in the country. From the podium of the Duma and in the press, deputies openly questioned government policies and asked whether the monarchy's actions were the result of stupidity or treason on the highest level.

In 1915, arguing that success of the war effort depended on political unity between society and the government, the majority of the members of the Duma, organized into the Progressive Bloc, and the municipal unions and zemstvo leaders insisted on the establishment of a government of "public confidence," a cabinet of ministers responsible directly to the Duma. Although such a demand in effect violated the Fundamental Laws of 1906, which stipulated the monarch's control of the executive, it enjoyed the support of the majority of the Council of Ministers and a substantial number of State Council members. Many of the cabinet members had already exhibited a desire to work in solidarity with the Duma from the very beginning of war. With Nicholas's departure to the front, this trend became even more prominent; in fact, the majority in the Council of Ministers shifted their loyalty from the monarch and the chairman to the Progressive Bloc.[424]

In response to a broad and progressively radicalized coalition of political, bureaucratic, and social elites demanding a government that would enjoy the support of the Duma, Nicholas's position was twofold. On the one hand, he found changing the Fundamental Laws and granting the Duma *de jure* right to appoint the government unacceptable and even dangerous to the monarchy's continued existence.

---

[424] Sergei Kulikov, *Biurokraticheskaia elita Rossiiskoi imperii nakanune padeniia starogo poriadka (1914-1917)* (Riazan' 2004), 123-136.

Especially resistant to changing the political system in a time of crisis, the tsar argued that Duma deputies had no sufficient expertise in government. He also believed that the deputies could not claim to represent the will of the people from whom they were far removed socially and spiritually.

On the other hand—and here is why contemporaries found Nicholas's strategy ambiguous and feared that his actions were inspired by outside influences,—the tsar also attempted to achieve a compromise with the opposition and concede to the majority opinion in the government by appointing ministers who had the Duma's approval. In June 1915, at the request of the Duma President Mikhail Rodzianko, the tsar had dismissed ministers unacceptable to the Duma: Interior Minister Maklakov, War Minister Sukhomlinov, Minister of Justice Ivan Shcheglovitov, and the Procurator of the Holy Synod Vladimir Sabler. The appointments of the minister of education, Petr Ignatiev, and his assistant, Aleksandr Rachinskii, Minister of War Aleksei Polivanov, Interior Minister Nikolai Shcherbatov, and Minister of Trade and Industry Vsevolod Shakhovskoi, among others, also reflected Nicholas's efforts to coordinate key appointments with the wishes of the public. But these half-measures, as the opposition saw them, served to further radicalize the Duma and antagonize public opinion.

Nicholas's attempts to compromise with the opposition peaked in August 1915 when he offered Krivoshein, the most outspoken champion of the government of "public confidence," the chair of the Council of Ministers. The trust Krivoshein enjoyed with the monarch between 1912 and 1915 had allowed him to voice his opinions on questions of economy, administration, and the nature of the autocracy,

even though Nicholas never liked to discuss those sensitive questions. In fact, Krivoshein enjoyed such a high level of authority with Nicholas and the Council that he was popularly dubbed the *de facto* prime minister.

As conditions for his assumption of power, Krivoshein asked Nicholas that he be allowed to take full charge of all aspects of politics as well as enforce the principles of united government. In addition, he requested that the newly formed cabinet of ministers under his authority enjoy the confidence of the Duma. Predictably, Krivoshein's views differed markedly from those of the tsar, and Krivoshein declined to assume leadership in the government. As his biographer has suggested, the minister was well aware that after Witte and Stolypin, Nicholas became increasingly reluctant to place full confidence in the head of the government, thus making a prime minister's success virtually impossible.[425]

It was in the circumstances of the escalating ideological struggle within the government between the supporters and opponents of a "ministry of confidence" that rumors of unofficial influences on government began to proliferate in the administration and society at large. The period from September 1915 to February 1917 produced ministerial changes unprecedented in frequency. During this period the government changed four prime ministers, five interior ministers, three foreign ministers, three ministers of war, three ministers of transport, and four ministers of agriculture. Nicholas's use of unofficial advisers in the past accustomed society and bureaucracy to look for the key to the tsar's erratic behavior and willful decision-making in potential or conspicuous outside influences on him. In addition, the

---

[425] Krivoshein, *Aleksandr Vasil'evich Krivoshein,* 296.

impossibility of criticizing or challenging the tsar openly fomented a search for culprits to blame for the incompetent decisions he made.

Both contemporaries and scholars have blamed the autocracy's domestic blunders and its inability to reach compromise with the Duma on the rise of a camarilla led by Grigorii Rasputin and Aleksandra.[426] However, no consensus has been reached on the exact nature of Aleksandra's and Rasputin's political role during World War I.[427] Among contemporaries, even those in the government, few disputed that it was Rasputin who was the actual ruler of the country and Aleksandra acted as his facilitator. Aleksandr Kerenskii conveyed the popular view when he wrote in his memoirs that the empress "showed no hesitation in taking a hand in the government herself." In her opinion, he continued, "Rasputin was just as capable of directing the life of the whole country, appointing ministers, commanding the army and choosing the time and place of the offensives as he was capable of miraculously checking the czarevitch's hemorrhage."[428]

---

[426] M. Paleologue, *An Ambassador's Memoirs* (London, 1923), 229; V. Gurko, *Features and Figures of the Past*, 362; A. Kerensky, *The Crucifixion of Liberty* (New York, 1934), 144-153; Leon Trotsky, *The Russian Revolution* (New York, 1959), 55. Others doubted Rasputin's political prowess and insisted that his influence on the royal couple was limited to his ability to heal tsarevich Aleksei.V. V. Shul'gin, *Dni* (Leningrad, 1925), 84. M. V. Rodzianko, while blaming Aleksandra for being under the spell of Rasputin, nevertheless doubted that Rasputin was capable of conducting any kind of politics. *The Reign of Rasputin: An Empire's Collapse* (London, 1927), 34, 26, 154.

[427] M. N. Pokrovskii, ed., *Perepiska Nikolaia i Aleksandry Romanovykh, 1914-1917 (Moscow, 1923); Monarkhia pered krusheniem, 1914-1917*, ed. V. P. Semennikov (Moscow, 1927); E. D. Chermenskii, *IV Gosudarstvennaia duma i sverzhenie tsarizma v Rossii* (Moscow, 1976), 234-238; G. Z. Ioffe, *Velikii Oktiabr' i epilog tsarizma* (Moscow, 1987), 29-30.

[428] Kerenskii, *The Crucifixion of Liberty*, 151.

