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Alexander II and Gorbachev: The Doomed Reformers of Russia

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Note on Sources:

There is, surprisingly, little available in English on the reign of Alexander II, therefore I rely primarily on the works of W.E. Mosse, N.G.O Pereira, and the collection of works on Russia's reform period edited by Ben Eklof. W.E. Mosse's book *Alexander II and the Modernization of Russia*, a secondary source, provides in-depth descriptions of the problems facing Alexander II when he came into power, the process of his reforms, descriptions of the reforms, and some of the consequences of those reforms including his assassination in 1881. Similarly, N.G.O Pereira's *Tsar-Liberator: Alexander II of Russia 1818-1881* is a secondary source, describing some of his reforms, but focuses most specifically on the process of the emancipation of the serfs, the emancipation itself and the impact it had on the population. *Russia's Great Reforms, 1855-1881* edited by Ben Eklof, John Bushnell and Larissa Zakharova is a collection of secondary source essays on the great reforms under Alexander II. Of these essays, the two I draw the most from are "Autocracy and the Reforms of 1861-1874 in Russia" by Larissa Zakharova and "The year of Jubilee" by Daniel Field. Zakharova provides in-depth information on the reforms, including useful details not found in the other sources, such as the jury selection process during the judicial reforms as well as a comprehensive discussion of the question of a constitution. Field's essay cites primary source material, providing examples of real reactions by the public to the peasant reform and the other reforms in general. All three sources together provide very thorough information about the specifics of the process of reform, detailed information about the reforms themselves, and their consequences (including a complete account of the tsar's assassination).

On the other hand, there are arguably too many books about Mikhail Gorbachev, many of which were dashed off to capitalize on the cachet of the glasnost era. The majority of these are overly dramatic, subjective and repetitive. In consultation with my advisor, I relied, therefore, on the most respected scholarly analyses of the Gorbachev phenomenon: works written by Archie Brown, Zhores Medvedev, and Richard Sakwa, whose accounts are detailed and reasonably free of bias and based on Russian language sources.

Richard Sakwa's book *Gorbachev and His Reforms 1985-90* is a secondary source that follows Mikhail Gorbachev's rule from 1985 to 1990, beginning with his rise to power and ending with a comprehensive review of *perestroika* and its effects. This source focuses specifically on *perestroika*, *glasnost*, and the other major reforms, how they were implemented, and how they impacted each part of Soviet society. This source was extremely useful for my discussion on the reforms themselves and the immediate consequences of those reforms, as well as difficulties in implementation. Though Sakwa's ends his analysis in 1990, one year before the collapse of the Soviet Union, the comprehensive review of the reforms and their effects for the years 1985 to 1990 is invaluable.

I relied on two sources by Archie Brown, the leading scholar of the Gorbachev era*: The Gorbachev Factor* and *Seven Years that Changed the World*. *The Gorbachev Factor* is a secondary source that discusses the importance of Mikhail Gorbachev in the transformation of the Soviet Union, not only in terms of his unique contributions in different policy areas, but also regarding his political style and leadership. *Seven Years that Changed the World* is a secondary source that looks back on the Gorbachev period to

analyze the impact of *perestroika* on the Soviet Union and the rest of the world. It describes the transformation of the Soviet state, the end of the Cold War, and the role of Gorbachev in the dissolution. These sources perfectly compliment each other because *The Gorbachev* Factor examines Gorbachev himself, his leadership style, and the reforms, while *Seven Years that Changed the World* focuses on the reforms, the impact of the reforms on the Soviet Union, and their part in the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Both sources provide retroactive analyzes of Gorbachev, the reforms, and their unintended consequences.

Gorbachev by Zhores A. Medvedev is a secondary source that includes detailed discussion on Gorbachev's leadership style, Gorbachev's personal involvement in the reform process, and the reforms themselves (particularly agricultural reforms). Medvedev also provides in-depth information about the opposition to the reforms.

All of these sources together provide in depth analysis of the Gorbachev era, from the reforms themselves to Gorbachev's personal leadership style, relatively free of bias and all based on Russian primary sources from the period.

Introduction

A century separates Russia's great reformers Alexander II and Mikhail Gorbachev. Given that Western journalists often compared Gorbachev to Alexander II while the former was in power, there is no serious scholarship that compares their reforms in depth. Both rulers "failed" in the sense that their reforms destabilized society, and in the case of Gorbachev, actually contributed to the end of the Soviet Union. Of course, Alexander II did not have to face secession movements from the union republics. However, apart from the "nationalities question," there are many similarities between these two eras of sweeping reforms, in terms of motivation, process, types of reforms, and consequences. This thesis will evaluate these factors, starting with Alexander II and the Great Reforms of the 1860s, followed by an assessment of Gorbachev's "glasnost" and "perestroika." Finally, the significance of these case studies will be evaluated in the context of Russia's historic resistance to dramatic change.

Part One: Alexander II

After three hundred years of oppressive autocratic rule, Alexander II determined that in order to move his country forward, he would need to make consequential reforms that challenged Russia and Russians in similar ways to the reforms of Peter the Great. After the Russian army was badly defeated in the Crimean War, Alexander was forced to take a hard look at the weaknesses in the Nicolaevan system to try to ensure that such a humiliating defeat could never happen again.[1] Russia's failure in the Crimean War was caused primarily by the backwardness of the Russian economy and the weakness of the Russian army, which relied on serf soldiers.

When Alexander II came to power in 1855, the Russian economy was in shambles, riddled with debt, and was not nearly developed enough to compete with foreign opponents, particularly those in the West. The economy was almost exclusively agricultural, while the West was industrializing and leaving Russia behind. Russia was also facing a growing deficit. Between 1853 and 1858, the overall state deficit increased from 52 million silver rubles to 307 million silver rubles, "the gold that backed paper money decreased by more than half," and the proportion of state revenues from liquor farming rose to forty-three percent between 1853-1856.[2] The state was on the brink of a financial crisis, pushing the administration towards reform. Liquid assets in banks decreased from 150 million rubles to 13 million rubles between 1857 and 1859. Alexander himself wrote in a letter to his brother Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolayevich

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[1] Larissa Zakharova, "Autocracy and the Reforms of 1861-1874 in Russia: Choosing Paths for Development," in *Russia's Great Reforms, 1855-1881*, ed. Ben Eklof, John Bushnell, and Larissa Zakharova (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 22.
[2] Ibid.

that he was extremely concerned by Russia's financial situation, and that he planned "to relieve it by any means possible."[3]

Alexander's motivations for sweeping change did not stem from the faltering economy alone, but also from the "realization that the domestic political course associated with the Nicolaevan system was in a state of crisis."[4] Power was highly centralized in the hands of the tsar and the bureaucracy was corrupt and inefficient, as was the judiciary. For the vast majority of Russians, "the law did not exist," due to the fact that the bureaucracy was staffed by corrupt government officials, who for the most part cared more about profiting from their positions than implementing the law.[5] The Russian army was also very weak by this time, clearly demonstrated by its almost unprecedented defeat in the Crimean War. Alexander II knew he would need to reorganize the military so it could "fight on equal terms with a European coalition."[6]

However, Alexander believed that the modernization of the military, like the economy, was impossible without the abolition of serfdom. Serfdom in Russia was not economy sustainable, even without considering the moral arguments against it. The subjection of more than about 40 million people, owned by individuals (serfs) and the state (state peasants), to the arbitrary and essentially unchecked power of their masters. Serfs could be forced to perform any kind of work, traded, sold, mortgaged, or drafted into the army. Families could be broken up, and some serfs suffered physical or sexual

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[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid., 21.
[5] W.E. Mosse, *Alexander II and the Modernization of Russia* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966), 23.
[6] Alfred Rieber, *The Politics of Autocracy: Letters of Alexander II to Prince A.I. Bariatinskii, 1857-1864* (Paris: Mouton & Co, 1966), 24.

abuse. Laws limiting the nobility's power were vague and rarely enforced. They exacted dues from their serfs, in cash (*obrok*) and in labor (*barshchina*).

The tsar and his Minister of Defense, Dmitrii Miliutin, also wanted a large reserve force instead of a costly peacetime active duty military. However, the serf population could not be entrusted with military training and then allowed to return to their villages as part of this reserve, for the risk of rebellion or revolution was too great. If the serfs were emancipated, however, they theoretically could be trusted to be part of this reserve force.

Another key aspect of serfdom was the concept of ascription, which meant that a serf could travel away from home to work in a factory (for example), but only with the written permission of their master, and they were still required to pay their share of taxes and dues to the landowner back home. Generally serfs were subjected to local laws (as distinct from the laws of the empire), had almost no personal freedom, and, except in unusual circumstances, could not prosper. Millions of people were tied to the land and owned by the nobility or the state, and therefore the state could not push forward with industrialization because they did not have the free labor source necessary for industrial growth and advancement. As a result, the abolition of serfdom became the centerpiece of the Great Reform Era.

Serfdom/Emancipation of the Serfs

Alexander II believed that the most important reform he needed to enact was the abolition of serfdom. He knew that there was no way the country could modernize economically and compete on a global scale if 40 million Russians were little more than slaves. In order to modernize the economy to Western standards, the country needed a

free labor force, not a compulsory labor force. Alexander felt that emancipation, by decree would not work if it were not also supported by the nobility.[7]

The abolition of serfdom began with a secret committee meeting in the Winter Palace in 1857, which sought to expand on past decrees on the subject of agriculture and peasants. The rescript of November 20, 1857 to Vilnius's Governor-General V.I. Nazimov revealed two contrasting solutions to the peasant question that had been instituted in the past in limited locales.[8] The first was a reform regulating peasant land allotments and work obligations implemented in the southwest in 1848 and the other was the emancipation of the peasants in the three Baltic provinces in 1816-1819. The rescript demonstrated that the government planned to combine the two: "the squires would retain a property right to all their land; peasants would gain the right to redeem only their household plots and the right to cultivate allotments of plow land in exchange for dues; the squire would retain his manorial authority."[9] The government distributed this rescript throughout European Russia, making it seem as though it was a noble initiative that the nobility could support. Though the nobility was in fact hostile to the reform, the government pressured them to "come forward with an 'initiative' in favor of the application of the rescripts nationwide."[10]

In 1858 and the first half of 1859, forty-six provincial committees of the nobility (and two interprovincial commissions) convened, representing "a new device in the history of reform."[11] The members of these committees came from various generations and sociopolitical groups, such as "amnestied Decembrists and Petrashevsky, Slavophiles

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[7] Rieber, 38.
[8] Zakharova, 24.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.

and Westernizers, and both partisans and opponents of the abolition of serfdom."[12] As the committees started working, divisions within the nobility became apparent with a liberal minority and a conservative or reactionary majority in almost every committee. Alexander had made it clear to the committees that the peasants needed to feel there had been a definite improvement in their lot, but at the same time ensure the interests of the landowners were safeguarded. The tsar further declared that all the committees needed to submit, along with their projects, detailed information on exactly how the peasants' lives would be improved by their proposals.

The government waited as "bitter battles were raging among the members" of the committees across the provinces, and closely scrutinized public opinion, including the nobility, the peasantry, and the press.[13] From 1857 to 1861, the Minister of Internal Affairs Sergey Lanskoy was required by Alexander II to submit weekly reports on the mood of the nobility and the peasantry, "on 'rumors' and 'gossip' in the provinces, on the activities of the provincial committees, and- this was a compulsory element- on all instances of peasant upheaval."[14] Liberals such as A.I. Koshelev, A.M. Unkovskii, and V.A. Cherkasskii took the lead on opening committee sessions to the public. They also shared "lithograph journals of their proceedings" with the public and the press.[15]

The reform itself was met with opposition both within the commission and without, such as deputies from the provinces. Opposition came from liberals, conservatives, reactionaries, and others who were against the reforms, but for different reasons. Some opposed the redemption of the plowing land by the peasants, the abolition

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[12] Zakharov 25.
[13] Mosse, 54.
[14] Zakharova, 25.
[15] Ibid.

of manorial power, and the concept of peasant self-administration. Others favored the redemption but felt sweeping reforms of the local administration were needed as well. Nikolai Miliutin headed a group of liberal bureaucrats who hoped the outcome of the reform would be the abolition of the nobles' manorial power, the incorporation of peasants into public life, and "the conversion of the peasants into the owners of their allotments."[16] All sides, however, opposed the larger role the state would be given by the reforms, both in the countryside and in social and economic affairs generally. This divisiveness within the provincial committees did not stop the reform from occurring, but it led to significant delays and modifications of the commission's draft, to the point where no side was satisfied. For example, land allotments were cut back by twenty percent and dues were increased, which made redemption more costly and a true burden on the peasants (but profitable for the state). While the committees hoped to avoid bringing much of the peasantry to ruin by the reform, that possibility "loomed larger and became inevitable."[17]

Grand Duke Konstantin, the Tsar's brother and a steady supporter of the liberal cause, was tasked with mediating among the many sides to reach an actual solution. Of all opposing viewpoints, three main groups persisted. The extreme "planters," led by Prince Pavel Pavlovich Gagarin, wanted to keep all the land in the hands of the gentry. The liberals, led by S.S. Lanskoy and Count D.N. Budov, often sided with the peasants and favored more sweeping reforms. The last group, led by Count Michael Muraviev, included people who simply wanted to "save for their order the maximum of material

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[16] Zakharova, 26.
[17] Zakharova, 32.

advantage."[18] These divisions within the committees led to two or three different projects being proposed, instead of the single proposal requested. As a result, there were many delays, making the task of the sub-committee set up to examine them even more difficult. In February 1859, Alexander approved the suggestion to turn the sub-committee into two separate commissions in an attempt to increase efficiency. Nevertheless, arguments continued in the main commission, most often about the amount of land serfs should be allotted; the provincial committees continued to present one liberal and one conservative proposal because they were not able to agree.

