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and the Struggle for
Emancipation:**

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Abstract

This essay explores the emergence of civil society in Imperial Russia in the 1840s and 1850s through an analysis of the role of the public in the preparation for the emancipation of the serfs before the government made the commitment to manumit the serfs. To do so, the essay considers the role of the Westerners, specifically one of the leading Westerners, the legal historian Konstantin Kavelin, from archetypically abstract thinker into political activist within the circumscribed parameters of autocracy in Imperial Russia. Kavelin and his allies, both within and without the bureaucracy, developed reform programs in the harsh years in Russia from 1848 until 1855 in the hope that a time more propitious for reform would come thereby enabling them to act in concert with the government. The Westerners played a vital role in providing the necessary intellectual underpinnings for the Great Reforms, in disseminating these ideas to the public, and in working closely with reformist bureaucrats in their specific preparations. Kavelin's efforts, primarily his proposed drafts and contacts, proved pivotal in facilitating the emancipation preparations that led to the legislation and implementation of the reform. This preparatory work of the late 1840s and 1850s bore fruit when the Russian state emancipated the serfs in 1861. The aspirations for a partnership with the government however failed to materialize.

The Westerners focused their activities in the late 1840s and early 1850s on fostering the growth of an open, modern society in Russia, in particular to develop individuality: the ability of the individual to act freely in personal matters and to partner with the government in promoting modernization. Throughout the 1830s and early 1840s, they had debated the philosophical underpinnings of the Russian nation and where its future lay. In this process they discovered themselves, and as they reached intellectual maturity they believed that Russia was ripe to do so too. During the oppressive years of the late 1840s and early 1850s—the apogee of Nikolaevan despotism, or *mrachnoe semiletie* (the seven dark years)—the original Westerner circle collapsed. Many of its former members abandoned abstract philosophical debates and focused instead on concrete plans to confront Russia’s many pressing problems, foremost among them the conundrum of serfdom. They believed that educated society had earned a place in Russia, that it had a duty to assist in resolving Russia’s unique problems, including serfdom, and that it must fulfill this duty.

In this essay, I will explore the mature thought and activities of the Russian jurist and historian, and a leader of the Westerners, Konstantin Kavelin. Russia’s defeat in the Crimean War, which, despite the limited nature of the loss, put to question Russia’s claim as a great military power and undermined the legitimacy of Nicholas I’s reign, coupled with increasing serf disturbances and economic problems, gave new urgency to resolution of the serf question. The growth of a maturing civil society and its increasing demands for greater space in autocratic Russia played the crucial role in fostering the promulgation of reform in Russia. Educated society, working at times within the government and at times outside it, collaborated with progressive officials to create a program that facilitated the Great Reforms of the 1860s. Kavelin’s efforts to bring together leaders of educated society and progressive officials in preparing for emancipation were instrumental in this process. He became an intellectual mentor to Russia’s enlightened bureaucrats who, with their experience in working through Russia’s often byzantine bureaucracy, provided the necessary skill to promulgate the emancipation. Despite their disagreements and inconsistencies, the Westerners created the necessary climate for change and provided the government with the requisite expertise to enact the reforms that opened the door to modernization.

The Westerners emerged in the 1830s and 1840s from the salons and student circles (*kruzhki*) connected to Moscow University. Like the Slavophiles, most of whom attended the same salons and circles, they were challenged by the *Philosophical Letters* of Pyotr Chaadaev, in which he dismissed Russia’s past, and hence its present and future, as sterile and devoid of any value. Out of these letters emerged

the accursed questions: Will Russia contribute anything to world civilization? What is Russia's future? What is Russia's relationship to the West? Their patriotism thus aroused, these young men gathered at Moscow University, which thrived intellectually under the relatively independent stewardship of its superintendent, Count Sergei Stroganov. At the university, and through its adjoining circles and salons, they encountered German Idealistic philosophy which contrasted sharply with the official ethos of Nicholas I's government. Based on Minister of Education Sergei Uvarov's trilogy, "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality," the official dogma emphasized bureaucratic regimentation, loyalty to the tsar, government service, and servility to superiors. The fluid historical, philosophical, literary, and religious debates initiated by Chaadaev's accursed questions eventually split the young friends into two competing camps, Westerners and Slavophiles.

The Westerners themselves struggled with an elusive unity as they fractured in the mid-1840s over religious and political issues. Their primary unity lay in opposing the Slavophiles' interpretation of Russia's past, present, and future. While the Westerners did look to the West for ideas, they never argued that Russia should blindly follow the West. They debated with each other what this amorphous West was, but for all their differences they agreed that Russia could learn some useful lessons from the West. One of the Westerners' core beliefs was that individuals should be free from government interference in their personal endeavors.¹

The Westerners, in the difficult last years of Nicholas I's reign, sought to create whatever freedom and individual dignity could be found in social spaces in society, and even in the government, and to use these spaces to educate both themselves and society about what was needed in order to promote the development of the individual in the future. They believed that it was part of their mission as Russians to spread their ideas and values into society, and in so doing, into the government. Through publications, unpublished manuscript campaigns, lectures, and salon activities, they stressed the importance of enlightenment and the dignity of the individual. They spent the harshest years of despotism, 1848–1855, studying and preparing a concrete program of reform that would create an open society. The death of Nicholas I in 1855 coupled with Russia's defeat in the Crimean War the following year provided the Westerners and their allies in the bureaucracy with the opportunity to promote this program to a public that increasingly expected its views to be considered. Their activities acquainted the Russian public with ideas appropriate to modernization, ideas that resonated with much of the educated public, thereby fostering the formation of a public opinion in Russia which not only accepted, but at times even demanded, a change in government policies and institutions.

The literary critic and prominent Westerner Vissarion Belinskii articulated the concrete goals for which the Westerners would strive so that they, considering themselves agents of modernization and spokespeople for educated society, could find space to act. In his famous letter to Nikolai Gogol', Belinskii foreshadowed a possible practical reform program: "The most pressing contemporary national questions in Russia now are: the abolition of serfdom; the elimination of corporal punishment; the introduction, as far as possible, of a strict observance of at least those laws which already exist."² Belinskii stressed the ideals of the rule of law and the inviolability of the person, but not through metaphysics or absolute moral imperatives, as the Russian intelligentsia had sought to do in the 1830s and 1840s. These concrete goals offered a base from which to develop a program. It was Belinskii's friend, the tea merchant Vasilii Botkin, who identified the Westerner turn toward practicality in a letter to the belle-lettrist Pavel Annenkov: "after a prolonged wandering through German emptiness it [Russian thought] has begun to pay attention to the practical world, or in other words—our friends are preoccupied with an ideology which has a direct relationship with the practical world."³ Botkin explicitly suggested in this letter that his friends had begun to concentrate their efforts on essential but concrete solutions to Russia's many problems.

Belinskii died shortly after writing his letter to Gogol'. His friend and former pupil Konstantin Kavelin assumed the dangerous and complex task of establishing a political program and disseminating it in autocratic Russia. After resigning from Moscow University where he had been professor of legal history, Kavelin reached St. Petersburg in the summer of 1848, just after the death of Belinskii.⁴ Several months later, after much introspection, he wrote a long and thoughtful letter to his former colleague at Moscow University, Timofei Granovskii, in which he described the oppressive and stagnant political and social situation from his new home in the capital and considered the tasks facing the Westerners and their allies in the bureaucracy in such trying circumstances. Lamenting that the intelligentsia had hitherto squandered its time and talents in idle abstraction, Kavelin called for a new emphasis on practical work: "To the question: what have they done, what have they added by their existence to the treasure house of life for sixty million half-savage and ignorant people, yet still people nevertheless? What purpose has their humanism served, their inner struggle, their love for the supreme truth, their self-sacrifice, their development—in a word, all the wealth of strength, mind, and knowledge, all the moral forces?"⁵

Kavelin wanted the leaders of educated society to rally public opinion, and he tried to convince Nikolai Nekrasov and Ivan Panaev, the new editors of the progres-

sive journal *Sovremennik*, to print his program. Fearing that the government would ban their journal in the increasingly reactionary political climate following 1848 the two men refused.⁶ Kavelin then decided to establish a reform party within the government itself in order to continue his campaign against Nicholas I's despotism.

In alliance with progressive officials in the bureaucracy, specifically the “enlightened bureaucrats,” the Westerners thus advanced the cause of modernization and reform in Russia, focusing primarily on the emancipation of the serfs as the first and most important step in establishing the primacy of the individual in Russia.⁷ That millions of Russians lived in bondage was an embarrassment to educated society, already frustrated by the conflict between the ideals promoted by Western education and the oppressive bureaucratic formalism of daily life. The Westerners, led by Moscow University Professor Pyotr Redkin, Granovskii, and Kavelin, envisioned a new Russia, one in which the educated public would metamorphose from subjects into citizens, with the concomitant obligations and rights.

In this study I examine these efforts through an analysis of the discussions within both educated society and the bureaucracy prior to the emancipation of 1861. Konstantin Kavelin played a critical role in these debates, through his connections with the enlightened bureaucrats, his efforts to unite educated society behind a reform program, and his activities as a publicist for an end to serfdom. The death of the despot in 1855 and Russia's defeat in the Crimean War were instrumental in enabling the educated public to act; the incoming reign of Alexander II offered new possibilities for it to use its years of preparation to facilitate the emancipation of the serfs and the transformation of Russia.

Into the Deep Recesses

Discussions of reform continued in Russia despite the establishment of a military-bureaucratic despotism in 1848, but such efforts moved into the deep recesses of government offices and into safe, protected salons as they had thirty years earlier in the last, reactionary days of Alexander I.⁸ Konstantin Kavelin's educational background and his many acquaintances in educated society and in the bureaucracy, coupled with the acclaim he received for his essay “A View of the Juridical Life of Ancient Russia,” gained him immediate access to the salon life of the capital, which in turn allowed him to become the intellectual mentor of a circle of enlightened bureaucrats led by Nikolai and Dmitrii Miliutin.⁹ Pavel Annenkov named this circle the Petersburg Party of Progress because it advocated orderly,

evolutionary change.¹⁰ Despite the circle's political moderation, it was extremely critical of Nicholas's regime for its "official lawlessness, police oppression, and strict formalism."¹¹ The group endorsed autocracy, but saw it as a means to slow, but steady, progress.¹²

The Petersburg Party of Progress, formed around the nucleus of the Miliutin brothers and Kavelin, coalesced in 1849. It included a number of mid-level officials and leading progressives. The enlightened bureaucrats came to believe that by the middle of the nineteenth century Russia's problems could not be considered solely in terms of administrative bureaus with all their inefficiencies and corruption. The best means to address the myriad problems was to bring the rule of law to Russia through reforming the judicial system, abolishing serfdom, and curtailing the arbitrariness of officials and landowners. In order to accomplish these goals, they sought to "harness the forces of social change and create a broader base of support for autocracy that somehow allowed Russians some amount of participation in government."¹³ These goals were commensurate with the syncretic views of the leading thinkers and actors from educated society and their allies among the enlightened bureaucrats.

