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To Russia with Love: Boris Chicherin’s 1857 “Contemporary Tasks of Russian Life”

[LINK TO ABSTRACT](#)

Foreword

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The reception in Russia of Scottish political economy dates to the 1760s, when Empress Catherine II financed the studies at Glasgow University of Ivan Tret’iakov and Semen Desnitskii. As Mikhail Alekseev has shown, after they returned from Scotland, Tret’iakov and Desnitskii inspired two generations of intellectuals to read Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations*. By the 1810s, Smith’s views had become central to political philosophers such as Aleksandr Kunitsyn and Nikolai Turgenev, and important to Russia’s great poet Aleksandr Pushkin (Alekseev 2018). Fifty years later, Smith and his followers had gained a still wider constituency among Russian thinkers but had also become more controversial. This was so because Smithian economics became entangled in the increasingly bitter debate over the future of Russian serfdom.

In imperial Russia, Boris Chicherin (1828–1904) was the pivotal figure in the development of classical liberalism. From 1861 to 1867, he was a professor of law at Moscow University, and thus a lineal descendant of Tret’iakov and Desnitskii. From late 1881 to 1883, he served as Moscow’s elected mayor, a position that lent him national prominence. He was also a well-regarded member of the elective land

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councils (the *zemstvos*) in Tambov province for most of the period from 1867 to 1900. Among Russians in his generation, he probably had the deepest experience in public institutions, including local self-government. As an intellectual, Chicherin first made his reputation as a historian. In 1856, he wrote a watershed history of the centralized state and of the law before the reign of Petr I (Chicherin 1856a). Later, between 1869 and 1902, he published a profound analysis of European political thought, in which he included chapters on Adam Smith and on his socialist critics (see Chicherin 1869; 1872; 1874; 1877; 1902). Chicherin's polemic against socialism, *Property and the State* (1882; 1883), was likely the most forceful statement of classical liberal principles to appear in old-regime Russia. Finally, Chicherin's magnum opus, his *Philosophy of Right* (1900), was an attempt to marry Smith's notions of civic freedom with those of Georg Hegel and Immanuel Kant.

Today readers of English can find a convenient selection of Chicherin's writings, including sections from *Property and the State*, in a volume titled *Liberty, Equality, and the Market* (Chicherin 1998).

Chicherin's career is striking not only for his practical experience and far-ranging erudition, but also because many of his writings on problems of political economy were clandestine, composed 'for the drawer.' That is, they were written to circulate in manuscript, without attribution to the author, or were published abroad anonymously to circumvent Russian censorship. According to the bibliographer Ignatii Gul'binskii (1914, 119–143), seventeen of Chicherin's 112 writings circulated privately as manuscripts and/or were published abroad pseudonymously. Chicherin's memoirs, composed in the late 1880s/early 1890s, were intended for publication only fifty years after his death, largely because they contained accounts of his clandestine writings and because they reproduced many of these secret texts (Chicherin 1929a; 1929b; 1932; 1934). In light of this record, it is clear that, throughout his life as a classic liberal, Chicherin resorted to clandestine writing when the political situation demanded he do so.

Let us take the essay "Contemporary Tasks of Russian Life," published in 1857. The essay made the case that the Russian state had been the "driving force in our development and progress," that there was "no nation in Europe where the government is more powerful than ours." Chicherin saw this fact not as a warrant of the Russian government's invincibility but instead as proof of its vulnerability: over time, the country's rulers had isolated themselves from the people and therefore had come to lack reliable information on popular life. The byproducts of this situation were despotic rule, "the omnipresent official lie," the "pandemic corruption of officials," bureaucratic incompetence, the diminution of civic life and atrophy of public discussion, as well as the "primitive condition" of the economy.

Chicherin's proposed solutions were: promulgation of freedom of con-

science; the liberation of the peasants from servile status; freedom of speech, of the press, and of the academy; publication of governmental policies; and public access to legal proceedings. These proposals closely interrelated to core elements of a liberal program as advanced elsewhere in Chicherin's writings. For millions of nonconforming subjects, freedom of conscience was just as necessary as was the end of serfdom. Freedom of expression in its various forms was the linchpin of civic life, because open discussion of Russia's problems was a vital source of information to the government and the best safeguard against official arbitrariness. These civic freedoms in turn made necessary gains in governmental transparency. Public access to court proceedings would help ensure against the government's abuse of power and therefore called for gains in administrative transparency. The logic of enhanced civil rights pointed toward two further, unarticulated political rights: the institution of representative government and the promulgation of a constitution. Thus, according to Chicherin, the classical liberal objective of economic freedom was inextricably linked to the granting of civil and political rights—that is, to sweeping reforms.

From Chicherin's memoirs, we know that, just after Nicholas I's burial in 1855, Chicherin was in Petersburg. There he met his former teacher, the abolitionist Konstantin Kavelin. Chicherin had written a short essay on Russian diplomacy and the Crimean crisis. Kavelin showed him a manuscript by Nikolai Mel'gunov critical of nearly every aspect of Nicholas I's reign of 30 years.² In conversation with Kavelin and others, including the future minister of war Dmitrii Miliutin and the prominent Slavophile Aleksei Khomiakov, Chicherin resolved "to say everything that tortured and disturbed thinking people in Russia, to express their dissatisfaction about the past and their plans for the future." Chicherin observed: "No one at that point even thought about changing our form of government. Everyone understood that, under serfdom and given the centuries-long humiliation of educated society, that [a change in the form of government] was impossible. The one thing we all passionately desired was...intellectual and civic liberty" (1929a, 161–162).

Chicherin therefore wrote "Contemporary Tasks of Russian Life." In the handwritten 1855 manuscript, he asserted that a transformation in the system of government "would be the ultimate result of the demanded reforms." Indeed, he wrote: "In the manuscript version, unencumbered by censorship considerations, I wrote with complete candor." However, Kavelin told Chicherin that, for now,

2. Chicherin's manuscript, "Vostochnyi vopros s russkoi tochki zreniia," circulated from hand to hand. It was published as an appendix to *Zapiski kniazia S. P. Trubetskogo* (1907, 125–153). Chicherin wrote another essay, "Sviashchennyi soiuz i avstriiskaia politika," which Kavelin also decided to circulate in Petersburg and later published (see Chicherin 1856b). For the critique of Nicholas' reign, see Mel'gunov 1856, 67–164.

“it would be better to keep silent about the distant goal” (1929a, 163). Chicherin agreed to remove the reference to the future abolition of autocracy.

After Chicherin had edited “Contemporary Tasks of Russian Life” to suit Kavelin’s scruples, Kavelin circulated it in Petersburg and eventually sent it to London, where the socialist Aleksandr Herzen had established the Free Russian Press. Herzen published the article in Russian along with many other manuscripts in the anthology *Voices from Russia* (1856–1860).

Chicherin’s involvement in the production and publication of clandestine literature fit a pattern of evading censorship almost as old as Gutenberg’s printing press. According to the historian Jonathan Israel, there occurred “a decisive broadening of such activity from around 1680, after which it fulfilled a crucial function in the advance of forbidden ideas for over half a century” (2001, 684). A leading historian of the Enlightenment book trade, Robert Darnton, has claimed that, “to French readers in the eighteenth century, illegal literature was virtually the same as modern literature” (1995, xix).³

In eighteenth-century Russia, clandestine literature tended to exist in manuscript form tightly controlled by the author, as the example of Denis Fonvizin’s (1959) “Discourse on Fundamental State Laws” suggested: Fonvizin showed his draft only to his patron Nikita Panin.⁴ Clandestine authors often engaged in esoteric writing, such as Aleksandr Radishchev in his *Journey from Petersburg to Moscow* (1790).⁵ In post-Napoleonic Russia, clandestine writing was common, especially among the Decembrist movement of the 1820s.

One prominent Decembrist living in Western Europe at the time of the 1825 uprising but sentenced to death for his part in its preparation was Nikolai Turgenev, who published his memoirs of the movement in Paris, under the subtitle *Memoires d’un proscrit* (1847). A second political exile, Aleksandr Herzen, left Russia in 1847 to live in Western Europe. Herzen established two journals on European soil—*Kolokol* (*The Bell*) and *Poliarnaia zvezda* (*Polar Star*)—and published in addition *Voices from Russia*, in which Chicherin and Kavelin placed their manuscripts.

The young Chicherin was well aware of the French literary underground of the eighteenth century. Growing up in Tambov, Chicherin discovered that his neighbor, Nikolai Krivtsov, had been a Decembrist. In university, Chicherin learned details of the Decembrists’ uprising, read Turgenev’s *La Russie et les russes*, and became familiar with Herzen’s radical past. By the time Chicherin wrote

3. Both Israel and Darnton were cited by Melzer (2014, 247–248). My thanks to Chris Nadon for this reference to Melzer.

4. On the history of this document see Safonov 1974.

5. Radishchev’s denunciation of Catherinian Russia was printed on Radishchev’s private press (ownership and operation of private presses were then legal in Russia) and cast as a travelogue to lull suspicions of the censor.

“Contemporary Tasks of Russian Life,” circumventing the Russian censorship became for him a natural process, part of being a Russian intellectual.