In summer 1859, Alexander declared that the provincial committees would now focus only on how the emancipation would be applied locally, as the fundamental principles of the reform were settled and not subject to change.[19] At this point committee discussions were restricted, along with the number of deputies sent to represent them in the capital. Although the deputies who had been called to the capital complained and requested a meeting with the tsar, they were told they must "limit their discussions to the best manner of applying these principles in their respective localities" and were not to discuss the main principles of liberation.[20] Alexander told the assembled deputies on September 16 that he hoped "this great work to be accomplished in a manner not hurtful to anyone and satisfactory to all."[21] Unfortunately this was an impossible task, as the peasants believed the land they toiled rightfully belonged to them, and the nobles also

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[18] Mosse, 54.
[19] Ibid., 57.
[20] Ibid., 58.
[21] Mosse, 58.

claimed the land for themselves, making it "absolutely certain from the start that there could be no solution satisfactory to both the main classes of Russian society."[22]

Tensions continued to rise between the deputies representing the provincial committees and the main commission, and many deputies appealed to the Tsar himself, declaring their disappointment with the commission's proposals. Even the liberal minority believed what was proposed was unacceptable, as they thought it would ruin landowners without helping the peasants. The liberals proposed different ideas, such as the immediate transfer of land to the peasants and the creation of an elective national assembly. This, however, the tsar would not accept, and all deputies received official reprimands and were dispersed.[23] This meeting of the first group of deputies demonstrated some of the fundamental problems facing Alexander. Throughout the emancipation reform deliberations, "he had spared no effort to enlist the cooperation of the gentry" and had tried to encourage them to take an active role in the process. Though he yearned for the support and consent of the nobility, "he had never been able to permit real freedom of discussion."[24] The majority of the deputies were opposed to a landed emancipation, as were the majorities in the provincial committees. The liberal minorities, however, went even beyond freedom with land, going "farther in their sympathy for the peasants than appeared practicable to the government," calling for a diverse array of far-reaching reforms in all aspects of Russian public life.[25] Thus Alexander's wish for discussion and noble participation in the process of the emancipation process ultimately

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[22] Mosse, 59.
[23] Ibid., 60.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Mosse, 60.

delayed the reform, forcing him to reject many of the proposals brought before him for consideration.

After changes in appointments to the Editing Commission in July 1860, commission members began the codification of the new law, with a deadline of October 22, 1860. Next the proposal had to be passed to the Main Committee and, finally, discussed in the Imperial Council. In the Imperial Council Alexander tried to hasten the process, as it had now been going on for four years. He also tried to impress upon the members of the Council the importance of improving the situation of the serfs, because he believed "the abolition of serfdom was vital to the future strength of Russia."[26] The Council began discussing the "one-thousand-odd sections of the statute," an enormous task that continued to produce opposing opinions on certain sections for some and on the very concept of liberation for others. The tsar often sided with the majority in disputes, and in an attempt to speed up the process, allowed for a final reduction in the maximum size of land allotments.[27] He also permitted the introduction of a pauper's allotment. This pauper's allotment would be "a quarter of the legal maximum for any given province," allocated with no redemption fee attached.

The liberal bureaucrats found themselves trying to abolish serfdom, while working for an absolutist state based on serfdom. Of the obstacles they faced, arguably the most restrictive was "Alexander II's refusal to permit the peasants to redeem their plow lands without the assent of the landowner, not to mention his unwavering attachment to his prerogatives as monarch."[28] The plan's stages were: 1) the personal

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[26] Mosse, 64.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Zakharova, 30.

emancipation of the peasants, 2) temporary obligation to the state, and 3) the final transition to redemption. The right of the peasants to use their land allotments of land was intended to be perpetual, with their repayment of the required dues and redemption "their only escape from the net in which the state had so tightly enmeshed them."[29]

Serfdom was officially abolished March 3, 1861, followed by reforms for the appanage peasants in 1863 and the state peasants in 1866. The serfs received the full rights of free rural inhabitants. Nobles retained their property rights, but they had to grant the use of specified allotments to the peasants "in return for a specified obligation." The peasants had the right, with the consent of the nobles, to acquire full ownership of the land once they were freed of their obligations.

Although the reform favored the nobility, no one was satisfied. The nobles lost a third of their land, and the land given to the peasant communes was much less than what the peasants had lived on before. The nobility also decided what land went to the commune, which led to the peasants receiving land that was difficult to farm (such as swamp land or infertile fields). The emancipation allowed a two-year transition period before the reforms were actually put into effect, except for household serfs, who received immediate personal freedom, but no land. [30] Nevertheless, the emancipation proved very costly for the government, because it owned the peasants' debt. During Mikhail

[29] Zakharova, 31.
[30] Mosse, 68.

Reitern's[31] term as Minister of Finance (1862-78) "the size of the state debt increased by 3,000 million rubles."[32]

Emancipation of the Serfs: Implementation and Effects

The public reception of the emancipation reforms varied. While the government expected jubilation and excitement from the peasants over the emancipation, this was rarely the case. Historian Daniel Field's article "Year of Jubilee" describes in detail an encounter between the government officials bringing news of the emancipation and the peasants in the Kaluga Province. [33] In 1861, the governor of Kaluga Province sent 167 officials as "heralds of liberty" to the districts of the provinces to read the relevant sections of the reform to the peasants. The peasants were "polite but exhibited 'astonishing restraint.'" He describes the men as worrying about how much land they would receive and the terms under which they would hold it. When the allotments and dues were explained, "the men mumbled vaguely and wandered off."[34] The peasant women seemed cautious but pleased, however, especially as the nobles' rights to fruit, mushrooms, fowl, etc. from the serfs was now abolished. The peasant woman Luker'ia serves to exemplify the joy some felt at the outset of the emancipation, supposedly giving the finger in the direction of the manor house and shouting "Now I'm free!" [35]

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[31] M. Kh. Reitern is either spelled Reitern or Reutern depending on the source, therefore for continuity he will be referred to as Reitern in this work.

[32] Peter Gatrell, "The Meaning of the Great Reforms in Russian Economic History," in *Russia's Great Reforms, 1855-1881*, ed. Ben Eklof, John Bushnell, and Larissa Zakharova (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 97.

[33] Daniel Field, "The Year of Jubilee," in *Russia's Great Reforms,* 40-57.

[34] Field, 40.

[35] Ibid.

Though the emancipation reform was imperfect and difficult to implement, it was nevertheless a law that freed over millions from bondage.[36] A major problem with implementation, however, was that the government did not give the peasants an explanation of the reform that they could understand, especially the stages involved. For example, some took the idea of a two-year transition period to mean that if they remained working for the landowner during the two-year transition period, they would be given land for free, without redemption payments, once it was over. Rumors that this was not the "real" emancipation spread quickly, and often the officials tasked with explaining it were met with hostility. Many communes refused to sign the reform; by January 1862, about 3% of the total charters required for the empire had been signed. A year later, only two-thirds of the total required had been signed.[37]

Another misunderstanding was that the peasants had their own conception of property ownership. Many peasants firmly believed that the land they tilled was *theirs*, although they thought it was the *property* of God or the tsar. For the peasants, the idea that they had to pay for *their* land "was a greater outrage to justice than serfdom itself." This "outrage" was the basis for much of the tension between ex-serfs and government officials, as well as nobles, in 1861.[38] It also became apparent that it was almost impossible to sell one's allotment, and impossible to free oneself from the debt that this land now entailed. By 1880, "only half of one percent of the ex-serfs" had managed to detach themselves from the commune. Though most peasants did not want to leave the

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[36] Field, 41.
[37] Ibid., 47.
[38] Ibid., 49.

commune or their land, the concept of getting a "fresh start" and doing something new elsewhere was essentially impossible for those mainly younger peasants who wanted it.

Though the abolition of serfdom was momentous as a moral act, the reality was that peasant life was still bleak. The process designed to stabilize the reforms was "loose and weak," while autocratic power remained untouched. The emancipation did not solve the land question, but tied the peasants to the state instead of the nobility, leaving both the peasants and the nobles equally dissatisfied. The statutes and administrative actions "all discriminated against peasants, circumscribed their geographical and occupational mobility, and imposed fiscal and economic burdens upon them."[39] For example, in the north, allotments of land were large but expensive, whereas in the south, the land was too valuable to give up to the peasants, so the allotments were much smaller. The compromises intended to satisfy the nobles meant that now many peasants could not make ends meet "relying solely on the output of their household plots and allotments," either because their allotment of land was too small, or because too much of what they produced had to go to redemption payments.[40]

The reason the redemption payments placed such a burden on the ex-serfs was that often these payments "were calculated according to an inflated value of the land and bore no relation to current market values."[41] The redemption payments therefore led to "the accumulation of substantial arrears."[42] Forms of sharecropping emerged between ex-serfs and their former owners. In some cases, labor contracts were written "in return for the legal right of access to the lord's land," such as forests and rivers for hunting and

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[39] Field, 41.
[40] Ibid., 49.
[41] Gatrell, 93.
[42] Ibid.

fishing. Many ex-serfs felt this to be an inescapable restoration of "servile relations" between ex-serfs and former serf owners, providing a clear example that elements of serfdom survived, despite the emancipation. Not only did the ex-serfs have to pay back the redemption costs, they also had to pay local and central government taxes.[43] Though many peasants were indebted to the state, there was a sense of security in the fact that their land could not be taken away.[44] Household serfs, who made up about seven percent of the serf population, were "not usually entitled to allotments of plow land," and though free of redemption fees, were left less much secure than other serfs.

The liberation of the serfs aided prosperous peasants but led to the further decline of poorer peasants.[45] As for the nobility, they lost land, income, and labor, as well as status. In Field's essay "Year of Jubilee," N.V. Sakharov, one of the many officials sent to the countryside to announce the emancipation, recounts a noblewoman crying, shouting that they had once had everything and now they had nothing, expressing general anger over the news of the emancipation.[46] Although the arbitrary power of the landowner ended with the emancipation, peasants still found themselves subjected to the nobles as a class. Nobles continued to dominate local government and administration, including the agencies charged with implementing the emancipation. Many ex-serfs were forced to turn to the nobility "as renters or wage laborers or sharecroppers" in order to survive, again placing the peasant in the subservient/submissive role in society.[47] The characteristics of the servile economy survived the abolition of serfdom, in the form of

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[43] Gatrell, 93
[44] Ibid., 94.
[45] Mosse, 9.
[46] Field, 44.
[47] Field, 50.

sharecropping and other types of agreements similar to *barshchina* (labor dues). Even after the abolition of serfdom, peasants were still ascribed, but to the village commune instead of to a master. The commune regulated the comings and goings of peasants, and peasants who left to work in factories or trade were still obligated to send part of their earnings back to the commune. However, freedom of movement for the peasant, despite the need for permission to travel, grew substantially after the abolition of serfdom.