The geographer P. P. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, a distant relative of Nikolai Miliutin and a trusted assistant to Iakov Rostovtsev, Tsar Alexander II's closest advisor, writes that after the rapprochement of Nikolai Miliutin and Kavelin, the two directed their work toward emancipation, which both recognized as essential for the renewal of the Russian state structure.¹⁴ The circle included A. P. Zablotskii-Desiatovskii, a rising young bureaucrat in the Ministry of State Domains; I. P. Arapetov, an old friend of the Miliutins, who worked in the Ministry of the Interior; E. F. Korsh, Kavelin's brother-in-law and a fellow refugee from Moscow, who worked as a journalist in the capital; and K. K. Grot, who worked in the Economic Department with Kavelin and Nikolai Miliutin.¹⁵

Through Kavelin and Korsh's efforts and connections, the circle had close links with other progressive circles and individuals in a number of cities, especially at the universities and other institutions of higher learning.¹⁶ Working through them, the Miliutin circle fostered a sense of reconciliation and good will among different groups of the intelligentsia which had been torn apart by the internecine debates between the Westerners and the Slavophiles, and the liberal and radical Westerners, earlier in the 1840s. By offering the opportunity for "practical work" to members of the alienated intelligentsia, the circle enabled formerly bitter enemies, including Slavophiles and Westerners, to collaborate productively and pragmatically to help solve Russia's many problems.¹⁷

The members of this circle also joined the Imperial Russian Geographical Society, which helped to prepare the way for the emancipation by compiling detailed ethnographic and statistical data on the serfs. The Geographical Society provided a venue for the intelligentsia and the enlightened bureaucrats to meet under the government's auspices and enabled them to develop contacts with powerful figures at court.¹⁸ These groups of progressives, endorsing the conviction that the autocrat had served as an instrument of reform in Russia since Peter the Great, believed that educated society must inform the tsar of Russia's true conditions, thereby circumventing the reactionary court camarilla. It was the Miliutin circle's intention to transform the Russian Geographical Society into an instrument to serve this purpose of collecting data about Russia and informing the tsar.¹⁹

The founders of the Geographical Society intentionally modeled it on Great Britain's Royal Geographical Society. It was established on August 6, 1846, and the selection of the tsar's second son, Konstantin Nikolaevich, as its first president proved to be a victory for those, such as the members of the Miliutin circle, who had a vision of the society as a vehicle for preparing reform. The primary goal of the society remained vague, but the ambiguity about its mission offered the opportunity to mold it into an effective social space, ironically protected from the government by its connection to the government, in which to prepare reform. The founders, most of whom were ethnic Baltic German, envisioned an institution that would support purely academic studies of the least explored peoples and regions of the Russian Empire. A number of the young Russians who entered the society in growing numbers in the following years, however, sought to avail themselves of its protection and resources to analyze the actual living conditions of the Russian people. Their influence grew quickly after the election of A. V. Golovnin, a close friend of the Miliutin brothers, as the society's secretary. Golovnin furthered these efforts when he introduced a number of his progressive friends from the bureaucracy into the society, starting what Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii called "a genuine revolution."²⁰ In 1848 the statistics division of the society, due mostly to Nikolai Miliutin's maneuvering, in a long and tumultuous meeting, rejected the appointment of the two nominees for its director to the Council (the geographical society's executive board), despite the society's rules. They sought to dilute the power of the council to the general assembly (in which they had a majority) of its members to extend their control. They elected instead one of their like-minded colleagues, A. P. Zablotskii-Desiatovskii.²¹ He used his new position to focus the work of the statistics division to a study of economic geography and to amass information on Russian peasants' lives.

Many of the younger, reform-minded Russians led this rebellion, inaugurating an acrimonious two-year struggle over revisions of the rules that would “extend participation in scholarly activity to a broader circle of members.”²² They successfully obtained full autonomy for each of the society’s four divisions, and succeeded in giving its general assembly a decisive voice in the management of the society.²³ In early 1850, Gen. M. N. Murav’ev became the society’s president; although not associated with reform efforts, he was a Russian and supported Russians in the society.

The struggle for control of the Geographical Society, superficially a conflict between the Russians and Germans, manifested Kavelin’s conviction, imparted to the members of the circle, that reform in autocratic Russia was most effectively promoted under the guise of nationalism to rally supporters. The reformers wanted their scholarship to enlighten and reform Russia, and they succeeded in defeating the more conservative, purely academic German elements. After the victory, the members of the Miliutin circle and enlightened bureaucrats began to play a leading role in the work of the society, especially in the ethnography and statistics divisions. According to Semenov, this victory enabled the new leaders of the Society to focus their “attention on the study of the Russian national way of life” in the more concrete effort to promote better relations between the serf owners and the peasants.”²⁴

The ethnography division initiated a comprehensive study of provincial and local life in Russia’s various regions. The questionnaire included a number of categories: physical appearance, language, domestic life, economic activity, customs, and traditions. The Geographical Society issued seven thousand copies of the questionnaires. Although many were not completed and some only completed in part, Kavelin, as editor, was able to use the data to issue a two-volume report on the Russian peasantry, published in 1853 and 1854 in the ethnographic section’s journal, *Etnograficheskii sbornik*.²⁵ The report depicted the peasants as sober, hardworking people, able to survive despite little food and rudimentary shelter. In its own way, yet similarly to Turgenev’s contemporaneous *A Sportsmen’s Sketches*, this statistical depiction of the serfs contradicted the general views of them among the elite. This experience and information bore rich fruit in the emancipation of 1861.

The obscurantism of the years 1848–1855 impeded the efforts of educated society to address Russia’s myriad problems, first and foremost among them, serfdom. In the wake of the 1848 revolutions in Europe, Nicholas I’s fear of the contagion of revolution compelled him to adopt numerous measures in order to quarantine Russia, to isolate it from the West. The government imposed severe censorship and considered closing the universities. Annenkov, upon returning to Russia from France in the fall of 1848, was shocked at the rise of obscurantism in education and

the seeming ubiquitousness of the police.²⁶ Nicholas appointed the noted reactionary Count A. A. Zakrevskii as governor-general of Moscow to ferret out liberals.²⁷ Solov'ev compared this era to the inaugural years of the Roman Empire, when the emperors used the praetorian guard to crush all perceived dissent.²⁸

Given this harsh environment, the Geographical Society avoided direct political action, but its activities enabled the Westerners and their allies in the bureaucracy to continue their preparations for reform at a future, more propitious, time. The society provided a haven where reform-minded men could safely work and discuss the various internal problems facing Russia. In addition, the Geographical Society financed and published its research about Russia's internal conditions, offering at times shocking portraits of the peasantry. Through their work these enlightened bureaucrats and Westerners directed the attention of other reform-minded people in educated society throughout Russia to the real living conditions in their homeland. They strengthened the belief in a realistic, pragmatic approach to social questions that Belinskii had endorsed shortly before he died. Thus, they laid the groundwork for reform and the modernization of autocratic Russia.

Enter the Grand Duchess Yelena Pavlovna

The Miliutin circle and other progressive members of the Geographical Society enjoyed the protection of several highly placed individuals, the most important of whom was their patron, the Grand Duchess Yelena Pavlovna, widow of the Tsar Nicholas's brother Mikhail who died in 1849. Her salon became the primary center of the emerging abolitionist party. Born a Württemberg princess, she possessed both intelligence and character. In an obituary written in 1873, Kavelin described her as "endowed with a sharp, versatile mind, thoroughly enlightened in the broadest sense of the word." She was a patron of the arts, well-versed in questions of science, and knowledgeable about the pressing social questions of the day. Most important to Kavelin, she dedicated her "remarkable and enlightened mind, all her brilliant, incomparable talents" to the glory and improvement of her adopted homeland.²⁹

Politics was the greatest of her many interests. In order to follow the current political situation, she organized intimate dinners for dignitaries, usually Nicholas I's more moderate and well-intentioned advisors, including Pavel Kiselev and Modest Korf.³⁰ She also began to turn to younger, progressive officials, about whom she learned from the senior dignitaries. She eventually succeeded in her most important effort, that is, building a relationship with the grand duke Konstantin Nikolaevich,

who became closer to his aunt in the early 1850s.³¹ The tie was further strengthened when her friend A. V. Golovnin became the grand duke's personal secretary and Prince D. A. Obolenskii transferred into the grand duke's Naval Ministry as director of the commissariat. Until Nicholas's death, the grand duchess limited her activities to providing a refuge where conscientious reformers could exchange ideas about Russia's problems.³²

In 1847 Prince Obolenskii, assistant president of the civil court in St. Petersburg, and a number of the younger, more progressive officials were invited to her Thursday evening gatherings. Shortly thereafter Nikolai Miliutin began to attend them as well. Obolenskii recalled that most of the young men who frequented her salon were confirmed Westerners although Obolenskii himself was not. Despite differences in the participants' convictions, they "agreed in one common feeling, in the desire for a better order. The ways of the bureaucracy and the highest-ranking statesmen were subjected to bitter and derisive criticism." Obolenskii added that the works of Western socialists, such as Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Charles Fourier, and Louis Blanc, influenced the discussants, although in a "platonic" way, not in the quest for a revolution. Obolenskii concluded that "these young men worked, studied, read, and treated the aimless, empty life of high society with contempt. Fear reigned over everything; routine in administration, formalism to the point of scandal in the courts. Life hid in the minds and hearts of these young men, but they were sustained by an incomprehensibly firm hope that the present order could not long continue and that more favorable days must soon arrive."³³

Thus, Yelena Pavlovna's salon provided another critical social space where enlightened bureaucrats and the moderate intelligentsia could discuss Russia's current problems. The coalescence of these forces, alienated since the Decembrist uprising in 1825, created the practical and intellectual preconditions for the Great Reforms of the 1860s and 1870s. The moderate intelligentsia provided the enlightened bureaucrats with the philosophical underpinning, including the work of leading social and political thinkers of Western Europe. These ideas and the resulting discussions led the participating bureaucrats to view reform and modernization as a joint project of educated society and the state. Two individuals, Kavelin and the youngest Miliutin brother Vladimir, fostered the Miliutin circle's interest in the French utopian socialists, but not as a blueprint for action. Because the Miliutin brothers and their allies were not seeking a new philosophical system or a model upon which to remake Russian society, they ignored the overtly political aspects of the socialists' works. In the process of these debates, they expanded their conception of reform beyond a mere fine-tuning of the administrative machinery and simple statistical studies.