“Contemporary Tasks of Russian Life” was both clandestine and esoteric, as defined by Arthur Melzer (2014, 247)—clandestine because it circulated in private channels and abroad without attribution of authorship, and esoteric because the demand for political rights was between the lines. According to Melzer, virtually all late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century political thinkers “found it necessary—in the very pursuit of popular enlightenment and freedom of speech—to employ a tactical esotericism. ... They were not strong enough—or reckless enough—to declare their true beliefs openly and all at once” (ibid., 254–255).

It is perhaps odd for twenty-first century admirers of Adam Smith to imagine societies in which discussion of free labor could not be unhindered, because economic liberty was bound firmly to the need for civil and political rights. Despite Russia’s early exposure to the Scottish Enlightenment, however, Smith’s economic and jurisprudential ideas were fully accessible there only in the political underground. Let us hope that by historical imagination modern readers will come to understand such constraints.

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Contemporary Tasks of Russian Life¹

Boris N. Chicherin
translated by G. M. Hamburg

In the lives of individuals and of peoples there are moments when, shaken by unexpected events, they seem to awaken from a long slumber, look around themselves and arrive at a clear understanding of their situation. Such a moment has arrived for Russia. For a long time we assured ourselves that our fatherland is great and powerful, and we carelessly followed the course which the government set for us. A few thoughtful individuals realized with sorrow where we were headed. They saw how, under the influence of a faulty system of administration, the state itself was becoming corrupt; how all the foundations of civic life were gradually being undermined and destroyed; how all the forces [of our national vitality] were collapsing; and how the people were condemned to stagnate and grow dull in mute bondage. These individuals saw that we were imperceptibly drawing near an abyss, and suddenly the abyss opened before our very eyes. Unexpectedly, like a flash of lightning, a crisis burst upon us [in the Crimea], and in that moment, animated by the danger to our fatherland, we surveyed the scene and we began to see that a faulty system of government had undermined the might of Russia, that we had neither the personnel nor the technical means to defeat our foreign enemies,

1. Reprinted with the permission of Yale University Press from *Liberty, Equality, and the Market: Essays by B. N. Chicherin*, edited by G. M. Hamburg, pp. 110–140. Copyright © 1998 by Yale University. *Note by G. M. Hamburg about this text:* “Contemporary Tasks of Russian Life” was written in summer 1855 for K. D. Kavelin’s liberal “manuscript literature” campaign. Because the essay was intended for limited private circulation, Chicherin expressed his political views “with absolute candor.” The original draft of the essay even included a brief discussion of the possibility of constitutional rule in Russia. Chicherin understood the unlikelihood of a constitutional regime at present but foresaw that liberal reforms might facilitate the establishment of such a regime in the future. When Kavelin reviewed the manuscript in early 1856, he suggested that references to the liberals’ “distant [constitutional] goal” be removed from Chicherin’s essay because such references might prove politically counterproductive. Chicherin “agreed with this [assessment] and rewrote the article.” See MSG, 163–172. Kavelin sent the second, rewritten variant of Chicherin’s essay to London, where Alexander Herzen and Nikolai Ogarev published it in the *Voices from Russia* anthology. See “Sovremennye zadachi russkoi zhizni,” *Golosa iz Rossii* (London, 1857), 4: 51–129. The English text is a translation of the published version of Chicherin’s essay. Editors of the Soviet facsimile edition of *Golosa iz Rossii* described “Contemporary Tasks of Russian Life” as “the most precise formulation of the...theoretical foundations of the [Russian] liberal program.” See “Kommentarii i ukazateli,” *Golosa iz Rossii* (Moscow, 1975), 10: 177.

and that all our efforts would remain futile, given the corruption that had spread throughout the social organism.

The hour of reckoning has come. The voices of preachers, poets, and journalists call us to repentance. We all have become aware of our internal blemishes and shortcomings, although perhaps not everyone understands clearly whence they originated and how they contributed to our general misfortune. The time has come to explain these matters to ourselves, and, having devoted ourselves to introspection and having gathered our strength, to cleanse ourselves of corruption and set out anew with a rejuvenated spirit and a rational self-consciousness.

Our plight is difficult and dismal to contemplate: from abroad we face a terrible threat, the *levée en masse* which we are in no condition to match, while at home there is universal disorder and disintegration. Everywhere there is lawlessness, everywhere oppression, everywhere complaints and dissatisfaction. Nowhere in the public realm is there a gratifying development that one might survey with satisfaction and from it derive reassurance. There was but a single city on the periphery of the realm [Sevastopol] where all the heroism of the Russian people was concentrated, and which, by its courageous defense, redeemed the disasters of a difficult era. But even this city fell at last in its unequal struggle. Despondency spread everywhere and the future came to seem, if that was possible, darker than ever before.

How did we come to this humiliating pass? How could young and powerful Russia fall into such desperate straits?

Let us turn to the past and try to find in it the key to comprehending the present. Let us examine the natural conditions under which the Russian people have developed, what are their traits, what is their history, and then we will perhaps better understand what kind of turning point the people have reached and what may extricate them from their current, sorry plight.

The territory of Russia extends over the immeasurable distance from the Black Sea to the White and Baltic Seas in a monotonous steppe interrupted only by large rivers and, in the North, by broad lakes. On the steppe there are no mountains, only insignificant, hardly noticeable eminences that are lost in the vast flatland. The sparse population is sprinkled over the plains; villages and cities lie enormous distances apart, the roads are often barely passable, and there is no link between the various towns. Yet on the other hand, there are no natural barriers to divide the population and facilitate their coalescence in separate, closed alliances. Everything is dispersed across a vast space, nowhere finding a natural concentration. Rich soil easily yields food: a man does not have to work hard and contend against nature. There is nothing demanding exceptional activity and the straining of mental and physical energies, there are no striking vistas or natural phenomena arousing the imagination, no variety for developing different aspects of the human

spirit. Man seems lost in the vast steppe; he lives under the influence of monotonous nature and a limitless terrain that awakens in him an urge to wander like a nomad and a boldness that has no direction.

In such a milieu the national character took shape. The Russian nation is not composed of discrete elements, each living its own life and bearing its own peculiar stamp; it consists of a more or less homogeneous mass, dispersed across a vast area. Only Ukraine, separated from Russia as a result of historical circumstances, seems to be a discrete entity with its own characteristics. Furthermore, this homogeneous mass, dispersed over limitless territory, is nowhere concentrated. In it there are no central points that draw together scattered interests and facilitate the people's development and progress. Natural conditions led to the formation of a vast realm, but there are no tight social connections between the whole and its parts, no vital and closely woven relationships promoting human activity and constituting the life of society. The populace, scattered over the plains, lives under the influence more of natural determinants than of social ones. In Europe there is therefore no people in whom the civic spirit is so little developed as among the Russians; everyone lives aloof from everyone else, and no one troubles about common needs and interests. A Russian does not gladly leave that private sphere into which birth and environment have thrust him. He loves the nomadic life but not concerted activity. Being naturally talented, he may outdo and outperform others, but these moments are rare, evanescent flashes. In general, a Russian does not move untiringly forward, but does everything haphazardly, by chance, accidentally and lazily. He does not know how to create from his own resources an intellectually multifaceted world, and he does not tear himself away from the influence of his surroundings. In him the force of custom and tradition is astonishing; it is amazing how he uncomplainingly and humbly submits himself to the sovereign authority he recognized centuries ago.

These traits clearly suggest that the Russian character is more passive than active. But this passivity makes a Russian quite capable of accepting foreign influences, and when he is once forced to step out of his usual rut, he may easily, and with the same extreme devotion, submit to the new, just as earlier he clung stubbornly to the old. It is no wonder that under such circumstances he did not develop a multifaceted culture, he did not develop fully his talents in the fields of science, art, industry, and elegance of manners. Another factor in the development of the Russian character was Russia's distance from Rome, which passed on to Western nations the age-old achievements of the ancient world. The Russian people took from Rome the Christian religion, but accepted it, so to speak, in a pagan fashion. The Russian man did not assimilate Christianity's abstract spiritual content, its separation of the spiritual from the mundane, nor did high philosophical questions occupy him; Christianity did not prompt him to engage

in indefatigable activity for the sake of his neighbor. No, he accepted mainly the external, ritualistic side of Christianity, which became for him just as strong a tradition, just as sacrosanct as other centuries-old customs. Trivial rituals became for him more important than substantive truths; from smokers of tobacco he turned with revulsion as from apostates; the change of a letter in a book became the basis of the most important schisms. And to this day among the people pagan rituals survive, so mixed up with the Christian as to be indistinguishable. It is sufficient to point to marriage and other rites, still practiced today as the fresh, eternal flowers of popular life.

Of course, given such natural circumstances, given such a national character and the estrangement of Russia from the ancient world, Russian history could not be as rich in great phenomena as the history of the West. But the Russian people are capable of developing; they belong to the family of European peoples, and, despite all their peculiarities and the utter modesty of their historical achievement, the Russian people have developed parallel with the Europeans. Patriarchal life, based on blood relations, prevailed originally in both the East and the West. But no tribe submitted so profoundly as the Slavic tribe to this natural form of organization. Its residual effects are still felt among us. On the other hand, no tribe was less able to move beyond the patriarchal life by means of internal differentiation and to create from its own resources new forms of social organization. Whereas in the West loyalty to the feudal prince [*druzinnoe nachalo*], along with the related concepts of personal freedom [*lichnost'*] and voluntary associations, developed organically, for us it was an alien notion. Patriarchal society was shaken by an influx of foreign influences, and when its internal insolvency finally showed, the Slavic tribes proved incapable of creating new forms of civic organization. To do this they needed to rely on an external authority, so they were forced to summon the Varangians, their old enemies. They left it to the Varangians to rule over them and to establish order.