The accusations against Aleksandra found deep resonance in street folklore and the yellow press, contributing, as Orlando Figes and Boris Kolotnitskii have argued, to the desacralization of the autocracy in the eyes of the population. Among the most popular themes were the empress's alleged affair with Rasputin, her plot to murder Nicholas, and her and Rasputin's secret plans to commit treason and to negotiate a separate peace with Germany. Not only the common people, but even the intellectual elite were susceptible to these rumors. Zinaida Gippius, a well-known poet, recorded in her diary in November 1915 that "Grisha is governing and getting his way with the ladies in waiting…. And with Fedorovna [the empress], as usual."[429] "Through the medium of Rasputin," Kerenskii wrote in his memoirs, "the German intelligence service obtained all the most secret information"[430]

Historians have also placed Aleksandra and Rasputin at the center of the autocracy's collapse in 1917. Richard Pipes, in his account of the 1917 Revolution, published in 1990, stated that "Rasputin and Aleksandra led Russia toward disaster by their refusal to acknowledge political and economic realities and blind insistence on the principle of autocracy."[431] Donald Treadgold in his widely used survey of twentieth-century Russia also placed full responsibility for the collapse of the empire on the empress. With Nicholas II at the front, he wrote, "the direction of government was left in the hands of the Empress and Rasputin." According to Treadgold, an

---

[429] Otdel rukopisei Russkoi natsional'noi biblioteki, f. 481, op. 1, d. 1, p. 62, quoted in O. Figes and B. Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution: The Language and Symbols of 1917* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 13.

[430] Kerenskii, *Crucifixion of liberty*, 153

[431] Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, 240.

example of her omnipotence was demonstrated in 1915, when Aleksandra, "who was by now nearly all-powerful, obtained the proroguing of the Duma."[432] An eminent historian, Nicholas V. Riasanovky, described Aleksandra as a "narrow-minded, reactionary, hysterical woman" and Rasputin as an "ignorant, weird peasant - who apparently made decisions simply in terms of his personal interest, and whose exalted position depended on the empress's belief that he could protect her son from hemophilia, and that he had been sent by God to guide her, her husband, and Russia." Together, they held "the destiny of an empire in their hands."[433]

While there is plenty of evidence of the empress's and Rasputin's attempts at influencing government appointments, there is not much indication that they achieved any substantial degree of success. Moreover, as historian Henry L. Roberts's analysis of the charges made against four queens in times of revolutions suggests, such uniform accusations raise questions about the biases and prejudices of historians and their sources.[434] Denunciations of Aleksandra during World War I resonated with the anxieties of a time of crisis, making her a symbol of the dying regime. Various political camps—the monarchists, liberals, government officials, and revolutionaries—coopted the tsarina's image for their own goals by accusing the monarch of lacking "masculinity" and no longer being capable of offering true leadership. A historian of the French Revolution, Lynn Hunt, has investigated the

---

[432] Donald Treadgold, *Twentieth Century Russia,* 7th ed. (University of Washington, 1990), 97

[433] Nicholas Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, 421.

[434] Henry L. Roberts, *Four Queens and Several Knaves*, Institute on East Central Europe and Russian Institute, Columbia University, 1971.

conscious motives and subconscious resentments of the French revolutionaries in denigrating Marie Antoinette in her essay "The Many Bodies of Marie Antoinette." As in the case of Aleksandra, contemporaries' hatred of Marie Antoinette at times went beyond their hostility toward the king. Hunt argued that Marie Antoinette had been widely perceived as having used her sexual body to corrupt the body politic through her ability to act sexually upon the king, his ministers, and his soldiers, and as such she posed a menace to the republican notions of manhood and virility leading to the feminization of the republic.[435]

Mark Steinberg has put forth a more compelling view of the empress in an essay entitled "Nicholas and Aleksandra, an Intellectual Portrait." He has persuasively demonstrated that Aleksandra's role lay less "in her damaging interference in government administration, than in her encouragement of Nicholas's anachronistic political convictions."[436] To encourage his independent stand and forceful determination, she called on Nicholas to stand up to the Duma and never to relinquish his authority as Russia's leader. "It must be your war and your peace and your and our country's honor and by no means the Duma's," she wrote to Nicholas in March 1916, reminding him of the special patriarchal relationship and responsibility he had to his subjects, which excluded the intelligentsia.[437] Aleksandra urged him to

---

[435] See Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 94.

[436] Mark D. Steinberg, "Nicholas and Aleksandra. An Intellectual Portrait." In *The Fall of the Romanovs. Political Dreams and Personal Struggles in a Time of Revolution,* ed. Mark D. Steinberg and Vladimir M. Khrustalev (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 5.

remain strong and unbending in his actions and the tsar appreciated her support. As Nicholas wrote from the front on September 7, 1915, he knew of "no more pleasant feeling than to be proud of you, as I have been all these past months when you urged me on with untiring importunity, exhorting me to be firm and to stick to my own opinions."[438] Finally, Aleksandra's support became ever more important during the war when Nicholas found himself increasingly isolated politically not only in his government, but also in his own family.

Aleksandra fostered in Nicholas resignation before God's will and a distrust of the rational council of the ministers. Rasputin represented for her a guide to God's wisdom because God, the empress insisted, "has given [Rasputin] more insight, wisdom and enlightenment' than all of the tsar's advisers and experts."[439] Aleksandra's dislike of the Duma and the more liberal members of the government and her appeals to Nicholas to destroy all opposition resonated with the tsar. But to interpret Aleksandra's prodding of her husband to take a truly autocratic stand as the tsar's weakness would be simplistic. Nicholas's self-constructed identity of a saintly (*tishaishii*) monarch, an image he determinedly projected until the last days in power, prevented him from openly acting in the manner of Peter the Great and Ivan the Terrible. Yet, this seeming weakness and passivity were only external. When in December, 1916, Nicholas decided to close down the Duma, "he was determined that

---

[437] *The Letters of the Tsar to the Tsaritsa*, edited by Bernard Pares (Paris, 1929), 304, quoted in Lieven, *Nicholas II,* 207.

[438] *The Letters of the Tsar*, 137 and 219, quoted in Lieven, *Nicholas II,* 215-216

[439] Aleksandra Fedorovna to Nicholas II, 7 September 1916, GARF, f. 601, op. 1, d. 1151, p. 263ob., quoted in *The Fall of the Romanovs*, 35.

someone else, the chairman of the Council of Ministers, should do the 'dirty business,' so that 'all the responsibility and difficulty fall on his shoulders.'"[440]

Sergei Kulikov's work on the monarchy during World War I supports Steinberg and Khrustalev's conclusions that Aleksandra's political role was that of her husband's confidant and a vigorous supporter of his own views and actions and that Nicholas rarely followed her political advice. For example, Aleksandra disliked Bark and had pleaded with Nicholas to dismiss him on several occasions. Yet, he was able to keep his position until the revolution.[441] A statistical analysis performed by Kulikov showed that of the thirty-one ministerial appointments made between July 1914 and February 1917, fifteen received no mention in the correspondence between Aleksandra and Nicholas, while nine were criticized by the empress. The remaining seven appointments that met with the empress and Rasputin's fervent support, had in fact been previously selected by the tsar himself but were being contested by one of his ministers.[442] Of Aleksandra's protégés, only one became assistant minister and two received appointments in the State Council. Rasputin succeeded in appointing one governor out of 78 appointed during the war.[443] Aleksandr Rudnev, who served on the committee appointed by the provisional government to investigate the

---

[440] *The Fall of the Romanovs,* 27.