Instead, they stressed practical matters in discussions about change and in their efforts to consult public opinion.³⁴

Until his death in 1849, the Grand Duke Mikhail inhibited his wife's efforts so she had to proceed cautiously in cultivating the acquaintance of these young officials and *intelligenty*. Playing chess in the corner, Mikhail often intervened in the discussions; sometimes he so upset his wife with his obscurantist views that she stalked out of the room. After his death, however, Yelena Pavlovna's "morganatic evenings" as she called them, significantly expanded. With the assistance of her ladies-in-waiting, first Princess L'vov and later Baroness Rahden, she altered the composition of her salon, inviting "all the best representatives of the younger generation" led by the members of the Miliutin circle.³⁵

In such venues as the Russian Geographical Society, Yelena Pavlovna's salon, and the Miliutin circle, Kavelin suggested three guidelines for reform to succeed: it must be distinctively Russian, it must be based on a thorough knowledge of the conditions in Russia, and it must come from above—from the autocrat. Kavelin spoke for the circle in Petersburg when he wrote to Granovskii in 1848: "I believe in the complete necessity of absolutism for contemporary Russia, but it must be progressive and enlightened. The kind we have only destroys the germ of an independent life. The good that is happening is occurring without its knowledge. Little by little, we are growing accustomed to fighting it with its own weapons."³⁶

The Little Center in the Capital

Kavelin had become a central figure among the intelligentsia and enlightened bureaucrats in the capital, uniting the disparate elements of both groups around the goal of reform within the state.³⁷ The legal philosopher Boris Chicherin, who visited his former professor in Petersburg, later recalled that Kavelin had become the "little center" of the capital's intelligentsia with contacts throughout the city, including the "liberal bureaucrats" and the salon of the grand duchess where they "esteemed his talent and the nobility of his character."³⁸ Thus, despite its oppressiveness, Kavelin found life in the capital useful to his cause. Dismissing the rumors about a return to a faculty position in Moscow at this time, he informed his sister that he "would not go. It is better for me in Petersburg. I have become accustomed to this place and have made some connections."³⁹

Kavelin suggested that his motherland had the same goal as Europe: a free society in which the individual had a creative and independent existence. Russia,

however, would follow its own path to that goal. Granovskii had already made this point in one of his public lectures:

We [Russia] will accept from Europe only the purest results of her development by eliminating all the incidental admixtures. The science of the West is the single good that it can transmit to Russia. We accept this heritage with due recognition toward those who have prepared it for us, the unexpected heirs, and we would not demand from them an account of how they acquired the treasures that they bequeath to us. Our work would increase these treasures in a way worthy of the contribution of Russian thought and word.⁴⁰

As Westerners, Granovskii and Kavelin believed that Russia must not simply import Western ideas, but learn from Europe's past.

These efforts to inculcate liberal, humane values into young Russians bore fruit in later years in a variety of ways. The aspirations raised by their European education contrasted with the harsh realities of their jobs in the bureaucracy and everyday life.⁴¹ This contradiction between inculcated values (*vospitanie*) and the ways of daily life (*nrvy*) experienced by educated Russians ultimately played a vital role in the government's initial commitment to end serfdom. Even those nobles most closely connected to serfdom often experienced a tension between their attitudes drawn from daily life and their cultural education.⁴²

The Moscow University Jubilee

Moscow University's centennial jubilee, celebrated in January 1855, offered educated society a unique and officially sanctioned opportunity to coalesce and to manifest its maturity. The university created a committee of five professors to organize the festivities. Professor S. P. Shevyrev wrote a history of the university and collaborated with the historian S. M. Solov'ev on a biographical dictionary of the faculty of the university's first century.⁴³ The jubilee placed the former capital into the national spotlight. It additionally illustrated the ill-disguised fact that Moscow was a much more independent city than St. Petersburg. Contrary to Nicholas's expectations, the celebrations turned into a demonstration of support for the growing independence of educated society.

The celebration exceeded its original plans through the organization of numerous informal gatherings not just to honor the university but to reaffirm old friendships. The jubilee became a series of grandiose events with large numbers of guests from across the empire, including more than three hundred from the capital, in attendance.⁴⁴

The committee had resolved to include deputations from sister institutions of higher learning and learned societies. By early January, these deputations and alumni from all parts of Russia began to arrive in Moscow. Illustrating clearly the significance of Moscow University as an institution, people who could not get to Moscow staged their own celebrations in other cities.

Slavophiles gathered at Yurii Samarin's home while Westerners came to Granovskii's.⁴⁵ Granovskii remarked that the friends spent both their days and evenings together during the week of celebrations,⁴⁶ enjoying the company of old comrades, recalling their youthful dreams and halcyon days in a convivial atmosphere. United by common ideals and hopes, a stronger rapport also developed among the Petersburg and Moscow progressives, who were drawn together by the jubilee.⁴⁷ The centennial festivities and unofficial gatherings during the week testified to the emergence of an independent public in Russia.

A number of people gave speeches about the university at the official ceremonies and private gatherings. The minister of education, A. S. Norov, canceled Solov'ev's speech on the university's official founder I. I. Shuvalov, at the official celebration on January 12, because the minister considered the content of the speech too inflammatory.⁴⁸ However, Nikolai Chernyshevskii soon published it in his journal, *Sovremennik*. Solov'ev maintained that every viable institution answered a specific need. For example, Russia in the eighteenth century needed to inculcate civic responsibility in lieu of blind obedience to authority, thus resulting in a moral purification. He posited that educated society recognized its own value by improving itself through the instrument of "learning, civic wisdom, the dissemination of light, with the assistance of which the members of society see what they are, where they are, what they are obliged to do for the fatherland." He defined "a true son of the fatherland" simply: a person "who knows his fatherland, its needs, and is able to use his capabilities toward the satisfaction of one or another of those needs."⁴⁹ Solov'ev added that educated society had created the university and that Russia's current need was a self-conscious civil society. He later acknowledged that he was astounded by how his essay "created a powerful impression by its boldness and liberal message" for which the Slavophile Samarin congratulated him and mentioned that Chaadaev planned to translate it into French.⁵⁰

What made the centennial jubilee an historic occasion was that the leaders of educated society met together for the first time in Russian history. The gatherings during the week after the official celebration had offered educated society a genuine opportunity to acknowledge itself as a cohesive and even powerful force. Such emerging views within society led to greater expectations of its role as a partner with

the government in determining Russia's path. It was this coalescence, this cohesiveness that Kavelin, his former student and legal philosopher Boris Chicherin, and the enlightened bureaucrats sought to use to bring reform to Russia.

Much of educated society hoped that Russia would lose the Crimean War because it believed that Russia's defeat would prove conclusively the bankruptcy of The Nicholaevan regime, while a victory would sustain the oppressive system. Solov'ev asserted to all who would listen that Russia must pay for Nicholas's despotism of the previous thirty years.⁵¹ Educated society experienced the paradoxical situation of hoping for defeat while suffering with Russia's losses. Solov'ev admitted: "We found ourselves in a grave predicament. On the one hand, our patriotism was horribly wounded by Russia's humiliation. On the other hand, we were convinced that only a disaster, namely an unsuccessful war, could produce a salutary change, preventing future decay. We were convinced that success in war would tighten our shackles, would ratify our barracks regime."⁵² Even the Slavophiles, after initially supporting the war as a religious crusade, believed that defeat was punishment for Russia's apostasy. Chicherin also interpreted the defeat as salutary for Russia, noting that Prussia's collapse of 1807 led to its national renewal. The loss in the Crimea would create a parallel situation and herald a new era of reform.⁵³

The disastrous results of the Crimean War firmly alienated broad strata of educated society from the government. Russia, considered a great power solely for the might and size of its army, suffered a defeat on its own soil, seriously undermining its status and the justification for unbridled repression. Even the most loyal supporters of the autocracy began to question the government. Mikhail Pogodin, a leader of the Official Nationalists, wrote a series of letters, later called the *Historical-Political Letters*, the manuscripts of which enjoyed popularity because of their perspicacious analysis of the situation.

Pogodin brought to the government's attention the need for reform of the old order in which he saw "the quiet of a graveyard, rotting and stinking, both morally and physically." Because he feared the ominous consequences of continuing the anachronistic order maintained by Nicholas, he wrote these letters to alert the new tsar to such perils, informing Alexander II that "the previous system has had its day." Pogodin suggested that the government should be wary of the specter of a peasant revolt (*bunt*), reminding the tsar of previous uprisings under Razin and Pugachev.⁵⁴

Despite his political differences with Pogodin, Kavelin regarded the Letters as a "civic feat," proving that quite distinct outlooks could work together to support a reform agenda. He initiated a friendly correspondence with his former teacher, who agreed that the primary cause for Russia's internal and external difficulties was

the corrupt and oppressive regime, engendered by Nicholas, and based on official lawlessness (*proizvol*).⁵⁵

Impernikel is dead!