While there were moral and military reasons for the emancipation, its foremost purpose was for economic modernization, and to maximize growth and prosperity, which serfdom had impeded. Yet the extent to which the peasants became "modern" citizens of the empire is debatable. Russia remained rigidly hierarchical. Though serfs became "free rural inhabitants," they were subject to the vagaries of local law, rather than national law, and though they could serve on juries after the judicial reform of 1864, the "property qualifications for jury service excluded all but a few rich peasants."[48] The social tension between freed serfs and the gentry was ever present, and the serfs were still tied to the land due to the taxes demanded by the state and the redemption fees (which had to be paid off over 49 years). The redemption fees and taxes that kept the serfs tied to the land meant that the free labor force the tsar desired did not emerge.

Censorship Reform

In order to promote the growth of culture and the flourishing of ideas within the general populace, in contrast to Nicholas I, Alexander II knew to relax controls. For example, passports for travel abroad were freely issued, causing the number of people

[48] Field, 51.

who traveled abroad to increase 4.5 times from 1856 to 1859. In August 1856, amnesty was declared for political prisoners, such as "surviving Decembrists, Petrashevtsy, and participants in the Polish insurrection of 1831," a total of nine thousand people.[49] The most important manifestation of cultural relaxation was the censorship reform.

In spring 1865 Alexander II passed new censorship laws, which would remain in place for forty years.[50] This included the removal of preliminary censorship, foreign works were now permitted in universities without being censored by the state, and any violations of censorship norms were now dealt with in a public jury trial.[51] Under Nicholas I, censorship had been oppressive, keeping the public in the dark about all government activities and stifling intellectual discussion. Books were banned, publishing companies shut down, and a central censorship committee was created to "supervise" the education of youth, observe internal security, and "promote support for the policies of the government."[52] Alexander II, on the other hand, wanted to promote critical thinking in Russia and also make the workings of the government more transparent to the people than it had ever been (e.g. publishing the public budget each year).

In May 1862 radical pamphlets titled *Young Russia* circulated St. Petersburg. These demanded elective national and provincial assemblies, elected judges, publicly owned factories, universal education, the abolition of marriage, and the dissolution of monasteries.[53] A special commission was set up to find the authors of these pamphlets, as well as members of secret revolutionary organizations. The first political trial since

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[49] Zakharova, 23.
[50] Mosse, 83.
[51] Ibid.
[52] David W. Edwards, "Russian Ecclesiastical Censorship during the Reign of Tsar Nicholas I," *Journal of Church and State* 19, no. 1 (1977), 85. www.jstor.org/stable/23914701.
[53] Mosse, 109.

Nicholas I was the trial of poet M.I. Mikhailov, who was arrested as the "reputed author of one of the clandestine handbills" circulating St. Petersburg and sentenced to penal servitude in Siberia.[54] This trial symbolized a shift in Alexander's political policies. Leading radical journals were suspended, and Nikolai Chernyshevsky, who edited one of them, was arrested in 1861 along with other journalists.[55] Chernyshevsky was brought to trial as one of the editors of the radical journals, and sentenced to fourteen years of hard labor in Siberia and then life in exile.

Alexander's censorship reform certainly promoted critical thinking, and the new freedom of publication and public intellectual debate sparked a flourishing of culture, but also the growth of revolutionary movements. One of the unintended consequences of the censorship reforms was that revolutionaries were now able to spread their message to the public, and the encouragement of critical thinking led to the questioning of the autocracy itself. This was politically destabilizing; ultimately Alexander II tried to pull back on these reforms because of the dangers such changes posed to autocratic power, but he could not stop the flow of ideas, particularly revolutionary ones, once Pandora's box had been opened.

Zemstvo Reform

Due to the abolition of the nobility's manorial power and new civil rights for the peasantry, local government had to be reformed. The new administrative institution was called the zemstvo. The process began with local committees submitting projects for the

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[54] Mosse, 110.
[55] Ibid.

reform of local self-government to a main committee and an editing commission.[56] As with the Emancipation process, members of these committees disagreed on much. In the main committee, some members believed the nobility should manage local affairs, while the others argued that all social groups should participate equally. P.A. Valuiev, who became Minister of the Interior in 1861, favored the nobility, hoping to reserve the greatest influence in local affairs for the nobility, place the zemstvos under control of the Ministry of the Interior, and allow the zemstvos to deal with economic issues alone. Reformers like Nikolai Miliutin and Mikhail Reitern attacked many principles in Valuiev's draft, and the struggle between the liberals and conservatives continued within both the commission and the Imperial Council. Alexander finally signed the zemstvo statute in January 1864. The statute kept many of Valuiev's original principles as a form of "consolation prize offered to the nobility for the losses of 1861."[57]

The zemstvos had two levels: district and provincial. The goal of the zemstvos originally was to allow the people to participate in the administration of local affairs. The zemstvos met each year for short sessions, where they debated and voted on a budget, discussed outlines of their work, and decided on future policy. Members were elected by three groups of electors. These groups were based on property qualifications: the first group was the landowners; the second, townsmen; and the last, peasants (who voted indirectly). The size of each zemstvo was fixed and although the landowners held a majority, it was not an absolute majority.

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[56] Mosse, 77.
[57] Ibid, 78.

In the first zemstvo elections, the gentry was 42% of the electorate; the clergy, 6%; merchants, 10%; and peasants, 38%.[58] [59] Members of the district zemstvos elected the provincial zemstvos, which focused on "matters affecting a whole province."[60] Due to the skewing of the electorate, provincial assemblies consisted of 74% nobles and bureaucrats, 4% clergy, 11% merchants, and 11% peasants.[61] The peasant representation in the zemstvos was wildly disproportionate to numbers of peasants in the population, at least 80%, in favor of the landowning nobles who composed a small fraction, about 2%.

The zemstvos nevertheless provided the first real opportunity for the peasants to participate in public affairs and administration. After 1873, the zemstvos were "given the right to make legally binding by-laws" relating to local issues, such as sanitation or fire prevention.[62] While they did not succeed in becoming fully autonomous, they did provide health care and education to rural districts and improved the conditions of hospitals, asylums, and other public institutions. Their role in fire prevention in the countryside had a positive impact on the lives of the peasants. The zemstvos also improved elementary education; in 1856 there were only around 8,000 primary schools in the entire country, but by 1880, there were over 23,000 (the majority of which were funded by the zemstvos).[63]

The creation of the zemstvo allowed the peasants a degree of political participation that had not existed before. Their right to vote moved them one step closer to social and political modernization. While they were many degrees removed from the

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[58] Petrov, 198.
[59] Exact figures of first zemstvo election: 6,204 landowners, 1,649 townsmen, 5171 peasants, 13,024 total.
[60] Mosse, 79.
[61] Petrov, 199.
[62] Mosse, 80.
[63] Mosse, 81.

political power of the nobility and the state, Alexander had given the peasant elite new ideas about their place in society.

1870 Municipal Government Reform

There was a similar law for municipalities, intended to create "urban self-administration on the same principles" as the zemstvos.[64] The municipal statute of 1870 created an elective town council (duma) in all towns, similar in status and function to the zemstvos. Until the early 1870s, the City Charter of Catherine II (1785) was the primary legal document regulating municipal administration. However, by the 1870s, the Charter "no longer reflected the actual level of urban social and economic development."[65] City administrations had no elected members; instead, "administrative duties were performed by assemblies of the 'urban elite,'" and commoners were generally banned from participating in public affairs. In response to petitions, the Ministry of the Interior decided to tackle city reform and formed a committee, which, taking public opinion into account, "authorized the creation of special city commissions made up of local bureaucrats and representatives of the urban population."[66] After eight years of discussion and drafts, the ministry approved the measure in 1870. As a result of continuous revision to meet the objections of the elite, the statute was much more conservative than originally intended. While the first draft bore similarities to the reforms of the early 1860s, the final draft had very few. However, the municipal reforms succeeded in taking administrative responsibilities out of the hands of the "urban elite" and into the hands of a representative

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64 Zakharova, 33.

65 Valeriia Nardova, "Municipal Self-Government After the 1870 Reform," in *Russia's Great Reforms,* 181.

66 Nardova, 182.

body (the Duma).[67] The number of delegates was based on the number of voters in the city, but voting rights were restricted to property owners and legal entities; this provision excluded many members of society such as hired laborers, teachers, and physicians.[68]

The dumas had the same difficulty in achieving full autonomy as the zemstvos; they had a "lack of control over the police, an elective system copied from Prussia, but alien to Russian municipal traditions, based on three electoral groups with a few wealthy citizens enrolled in the first, the bulk of the poorer in the third."[69] Despite these drawbacks, the dumas still "did much to revive Russian local life."[70] Networks of municipal services were created in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Their tasks included taking care of the water supply, paving roads, improving hospitals, and even running slaughterhouses. Smaller towns provided other services based on the needs of that town. Healthcare improved as the number of hospitals increased and their quality improved. Like the zemstvos, the dumas had responsibility for primary education as well, and often formed committees to supervise the municipal schools.[71] The number of municipal schools grew dramatically in Moscow and St. Petersburg, as well as in cities like Kiev and Chernigov. In fact, from 1873 to 1880, the number of municipal schools in St. Petersburg rose from sixteen to eighty-eight. The budget devoted to primary education also rose sharply during the reform era.

Local government reform was meant to make local government more efficient and aid the transition brought about by the emancipation. The zemstvos improved health

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[67] Nardova, 183.
[68] Ibid., 184.
[69] Mosse, 81.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Mosse, 82.

care in villages and towns "wonderfully,"[72] and they gave the peasants their first taste of political participation. The municipal dumas woke Russian towns "from the profound slumber into which they had plunged in the reign of Nicholas."[73] However this newfound freedom also had unintended consequences as it further destabilized the already unstable countryside, and like many of the other reforms, threatened the power of the autocracy.

Education Reform

Educational reform under Alexander II targeted universities as well as primary schools. A state system of primary schools was established, and for the first time in Russian history primary education was free and secularized. In this new system, competition for spots in high schools were made equal among the castes, no longer allowing preferential treatment for the children of the elite.

The process for the reform of the university education system, however, began in spring 1861 when the Council of Ministers considered the state of the universities, which many conservative ministers wished to close for "reorganization."[74] Though the tsar refused, Admiral Y.V. Putiatin, a rigid disciplinarian, replaced the liberal Minister of Education M.M. Kovalevskii. He introduced new regulations, which led to student protests; in response, all lectures were suspended, and St. Petersburg University was closed. Protests continued to escalate until the Governor-General called out troops to quiet the situation. Meetings continued, and about 300 students were arrested. Demonstrations occurred in many other higher education institutions across the empire to

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[72] Mosse, 94.
[73] Mosse, 82.
[74] Mosse, 107.

support the protestors. Tsar Alexander stepped in, relieved the Governor-General of his duties, saying that he did not approve of students being arrested. However, St. Petersburg University remained closed until a "new statute for all Russian universities" could be created.[75]

The University Statute of 1863 declared that a Rector, elected every four years from among the professors of that university, would head each university. The university administration was to be run by a council composed of the professors themselves. They were to appoint and train new professors, open new institutions, and scholarly inquiries and missions abroad were encouraged.[76] The ministry promoted university autonomy of at first, which had been limited under Nicholas I, and now controlled their own curricula.[77] Student regulations were also relaxed; now study abroad, which had been banned under Nicholas I, was allowed.[78]

From 1863 to 1880, the Russian university system saw a phase of rapid development. Alexander II's education reforms were meant to modernize the educational system by extending education to the peasants, which would create a well-educated work force to modernize the Russian economy. The educational reform did succeed by providing basic education for all people, regardless of caste. However, literacy did not spread as quickly as Alexander II had hoped because peasants wanted their children in the fields. It did, however, introduce the principle of equal opportunity to Russia.

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[75] Mosse, 108.

[76] Ibid., 83.

[77] N.G.O. Pereira, *Tsar-Liberator: Alexander II of Russia 1818-1881* (Newtonville, MA: Oriental Research Partners, 1983), 68.

[78] Mosse, 98.

This newfound freedom and education also had some unintended consequences, such as sparking student protests for more concessions. Alexander answered these with the "May Regulations," which led to more unrest. Incendiary ideas could now spread quickly throughout the country, including rural villages. As early as 1862, major sectors of society were discontented and it seemed the country would be plunged into chaos; it began with unrest among university students in Kiev that later spread to other schools. Alexander ignored these "breaches of discipline," refusing to close Kiev University, but this only encouraged more disorder and led to organized student demonstrations against the government. In 1861, a series of illegal proclamations were circulated in St. Petersburg, urging the educated classes to seize power from the government. The pamphlets also started calling for a constituent assembly, a constitution, and general social transformation. The struggle between the government and the university students ultimately led to Alexander's administration attempting to withdraw many of these reforms.

