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CHAPTER I

**Introduction: old problems, new principles –
tsarist government and the Great Reforms**

The Crimean War of 1853–6 is invariably regarded as a turning point in modern Russian history and with good reason. Not only did it end the reign of Nicholas I (1825–55) and shatter the ideal of enlightened autocratic rule that he inherited from his predecessors. Even more, it triggered unprecedented levels of peasant unrest in the provinces and left the state bankrupt. Under such circumstances, as so often in the past, the Russian state embarked on a series of reforms that in the 1860s created a new administrative order in rural Russia and solidified a ministerial system of government that remained fatefully intertwined down to 1917. Yet by almost all accounts changes in provincial administration were urgently needed. So ubiquitous was the corruption and inefficiency of rural officials that the description of it in the works of Gogol, Saltykov-Shchedrin, and other contemporary writers amused but did not shock their readers.¹ As for officials themselves, Petr Aleksandrovich Valuev, the governor of Courland Province and later minister of internal affairs (1861–8) was not alone in pointing out that suspicion, ignorance, and incompetence were the most distinguishing shortcomings of Russian bureaucrats, and that provincial administration stood in need of complete overhaul.²

The shortcomings of provincial administration noted by Valuev were not new to Russian officials. They had long wrestled with the problem of how to make local government efficient and had faced the dilemma of whether

¹Starr, *Decentralization*, pp. 4–5.

²P. A. Valuev, "Duma russkogo vo vtoroi polovine 1855 goda," *Russkaia starina* 24, no. 9 (1893): 509, 514. Slavophile I. S. Aksakov referred to provincial administration in similar terms in a letter sent in 1850 to Nikolai Alekseevich Miliutin, his superior in the Provisional Section of the Economic Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Aksakov claimed that, "out of every hundred minor bureaucrats, one cannot even find two honest ones." Quoted in W. Bruce Lincoln, "N. A. Miliutin and the St. Petersburg Municipal Act of 1846: A Study of Reform under Nicholas I," *Slavic Review* 33, no. 1 (1974): 56. For other criticisms, see Lincoln, *In the Vanguard of Reform: Russia's Enlightened Bureaucrats 1825–1861* (DeKalb, Ill., 1982), pp. 63–5.

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to administer local affairs directly from St. Petersburg, an approach consistent with the extension of ministerial power in nineteenth-century Russia, or to turn such matters over to officials elected by the local population. Throughout the period covered in this and the next chapter the government invariably and ineffectively combined both approaches. These efforts to establish effective decentralized administration using peasant and zemstvo self-government, without threatening the autocrat's monopoly on political power or the interests of his ministers, are the subjects of these first two background chapters. Following a brief analysis of prereform local administration in Russia, this chapter looks at the ideology of the Great Reforms as it pertained to government in general and local administration in particular, and at the ministerial system of government effected by Alexander II's reforms. This chapter thus provides a context for our discussion of the new peasant and zemstvo institutions created in the early 1860s and the ministerial conflict over them up to the mid-1870s, the subject of Chapter 2. Together the two chapters provide an introduction to the main topic of this study, the local government crisis of the late 1870s to early 1880s and the key administrative and political concerns that dominated official reform discussions in the 1880s and local administration policy into the next century.

Prereform gentry administration: a legacy of failure

Although it is commonplace to credit Peter I and Catherine II with the creation of prereform local administration in Russia, their contributions were by no means equal. Despite Peter the Great's reforms of 1708–10 and the post-Petrine statute of 1727, which introduced a more rational organization of local bureaucracy on paper, the arbitrary administration that characterized seventeenth-century Muscovite *vovody* (civil governors) continued, with all of its ruinous effects in the provinces. Such was not the case with Catherine II's provincial reform of 1775. It truly decentralized and rationalized local administration by establishing fifty provinces (in place of Peter's eleven), each subdivided into twenty districts with 20,000 to 30,000 male souls apiece. In each province a governor served as chief executive of the provincial administration and was assisted by the provincial directorate and the provincial chambers, although in practice the governors-general, handpicked by the ruler to administer regions of two or more provinces, exercised virtually unlimited authority and made decisions on the most important matters. Notwithstanding some increases in the powers of governors under Nicholas I and the administrative reorganization of Alexander II discussed in the following paragraphs, the provincial reform of 1775 remained largely intact and defined the parameters of rural Russian administration until the end of the old regime.³