Tsar Nicholas died from pneumonia at noon on February 18, 1855. The news of his death shook Russian society because the man had so dominated the previous thirty years. A maid-of-honor at the court recorded in her diary that “only two days have passed since all this occurred, yet it seems to me that, after these two days, the sky has come tumbling down. . . . I went to dine with my parents and Papa said: ‘It was as if we had been told a god had died.’”⁵⁶ Meanwhile in London, Alexander Herzen, upon hearing the news, showed only great joy as he opened his finest champagne and gave coins to the street children to shout, “Hurrah! Hurrah! Impernikel is dead! Impernikel is dead!”⁵⁷

According to Solov’ev, he saw Granovskii while both were en route to take the oath to Alexander at Moscow University’s chapel. All the former could say to Granovskii was, “He is dead!” Granovskii responded quietly, “There is nothing amazing about his death. What is amazing is that we are still alive.”⁵⁸ Educated society felt relief with the despot’s passing; it remained concerned, however, about what might follow. Solov’ev articulated this vague unease: “Of course, I was not saddened by Nicholas’ death, but I was also upset and nervous: What if something worse should follow!! Guards escort a man from prison, good, he can easily breathe the fresh air, but where are they taking him? Perhaps to another prison?”⁵⁹ Kavelin commented to Granovskii that much of educated society did not know what to expect. Although happy about the passing of the tyrant, many Russians feared that the next tsar would not be able to rule effectively:

Many, while hating the deceased, fear that the new tsar will not be able to deal with the difficult external circumstances into which the deceased has plunged him. . . . Many regret the loss of the firmness of Nicholas, considering the new tsar completely incompetent, and foresee even greater arbitrariness and disorder in the administration and the sway of the German and landowner element in the tsar’s council. . . . There are people who consider that things will be better under the new tsar, considering his gentle disposition and good heart.

Kavelin added that life would get better, yet he admitted that Russia might need to wait ten to fifteen years to recover from the last thirty years of tyranny.⁶⁰ In a letter to Dmitrii Miliutin almost thirty years later, Kavelin reminded his friend that

among the members of their circle, he alone had shown an unshakable faith that the emancipation question would be resolved.⁶¹

This general malaise, which temporarily seized society, passed; much of educated society grew increasingly hopeful that the new tsar would be willing to foster change. The Slavophile leader A. S. Khomiakov noted idiosyncratically that a happy reign invariably followed a poor one. He told Solov'ev that even the staunchly anti-Slavophile Chaadaev had lectured him that Russians should expect great things from Alexander.⁶²

Shortly after Nicholas's death, Kavelin wrote a long, cathartic letter to Granovskii and vented his bile at the dead tsar. He spoke of the despair and the waste of the last three decades, of his "perverse joy," at the death of the "Kalmyk demigod" who "devastated the Russian state like a hurricane," and of his contempt for "this fiend of the uniformed enlightenment and of the vilest aspects of the Russian character," "a kind of evil monster." He ended the letter saying, "I want to live seventy years in order to hate him and his memory with all the strength of my soul and body, down to the last toenail."⁶³ Kavelin's letter quickly became a part of the manuscript literature campaign and a political act, passing from hand to hand "with complete sympathy." As one of his acquaintances noted, the letter was "a cry of triumph, of unmitigated hatred for the man who personified the crudest of despotisms."⁶⁴

The Sunrise of a New Reign

As Russia emerged from the reactionary darkness of Nicholas's regime to what it hoped was the sunrise of the new reign, it began to speak, tentatively at first but with increasing confidence about the need for reform, first and foremost a reform of the lives of Russia's serfs. Prince Obolenskii recorded in his diary in 1856 the growing optimism he felt in this uncertain time: "People are beginning to breathe freely. . . . Although much in the disappearance of constant oppression seems strange and although the government has not drawn up a plan and has not devised the way it will move in new directions, still . . . the universal chill is starting to dissolve."⁶⁵

At the accession of Alexander II in 1855, Kavelin held a modest post in the bureaucracy in the capital. He however also had wide contacts in educated society, the bureaucracy, and even at the court.⁶⁶ He noted the growing openness in Petersburg concerning emancipation in a letter to Solov'ev in January 1856: "Now the question of emancipation is on everyone's lips. People speak about it loudly. Even those people who had nervous spasms at the very mention of the subject think about

it.”⁶⁷ Nikolai Miliutin, in a letter to his brother Dmitrii, also marveled at the open discussion of emancipation which would have been unthinkable only a short time before. “In public the main conversation is about the opposition of the gentry’s serfs. I must confess that in this respect public opinion, at least here [i.e., in Petersburg], has made a remarkable jump. When we recall what it was like exactly ten years ago, then you cannot help but be amazed how it has accomplished this unexpected change.”⁶⁸

An ardent, uncontrollable demand to speak erupted within educated society at the first sign of a thaw in the government’s policies. The Russian novelist Lev Tolstoi commented that these manuscripts began to appear “like mushrooms after a rain.”⁶⁹ The thaw, as manifested in the new tsar’s initial efforts to reach out to the public, elicited a surge of optimism that Russia might at long last develop a public life (*obshchestvennaia zhizn’*) and engendered increasingly frenzied activity within educated society.

Kavelin, who predicted in 1856, “You will see that the new system will replace the old, but the system will be introduced cautiously, gradually, without haste,” engaged in feverish and increasingly public activity on behalf of reform.⁷⁰ He sought to strengthen unity in society by allaying suspicions, minimizing differences, and urging reconciliation. Common to many in his generation, Kavelin tended to act and relate to people on the basis of personal affinity rather than doctrine.⁷¹ To this array of friends, acquaintances, and colleagues, Kavelin consistently articulated his belief that the emancipation of the serfs was a manifestation of the full maturation of the principle of individuality in Russia and the most significant accomplishment of his generation.⁷²

Kavelin and his friends sought to remain faithful to their humanitarian ideals in their efforts to reconcile the differences of opinion within educated society and the bureaucracy in the 1850s. These ideals found expression chiefly in their consistent contributions in the 1850s to the discussion of the abolition of serfdom and their attempts to articulate a concrete political program following the death of Nicholas. Educated society, long kept silent, seized the opportunity of the accession of Alexander II to articulate the need for space (*prostor*) and the abolition of serfdom, which Kavelin called “the question of all questions, the ills of all ills, the misfortune of our misfortunes.”⁷³ They sought to resolve the most pressing problems, and the emancipation had to be addressed before all the others.

Even prior to Nicholas’s death, a number of people had gradually developed their views on the serf question into a series of proposals. Kavelin did so while researching in the ethnographic section of the Russian Geographical Society. His essay “Krest’ianskii vopros” (“The Peasant Question”) helped to initiate a manu-

script literature campaign that was designed to promote a concrete political program, and to articulate the needs of educated society based on the previous seven years of preparation. He finished the essay in March 1855 and circulated it in manuscript form because the censorship laws would have prohibited its publication.

This manuscript literature campaign arose in the more relaxed political environment introduced with Alexander's accession. Kavelin and his former student Boris Chicherin directed their analyses at what they believed were the primary evils in Russia: bureaucratic corruption, political reaction, and the repression of the press, education, and other public institutions. They asserted in these manuscripts that the best means to address these problems were through reform of the recently expanded bureaucratic and administrative system.⁷⁴ They not only did not reject government involvement in these reforms, but they hoped to work with the government in preparing them.

Inspired by the reception of Pogodin's *Letters*, Kavelin resolved to establish a manuscript literature campaign for his like-minded friends and other thinkers committed to rebuilding Russia. In a meeting with Chicherin at the Moscow University jubilee in January 1855, they agreed to collaborate in the circulation of a whole series of unpublished manuscripts devoted to the need for reform and possible measures to do so.⁷⁵ The product of this collaboration was the most incisive critique of the contemporary bureaucratic and political system and the most elaborate program of reforms.⁷⁶ Their efforts inspired educated society to participate in the discourse of reform and offered Russia's enlightened bureaucrats practical steps to achieve it.

The two conspirators agreed that Chicherin should compose an article on Russia's disastrous foreign policy and send it to the capital for Kavelin's approval. Meanwhile Kavelin would complete his essay on emancipation. He instructed Chicherin to tell no one, not even Granovskii, lest the authorities discover their plans. A manuscript campaign in the last days of Nicholas's reign was fraught with danger for anyone connected to it. For example, a manuscript copy of Chicherin's essay, "The Eastern Question from the Russian Perspective," in which he excoriated the regime for its stupidity, fell into the hands of the Third Section, which immediately made an intensive, yet fruitless search for the author. Chicherin had circulated copies of this manuscript among his friends in Tambov province during the summer. Two of his friends in Tambov were found with the manuscripts and arrested. One was imprisoned, because he refused to reveal the name of the author when a copy was found in his possession while the other convincingly feigned innocence.⁷⁷

Chicherin arrived fortuitously in the capital the day of Nicholas's funeral to confer with Kavelin about the campaign. The death of the tsar fundamentally altered

the domestic political situation from their meeting the previous month. The death of the embodiment of despotism convinced Kavelin that the manuscript campaign was even more pressing because it could act as a means to influence both the new government under Alexander II and educated society. Chicherin had bluntly attacked the government in his manuscript, arguing that the Crimean failures and the general spiritual malaise in Russia were a product of the blind reaction instituted by the tsars since 1815. He asserted that educated society should not permit the autocracy to rule alone, but must take control of its future, that the educated public had matured in Russia and must fulfill its responsibilities. Filled with high hopes for the new tsar, Kavelin instructed Chicherin, who readily agreed, to soften the tone of this manuscript and show more respect for the government.⁷⁸ Kavelin also recruited a third contributor to the campaign, the literary critic N. A. Mel'gunov, who had already written several essays in which he bitterly attacked the government's incompetence.⁷⁹ Returning to Moscow several weeks later in March, Chicherin carried back Kavelin's essay on emancipation for dissemination. It was widely read in the salons and created a sensation.⁸⁰

“Russian Liberal” and its Program

Soon, however, the authors of the manuscript campaign found another outlet for their articles that enabled them to reach a much broader readership. To augment the hand-to-hand circulation among his friends and contacts, some time in early 1856 Kavelin sent the first of several packets of manuscripts through Mel'gunov's connections to the publisher and Westerner Alexander Herzen in London. The Third Section was surveilling Herzen, so Kavelin's decision was a calculated political act and therefore dangerous for the authors.⁸¹ Because they disagreed with the revolutionary tone of Herzen's articles over the last few years, Kavelin and Chicherin composed a letter describing the history of the manuscript campaign to highlight their differences with Herzen. Kavelin wrote the more moderate first twenty pages of the “Letter to the Editor,” and Chicherin wrote the more acerbic last fourteen pages. They signed their joint letter “Russian Liberal.”⁸²

Herzen decided to accept these manuscripts as he had been calling in vain for articles from Russia for several years. He created a new series called *Golosa iz Rossii* (*Voices from Russia*) so as to distance these authors from his more revolutionary publications. He also wrote an introduction to the first volume explicitly asserting his disagreements with “Russian Liberal” and limiting his role to that

of “a publisher.”⁸³ The inaugural issue of *Voices from Russia*, smuggled back into Russia, contained Kavelin’s essay on serfdom, some articles by Mel’gunov, several essays by Chicherin, and the “letter to the Editor” signed “Russian Liberal.” It was a cogent and persuasive analysis of Russia’s most urgent problems: serfdom, the corrupt bureaucracy, the secret police, censorship, and obscurantism.