Economic Reform

Russia's traditional economy was a major impediment to change, but Alexander believed these obstacles had to be overcome, given that the empire's underdevelopment had been a major factor in the devastating loss in the Crimean War. The tsar attempted to modernize Russia's economy through a number of financial reforms, the first of which was aimed at the poorest members of society, the serfs. He pardoned 40 million rubles in tax arrears and gave tax exemptions to regions "severely hit" by the Crimean war.[79] The

[79] Mosse, 42.

real process of reform, however, began when Mikhail Reitern was appointed Minister of Finance, charged with carrying out Alexander's economic reforms. Before 1862, many important sources of revenue "had been administered independently by various government departments."[80] He centralized accounts and revenue sources, improved audit methods, and after 1862 began publishing the budget each year as an attempt to promote transparency in the relationship between the state and the people.[81] His technical reforms sought to improve and develop the economic life of the empire, which he believed could be found in railway construction.

Reitern devoted time and resources to railway building, specifically in "the encouragement of railway building by private companies."[82] Government assistance to the private sector, especially in iron, steel, and engineering companies, helped those industries to expand and therefore contributed to the speedy completion of the railway projects. When Alexander came to the throne, Russia had only about 660 miles of railway. At the time of the tsar's assassination in 1881, the empire had approximately 14,000 miles of railway. The major objective of this construction was to facilitate the export of grain, which was achieved. Between 1861 and 1865, the average annual export of grain was about 2.7 billion pounds, by 1880 it had risen to an annual average of about 9.3 billion pounds.[83] The construction of railways not only increased grain exports, but also allowed for the general expansion of Russian exports and imports in the 1860s and 1870s. Russia began to "import rails, locomotives, and other capital goods on a larger scale" through the use of the railways, however this ultimately led to a "sustained trade

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[80] Mosse, 88.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.

deficit during the late 1860s and early 1870s."[84] Large-scale enterprises increased their output during this period as well. The output per person between 1845 and 1855 increased by 25 percent, while between 1855 and 1863 output per person increased by 85 percent. In general, foreign trade increased during the reform era, particularly an "increase in European demand for Russian grain," due to the railways, lower duties, and the liberalization of trade in Europe during this time period. Duties were reduced in 1850, 1857, and 1868.[85] The new railways also allowed for more efficient supply and transport chains, and were used to transport troops as well as military supplies.[86]

In 1864, Russia's first commercial bank was created. The government played a large role in its creation, as it provided "up to half of the foundation capital," and other financial institutions quickly followed.[87] The government continued to encourage banks to start and grow, and towards the end of Alexander's reign, Russia not only had 278 municipal banks, but also 33 joint stock commercial banks. There were societies for mutual credit, loan and savings associations, and a huge growth in joint-stock companies. Although the State Bank maintained its important role in Russian finances, the creation of private banks and other financial institutions during this period helped lay the foundation for commercial and industrial expansion.[88] This growth in banking during the reform period "increased the importance of capitalist entrepreneurs."[89]

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84 Gatrell, 89.
85 Ibid.
86 John Bushnell, "Miliutin and the Balkan War: Military Reform vs. Military Performance," in *Russia's Great Reforms, 1855-1881*, 139.
87 Gatrell, 97.
88 Mosse, 89.
89 Ibid., 9.

At the same time, the expansion of large-scale production and industry caused the ranks of the industrial proletariat to grow. However, the state bank was not established to extend credit for economic development to prospective entrepreneurs, but instead was used to provide low interest loans to the government, lower inflation on paper currency, and to "retire part of the national debt."[90] The construction of the railways stimulated growth in Russian industry.[91] The new railway systems promoted the trade and export of Russian grain through the Baltic and Black Sea ports, and allowed for easier transportation of troops to the south and west.[92] The economic reforms were meant to modernize the economy, and along with the emancipation, to increase prosperity, productivity, and the wealth of the country in general (especially because Russia was severely indebted). While the economic reforms certainly laid the path for rapid economic growth, development, and modernization particularly in industry and advanced finance, the reforms did not cause the immediate growth in the economy Alexander II was expecting.[93] It also did not significantly improve people's lives (which was one of the original goals of the reforms), due to the destabilizing nature of the emancipation, which went hand in hand with these economic reforms.

Military Reform

The backwardness of the Russian military and failure to modernize proved to be disastrous in the Crimean War. Alexander and his government knew that military reform was necessary to avoid another international embarrassment. Dmitrii Miliutin was

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[90] Rieber, 37.
[91] Mosse, 9.
[92] Ibid., 43.
[93] Ibid., 105.

appointed Minister of War in 1861, and the military draft was suspended for three years to allow time for the reforms to be developed and implemented. During his tenure, Miliutin introduced a series of reforms in the hopes of modernizing and improving the Russian military. He believed that with the education of soldiers, and a reduction in military cruelty, the army would not only become more technologically advanced but would generally be more effective, as the troops would not fight out of fear.

Miliutin began to abolish the more barbaric forms of corporal punishment meted out to soldiers, such as flogging and branding. Miliutin also suggested length of service be reduced to eight years, although he would have preferred a shorter term because he wanted to create a small peacetime force and large reserve. His ultimate goal was to have a reserve army that could be called upon when needed. He believed soldiers needed training in adapting to terrain instead of parade marching, that they needed rifled weapons, and that the supply system needed to be updated. He also wanted to reform the military education system, and in particular pushed for a curriculum that included instruction in reading and writing. Alexander approved his plan, which "served as the blueprint for Miliutin's activity until his retirement in 1881."[94]

In 1859, Miliutin succeeded in reducing the term of military service from twenty-five to sixteen years, the Military Code was revised, punishments were reduced, and he abolished the practice of using military service as a form of civil punishment. Sailors' and soldiers' sons were released from obligatory service; they became free taxpaying citizens, and the category of military cantonists and all military colonies were abolished. In addition, basic education (such as reading and arithmetic) was now given to all

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[94] Bushnell, 146.

draftees, including peasants.[95] A new statute abolished the crueler, more barbaric forms of punishment in 1863, an act that "completely altered the spirit of the Russian army and navy."[96] The procedure within military courts was modernized to make it resemble the form of civil courts established in 1864, military engineering was improved, and "the construction of strategic railways was sped up."[97]

The military justice system had been similar to the pre-reform civilian justice system, and provided no provision for defense counsel. Commanders in the military courts had the authority to reduce or raise sentences the courts dispensed, with no oversight. In 1867, the reformed military justice system was codified, including courts for appeals and proposed changes to punishments. The tsar himself appointed the judges at the higher levels of the system.[98] Administrative changes improved military efficiency, such as the modernization of weapons, equipment, and military schooling. The former cadet schools had focused on purely military instruction. Miliutin organized the new schools like their civilian counterparts, with military instruction added to a regular curriculum. This meant that as soldiers began to be taught to read and write, and receive a general education, they were able to achieve a higher level of skill in regards to military technology and training than soldiers in the past.[99] Miliutin continued to push for literacy programs, which finally became mandatory in 1875 (though it only lasted until 1880).

Miliutin's introduction of conscription was a step towards social equity, at least in terms of military service. Before conscription reform, only the taxpayers were required to

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[95] Rieber, 29.
[96] Mosse, 84.
[97] Mosse, 85.
[98] Bushnell, 149.
[99] Mosse, 85.

perform military service, namely the peasants and the lower middle class. Miliutin formed a commission in 1863 to prepare a new statute on military service. Nobles and wealthy merchants fiercely opposed this reform, because in the past their status had shielded their sons from military service. This noble opposition delayed implementation of the reform, but finally, on January 1, 1874, Alexander signed Miliutin's statute on military service; now all men could be conscripted for military service after the age of twenty, and military service was reduced to six years.[100] Though there was a reduction in service for those who were highly educated, this was still a step toward a form of social equality among the classes. The days of buying exemptions were over.[101]

Milutin more or less succeeded in his goal of modernizing the military; "by the end of Miliutin's tenure Russian arms were roughly up to the European standard."[102] By 1870, he built an army reserve corps that enabled the smaller standing army he had hoped for.[103] Due to Miliutin's persistence, the reform army was also somewhat less costly and better trained. Increasing basic literacy and numeracy for peasant conscripts allowed the military to use advanced weaponry more effectively, and officers received a better technical educations than their predecessors.[104] (However, the Russian Army still faltered in combat and field tactics, which the Russo-Turkish war exposed.[105]) An unintended consequence of military reform was that peasant soldiers returned to their villages combat ready, capable of inciting or leading rebellion and even more dangerous to the state than they were previously.

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100 Rieber, 29.
101 Mosse, 87.
102 Bushnell, 146.
103 Ibid., 147.
104 Mosse, 100.
105 Bushnell, 156.

Judicial Reform 1864

Alexander II, like Peter the Great before him, felt that Russia's corrupt legal system needed to be reformed. For many citizens, "the law did not exist."[106] In late 1861, Alexander set up a commission of officials and jurists to discuss and determine the general principles of a "radical transformation of the Russian legal system."[107] Alexander instructed the commission to plan the reorganization of the judiciary based on the example of European court systems and legal theories. The commission studied the flaws of the existing system and found twenty-five "radical defects" that deviated from "European public law and science."[108] The commission decided to propose an independent judiciary. Alexander II accepted this recommendation and separated the judiciary from the bureaucracy, in an attempt to remove the state's influence on the legal process.[109] The commission also argued that the Russian legal system was too complicated. The main principles of the reform were made public in October 1862, and "comments were invited from universities, officers of the law, and private individuals."[110] The more than 400 comments and observations received were reviewed by a committee of "the best jurists of the empire, charged with preparing the detailed legislation."[111] This committee worked for just under a year, preparing a draft of legal codes of procedure and new judicial institutions, which received the emperor's approval in late 1864.

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106 Mosse, 23.
107 Mosse, 73.
108 Ibid., 74 & 86.
109 Mosse, 86.
110 Ibid., 74.
111 Ibid.

The new judicial system tried to address the defects the commission had identified. It was public, provided for a bar, justices of the peace were elected, judges received tenure, and trial by jury was introduced. Jurors were drawn from many social groups, including the peasantry.[112] These changes limited the power of the autocracy by establishing legal order within the judiciary.[113] The reformed judiciary was divided into two parts: the peace courts (presided over by justices of the peace) and the regular court, each of which included a court of appeals.

The peace courts dealt with petty cases, small conflicts, and "disputes of everyday life," and the justices of the peace were at first elected by popular vote, then later by the zemstvos. The regular court heard more serious cases, and their judges were nominated by the emperor. The peace courts succeeded in improving rural justice. Previously, if two peasants had a disagreement, their problem was left unsolved, and they were both punished. The new peace courts treated people politely, listened well to complaints, and tried to reach a positive and fair outcome for all those involved.[114] The regular courts improved as well, through the establishment of public trial and trials by jury.[115] The first of these reform courts opened in 1866. While these courts did modernize the judicial system as intended, in some areas of the empire the new system was applied in a "modified form"; for example, trial by jury was not applied to courts in the Caucuses, Poland or the western provinces.[116]

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112 Zakharova, 33.
113 Ibid., 34.
114 Mosse, 76.
115 Mosse, 87.
116 Mosse, 87.

Revolutionaries took advantage of the public trials as forums to propagandize their ideas, alarming the tsar, who removed political trials from the reform courts in 1878, which outraged people. This reform did, however, succeed in making the court system an easier and more useful experience for the common people than previously.[117] The new courts, especially the peace courts, were very popular among the people to settle common disputes because they knew that the justices would treat them politely, act quickly (without the long drawn out decisions of a bureaucratized system), and above all they acted without "bribes or blackmail."[118] Before Alexander II began to withdraw his judicial reforms due to revolutionary agitation during trials, the new courts succeeded in providing more equitable distribution of justice in the empire.

Why did the Great Reforms ultimately fail?

The French economist Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu compared the reforms of Alexander II's reign to building operations "carried out without a blueprint, without any general plan, [and] without an architect to coordinate the different operations."[119] He believed that the autocracy introduced innovations into an ancient structure, while "neglecting nearby indispensable repairs," causing incomplete social and economic transformation. For example, the Ministry of the Interior remained in the hands of "bureaucratic centralizers," which meant that the new self-governing institutions created by the reforms struggled to develop true independence.[120]

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[117] Ibid., 76.
[118] Ibid., 89.
[119] Ibid., 90.
[120] Mosse, 89.