[441] Petr Bark, "Vospominaniia," *Vozrozhdeniie*, 35-7.

[442] S. V. Kulikov, "IV Gosudarstvennaia Duma I formirovanie vysshei ispolnitel'noi vlasti v gody pervoi mirovoi voiny (iul' 1914 - fevral' 1917)," in *Rossiia v XIX-XX vv. : sbornik statei k 70-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia Rafaila Sholomovicha Ganelina*, ed. A.A. Fursenko (St. Peterburg, 1998), 261.

[443] Sergei Kulikov, *Biurokraticheskaia elita Prossiiskoi imperii nakanune padeniia starogo poriadka (1914-1917)* (Riazan' 2004), 398.

activities of the tsarist ministers, reported that he did not see a single incriminating document about Rasputin's alleged influence among the papers of any high level official.[444]

Introduced to the royal couple in late October, 1905, as a healer and a 'man of God," Rasputin's primary function was to provide relief to Nicholas's son, Aleksei, who was suffering from hemophilia. Rasputin's continuous success (real or perceived) in relieving the heir's hemophilia attacks at the time when no cure was available won him the immense affection of the tsarina. Aleksandra defended him against the Duma and the government, especially when persistent rumors of Rasputin's sexual misconduct and heavy drinking spread.

To Nicholas, Rasputin offered spiritual support. "When in trouble or assailed with doubts," the tsar told one of his ministers, "I like to have a talk with him, and invariably feel at peace with myself afterwards." Rasputin soothed Nicholas's burden of responsibility as he affirmed the people's loyalty and affection for the monarchy and encouraged the tsar to follow his intuition in political decisions. Like Klopov, Rasputin represented the authenticity of the Russian people and the source of knowledge the tsar trusted. Chief of the Imperial Chancellery Aleksandr Mosolov referred to the tsar's populist aspirations when he remarked in reference to Nicholas's relationship with Rasputin that "the tsar needed a peasant."[445]

When an increasing number of ministers began to fear that a close association of the royal couple with Rasputin was detrimental to the prestige of the monarchy,

---

[444] V. Rudnev, *Pravda o Tsarskoi sem'ie i 'temnykh silakh* (Berlin, 1920), 17.

[445] Bernard Pares, *The Fall of the Russian Monarchy: A Study of Evidence* (New York: Knopf, 1939), 140.

Nicholas and Aleksandra firmly insisted that it was a private matter. As Nicholas explained to Kokovstov, "Rasputin is a simple peasant who can relieve the sufferings of my ailing son by a strange power. The empress's reliance upon him is a matter for the family, and I will permit no one to meddle in my family affairs."[446] At times, Nicholas gave an impression that he tolerated Rasputin in order to please the empress. "I prefer ten Rasputins to one attack of hysteria on the part of the empress," he told Stolypin. When Stolypin ordered that Rasputin leave St. Petersburg in 1908, the order was rescinded on the highest authority. "Everything you say may even be true," Nicholas told Stolypin, "but I must ask that you never speak to me again about Rasputin. In any event, I can do nothing at all about it."[447] To Rodzianko, who investigated the Rasputin affair and appealed to Nicholas to banish him from the capital, he said "No, I cannot promise you that. Nevertheless, I fully believe all you have told me."[448]

Memoirists of the period disagree on the extent of Rasputin's influence on the government and his impact on domestic politics. Pavel Benkendorff, the last palace commandant, was convinced that "the political influence of Rasputin was nil."[449] Bark, who served as minister of finance until the revolution, wrote in his memoirs that he had never been approached by Rasputin's protégés before Nicholas left for the

---

[446] V. I. Mamantov, *Na gosudarevoi sluzhbe* (Tallin, 1926), 233, quoted in Warth, *Nicholas II: the Life and Reign of Russia's last monarch* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1997), 165.

[447] V. I. Gurko, *Tsar i tsaritsa* (Paris 1927), 90, quoted in Warth, *Nicholas II,* 156.

[448] M. V. Rodzianko, *The Reign of Rasputin* (Gulf Breeze, Fla, 1973), 40-47, quoted in Warth, *Nicholas II,* 161.

[449] P. Benckendorff, *Last Days at Tsarskoe Selo* (London, 1927), 114.

front. As soon as the tsar assumed supreme command, however, more of Bark's visitors presented letters of introduction from Rasputin signed by "Grigorii." But even in those circumstances, Bark insisted, these notes carried little influence, and he almost never paid attention to them.

Other senior officials' accounts testify to a much more tangible impact of Rasputin on the political scene. Senior ministers and minor officials, knowing the influence or potential influence of Rasputin, fulfilled his requests, sent him presents, such as wine, fruits, and hors d'oeuvre. According to Minister of Education Pavel Naumov, his refusal to grant an appointment to Rasputin caused a major upheaval in his ministry.

> That day and later I became convinced that Rasputin really carried great importance because all employees talked about it. For me it was a gesture as natural as for a person who wants a cup of tea, takes it and drinks tea, and here, it appeared, as if I did some heroic deed. I realized that Rasputin was a person who greatly influenced the political market. That day I was telephoned many times and warned that a complaint had been sent to Tsarskoe Selo.[450]

Despite the complexity and confusion surrounding Rasputin's role and his relationship with the tsar, it is possible to sketch his real motives and the impact of his activities. Rasputin employed his position as a royal favorite to remain at the center of attention among his admirers and to help his protégés. In return for his assistance in passing a petition for a raise or an appointment, application for a divorce or an appeal for clemency, he received cash tips and presents. But even though his actual

---

[450] *Stenograficheskii dopros ministra zemledeliia A. N. Naumova*,GARF, f. 1467, op. 1, no. 325, p. 4ob.

influence on Nicholas was very limited, Rasputin's presence around the tsar intimidated the administration and corrupted the political culture of the government because the ministers feared that efforts to discredit or ignore Rasputin would bring upon them the tsar's displeasure.

Another subject of pervasive rumors about unofficial influences on the government was Prince Mikhail Andronikov, who in 1915 emerged at the very center of political intrigues and was widely considered to be a powerful political dealer. As one contemporary recalled, officials felt compelled to receive people like Andronikov because they had access to the court and could easily damage the reputation of those whom they disliked. Ministers also used influential outsiders in order to have "an indirect influence, make their opinions known, and recruit allies for their projects."[451] The prince's copious letters and reports can be found in the personal archives of virtually all high-level ministers and influential members of society.[452] His knack for securing audiences with high-level officials was astounding and earned him numerous benefactors and protégés. In 1899, Andronikov befriended Sergei Witte, then the influential minister of finance.[453] He later became acquainted with ministers Boris Sturmer and Aleksandr Protopopov. Among his most valuable connections and liaisons to the royal couple were Anna Vyrubova, a close friend of Aleksandra

---

[451] *Nikolai II. Poslednii Rossiiskii imperator* (St. Petersburg, 1992), 473.

