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CHAPTER SIX

The Emergence of the Russian Intelligentsia

INTRODUCTION

Russians who thought for themselves despaired of the empire’s future after the defeat of Decembrism. They seemed to be wholly out on a limb. The elite, to which the conspirators belonged, had not yet overcome its isolation from the people, and now its ties to the state were cut too. Although, with the benefit of hindsight, some of Nicholas I’s policies look constructive, to people who had been conditioned by the events of December 1825 to think of the authorities as their enemy they looked benighted. The tsar turned to outright oppression only in the last years of his reign, but never moved forward quickly or openly enough to prevent a widening of the gap between the state and the educated public. The result was the emergence of what subsequently came to be known as the Russian intelligentsia.

The intelligentsia was not solely the product of aristocratic disillusionment, for Nicholas I’s domestic critics came from both privileged and non-privileged parts of the community. The emergence of the “post-Decembrist” generation of dissidents ought to be related to the phenomenon of social displacement in general, not to the changing fortunes of any one section of Russian society. Some nobles felt they were moving downwards, some non-nobles felt that they ought to be moving upwards. The former sensed that the regime was becoming less reliant on them, the latter believed that their new-found education ought to enable them to improve their fortunes. Both sorts of dissident, the former reluctantly, the latter voluntarily, were looking for ways to express themselves which differed from those of their fathers. Although not everyone whose social status had changed or was changing felt himself to be at odds with the government (one of the outstanding proponents of “Official Nationality”, the university historian Mikhail Pogodin, was born a serf), many of the people whose views differed from those of the authorities found difficulty in reconciling the aspirations which their background or education had given them with the circumstances in which they found themselves.

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DISCONTENTED NOBLES

Although the intelligentsia was socially diverse, in numerical terms its ranks were dominated by nobles. Privileged members of Russian society had been freed from their obligation to serve the state in 1762 and appeared to have benefited from Catherine the Great’s Charter to the Nobility of 1785, but in reality they were being elbowed aside by the bureaucracy, losing their dominant position in the Russian polity, and becoming surplus to the requirements of the regime. The failure of Decembrism confirmed the fact. In 1887 Vasiliy Klyuchiievskii described the effect of reading, as a young man, Pushkin’s Eugene Onegin. Why, he asked himself, did the talented fictional aristocrat on whom the work centred not feel at home in the society to which he belonged? The answer, Klyuchiievskii believed, lay in the western-orientated culture of the Russian Empire’s eighteenth-century nobility, which had cut nobles off from the traditions of their homeland. The shock of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars had led the Onegin generation to attempt reintegration, but its members were too far removed from their roots to succeed in this last-ditch endeavour. Russian nobles seemed to dwell on the fringes of their society. In 1851 they acquired the name “superfluous men” from the title of a story by Ivan Turgenev, but the phenomenon of superfluity existed before words were found to describe it. It was not confined to the lands of the tsar. Lenore O’Boyle speaks of “an excess of educated men” in early-nineteenth-century western Europe: too many men were educated for a small number of important and prestigious jobs, so that some men had to be content either with under-employment or with positions they considered below their capacities. There was a disparity between an individual’s estimate of his own worth and the rewards in money and status that his society accorded him. This was precisely the difficulty in which many Russian nobles found themselves.

They responded to their marginalization in different ways. The disaster of 1825 ruled out direct action, but discussion, in one form or another, continued. Some of the regime’s noble opponents who remained at liberty or who came to maturity after 1825 espoused new ideological currents which penetrated the Russian Empire from western Europe; some looked back with affection on what they thought had been happier times; some simply floundered; and some, like Onegin, surrendered to pessimism. None felt at home in his native environment. The Decembrist Mikhail Orlov probably suffered more than most, despite escaping punishment in 1826 because his brother was a highly placed police official. Physically free, he was spiritually emasculated. Alexander Herzen called him a “lion in a cage” in the 1830s, consumed by a thirst for activity but obliged to spend his time on the study of chemistry. Pushkin, by contrast, may have succeeded in working off some of his frustration in verse. A few members of the Russian elite expressed their disillusionment unequivocally. Petr Chaadaev had
minister, he became an archpriest. If he had become a Roman Catholic prelate, he would have found himself an outcast, but he became a Russian archpriest, in whom the government admired intellect and talent only to the extent that they were employed exclusively in governmental service."

Pilaret no less than Mikhail Orlov, Petr Chaadayev, and the young Ivan Kireevskii, the effects of the atmosphere of Nicholaevan Russia seemed to be wholly damaging. The empire's privileged orders appeared to have been silenced.

COMMONERS

Not all the creative minds of the time of Nicholas I, however, belonged to the socially well placed. Members of non-royal estates gave heart to the superfluous privileged by injecting additional life into discussions of Russian culture. A son of the Siberian merchant, Nikolai Polevoi, taught himself French and German, moved to Moscow, and 'there, without collaborators, without connections, with no literary reputation, conceived the idea of editing a monthly journal.' Moscow Telegraph, which lasted from 1825 to 1834, bridged the gap between the defeat of the Decembrists and the point at which new ideas began to offer thinking Russians a respite from despair. Polevoi was not enamoured, for example, of the conservative philosophy underlying Karaznin's History of the Russian State, and subjected the work to a hostile review when its twelfth and final volume was published in 1829. 'As a littérateur, philosopher, and historian,' he wrote, 'Karaznin belonged to the last century.' According to Polevoi, Karaznin's magnum opus emphasized the importance of the state at the expense of the community at large and implied that Russians should acquiesce in the oppression to which they were subjected. The journalist's rival History of the Russian People (1829–33) lacked the artistry and learning of its predecessor and failed to attract as many readers, but his appraisal of Karaznin nevertheless constituted one of the major contributions to a wide-ranging contemporary debate about the historical legitimacy of tsarist absolutism. Hostility to Karaznin was only one of the many ways in which Polevoi irritated the authorities. Eventually, they closed down his journal for criticizing a historical drama which dealt sympathetically with the Romanovs' accession to power. By then Uvarov, the Minister of Education, was convinced that the editor of the journal was bent on subversion. 'The Decembrists were not destroyed,' he said, 'and Polevoi wanted to be their organ.' The most sustained effort to keep freedom of thought alive in the first years of the reign of Nicholas I appeared to have come to nothing.