In their joint letter to Herzen, Kavelin and Chicherin laid out the program of the new “liberal party” in Russia.⁸⁴ Russian society does not need revolutionary movements or public opposition, they argued, but the opportunity to participate in the government. They claimed that Russia had no revolutionary groups and rejected revolution and socialism as immoral, nonscientific, and pernicious for society, charging that the actions of revolutionaries “justified despotism.” If the government offered some concessions to educated society, such as freedom of expression, such a move would strengthen the government by broadening its base of popular support. They articulated their belief in the regularity of the historical process, emphasizing that the “law of gradualness” was the foundation of historical development.⁸⁵ Based on their interpretation of history, they were convinced that Russia had reached a stage of development that called for liberalism.

In another essay entitled “Contemporary Problems of Russian Life,” Chicherin asserted that “we need neither class privileges nor limitations of the power of the Tsar. . . . We need freedom.”⁸⁶ In a draft of this essay written in early 1856, he had explicitly said that a constitution was a long-term goal of the liberal party. After reading this draft, Kavelin persuaded him to remove all references to constitutions: “It will be better to remain quiet about the possibility of change in the form of government in the future” because discussions would only frighten the government.⁸⁷

In “Thoughts Aloud on the Past Thirty Years in Russia,” Mel’gunov described what the authors believed was the most rudimentary, but necessary requirement in the view of emerging society: “We need space, space [*prostor*]! It is that alone for which we thirst, all of us, from peasant to magnate, as the dried land thirsts for the life-giving rain. We all stretch out our hands to the throne and pray: Give us room, powerful tsar! Our limbs have become numb; we have become unaccustomed to breathing freely. We need room as we need air, bread, the light of day! It is necessary for each of us, it is necessary for Russia.”⁸⁸

Mel’gunov’s reference to space had a specific meaning for the liberal party. After consulting with Kavelin, Chicherin listed the seven concrete desiderata for space in Russia: freedom of conscience, abolition of serfdom, freedom of public expression, freedom of the press, academic freedom, publicity for all government activities, and public legal proceedings.⁸⁹ In short, the liberal party wanted the basic

civil liberties that would permit educated society to enter into a partnership with the government without demanding political rights or any attenuation of the autocracy's power. Kavelin and Chicherin believed this program was compatible with autocracy because it was progressive historically; Nicholas I's reign had been an aberration. Kavelin had expressed his belief in this progressive synthesis of autocracy and freedom in a letter to Pogodin in 1855 in which he wrote that it was an "absolute necessity to preserve the sovereign's unlimited power, while basing it on the widest possible freedom and the participation of all in local affairs and local administration."⁹⁰ Chicherin echoed these views when he argued that if enacted, the desiderata of the liberal party would strengthen the autocracy by effecting a rapprochement between the tsar and the people.⁹¹

"Russian Liberal" made it clear that educated society had no intention of forcing these principles as demands on the government; reform must come from above. If the government spurned its pleas, then liberalism "must remain powerless, aimless, and ineffective." If, however, the government chose to use the resources of popular support latent in Russia, then the liberals "would always remain true and faithful, a genuinely useful ally." Kavelin and Chicherin added, "We are ready to rally behind any liberal government and support it with all our strength, for we are profoundly convinced that we can act, and achieve results, only through the government."⁹² Thus, the two sought a voice for educated society in the autocrat's ear. They were convinced that its moral conscience could persuade the tsar to complete the long process of emancipation of the individual in Russia, beginning with the abolition of serfdom.

Emancipation Proposals

A. P. Zablotskii-Desiatovskii, a member of the Petersburg Party of Progress, one of Russia's leading experts on peasant life, and chief of the Statistical Division of the Department of Rural Economy in the Ministry of State Domains in the 1840s, had written in 1841 a detailed memorandum on serfdom in which he indicted the institution because the moral injustices inherent in it contradicted his belief in a society based on legality. Moreover, serfdom offered no incentive to the peasants and thus fostered great poverty in Russia. Russia's moral order suffered as a result of the grinding poverty and the nobles' arbitrariness.⁹³ Kavelin borrowed liberally from this work in preparing his own manuscript.

Kavelin's "Memorandum on the Emancipation of the Serfs in Russia," written in 1855 influenced a number of other drafts circulating throughout educated society in private discussions and within the government in the 1850s.⁹⁴ In the essay, Kavelin enumerated the many causes for Russia's poverty, including the absence of a rigorous judicial system, a corrupt system of government, and the numerous limitations placed on trade and industry. The most pernicious cause, however, was serfdom because it engendered many deleterious economic and moral consequences by depriving 25 million Russians of basic civic freedoms.⁹⁵ Like Zablotskii-Desiatovski, he considered serfdom morally untenable and, more important, the cause of the moral degradation of the entire nation. Kavelin sought to reconcile the interests of the government, the landowners, and the serfs; only by addressing the requirements of all three sides would Russia be able to overcome this "stumbling block." Serfdom obstructed the continuing development of individuality, the premise of his philosophy of history, which was a vital step to Russia's maturity. Until serfdom was eliminated, the most basic, concrete steps necessary for individuality could not be implemented, such as the education of the lower classes, the reorganization of government administration, and the modernization of the civil and criminal legal systems. None of these issues could be addressed until the government promulgated emancipation legislation.⁹⁶

In a letter to Pogodin in early 1856, Kavelin succinctly described why and how he wrote his plan to eradicate serfdom: "I began to write on this subject, a long article in a very conciliatory tone, with the one thought of bringing everyone into agreement and not into hostility: I imagined quickly what I would say, if I were a deep-rooted landowner and what I would demand, and so forth. And I tried to enter into the thought of the peasants and the government. The result of this was a long article, more in the form of a program with arguments and discussion in which is stated: the harm from serfdom, economically, morally and politically." He added that his plan envisioned a landed emancipation for the peasants, which they would redeem over thirty-seven years.⁹⁷

Considering the interests of the landowners, Kavelin noted that their most pressing concern was to maintain their private property. They should receive compensation for the loss of their serfs' labor, for without such compensation, the nobility, the primary source of Russia's educated people, could very well face impoverishment. Moreover, emancipation without compensation would be an unacceptable assault on private property.⁹⁸ Yet the government must also insure the personal and material welfare of the freed serfs. If the state allowed the peasants' dependence on the

landlords to continue and implemented an emancipation that left the peasants landless, the result would repeat the horrors of the Western European experience—an impoverished landless proletariat and the threat of social revolution.⁹⁹ In a letter to his friend A. V. Golovnin, who supported compensation to the serf owners only for the land given to the serfs, Kavelin argued that such a plan would be both contrary to civil law and ruin large numbers of landowners who derived most of their income from their serfs' labor.¹⁰⁰

Kavelin enumerated several reasons why earlier efforts to emancipate the serfs had failed over the previous decades: the government did not define its goals clearly, it was not sufficiently prepared to discuss the question, and it was unsure of how to approach the issue. Most important, the government had kept its deliberations secret. "The government wanted the impossible," he wrote. "It wanted to produce the most significant reform in Russia secretly, without preparing public opinion, without intelligent conviction, without becoming acquainted with the main thought of the very class whose material interests will be affected the most vividly."¹⁰¹ For the emancipation to be successful, the government needed to obtain from the public the best and most practical suggestions for carrying out the reform. It was in the government's interests to treat the educated public as citizens, partners in affairs of state, and not merely as subjects.¹⁰²

Throughout the corpus of his work as an historian and publicist, Kavelin emphasized that, through the law of regularity borrowed from Granovskii, social change in Russia must be peaceful and slow.¹⁰³ He wrote to Pogodin in 1855: "I believe that we should resolve this question [serfdom] intelligently, fundamentally, and honestly (not as it was done in all of Europe or our Baltic provinces) in order to save ourselves from senseless carnage and to give Russia internal peace and the chance to develop peacefully and prosperously without leaps and jumps, for five hundred years to come. I can only see the possibility of uprisings and bloody revolutions as a result of our pernicious serfdom."¹⁰⁴ His activities in the 1850s should be understood in this light. Russia, to fulfill its great destiny, must avoid the internecine struggles that would devour it.¹⁰⁵

Through his years of studying and analyzing the peasant question, Kavelin held to an idealistic vision of life after emancipation. He surmised that the serf owners and their former serfs could create in a short time a harmony of interests as landowners. He assumed that, given such an emancipation, Russia could become a nation of citizens regardless of property and educational differences between the

classes. Kavelin expressed idealistic hopes emblematic of his circle of friends, yet he failed to address how such unity would develop.¹⁰⁶

Kavelin's "Memorandum" was one of a number of proposals on emancipation that circulated in Russian society during the mid-1850s, including these by the Slavophile Iurii Samarin and Prince V. A. Cherkassky.¹⁰⁷ They were primarily to convince the government and, more important, the serfowners that emancipation served their interests. As the manuscripts circulated they were debated, critiqued, and revised so that it is difficult to determine the provenance of certain ideas.¹⁰⁸ Kavelin's was one of a number of significant drafts that contributed ideas that the later authors of the emancipation considered.