[452] Rudnev reports that he moved Andronikov's "colossal" archive from his apartment to the committee's headquarters at the Winter Palace on two automobiles. Rudnev, 18

[453] *Padenie tsarskogo rezhima. Stenograficheskie otchety doprosov i pokazanii dannyh v 1917 g. v Chrezvychainoi sledstvennoi komissii Vremennogo pravitel'stva.* Edited by P. E. Shchegolev, vol. 1 (Moscow-Leningrad 1924-1927), 362.

Fedorovna, and Vladimir Voeikov, Nicholas's trusted palace commandant. Finally, in 1914, Andronikov met Rasputin who became his trump card.

The prince inundated Nicholas and Aleksandra with alarming letters in which he disparaged officials for their alleged disloyalty and incompetence. He accused Bark, whom he called a mixture of a German colonist and a Jew, of destroying the ministry of finance with his policies, and cautioned against Krivoshein, who had befriended a leader of the Octobrists, Aleksander Guchkov. Andronikov warned the tsar of efforts by opposition to discredit the monarchy by spreading rumors about Rasputin, which the interior ministry and the police failed to prevent. The loss of strong monarchical power and its replacement with people's representatives, the prince admonished, would inevitably plunge Russia into a state of anarchy. He repeated these same criticisms in his letters to Aleksandra.[454]

While Nicholas did not follow Andronikov's recommendations, he also did nothing to stop the prince's conspicuous correspondence. Moreover, the tsar's actions seemed to feed the rumors of Andronikov's power and influence over him. For example, when in October, 1915, Andronikov petitioned Nicholas to bless his new undertaking – a periodical, *Golos Rossii***,** which, he claimed, was intended to be "absolutely independent, nonparty, but honest"—the tsar was pleased to oblige. Not only did Nicholas give his blessing, he also subscribed to Andronikov's new political weekly.

---

[454] see "Uspokoeniia nechego ozhidat'. Pis'ma kniazia M. M. Andronikova Nikolaiu II, Aleksandre Fedorovne, A. A. Vyrubovoi i V. N. Voieikovu." *Istochnik* 1 (1999), 27-29.

In the fall of 1915, Andronikov, along with Rasputin and Aleksandra, were accused by the opposition of arranging the controversial appointment of a rightist Duma deputy, Aleksei Khvostov, as Interior Minister. Yet, Kulikov's meticulous investigation makes clear that no evidence exists to prove these assertions by contemporaries. Khvostov's appointment, he argued, reflected Nicholas's attempt to compromise with the opposition by appointing a member of the Duma to the government. It was only after receiving news of Nicholas's decision to appoint Khvostov that Andronikov began to clamor for the appointment in an effort to create an impression that he was part of the high-level political intrigue. He wrote to Nicholas strongly advising him to appoint Khvostov, as the only person capable of addressing the people and "destroying the rifts blocking the streams of people's love for the tsar."[455] Rasputin, who also found about Khvostov's appointment after the fact, "blessed" Nicholas's decision when he returned to Petrograd from Siberia two days later, on September 28. He even tried to take credit for Khvostov's appointment. It angered Andronikov "when Rasputin would say 'I appointed Khvostov, I appointed Beletskii [director of secret police].' It wasn't true, because Khvostov had been appointed on August 24-25, and Rasputin arrived in September!"[456]

The view that the appointment of Prime Minister Boris Shturmer in March, 1916, was the result of Rasputin's and the empress's influences on Nicholas has become axiomatic in historical literature. But as Kulikov has demonstrated, both Aleksandra and Rasputin found out about Shturmer's appointment only several days

---

[455] Andronikov to Nicholas II, not later than 25 September 1915, 25-27.

[456] "Dopros kniazia M. M. Andronikova," *Padenie*, v. 1, 379, quoted in Kulikov, *Biurokraticheskaia elita*, 103.

after Nicholas had made his decision. As in the case with Khvostov, Rasputin posed as Shturmer's benefactor.[457]

Aleksandr Protopopov, the last interior minister appointed in late September 1916, was also discredited by the opposition for his alleged connections with the so-called "dark forces." Yet, Protopopov, who at the time of his appointment had been a leftist Octobrist and a supporter of the Progressive Bloc, not only enjoyed the recommendation of the Duma president, Rodzianko, but also of Sazonov and King George V of England, who met Protopopov during his official visit abroad. Nicholas saw the appointment as a concession to the opposition. As the tsar informed Aleksandra, "I have already dreamed of having an interior minister who would work in collaboration with the Duma."[458] Rasputin began to support Protopopov after the empress informed him of Nicholas's decision to appoint him.

It was only after Protopopov became minister that negative opinions about him began to emerge. His authority in the Council of Ministers was low and his judgments and explanations were considered shallow by his colleagues in the government and the Duma. Although unknown to the tsarina before his appointment, Protopopov became close to Aleksandra during his tenure, which further damaged his reputation. She requested that he inform her by telephone of all new developments and changes in the government, but even then, as Kulikov's research demonstrated, her and Rasputin's attempts to influence personnel selection in Protopopov's ministry

---

[457] Kulikov, *Biurokraticheskaia elita,* 187.

[458] A. A. Vyrubova, "Stranitsy iz moiei zhizni," *Strana gibnet segodnia. Vospominaniia o Fevral'skoi revoliutsii 1917g.* (Moscow, 1991), 220, quoted in Kulikov, *Biurokraticheskaia elita,* 278.

failed in almost every instance. When in November 1916, Nicholas was ready to give in to public opinion and part with his interior minister who had become intolerable to the Duma, the tsarina persuaded him to retain Protopopov. Her argument had little to do with Protopopov's qualities or politics. Aleksandra insisted that Nicholas stand up to the Duma. "Darling, remember that it does not lie in the man Protopopov or x, y, z," she pleaded,

> But it's the question of monarchy and yr. prestige now, which must not be shattered in the time of the Duma. Don't think they will stop at him, but they will make all others leave who are devoted to you one by one – and then ourselves. Remember, last year Yr. leaving to the army, when also you were alone with us two against everybody, who promised revolution if you went. You stood up against all and God blessed your decision. I repeat again – it was not lie in the name of Protopopov but in your remaining firm and not giving in – the Tsar rules and not the Duma.[459]

The question arises then, why did Nicholas, amidst the danger of revolution or palace revolt, the threat of which had increased significantly in 1916, allow Rasputin and the empress to meddle in questions of personnel selection, considering that he followed almost none of their recommendations? Why did he consent to Andronikov's harassment of officials? The answer lies in part in Nicholas's philosophy and manner of rule, which he adapted for a vigorous defense of his personal authority against opposition outside and inside the government. The tsar resisted any influences—official and unofficial—on his political direction and ministerial appointments, but he couched his resistance in a misleading image of

---

[459] Nicholas II, *The Letters of the Tsar to the Tsaritsa 1914-1917* (London, 1929), 297, quoted in Lieven, *Nicholas II,* 225-226.

pluralism and compromise he cultivated in order to ensure his ultimate authority in government.