In the year Polevoi's luck ran out, however, a second non-royal intellectual emerged who proved, between 1834 and his death in 1848, to be
the central figure in the reorientation of Russian culture under Nicholas I. Born the son of a poor country doctor in the province of Penza in 1811, Vissarion Belinsky had been expelled from Moscow University and was trying to make a living by his pen. He was a man of violent likes and dislikes. Herzen claimed that he ‘palpitated with indignation and groaned with rage at the eternal spectacle of Russian absolutism.’ Another contemporary pointed out that ‘The topic of his speech, in the main, was either the unseemly actuality or the joyous, sincere praise of a work of literature, a social fact, a littérateur or a social activist.’ ‘Unseemly actuality’ was the keynote of his first essay, a ten-part dranitza entitled ‘Literary Musings’ in which he claimed that Russia had no literature worthy of the name. What the empire needed, Belinsky concluded, was ‘learning! learning! learning!’ The essay ended, however, on a note of optimism. Russian education, in Belinsky’s view, was already making rapid strides. This observation touched upon one of the principal reasons why Nicholas I’s efforts to suppress initiatives from below were bound, in the long run, to fail.

The fact that domestic critics of the Russian Empire under Nicholas I included not only disgruntled aristocrats like Chaudaeve and Kireevski but also members of non-noble estates such as Polevoi and Belinski showed that the ‘learning’ by which Belinsky set so much store was no longer accessible only to the privileged. Neither Polevoi nor Belinski had benefited much from official educational institutions — the former was self-educated and the latter had failed to complete his university course — but many of their contemporaries had done so and a ‘market for ideas’ was growing. According to Herzen, writing in 1850, ‘The thirst for instruction is taking hold of the entire new generation.’ This was an exaggeration, but figures indicate that the schools and universities on which the regime had been placing great emphasis since the 1830s were beginning to make significant strides. Whereas there had been about 62,000 pupils in the schools set up by Catherine the Great at the end of the eighteenth century, official educational establishments contained about a quarter of a million pupils in the 1830s. By 1856, the year after Nicholas I’s death, 450,000 pupils were being educated in more than 8,000 schools. Secondary schools doubled their intake in the first ten years of Nicholas’s reign; universities doubled theirs between 1836 and 1848. By one reckoning, the number of people receiving education went up 74.6 per cent between 1808 and 1834 and a further 83 per cent between 1834 and 1856. The empire was still educating only 1 out of 208 of its inhabitants in 1834 and 1 out of 143 in 1856, but the upward trend of the figures was evident.

The government would have preferred not to allow members of non-noble estates to profit unduly from the educational opportunities it was providing. When Nicholas published the sentences on the Decembrists in July 1826 he ascribed their misdemeanours, in part, to the false direction taken by the Russian educational system under his brother. His statutes of 1828 on primary and secondary education and 1835 on universities seemed to subject educational institutions to greater central control.

The historian Sergei Solov’ev, who grew up under Nicholas, wrote of his reign that ‘enlightenment ceased to be meritorious and became a crime in the eyes of the government.’ This was certainly the view of Admiral Shishkov, the ultra-conservative Minister of Education of the mid-1820s who believed that ‘Making the whole people or too large a proportion of them literate would do more harm than good.’ Nicholas’s edict of 1827 forbidding secondary schools and universities to educate serfs showed that he agreed with his minister. Some of the tsar’s educational initiatives — the foundation, for example, of the Imperial War Academy in 1832 and the Imperial School of Jurisprudence in 1835 — were designed solely for the benefit of the country’s elite. The transfer of Alexander I’s Imperial Lyceum from Tverskoe Selo to St Petersburg in the 1840s gave it a higher profile but did nothing to broaden its intake. Universities were growing in size not just because non-nobles were entering them, but because the tsar wanted nobles to complete their education at home rather than abroad.

Whatever the authorities’ natural inclinations, however, they failed to draw the line between the parts of the community for which they thought education was worthwhile and the parts they wanted to keep in their place. Even ultra-conservatives seemed to realize that it was impossible to increase the size of the bureaucracy and the professions by relying entirely on people of noble origin. Some of the country’s rulers, moreover, were less conservative than others. Uvarov, Nicholas’s longest-serving Minister of Education, did much to preserve the universities’ freedom of manoeuvre by omitting from the statute of 1835 general statements about the value of education and the social groups for which it was designed. His shrewdness maintained the principle of relatively wide access to education which had been enshrined in Alexander I’s reforms of 1803–4. Herzen claimed in the 1850s that ‘Until 1848 the structure of our universities was entirely democratic. Their doors were open to anyone who could pass the examination and was neither a serf nor a peasant without a passport from his commune.’ For long periods of his reign Nicholas appears not to have insisted on the strict application of his rules about access to education. The fact that in 1845 he asked Uvarov to consider whether it was possible to prevent non-nobles from gaining admission to secondary schools showed that, below the level of the university, social origin had not been preventing the unprivileged from getting a foot on the educational ladder. The best-known student of the social background of educated people in the Russian Empire calculates that in the 1840s the country’s ‘bourgeois [ie non-noble] intelligentsia’ consisted of between 15,000 and 20,000 people. The regime had educated them in order to staff its burgeoning administration, but could not easily prevent them from putting their education to uses other than those approved of by the state. An explicit attempt on the part of Sergei Stroganov to run Moscow University in the interests of the gentry had unexpected results. Solov’ev said that Stroganov wanted ‘to give [the upper ranks of the gentry] the means of ... remaining the upper ranks for ever’, and that he thought educating them as well as possible at Moscow Univer-
sity was the best means of achieving this end. 24 Stroganov succeeded in making the university 'the centre of all intellectual activity in Russia', 25 but in doing so increased its attraction for people other than those whom he sought to benefit. Public lectures given by Professor Timofei Granovski in the winter of 1843–4 on the history of the Middle Ages marked 'the first attempt to bring academic questions out of tight-knit literary circles and make them the property of society as a whole'. 26 The lectures drew huge audiences and became the talk of the town. The following winter, Professor Shevyrev's disquisitions on medieval Russian literature went down less well but were attended by almost as many people. Stroganov was unable to broaden the appeal of the university without also broadening its narrow social orientation. In the period of his curatorship of the Moscow educational district commoners made up more than 50 per cent of the university's student body, whereas in the university system as a whole they constituted only 37 per cent. 27 This was a classic illustration of the way in which improving the empire's educational facilities created as many problems as it solved. When, in 1845, students demonstrated their support for Granovski at the heated public examination of his master's dissertation, Stroganov realized that developing the university was having consequences other than those he intended. He acted, therefore, to make future such manifestations impossible.