³For details, see Iu. V. Got'e, *Istoriia oblastnogo upravleniia v Rossii ot Petra I do Ekateriny II* (2 vols.; Moscow, 1913), 1:18–20; Zytianov, p. 286; Robert E. Jones, *The Emancipation of the Russian Nobility 1762–1785* (Princeton, 1973), pp. 221–2; and Raeff, *Understanding Imperial Russia*, pp. 94–7.

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In terms of organization and purpose, the provincial government established by Peter I and Catherine II adhered to the Russian version of the well-ordered police state. As it turned out, this would have two lasting consequences for the evolution of local self-government and local self-government reform in Imperial Russia. On the one hand, the Russian state was far more prescriptive and prohibitive in regulating the participation of social groups in local administration than its German counterparts. The German police ordinances left room for more collaboration and initiative on the part of the local population. Over time local society assumed a leading role in German administration and economic development and the state shared in the wealth and benefits.⁴ On the other hand, the local administrative reforms of Peter and Catherine showed Russia's tendency to adapt western concepts and institutions to suit the tsars' purposes. This is not to suggest that Imperial Russia was a Western state or that it fit the Weberian model of rational bureaucratic administration; on the contrary, the idiosyncrasies of autocratic Russia were even more striking than its similarities to old regimes in the West.⁵ But it is important to emphasize that Russian officials increasingly used Western concepts and criteria to evaluate the government's performance and, when needed, to introduce reform (as would be particularly evident in the midnineteenth century).

Indeed, experience proved that throughout the prereform period the government had far more difficulty finding qualified people to administer local affairs than establishing the organizational structure of local government. Most of the population had no opportunity to participate in local administration because they were enserfed either to the landlords or the state. As late as 1857 seigneurial serfs constituted almost 42 percent of the population, and state peasants and bonded townsmen comprised an additional 48 percent.⁶ Consequently, the burden of rural administration fell almost exclusively on the landed gentry, who preferred more personalized, discretionary authority, and the regular provincial bureaucracy, who conversely advocated more regulation and accountability – a conflict of interests that had detrimental influences on rural administration and all participants in it.⁷ Historians with diverse views on Catherine's motives for granting the gentry a permanent role in local government generally agree that her edicts of 1771, 1775, and 1785 made them responsible for preserving order in the provinces

⁴Raeff, *Well-Ordered Police State*, pp. 204–13, 228–33. Raeff notes that Catherine did seek to involve social groups in local administration much more than Peter I, who limited the gentry to tax collection (pp. 237–8); nonetheless, the Western and Russian *Polizeistaat* were quite different even in Catherine's era.

⁵David Christian, "The Supervisory Function in Russian and Soviet History," *Slavic Review* 41 (Spring 1982): 73, 88–9. Shanin argues that the Russian bureaucracy adhered to the Weberian model (which saw the bureaucracy as a distinct group characterized by its formal employment, functional division of labor, appointment and promotion by merit, and hierarchy), except that the tsarist bureaucracy was much more defenseless against its own superiors and more prone to petty corruption than Western bureaucracies. Shanin, pp. 35–6.

⁶Vodarskii, pp. 56–7.

⁷Raeff, *Understanding Imperial Russia*, pp. 92–3.

