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978-0-521-08919-7 - The Russian Landed Gentry and the Peasant Emancipation of 1861

Terence Emmons

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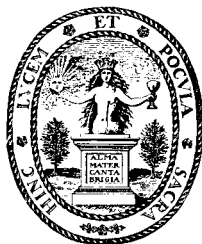
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THE RUSSIAN LANDED  
GENTRY AND THE PEASANT  
EMANCIPATION OF 1861

TERENCE EMMONS

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CAMBRIDGE  
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
1968

Cambridge University Press

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521073400](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521073400)

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First published 1968

This digitally printed version 2008

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Catalogue Card Number: 68-29654*

ISBN 978-0-521-07340-0 hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-08919-7 paperback

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## Preface

In a speech to the assembled gentry of Moscow province on 30 March 1856 shortly after the signing of the Treaty of Paris that had ended the Crimean War, Emperor Alexander II publicly declared his intention to proceed with the emancipation of Russia's 22,000,000 serfs. Thereupon began the 'Epoch of Great Reforms', productive of a series of changes in the civil and legal order which, measured by their collective impact on Russian life, constituted the most important episode in Russian history between the reign of Peter the Great and the Revolution of 1905. Although the 'Epoch' can be extended chronologically to include the last of the 'Great Reforms', the military reorganization of 1874, its central core encompassed the years 1856–62, during which time the primary and fundamental reform, the emancipation of the serfs, was prepared and carried out and the terms of two other important reforms—the *zemstvo* and judicial reforms—were publicly announced (although promulgated only in 1864). These years constitute the crucial period of the 'Epoch of Great Reforms' and a period in which there occurred a political crisis of great significance in the life of the state.

The central importance of the emancipation in Russia's modern history has always been recognized. Most scholars have been concerned either with its impact on the peasantry, or (especially since 1917) with its impact on the development of the revolutionary movement. In a phrase, the peasant and the 'revolutionary democrat' have received the lion's share of attention. Another intimate party to the emancipation—the landed gentry—has received scant attention. Yet it is hardly possible to understand either the character of the emancipation and succeeding reforms, or the political atmosphere in which they were devised, without coming to terms with the problem of the gentry. That problem is the subject of this book.

*Chto takoe dvorianstvo?*—What is the *dvorianstvo*? In nineteenth-century Russia the *dvorianstvo* was an official class which encom-

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passed the Russian equivalents of the European social groups usually called 'gentry' and 'nobility' in English. It is inconvenient, for purposes of consistency in translation, to use both terms. I have chosen 'gentry' as the translation of the word, because this study is concerned primarily with the land- and serf-owners and their corporate life in the provinces; that is, with the *dvorianstvo* as 'landed gentry'.

In 1962 I began a study of the involvement of the gentry of Tver province in the peasant emancipation. Tver was a well-known center of abolitionist opinion in the 1850s and the scene of extensive political activity among the gentry in the early 1860s. Who were the gentry abolitionists and political reformers? What 'interests' did they represent? In whose interest was the emancipation carried out? These were some of the questions that led to a study of the Tver gentry. The discovery that the Tver gentry were not an isolated group, but were participating in a widespread movement, led me to a broader investigation of gentry involvement in the reform and of gentry politics. These studies were made possible by access to published and, especially, unpublished materials in the Soviet Union. I was able to work in the central state archives of Moscow and Leningrad, and in the provincial archives of Tver (present-day Kalinin).

As the study progressed, it also became clear that the views and activities of the gentry could not be evaluated properly without reference to certain economic problems; to the development of the state's plans for reform; and to broader currents of thought and politics. The result is neither an economic history of the emancipation, nor a study of state policy, politics or public opinion. It is, rather, a mixture of all these—with emphasis on the gentry—which, if it had to be labelled, might be called 'a social history of the emancipation'.