OUTLETS FOR OPINION

The condemnation of Chaudaev, the closure of The European, and the suppression of Polevoi's Moscow Telegraph implied that people who thought for themselves under Nicholas I were likely to experience great difficulty in writing for the public. In fact, however, some of those who passed through Russian educational institutions in the second quarter of the nineteenth century refused to apply themselves to the administrative tasks for which the government thought it was training them and succeeded in making literary careers. Sometimes simple inefficiency on the part of the authorities came to their aid. The most famous example in Russian history of a mistake on the part of the censors belongs to the next reign (the stamp of approval given to Nikolai Chernyshevskii's subversive novel What Is to be Done? in 1863), but if the censorship had been efficient under Nicholas, Chaudaev's 'First Philosophical Letter', the 'shot that rang out in the dark night', 28 would never have found its way into print. When promulgating the relatively liberal censorship statute of 1828 the tsar had taken the precaution of instructing the Third Department to act as a second, covert check on the press, which enabled him to indulge in post-publication as well as pre-publication censorship, but when writers expressed themselves subtly, or when it was not clear that their writings had political implications, the bodies which monitored their output tended to allow their work to appear. Thus Gogol was able to publish The Government Inspector in 1836 and Dead Souls in 1842, neither of which had purely recreational value. In the case of Dead Souls, the left hand of the administration did not know what the right was doing, for the book was rejected by the Moscow censor before being cleared in St Petersburg. It is probable, however, that on this occasion the regime's shortsightedness was fed by uncertainty, for the St Petersburg censor, Aleksandr Nikitenko, was not at all sure that suppressing thought-provoking literature was in the interests of his superiors. Nicholas may have had similar doubts, for if he had been determined to prevent unofficial opinions from seeing the light of day he could have given the censorship and the Third Department blanket instructions to this effect. Only three journals, however, were closed down in the course of the reign - those of Kireevskii and Polevoi, mentioned above, and The Telescope in 1836 for publishing Chaudaev. Literary figures were pursued by the authorities on other occasions (Lermontov for reflecting bitterly on Pushkin's pointless death in a duel in 1837, Turgenev for lamenting Gogol's death in 1852), and writers did not trouble the censors with manuscripts which they knew would get them into trouble; but authors came into conflict with the regime on surprisingly few occasions and did not escape prosecution simply because they censored their own work before trying to publish it.

In at least two respects, one practical, one ideological, the regime positively encouraged writers to write. First, Nicholas I passed a copyright law in 1828 which prevented piracy and 'helped cause a steady, profit-centred growth in the publishing industry'. 29 Second, the regime seems to have allowed writers a certain latitude because it believed that it could win ideological exchanges. By founding or supporting journals which expressed the government's point of view - the journal of the Ministry of Education in 1834 (whose first issue contained Uvarov's proclamation of 'Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality'), the provincial gazettes of 1838, and especially The Muscovite of 1841 (which took on the task of responding to Belinski's invective) - the authorities showed a readiness to use the tools of their critics. By doing so they actually encouraged an interplay of ideas which, in the long run, worked to their disadvantage. Sydney Monas goes so far as to say that the tsar 'felt it as part of the mission of enlightened absolutism, which he had taken upon himself, to encourage the flourishing of letters', 30 and argues that therefore there is no paradox in the fact that the age of 'Official Nationality' was also the 'Golden Age of Russian Literature'. Perhaps, when Nicholas acted as Pushkin's personal censor and partly funded the poet's journal (The Contemporary), he was trying not only to ensure that the output of the country's greatest writer contained no aspersions on the regime, but also to bask in the reflected glory of association with the principal literary figure of the day. This may be claiming too much, but although Nicholas probably felt less warmly towards Pushkin,
Gogol and the early works of Dostoevsky and Turgenev than he did towards more obscure writers like Nestor Kukolniki (the author of the play about the accession of the Romanovs which Polevoi was punished for criticizing), at least until 1848 he seems to have been only half-hearted in his hostility towards writers whose opinions differed from his own.

Slowly, more printed matter became available. One scholar claims that 'The quantity of literature published in Russia between 1801 and 1837, up three times', though she also finds that the increase came to a halt between 1837 and 1850. Whereas the record number of books published in a single year in the eighteenth-century Russian Empire was about 450, the average number of books published each year in the period 1841-54 was 944.29 A student of history books published in the reign of Alexander I and Nicholas I argues that they sold in relatively large editions relative to the size of the population, that they were bought by the non-privileged as well as the privileged, and that they were to be found in many parts of the country. Not even Karamzin's History of the Russian State approached the popularity, at the other end of the continent, of Macaulay's History of England (the first two volumes of which sold 22,000 copies within a year of their publication in London in 1848); but the demand for works of history in Russia was far greater in the reign of Nicholas I than it had been in the eighteenth century.