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and for providing essential local economic services (famine relief, construction of roads, bridges, and the like).⁸ Taken as a whole, these three measures provided the framework for gentry participation in elected local administration for the rest of the prereform period. To be sure, other free social estates had their own corporate offices and local self-regulation; but the gentry's local organization was the most extensive and autonomous, far surpassing that of their distant land captain successors, as we shall see.⁹ Gentry administration consisted of four components: the provincial gentry assemblies, the district deputies, the gentry marshals, and the local officials elected by the gentry assemblies. Besides electing these officials, the provincial assemblies passed resolutions and appropriated funds for local needs when they convened every three years. They had the right to petition the tsar about local needs but rarely exercised it. The district deputies on their part originally were confined to certifying the status of individuals who acquired gentry status by birth or through service, but later participated in the allocation of taxes and similar functions.¹⁰

The most important official in local gentry administration was the provincial marshal of the gentry, who ranked second in the province to the governor in terms of authority and jurisdiction. The elected marshals acted as the spokesmen for gentry corporate interests in dealing with the central and local bureaucracy and transmitted the orders of the government to their gentry constituents. They were responsible for preserving and spending gentry funds, for maintaining order in the assemblies, and for participating as voting members in various administrative institutions such as recruiting boards and commissions on public food supply and on the apportionment of local economic duties (*zemskie povinnosti*).¹¹ However, the government's unwillingness to give the elected gentry full control over these functions or to do away with the offices altogether soon bred gentry dissatisfaction. In saddling the marshals with more and more bureaucratic functions that included assisting the governors, the government, beginning in Alexander I's reign, put gentry officials increasingly in the position of unsalaried state

⁸The motives cited include Catherine's desire to buy gentry support through such concessions and her intention, following the Pugachev Rebellion (1773–5), to maintain domestic security in the provinces by using local gentry as her provincial agents. The first interpretation is found in S. A. Korf, *Dvorianstvo i ego soslovnnoe upravlenie za stoletie 1762–1855 gg.* (St. Petersburg, 1906), pp. 110–11, 207; and M. P. Pavlova-Sil'vanskaia, "Sotsial'naia sushchnost' oblastnoi reformy," *Absolutizm v Rossii*, ed. N. M. Druzhinin, N. I. Pavlenko, and L. V. Cherepnin (Moscow, 1964), pp. 460–1. For the second interpretation, see Jones, *Emancipation of the Russian Nobility*, pp. 121–2, 202–3. Jones also maintains that fiscal considerations played an important part in Catherine's decision to introduce local gentry corporate administration. For a detailed study of how the gentry used local government reforms to consolidate its power, see John LeDonne, *Ruling Russia: Politics and Administration in the Age of Absolutism, 1762–1796* (Princeton, 1984), pp. 79–82; see also Robbins, "Viceroy," chap. 1.

⁹Starr rightly suggests that there was probably more continuity in the actual working of local government before and after Alexander II's reforms than has usually been recognized. S. Frederick Starr, "Local Initiative in Russia before the Zemstvo," *The Zemstvo in Russia: An Experiment in Local Self-Government*, p. 6.

¹⁰Field, pp. 15–16; Korf, *Dvorianstvo*, p. 122.

¹¹Korf, pp. 560–1.

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agents rather than spokesmen for their constituents. Although this trend stemmed in large part from the gentry's disinterest in their elected corporate administration and from the need for state intervention in gentry affairs to maintain order and to provide local services in the provinces, such state intervention only reinforced gentry indifference toward elected corporate office.¹²

As a case in point, the landed gentry under the 1775 reform were required to elect a number of local police and judicial officials from among their corporate estate. These included the chairmen and assessors of the criminal and civil courts of arbitration, the judge and assessors of the district courts, the district police chief, and the four to five assessors of the lower land court (the basic police organ that enforced all the orders of the governor, the provincial directorate, and the district police chief).¹³ In no other area did the gentry demonstrate so clearly their disdain for serving in elected corporate administration. The absentee rate for gentry at the assemblies called to elect these officials was so high that an edict issued in 1832 conceded that "the best nobles [gentry] refuse to serve or acquiesce indifferently to the election of men who lack the qualities required."¹⁴

Why did the gentry shun elected office in local administration? The preeminent official of the era, M. M. Speranskii, as well as numerous historians have cited a variety of reasons to explain the gentry's indifference, notably their low level (or often lack) of education, their servile attitude toward government, the absence of a homogeneous gentry estate, and bureaucratic interference in local gentry affairs.¹⁵ In fact, all of these problems derived from the way in which local self-government was established

¹²Becker, pp. 20–2. Raeff credits Catherine with expanding administration and moving toward local autonomy, but concludes that her efforts to create a vital corporate gentry administration largely failed. In his view, local gentry initiative was checked by bureaucrats controlling local gentry budgets and by laws of local custom, which impeded the development of local rational administration. In essence, state "paternalism degenerated into bureaucratic arbitrariness." Raeff, *Understanding Imperial Russia*, p. 101. Still, as shown below, local bureaucrats often had reason to take direct, arbitrary measures against local gentry administration.