This remarkable event, which has merited the attention of all historians, clearly demonstrates the passive qualities of the Slavic tribe and the inability of patriarchal leaders to unite themselves in an alliance based on their own forces and activity.

The Varangian princely retinue finally destroyed society based on the clan, and little by little replaced blood ties with voluntary alliances based on the will of individuals. But as we have noted, the principle of individuality [*lichnost'*] was unable to generate a rich culture or [to serve as a foundation for] significant social agglomerations. Torn from their natural social moorings, individuals plunged themselves into the nomadic life, and it was then that began the chaotic popular nomadism that characterized the so-called appanage period. Everyone—princes and boyars, servants, merchants, and peasants—surrendered to nomadic impulses; they all moved about the entire expanse of broad Russia, nowhere stopping to

settle, nowhere shaping solid and durable forms of social organization. Even the free cities of Pskov and Novgorod, where social life was more developed, were examples of such disorder as could rarely be found elsewhere [in Europe].

Princes were the first to settle down, and, by so doing, they became the true founders and builders of the Russian land. Chaotic nomadism could not continue; order was needed, and so there appeared sovereign princes [*gosudari*] who arrogated to themselves political power, gradually reduced the scope of nomadism, and finally compelled the nomads to submit to the state's authority. There was no protracted, spirited resistance [from below], but it was hard to force the wandering masses to settle down and assume permanent obligations. Everyone fled from his place: the boyars fled to Lithuania, urban tradespeople [*posadskie*] and peasants fled from the lands to which they had been bound. It was no easy matter to establish a [modern] state in the Russian land. Ivan IV had to arm himself with all the fury of a dread king, Boris Godunov had to employ all the guile of a clever politician in order to put an end to nomadism. But the sovereign princes had barely managed to introduce a certain order when all the downtrodden elements again rebelled and broke out of it. The Time of Troubles arrived. Pretenders, boyars, Cossacks, slaves, peasants, Polish and Russian hordes—all wandered across Russia, roaming everywhere without a goal, without a plan, without rational design of any kind. But this was already the last festival of the old way of life; the people had grown sufficiently mature to prefer living in a modern state to chaotic wandering. Moreover, the Time of Troubles threatened the very foundations of national identity—the Russian nationality and the Orthodox faith. Invasion by foreigners was a bitter experience for Russians. The people rose up, this time of their own accord, without compulsion from above and, after a desperate effort, expelled the Poles and selected their own tsar. Afterward, the people again sank back into their lazy and submissive state, trusting their future fate to the government they had established.

The first Romanovs reintroduced order, but it soon became apparent that to rule in the old way was impossible, that a strong state cannot survive without thought and enlightenment. Before Peter the Great, Russia succeeded in elaborating a rudimentary form of social organization; now was the time to add rationality and proportion to this system—to enliven it by thought. So Peter the Great turned, as a pupil, to the Western peoples, the guardians of thought and enlightenment. The Russian tsar donned a sailor's jacket in order to serve the cause of [secular Western] education, which he wished to transplant into his fatherland. This great and noble enterprise demarcated a new direction in Russian history; since that time, secular education has spread and become ever more important in Russia. The Russian people are now part of the European family and are one of the peoples governing the course of historical events. Russia's external power has grown remarkably; domestically, the realm has developed and become

stronger—an army and navy have appeared as if by miracle, the resources of the treasury have multiplied, education has spread, and there has appeared a literature in which talented individuals display their gifts, glorifying the Russian name. Whereas earlier the government was the source of all social institutions, of all measures for order and improvement, so [under Peter the Great] it now again led the new movement and fostered education. The government compelled Russians to study grammar and forcibly implanted on virgin soil science, art, industry, new manners, and customs. But it was also evident that the Russian man easily submitted to foreign influence; once having been forcibly divorced from ancient prejudices, having set off on a new course, he completely enslaved himself to the new way; he disavowed his old identity, borrowed a new language and customs, Frenchified himself, and, with a frenzy, now persecuted everything native, everything that earlier had been thought sacred. On one hand, the lower classes, which the reform did not affect, remained a stubborn negation of the foreign; on the other hand, the higher Estate transformed itself into a senseless negation of everything Russian, and, of course, in its still childish stage of development, it at first adopted only the superficial trappings of Western life and only later, little by little, did it investigate their rational content.

This quick glance at Russian history is enough to demonstrate that the government has always been a driving force in our development and progress. The Russian people, given their passivity, were not so constituted as to develop on their own initiative, without the state's interference, a multifaceted culture. The government led the people by the hand, and the people blindly followed its guide. For this reason there is no nation in Europe where the government is more powerful than ours. At no time in Russian history have the people posed a real threat to our government. The government should have fought harder against ignorance, stupidity, centuries-old and deeply rooted customs than it did against [the prospect of] serious, energetic opposition [from below]. The government's actual enemies were the seditious boyars, the wandering Cossacks, the ignorant defenders of the past. But the boyars had no roots in the people and could oppose the tsars only by secret intrigues and regionally based cabals; it was easy to deal with the Cossacks by instituting a standing army, while the devotees of the old ways [the Old Believers] could act only by silent and dull opposition and not by open force. There were only a few free cities; with one of them [Novgorod] there was a short struggle, but another [Pskov] surrendered without murmur. It was not so much independent centers and alliances that interfered with governmental activity as it was the absence of social connections, the universal disorder, and the enormous distances that made difficult the extension of the central government's power. But as these obstacles were overcome, the government's importance increased. With the growth of the population, with the establishment of stable social relationships,

with the development of the state apparatus, with the growth of the government's resources, obstacles collapsed and the government grew stronger and stronger. Today it is stronger than ever before: an enormous army submitting to the state's desires alone, an enormous bureaucracy spreading across the Russian land and everywhere carrying out the center's decisions and orders, a universal uncomplaining submissiveness taught to us by centuries of Russian history—all these factors make the government's power limitless and unconditional. Any criticism is immediately silenced, any complaint crushed, any whim [of the sovereign] may be carried out in the most distant parts of the empire.

The government's great power is also the source of its vulnerability. There is no surer axiom in politics than that the state must never act with too much persistence. Statecraft is nothing but a series of uninterrupted compromises. Its secret consists in knowing how to reconcile various demands and interests of society, in satisfying each as far as others will permit and thus establishing universal unity, in integrating these demands and interests into an overall plan based on the entire society's welfare. Only by such activity can the government attain real strength, for through it the government will generate support everywhere. Once having received its legitimate due, every social interest becomes a defender of the established legal order and of the government. But if the government, proceeding selfishly, stubbornly supports one social interest and ignores all others, it will inevitably go to extremes, alienate its popular support, and arouse dissatisfaction. Precisely by seeking to make its social foundation unassailably strong and durable, it will undermine this very foundation. Superficially it may look ever more formidable, but in fact it will grow weaker, for in the process of acquiring the external trappings of greater authority, it will lose its base of support.

This is an inescapable axiom which must be borne in mind in governing any polity. But if, as a general proposition, each social interest, each substantive demand deserves an appropriate hearing, it is all the more crucial never to ignore the totality of needs and interests constituting popular life. The government and the people—these are the two basic elements of which any polity is composed. Each has its place and each must have the freedom of activity requisite to it. The people compose the body politic, but the government is the head and master. The former live and act, give birth to various designs, demands, interests; the latter makes coherent this varied activity, fosters harmony in society, prevents one set of private goals from interfering one with another, facilitates their development, and ultimately makes the people aware of what is good for the whole. But political unity does not have to develop at the expense of diversity. Governmental activity must not preclude the autonomy of the people, for popular autonomy is a basic precondition of public life. Of course, the government cannot permit a particular interest group to take up arms against another and to compel it to behave in a

certain way, for this would be to legalize anarchy; yet to harbor and express views and demands different from the government's views and demands should be a people's legal right, for without it the people will lose all autonomy and forfeit all political significance. Every social interest around which individuals coalesce must live and develop in its own way, according to the laws of its own nature and not according to standards imposed from without. To develop properly it needs freely to express its grievances and its attitude toward the existing governmental system. Only then will it be able to assume its appropriate place in popular life. For the government to establish norms of behavior and opinion and to bend everything to these norms, to render the people voiceless and silent before the government, is to kill in the people any life and to destroy one of the fundamentals of society. The suppression of popular activity by the government is the suppression of diversity for the sake of unity, the substitution of a dead machine for a living organism, the substitution of external forms for the inner development of social forces. For, once having suppressed the people's autonomy, the government itself will inevitably become a mere external form and a dead machine. Only from the people can it draw spirit and strength and life. The people live as autonomous subjects, and it is for their sake that the government itself is established, having no other purpose than to promote the common welfare. The people are that very society for whose sake all governmental institutions exist. Why deprive the people of [the opportunity to] participate in their own affairs?