Magazines, however, were the most successful form of publication. Whereas 129 were founded between 1801 and 1825, 224 came into being between 1826 and 1854. The latter figure is larger than it would have been if the authorities had not created the forty-two provincial gazettes which began to appear in 1838, but even when the gazettes are discounted an average of more than fifty journals were appearing at any one time under Nicholas, which was nearly twice the average for the reign of Alexander I. Although, after the suppression of The European in 1832, the tsar took it upon himself to consider personally all applications for permission to create new journals and on a number of occasions refused his assent, he did not attempt to reverse the upward trend but rather to slow it down. Between the formation of The Russian Review by the Decembrists Ryleev and Pestel in 1823 and the demise of Northern Flowers with the number for 1832, authors of fiction and poetry tended to publish their works in annuals or 'almanacs', but as the 1830s advanced the market proved able to sustain publications of a similar size at more frequent intervals. By the mid-1840s Osip Senkovski's Library for Reading (founded in 1834), Pushkin's The Contemporary (1836), Krylov's Notes of the Fatherland (1839) and Pogodin's The Muscovite (1841) were all appearing monthly. Subscriptions to the press sometimes reached notable heights. The conservative daily newspaper Northern Bee had a circulation of 7,000 in the 1830s and 10,000 in the 1850s. Library for Reading, Russia's first 'cheap' journal (rightly so called, since each number ran to about 300 pages) peaked at 7,000 subscribers in 1837. The Muscovite had only 300 subscribers in the mid-1840s and The Contemporary only 233 in 1846, but the latter's fortunes improved dramatically when it attracted Belinskii to its staff in 1847. The fact that Notes of the Fatherland retained its subscribers after Belinskii's departure showed that by the late 1840s two relatively high-circulation magazines could appear at the same time. The leading Russian journals were by this time selling as many copies as the Westminster Review in England and the Revue des deux mondes in France. Belinskii's editor at Notes of the Fatherland, though not Belinskii himself, became a rich man. Belinskii complained in 1845 that 'in contemporary Russian literature the journal has completely killed the book' and Ivan Kireevskii asserted in the same year that 'journalistic literature has replaced artistic', but Herzen was probably right to see journals as 'the best means of spreading light in a vast country' and to claim that 'Their very periodicity had the advantage of waking up lazy readers'. Gogol refused to allow Dead Souls to come out in instalments and was prepared, he said, to 'give away all [his] property for the sole purpose of not placing [his] works ahead of time', but Pushkin, Lermontov, Dostoevsky and Turgenev all published major works in the periodical press of the 1830s and 1840s and gave it a new-found distinction. Since Belinskii and other critics commented on all of the newly published literature, readers were now being offered both new texts and new interpretations. Censorship made open political discussion impossible, but writers often succeeded in implying what they were forbidden from making plain. Readers became skilful at discerning meanings in literature which differed from those perceived by officials. In a country where open political discussion was impossible, the likelihood that literature would be read closely was considerable. Without wholeheartedly accepting Leszek Kolakowski's claim that the Russian Empire was 'a country in which ... there was no clear-cut dividing line between literary criticism and assassination', one can still see that, in the absence of other forums for debate, imaginative responses to literature might address themselves to the relationship between literature and reality. Because they tended to do so, Herzen was able to say in 1850 that 'Superficially Russia remained stationary under Nicholas I, but deep down everything changed, questions became more complicated and solutions less simple'. Herzen went too far when he claimed that 'revolutionary ideas gained more ground in the past twenty-five years than in the entire century which preceded them', but his perception goes further to explain the rapidity of change in Russia after Nicholas's death than the idea that his reign was a cultural desert.

In view of the fact, however, that intellectuals could never speak or write openly about politics in the reign of Nicholas I, they probably expressed their most important opinions to each other rather than to the public at large. Educational institutions and journals were becoming increasingly significant as forums for debate, but remained less important than the small private circles which, in retrospect, stand out as the key feature of the Russian intelligentsia's emergence. To a degree the distinction between public and private means of expression is an artificial one, since although some 400 private circles have been discerned between 1801 and
1855, the most important of them in the 1830s were those centred on Alexander Herzen and Nikolai Stankevich, both of which originated at Moscow University when the members were students. Apart from Herzen and his closest friend, Nikolai Ogarev, no one in the Herzen circle subsequently made a name for himself, but almost everyone in the Stankevich circle did apart from Stankevich himself (who died at the age of twenty-seven). The love-child of an aristocrat, Herzen spent his first seventeen years in comfortable but frustrated isolation from the society which surrounded him. When he went to university in 1829 he found a group of like-minded contemporaries and began the long journey towards a Russian brand of socialism. The five years before he was exiled to Viatka in 1834, when he led his peers, applauded the French Revolution of July 1830, won a silver medal for his studies, and discovered the writings of the French socialist Saint-Simon, were probably the happiest of his life. The Stankevich circle, founded in 1831, remained a definable entity throughout the 1830s, and included not only Belinskii and Granovskii but also future representatives of three of the most striking intellectual currents in later-nineteenth-century Russia: Mikhail Katkov (who became an extreme conservative), Mikhail Bakunin (who turned into an anarchist) and Konstantin Aksakov (whose views led him in the direction of pantasmatism). Neither the Herzen nor the Stankevich circle had rules or a plan of campaign. Unlike the army officers who constituted the backbone of Decembrism, neither considered drawing up political programmes for a redesigned empire. Edward Brown describes the Stankevich group as a 'casually organized body which met on Fridays ... to discuss philosophy, listen to music, and read romantic poetry'. This makes the intellectual circles of the reign of Nicholas I seem a poor vehicle for the development of coherent opinions. Other criticisms could easily be added: that they were overwhelmingly aristocratic at a time when representatives of non-gentry estates were beginning to play a part in Russian intellectual life, and that they were to be found mainly in Moscow, when the only way to make changes in Russia was to infiltrate the centres of power in St Petersburg. It is true that some contemporaries thought circles a waste of time. 'A circle', wrote Ivan Turgenev in 1848, 'is a lazy and flabby kind of communal, side-by-side existence, to which people attribute the significance and appearance of an intelligent business.' In 1850 Mikhail Zagoskin decried Moscow literary evenings on the grounds that they consisted of 'a whole crowd of deep thinkers who, having arrived at the age of twenty, had managed to experience everything, feel everything, and bore everyone'. Reproaches like these, however, missed the point of the circles, which Boris Chicherin explained to Turgenev after reading his attack on them. 'The stuffy atmosphere of an exclusive circle', Chicherin said, 'undoubtedly has its drawbacks, but what is to be done, when people are not allowed out into the open air?' The press was freer than it seemed, but the only place in which educated contemporaries could be absolutely frank with each other was the private drawing-room. Chicherin could have said more, for

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Frankness in private was more than a transitory lifeline. In a few cases it forged bonds which laid the basis for future practical activities, but above all it facilitated deeper reflection on the country's future than would have occurred if intellectuals had been willing to enter the service of the regime. The circles of the 1830s and 1840s eventually had an importance disproportionate to their size and at odds with the abstract character of their discussions; they proved to be the bridge between the shattered hopes of the Decembrists and the reforms of the reign of Alexander II.