¹³A. Romanovich-Slavatinskii, *Dvorianstvo v Rossii ot nachala XVIII veka do otmeny krepostnogo prava. Svod materiala i prigotovlennye etiuudy dlia istoricheskogo issledovaniia* (St. Petersburg, 1870), p. 490; and A. A. Kizeveter, *Mestnoe samoupravlenie v Rossii, IX–XIX st.; Istoricheskii ocherk* (2d ed.; Petrograd, 1917), p. 96. Local police in the prereform period are analyzed in Robert J. Abbott, "Police Reform in Russia, 1858–1878" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1971), pp. 14–16.

¹⁴Quoted in Field, p. 17.

Wortman and Field have noted that in the reign of Nicholas I the numbers of gentry in the local judiciary increased whereas those in the police diminished, thereby suggesting that the legal profession was becoming more socially respectable. See Wortman, pp. 46–7; and Field, p. 16. Although there was a trend beginning in this direction, it still does not overshadow the fact that the gentry in general avoided elected offices of local administration except the marshal's post, which brought much prestige and power to its holder.

¹⁵Speranskii's view, which emphasizes the first two factors, is found in Korf, *Dvorianstvo*, p. 375. Field argues persuasively that the gentry were too divided in their interests, goals, and material status to take elected corporate service seriously, whereas A. V. Lokhvitskii stresses bureaucratic interference as the main force paralyzing the activity of locally elected corporate officials. See Field, p. 19; and A. V. Lokhvitskii, *Guberniia, ee zemskie i pravitel'svennye uchrezhdeniia* (St. Petersburg, 1864), p. 203. Korf cites all four factors in *Dvorianstvo*, pp. 165–6, 173.

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by the tsars, and for that reason they recurred no matter what form local self-government took in nineteenth-century Russia. Whereas in many Western European countries public self-government evolved as a political right extracted from the monarchy, in Russia the government imposed self-government on the local population, in this case the gentry, to suit its own purposes, much as a century earlier it had created the gentry corporate estate. This process had important consequences. First, the government regarded the reform of local self-government as its prerogative and constantly opposed attempts on the part of the public to influence the provisions of such reform. Typical of traditional states, the government's resistance to public participation only increased as it faced the challenge of adapting its institutions to modern social and economic conditions. Second, the local population in general and the gentry in particular never embraced self-government with the enthusiasm that the English gentry, for example, had for the concept.¹⁶ Local elected service in Russia meant added administrative burdens and possible disciplinary punishment with little economic compensation and no political rights for the officeholder.

Nor were the gentry a unified pressure group capable of extracting political rights from the throne in the nineteenth century. Baron August von Haxthausen, a German expert on and traveler to Russia in the 1840s, accurately pointed out that the gentry "exists only as a favor to the ideas and intentions of the state" and that it would disband at once and with little resistance if the government issued such an order.¹⁷ There were few ties between wealthy and poor gentry, and the lack of common interests put them in a weak position to defend their current privileges, much less obtain new political rights from the state. Indeed, one of the few characteristics uniting the gentry was their contempt for elected office, and they proved so adept at avoiding such service that in 1832 governors were formally empowered to appoint the district police chief and the personnel of the provincial and district courts in the event the gentry failed to elect these officials.¹⁸

The artificial nature of local self-government established by imperial fiat did not escape the notice of the gentry, the most ambitious and competent of whom capitalized on the expansion of the central government and pursued careers in the military or upper bureaucracy in accordance with the tsar's wishes.¹⁹ This was an important reason why local elected office found little support among the gentry. Partners with the government in administration and stewards in the provinces, they were in no mood to assume the menial tasks of elected service, despite Nicholas I's manifesto of 1832 proclaiming

¹⁶Korkunov, *Russkoe gosudarstvennoe pravo*, 2:366; and Elie Halévy, *England in 1815*, trans. E. I. Watkin and D. A. Barker (paperback ed.; New York, 1961), p. 15. On the actions of traditional states, see Black, pp. 31, 64.