Alexander quickly realized that his "thaw" threatened his own power. The public began to criticize "every measure of the Emperor and his government."[121] This small taste of freedom caused them to demand more. A return to the police state that Nicholas I had created was now intolerable. The public, who had been completely excluded from public life under Nicholas, "now protested that the relative freedom permitted by Alexander was insufficient."[122] Alexander II's attempts to accommodate all points of view and his belief in the necessity of compromise ultimately "making the New Russia an incomplete and uncomfortable dwelling where friends and opponents of innovation felt almost equally ill at ease."[123]

Another reason that the reforms did not last was Alexander's adamant refusal, until the last day of his life, to agree to a constitution. Desire for a constitution was first expressed in the assemblies of the nobility in the early years of the Great Reform era, but the tsar blocked it. As Mosse writes, "constitutionalism was not in accord with Russia's political tradition."[124] Alexander believed that he had a God-given right to rule; power sharing in any form would, in his view, diminish his divine authority. When the St. Petersburg zemstvo pressed for a constitution in 1865, Alexander claimed that a constitution would lead to Russia's demise.[125] He then dissolved the St. Petersburg zemstvo and exiled some of its leading members, weakening the constitutional movement in the zemstvos until it was revived in 1875.

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121 Ibid., 106.
122 Ibid.
123 Ibid., 90.
124 Mosse, 111.
125 Mosse, 112.

The tragedy, of course, is that the Great Reforms directly led to Alexander's assassination by the revolutionary group the People's Will. Alexander's version of "glasnost" freed people to speak their minds, and those who spoke loudest wanted a revolution. The first of many attempts on Alexander's life occurred on April 16, 1866 when he was shot at in the Winter Garden.[126] Investigations revealed that many members of the revolutionary circles were students, so Alexander, in an attempt to "change the spirit of Russian youth," released a rescript calling for the suppression of "subversive activities" in universities and other educational institutions.[127] This began what were, in effect, educational counter reforms, where "teachers became officials and were forced to act as spies and policemen."[128] Many students were expelled for trivial breaches of discipline, causing "the ranks of the malcontents" to swell, as the expelled student became the most common figures in revolutionary groups.[129] Through political maneuvering, conservatives began to replace liberals in the government, and Alexander's complete trust in his Chief of Police, P.A. Shuvalov, led to him appointing arch-conservatives to the Ministries of Justice and the Interior. In 1867 Count K.I Pahlen replaced D.N. Zamiatin, "the patron of the judicial reforms." Count Pahlen was an extremely conservative opponent of the reforms; with his appointment, coupled with other conservative appointments, the establishment of a reactionary government was complete.[130]

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126 For more information on this attack, see Mosse, 113.
127 Mosse, 113.
128 Ibid., 114.
129 Ibid.
130 Ibid.,116.

In the last decade of his life, Alexander was disillusioned, cynical, and isolated, due to the many assassination attempts by revolutionary groups. He could not understand his own unpopularity and the unpopularity of his reforms, believing that all he had to do to make an enemy was "to do [them] a favor."[131] By the late 1870s, the revolutionary movement had become increasingly violent, and in early 1877 the "government staged the first mass trial of revolutionaries."[132] As the trials were, at first, held in the new reform courts with juries, the accused were often acquitted or received very light sentences. Many who were acquitted were rearrested and exiled; those who were sentenced to prison saw their sentences increased.

In January 1878, Fyodor Trepov, the chief of the St. Petersburg police, was shot and wounded by a revolutionary noblewoman, Vera Zasulich, the daughter of a general. Acquitted by the jury, her comrades whisked her away to Switzerland before the police could rearrest her following the trial. After this scandal, the government declared that in the future, "rebellion, assassination or attempts on the lives of officials would be tried in military courts."[133] Violence continued regardless. In 1879, Prince Dimitri Kropotkin was killed, and an unsuccessful attempt was made on the life of General A.R. Drenteln, the new head of the Third Division, the palace secret police.[134] This was followed by another attempt on the tsar's life.[135] The public's refusal to cooperate with the authorities allowed the revolutionaries to escape completely after successful or unsuccessful assassination

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131 Mosse, 138.
132 Ibid., 135.
133 Ibid., 136.
134 Ibid.
135 Mosse, 137.

attempts. Governors-General across Russia were granted state-of-emergency powers, and military courts worked to convict and execute revolutionaries.

Despite the increased pressure (or because of it), on September 7, 1879, the terrorist group the People's Will "formally condemned Alexander Romanov to death… [and] from now on every effort of the movement was directed to his assassination."[136] When their first attempts failed, they published an appeal to the tsar claiming they would continue unless he called a Constituent Assembly.[137] Yet another assassination attempt failed in 1880, and Alexander authorized a new Supreme Executive Committee formed with immense powers, composed of both conservatives and liberals. This committee tried to appease the public by releasing political prisoners and allowing the press greater freedoms. After six months, the public seemed pacified.[138] The tsar and his commission planned "the formation of two commissions to prepare legislation," one financial and one administrative. These commissions would be composed of zemstvo representatives, officials, professors, and publicists. What they drafted "would come before a General Commission to be composed of the two Preparatory Commissions together with two elected 'experts' from each provincial zemstvo and major city."[139]

Alexander was willing to accept the commission's recommendation for a modest constitution, hoping that this concession would restore public trust in him. However, it was too late. On Sunday, March 13, 1881, Alexander gave "his final approval to the proposed constitutional innovations." Later that day, he was assassinated by members of the People's Will as he was returning to the palace after inspecting the Sunday Parades

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136 Mosse, 139.
137 For more information on the failed attempts, see Mosse, 139-141.
138 Mosse, 144.
139 Ibid.

and visiting his cousin, Grand Duchess Catherine. His death marked the end of reform era as his heir, Alexander III, immediately proceeded to undo many of Alexander II's reforms.

Alexander II's sweeping reforms dramatically changed Russia, even though he regretted many of them. Despite the many problems the emancipation created, the nobility's unlimited, arbitrary, and often abusive power over their serfs ended. The liberation of millions of serfs and state peasants "was a watershed, a turning point in Russian history."[140] The new railway lines and the expansion of banking and credit facilities also laid the foundation for an industrial revolution.[141] Alexander relaxed authoritarianism and centralization, increased self-rule in towns and the countryside, and lessened the power and influence of the nobility. However, his reforms did not go far enough, bringing about political instability and the flourishing of revolutionary groups and movements. The tsar desperately tried to retreat from some of his reforms, but there was no going back in the minds of the people. The reforms put into motion the forces of political and social change that proved unstoppable and would eventually lead to revolutions in 1905 and 1917.

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[140] Zakharova, 19.
[141] Mosse, 9.

Part Two: The Gorbachev Era

Introduction

In 1917, only thirty-six years after the assassination of Alexander II, the monarchy was toppled, and power in Russia transferred to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). By the 1980s, more than six decades after the revolution, the USSR still had not achieved economic prosperity and was on the verge of crisis. When Mikhail Gorbachev became General Secretary of the CPSU in 1985, the Soviet economy was stagnating. Domestic problems were abundant: "corruption, the decay of the social infrastructure, declining economic dynamism," the decline of technological advancement, as well as "difficulty of implementing policies despite the centralized controls exerted by the ministries."[142] Gorbachev not only inherited a superpower; domestically, he also "inherited a hidebound bureaucracy and an economy whose growth was in long-term decline from the 1950s to the 1980s."[143] Furthermore, "the gap in the efficiency of production, quality of products, scientific and technological development, the production of advanced technology and the use of advanced techniques began to widen" between Russia and the West.[144] The standard of living was declining, and with "decreasing returns on investment, low labor productivity," coupled with the decline of science and technology compared to the West, the country was in trouble.[145]

Agricultural production did not produce enough food for the nation, due to widespread inefficiencies on the collective farms: "sluggish economic growth and

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142 Richard Sakwa, *Gorbachev and His Reforms 1985-90),* (Cambridge: Prentice Hall, 1991), 21.
143 Archie Brown, *Seven Years that Changed the World* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 70.
144 Mikhail Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, (New York City: Harper & Row, 1987), 19.
145 Sakwa, 22.

agricultural difficulties could no longer sustain rises in consumption."[146] Harvests were so low that millions of tons of grain had to be imported "to reduce the food and feed grain deficit."[147] For example, in 1984 the Soviet Union produced "170 million metric tons, 70 million short of the planned target," lower than the average level from the 1960s.[148]

Despite these pressing issues, the money spent each year on the military industrial complex in the Soviet Union continued to increase, despite little to no yearly growth in gross domestic product.[149] By 1985, the defense budget was no longer sustainable. With so many problems, the state of the economy and its infrastructure could no longer be ignored. According to Gorbachev, a major shortcoming of the Soviet economic system was a "lack of inner stimuli for self-development." He also pointed to the fact that wages were guaranteed regardless of the cost or quality of goods. Prices were fixed, the market was guaranteed, and the states covered all losses.[150] Gorbachev believed that through a "profound structural reorganization of the economy," investment in new technologies, a focus on investment policy changes and "high standards in management," acceleration of scientific and technological advancement could be achieved.[151]

Another major problem was the large and inefficient bureaucracy, which harbored widespread corruption, such as bribery and severe abuses of power.[152] In addition, the political system was "palpably anti-pluralistic," with the highest authority resting within

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146 Sakwa, 27.

147 Zhores Medvedev, *Gorbachev*, (New York City: W.W. Norton & Company, 1986), 8.

148 Medvedev, 8.

149 CIA, *Analyzing Soviet Defense Programs, 1951-1990*, (Washington, D.C.: George Washington University, NSA Archive, 30 Dec. 2008), PDF. https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/DOC_0000872680.pdf

150 Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, 85.

151 Ibid., 27.

152 Ibid., 23.

the Communist Party and the various Party organs and ministries.[153] Gorbachev argued that the USSR could not meet the basic social needs, including housing, health care, foodstuffs, and consumer goods.[154] He was faced with the paradox of a country that could send rockets to space but could not make basic decent household appliances. Gorbachev also hoped to conquer numerous societal problems, namely "alcoholism, drug addiction, and crime."[155]

Like Alexander II, Gorbachev believed his country "was verging on crisis."[156] He was not, however, ready to abandon the communist project. He hoped that through modernizing reforms, he could salvage what he believed were Leninist ideals. However, his reforms—*glasnost,* which ended censorship and other restrictions on free speech, and *perestroika* of the political and economic system—led to numerous unintended consequences that contributed significantly to the end of communism and the dissolution the Soviet Union, including Gorbachev's ousting on December 25, 1991.