THE POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF LITERARY EXPRESSION

Views which made their way into print in the 1830s and 1840s were rarely as forthright as Polevoi's critique of Karamzin, Chaadaev's 'First Philosophical Letter' or Belinskii's 'Literary Musings'. Nevertheless, many publications either showed signs of a political orientation or allowed critics to pretend that they did. Pushkin's poem The Upas Tree, published at the end of 1831, portrayed a ruler who was prepared to sacrifice a subject in order to be able to poison his enemies. Reviewers of different persuasions took the Ukrainian setting of Gogol's short stories Evenings on a Farmstead near Dikan'ya (1831–2) to stand either for the virtue of tradition or for freedom from the strait-jacket of modern society. Herzen wrote in 1850 that nothing indicated the psychological changes which were taking place among Russian intellectuals in the reign of Nicholas I more effectively than the difference between Pushkin and Lermontov. Whereas the former had been prepared to make peace with the regime, the latter, who was half a generation younger, was not. According to Herzen, Lermontov's novel A Hero of Our Time (1840) depicted the despair which life under Nicholas could induce. Gogol's play The Government Inspector, first performed in April 1836, outraged proponents of 'Official Nationality' because it painted an extremely unflattering picture of life in the empire's backwoods. Prince Viazemskii defended Gogol from the charge that the play contained 'not a single honest or right-thinking individual' on the spurious grounds that the 'right-thinking individual' was the government which allowed the play to appear. Sensing the frailty of his argument, he subsequently claimed that contemporaries were wrong to think of the play as a veiled indictment of the authorities because Gogol did not intend political conclusions to be drawn from his work. This was true, but did not allow for the fact that audiences and readers were not privy to Gogol's intentions. The literary work which gave rise to the greatest controversy in the reign of Nicholas I was probably Gogol's novel Dead Souls, which appeared in 1842. Nikolai Grech, one of the principal spokesmen for 'Official Nationality', saw in it a

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peculiar world of ne'er-do-wells which never existed and couldn't exist, but Pushkin's successor as editor of The Contemporary, P. A. Pletnev, believed that Gogol had met a fundamental requirement of contemporary literary criticism by producing a work of art which described the world around him. The future panslavist Konstantin Aksakov lauded the novel on the grounds that it belonged to the universal tradition of the epic and could be compared with Homer, while Belinskii, despite being an even greater admirer, thought that universality was not at all the book's key feature and that, on the contrary, only Russians could understand it. Herzen, who shared Belinskii's view that the novel's virtue lay in its depiction of Russian reality, claimed that Dead Souls shook the whole of Russia because it represented a savage indictment of the empire's provincial nobility.

In the mid-1840s literary politics intensified. Ivan Kireevskii revealed the extent to which he had moved to the right since the closure of The European in 1832 by editing three numbers of the conservative Muscovite in 1845. 'With his characteristic wit and humour, but also with his characteristic superficial sophistry, he inveighed against the whole of western philosophy...and offered the prospect of salvation solely in the bosom of the Orthodox Church.' When The Contemporary changed hands two years later, the first number put out by the new management constituted 'an embryo political demonstration' on behalf of the left. By publishing the first of Ivan Turgenev's Sportsman's Sketches ('Khor' and Kalinych') and Konstantin Kavelin's non-fictional 'Glimpses at the Juridical Life of Ancient Russia,' the editors hinted strongly that individuality offered better prospects than Nicholaevian regimentation. Just before his death in 1848, Belinskii published what was perhaps the most trenchant of all his published writings, 'A Survey of Russian Literature in 1847,' in which, by concentrating on Herzen's novel Who is to Blame? and Ivan Goncharov's An Ordinary Story, he argued that a writer's primary duty was to engage in pictorial representation of his environment. Since, by then, it was clear what the country's greatest critic thought of his environment, the subtext of the argument was not difficult to discern.

Literature printed under Nicholas I thus said a good deal about contemporary attitudes to the tsarist political and social system. It was only a pale reflection, however, of the range and profundity of contemporary intellectual developments. Out-and-out sympathizers with the regime — Nikolai Grech and Faldei Bulgarian at The Northern Bee, Osip Senkovskii in Library for Reading — could print more or less exactly what they meant, but others had to refrain from making public the depth of their feelings. A private exchange between Gogol and Belinskii illustrated the difference of degree between views which found their way into print and the views for which they stood proxy. In 1847 Gogol published Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends, in which he made plain that he was much less critical of Russian reality than contemporaries had thought him to be on the basis of The Government Inspector and Dead Souls. Conservatives like

Bulgarian and Senkovskii were delighted. Belinskii, in a review published in the second number of the revamped Contemporary, objected. Gogol then attempted to justify his new book in a letter to Belinskii, who was receiving treatment for tuberculosis at Salzbrunn and was temporarily out of reach of the Russian censor. Belinskii's reply to Gogol's letter was vitriolic. 'Russia,' he wrote, 'sees her salvation not in mysticism, ascetism, or pietism — the remedies Gogol was proposing — but in the advances of civilization, enlightenment and humanism.' The most vital national problems in Russia today, he went on, 'are the abolition of serfdom, the repeal of corporal punishment, and the strictest possible implementation of at least those laws which do exist.' Yet at a time when the country's situation was desperate, 'a great writer whose wonderfully artistic and profoundly truthful works have so powerfully stimulated Russia's self-awareness and enabled her to see herself as she is in a mirror, comes out with a book which in the name of Christ and the Church teaches the barbarian landowner to squeeze even more money out of his peasants, who are criticized for their misbehaviour.' In Belinskii's view, Gogol had abandoned the forces of light for the forces of darkness. The sense of betrayal and the sheer anger which characterized his letter clearly represented what he would have said in print if he had been able to do so. Whatever the extent to which literature published under Nicholas I reflected the ideological currents of the day, it did not allow the expression of feelings as strong as this.