¹⁷August von Haxthausen, *Studies on the Interior of Russia*, trans. Eleanore L. M. Schmidt, ed. and intro. S. Frederick Starr (Chicago, 1972), p. 248.

¹⁸Korf, *Dvorianstvo*, pp. 566–7; Becker, p. 24.

¹⁹Zaionchkovskii, *Pravitel'stvennyi apparat*, pp. 152–3, 163, 166, 172.

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corporate service to be one of the gentry's most important duties. Count Arsenii Andreevich Zakrevskii, the minister of internal affairs (1828–31), was much closer to reality when he admitted that elected gentry service "*promised nothing more than hard work and responsibility.*"²⁰ Unlike the honor, prestige, and financial security associated with military or state rank, especially in the capitals, the gentry landlord with a corporate administration position suffered the social degradation that came from working side by side with professional bureaucrats of nongentry origins.²¹ It is little wonder that the gentry turned a deaf ear to the tsar's appeal and continued to elect inexperienced pensioned army officers and petty landowners who needed the salaries to make ends meet as local officials, or left the offices vacant for the government to fill by appointment – trends that continued even after the reforms of the 1860s.

Local corporate service frequently entailed jurisdictional conflicts with bureaucrats owing to vague laws governing the relations between local corporate administration and the provincial bureaucracy, and this fact also dissuaded landed gentry from such work. No sooner were the gentry marshals installed in 1768 than misunderstandings arose between the government and the new officials over the nature of their duties. Nor did the situation improve significantly during the nineteenth century. In drafting the Code of Laws in 1832, the government, in a manner that anticipated the zemstvo reform three decades later, failed to delineate between the jurisdictions of the provincial bureaucracy and gentry officials. The result was a series of conflicts between them in the 1830s to 1850s over the election of gentry assembly delegates who the government insisted had no right to be elected. The government also reprimanded a number of marshals for allowing their assemblies to discuss state measures, for example, the emancipation of the serfs, which it considered outside their jurisdiction.²²

The crux of the problem was that autocrats from Catherine II on, who allowed some measure of public participation in local administration, refused to have their powers constrained by precise laws. In their concept of autocratic rule, they insisted that the gentry participate in local administration on the

²⁰Quoted in Romanovich-Slavatinskii, p. 498. Emphasis in the original.

²¹Starr, *Decentralization*, p. 24; Field, p. 10; Gradovskii, 9:42.

The subordination of gentry-elected officials to the provincial bureaucracy and the ill-defined jurisdiction of each prompted one gentry landlord of the period to comment: "Who wants to serve as district police chief, who according to the law is the head of the district, the censor of morals, and guardian of prosperity and order, when he is ordered about by the governors and even by their clerks and according to their whims races like a whippet from one province to another." This resulted in a situation where, according to another contemporary, "no one is elected [because] everyone declares himself ill; no one is afraid of prosecution, and in fact they request to be turned over to the courts, because they prefer to be on trial and consequently exempt from service." The passages are quoted from S. M. Seredonin, comp., *Istoricheskii obzor deiatel'nosti Komiteta ministrov* (5 vols.; St. Petersburg, 1902), 1:277–8.

²²Korf, *Dvorianstvo*, pp. 334–40, 580–3; and I. A. Blinov, *Otnosheniia senata k mestnym uchrezhdeniiam v XIX veke* (St. Petersburg, 1911), pp. 95–110. In a number of cases, the governors abused their right to veto the election of marshals and rejected the candidates for personal reasons.