Particular attention has been paid to two areas of gentry activity: Involvement in the preparation of the reform between 1857 and 1861; and the political activities of the gentry—primarily in their provincial assemblies—in 1861–2. Greatest consideration has been given to the gentry liberals. Conservative gentry attitudes are relatively easy to understand. Gentry liberal-



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ism, which has been the subject of considerable historiographical controversy, is more in need of study and explanation, if only because the political program elaborated by the gentry liberals at this time was to a large extent the genesis of all subsequent efforts to reform the autocratic regime.

These comments should be of some help in approaching the organization of the study. The subject is large and complex, and the usual apologies for having neglected or failed to render justice to many important questions are more than usually in order. In particular, less attention has been paid to journalistic debates than would be desirable for a full consideration of contemporary currents of opinion. To have done so would have carried the study far beyond the limits of a single volume. Fortunately, the publicism of this period—in marked contrast to the corporate activities of the gentry—has been the subject of several important contributions by such scholars as Ivaniukov, Dzhanshiev, Kornilov, and Druzhinin. Still other limitations have been dictated, of course, by the availability and character of the sources.

I have received an almost embarrassing amount of support and encouragement in this undertaking. I am indebted to the Inter-University Committee on Travel Grants and to the Soviet Ministry of Higher Education for making possible nearly two years of uninterrupted research in the Soviet Union. To the Center for Slavic and East European Studies at the University of California, Berkeley; the Committee on International Studies, Stanford University; the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace; and the American Philosophical Society, I am grateful for financial support at various junctures. I would like to record heartfelt thanks to the library staffs of the University of California, Stanford University, and the Hoover Institution; and to the many archivists and librarians of Moscow, Leningrad, and Kalinin, who worked hard and cheerfully to help me.

I owe a great deal more than this conventional nod to Miss Erica Brendel, Professor Ivo J. Lederer, and Professor Wayne S. Vucinich, for much help and kindness. I am deeply grateful to Professor Nicholas V. Riasanovsky and Professor Martin E. Malia

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for reading the manuscript at various stages in its evolution, for many constructive comments, and especially for the privilege of being their student. My greatest debt in the preparation of this study is to the generous help, wisdom, and inspiration of Professor Petr Andreevich Zaionchkovskii. All errors and faulty judgments in this book are, of course, my own.

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NOTE. All dates are in the old style; that is, twelve days behind the Western calendar in the nineteenth century.

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## Key to Abbreviations

**GAKO** *Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Kalininskoi oblasti* (State Archive of Kalinin Oblast’).

**TsGAOR** *Tsentralnyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Oktiabr’skoi revoliutsii, vysshikh organov gosudarstvennoi vlasti i gosudarstvennogo upravleniia SSSR, g. Moskva* (Central State Archive of the October Revolution, Higher Organs of State Authority and State Administration of the USSR, Moscow).

**TsGIAL** *Tsentralnyi gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv SSSR, g. Leningrad* (Central State Historical Archive of the USSR, Leningrad).

**TsGALI** *Tsentralnyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva SSSR, g. Moskva* (Central State Archive of Literature and Art, Moscow).

**PD** *Institut russkoi literatury (Pushkinskii dom) Akademii nauk SSSR, g. Leningrad* (Institute of Russian Literature [Pushkinskii dom], Leningrad).

**ORLB** *Gosudarstvennaia biblioteka SSSR im. V.I. Lenina, Otdel rukopisei, g. Moskva* (State Lenin Library of the USSR, Manuscript Division, Moscow).

**GPB** *Gosudarstvennaia publichnaia biblioteka im. M.E. Saltykova-Shchedrina, Otdel rukopisei, g. Leningrad* (State Public Saltykov-Shchedrin Library, Manuscript Division, Leningrad).

The use of page numbers followed by lower case ‘a’ (pp. 1–1a, etc.) in reference to materials from these archives corresponds to the reverse sides of the *leaves* that are the numerical units by which the materials are arranged.

The use of the abbreviation ‘f.’ in reference to archival materials indicates the *fond* (collection) in which the materials are arranged (thus: *GAKO, f. 59*). Since archival materials are subject to re-organization, the titles—or lacking that, brief descriptions—of the *fondy* referred to are included in the bibliography.