Belinskii felt more deeply than his peers, but he was not alone in possessing views which, in the interests of self-preservation, he had to keep from the government. Even on the right of the political spectrum intellectual developments were occurring which their progenitors did well to pursue quietly. The conversion of Ivan Kireevskii from the man who enthused about western Europe in 1832 to the man who inveighed against the whole of western philosophy in 1845 looked like a triumph for the regime, but in fact represented an attack on it from a novel perspective. Just after the closure of The European Kireevskii had begun spending a great deal of time with Aleksei Khomiakov, 'an extraordinarily consistent character whose convictions were a deep devotion to the Orthodox Church and a Russian patriotism which... contained from early on a definite hostility to the European Russia of Peter the Great.' The two men and their coterie disagreed both with the regime and with modernizers like Belinskii. In 1839 they knocked their ideas into shape in two privately circulated essays. Khomiakov played devil's advocate. It was wrong, he felt, to believe that everything had been better in Russia before westernization began in the early eighteenth century. If neither the old ways nor the Church generated a tangible form in which the old Russia would have been encapsulated, ought we not to acknowledge that they lacked an element, or even several elements? The question, however, was rhetorical. Khomiakov went on to claim that medieval Russia did indeed embody purity, simplicity and mutual love. Modern Russians had to understand 'that man achieves his moral fulfillment only in a society in which the strength of the individual belongs
to everyone and the strength of everyone to the individual'. In Khomiakov's view, medieval Russia was precisely such a society. Although modern Russia could take advantage of 'chance discoveries' made in the West, she ought not to attach any great significance to them. Then ... ancient Russia will revive... full of life, organic force, not hesitating endlessly between life and death'. 56 Kireevskii continued the discussion. 52 The circle he said, was trying to answer the question whether 'ancient Russia ...' was better or worse than present-day Russia'. He realized that the western influences which had penetrated modern Russia could not be expunged, but he considered western rationalism to be 'a one-sided, deceptive, corrupting and treacherous principle'. Because, in medieval Russia, social relations depended on the church and the peasant communes, collectivism prevailed over individualism. 'Private and individual life, the very cornerstone of Western development, was as little known in Russia as political rule by the people'. Kireevskii believed that the traditions of medieval Russia had engendered consensus and harmony whereas those of the West depended on 'material force, physical superiority, the power of the multitude and compromise between differing views'. He was uncertain whether the clock could be turned back, but he ended ironically by saying that it would be possible to turn it back if a Frenchman or a German made the case for Russians were more likely to believe foreigners than their own intellectuals.

At first sight it seems odd to say that Khomiakov and Kireevskii did well to develop their ideas in private. Far from threatening the regime, they appeared to have a lot in common with it. Their enthusiasm for the Orthodox Church dovetailed with Nicholas I's 'Official Nationality'. Their affection for the traditions of the countryside seemed to justify the government in adopting a tentative approach to the abolition of serfdom. These resemblances, however, obscure the fact that Khomiakov and Kireevskii disagreed with the government almost as much as modernizers like Belinskii who wanted to bring the empire into line with the West. The circle which grew up around Khomiakov and Kireevskii advocated regression to an idyllic past. Modernizers sought the empire's salvation in movement towards a western-orientated future. What united the two groups was dissatisfaction with the contemporary state of the country. Both were looking for a way out of what, to them, was a blind alley. 'Official Nationalists', meanwhile, were willing to strengthen the regime's foundations and tinker with its superstructure, but rejected the idea of changing the direction in which the regime was moving and refused to quicken their step. In these circumstances, Khomiakov and Kireevskii had to keep their heads down. Their essays of 1839 did not see the light of day until six years into the next reign, when both the authors were dead.

Exponents of the modernizing and backward-looking philosophies which took shape under Nicholas I came to be called Westernizers and Slavophiles. The former because they looked to the West for inspiration, the latter because they set great store by the indigenous culture of the Slavs. In 1848 they parceled the terms stand for 'progressives' and 'reactionaries', but everyday parlance the terms stand for 'progressives' and 'reactionaries', but in 1848 they parceled the terms stand for daily parlance the terms stood for 'progressives' and 'reactionaries', but in 1848 they parceled the terms stood for 'progressives' and 'reactionaries', but in 1848 they parceled the terms stood for 'progressives' and 'reactionaries', but in 1848 they parceled the terms stood for 'progressives' and 'reactionaries', but
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The present age, he said, would not have been necessary, if former ages had accomplished everything of which human reason was capable; future ages would not be necessary if the present had reached the final goal. As above all, the Slavophiles were a broad church. Khomiakov and Konstantin Aksakov may have been insatiable by comparison with some of the other members of the circle, but since, as Ivan Kireevskii pointed out in 1877, Slavophiles did not agree on what they meant by calling themselves Slavs, on what they meant by the emphasis they placed on nation (nacional'nost'), and on what their attitude should be towards state institutions if they were unwilling to become an exclusive brotherhood. The balance between their conservative and liberal inclinations was constantly shifting; and as long as it went on doing so, they provided an example of intellectual fluidity which was worth more than the kaleidoscopic opinions of the group's individual members.