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state's terms, and the rural state bureaucracy remained wedded to this view. The tsars' aim in formulating laws was to transmit imperial authority to the population, instruct the bureaucracy in its activity, and curb official arbitrariness and inefficiency. At the same time, the absence of precise laws left open the safety valve of direct autocratic intervention or arbitrary measures by officials that transgressed normal procedures but, in the view of the ruler, were necessary for expedient action (*iselesobraznost'*) in emergency cases.²³ The autocrats refused to admit publicly (while no doubt realizing privately) that a legally regulated government required the autocrat, the highest official of all, to adhere to the law and circumscribe his authority in order for it to be effective.

Thus, the creation of local self-government in Russia by autocracy, the avoidance of local elected service by the most qualified gentry in favor of military careers, the vague laws on the relations between corporate and state officials, and bureaucratic interference in gentry corporate administration all combined to make gentry administration ineffective. Its shortcomings were evident everywhere. Many willfully avoided the local assemblies and provincial commissions organized to allocate economic duties for peasants (such as the amount of corvée on roads, bridges, and postal stations, and the peasants' share of the conveyance, billeting, and food supply duties).²⁴ They neglected to protect their serfs from the abusive treatment of the police assigned to collect these duties and to supervise peasant performance of corvée obligations. In the area of public food supply, the gentry displayed little interest in helping the government build the grain warehouses provided for under the Public Food Supply Statute of 1834, or in electing honest officials to guard grain supplies. By the end of the 1850s, the grainhouses were more notorious for filling the pockets of the gentry-elected guardians, who sold the grain they embezzled, than for providing famine relief.²⁵

In short, despite Nicholas I's proclamations in favor of a stronger autocracy, the central government during his reign had little control over its provincial administration. By the late 1850s, top officials recognized that local administration contingent on the goodwill and voluntary services of a limited

²³The role of law in autocratic Russia as opposed to the more bureaucratized states of Prussia and France is analyzed in Taranovski, "Politics of Counter-Reform," pp. 289–91, 632–3; and Raeff, *Understanding Imperial Russia*. The government's refusal to give a precise legal definition to the functions of officials in order to maintain autocratic control over the local hierarchy has carried over into the Soviet period, along with the problems of local level jurisdictional conflicts resulting from vague laws. See John A. Armstrong, *The European Administrative Elite* (Princeton, 1973), p. 265; and Hough, pp. 26–32.

²⁴The system of local economic duties was established in 1805 to provide essential goods and services for the local population. Several times during the prereform period the government reorganized it, the last time in 1851. Many of these duties were included as mandatory expenses for zemstvo institutions when the latter were introduced. See S. Ia. Tseitlin, "Zemskaia reforma," *Istoriia Rossii v XIX veke* (9 vols.; St. Petersburg, n.d.), 3: 186–8; and B. B. Veselovskii, "Detsentralizatsiia upravleniia i zadachi zemstva," *1864–1914: Iubileinyi zemskii sbornik*, ed. B. B. Veselovskii and Z. G. Frenkel' (St. Petersburg, 1914), p. 37.

²⁵Tseitlin, "Zemskaia reforma," pp. 189–90.

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number of gentry was completely inefficient and required substantial changes. No longer could the government be the patron and client of the gentry, dependent on and supportive of it, in its efforts to develop an efficient local administration.²⁶ Hence, the reign of Nicholas I signified the end of the era of exclusive gentry control over elected local government in the nineteenth century. The failure of local corporate administration was all the more critical given the many shortcomings of Nicholas I's provincial bureaucracy and the undergoverned nature of rural Russia. Not only did Russia have far fewer civil servants for its population in 1861 (1.1 to 1.3 + civil servants for every thousand people) than other major European states,²⁷ but Russia's provincial officialdom was notorious for its corruption, incompetence, formalism, inefficient procedures, and illiteracy – the latter of which the state sought to rectify through the Law of 14 October 1827.²⁸ Yet, tragically, the tsar's last efforts to improve local administration by increasing the size of provincial staffs resulted merely in more paperwork, red tape, and longer administrative delays. For example, in 1841 the Ministry of Internal Affairs received and sent out a total of 22,326,842 separate documents; a decade later the figure had risen to 31,103,676.²⁹