To do so would obviously contradict good political sense. Both elements [the government and the people] should function side by side; they should help one another and should collaborate in working for the common public purpose. For this reason the dominance of either the government or the people always has deleterious consequences. As soon as one begins to outweigh the other, society experiences discord; a reaction sets in and there commences a historical process tending to restore the requisite equilibrium. The entire political life of states consists in the interaction of these two elements, in the eternal search for balance between them. History presents us with an edifying spectacle that all those governing the fates of peoples must study, for a short-sighted, thoughtless concern for the present alone will lead rulers to ruinous delusions. Within such a narrow perspective, transient concerns may appear to be vitally important, while great historical forces that have developed continually over centuries may seem to be matters of relative insignificance. Only study of the past can provide us the key to understanding the present or can afford us the possibility of divining the future. Let us see what that greater teacher reveals to those attentive to her voice.

If we turn to the origin of the history of contemporary societies, to that period when, having abandoned their original patriarchal structure, they began their historical lives, we see the almost total dominance of the popular element. In

the Middle Ages the state as such did not exist, governmental authority was almost nonexistent, social ties were to the highest degree unstable and capricious. But this extreme circumstance engendered a powerful countervailing force. Lacking government, the people were but a chaotic mass subject to the reign of unbridled arbitrariness. Instead of relationships based on mutual benefit and justice, there prevailed the right of the strong; the majority was trampled under the feet of mighty personalities. Endless civil strife was ignited and anarchy ruled, universal and unbearable. [Strife and anarchy] generated a historical reaction, a movement to establish government that would introduce order and peace. The desire to avert endless troubles created a reaction against fractiousness and anarchy. The modern state arose, and history's main agenda became the gradual development and strengthening of the heretofore missing element in society—namely, the government. Anarchy diminished, order was established, the state apparatus was constructed, the government's resources were augmented, the authority of political agencies increased. The popular element became more and more secondary, and the government became ever more powerful.

Yet this dispensation also went to an extreme. Accustomed to following its own plan, the government began to consider itself a surrogate for the rest of society and to lose sight of society's other constituent element. The people became completely estranged from participation in public affairs. Every popular murmur was suppressed, and the government's voice alone filled the general void. At that point discord became evident in society; again it became apparent that there was some kind of important shortcoming, that the fullness of life had disappeared, that something essential was lacking in society. Everything became unstuck. No matter what measures were taken, they proved useless, for between legislation and its implementation there was a vast gap. The government became essentially powerless, and among the people dissatisfaction was reborn.

This is the situation in which we find ourselves today. Since the fifteenth century our state has evolved and the government's authority has grown; but only in our time has it reached an unbearable extreme. In Muscovite Russia popular life was not so restricted as it is now. At that time there was such disorder in both society and in government that the government was shackled hand and foot. With every movement it felt its own impotence. It could neither learn of social problems nor undertake any successful action [to remedy them] without the people's cooperation, and it was constantly forced to summon land councils [*zemskie dумы*] for advice on the management of public affairs. Individuals found it easy to avoid not only oppressive authority but also their legal obligations. They simply resettled themselves in other places, and, given the existing chaos, it was impossible to pursue or to find them. Entire communes not infrequently made use of this freedom. If cities or villages found too onerous the authority of an appointed governor,

they simply sent money to Moscow and obtained for themselves favorable charters that freed them from the burdensome administrator. It even happened that junior officials, without authorization [from the central government], changed superiors, and this was thought to be nothing unusual. Government was so distant and so weak that it could not resolve justified complaints and had to allow all kinds of license and disorders.

Peter the Great's reforms put an end to all this. The state had built itself up and now ceased to tolerate the unauthorized actions of junior officials as well as exceptions in the general rules of administration. But the government had not yet acquired the kind of dominance [over national life] that would have made it oppressive to the people. The government's attention was directed toward general public concerns; it was building the army and navy, stimulating industry, implanting education. Citizens carried heavy responsibilities for the sake of Russia's greatness, but the government did not intrude into everyday life. Citizens did not ceaselessly confront some administrative body set up to supervise their every action. Authority gradually concentrated itself in the center, but in the provinces people still lived freely and easily, worrying little about the authorities. The government was thought something distant and glorious, something raising Russia's might and lifting high the fatherland's banner. On the throne Russians saw the genius of Peter, the liberal wisdom of Catherine II, and they embraced the throne as the source of the fatherland's glory and prosperity.

In the nineteenth century everything changed. The age-old process of state building finally completed itself: the administrative apparatus, gradually extending itself from its trunk like a tree, pushed its branches into every region of the country, while centralization crowned the whole edifice and made administration the obedient tool of a single will. The new bureaucratic machine enabled government power to flow unhindered like a stream from center to peripheries and to return from the peripheries to the center. Now humble citizens saw the government close up, face to face. The administrative apparatus grasped us from all sides, and the more it expanded itself and branched out, the more restricted was popular activity. The government was all-encompassing, dominating everywhere, penetrating everywhere, and the people grew ever weaker and finally shrank before it. Today it is impossible to take a single step without bumping into some official, without seeing in front of oneself a manager, a director, a supervisor. On every street one meets a policeman or gendarme; on village roads, where formerly one never saw official uniforms, now rings the bell of the district police officer. And this does not occur without harm. For the humble citizen is powerless and voiceless before the most petty official, who to us is not a defender and protector but a person completely foreign and, in addition, most vile. We find ourselves narrowly and tightly bound in administrative swaddling clothes covering us from all sides, and

with every new day we sense ever more acutely that something important has gone out of life.

Meanwhile, the government's frightful dominance over national life grew ever greater as a result of its adoption of a faulty theory of administration. The inner logic of Russian history, the uncomplaining obedience of the people, bred in the government habits of despotism and arrogance; meanwhile, the conservative system borrowed from the Austrian court lent legitimacy to these habits and transformed them into theoretical conviction. Conservatism inculcated in government the notion that, besides itself, no other social element should exist in the realm, that every independent manifestation of life is lawless, something leading to troubles and revolutions, that a government desiring to preserve itself must suppress in the people every movement and all autonomous activity.

It was not difficult to create such a system in Russia. There were no obstacles; it was only necessary for the government to keep moving, oblivious to everything else, upon the same course. [The new ideology] demanded only that the government avoid distractions of the sort that may naturally issue from excessive solicitude for the popular welfare. Previously the government had been concerned about stimulating intellectual activity among the people, about spreading education; but now it was explained to the government that education engenders liberalism and atheism, that an educated people will inevitably want to participate in public affairs, and that revolution occurs when the government prohibits such harmful doctrines. The lesson was reinforced, of course, by obvious examples, and the government, giving in to such convincing proofs, renounced its former deeds. Public welfare, thought, intellectual development are compatible only with a certain degree of governmental power. These enterprises derive their vitality from the people and therefore require [that the people possess] a certain autonomy vis-à-vis the state; as soon as this autonomy is eliminated, they become estranged from and opposed to the government. It is only necessary [for the government] to cross a certain line, to move further away from the people, and these interests take on a completely different light; whereas formerly they were [the government's] allies, now they are inimical to it. Our government bravely crossed this line, and the consequence was the general decay of the state apparatus. From this came those social problems from which we now suffer. Let us try to enumerate them.

Once impregnated by the conservative spirit, the government's first concern was to find obedient servants [to staff the bureaucracy]. This was not difficult; it was only necessary to turn to the habitual slaves and cringing lackeys who, even without it being demanded, are always ready to satisfy the authorities. The government sought obedient tools and found them: it staffed itself with officials personally devoted to the tsar. Statesmen were replaced by courtiers. But the state did not benefit from this. Do courtiers care about the popular welfare and keep

the government safe from delusions? They expect nothing from the people, but for them the tsar is the source of all favors, and personal advantage prompts them to indulge the tsars and to uphold the tsars' delusions. Only by such means do the courtiers become powerful in the state; only in an atmosphere of universal silence does their voice have a certain significance. They substitute themselves for public opinion. The government inquires of them when it wishes to seek support, and their judgments pass for the voice of Russia. Through them the government receives information about the nation's condition; they decide what to tell the government and what to conceal. In other words, given the suppression of popular autonomy, they are the only mediators between tsar and people.

It cannot be said, however, that these mediators are very conscientious. They were summoned to serve the crown because of their loyalty and obedience, and they do not go beyond that. Their only goal is to please the tsar personally, to keep away from him every unpleasant sight, and by servile bows to win favors for themselves. Standing at the summit of society, they pay attention only to the sun shining above them, and they care little about what goes on below. If you plunge yourself into the middle of an ocean wave, you see below monsters moving about and eating the small denizens of the deep; yet on the surface of the water everything is placid and calm! And in fact everything in Russia is improbably placid and calm. The most scandalous abuses are carefully concealed; crying grievances are kept from the tsar's hearing; everything is arranged, smoothed over and presented in such a favorable light that it looks beautiful. The truth is inexorably persecuted because it exposes both tsars and courtiers. A triple barrier of high courtiers keeps the truth from the throne, and the government remains completely ignorant about what Russia is actually thinking and doing. Sealed off from the people by servile courtiers, the throne stands isolated, and the people have ceased to regard the throne as a sacred thing to be trusted and loved.

The government itself senses its estrangement from the people, or, rather, it considers this estrangement to be a necessary rule of politics. The conservative system proclaims that the people are dangerous, that they harbor revolutionary ideas, and that the government must find support not in the people's affection but in an enormous army powerful enough to defeat any movement. Naturally, in accordance with these principles, the government has increased the size of its army to the outer limits and has devoted to the army its greatest attentions. The army has become the model for the entire state apparatus; everything must run on a military basis. Military discipline has become the fundamental principle of government; it has been introduced everywhere—in the civil service, in private relationships and in the public sphere. Ignorant generals have been appointed trustees of universities; military discipline and instruction have been introduced in educational institutions.