A combination of popular anxiety, the stress of war, the impact of the press, and the growing efforts of the opposition to discredit the monarchy played a pivotal role in exaggerating the impact of outsiders' influence on Nicholas. As a result, figures like Rasputin, Aleksandra, and Prince Andronikov became powerful arguments and symbols employed by the opposition against the monarchy as well as dangerous tools in the hands of those who wished to influence the government. Rasputin's murder in December 1916 became a symbol of the unification of a broad-based opposition against Nicholas, an opposition that included not only the disgruntled left, but also the conservative right, and the members of the extended imperial family.

In January and February 1917, popular discontent exacerbated by military defeats and economic problems spread throughout the country, affecting all sectors of the population and, most importantly, the armed forces. Demands for work, bread, and political rights mixed with rumors discrediting Nicholas and his family in the eyes of the population. Revolution was in the air, but the tsar ignored all warnings. Having become anesthetized to the ever-present crises that riddled his reign, Nicholas retreated into a protective shell of his faith-inspired fatalism. To many of his closest advisers, he seemed utterly unaware of the grievousness of the situation until the last days in power. More so, Nicholas continued to believe naively that he enjoyed popular support among the soldiers and peasants he encountered during his travels and army reviews. "How can even you talk to me about a danger to the dynasty,

which right now everyone is trying to din into me?" Nicholas reprimanded Mosolov on the eve of the revolution. "Can you too, who have been with me during my inspections of the troops and have seen how both the solders and the people receive me, also get frightened?"[460]

Indoctrinated into the mystical nature of autocracy, Nicholas perceived events and offered solutions to Russia's political and social problems from a standpoint of an absolute national monarch. He envisioned an unmediated relationship between ruler and the people, a relationship that was a far cry from the needs of a burgeoning modern industrial society torn apart by war and political crisis. Even as the revolutionary anarchy engulfed the country, mutiny spread through the army, and the government steadily lost control of the capital, Nicholas stubbornly refused to surrender his prerogatives and grant "responsible ministry," which alone may have saved the dynasty.[461]

When on March 15, 1917, Nicholas finally agreed to parliamentary rule, it was too late. Having antagonized his subjects, his government, members of the royal family and his entourage, he had few supporters left to defend him and the monarchy he represented. Persuaded by a group of high-ranking military officials, members of the government, and Progressive Bloc that his staying in power could lead to civil war and a possible defeat in the war with Germany, Nicholas abdicated the throne. The Provisional Government placed the former tsar and his family under house arrest and, in the summer 1917, moved them to exile in Siberia. In July 1918, the

---

[460] Mosolov, *Pri dvore*, 99, quoted in Lieven, *Nicholas II,* 230.

[461] Lieven, *Nicholas II,* 232.

Romanovs were brutally murdered by the Bolshevik government, whose ascent to power Nicholas had helped bring about through his irresponsible and irresponsive policies.

9. Conclusion.

Nicholas's reign, like no other in Russian history, was marked by rumors of the tsar's susceptibility to outside influences. Yet attempts to explain Nicholas's unimaginative leadership, his stubborn clinging to an antiquated worldview, and his unwillingness to address the nation's basic political demands as a consequence of his weakness and susceptibility to unofficial advisers result in oversimplification. Such historical interpretations diminish the role and responsibility of the tsar in creating the conditions for the political crisis during World War I and contributing to the February Revolution of 1917.

In this dissertation, I have examined the personality, philosophy, and manner of rule of Nicholas II as mirrored in his relationships with advisers outside the administration. These advisers assisted him in safeguarding the autocracy as well as fulfilling several important purposes. They offered the tsar an alternative political perspective and satisfied his need for confidants and assistants in maintaining political autonomy apart from his ministers and, later, in confronting the Duma. They also increased Nicholas's confidence and encouraged him to follow his instincts in both domestic and foreign policies, at times in contradiction to his official administration. Nicholas enjoyed emotional and spiritual kinship with men like Anatolii Klopov, Vladimir Meshcherskii, Aleksandr Bezobrazov, and Grigorii Rasputin. Much older than he, they provided a patriarchal father figure, while their worship of the tsar contrasted with the business-like manner of many of his ministers.

Advisers also boosted Nicholas's democratic self-image. Representing their relationships with the tsar as a historically sanctified custom of direct communication

between the ruler and the subject, they offered Nicholas an opportunity to engage in a gesture of tapping a public opinion previously ignored by monarchs. Posing simultaneously as "representatives" of the people and as Nicholas's personal emissaries, they allowed him an opportunity to govern through personal ties and influence and, to a degree, to break through the constraints of the bureaucracy. In other words, they helped sustain an elevated symbolic space where the tsar operated in a state of pure autocracy unrestricted by state institutions and public demands.

Historians Mark Steinberg and Vladimir Khrustalev have suggested that Nicholas II believed in the political myth of a ruler whose power was imbedded in sacred moral absolutism and could not be institutionalized.[462] I have argued that because his personal power could not be institutionalized, the tsar required personal agents to assist him in sustaining the myth. In other words, Nicholas's use of unofficial advisers reflected his attempt to overcome the contradiction between the theory and practice of autocracy. In theory, it was a system of government based on personal rule; in reality, Nicholas's authority and initiative were constrained by bureaucratic institutions and practices. The constitutional changes of 1905 further intensified Nicholas's exasperation with the impingements on his authority. And long after the new legal order was established in Russia, the tsar continued to resist it and seek to restore his autocratic privileges. These efforts set him against the Duma and united government headed first by Sergei Witte, then by Petr Stolypin, and later by Vladimir Kokovtsov.

---

[462] Mark D. Steinberg, "Nicholas and Aleksandra. An Intellectual Portrait." In *The Fall of the Romanovs. Political Dreams and Personal Struggles in a Time of Revolution,* eds. Mark D. Steinberg and Vladimir M. Khrustalev (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 15.

Contrary to widespread contemporary opinion, Nicholas never allowed anyone to influence him completely and always exercised the right to make the final decision. Despite the rumors of his influence, most of Meshcherskii's concrete policy recommendations remained unfulfilled. Even though Nicholas shared some of the prince's views and opinions at some periods of his reign, the emperor always made the final decision himself. In fact, Meshcherskii remained an "adviser" only as long as his views coincided with those of the tsar. If their opinions differed, the prince suffered rejection and the loss of favor. Klopov's benign correspondence with the tsar, which combined broad descriptions of life in the Russian countryside with abstract appeals for reform, had distinct limitations. As Grand Duke Nikolai Mikhailovich warned Klopov, Nicholas may be "prepared occasionally to accept commonsense advice. But he is not inclined to have a tutor who pesters him with correspondence."[463] A careful examination of Nicholas's actions on the eve of the Russo-Japanese War reveals not an unaware ruler manipulated by Bezobrazov, but one who switched allegiances between his official and unofficial advisers as a strategy to maintain supreme authority in foreign policy.