Westernizers

The Westernizers were a broad church too. In the opinion of Boris Chicherin it was they rather than the Slavophiles who were conspicuous for their variety. Whereas the Slavophiles were 'an out-and-out sect', the Westernizers 'possessed no common doctrine'. Westernizers, Chicherin said, included 'the devoutly Orthodox and the utterly irreligious, metaphysicians and empiricists, social-democrats and moderate liberals, statist and advocates of pure individualism'. Individual Westernizers were no more consistent than the group as a whole. At the end of the 1830s Belinskii went through a period known as his 'reconciliation with reality', when he seemed, for a time, to be accepting the world as he found it. Alexander Herzen radically modified his political opinions after witnessing the failure of the west European revolutions of 1848 and was soon speaking with well-nigh Slavophile enthusiasm of the virtues of the Russian peasant commune. If one accepts Nicholas Riasanovsky's view that 'the bureaucratic formalism and legalistic oppressiveness of the imperial system had never been attacked so powerfully and especially from such a strong theoretical base as they were ... by Khomiakov and his friends', Westernizers can hardly be said to have been more hostile than Slavophiles to the tsarist regime. Nor were they more practical than their opponents, for (unlike the Decembrists) they took no interest in devising anti-autocratic constitutions. Edward Brown points out that calling the early Westernizer Nikolai Starokov 'an enemy of the Czarist social order' is to strain the evidence. Grousinski fell back on card-playing during Nicholas I's last years on the throne, but retained his professorship at Moscow University. Herzen's enthusiasm for the reform process inaugurated by Alexander II in the second
half of the 1850s implied that he was prepared to back autocracy when it was put to good use. Sometimes it is hard to see why the Westernizers have gone down in history as radicals.

In the main, moreover, Westernizers and Slavophiles felt warmly towards each other. When, in the early 1840s, Franz Liszt was taking Moscow by storm, Khomiakov suggested to Herzen that they start an argument in the pianist’s presence in order to demonstrate that no one was obsessed with the distinguished visitor. Ivan Kireevskii had to miss Granovski’s public lectures at Moscow University in the winter of 1843–4, had asked for transcripts, and expressed the conviction that, whatever the differences between them, no historian could combine ‘so much spiritual warmth, so much spiritual elegance and spiritual vitality’.46 Passing Herzen in a regret for their differences. With benefit of hindsight Herzen was prepared ‘like Janus, or the two-headed eagle, they and we looked in different directions while one heart throbbed within us’.47 Although the Westernizers adored the Slavophiles’ emphasis on the traditions of the church and the countryside, the two sides disagreed about means more than ends, both sought ways of changing the status quo.

It was the Official Nationalists and Belinskii who were primarily responsible for the acrimony between Westernizers and Slavophiles which unleashed for a few years in the mid-1840s. Stepan Shevyrev’s a stinging reply which affected not only Shevyrev himself and his associates, the Slavophiles rarely had control over a journal and never in the lecture rooms. In their search for outlets, they sometimes entered into uneasy dealings with apologists for the regime. Belinskii had no sympathy for their dilemma. The larger the number of those whom he could consider his enemies, the more his spirits rose. When Vasili Botkin wrote to him in St Petersburgh of the effect his indictment of Shevyrev was having come out of the ‘Right Hegelianism’ of his ‘reconciliation with reality’ period, Belinskii seemed determined not to over-compensate for the interruption by Konstantin Aksakov to rebut the literary critic’s inclination to treat the Slavophiles as if they were Official Nationalists. As nineteenth-century school of thought which sought to strip the Russian language of foreign accretions and return it to its Slavonic roots. Belinskii himself still employed the word in this sense, but as his wrath mounted he enlarged its meaning and made it a term of abuse. Khomiakov and Ivan Kireevskii were investing it with new meaning at the same time, but Belinskii did not trouble himself with the difference between the two reinterpretations. He needed opponents on whom to vent his spleen. Having found them, he lost interest in niceties. Granovski’s lectures of 1843–4 and Ivan Kireevskii’s editorship of The Muscovite in 1845 would have highlighted the differences between Westernizers and Slavophiles whether Belinskii existed or not, but his intemperate language poured oil on the flames. Although Herzen and Granovski maintained some sort of dealings with their adversaries even at the height of the quarrel between the two orientations, Belinskii called himself ‘a Jew by nature’ who would not ‘eat at the same table with the Philistines’.48 His explosive temperament not only injected life into Russian intellectual exchanges, but also involved opponents of the regime in spending time on mutual recriminations which would have been better spent on pooling their intellectual resources.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps the Russian intellectuals who emerged in the reign of Nicholas I ought not to be taken too seriously. They were relatively few in number, had few means of addressing themselves to large audiences, avoided, for the most part, the limelight of St Petersburg, devoted most of their time to discussing abstractions, never dreamed of running the risks taken by the Decembrists, and weakened themselves by internal dissension. Their commitment to ideas was intense, but ‘A man who went for a walk in Sokolniki in order to surrender himself to the pantheistic feeling of his identification with the cosmos’ and ‘ten-year-old boys’ who spoke of ‘concrete objectivity’ were hardly likely to set the world on fire.’49 Comparing the fictional Khor and Kalinych with Goethe and Schiller was a credo to the breadth of Ivan Turgenev’s imagination, but rang hollow in a short story which readers thought of as an indictment of serfdom.50 The very small number of intellectual circles which the government felt obliged to break up in the reign of Nicholas I (of which more in Chapter Seven) reflected not so much the authorities’ kindheartedness as the fact that few if any of the circles generated anything other than literary criticism, novels and salon talk.

Attempts by Soviet scholars to speak of a ‘liberation movement’ or even a ‘revolutionary movement’ in the reign of Nicholas I thus seem to be special pleading.51 Although, with benefit of hindsight, Westernizers and Slavophiles can be treated as the founders of continuous intellectual traditions which have been discernible in recent times in the views, for example, of Andrei Sakharov and Alexander Solzhenitsyn, resemblances between ear-
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lifer and later exponents of the two orientations may be entirely coinci-
tal. It is not unusual, after all, for advocates of change to consist on the one
hand of people who look for inspiration beyond their country's frontiers
and on the other of people who dedicate themselves to the promotion of
native traditions. It may even be doubted whether the men of the 1820s
and 1840s deserve the high-sounding name 'intelligentsia', for although the
word is of Russian origin it entered the language only in the 1860s and
spreading into English. It is not true that 'people who dedicated themselves
to ideas'. In a celebrated essay of 1909 Peter Struve argued that members
ship of the intelligentsia implied either absolute or relative alienation
from the state. This conception, he said, had been 'ideologically prepared' in the
1840s, but the anarchists and social-democrats of his own time exemplified
students of the term have agreed with Struve in expecting a higher degree
of political oppositionism from members of an intelligentsia than was ex-
dient in the often comfortable lives of those who felt alienated by the
regime of Nicholas I.