One of the few common beliefs among the Westerners was their reverence for Peter the Great and his efforts to create a modern state. The Westerners had a profound faith in the revolutionary power of the autocracy as the historical agency for modernization and unity in Russia. They assumed that Peter's successors would continue to fill the role of the crowned revolutionary. Kavelin, the Westerners' leading historian, asserted that the tsar cannot be identified with the gentry.¹⁰⁹ He asserted that the Russian Tsar, "is not a nobleman, not a merchant, not a military man, not a peasant. He stands higher than all the estates and at the same time remains close to all of them. The force of things, which not infrequently stands opposed to personal inclinations, aspirations, and concepts, makes the Russian tsar without fail a mediator, the supreme arbitrator of social interests, a just measure of the claims of all classes and estates." Kavelin held to the sentiments articulated in his earlier historical work; the autocrat served in Russia as the greatest force for progress, and he needed to work with the educated public as a partner.¹¹⁰

Kavelin's faith in the autocracy as an instrument of progress, a product in part of the Westerners' conceptions of history and his own fear of revolution, proved to be an ingenuous rationalization. Granovskii's theory of the regularity of history led him to regard Nicholas's thirty-year reign of obscurantism as an aberration created by the despot's personal vagaries rather than a systemic problem. In an autocratic society struggling to cope with modernization in the wake of a military defeat, it appeared that the options for profound social and economic change were limited. If the tsar did not initiate the necessary reforms, the result might be revolution from below. Kavelin feared the violence and its consequences for Russia. A representative of the "remarkable decade" with its sophistication and cultivation, he opposed revolution as simply destructive.¹¹¹

The Reform Debate Begins

The accession of the new tsar seemed to augur well for educated society. Alexander II's first moves offered hope to a public seeking any opening for society to breathe: he lifted travel restrictions to Europe, allowed university enrollments to increase, eased censorship, and granted an amnesty for many political prisoners, including the Decembrists and members of the Petrashevskii circle.¹¹² These reversals of his father's policies created a mood of restive hope, and Kavelin and his friends proved susceptible. Just two months after Alexander's accession, Kavelin, according to one acquaintance, "was literally sent into raptures when he spoke of the new sovereign."¹¹³ People in the capital heard rumors that leading government officials, with Alexander's encouragement, were considering emancipation proposals. In a letter to Pogodin in 1856, Kavelin noted that he was becoming fonder of the new tsar, who acted intelligently. Kavelin's main concern remained the court camarilla surrounding Alexander, most of whom he regarded as reactionaries.¹¹⁴

While all this discussion about the hopes for reform engaged Russia, the Crimean War ended in March 1856, thereby enabling the government to turn its attention toward internal problems. Alexander II's Manifesto of March 19, 1856, announcing the terms for the Treaty of Paris, hinted at the spirit of reform which would soon follow: "May her [Russia's] domestic order be strengthened and perfected; may justice and mercy rule in her courts, and the striving for enlightenment and all useful activity develop everywhere and with renewed strength, and may each, under the canopy of laws equally just for all, equally protective of all, enjoy the fruits of honest labor in peace."¹¹⁵ Although cryptic, such words elated those who longed for reform. Much of the landed nobility, however, fearing the rumors of reform, sought assurances from Alexander that he would not threaten their interests. Count A. A. Zakrevskii, the governor-general of Moscow, expressed these fears in a letter to a friend: "Rumors about freedom are circulating among people, rumors that freedom will be proclaimed on coronation day, and although this is nonsense, it must be attended to. . . . There's no joking about transformations like that."¹¹⁶ He asked the tsar to reassure the nobility. Thus, Alexander, in a speech to the Moscow nobility on March 30, 1856, announced:

I have heard, gentlemen, that rumors have spread among you to the effect that I intend to abolish serfdom. In order to dispel various unfounded rumors about a subject of such importance, I consider it necessary to inform you that I do not have the intention of doing that at this time. But of course, you yourselves know

that the existing order of ruling over living souls cannot remain unchanged. It is better to abolish serfdom from above than to await the day when it will begin to abolish itself from below.¹¹⁷

The speech stunned government officials. The minister of the interior, S. S. Lanskoï, did not believe the tsar had pronounced such words until Alexander actually confirmed them.¹¹⁸ Alexander instructed Lanskoï to oversee all the work concerning the nobility's serfs and what should be done about a reform of serf life.¹¹⁹ Nevertheless, Alexander did not offer a government plan for emancipation. He expected the nobility to come forward and work out the details in private agreements as he suggested several months later in a letter to Yelena Pavlovna: "I am waiting for the well-meaning landowners of populated estates themselves to express to what degree they think it possible to improve the lot of their peasants."¹²⁰

Convinced that the tsar looked favorably upon emancipation, Lanskoï believed that the government should quickly articulate its position. Since he himself did not have definite ideas about emancipation, he invited A. I. Levshin from the Ministry of State Domains to serve as his deputy. Levshin immediately started to amass information gleaned from previous projects and current manuscripts on the peasant question. Because the landed nobility failed to respond to the tsar's appeal, Lanskoï suggested to Alexander in December 1856 that he appoint a small committee of senior officials committed to reform.¹²¹ Here was the genesis of the Secret Committee on the Peasant Question that Alexander appointed the following month. The tsar, however, equivocated by appointing a committee comprised primarily of great landowners who opposed emancipation. They would do anything possible to prevent or delay emancipation and largely succeeded in their efforts for almost two years.¹²²

Yelena Pavlovna resolved to act on this question after the accession of her nephew. She informed Prince Obolenskii that, to bring her progressive influence at court, she intended to become closer to the new imperial couple and gain their trust. She had already begun to invite Alexander and his wife to her morganatic evenings over the previous two years.¹²³ One day after Nicholas's death, she reiterated her intentions of gaining influence at court so as to counteract the pernicious influence of those who opposed reform, particularly Gen. Yakov Rostovtsev whom she despised.¹²⁴ To influence Alexander, she asked Prince Obolenskii to persuade Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich, the tsar's brother, to avoid getting so mired in the minutiae of his work in the Naval Ministry that he neglected work on broader issues.¹²⁵

The ideas expressed by Kavelin in his "Memorandum," while alienating a number of powerful figures at the imperial court, also brought him closer to the small

circle of influential people who worked for the emancipation, including the Grand Duchess Yelena Pavlovna, the Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolavich, and members of the Miliutin circle. Nikolai Miliutin expressed his strong endorsement of the “interesting, keen, intelligent,” and “honest” draft, only suggesting that the section on the financial aspects of emancipation needed revision.¹²⁶ The grand duchess suggested to Nikolai Miliutin and Kavelin in the fall of 1856 that they collaborate with local landowners and officials to prepare a plan for emancipating the serfs on her vast estate, Karlovka. By taking the initiative, she hoped to press the government into action and possibly to offer a model. In a memorandum written by Miliutin and Kavelin to her nephew Alexander, she requested permission to proceed with the liberation of her peasants and asked for definite guidelines to follow. Alexander approved of her project but could not offer any specific guidelines.¹²⁷

Miliutin, after extensive discussions with Kavelin, wrote an essay by October 1856 in which he clearly articulated two points: the serfs at Karlovka must be emancipated unconditionally and they must be given an opportunity to buy sufficient land with state assistance. The grand duchess immediately forwarded the plan to her nephew for his review. The tsar commended the work but resolved to let the gentry take the lead in the process. Miliutin and Kavelin continued to work on the project, completing it in 1858. The first two general provisions were kept, in addition to a specific plan for redemption payments and landed allotments for the peasants. She submitted the plan to the Main Committee on Peasant Affairs in March 1858. After approval by the committee and the tsar, the grand duchess implemented the plan in the spring of 1859.¹²⁸

Although the Karlovka project could not serve as a direct model for the emancipation—the government had already committed itself to its own abolition plan—the experience gained by working out the details on that estate proved fruitful both theoretically and directly. Clearly, Kavelin influenced the emancipation legislation most significantly, and Miliutin was directly involved as a member of the Editing Commission that drafted the final emancipation statute.¹²⁹ Nevertheless, the authors’ lengthy discussions and proposals and syncretic emancipation of the serfs on the Karlovka estate offered the Imperial government an actual landed emancipation project. These efforts did not go unnoticed and overlapped with other endeavors that Yelena Pavlovna facilitated.

Because the Secret Committee moved slowly and the emancipation process seemed stagnant in the capital, the grand duchess sponsored a conference on the peasant question in Wildbad in the summer of 1857 to establish an environment free of the constraints in Russia. This conference played a pivotal role in establishing

the most important guidelines for the emancipation edict. In addition to the tsar and his trusted aide General Rostovtsev, she invited a variety of experts on the peasant question: Count P. D. Kiselev, Kavelin, the German researcher Baron August von Haxthausen, and others.¹³⁰ The occasion enabled Kavelin to discuss freely both his work on the Karlovka reform and his draft on emancipation with the other guests, particularly Count Kiselev and Baron von Haxthausen. Kavelin effusively thanked von Haxthausen several weeks later for his assistance.¹³¹ The guests resolved that the serfs must be liberated with land, which the state would help them redeem, and with local village self-government. The government later adopted these proposals in 1861.¹³²

Uniting Educated Society

In his efforts to unite the government and educated society, Kavelin, through the intercession of a friend at the court, received an appointment as a tutor to the heir to the throne. Several days after being appointed to the position, Kavelin met the empress who was reading a copy of Herzen's *Kolokol* (*The Bell*) while waiting for him. She promptly inquired about his friends, acquaintances, and political beliefs. She asked if he deserved his reputation as a "desperate liberal," and pointedly informed him that, although she could accept his former friendships with Granovskii and Belinskii, she could not countenance his relationship with Herzen. Kavelin, using his well-known charm, overcame the initial suspicion and impressed the empress with his sincerity. To press on her the need for reform, he emphasized that, although he was not a revolutionary, revolutions became inevitable "when governments did nothing for the people and blindly devoted themselves to their closest advisors, the privileged classes. Revolutions always express just demands but they are based on a mistaken theory." The empress concluded the conversation by informing him that the emperor manifested no opposition to his appointment as tutor.¹³³

Nevertheless, as he attempted to maintain unity among the most disparate people in order to reform Russia, Kavelin made efforts to renew his friendship with Herzen, with whom he had been closely acquainted in the 1840s. To effect a rapprochement after the disagreements expressed in the "Letter to the Editor" of 1856, Kavelin appealed to his old friend to use his influence in Russia to expedite meaningful reforms. Recalling their close friendship in the Westerner circle, Kavelin wrote in his characteristically effusive style, "You were my sustenance and my school. It seems

that even now I can trace with my fingers the veins and nerves that were formed in my character under your influence. . . . I am bound to you with a bond that does not break, even when opinions differ.” He continued by discussing the influence of Herzen’s publications within Russia. Corrupt and dissolute functionaries lived in terror of *Kolokol*, while the young idolized Herzen.¹³⁴

Kavelin and his allies recognized the power of Herzen’s pen in Russia. One Westerner wrote to a friend of Herzen: “Please write to Alexander [Herzen] that he is une grande puissance and here [Moscow] they swear upon him while in Petersburg they fear him. The Tsar and Konstantin Nikolaevich read everything that he writes and many reforms have been made upon his advice.”¹³⁵ Kavelin echoed these sentiments, asserting that Herzen’s influence also carried a profound responsibility for moderation and tactfulness: “Print all corruption, absurdities, and crimes [of the bureaucracy], punish them without mercy, giving names, and so forth. Show care, treat the royal family even more cautiously. . . , and, be assured, you will have yet greater influence. Soon you will be able to shake hands with forthrightness with Alexander II and consider one another allies for the benefit and happiness of Russia.”¹³⁶ Despite Kavelin’s efforts, the rapprochement between Herzen and the tsar never took place.