Rasputin's alleged omnipotence and his ability to influence Nicholas have also been grossly exaggerated. As Sergei Kulikov observed, his success at remaining a favorite derived from the fact that he "did not so much give advice [to the tsar] as simply did not contradict him." Both Rasputin and Aleksandra encouraged Nicholas to follow his intuition, his first thought, which was almost always directed against the Duma. Rumors of outside influence on the government proliferated during World

---

[463] Grand Duke Nikolai Mikhailovich to A. A. Klopov, RGIA, fond 1099, op. 1, d. 5, p. 61.

War I and contemporaries blamed the so-called ministerial leapfrog of 1915-1916 on the manipulations of Rasputin and Empress Aleksandra. Yet, it is clear that the leapfrog was not the result of outsider influence, but an inept and desperate attempt by Nicholas to deal with a political crisis by making piecemeal personnel adjustments. Kulikov concluded perceptively that the widespread notion of the omnipotence of unofficial influences was a myth, which in a crisis situation "acquired the proportions of a classical mass psychosis."[464]

Disputing Sergei Witte's vision of Nicholas as susceptible to influence, historian Evgenii Tarle wrote:

> Why was it the case that only those guards' officers or clairvoyants, or Tibetan doctors who spoke and acted the way Nicholas had already firmly wished before their arrival had influence on the tsar; why was it that none of those guards or wizards who parted opinions with Nicholas retained their influence for even one day after that; how could some retired officer, who was 'absolutely powerless' and a 'zero' overpower Witte without much effort?[465]

In other words, as historian Aleksandr Iskanderov noted, individuals without official positions surrounding the tsar were able to influence events only "to the extent that they expressed the opinions of the tsar and his own vision of state affairs."[466] Once their immediate task had been fulfilled or if they faltered in performing it, Nicholas

---

[464] Sergei Kulikov, *Biurokraticheskaia elita Rossiiskoi imperii nakanune padeniia starogo poriadka* (1914-1917), (Riazan', 2004), 398.

[465] E. Tarle, *Graf S. Iu. Vitte. Opyt kharakteristiki*. (Leningrad, 1927), 41, quoted in Aleksandr Iskanderov, "Rossiiskaia monarkhiia, reformy i revoliutsiia," pt. 3, *Voprosy Istorii* 7 (1993), 129.

[466] Iskanderov, "Rossiiskaia monarkhiia," 129.

withdrew favors from his advisers and turned to new mentors to assist him in pursuing his idea of personal rule.

To be sure, there had been numerous attempts at influencing Nicholas, but none of them enjoyed significant success. The most important reason for their failure was Nicholas's adamant guarding of his autonomy not only from his ministers and the opposition, but also from his closest advisers. The tsar allowed those around him to echo his opinions, but never direct them. "During his whole reign," wrote Vladimir Gurko, "Nicholas sought an individual who would diligently and ably realize the tsar's ideas while himself remaining invisible."[467]

Yet, despite the limited impact of unofficial advisers on the tsar, Nicholas's conspicuous engagement with outsiders like Meshcherskii, Mikhail Andronikov, and Rasputin should not be underestimated. The tsar's relationships with unofficial advisers, which allowed individuals without official responsibilities to function as centers of power and to inject ambivalence and insecurity into the work of the ministers through political salons, intrigue, and slanderous press campaigns, constituted the most important negative factor in late imperial Russia's political environment. Most important, unofficial advisers reinforced Nicholas's resistance to political change and inspired exaggerated rumors, ultimately contributing to the monarch's damaged reputation, belated and inadequate responses to political crises, and Russia's collapse in the Revolution of 1917.

---

[467] Vladimir Gurko, "Tsar' i tsaritsa," in *Nikolai Vtoroi: Vospominaniia, Dnevniki*, ed. B. V. Ananich and R. Sh. Ganelin (St. Petersburg, 1994), 357.

Bibliography:

Archival sources:

State Archive of the Russian Federation, Moscow (GARF)
Fonds:
601: Nicholas II;
640: Aleksandra Fedorovna;
1001: A. A. Mosolov;
1467: Chrezvychainaia sledstvennaia komissiia Vremennogo Pravitel'stva.

Russian State Historical Archive, St. Petersburg (RGIA)
Fonds:
472: Chancellery of the Ministry of the Court;
1099: A. A. Klopov;
1282 Chancellery of the Ministry of the Interior;
1328 Palace Commandant;
1571 A. V. Krivoshein;
1617 M. M. Andronikov;
1626 I. L. Goremykin.

Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts, Moscow (RGADA)
Fonds: 1378: Meshcherskie.

Bakhmeteff Archive of Russian and East European Literature and History, Rare Book and Manuscript Library (BAR), Columbia University
Collections: D. N. Liubimov, P. Benkendorff, S. Iu. Witte.

Published Sources

Alexander, John. "Favourites, Favoritism and Female Rule in Russia, 1725-1796" in *Russia in the Age of the Enlightenment*, ed. Roger Bartlett and Janet M. Hartley. London, 1990.

Alexander Mikhailovich. *Kniga vospominanii*. Paris, 1933-1934.

_____. *Once a Grand Duke*. New York, 1932.

Ananich, B. V. and R. Sh. Ganelin. "Nikolai II." *Voprosy istorii* 2 (1993).

Ana'ich, B.V., and R. Sh. Ganelin, eds. *Nikolai Vtoroi: Vospominaniia, Dnevniki*. St. Petersburg, 1994.

Anan'ich, B.V., R. Sh. Ganelin, et al., eds. *Krizis samoderzhaviia v Rossii, 1895-*

1917. Leningrad, 1984.

Ascher, Abraham. *P. A. Stolypin. The Search for Stability in Late Imperial Russia*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001.

_____. *The Revolution of 1905: Russia in Disarray*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988.

_____. *The Revolution of 1905: Authority Restored*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992.

Avrekh, A. Ia. *Tsarizm i IV Duma.* Moscow, 1981.

_____. *Tsarizm nakanune sverzheniia.* Moscow, 1989.

Bark, P. L. "Glava iz vospominanii." *Vozrozhdenie* 43. Paris, 1955.

Belokonskii, I. P. *Zemskoe dvizheniie.* Moscow, 1914.

Benckendorff, P. K. *Last Days at Tsarskoe Selo.* London, 1927.

Bing, Edward J., ed. *The Secret Letters of the Last Tsar*. Toronto, 1938.

Bogdanovich, A. *Tri poslednikh samoderzhtsa*. Moscow: Novosti, 1990.

Bokhanov, A. N. *Nikolai II*. Moscow, 2000.

Byrnes, Robert F. *Pobedonostsev: His Life and Thought*. Bloomington, Ind. 1968.

Chermenskii, E. D. *IV Gosudarstvennaia duma i sverzhenie tsarizma v Rossii.* Moscow, 1976.