Gorbachev's First Year

Gorbachev, unlike past Party secretaries, was "entirely dependent on the Politburo, but he had a better opportunity than his immediate predecessors to make substantial changes in its composition."[157] Gorbachev's open leadership style was unfamiliar to Soviet citizens. His "new style was perhaps designed to inspire, but 'shock

153 Brown, 171.
154 Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, 21.
155 Ibid., 22.
156 Ibid., 24.
157 Medvedev, 166.

treatment' was required to get rapid results."[158] Gorbachev travelled around the country, speaking with citizens, discussing problems and issues that impacted people's everyday lives. For example, Gorbachev spoke with a chief surgeon in a hospital in Moscow who had many grievances, including too few qualified staff, insufficient pay, serious shortages of equipment and modern drugs.[159] Gorbachev provided Soviet citizens with a fresh, "simpler, less pompous style" of leadership they had never experienced before, which was intended to both gain him popular support and "be a model for other Party officials."[160]

Glasnost

Like Alexander II, Gorbachev believed that censorship needed to be drastically curtailed in order to promote the growth of culture and the flourishing of ideas. In his first speech on March 11, 1985, he called for more openness in the Party and the government; at the 27th Party Congress the following year, he argued that glasnost was the precondition for restructuring. In February 1987 Gorbachev announced "a manifesto for glasnost," stating that there should be no "blank pages" in Soviet history or literature, but he also warned that "criticism should always be from a party point of view."[161]

There were three parts to glasnost: information, discussion, and participation. The first, information, included "the lifting of most restrictions on the circulation of information," but not the complete abolition of censorship.[162] One of Gorbachev's first

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158 Medvedev, 184.
159 Ibid., 185.
160 Ibid., 186.
161 Sakwa, 66.
162 Ibid.

steps was to stop jamming the BBC and other Western radio stations. In June 1986, the censorship functions of Glavlit (Main Administration of Literature and State Publishing Houses) were abolished. Similar to Alexander II's abolition of preliminary censorship, published works and those to be published no longer needed Glavlit's approval, although Glavlit was still allowed "to monitor security matters."[163] Publishers, filmmakers, writers, and editors were no longer forced to be "directly answerable to the propaganda department of the Central Committee."[164] By 1989, previously banned books and authors were published, such as Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago,* George Orwell's *1984*, and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*.[165]

Although intellectuals may have rushed to buy *Doctor Zhivago*, most ordinary citizens experienced glasnost through films, which had for decades been "the main filler of leisure time."[166] Before Gorbachev, the production and creative process had to be filtered through the Communist Party's lens. Glasnost and perestroika gave filmmakers creative license and allowed moviegoers to see many previously banned films. Poets, writers, filmmakers, and other artists immediately "responded enthusiastically to Gorbachev's initial directives for perestroika and glasnost."[167] Criticism of everything from collectivization, to Stalinism, to "censorship in art and literature" began to appear across artistic spheres, including the official press.[168] Filmmakers enjoyed their newfound freedom of expression, and could produce movies on basically whatever they chose. New

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163 Sakwa, 67.
164 Ibid.
165 "Solzhenitsyn's Works Return to the USSR," *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 41, no. 47 (1989): 1.
166 Anna Lawton, *Kinoglasnost: Soviet Cinema in Our Time*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 9.
167 Ibid., 52.
168 Ibid.

films reflected the inquiring spirit of the reform era, as "at no other time were there so many film titles ending with a question mark or suspension dots — a visible sign of anxiety and frustration."[169] Gorbachev hoped giving the Soviet intelligentsia freedom of expression would bring him their support, thereby lending "credibility to Gorbachev's policies in the eyes of the people, and to mobilize public support."[170]

The relaxation of censorship was meant to show the Soviet people "life with all its contradictions and complexity."[171] Under Stalin's rule, even maps of the USSR had been censored as "state secrets." With most of these restrictions lifted, Soviet citizens were able to learn more about their country through maps, economic statistics, and historical data. Details about past disasters, such as the 1957 nuclear explosion in the Ural Mountains, were released, and information about current disasters and accidents became "increasingly swift and full."[172] In Gorbachev's first year in power, up to 2,000 letters a day addressed to the government were received. Article 49 in the Soviet constitution stated that anything written to officials or the government could not be considered anti-Soviet propaganda or used for prosecution, as long as the letters were not released publicly. Enforcement of this article allowed for the floodgates of criticism to open, and millions of letters were written to the Kremlin. Although KGB officials looking to prosecute someone would sometimes deliberately release these letters to the general public, Gorbachev valued these letters, often quoting from them in speeches, and using them as a "barometer of public opinion."[173]

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169 Lawton, 234.
170 Ibid., 52.
171 Sakwa, 66.
172 Ibid., 66.
173 Medvedev, 210.

Before Gorbachev's rule, the lack of Party and government transparency and the significant gap between "leadership assertions and popular knowledge," had grown so significantly "as to constitute a veritable crisis of authority."[174] Like Alexander II's censorship reform, glasnost attempted to bridge this divide and restore credibility and authority to the government by ending the secrecy of the past and establishing new communication networks between the government and the people. Just as the proceedings of the emancipation process under Alexander II were shared with the press and the public, full reports began to be published about Party meetings. Central Committee meetings were also occasionally televised. The Party's theoretical journal *Kommunist* received an infusion of liberal writers, which allowed it to "become the intellectual muse of the Gorbachev regime and the forum for vigorous debate."[175] The conservative editor of the newspaper *Pravda*, "the organ of the Central Committee of the CPSU," was dismissed in 1989 and replaced by Ivan Frolov, a former advisor to Gorbachev, who introduced a discussion page to the journal.[176]

Economic reforms were debated in many newspapers and journals, and fact bulletins examining Soviet reality like *Argumenty i fakty* sold millions of copies by 1990. Many Party and government journals were reorganized and given new voices, dropping much of the propaganda of the past. Though subscriptions to these major Party journals fell in 1989, "the circulation of the more radical and non-party papers increased."[177] Although the BBC and other Western stations had been unjammed in 1985, it was not until December 1988 that the "overtly political" Russian language broadcasts by the

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[174] Sakwa, 66.
[175] Ibid., 67.
[176] Ibid., 68.
[177] Ibid.

Western stations Radio Liberty and Deutsche Welle were unjammed.[178] The Law on Press Freedom was only promulgated in June 1990, which legally abolished the institution of censorship, except to protect "state secrets, to prevent pornography, and to impair the promotion of war and ethnic conflict."[179] The law established press freedoms already in practice, but critics complained that "some of the clauses were unduly restrictive," with the CPSU still carrying "undue weight" as they owned the vast majority of papers.[180] Despite these concerns, the law allowed for self-financing independent journals, and the "unofficial press" flourished.[181]

"Discussion," glasnost's second goal, was focused on debates in the press and on rejuvenation of the social sciences, particularly history. For example, the Soviet history taught in schools was so distorted that it was "meaningless," leading to school textbooks on twentieth century history being withdrawn from schools, to be replaced by a "more truthful version" commissioned in 1988.[182] Public debate flourished, although "there were limits to the scope of discussion, and leadership policies themselves remained relatively immune to criticism."[183] Many citizens feared the consequences of speaking openly about government policies, due to their experiences with other Soviet leaders. There was some justification for this concern, as the press was "constantly under pressure." For example, Gorbachev criticized the editor of *Argumenty i fakty* in Party meetings in October 1989 for publishing a survey of readers' letters that demonstrated Gorbachev's unpopularity.[184]

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178 Sakwa, 69.
179 Lawton, 56.
180 Sakwa, 69.
181 Ibid.
182 Ibid., 71.
183 Ibid.
184 Sakwa, 68.

Participation, the last aspect of glasnost, meant that the Party would exhibit "a greater trust in the population [that] was to be reciprocated by a greater involvement on their part in solving the problems of society."[185] Just as Alexander II encouraged his nobles to participate in the emancipation process, Gorbachev felt that for the reforms to be successful (especially his efforts to weaken the bureaucracy), citizens needed to be active participants. Therefore, another component of the Gorbachev era was the encouragement of workplace democracy in society. Gorbachev believed that the bureaucracy needed to be challenged if production and efficiency were to improve, so he attempted to enlist support from below through the concept of "self-management" and mass participation.[186]

Participation took many forms, such as "nationwide discussions preceding the adoption of important documents," similar to the lengthy discussions across the country about the Emancipation in the late 1850s. In addition, procedures for local soviets were modified to "make participation more effective."[187] In 1986, the Party received "over 6 million suggestions" during the discussion over the revised Party program. In June 1987, the Law on Nationwide Discussions "established a legal framework" for participation in open discussions across the Soviet Union.[188] Gorbachev felt that if there was to be true mass participation from the citizenry, "tolerance for differing viewpoints" was necessary.[189]

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185 Ibid., 72.
186 Ibid., 151.
187 Ibid., 152.
188 Sakwa, 152.
189 Sakwa, 154.

Despite Gorbachev's promises, people still feared reprisals for expressing their own opinions. Gorbachev recognized these fears and responded with the law of June 30, 1987, which "gave citizens for the first time the right of legal appeal against the violation of their rights by public officials."[190] This law established "a legal framework" to encourage mass participation "without fear of recrimination."[191] The constitutional amendments of November 1988 were discussed for five weeks, with "some 300,000 contributions leading to changes in half of the draft articles."[192] Under these reforms, the citizenry became more politically aware, expressing their opinions in letters to the government, newspaper articles, and even demonstrations and rallies.[193]

The other important element of participation was the institution of workplace democracy through "self-management," and the democratization of industry. The concept of self-management as a way to activate society and increase participation by the people in "the affairs of society and the state" was first discussed at the 27th Party Congress in 1986,[194] but it was not implemented until later. In response to the Party Congress, debate on the topic occurred in the press; for example, two Soviet historians discussed the necessity for the "creation of real opportunities for workers to take part in economic management" if the acceleration of the Soviet Union's social and economic development were to be achieved.[195] The democratization of industry had "four main aspects." The first was "an attempt to make the concept of the 'labor collective' a living force in the life of the enterprise," achieved through the creation of "enterprise, shop and brigade councils

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190 Ibid., 155.
191 Ibid.
192 Ibid., 152.
193 Sakwa, 156.
194 Ibid., 152.
195 "Restructuring and the Working Class," *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 38, no. 43 (1986): 7.

(soviets) of self-management."[196] The purpose of these soviets was to create a sense of democracy within enterprise and production, and involving the workers themselves in aspects of management.

The second aspect was introducing an "electoral principle" into the workplace, by which managers were to be elected by labor collectives. Even though the Party maintained a "guiding role" in self-management, the workers were given more power than before and elected managers were allowed to "resist party demands, but not those of the workers."[197] The third aspect of the democratization process was the "revival of the trade unions," sparked in part by the Solidarity movement in Poland, which showed Gorbachev how dangerous it was "if the gulf between workers and their alleged representatives became too large."[198] The trade unions were now supposed to "defend the rights of the workers" and interfere in management decisions if they violated the rules. (Unions previously served no real function, as they were controlled by the councils of workers collectives.)

The empowerment of the trade unions in 1989 was an attempt to calm the wave of strikes across many industrial sectors and to lessen worker dissatisfaction. The trade unions met in September 1989 at the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions and discussed the need for the rights of workers to be heard, as well as collective bargaining rights. An unforeseen consequence of the encouragement for reviving trade unions was that union leadership "immediately set about braking the economic reforms by urging a freeze on basic food prices until 1991," in hopes of ameliorating workers' standard of

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196 Sakwa, 157.
197 Ibid.
198 Ibid.

living in a time of economic uncertainty.[199] This created a paradox: trade unions were attempting to freeze food prices while the government was simultaneously attempting to establish market pricing. This contradiction made economic reform "that much more difficult."[200]

The fourth and final aspect of democratization of industry and the workplace was "a new approach to industrial relations," including how strikes and violation of workers' rights were to be treated. The press pointed out in 1989 that strikes were treated as illegal when the "law says nothing at all on the subject."[201] In an attempt to clear this gray area, a bill was drafted in April 1989 to regulate labor conflicts, but it was superseded three months later by a new version that legalized strikes, except for "strategic sectors" like railways, other public transport, and defense. However, there were restrictions for legal strikes. These needed to undergo an elaborate process including a "three day 'cooling-off period,'" mediation by local judges, and a majority vote to strike.[202] Though picketing was not legal, and striking workers would forfeit their pay, for the first time managers found responsible for causing the strike could be fired, and workers' rights were expanded beyond the official unions and workers' collectives. This process of democratization of industry and the workplace attempted to introduce accountability into Soviet production, as well as to involve the workers in decision-making to help combat the corrupt bureaucracy.

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199 Sakwa, 158.

200 Ibid., 157.

201 "The Case for Strike Legislation: Defining the Rights and Obligations of All Concerned," *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 41, no. 28 (1989): 5.

202 Sakwa, 158.

All these measures to open society through more transparent communication gave people more access to information than ever before, as well as allowing the government to learn public opinion without resorting to the KGB. Through surveys, forums, and critical opinion articles, Soviet citizens were for the most part able to express their views, bridging the chasm between the public and the government that had been deepening for years.

Glasnost: Implementation and Effects

Gorbachev and his fellow reformers believed that "a degree of critical free-thinking was an essential element in the modernization process."[203] Glasnost increased the information available to the public, "explored the extent of the crimes of the past and revealed the shortcomings of the present."[204] Analysis and debate of past policies and present reforms meant that "the party itself [was] forced to justify its leadership in new ways," and public criticism had exposed widespread discontent. While giving people new freedoms, glasnost exposed and fostered societal discontent by exposing "bureaucratic mismanagement and corruption."[205] However, just as Alexander II's censorship reform had led to discussions that questioned the autocracy itself, public debate under glasnost similarly began questioning the communist system and the power of the Party.