Although proscribed by the government, Herzen’s publication seemed ubiquitous at court, in the bureaucracy, and in the circles of the 1850s. Kavelin also acknowledged the power of Herzen’s pen in a letter to Herzen: “Your influence is without measure. ‘Herzen est une puissance,’ Prince Dolgorukii [the chief of the gendarmes] said recently at a dinner in his honor.”¹³⁷ Even General Rostovtsev admitted that members of the government committee on emancipation must make use of all useful information even if it came from people such as Herzen.¹³⁸

In August 1857 it seemed as though the opponents of emancipation were winning the political struggle.¹³⁹ Although Konstantin Nikolaevich, who chaired the Secret Committee, was a supporter of reform, he was inexperienced, and his opponents’ stalling tactics prevented real progress. Alexander was displeased but did not force the issue. In its journal of August 18, the Secret Committee issued a statement, endorsed by the tsar, intended as a conclusive formulation of the government’s position on serfdom. It concluded that “it is not presently possible to undertake the general emancipation of the serfs among us,” and it authorized only palliative measures.¹⁴⁰

On the Eve

In its statement of August 18, the Secret Committee posed fourteen questions about the best means to emancipate the serfs. These questions were sent only to members of the Secret Committee and a handful of public figures concerned with the peasant question. The grand duke personally requested answers by October 1. A. V. Golovnin, in his role as Konstantin Nikolaevich's secretary, had asked for his response, but Kavelin was preoccupied, writing lectures for both his classes with the heir and at St. Petersburg University in addition to working on the Karlovka reform, and did not reply, with apologies, until October 5.¹⁴¹ Two months later, Golovnin sent a letter expressing the grand duke's support for Kavelin's positions: "The Grand Duke has paid particular attention to your Memorandum which concurs completely with his view. He handed a duplicate to the Empress for conveyance to the Sovereign, and then, without giving your name, sent copies to Prince Orlov, Chevkin, Norov and Timashev."¹⁴²

Kavelin later reworked his responses into a short essay, "A View of the Best Means of Working Out the Question of the Emancipation of the Peasants." He recognized the "magnanimous efforts" of the sovereign to abolish serfdom and suggested the establishment of special commissions to deal with the complexities of emancipation "from all these sides." Kavelin believed that these commissions, composed of people knowledgeable about peasant life, such as officials and enlightened landowners, could devise the best plan. His suggested list of the people best equipped to work in the commissions included, in addition to himself, many of his friends from the Geographical Society: Nikolai Miliutin, D. A. Obolenskii, A. V. Golovnin, and A. P. Zablotskii-Desiatovskii.¹⁴³ In 1859, the government established Editing Commissions to prepare the emancipation, and with the notable exception of Kavelin himself, all of his suggestions for membership were accepted. Indeed, the initiative for the establishment of the Editing Commissions, their plans, and their membership came in large part from his recommendations.¹⁴⁴

The Secret Committee, showing little inclination to proceed, asked the Ministry of the Interior to work on the emancipation. This request unexpectedly expedited the emancipation process when Lanskoï, with the cooperation of the governor-general of Vilna, V. I. Nazimov, compelled the nobility of the northwest provinces to take a firm stand on the side of emancipation.¹⁴⁵ The rescript of November 20, 1857, better known as the Nazimov rescript, and another of December 5 sent by the tsar to the governor-general of St. Petersburg Province P. I. Ignat'ev, were the product of Lanskoï's behind-the-scenes efforts, and work on full-scale emancipation began

to move more decisively than anyone had foreseen when the Wildbad Conference had concluded several months earlier.¹⁴⁶

The Ministry of the Interior under Lanskoï provided a powerful institutional base for the proponents of emancipation. Largely controlled by progressive officials who believed that autocracy stood above *soslovie* (estate) interests, the ministry successfully co-opted the ideas proposed in various circles and salons and made them official. In an effort to come to terms with the needs of modern statehood within an institutional framework burdened by traditions and structural weaknesses, these enlightened officials placed the interests of the state above all others and provided the bureaucratic muscle and experience to promote emancipation through subterfuge when necessary.¹⁴⁷

The government's commitment to abolish serfdom elicited support from within the emerging civil society and manifested itself in a public banquet in Moscow on December 28, 1857. The organizers hailed the banquet as a "general Russian festival" which would unite all segments of Russian society and state: Moscow (educated society) and St. Petersburg (the government), Slavophiles and Westerners, nobles and non-nobles. It illuminated the breadth of support for the emancipation and helped to prod the government to continue its course with purpose. According to the Westerner Mikhail Katkov, who also sponsored the dinner, Kavelin made a special trip from the capital with the "intention to arrange a banquet in the spirit of reconciliation and unity of all the literary parties."¹⁴⁸

The attendees extolled the rescripts of November 20 and of December 5. The rescripts did not necessarily entail an emancipation of the serfs; rather they were limited to the "organization and amelioration of the way of life of the proprietary peasantry."¹⁴⁹ Nevertheless, many saw the rescripts and the accompanying published documents as the proverbial crossing of the Rubicon by the government.¹⁵⁰ From London Herzen greeted the announcement of the rescripts with "Thou hast conquered, Galilean!" The Russian censor A. V. Nikitenko believed that the rescripts meant emancipation was inevitable and "it was impossible to go back."¹⁵¹ Turgenev wrote to Tolstoi that, "the long-awaited event is coming true—and I am happy that I lived until this time."¹⁵² After reading the rescripts, the Slavophile leader Aleksei Khomiakov exclaimed that out of the "garbage pit of the Petersburg prison came the word which will summon millions into freedom and into intellectual life. It is a miracle."¹⁵³

The banquet, attended by more than one hundred eighty people, claimed to represent educated society. It lost much of its force, however, because of the conspicuous absence of the Slavophiles. In a letter to Pogodin, Yurii Samarin explained that

the Slavophiles feared reactionaries in the capital, and Governor-General Zakrevskii in Moscow, would observe a dinner of the most suspect people in Russia—professors, scholars, and journalists—and would charge, “Here are the Sovereign’s allies. The Reds all support him!” The dinner would play into the hands of the enemies of emancipation, thus the Slavophiles would not attend.¹⁵⁴

The intellectual and social luminaries who did attend gave passionate speeches of support for the government.¹⁵⁵ Kavelin, who spoke last, happily announced that the rescripts represented the resolution of the great task of many centuries of Russian history—the emancipation of the serfs and the juridical recognition of the significance of independent individuality (*lichnost*). He then proceeded to toast the tsar who brought the blessings of peace to Russia.¹⁵⁶ Despite such effusive support for the tsar and government, Zakrevskii watched the affair with ill-disguised suspicion and contempt, and he persuaded the tsar to proscribe a much larger banquet scheduled for February 19, 1858, to celebrate the third anniversary of Alexander’s accession. The ban on the celebration shocked the public and indicated the government’s uncertainty about its own pronouncements. As one scholar has observed, “It was ominous and anomalous that the government forbade a public celebration of its own activities.”¹⁵⁷

Fragmentation of Educated Society

When the government finally committed itself to the abolition of serfdom, most of educated society was exhilarated. Nevertheless, its temporary unity quickly fragmented. Public discussion of this contentious issue soon precipitated the rise of political partisanship. As long as abolition remained a remote, yet realizable goal, it had fostered unity among disparate groups, subsuming diverse views. Once it became a practical matter, and even more when the government promulgated it, the emancipation provided a fecund environment for disagreements which manifested and even exacerbated disputes that the overarching goal of emancipation had obscured, and these disputes served to fragment educated society. The government remained undecided as to how much public debate should be permitted concerning the peasant question. Nevertheless, it changed the name of the Secret Committee to the Main Committee in January 1858, and the inertia of its first year gave way to activity in response to the flood of telegrams sent from various parts of Russia.¹⁵⁸

Kavelin himself was a casualty of the bureaucratic infighting that followed the issuing of the rescripts. He lost his position as tutor to the heir and an official participant in the emancipation process, and narrowly escaped losing his chair at

St. Petersburg University. In April 1858, the editor of *Sovremennik*, Nikolai Chernyshevskii, published an article entitled “The New Conditions of the Rural Way of Life,” the second part of which included excerpts from Kavelin’s “Memorandum on the Emancipation of the Serfs in Russia,” written originally in 1855. Chernyshevskii had asked for a manuscript copy of the liberation plan, and Kavelin had complied in order to keep the most radical journal in Russia to a course of reform with the autocracy as its instrument.¹⁵⁹ Although Chernyshevskii disagreed with many of Kavelin’s views on emancipation, he still published portions of the essay as a possible “formula for uniting men who sympathize, as we do, with the basic convictions” of their author.¹⁶⁰ Kavelin admitted at the time, “I gave it [the manuscript] to him [Chernyshevskii] and added that I was making a gift of the right to publish it.”¹⁶¹

The first part of the article had passed unnoticed but the second part, which included excerpts from Kavelin’s essay, attracted attention because it included a discussion of a redemption plan and political views on the autocracy and class relationships. The tsar, at a session of the Main Committee, heard comments that an article in *Sovremennik* “was absolutely contrary to the views of the government and was scandalous.” Outraged that the censors permitted the publication of such an article, he directed the chief of the Third Section and the gendarmes, Prince Dolgorukii, to investigate the affair.¹⁶²

Dolgorukii commanded A. Ya. Panaev, an editor of the offending journal, to visit him, bringing Kavelin’s entire manuscript, including pages where the author had crossed out passages. The censors approved both parts of the article, and only removed excerpts that discussed the injustice and pernicious effects of serfdom. Certain parts of Kavelin’s memorandum appeared to be critical of some of the provisions in the rescripts, but he had written the essay more than two years prior to the issuing of the rescripts.¹⁶³ Dolgorukii then summoned Kavelin and confronted him with the essay, including the deleted sections. He warned Kavelin against publishing another article on the peasant question and threatened to proscribe the journal if it ever printed anything similar.¹⁶⁴

The enemies of emancipation had hoped to use the incident to ruin the Minister of Interior Lanskoï, but he told Dolgorukii that his ministry had not authorized the publication.¹⁶⁵ Prince A. G. Shcherbatov had approved the article for publication. Although unable to use the article against Lanskoï, the supporters of serfdom successfully undermined Kavelin’s position at court. Dolgorukii reported his findings to the tsar, who exclaimed with great indignation to Prince Gorchakov, “Here is the man whom your friend [Titov] recommended as a tutor to my son!” The government forbade other writers from citing his essay, and the publishers of Kavelin’s collected

works in 1859 were not permitted to include it.¹⁶⁶ Kavelin ultimately blamed Chernyshevskii for his forced resignation from his position as tutor to the heir.