Yet this enormous army was not really necessary. No one seriously contem-

plated a foreign war, and, domestically, everyone obeyed without reference to the army. Hence the army became a toy. Instead of worrying about improving the army's fighting capacity, its material basis, the soldiers' morale, or officers' education, the government devoted its attention to superficial matters. Inspections, parades, maneuvers served the tsar as amusements; his concern was with decorous uniforms and elegant maneuvers. When finally, as a result of rashness [in Russian foreign policy], war burst upon us unexpectedly [in the Crimea], when there was a real challenge for the army, then its inadequacy became apparent at every step. The adversary encroached upon Russia's borders, and yet the Russian government could not oppose it with equal forces. The government had at its disposal neither sufficient material means for effectively waging war nor able generals. Constant levying of recruits had exhausted the people, while the badly equipped recruits themselves have died by the thousands without advantage to the state. The elite guards have been held far from the war theater, while hastily recruited levies have been sent to the Crimea—levies that have proved worthless in the actual fighting.

Similar shortcomings are felt in civil administration. The government's goal has been to transform the bureaucracy into a machine that will always operate reliably as an obedient tool of central authority. The rank system has functioned in such a way as to reinforce obedience; the failure to follow established bureaucratic routine, the systematic transmission of orders from the top to the bottom of the apparatus, has led to the replacement of otherwise capable officials whose independence and convictions did not harmonize with the government's will. The government actually has achieved its goal. A bureaucratic machine now exists; its methods of operation, its protocols governing written communications, have been refined to express the most precise nuances; bureaucratic discipline is observed as never before. Yet the bureaucratic machine lacks a soul, and from the perspective of public affairs it is practically worthless. Respect for rank leads officials to cultivate the favor of their superiors rather than to think about the public welfare or systematically improving matters under their jurisdiction. State service now means serving one's superiors. Instead of applying their talents and zeal for the nation's benefit, officials give priority to personal relations, for, beginning with the highest officials in the government and descending to the most petty ones, each may profit more from sycophancy than from actual performance of particular service obligations. Meanwhile, the bureaucratic routine has led to an appalling multiplication of paperwork, which has now replaced real business. To take care of a matter means to make a formal written reply to a request, to write something on a piece of paper; it means to copy down and pass along data. The upper bureaucracy must make do with such documents and take for granted that the reported data are accurate, for it has no other means of gathering information. So on the one hand, the circle of high officials obscures and replaces public opinion, while on the other

hand, bureaucratic paperwork obscures and replaces an understanding of the real situation.

From this issues one of Russia's greatest problems—the omnipresent official lie. One can say without exaggeration that every official statement is nothing other than a lie. All reports and communiqués of high state officials are essentially lies; all reports and communiqués of governors and other provincial authorities are lies; all statistical data are lies; all assurances of loyalty to and affection for the throne are lies; all public ceremonies honoring higher officials, such as, for example, government-authorized presentations of awards, are lies; finally, even most patriotic declarations are nothing but lies. After all, we have watched private individuals give money to the government for patriotic causes, but nine-tenths of these gifts have been given under duress. We have read certain statements by members of the nobility in which nobles have assured the government of their readiness to sacrifice everything for the tsar and the fatherland, but when it was time to select levies for army duty, every noble strove to decline this honor. Under a faulty system of government the most sacred of human sentiments are perverted into disgraceful flattery and servile fear. And how could it be otherwise? When everyone must bow silently before the government, who will dare speak the truth? Only free public opinion can serve as a check on the public utterances of officials whose personal advantage always forces them to flatter the government. When public opinion is suppressed by all available means, when all who would dare to disagree with the servile choir of official praises and assurances are forced to be silent, then the lie necessarily insinuates itself into every aspect of public life. The government deprives itself of the possibility to learn of the people's real condition and to exercise restraint over the actions of its own agents, while the people lose all trust in the government.

Another no less serious problem in the existing order is the pandemic corruption of officials, both civilian and military. Abuses are the rule rather than the exception in our administrative system. As we noted earlier, it is enough [from the official perspective] to implement a law on paper; as far as the government is concerned, how the law is implemented in fact remains a mystery. Taking advantage of this state of affairs, the authorities permit themselves to do anything that strikes their fancy. They know that the cry of the oppressed will never reach the throne, and that at the very foot of the throne they will find themselves powerful protectors. Thus the power entrusted to them becomes an instrument of oppression; the law, which should be the people's defense, serves only as a means for enriching officials. Every government measure, every encounter with citizens becomes a pretext for officials to extract more money [to line their own pockets]. And subordinates remain defenseless and without recourse before their superiors because they are in no way protected against administrative arbitrariness, and

complaints are themselves considered a violation of discipline. It is the duty of the highest state officials both to supervise those junior officials who actually execute the law and to prosecute those who abuse the law, yet wherever possible, these higher officials try to cover up abuses. On one hand, a desire to please the sovereign compels them to present everything in the rosiest light; on the other hand, flattery prompts them to look leniently upon their subordinates and to conceal lawlessness. Finally, many of these same high officials are themselves no strangers to bribes. For convenience they take money from their subordinates, selling positions and extracting from the takers an annual fee [*obrok*]; in turn, their subordinates take money from their juniors and so on until finally citizens pay out of their own pockets the salaries not allocated by law to high as well as low government officials.

A priori one might assume that government is established for the benefit of the governed, but in reality it turns out to exist solely for the benefit of the rulers who constitute a bureaucratically organized corporation based on the principle of mutual assistance in the robbery and oppression of their subjects.

It is, of course, difficult for a genuinely noble and capable person to submit to a system that transforms him either into a machine for sending letters or into the wheel of a hydraulic press designed to squeeze all life and resources out of the people. Moreover, noble and capable persons are not given a chance [to affect policy], except in very unusual cases when they enjoy the personal protection of an important high official. Consequently, there is a third serious problem—the widespread incompetence of those in government. The present crisis has demonstrated how few people there are in our government with expertise and talent. The few who have these qualities have been found either in the lower ranks or far from the central sphere that ruins everyone who enters its charmed circle. It is as if incompetence has become a prerequisite for receiving a responsible office. For the most part, the incompetent person has neither an independent character that would be unpleasant to the authorities, nor convictions in disharmony with prevailing views. He agrees with everything and serves as the most uncomplaining and obedient tool for implementing imperial orders on paper. One could entrust to him an entire ministry and everything would go on as before. It is only necessary that under his command there be someone initiated in the secrets of bureaucratic routine and knowing how cleverly to arrange matters so that the interests of high officials will not clash. People of this last type constitute the business section of administration, just as the policy and executive sections consist of those whose courtier's tact replaces statecraft.

After this is it surprising that our legislation has failed to advance and that the most crucial political and social problems remain unresolved? We have a Senate, a remnant from an earlier institutional structure, which does not fit at all with the most recently created agencies. Its multitudinous and utterly superfluous areas of

jurisdiction should have been abolished long ago, while its genuinely important role as Russia's final court of appeals should have been emphasized. Yet the Senate has become a refuge for those high officials who are judged as incompetents even in our administration, and thus Russia's supreme court has become a place of exile for old men and idiots. We have a trial system that protects no one and that delays cases for decades by requiring submission of endless documentation. We have a financial system that rests all its weight on the lower classes and is a model of injustice and inefficiency in taxing the nation's resources. Finally, we have the serf system, an ulcerous wound, an institution swallowing an entire third of the nation's populace. Both equity and the interests of the state demand the abolition of serfdom. The illegality and harm generated by serfdom are so apparent as to be obvious even to a conservative government.

The government senses the incongruity of maintaining serfdom and would like to ameliorate this problem but does not know how to go about it. In general, recent legislation has been confused and contradictory. Every minute new laws are published, so that a decade's addendum to the *Code of Laws* almost exceeds the original code in length; yet among all these laws there is not one that can bring real benefit to the state, not one that can cure any of the terrible wounds of contemporary life. Individual decrees and half-measures often contradict one another; they are published today and are repealed or ignored tomorrow. Timid, venal, and incompetent hands have transformed our body of laws into chaos. There is no one in the government who can point to true principles, to the essential needs of the people; and if someone can do so, he keeps silent, so that by servile and mute obedience he may purchase for himself the tsar's favor.

Such are the political consequences of the hypertrophied development of governmental authority. Obviously, such a system could not help but have a deleterious impact on the people. The main goal of the conservative doctrine was, as I indicated above, to suppress popular initiatives of any kind and to thwart popular independence. In a sense the goal was commendable: by destroying opposition the government hoped to avoid internal dissension and to preserve its unity with the people. Unfortunately, the means were inappropriate to attainment of the ends. If the people could have been completely stricken from public life or transformed into a mute machine, then the conservative system would have been irreproachably correct. But fortunately, that could not be done. One cannot shake the people off the face of the earth; yet, if one forbids the people to speak, if one strives to create harmony by force, the people quietly become alienated from the government and refuse to cooperate with it.