Just as Alexander II had hoped the nobles would participate in and accept the reform process, Gorbachev hoped the intelligentsia would also involve itself in the reform process. Glasnost preceded economic perestroika because Gorbachev thought that

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203 Sakwa, 72.
204 Ibid., 65.
205 Ibid., 72.

their newfound cultural freedoms would "mobilize the intelligentsia to support his changes against the entrenched bureaucracy."[206] A major achievement of glasnost was, therefore, the revival of the intelligentsia as a "free-thinking and relatively independent group to act as a counterweight to the bureaucracy and the administrative system."[207]

A major problem with glasnost, however, was that while it allowed for open discussion, disagreements between publishers and the authorities concerning what was permissible led to a "situation of half glasnost." This increased public discontent and unrest, and increased the "pressure of public demands for full truth."[208] Similarly, giving workers more rights to complain and participate made economic revival difficult.[209]

Reform and Restructuring of the Economy/Agriculture

Both Alexander II and Gorbachev began with small economic reforms when they came to power. Therefore, the process of initial economic reform began in March 1985, with consultations with several prominent economists, and the establishment of "special commissions to investigate various urgent current problems."[210] Support within the commissions split between two different options for solving the country's many problems. The first group, the "planners," was led by academician Abel Aganbegyan and supported using mathematical models to plan the economy. The second group, the "social economists," advocated for "some liberalization and the legalization of freelance activities within some sectors," because they believed "competition and the market could

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206 Sakwa, 74.
207 Ibid., 81.
208 Ibid., 78.
209 Ibid., 159.
210 Medvedev, 190.

provide a stimulus" to the stagnating economy.[211] Although these commissions did not implement any decrees or plans in 1985, many of the "planner" ideas could "be recognized in Gorbachev's speeches…. and in the economic plans for the future."[212]

In early April 1985, Gorbachev called together a group of industrial plant directors for a one-day conference to discuss the dire need to increase efficiency, quality, and to improve technology.[213] Gorbachev explained to them that there would now be penalties for production that did not meet standards, and that they would begin implementing "an economic mechanism which would make income dependent on the quality and profit of the product."[214] In August 1985, the Central Committee and the Council of Ministers officially "linked the salaries of workers and other employees of factories and plants with the quality of their production."[215] The Central Committee and Politburo approved a program increasing production of cameras, cloth, radios, kitchenware, and other "consumer goods and services for the period 1986-2000."[216] However, this proposal retained central planning, which was ill-equipped to predict changing consumer demands.

Throughout 1985, Gorbachev travelled widely, giving "speeches on a wide range of topics" throughout the country, discussing his long term plans to fix the many problems facing the Soviet people. Nevertheless, the general economic plan published in November 1985 "seemed to be constructed along traditional [conservative] lines."[217]

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211 Medvedev, 190.
212 Ibid., 191.
213 Ibid., 192.
214 Ibid.
215 Medvedev, 194.
216 Ibid., 195.
217 Medvedev, 197.

Well aware of the Soviet Union's agricultural deficiencies, Gorbachev next attempted to reorganize the agricultural economy to make it more efficient and productive. He appointed Valeriy Boldin, an agronomist who headed Pravda's agricultural department, as his senior assistant. G.P. Rasumovsky was appointed as the head of the Organization Department of the Central Committee, placing him in a position to replace "local agricultural officials" and aid in major agricultural reorganization. On November 22, 1985 the Central Committee and the Council of Ministers "passed a resolution which completely reorganized the agricultural administration."[218] Seven ministries relating to agriculture were abolished and merged into two consolidated organizations, the State Agro-industrial Committee and the Gosagroprom SSSR.[219] This reorganization essentially created a "separate agriculture government of the USSR," which could operate separately from the central Party organs and the "heavy, machine tool and defense industries."[220]

Agricultural experts gathered to have an open discussion about the pros and cons of the system, specifically, to find remedies to solve the many problems. This discussion was "significant in itself," as never before had true open debate on agricultural methods and problems been permitted, let alone officially encouraged.[221] During the reform period, a "rural exodus" exacerbated agricultural problems, with many citizens leaving the villages for the cities. However, the more people who left, the harder the work became for those who remained, leading them to leave as well. In response, on July 2, 1985 the Central Committee passed a decree that among other provisions would "prevent

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[218] Ibid., 204.
[219] Ibid., 205.
[220] Ibid.
[221] Medvedev, 203.

the employment of the rural workforce in industry or in towns in general," once again robbing the peasants of "their freedom of movement and choice of jobs."[222] The new Party program also tried to address the exodus by raising food prices, which had not been raised since 1962.

Gorbachev also announced an increase in private garden allotments to be leased to industrial and office workers as an attempt to stimulate private initiative in agriculture, at least on a small scale. These allotments proved significant for the production of fruits and berries such as apple and pears, while flowers, garlic, and other products grown on these allotments were sold in town markets. During the 1980s the importance of these allotments for the countryside increased as state production of food decreased. Gorbachev "was strongly in favor of increasing the number of allotments," and in a speech in May 1985 announced that the allotment size would increase from 1 million to 1.2 million. While the increase did not have much of an impact on Soviet agriculture as a whole, it did have a "positive impact on the quality of people's lives."[223] Gorbachev then implemented the "collective contract scheme," which allowed farmers to be contracted "to achieve certain results within the collective farm system and [were] allowed to keep part of the profits."[224] Although this change would theoretically increase incentives for more efficient production, there were still was not enough incentives for farmers to do the work as well as deal with all the "bureaucratic hurdles that had to be overcome."[225]

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[222] Ibid., 203.
[223] Ibid., 201.
[224] Sakwa, 287.
[225] Ibid.

Not until 1987 did economic reform become a program of "structural change of the whole organization of the economy," called perestroika.[226] Gorbachev himself defined perestroika many ways: as mass initiative, the revival of the Soviet economy, encouragement to innovate, and "socialist enterprise." He saw perestroika as a means of overcoming stagnation, "breaking down the braking mechanism, creating a dependable and effective mechanism for the acceleration of social and economic progress and giving it greater dynamism."[227] Gorbachev hoped that eventually the reforms would motivate quality performance.[228] He wanted every enterprise to follow "real social demands to determine production and sale plans for itself," based on actual orders by enterprises or government organizations, instead of "numerous detailed assignments set by higher bodies."[229] Gorbachev also wanted to encourage economic competition, which did not exist in the planned economy, in order to satisfy real consumer demands, and for employees' incomes to be dependent on the quality and profits of the final product.[230]

One of the first steps in economic restructuring was converting the old statistical board into the State Committee for Statistics (Goskomstat), which would become "an authoritative body for the gathering and publication of statistics."[231] During the Stalin era, accurate statistical data were almost impossible to find, and since then most published economic data were inaccurate (partly because inflation was never taken into account during calculations). In order to proceed with economic reform, accurate statistics on the true status, output, production, etc. of the economy were required, making the

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226 Ibid., 269.
227 Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, 34.
228 Ibid., 85.
229 Ibid., 86.
230 Ibid.
231 Sakwa, 271.

Goskomstat extremely important. Goskomstat began to produce more accurate information for the Soviet leadership and the public, such as infant mortality rates, employment rates, and life expectancy rates. Though Goskomstat attempted to sift through decades of falsified economic data, it was extremely difficult to determine accurate statistics for past production, and despite the agency's efforts, the "new statistical series on agriculture and investment offered little new by 1989."[232]

An early act of economic perestroika was the "Law on Individual Labor Activity," which came into effect in May 1987, although it had been created in November 1986. The law allowed individuals to open small businesses such as restaurants and repair services, "in competition with the often low quality state-run businesses."[233] Alhough the new law permitted a bit of privatization, it was severely limited to family-run businesses that could operate during the owners' spare time from a state job.[234] During the January 1987 Plenary Meeting of the CPSU Central Committee, Gorbachev wrote that the meeting "encouraged extensive efforts to strengthen the democratic basis of Soviet society, to develop self-government and extend glasnost, that is openness, in the entire management network."[235] In his book *Perestroika*, he describes the realization at this meeting "how stimulating that impulse was for the nation."[236] Gorbachev intended for democratic changes to occur in all parts of society, especially in the Party and the work

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232 Ibid.
233 Ibid., 280.
234 Sakwa, 280.
235 Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, 33.
236 Ibid.

collective. He also stressed the need for more glasnost, more "genuine control from 'below,' and greater initiative and enterprise at work."[237]

At the June 1987 Plenary Meeting of the CPSU Central Committee, the Central committee endorsed the major "radical reform" options, including the "Basic Provisions for the Fundamental Restructuring of Economic Management," created and proposed by Soviet economists and some of Gorbachev's associates. Though a centrally planned economy is controlled from the top, Gorbachev wrote that at the meeting, the central committee decided to start at a more basic level, with enterprises, and attempt to create optimum economic conditions, "extend and consolidate their rights, and only on that basis introduce fundamental changes in the activity of all higher echelons of economic management."[238] The provisions focused on the decentralization of state industry by giving autonomy to individual producers, which "marked the first steps towards a radical overhauling of the Soviet economy."[239] These provisions were then incorporated into the Law on State Enterprises. The draft of this law was discussed nationwide in trade union meetings, worker collectives and the media. The modifications to the law were "meant to extend the work collective's rights,"[240] and allowed for workers to "elect the managing director as well as a council of workers' collectives."[241] However, suggestions and requests to "give up [the] planned economy" were rejected and not permitted by the Party

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237 Ibid.
238 Ibid., 85.
239 Sakwa, 279.
240 Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, 86.
241 Sakwa, 156.

leadership. Gorbachev wrote that his goal was for the reforms to "strengthen socialism, not replace it with a different system."[242]

After lengthy and extensive debate, drafts, and modifications, very similar to the creation process of the peasant reform under Alexander II, the law was finally implemented January 1, 1988. The law moved "60 percent of state enterprises on to a system of self-management," with the other 40 percent to be switched over by January 1989. This law allowed enterprises to set their own prices, engage in trade with other enterprises, and managers now had to negotiate for raw materials in "a semblance of a market," instead of simply being allocated the resources.[243] Mandatory targets for production were no longer set from above, and unprofitable enterprises needed to cut workers or wages, or in some cases, declare bankruptcy and close. More amendments to the law were announced in 1989 and 1990, which "further weakened an enterprise's dependence on central planning and even allowed them to break away from their parent ministry."[244] Ministry control declined, and enterprises were allowed to deal with foreign companies, including in capitalist nations.[245]

Co-operatives, which were introduced to the USSR by the New Economic Policy (1921- 1928), had been restricted by the state for the fear of encouraging private enterprise. However, to Gorbachev and the Supreme Soviet, the co-operatives "appeared to offer a way of rapidly improving certain quality of life industries," without placing that burden on the state itself. The Law on Co-operatives, implemented May 26, 1988 freed co-operatives from the control of the state planning system, and "gave them equal rights

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[242] Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, 86.
[243] Sakwa, 279.
[244] Ibid.
[245] Ibid.

with the state sector of the economy."[246] The co-operatives were also able to trade abroad without government intervention. The Law on Leasing, which promoted "the decentralization of the economy," was introduced in the Supreme Soviet on November 23, 1989. This law "greatly expanded the legal rights of leaseholders," weakening the bureaucracy's veto powers over the activities of the leaseholders. The law sought to encourage leasing in all spheres of society, although it impacted workers first and foremost.[247] Workers would now be allowed to buy an enterprise that had been leased from the state with the guarantee that "there would be no expropriation in the future."[248] Though the new law "was expected to yield rapid results in agriculture," the law made it unclear if farmers could also buy land, thus preventing the expected immediate positive agricultural impact. Even though state interference in enterprise was supposed to disappear, Gosplan, the state's economic planning agency, purchased 86 percent of production in 1988. Despite Gosplan's promise to purchase only 25 percent of production in 1990 to demonstrate a retreat from interference, in 1989 and early 1990 "state orders still took 90 percent of enterprise output."[249]

During the reform period, Gorbachev spoke frequently both in public and Party meetings to defend restructuring and the reforms, answering questions from critics, and giving speeches that appeared in newspapers, that defended his reforms and addressed concerns. For example, in early 1989, Gorbachev gave a speech during a Central Committee meeting to representatives from the scientific and artistic elite to defend the reforms from critics on both left and right. He admitted to problems such as production

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[246] Sakwa, 293.
[247] Ibid., 281.
[248] Ibid., 281.
[249] Ibid., 279.

shortages and the budget deficit but criticized those who "claim[ed] that restructuring [was] leading to chaos," and ultimately urged people "not to lose a sensible, realistic assessment of what [was] happening" during this process of transformation, and breaking with the outdated tendencies of the past.[250]

Gorbachev also frequently heard complaints and suggestions from groups like workers and intellectuals. At a Party meeting in October 1989, Gorbachev and other Party members listened to the concerns and requests of multiple workers; for example, an "assembler" at the Kuibyshev Aircraft Plant talked about how "the population's living standard [was] considerably worse than it [was] in the Baltic republics," which he said was "not right."[251] In Gorbachev's concluding statement at the end of the meeting, he responded to this worker's complaints, which were echoed by others in attendance, by explaining that the government "had no ready-made formulas and answers" as to how to fix the economic problems, and that perestroika was evolving through real life implementation.[252]

Through frequent discussion and debate, Gorbachev hoped all groups in society would involve and invest themselves in the reform process, in order to make success more likely. He not only had to defend the reforms to the common people, but to the Party as well. For example, Gorbachev's closing remarks to the Party Plenum in April 1989 addressed concerns expressed by critics of restructuring, both in the Party and the public. While acknowledging remaining problems, he blamed perestroika's failure to

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250 "Gorbachev at Bay? –Defending His Policies," *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 41, no. 1 (1989): 2.
251 "Gorbachev Replies to Workers' Complaints," *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 41, no. 39 (1989): 2.
252 "Gorbachev Replies to Workers' Complaints," *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 41, no. 39 (1989): 4.

produce the desired results on "the activity of central agencies."[253] Again, in May 1989, he gave a speech to the Party that advocated for continuing reform, right before the secret ballot vote for the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet.[254] Throughout the reform process, Gorbachev was constantly defending the program to the Party, and to the public during travels similar to his trips around the country in 1985.