Chernikova, N. V. "Kniaz' Vladimir Petrovich Meshcherskii i revoliutsiia (1904-1907 gg.). In A. Iu. Minakov, ed., *Konservatism v Rossii i mire*, vol. 2. Voronezh, 2004.

Diakin, Valentin. *Russkaia burzhuaziia i tsarizm v gody pervoi mirovoi voiny, 1914-1917*. Leningrad, 1967.

Elliott, J. H. and L.W.B. Brockliss, eds. *The World of the Favourite.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.

Figes, Orlando and B. Kolonitskii. *Interpreting the Russian Revolution: The Language and Symbols of 1917.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.

Fuller, William. *Civil-Military Conflict in Imperial Russia, 1881-1914*. Princeton:

Princeton University Press, 1985.

Ganelin, R. *Rossiiskoe samoderzhavie v 1905 godu: reformy i revoliutsiia*. Sankt-Peterburg: Nauka, 1991.

Gerth, H. H. and C. Wright Mills, eds. and trans. *From Max Weber. Essays in Sociology.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1958.

Glinskii, B. B., ed. *Prolog russko-iaponskoi voiny: materialy iz arkhiva grafa S.Iu. Vitte*. Petrograd, 1916

Grazhdanin (St. Petersburg). 1900-1914.

Gurko, Vladimir Iosifovich. *Features and Figures of the Past: Government and Opinionin the Reign of Nicholas II*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1939.

_____. "Tsar' i tsaritsa," in *Nicholai Vtoroi: Vospominaniia, Dnevniki*, ed. B. V.

Ananich and R. Sh. Ganelin. St. Petersburg, 1994.

Hosking, Geoffrey A. *The Russian Constitutional Experiment: Government and Duma,1907-1914*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973.

Hunt, Lynn, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.

Ioffe, G. Z. *Velikii Oktiabr' i epilog tsarizma.* Moscow, 1987

Aleksandr Iskanderov. "Rossiiskaia monarkhiia, reformy i revoliutsiia," pt. 3, *Voprosy istorii* 7 (1993): 111-131

"Iz zakulisnyh vliianii. Kniaz' V. P. Meshcherskii i A. V. Krivoshein." *Russkoie proshloe*, 77-87

Izvolskii, A. P. *Vospominaniia.* Moscow, 1989.

Judge, Edward H. *Plehve: Repression and Reform in Imperial Russia, 1902-1904.* Syracuse, NY. 1983

Kartsov, A. S. "Kniaz' V. P. Meshcherskii: semeinye sviazi." *Iz glubiny vremen* 6 (St. Petersburg, 1996): 119-135.

_____. "Obshchestvenno-politicheskaia deiatel'nost' kn. V. P. Meshcherskogo (1860-1890gg). Ph.D. diss., St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences, 2000.

Kassow, Samuel D. *Students, Professors, and the State in Tsarist Russia*. Berkeley,

1989.

Kerensky, Alexander, *The Crucifixion of Liberty.* New York, 1934.

Klopov, A. A. *Tainyi sovetnik Imperatora*. St. Petersburg, 2002.

Kokovstov, V. N. *Iz moego proshlogo*. 2 vols. Paris, 1933.

Krivoshein, K. A. *Aleksandr Vasil'evich Krivoshein. Sud'ba rossiiskogo reformatora.* Moscow, 1993.

Kulikov, S. V. "IV Gosudarstvennaia Duma i formirovanie vysshei ispolnitel'noi vlasti v gody pervoi mirovoi voiny (iul' 1914 - fevral' 1917)," in *Rossiia v XIX-XX vv. : sbornik statei k 70-letiiu so dnia rozhdeniia Rafaila Sholomovicha Ganelina*, ed. A.A. Fursenko. St. Peterburg, 1998

_____. *Biurokraticheskaia elita Prossiiskoi imperii nakanune padeniia starogo poriadka (1914-1917).* Riazan' 2004,

_____. "Vysshaia biurokratiia Rossii v gody Pervoi mirovoi voiny (1914-1917)." Ph. D. diss., St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences, 1999.

Kurlov, P. G. *Gibel' imperatorskoi Rossii: vospominaniia*. Moskva: Zakharov, 2002.

Kuropatkin, A. N. "Dnevnik Kuropatkina. " *Krasnyi arkhiv 2* (1922): 5-117.

Lieven, Dominic. Nicholas *II: Emperor of All the Russias*. London, 1993.

_____. *Russia's Rulers under the Old Regime.* New Haven, 1989.

Lincoln, W. Bruce. *In War's Dark Shadow: The Russians before the Great War.* New York, 1983.

Lukoianov, I. V. "Tainyi korrespondent Nikolaia II A. A. Klopov." *Iz glubiny vremen* 6, (1996): 64-86.

Loukianov, Mikhail. "Conservatives and 'Renewed Russia,' 1907-1914." *Slavic Review* 61, no. 4 (2002): 762-786.

Macey, David. *Government and Peasant in Russia, 1861-1917: The Prehistory of the Stolypin Reforms.* DeKalb, Ill., 1987.

Malozemoff, Andrew. *Russian Far Eastern Policy, 1881-1904*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958. Reprint. New York: Octagon, 1977.

Massie, Robert. *Nicholas and Alexandra.* New York: Atheneum, 1967.

McDonald, David M. "The Durnovo Memorandum in Context: Official Conservatism and the Crisis of Autocracy. " *Jahrbucher fur Geschichte Osteuropas* 44, no. 4 (1996): 481-502.

_____. *United Government and Foreign Policy in Russia 1900-1914.* Harvard, 1992.

Meshcherskii, V. P. *Moi vospominaniia* 2 vols. St. Petersburg, 1897-98.

Mosolov, A. A. *Pri dvore poslednego rossiiskogo imperatora.* Moscow, 1993.

Mosse, W. E. "Imperial Favourite: V. P. Meshchersky and the Grazhdanin." *Slavonic and East European Review* 59 n. 4 (1981): 529-547.

"Nikolai II i samoderzhaviie v 1903g. Iz itogov perliustratsii." *Byloe* 2 (1918): 190-222.

Nikolai II. Poslednii Rossiiskii imperator. St. Petersburg, 1992.

Nicholas II. *Dnevniki Nikolaia II.* Moscow, 1991.

_____. *The Letters of the Tsar to the Tsaritsa*. Edited by B. Pares. London, 1929.

_____. "Pismo Nikolaia II P.S. Vannovskomu." *Byloe* 2 (1918).

_____. "Zametki NII o narodnom obrazovanii." *Byloe* 2 (1918).

Nichols , Robert, L. "The Friends of God: Nicholas II and Alexandra at the Canonization of Serafim of Sarov, July 1903." In *Religious and Secular Forces in Late Tsarist Russia.* Edited by Charles E. Timberlake. Seattle, 1992.

Ol'denburg, S. S. *Tsarstvovanie Imperatora Nikolaia II*. Moskva, 1992.