That is what happened in Russia. What could have been easier for government than to uphold an alliance with the people, an alliance fortified by centuries? And yet the foolishness of the conservative system managed to weaken even this

centuries-old loyalty. Having become conservative, the government began mercilessly to persecute every independent initiative; meanwhile, the idea of the people fostered by the government itself grew ever stronger and bolder and demanded for itself greater latitude. The very growth of governmental power generated a popular demand for greater freedom. When the government was but a distant authority, it was possible not to get entangled in its grasp, it was possible to overlook rare cases of arbitrariness. But when the government's presence was felt in every aspect of daily life, it inevitably provoked a political response; legal protection from administrative arbitrariness became a necessity. Indeed, how can one not criticize the actions of an authority that one sees everywhere around oneself! How can one tolerate restrictions and abuses that one encounters at every step? For us freedom of speech which exposes the shortcomings of our body of laws and reveals the abuses of our rulers has now become essential, a necessity, yet the exercise of this freedom has been more and more circumscribed. The consequence is discord between the government's aims and the people's demands, discord that has led to the destruction of the ancient alliance [between crown and people].

Popular alienation from the government has had an impact in every sphere of public life. All thinking and enlightened persons have concluded that between themselves and the government there is nothing in common. They hunger for freedom of thought, for the enlightened and free activity of the mind, but this freedom is suppressed by all available means. They involuntarily recoil from a government which has trampled on all their fundamental beliefs and convictions. The lower classes view the government as an oppressive agency gripping them from all sides and resting upon them with all its weight. There is no hut, no corner in the Russian nation where the government's unclean hand has not reached; and wherever it has been, it has never come away empty; wherever it has intruded itself, there invariably is heard the moan of the oppressed. For the lower classes the government may be characterized in a single word: the treasury—a word ominous and frightening to the people. It is, in the eyes of the people, a monster swallowing the money and sucking the blood of poor citizens. The treasury is the people's natural enemy. Ignoring just demands and complaints, the treasury's sole ambition is to squeeze out of the humble as much money as possible, and, for their part, the humble do not consider it a crime to steal from and deceive the treasury when this can be done without fear of punishment. It never occurs to the people that the treasury exists for their benefit. The interests of treasury and people are so different that they resemble two opposing parties that, despite formal assurances of mutual love and respect, secretly try to play on each other as many dirty tricks as possible.

Yet how touching are official expressions of loyalty and submission! How the people crowd all official ceremonies! How movingly the bribe-taking and servile writers describe the Russian people's love for the established authorities

and the felicity which they enjoy under the blessed rule of autocratic monarchs! Officially everyone is improbably happy, yet if one could but lift this false curtain, how much different would be the spectacle unfolding before our eyes! It is rare for a private citizen to meet anyone contented with the actual state of affairs in Russia. Everywhere you hear endless complaints about oppression and bribery. Such is the theme of all conversations about public affairs; such are the innumerable stories which circulate everywhere, in the capitals and in the provinces, both in public meetings and around the domestic hearth. Such stories have educated the younger generation, who from their early childhood have learned to fear the government and to distrust the legal order. Under this influence a new civic life develops, a civic life full of bitterness and mistrust. It has replaced the former patriarchal ways, so carefree and tranquil, the former life on the plough so characteristic of the Russian people. How frightfully Russian society has changed in recent times! Everything that our fathers loved and to which they bowed has become foreign to us. Love for the throne and trust in the government have been beaten violently out of us. We have no memories like those that formerly delighted our grandfathers. Even the fatherland has lost its charm for us, for our public life is full of things that vex the soul and insult all noble human aspirations. No one dares say the word aloud, but secretly everyone grumbles and grows indignant.

Everyone understands, however, that grumbling and indignation lead nowhere. Active opposition, much less revolutionary opposition, is not at all in our character. For that we are too soft, compliant, and submissive. Our entire history has facilitated the growth of governmental authority, and before that power we are reduced to nothing. We know that the government is everything and we are nothing, and we see no way out of this predicament. Everyone is dissatisfied, but everyone understands that this dissatisfaction cannot be assuaged and so everyone resignedly views the situation as hopeless. Consequently, indifference to public affairs is universal. Everyone sees that he can do nothing for the fatherland's benefit, and therefore he concentrates on his private life and cares only about his personal affairs. If an individual runs into a problem with the law, he tries, where possible, to get around the law; if he has to make a monetary sacrifice for the nation, he tries to give as little as possible, and even this he gives reluctantly and under duress. There is no public spirit, no public interest, and this imparts to all public life the stamp of triviality and boredom. Not being drawn into nobler activity, most people surrender themselves to trivial calculations and vulgar passions, which are poor substitutes for intellectual passion and political engagement; those rare individuals with a more elevated vision are bored and succumb to despondency amid a monotonous, colorless, and petty life that offers no spiritual nourishment.

In general, intellectual life suffers much under the existing governmental system. Enlightenment cannot spread without a greater or lesser degree of liberty.

Science and art are disciplines that do not bend to the government's prescriptions; they have their own methods and sources of inspiration over which no one has power. Science cannot change at the government's insistence the logical coherence of its concepts or the incontrovertible meaning of certain facts. Art seeks inspiration in life; it depicts the surrounding good and evil as they appear to the artist's eyes, not as the government understands them. The government is no judge of art at all. It cannot order an artist to think this way or that, to study a phenomenon in such a way but not in another way, to depict this rather than that side of life. Science and art do not subordinate themselves to such demands, for they are by their very nature free. You can destroy them, but you cannot direct them in an arbitrary fashion.

The government itself seems finally to have arrived at this realization. Having no tolerance for freedom itself, the government cannot tolerate those things that are even indirectly connected with freedom. But cowed by the opinion of the educated world, the government has not dared completely to eradicate science and literature; rather, it has simply pressured them whenever possible, so that they have come to a very sorry pass. The censorship regulations are so strict that one cannot write anything having a humane content. Every thought is hunted like contraband, and even facts are expunged from publications that might throw a not-altogether-favorable light on the existing political order or on those political, religious, and moral principles that are now accepted as the official norms. In educational institutions military instruction and military discipline have been introduced; ignorant generals have taken charge of our national system of education; universities have lost their former prerogatives and even the number of students has been reduced. One wonders what could be better for the state than the largest possible number of educated people? One wonders what to inculcate in the younger generation if not a desire to study? And yet this most exalted human aspiration is the object of prohibitions; the government regards education as dangerous to itself, and it limits the number of students.

Consequently, is it really surprising that intellectual interests in society have diminished, that zeal for science and art has diminished? Instead of the several hundred students who formerly entered our major universities each year, the universities now field hardly enough students to fill even the limited quotas. And the cause of this is not the war, for [restrictions on university enrollment] predated the war. The cause is governmental measures that impede intellectual activity. Educationally, Russia is going backward and the government will gain nothing by this, for [its hostility to education] has produced more dissatisfied youths than could have been produced by all the journal articles in the world. Everyone who has the least respect for education must involuntarily lose respect for a government that suppresses education. Only the most patent vulgarity can enable one to describe

the government as enlightened or as a protector of science and art. Such a claim is a lie, refuted by facts at hand.

Education is also connected with Russia's material welfare. Industry cannot get along without science, but science in Russia is in disfavor. It is futile for the government to funnel personnel into those branches of science that have practical benefits. Science does not submit itself to such a disingenuous approach. Scientific advancement accrues from concentrated attention to basic science, not from [superficial attention to] its practical applications. It is necessary that there be a lively public participation in science, but this participation must spring from forces other than the government's dictates. One must first grant freedom to science, and then science will yield practical benefits.

In Russia, however, even the practical application of science suffers the same disregard as theory, and this disregard naturally is reflected in the primitive condition of industry. The ignorance of our managers and manufacturers is vast; there is only a handful of exceptions to the general rule. In most cases, when knowledge or a special skill is required, a foreigner is quickly sent for, and the administration of the firm in question is entrusted to him. This habit is very expensive; moreover, a foreigner, especially one not knowing the Russian language, usually finds it hard to deal with our workers. Those factory owners who do not have the means to hire a foreigner usually follow an age-old routine, make the most elementary mistakes, and needlessly waste time, money, and labor. Obviously, our industry is bound to suffer from this lack of enlightenment.

Other factors also contribute [to the primitive condition of our industry], factors that also ultimately arise from the same source. For the successful development of industry the first prerequisite is civil liberty, which provides the opportunity to use one's energies and talents in the most profitable fashion. Moreover, industrial growth presumes an active, energetic populace, for otherwise there will be no entrepreneurial spirit; it presumes the existence of legal safeguards against governmental interference and, in general, a system of government that will not hamper commercial exchanges. Finally, it presumes the development of society's material resources such as credit, communications, and so on. And we lack all these prerequisites for industrial growth. Serfdom diverts from work a significant portion of the people's energies and constitutes an obstacle to any improvement in agriculture; the financial system rests all its weight on the lower classes; the suppression of popular initiative and independence undermines popular industriousness; the faulty ideology adopted by the government generates ruinous restrictions for industry and trade, and it destroys private credit without which commercial exchanges are impossible; finally, the absence of good roads hinders market activity and depresses productivity everywhere. The government does not permit private entrepreneurs to build a communications network because

it wants to do everything itself, and it does everything slowly and badly. It has at its disposal insufficient capital [for building a proper road network], and of those funds which are earmarked for the communications network, two-thirds goes into the pockets of officials and contractors.