Yet as early as 1840 the head of the Third Department reported to Ni-
cow: 'I do not know exactly, but something is wrong'. 'Of course
mind were 'less propitious than at any time during the entire last fifteen
years.' The authorities seem disinclined to have suspected that philosophi-
ideas had practical implications and that they could somehow pass from
the pages of journals, the lecture halls of universities, and the salons of
the the wrangling of Westernizers and Slavophiles often looked inconsequent.
Journalism, a major practical implication of the ideas which circulated in the
sphere of Nicholas I derived from the fact that virtually all the intellectuals
of the reign were Hegelians. Even Khomiakov depicted the history of the
Church in terms of the principle of power, the principle of freedom and the
principle of love, a triad which, like all Hegelian triads, implied movement.
If the Hegelian idea of dialectical movement reached the chancelleries
of government ministries, Nicholas I's piecemeal innovations would begin to
seem petty.

The idea, furthermore, was already within the walls. Boris Chicherm
consisted of 'playing up to the bosses, never giving voice to your convin-
tions, and often undertaking what seemed to be positively wrong', but
others either had to work for a living or felt that life without employment
was impossibly self-indulgent. Nikolai Miliutin, the author of the St Peters-
burg Municipal Reform Act of 1846, fell into the first of these categories
Ivan Aksakov, with some hesitation, into the second. Their willingness to
enter official employment exemplified one of the main ways in which the
intellectual exchanges of the reign of Nicholas I made a mark on Russian

THE EMERGENCE OF THE RUSSIAN INTELLIGENTSIA

In one of the most imaginative studies of any aspect of nineteenth-
century Russian history, W. Bruce Lincoln has demonstrated that the 1830s
and 1840s saw not only the entry into the empire of a new set of west Eu-
ropean philosophies, but also the emergence in St Petersburg of a group of
'enlightened bureaucrats' who were to play a notable part in the reforms of
the early 1860s. Lincoln connects the two phenomena. Encouraged by P.
D. Riesky (the Minister of State Properties), Lev Perovskii (the Minister of
Internal Affairs) and subsequently by the Grand Duke Konstantin Niko-
laevich (Nicholas I's younger son) and the Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna
(his sister-in-law), products of the empire's higher education establish-
ments began to occupy positions which gave them scope for collecting
information on the true state of the country. Having been exposed as
young men to the philosophies which gave rise to Westernizers and Slavo-
philes they continued, after entering government service, to move in unof-
icial circles which encouraged them in their reformist inclinations. By
combining their commitment to ideas with the knowledge they acquired in
the course of their duties, they put themselves in a position to exercise an
influence disproportionate to their numbers. Under the next tsar, they were
to make their mark.

Most of the 'enlightened bureaucrats' were Westernizers, but a collateral
descendant of Slavophilism was also to prove influential in the politics of
the next reign. When, in the wake of the failure of the west European rev-
olutions of 1848, Herzen proclaimed 'what a blessing it is for Russia that
the rural commune has never been broken up', he revealed a new-found
sympathy for the ideas of Khomiakov and Kireevskii which led him to a
Russian brand of socialism. His 'activist communalism' differed sharply
from the socially passive, religious kind' invented by the Slavophiles, but
shared with it the principle of capitalizing on indigenous Russian culture.
By combining the western idea of progress with the notion of Russian
uniqueness, Herzen and other mid-nineteenth-century intellectuals con-
verted the second generation of the Russian intelligentsia to populism, a
dynamic creed which gave rise to action far more radical than that of the
enlightened bureaucrats.

It might be argued, therefore, that the intellectuals of the 1830s and
1840s not only planted 'the seeds of much later political speculation', but
actually shaped the political history of the reign of Alexander II. While the
ideas of the Westernizers penetrated the bureaucracy, those of the Slavo-
philes - reinterpreted - contributed to the country's first significant period
of violent revolutionary activity since Decembrism. Before these develop-
ments could ensue, however, Nicholas I's style of rule had to be exposed
as inadequate. Until the regime lost a war, it was unlikely to lose its grip.
NOTES


15. Gertsen, ‘Du développement’ (above, no. 9), p. 82.


19. Gertsen, ‘Byloe i duma’, *Sbornik sochinenii* (above, no. 9), viii, 107 (incorrectly translated in Herzen, *Past and Thoughts* above, no. 4, i, 95).


22. B. N. Chicherin, *Vospominanii* *Moskva sovetskih godov* (Moscow, 1929), p. 34.

23. Ibid., p. 7.


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57. Ibid., pp. 70–7.
60. Konstantin Sergeevich Aksakov, Memorandum to Alexander II on the Internal State of Russia’, in Leatherbarrow and Offord, A Documentory History (above, n. 51), pp. 95–107.
61. Herzen, Past and Thoughts (above, n. 4), ii. 535.
62. Khomiakov, ‘Po povodu stati I. V. Kireevskogo “O kharaktere prosveshchenii Evropy i o ego otosenii k prosveshcheniiu Rossii”’, PSS (above, n. 53), i. 258.
64. Chicherin, Moskva (above, n. 22), p. 223.
69. Herzen, Past and Thoughts (above, n. 4), ii. 549.
70. Ibid., ii. 543.
75. Rusanovsky, A Parting of Ways (above, n. 29), pp. 249–50.
77. W. Bruce Lincoln, In the Vanguard of Reform: Russia’s Enlightened Bureaucrats 1825–1861 (DeKalb, Ill., 1982).
78. Herzen, From the Other Shore (above, n. 65), p. 189.