As a result of the scandal, the government, seeking to circumscribe the growing discussion of the peasant question, issued a series of administrative circulars in April 1859 that instructed journals not to publish articles “which may upset the serfowners and peasants, dispersing among the latter absurd rumors and thoughts.” The circulars specifically prohibited any discussion of the peasant question that did not correspond with the views of the government.¹⁶⁷ They were also designed to placate the gentry, who considered any public speculation an encroachment on the prerogatives of the provincial committees working out the details of the reform.

Kavelin’s friend P. P. Semenov suggested that someone had recently told the tsar that Kavelin maintained a correspondence with Herzen, supplying him with inside information. Alexander, aghast that one of his son’s tutors betrayed his position, thus became even more infuriated with Chernyshevskii’s publication. And indeed, his most trusted advisor, General Rostovtsev, a target of Herzen’s furious pen, wrote to Obolenskii: “All these articles were sent to Herzen from Petersburg. I know that they were all written by one and the same person. This person was under my immediate authority for several years. All the lies about me are the product of his hostility toward me.”¹⁶⁸ Although the author was anonymous, Rostovtsev assumed that Kavelin was the person in question.

Nikolai Miliutin, in a letter to his brother Dmitrii in which he articulated his concerns about the growing power of the opponents of reform, suggested that Kavelin was the victim of intrigues among high court figures who sought to prevent the emancipation by any means: “When they allowed one to publish about the peasant question, one could place much hope on our press however weak it may be, but it seems that it will not celebrate for long. Any article (besides the content) grates the good landowners. It seems the first victim will be our poor friend Kavelin. In the fourth number of *Sovremennik* he placed an unsigned, not at all radical article. . . . The intriguers use similar situations to push aside from the Court people who are not to its liking.” Kavelin also blamed enemies at the court.¹⁶⁹

Although a number of reactionary figures at court celebrated his disgrace and prevented him from an active role in the actual reform legislation, Kavelin remained one of the central figures in the emancipation debates. He maintained his efforts to work with many of the officials charged with completing the reform. Kavelin’s cause succeeded where his personal ambitions failed: the positions outlined in “Memorandum on the Emancipation of the Serfs in Russia” were almost entirely adopted by the government in the final emancipation legislation.¹⁷⁰ General Rostovtsev’s assistant,

P. P. Semenov, noted that “although Kavelin did not play a direct, or so to speak, official role in the legislative work on the liberation of the peasants, the service rendered by him to this great cause was so great that it makes his name unforgettable in the history of this period.”¹⁷¹ In fact, many of Semenov’s suggestions to Rostovtsev developed from ideas that originated with members of the Geographical Society, in particular Nikolai Miliutin and Kavelin.¹⁷² Kavelin’s insistence on the principle of emancipating the serfs with land influenced General Rostovtsev to support a landed emancipation. Indeed, Rostovtsev was more responsible than any other person for enacting a landed emancipation. Many years later Kavelin noted the irony of this fact: “Remember that Iashka Rostovtsev emancipated the peasants—Iashka, the thickheaded scoundrel, the shady political cardsharp! Why, that would be the most howling absurdity, if it weren’t true!”¹⁷³

Passing the summer of 1858 at German spas, the general studied the peasant question and summed up his thoughts in four letters, subsequently entitled the “Wildbad Letters,” to the tsar. After considering the liberals’ proposals for emancipation, Rostovtsev converted to the authors’ views. The last of his letters was markedly different in its message from the first. Initially opposed to the peasants’ ownership of land and government-sponsored redemption, Rostovtsev, now gave unqualified support to a program of government assistance to redeem the land.¹⁷⁴ Rostovtsev’s letter was significant not because of the originality of its suggestions, but because for the first time the tsar’s most trusted advisor advocated the measures put forth by the leading supporters of emancipation. Because of Alexander’s almost limitless faith in Rostovtsev, the general’s conversion to the liberal emancipation program made it government policy. The general proceeded to support the “enlightened bureaucrats” in the political struggles within the bureaucracy and against the great landowners.

At a session of the Main Committee on December 4, 1858, Rostovtsev pushed through the decisive principles of the emancipation statute. The peasants were to acquire the three desiderata that Kavelin had listed for a genuine and efficacious emancipation: personal freedom, land, and government-assisted redemption of the land. Even the death of Rostovtsev in early 1860 failed to prevent the completion of the emancipation program as reflected in the final statute of 1861. The emperor signed the Emancipation Acts on February 19, 1861.

To be sure, not all manuscript contributions can be directly related to the reform statute because five years of bureaucratic infighting and intricate legislative work stood between the manuscripts and the final product. Nevertheless, the proposals coming from educated society and the recesses of the government had a strong influence on the final provisions of the emancipation.

Conclusion

The provisions of the emancipation statute of February 19, 1861, owed a great debt to the activities of educated society, in particular the Westerners and their associates in the bureaucracy. Westernism in its broadest contours had become deeply entrenched within educated society by the end of Nicholas's reign. The fundamental tenets of this Westernism were humanitarianism, individualism, and faith in progress. These tenets were antithetical to serfdom and its social consequences. The Westerners played a key role in shaping this emerging public opinion and offering a specific program on which to act.

Following the death of Nicholas and Russia's defeat in the Crimean War, the moderate Westerners tried to keep criticism of the government focused on specific issues in the effort to promote cooperation between the government and the public to move forward with reform. They argued that the two needed each other to succeed in this joint endeavor. The liberation of the serfs offered promise of further reform to come, illustrating vividly the positive influence that the forces working for reforms had on both educated society and the Tsar.

The 1840s and 1850s were the critical years during which a nascent civil society formed in Russia. The theoretical debates of the 1830s and 1840s gave way to more practical endeavors of the 1850s during which the framework for the Great Reforms emerged. The Westerners—Belinski, Herzen, Turgenev, Kavelin, Cranovskii—through their writings and lectures, led the way in creating the social and intellectual climate necessary for the Great Reforms. They helped to give birth to a civil society, calling for reform and providing the expertise necessary for the abolition of serfdom. The work of, and the support of, the intelligentsia and enlightened bureaucrats enabled the government to enact and implement the Great Reforms. In fact, it was the combined efforts of these groups that gave the government the expertise and knowledge to create such complicated legislation.

Notes

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8. W. Bruce Lincoln, "The Circle of the Grand Duchess Yelena Pavlovna, 1847–1861," *Slavonic and East European Review* 48 (1970): 374.
9. For the popularity of the essay, see, for example, K. Bestuzhev-Riumin, *Biografii i kharakteristiki* (St. Petersburg: Izd-vo "Vek," 1882), 288; pis'mo V. G. Belinskogo k A. I. Gertsenu, 20 mart 1846, in Belinskii, *PSS*, 12: 267.
10. P. V. Annenkov, *Literaturnye vospominaniia* (Moscow: Gos. izd-vo khudozh. Lit-ry, 1960), 532; see also D. A. Miliutin, "Moi starcheskie vospominaniia, kn. 4," Otdel rukopisei Rossiiskaia gosudarstvennaia biblioteka (OR RGB), fond 169, papka 12, delo 4/173–175.
11. D. A. Miliutin, "Moi starcheskie vospominaniia, kn. 4," OR RGB, fond 169, papka 13, delo 1/191–192.
12. Lincoln, *In the Vanguard*, 83.
13. *Ibid.*, 98.
14. P. P. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, "Vospominaniia," *Vestnik evropy*, no. 2 (1911): 17–18.
15. V. N. Rozental', "Ideinye tsentry liberal'nogo dvizheniia v Rossii nakanune revoliutsionnoi situatsii," in *Revoliutsionnaia situatsiia v Rossii v 1859–1861 gg.*, ed. M. V. Nechkina (Moscow: Izd-vo Akademii nauk, 1963), 385; Korsakov, "Zhizn' K. D. Kavelina," *SS*, 1: xxii.
16. For a small sample of the correspondence, see "Iz literaturnoi perezpiski Kavelina (1847–1884)," *Ruskaia mysl'*, no. 1 (1892): 104–138; for more complete collections of the correspondence, see the following, pis'ma D. I. Kachenovskogo k K. D. Kavelinu, Institut Russkoi literatury i iskusstva (Pushkinskii dom) (IRLI)(PD), fond Kavelina, CXZ/20.508 b 2; Pis'ma P. V. Pavlova k K. D. Kavelinu, IRLI (PD), fond Kavelina, CXZ/20.624 b 16.
17. Lincoln, *In the Vanguard*, 85–86.
18. Miliutin, "Moi starcheskie vospominaniia za 1816–1873 gg., kn. 4," OR RGB, fond 169, kartonka 12, papka 4/92; Korsakov, "Zhizn' Kavelina," *SS*, 1: xxii–xxiii.
19. For detailed information, see Nathaniel Knight, "Science, Empire, and Nationality: Ethnography in the Russian Geographical Society," in *Imperial Russia: New Histories for the Empire*, ed. Jane Burbank and David Ransel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 108–140.

20. P. P. Semenov-Tian'-Shanskii, *Memuary*, 3 vols. (Petrograd: Tip-ia M. Stasiulevicha, 1915–1917), 3: 17.
21. L. S. Berg, *Vsesoiuznoe geograficheskoe obshchestvo za sto let* (Moscow: Izd-vo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1946), 173–174.
22. Miliutin, “Moi starcheskie vospominaniia, kn. 4,” OR RGB, fond 169, kartonka 12, delo 4/98.
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25. V. N. Rozentel', “Peterburgskii kruzhok K. D. Kavelina v 1855–1857,” in *Revoliutsionnaia situatsiia*, 216.
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