Thus both the intellectual and material interests of the state suffer from the government's short-sightedness. Indeed, this short-sightedness has become so pronounced as to affect all aspects of life. The passive qualities of the Russian people and the nature of the historical development to which these qualities have contributed have led us to a situation in which the government is all-powerful. But instead of cautiously taking advantage of this omnipotence and, in consciousness of its strength, permitting the people to exercise their autonomy, instead of stimulating in Russian society the initiative that is wanting in it and which, given the national character, cannot be dangerous to the central government, the government has concentrated all its efforts on increasing the state's power and has ignored the other elements of public life. Little by little, the government has completely separated itself from the people. In the army it has created for itself a base of support separate from the citizenry; in the bureaucracy it has an obedient instrument; the tsar is surrounded by officials who are personally loyal to him but who have nothing in common with the people. From all sides the government has fenced itself off and shielded itself from the light. It lives and moves in a separate sphere, a sphere into which nothing penetrates from the lowlands where there is not audible even a whimper of civic life. Inside the government's charmed circle everything is unique, utterly distinctive, bearing no resemblance to things on the outside. There is official loyalty, official flattery, official falsehood, official satisfaction, official welfare, official information, official articles, official discipline, official routine. All of this is created and maintained with great effort for the tsar's amusement, but, unfortunately, all is illusion. It is a soap bubble which has taken shape around the omnipotent lord; it blinds him by its rainbow colors. Meanwhile, the people live their lives, mute and submissive, but not at all happy and contented. But who cares? Courtiers treat the people with arrogant contempt. The people are duty-bound to be satisfied with their lot. Dissatisfaction is something pernicious and seditious, something that cannot be tolerated, and, if anyone dares to say that Russia is unhappy, then he is classified as a Jacobin who ought to be thrown into prison or exiled to a distant province of the empire. If not for this purpose, then why does the [political police, the] Third Section of His Majesty's Chancellery exist?

Under such circumstances one cannot be surprised that Russia finds it difficult to wage war against foreign invaders. What good is all the great valor of the Russian people when their energies are sapped by the general corruption of the state apparatus, by the virtually universal corruption they see on all sides?

Russia has reached a critical moment in its historical life. The course that it

has pursued for several centuries turns out to be incorrect; Russia has pursued that course to its logical limits and now suffers from the most ruinous consequences. Such is the law of history. The people (and along with them the government) have long been walking down one road, obsessed by a single ideal embodying their deepest desires. But as they reached the end of the road, as they grasped all the implications of their ideal, they suddenly realized that the road was perhaps not the correct one, that the idea did not make full use of all the nation's resources. Extremism inevitably entails absurd consequences. The very process of achieving an extremist program reveals the bankruptcy of that program and suggests the need to alter one's course, to pursue another, more rational objective. Then comes the turning point. Everywhere discord and frustration make themselves felt; today it is apparent that the very constituent elements of the body politic that have heretofore been held in contempt by the government are precisely those elements needed to bring about improvements in the common welfare. Happy is the nation whose government is sufficiently prudent to recognize its shortcomings, to sense its mistakes, and to lead the people onto a new course. How much misfortune and civil strife this will save the people!

For Russia such a turning point has now arrived. Heretofore in Russia the body politic has existed in name only; now the spirit of public life must be suffused into this body. Heretofore the only actor on stage has been the government; now the people must be allowed to play their role as well. Centuries of obedience have atoned for the people's anarchistic impulses. The people have submitted to the state order; they have been educated for political life. Now they must be treated not as a child wrapped in swaddling clothes but as an adult who thinks and acts independently. We will remain grateful to our mentor and prepared to love him as before, if only he will understand our needs and satisfy our just desires. We do not demand rights peculiar to our social station, nor the limitation of tsarist authority—a limitation about which no one in Russia even thinks. We need freedom! We want the opportunity freely to express and develop our thoughts, so the tsar will know what Russia is thinking and doing and can govern us with a clear understanding of social conditions and with a rational love for his people.

Liberalism! This is the slogan of every educated and sensible person in Russia. This is the banner which can unite individuals from all spheres, all social Estates, all convictions. This is the word that can shape a powerful public opinion, if only we will shake off our self-destructive laziness and indifference to the common cause. This is the word that can heal our profoundest wounds, that can heal our inner corruption, that can give us the opportunity to stand next to other peoples and, with renewed strength, to set off on a great course a harbinger of which lies in the great achievements of the Russian nation. In liberalism is the whole future of Russia. May both the government and the people rally around this banner

with trust in each other and with the firm intention of reaching the avowed goal.

But what should be understood by the term *liberalism*? *Freedom* is a vague word. It may be either unlimited or limited, and, if unlimited freedom cannot be permitted, then in what should limited freedom consist? In short, what measures should a liberal government adopt and what should the liberal party in society desire?

Let us attempt to enumerate the chief principles connoted by the term *liberalism* and those measures which, in our view, are essential for Russia's prosperity.

1. *Freedom of conscience.* This is the first and most sacred right of a citizen, for if the government begins to concern itself with matters of conscience, then what will remain safe from it? A person's religious convictions are a sanctuary into which no one has the right to intrude. They constitute the inner world of his soul and do not fall under the jurisdiction of civil law, for law is public prescription applying only to citizens' public activities. Law defines citizens' rights and duties toward one another and toward the government, but a citizen's attitude toward God remains a matter of conscience. This means a person considers best for the salvation of his soul is no concern of the state. In this sphere one can act only by persuasion, not by force; persuasion is a matter for the church, to which must be left the right of counseling souls for salvation's sake. The law has no authority whatsoever here. It cannot compel a person to believe in one thing but not in another; coercion fosters only hypocrisy, not sincere worship. Legal coercion can have but one result: peaceful citizens, who heretofore have strictly discharged their public duties, will be insulted by interference in these most intimate matters and will become enemies of the law. Such a result would doubtless harm the state just as it would harm religious belief.

The legal code itself recognizes this principle, and it proclaims freedom of conscience as the fundamental right of all citizens in the Russian empire. Unfortunately, this freedom is limited in practice. Several millions of schismatics, [the Old Believers], constituting perhaps the most industrious and developed part of the Russian peasantry, not only do not have freedom of religion but are subjected to every kind of persecution and oppression. While pagans are allowed to bow to their idols without interference, those sects closest to Russian Orthodoxy are persecuted in every way. Such an unjust contradiction in our institutions must be eliminated. Moreover, it is also necessary to abolish legal sanctions meted out both for failure to carry out religious duties and for conversion from Orthodoxy to other confessions. This is again a matter of conscience in which the civil law has no right to meddle. Finally, justice demands that oppressive restrictions be lifted from the Jews, for freedom of conscience is a right that must not be taken from any citizen of the Russian empire. No one should suffer for his religious convictions.

2. *Emancipation from servile status*, from one of the greatest evils now afflicting

Russia. Serfdom reflects not on a lesser but on a grander scale the ideology that dominates the whole nation. The seigneur wields almost the same kind of omnipotent and irresponsible mastery over his peasants that the sovereign wields over his subjects. The seigneur has more than the power over life and death: neither the person nor the property of the serf is in any way immune from the lord's arbitrariness.

The position of the two authorities [with respect to their subordinates] is similar, their abuses similar, and the very arguments that they employ to justify themselves the same. The government speaks in favor of the autocrat's prerogatives, landlords speak in favor of the right of property. The government says that to permit freedom and opposition in the state would violate the patriarchal union based on mutual love for the sake of artificial relations based on political calculations; landlords say that destruction of their authority is tantamount to replacing patriarchal care (!) [of the peasantry] with a commercial system of free wages. The government asserts that the people to whom freedom is being granted are disposed to anarchy; the landlords assert that the liberated peasant goes to seed through drink and becomes a ne'er-do-well. The government says that every concession leads to revolution; the landlords say that peasant emancipation will be a signal for the general slaughter of the lords. The government wants to act by palliative measures, by eliminating abuses, but it wants to preserve the system that generated the abuses. Likewise, the landlords do not want to hear about the eradication of the problem itself; instead, they support sanctions for violating legal statutes that actually protect no one. The government eloquently describes the bliss being savored by subjects under its power; the landlords just as eloquently prove that their peasants are better and more fortunate than all free peoples in the world. The government points to Western peoples as an example of the unhappy effects of alternate forms of political administration; the landlords depict the lot of state peasants as a misfortune that their serfs have avoided. But neither the one nor the other authority wishes to take into account what their very own subjects consider the greatest happiness. If their subjects' circumstances should even begin to resemble the people's vision of happiness, it would serve the authorities as a lesson and a warning against ruinous schemes. Both the government and the landlords claim that the liberal projects amount to nothing more than imitations of Western models that cannot be adapted to Russia. Russia, in their opinion, is a country completely unlike any other, a country having such peculiarities as to make the existing order the only conceivable one. But nobody has taken the trouble to enumerate these strange peculiarities. Apparently, they are generally ones most convenient for the authorities.