Consequently, by the time of the reform era the government had reason enough to rule out direct government control over all local administration as a remedy to its administrative problems. Not only had such an approach proved futile under Nicholas I, owing to the shortage of bureaucratic personnel and the bureaucratic formalism that stigmatized his reign, but the budgetary deficit of a half billion rubles following the Crimean War precluded the increase in bureaucratic personnel necessary to introduce social and economic reform in Russia. Yet the record of gentry failure in prereform local corporate administration dissuaded the government from delegating these functions exclusively to the gentry as a group. Consequently, new approaches to reform and institutional renovation were required if the autocracy intended to initiate change in the provinces, engage public support and service, and maintain its control over the process. Such approaches found their expression in the ideology of the Great Reforms and in the new doctrines of decen-

²⁶Field, p. 146. The one exception to the rule was the enthusiastic gentry participation on the Social Welfare Boards, established according to the 1775 legislation, to supervise construction and management of hospitals, orphanages, insane asylums, and schools. Yet, as Starr notes, the gentry tended to pocket government contributions to these projects for their own use, fully aware that the state lacked the resources to hold the gentry accountable for the funds. Starr, "Local Initiative Before the Zemstvo," pp. 13–14.

²⁷Starr, *Decentralization*, p. 48.

²⁸The law required that all new civil service recruits furnish proof that they could read and write and that they had mastered the basic rules of arithmetic and grammar. The law accelerated the shift from retired military officers of gentry status to career civil officials in the capitals and higher offices in the provinces – clear evidence, according to Walter M. Pintner, of the professionalization of the imperial bureaucracy under Nicholas I. See his essay, "The Evolution of Civil Officialdom, 1755–1855," in *Russian Officialdom*, p. 214.

²⁹Lincoln, *Vanguard*, p. 36.

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tralization and public self-government prevalent in Western Europe in the 1850s – ideas antithetical to the autocratic system and ministerial authority that constituted the Nicholaevian order.

Architects and ideology of the Great Reforms

If the reign of Nicholas I revealed the limits of the traditional well-ordered police state in Russia, especially with respect to local administration and rural development, his death and Russia's defeat in the Crimea in 1855 offered an unusual opportunity for administrative reform and renewal. It was these two occurrences, along with the problems in nearly all areas of Russian administration and economy and the appearance of a generation of enlightened bureaucrats, that gave impetus to the enactment of the Great Reforms. Although the individual reforms and the climate that spawned them have been studied at length by Soviet and Western scholars, it is appropriate here to discuss briefly the proponents and principles of the Great Reforms, because the ideology of reform was instrumental in the establishment of local self-government in 1861–4 and in the counterreform debates some twenty years later. Moreover, these reform ideas would come into conflict with Alexander II's determination to preserve autocracy and with his ministerial system in the first decade of his reign, thus diminishing the prospects for the successful development of public self-government.

Alexander II's decision to emancipate the serfs and introduce related administrative reforms soon after the Crimean debacle brought to the fore a cadre of "enlightened bureaucrats." Although these officials did not question Russia's need for autocratic authority, which they regarded as sacrosanct, they did reject Nicholas I's version of the well-ordered police state based on Official Nationality in favor of a more activist state responsive to social and economic change. Having a superior, well-rounded education and deriving their livelihood from service rather than land, these officials rose to prominence in the 1840s, especially in the Ministries of Internal Affairs, State Properties, and Justice. A number of them (for instance, N. Miliutin, K. Grot, N. Girs) had experience with and knowledge of provincial conditions, based on work they had done for their ministries. As a group, they received the patronage of the royal family (Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich and Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna) and were urged to use their knowledge of the provinces to think in terms of broad legislative reform.³⁰ Consequently, when Alexander II commissioned them to draft the emancipation statutes and other reform legislation, these officials seized the opportunity to propose a new type of state in which the government would not only police the population, but likewise would provide it with vital services. Their view

³⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 16–18, 22, 30–3, 64ff., 109–14, 135–8, 169–78; Zaionchkovskii, *Pravitel'stvennyi apparat*, pp. 139–41; and Daniel T. Orlovsky, "High Officials in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 1855–1881," *Russian Officialdom*, pp. 255–9.