Padenie tsarskogo rezhima. Stenograficheskie otchety doprosov i pokazanii dannyh v 1917 g. v Chrezvychailoi sledstvennoi komissii Vremennogo pravitel'stva. Edited by P. E. Shchegolev. Vols I-VII. Moscow-Leningrad 1924-1927.

Paleologue, Maurice. *An Ambassadors' Memoirs*. 2 vols. New York, 1925.

Pares, Bernard. *The Fall of the Russian Monarchy: A Study of Evidence*. New York: Knopf, 1939.

Pintner, Walter McKenzie and Don Karl Rowney, eds. and trans. *Russian officialdom: the bureaucratization of Russian society from the seventeenth to the twentieth century.* University of North Carolina Press, 1980.

Pipes, Richard. *The Russian Revolution.* New York, 1990.

Pobedonostsev, K. P. "Pis'ma K. P. Pobedonostseva k Nikolaiu II." Moscow, 1925.

Polivanov, A. *Memuary*. Moscow, 1924.

Polovtsov, A. A. "Dnevnik," *Krasnyi Arkhiv* 3 (1923):76-192; 2 (1929):170-203; 3 (1931):110-32; 6 (1934):169-86; 3 (1923):76-172.

Radzinsky, Edvard. *The Last Tsar: The Life and Death of Nicholas II.* New York, 1992.

Reformy ili revoliutsiia. Rossiia 1861-1917: Materialy Mezhdunarodnogo kollokviuma istorikov. Edited by Valentin S. Diakin. St. Petersburg, 1992.

Riasanovskii, Nicholas. *A History of Russia.* New York, 1984.

Rieber, Alfred. "Bureaucratic Politics in Imperial Russia." *Social Science History* 2, no. 4 (Summer. 1978): 399-413.

Roberts, Henry L. *Four Queens and Several Knaves*. Institute on East Central Europe and Russian Institute. Columbia University, 1971.

Rodzianko, M. V. *The Reign of Rasputin: An Empire's Collapse*. London, 1927.

Romanov, Boris, *Rossia v Manchurii*, 1892-1906. Trans. By Susan Wilbur Jones. Ann Arbor, 1952.

Rudnev, V. *Pravda o tsarskoi sem'ie i 'temnykh silakh'*. Berlin, 1920.

Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, David. *Towards the Rising Sun. Russian Ideologies of Empire and the Path to War with Japan.* DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2001.

Semennikov, V. P., ed. *Monarkhia pered krusheniem, 1914-1917.* Moscow, 1927.

Shavelskii, G. I. *Vospominaniia poslednego protopresvitera russkoi armii i flota.* Vol. 1. Moscow, 1996.

Shepelev, L. E. *Chinovnyi mir Rossii: XVIII-nachalo XIX v.* St. Petersburg, 1999.

Shul'gin, V. *Dni.* Leningrad, 1925.

Solovev, Iu. B. "K istorii poishozhdeniia manifesta 26 fevralia 1903." *Vspomogatel'nye istoricheskie distsypliny* 11 (1974)

_____. "Nachalo tsarstvovaniia Nikolaia II i rol' K. P. Pobedonostseva v

opredelenii politicheskogo kursa samoderzhaviia." *Arkheograficheskii ezhegodnik za 1972 god.* (1974): 311-318.

_____. *Samoderzhavie i dvorianstvo v 1902-1907.* Leningrad, 1981.

Soloviev, Iu., ed. "Politicheskaia smert' P. A. Stolypina. In *Gosudarstvennaia deiatel'nost' P. A. Stolypina: sbornik statei.* Moscow, 1994.

Steinberg, Mark D. "Nicholas and Aleksandra. An Intellectual Portrait." In *The Fall of the Romanovs. Political Dreams and Personal Struggles in a Time of Revolution.* Edited by Mark D. Steinberg and Vladimir M. Khrustalev. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.

Tainyi sovetnik imperatora. Edited by V. M. Krylov et als. Sankt-Peterburg: Peterburg-XXI vek, 2002.

Tolstoi, Ivan. *Memuary grafa I. I. Tolstogo*. Moskva, 2002.

Treadgold, Donald. *Twentieth Century Russia,* 7th ed. University of Washington, 1990.

Trotsky, Leon. *The Russian Revolution.* New York, 1959.

Turnbull, Daniel , "The Defeat of Popular Representation, December 1904: Prince Mirskii, Witte, and the Imperial Family." *Slavic Review* 48, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 54-70.

U[rusov]. *Imperator Nikolai II. Zhizn' i deiatel'nost' Venzenosnago Tsaria*. Nice, 19.. .

"Uspokoeniia nechego ozhidat'. Pis'ma kniazia M. M. Andronikova Nikolaiu II, Aleksandre Fedorovne, A. A. Vyrubovoi i V. N. Voieikovu." *Istochnik* 1 (1999): 24-41.

Vedernikov, V. V. "Krizis konservativnoi ideologii I ego otrazhenie v pechati (1895-1902), V*estnik Leningradskogo universiteta. Istoriia. Iazyk. Literatura* 2 (1981): 104-107.

Verner, Andrew M. *The Crisis of Russian Autocracy: Nicholas II and the 1905 Revolution*. Princeton, N.J. 1990.

Vinogradoff, Igor. "Further Russian Imperial Correspondence with Prince V. P. Meshcherskii. " *Oxford Slavonic Papers* 11 (1964): 101-11.

_____. "Some Russian Imperial Letters to Prince V. P. Meshcherskii (1839-1914)." *Oxford Slavonic Studies* 11 (1962): 105-57.

Voeikov, V. N. *S tsarem i bez tsaria*. Helsinki, 1936.

Volkonskii, S. *Moi vospominaniia*. Moscow, 1992.

Warth, Robert D. "Before Rasputin: Piety and the Occult at the Court of Nicholas II." The Historian 47 (May 1985): 323-37.

_____. *Nicholas II: the Life and Reign of Russia's Last monarch*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1997.

Whelan, Heidi. *Alexander III and State Council: Bureaucracy and Counterreform in Late Imperial Russia.* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1982.

White, John Albert, *The Diplomacy of the Russo-Japanese War.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964.

Whittaker, C. H. "The Reforming Tsar: The Redefinition of Autocratic Duty in Eighteenth-Century Russia." *Slavic Review* 51, no. 1 (1992): 77-98.

_____. *Russian Monarchy: Eighteenth Century Rulers and Writers in Political Dialogue*. Northern Illinois University Press, 2003.

Vitte, S. Iu. *Vospominaniia*. 3 vols. Tallinn, 1994.

_____. *Memoirs of Witte.* New York, 1967.

Wortman, "Nikolai II i obraz samoderzhaviia," in *Reformy ili revoliutsiia.* St. Petersburg, 1992.

_____. "Reply to Mikhail Dolbilov," *Kritika* 2, no. 4 (Fall, 2001): 797-801.

_____. *Scenarios of Power. Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*, vol. 2 Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

Zakharova, L. G. "Krizis samoderzhaviia nakanune revoliutsii 1905 goda."*Voprosy Istorii* 8 (1978): 119-40.