Consequently, the arguments are uncannily similar; indeed, these are the arguments of all oppressors. But there is an important difference—namely, the

government is the representative of society, a representative possessing necessary and legitimate authority which it now uses in a one-sided fashion. The landlord is but a private person invested with power, power that has no just and legal foundations. Authority over a person can belong only to the state, and private authority over other citizens is a violation of the state's prerogatives. It is repugnant to ethical sense, to justice and to the public good. It is a reward to one social Estate at the expense of another, because all citizens should equally enjoy the blessings of civic life. Therefore, there is nothing stranger than to hear a landlord speaking about his prerogatives, about government oppression affecting him, when he himself is a perpetrator and defender of the greatest oppression. The landlord has no justification whatsoever to complain about the existing order, for the abuses of seigneurial authority are much more serious than the abuses of the conservative government, and the harm done by the government is nothing in comparison with the harm done by serfdom, which ties the hands of all social Estates, perverts all social relations, hinders all institutional improvements, removes from the law's jurisdiction an entire third of the population, spoils the national character, destroys in the people a sense of human dignity, and fosters in the state apparatus immorality, illegality, and corruption. If the government is primarily responsible for the nation's sorry plight, then doubtless the burden of guilt also falls on the nobility, the primary supporters of the throne, for the nobility could have helped improve the sorry situation but did not do so. Given the prevailing moral laxity, if there is one social Estate that might still render true service to the fatherland, that Estate is the nobility. By emancipating their peasants, nobles can render a far more useful service to Russia than they render by the futile complaints and pointless lamentations now heard on all sides.

How one might accomplish the emancipation is not a matter to be examined here; that would digress too far from the issue at hand. It is enough to insist on the need for this step to be taken.

3. *Freedom of speech.* Our entire discussion suggests that freedom of speech is essential in Russia. Therefore, one should bring it to the forefront as the cornerstone of liberal politics. Let each Russian regard himself as a citizen of his fatherland who is called to assist the common cause. The government not only should not suppress political life among the people but is obliged by all means to arrange matters so that each individual may understand as clearly as possible the laws of Russia, its domestic condition, and its system of government. But this cannot be achieved by any other means than by granting to all the right freely to express their opinions and convictions. A person who for each oppositional word, for each bravely expressed thought, can be seized and subjected to arbitrary punishment is not a citizen but a slave. He cannot use his strengths and talents according to his convictions but can only silently obey another's will. But we have

seen where silent obedience has led us. It is time to put it aside, and in its place to raise freedom of speech, which can be the best and most reliable aid to a government that has in mind the popular good. Free speech alone can uncover the truth, search out capable people, rouse the public to action, and finally impel the government itself to adopt necessary reforms. Free speech is the expression of the people's aspirations. Allow it at first to be shaky, immature, uncoordinated; it cannot be otherwise after centuries of silence. But freedom will educate and strengthen public opinion, and ultimately the government will find in the public its best ally.

4. *Freedom of the press*, a necessary consequence of the freedom of speech. It is not enough to have the possibility to express one's ideas in conversations; conversations are private exchanges. If popular opinion is to have a public impact, then it should be publicly accessible and widely known, and that is only possible through the press. Until censorship which subjects every expression of ideas to governmental approval is abolished, only the government's opinion will be known and the people will remain silent. The abolition of censorship is the foundation of every liberal system desiring to rely on free speech and to give the people a certain autonomy. Only by abolishing censorship can the government prove that it does not intend to escape from trouble by ringing phrases alone, but that it wants to adopt genuine reforms. It has nothing to fear from the political tricks of the opposition. Opposition not only cannot weaken but will actually strengthen the government, provided the government knows how to behave prudently. The existence of an opposition will mobilize the government's defenders, who are today held in low esteem, for no one dares to contradict them; in the future these defenders will become more powerful and more important. Opposition will provide a legal channel for expressing the now-suppressed aspirations of the people; dissatisfaction once expressed loses half its force. Instead of a secret and widespread irritation extending to every aspect of life, whether justifiably or not, opposition will develop among the people a genuine understanding of things; it will educate their political instincts; and to the government it will reveal truth, it will indicate the government's shortcomings, it will proclaim the various desires of the people. Opposition consists precisely in expression of these heterogeneous aspirations; the nation's political life consists of debate and struggle between advocates of such [conflicting] perspectives. It is only necessary that this struggle be peaceful and legal, and that can be assured only by granting to it free channels for development. Let even absurd opinions be expressed; they will expose themselves as absurdities. The less rational the opposition, the less support it will find in public opinion and the stronger will be the government. For the government's moral strength does not consist in a populace that is outwardly silent but inwardly resentful; rather, the government finds strength as the majority joins it with trust

and affection, under conditions where the possibility of opposition exists. Only by this means can government be certain that truth is on its side; today the government has only the power of physical coercion on its side. The government should not fear prudently expressed criticism; only a call to violate the law, only an attempt to overthrow public institutions cannot be permitted. But in such a case the government may rely on law for punishing the guilty party. It can always bring a writer to court or prohibit a journal that is engaged in destructive propaganda. The law must punish actual crimes but should not prohibit every activity that presents an opportunity for abuse. There will always be abuses, but from this it does not follow that everything must be prohibited.

5. *Academic freedom.* Scholarship must develop independently, and the government should not intrude its own views into scholarship. The government must limit itself to making certain that academic departments do not become centers of political and religious propaganda rather than vehicles for promoting scholarly instruction. Meanwhile, all measures should be repealed that now hinder public education, and public education ought to be based on liberal principles and not on military discipline.

6. *Publication of all governmental activities* whose disclosure would not be injurious to the state, and especially publication of the budget, state income, and expenditures. The people should know what is happening in the central government: public business is the people's own business, and a government that genuinely cares about the people's welfare cannot fear publishing a record of its actions.

7. *Public legal proceedings.* In order to guarantee fair verdicts and speedy trials, to eliminate the innumerable abuses now hidden under the cover of darkness, this measure is vital. Plaintiffs and defendants will find in it protection against oppression; judges will find in it an encouragement to render just verdicts; the government and the people will find in it the recognition of the judiciary's rightful place as one of the most important branches of government. In addition, the daily spectacle of trial and punishment will nurture in the citizenry a respect for rights and legality that is the ultimate basis of rational public life but which is unfortunately moribund among us today. How to implement this reform is a matter about which we do not now have space to speak.

These are the chief measures which should be the objects of an enlightened government's solicitous protection and which are the desire of the liberal party in Russia. In liberalism, as we said earlier, is Russia's future; it alone can awake Russia to new life and provide the opportunity to develop the nation's slumbering potential. Therefore, everyone who genuinely loves Russia, every enlightened citizen must rally around this banner. Having cast off our ruinous indifference toward the common cause, we must, by every means permitted under the law, strive to support the great and salutary principle of freedom. Let us proclaim loudly

our desire for liberty, for our conviction is not the result of an intellectually empty, hyperemotional impulse toward license, but of genuine love for Russia and of a desire to extricate it from the sorry condition into which it has fallen. Perhaps certain people will be forced to suffer for their candor, but to suffer in a just cause is no hardship. It is time for us to dispense with our habitual servility and humiliating fear of authority and to recognize that a noble firmness of conviction is alone worthy of a great people. Civic courage is a virtue that has almost disappeared among us, but it is essential for everyone who wishes to accomplish something useful. We must act on our own, not expecting anything from the government and not blaming it for all our misfortunes. We ourselves are to blame for much in the current state of affairs in Russia. Only our own inactivity, our silent indifference to the public welfare, our unpardonable timidity could have permitted the government such a degree of blindness. Seeing no obstacles around it, having no admonitions to guide it, the government imagined that it was pursuing the proper course and it assumed that the people were satisfied with its rule. We must finally raise our voices and make evident our desire for improvements. Only when we begin boldly to tell the truth without fear of being exiled or punished, only when we ourselves act without waiting to be prompted by the government, only then will we have the right to say that we are a people that has within us the makings of a great future. And who among us does not want that for Russia?

In conclusion, let me say one more word. This exposure of our inner corruption, this public confession should serve as an answer to the call for repentance that is now heard on all sides. If it is the duty of each citizen who truly feels the shortcomings of his fatherland to speak about them for the benefit of his fellow citizens and to suggest ways to correct these shortcomings, then this duty is now doubly sacred. The call of our spiritual elders has not been made in vain. More than once from among the people the voice of true confession has been heard. We repent of our sins and we repent from the depths of our souls, with heartfelt grief, with the desire that all be well in our fatherland. But now it is the government's turn to confess. Why do our preachers, who speak so eloquently about the sins of the people, not call upon the government to repent? Do not the same transgressions that weigh down so heavily upon us also press upon the government's conscience as well? Until now we have depended on the government for everything; for centuries it has been our ruler and guide. It has now led its lost sheep to such a pass that it has called down upon itself God's punishment. Let it now make its public confession; let it show us an example of atonement. And this the government may do so by abolishing the ruinous system of administration now in place, by renouncing egoistic attempts to strengthen its authority, and by granting to the people that political life without which no enlightened state can survive.

About the Author



Boris Chicherin (1828–1904) was a professor of law at Moscow University. From late 1881 to 1883, he served as Moscow’s elected mayor, a position that lent him national prominence. He was also a well-regarded member of the elective land councils (the *zemstvos*) in Tambov province for most of the period from 1867 to 1900. Among Russians in his generation, he probably had the deepest experience in public institutions, including local self-government. As an intellectual, Chicherin first made his reputation as a historian. Between 1869 and 1902, he published a profound analysis of European political thought, in which he included chapters on Adam Smith and on his socialist critics. Chicherin’s polemic against socialism, *Property and the State*, was likely the most forceful statement of classical liberal principles to appear in old-regime Russia. His magnum opus, *Philosophy of Right* (1900), was an attempt to marry Smith’s notions of civic freedom with those of Georg Hegel and Immanuel Kant. Today readers of English can find a convenient selection of Chicherin’s writings in *Liberty, Equality, and the Market: Essays by B. N. Chicherin* (1998).