In Gorbachev's last two years in power, 1990 and 1991, he sought to form a team of experts to fully transition the country to a market economy. Gorbachev asked Boris Yeltsin, his former rival in the Communist Party[255] who as a non-Party "liberal" had been elected President of the Russian Republic, to put together a team of "radical economists" to create the program. The so-called 500 Days Program, officially known as the "Transition to the Market: Conception and Program," focused on "large-scale privatization, a great devolution of power to the republics, and the speedy construction of market institutions."[256] However, Gorbachev was under immense political pressure from his power base in the Party, so he retreated somewhat from the original 500 Days Program. His retreat was an attempt to appease his critics, but he also feared the 500 Days Program would lead to the swift dissolution of the Soviet Union due to the autonomy the program granted the republics.[257] Gorbachev then asked his chief economist Abel Aganbegyan to create a "compromise program which incorporated" some of the original ideas from the "Transition to the Market" team, with elements that might appease his political critics. However, just like Alexander II's compromise version

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253 "Gorbachev Answers Critics at Party Plenum," *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 41, no. 19 (1989): 12.
254 "Gorbachev Answers Critics," *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 41, no. 21 (1989): 16-17.
255 Yeltsin resigned from the Communist Party on July 12, 1990.
256 Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, 152.
257 Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, 152.

of the emancipation reform, this compromise version was unsatisfactory for both sides involved.[258]

As more liberal reformers, led by Yeltsin, increased their criticism of the reforms, Gorbachev turned to the Party for much needed political support, which led to more concessions "made to conservative forces in the winter of 1990-1," while at the same time attempting to keep all sides appeased, an impossible task that Alexander II had also faced. Ultimately the 500 Days Plan, or any amended version, could not be enacted due to Gorbachev's loss of power and authority, exemplified by the abortive August 1991 coup led by Party hardliners. After the attempted coup, Gorbachev waged a hopeless battle to keep the Soviet Union intact before he gave into the inevitable and "resigned" on December 25, 1991.

Perestroika's Implementation/Consequences

Just as Alexander II faced opposition to the Emancipation from a multitude of groups, perestroika was opposed by all sides. Within the Party, liberal reformers were pitted against "old-style" Party members, while outside the Party debates raged on among the public and in the press.[259] Similar to the noble and peasant unhappiness with the Emancipation in 1861, both conservatives and liberals in the Gorbachev era hated perestroika for essentially opposing reasons. Party reformers were discontented with the slow pace of the program, given the extensive changes, while Party hard-liners were quite resistant to any movement away from communism. This dichotomy within the Party led

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[258] Ibid., 153.

[259] "Restructuring and Its Opponents," *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 38, no. 41 (1986): 1.

to extensive compromises in an attempt to satisfy all sides, but just as few were happy with the compromised Emancipation, few liked perestroika.

The implementation of the initial economic reform in 1985 had little impact on either industry or agriculture. Perestroika actually gave the Soviet consumer "less choice and fewer goods."[260] In the first three years of "radical" economic reform (1987-1990), "one of the most over managed economies" was becoming "the most mismanaged."[261] There was zero growth, shops lacked basic consumer items, inflation grew, and "static farm output" worsened the food deficit.[262] Industrial output rose only 1.7 percent in 1989, the lowest increase since 1945. Some new laws could not be implemented without added state intervention. For example, at first the Law on Co-Operatives was seriously compromised by a new tax, which allowed "local authorities to take up to 90 percent of the co-operative profits."[263] This tax eliminated all incentives, so the Supreme Soviet challenged the finance ministry and modified the tax law.[264]

Despite this, the Law on Co-Operatives succeeded in increasing the number of co-operatives in the country. In just two years the country had gone from less than 1,000 coops to over 130,000, "employing nearly 3 million people with a turnover of some 13 billion Rubles."[265] The co-ops focused mainly on "consumer goods and service industries like restaurants, repairs, beauty salons and clothing, rather than moving into manufacturing."[266] These cooperatives were as diverse as they were fast growing, but this

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[260] Sakwa, 270.
[261] Ibid., 281.
[262] Ibid.
[263] Ibid., 293.
[264] Sakwa, 293.
[265] Sakwa, 294.
[266] Ibid.

success was not replicated in the agricultural sector. By 1989, the USSR was importing "a quarter of its butter and cooking oil, a third of its sugar and two-fifths of its potatoes and onions," as well as 35 millions tons of grain.[267]

The poor condition of the Soviet economy, as well as the growing deficit and the unsustainable defense budget, meant that from the outset Gorbachev did not have the capital needed to implement his reforms. However, Gorbachev's budget was further reduced when he launched his "vigorous anti-alcohol campaign" in 1985.[268] The price of alcohol was increased, vineyards were destroyed, beer halls closed, and state production of alcohol was halted in order to combat alcoholism. As the state held the monopoly on alcohol production, especially vodka, this campaign led to a massive loss of state revenue, about 10 billion rubles annually. Reform and reorganization were expensive and; given the out of control military spending, lack of capital was a real roadblock to Gorbachev's success.

Early in the reform process, the deficit (which by 1985 had reached 37 billion rubles) was not really considered, so instead of cutting back on spending, it was increased by "taking on extra social and investment commitments while maintaining the military budget."[269] This deficit was exacerbated by the anti-alcohol campaign, as described above, and led to the emergence of a large bootleg liquor industry, not to mention Gorbachev's collapsing popularity. Gorbachev abandoned his temperance movement in 1990, after costing the state billions of rubles in revenue. By October 1988, the state

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[267] Ibid., 286.
[268] Ibid., 271.
[269] Sakwa, 272.

deficit was estimated to be over 100 billion rubles, 11 percent of the GNP, and rose even higher the following year.[270]

In general, prices for rent, groceries, and other necessities had been stable for decades, even though production costs continued to increase. Government subsidies to cover this increased each year. By 1990, the government was spending 100 billion rubles a year on food subsidies alone, nearly 15% of the total Soviet budget. Price reforms were considered necessary for the success of perestroika, so by 1986 there was open debate in the press on this topic.[271] If fully implemented, perestroika would have permanently tied wages to productivity, while removing government subsidies on many goods and services, such as food and gas.[272] However, fearing a recurrence of the bread riots that Khrushchev faced due to a dramatic planned price increase, Gorbachev postponed the price reform until "a balance had been achieved between supply and demand of consumer goods."[273] However, wages continued to rise faster than production. In an attempt to relieve this problem temporarily, the government purchased 10 billion rubles of consumer goods and new investment in consumer goods were announced in 1989, as well as a "10-fold devaluation of the ruble in November 1989 for tourist transactions."[274]

Another significant problem throughout Gorbachev's rule was that the reformers seemed not to understand the consequences of their reforms and legislation before implementation. This exacerbated the already extreme public discontent, Gorbachev's personal unpopularity, and later in 1989, strikes. Lack of quality control worsened

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[270] Sakwa, 272.
[271] "Total Reform of Price Formation Urged," *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 38, no. 21 (1986): 12-13.
[272] Sakwa, 273.
[273] Ibid., 274.
[274] Ibid., 275.

shortages and further strained the budget. As early as 1986, Gorbachev and the Party planned to tackle the scarcity of consumer goods, as well as to "improve their quality significantly and expand their assortment."[275] However, in an attempt to increase the quality of goods, the State Quality Control Board rejected over six billion rubles worth of goods, which led to bare shelves that further angered citizens. The anti-alcohol campaign provides another example of legislation implemented before the economic and social consequences had been thoroughly analyzed.

Besides the economic consequences of perestroika, strikes in summer 1989 demonstrated overwhelming public anger with the "failures of economic perestroika."[276] For example, the strike in the Kemerovo mines in 1989 occurred because the Ministry of the Coal industry was "doing everything it could to restrain and prevent mine collectives from managing their own affairs… from doing what the Law on the Enterprise allows them to do," which angered workers.[277] The Party newspaper *Pravda* reported in July 1989 that miners were still striking in Chervonograd and Lvov provinces, and in "74 of 121 mines in the Donets Basin."[278] Unemployment, a previously unknown concept (although underemployment was common), came as another shock. Although wages were much lower than in the West, guaranteed employment created a sense of stability. The implementation of perestroika led to over three million people becoming jobless since 1985.[279]

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275 "Consumer Goods: Planning System Changed," *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 38, no. 19 (1986): 12.
276 Sakwa, 270.
277 "Miners' Strike: Grappling With Its Import," *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 41, no. 30 (1989): 2.
278 Ibid., 3.
279 "Soviet Unemployment: Facing the Facts," *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 41, no. 44 (1989): 6.

Gorbachev also worried that "if the gulf between bureaucratized union hierarchy and a dissatisfied labor force" grew too big, coupled with falling standards of living and political instability, strikes would become rampant as they had in Poland under similar conditions in July 1989.[280] Gorbachev, like Alexander II, expected gratitude for his reforms, not scorn. Just as Alexander II and his advisers carefully followed the opinions of the nobility, the peasantry, and the press during the Emancipation process, the All-Union Centre for the Study of Public Opinion of Socio-Economic Problems polled the population in order to determine their attitudes about the changes. A survey in August 1989 revealed "profound pessimism" about perestroika, with "only one person in eight believing that it would improve life in the next few years and seven out of ten thinking that there would be little change for the better."[281] This public pessimism with perestroika contributed to growing discontent and increasing social and political instability.

Education, Science, and Technology

Education reform under Gorbachev was not as comprehensive as Alexander II's, but instead an attempt at technological modernization as well as further development of vocational training and education in general. Gorbachev pushed to introduce technology into the educational system, beginning in January 1985 when the Collegium of the Ministry of Education announced the plan to create a computer technology course at all "Soviet senior secondary schools."[282] In March 1985, the computer technology course "Principles of Information Science and Computer Technology" was introduced to all

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[280] Sakwa, 157.

[281] Ibid., 70.

[282] Beatrice Beach Szekely. "The New Soviet Educational Reform." *Comparative Education Review* 30.3 (1986): 321-43. *JSTOR [JSTOR]*. Web. 24 Feb. 2017. 330.

grades in general education schools as well as vocational schools. Teachers in the Soviet Union underwent a "highly complex process of peer and supervisory review" from 1986 to 1990, where they were evaluated and judged fit to continue in "their present positions, in need of in-service training, or as candidates for job dismissal."[283] The results of these evaluations were also tied with salary increases, as those who received the best ratings were given the highest increases.

In addition, before 1986, students started school at age seven, beginning a ten-year program. After 1986, six-year-old students were, for the first time, to be enrolled in an eleven-year program of schooling. In terms of older students, particularly those in senior secondary school, vocational training and experience became a major focus. Vocational education and labor training programs were introduced into general education schools. Students would take courses during school and as extracurricular training, such as courses at "production training workshops and farming plots located directly at schools and at local or district interschool production training centers." The main goal of these changes was to improve general education and technical and vocational training in order to facilitate modernization of Soviet industry and agriculture.

Legal Reform

Just as Alexander II's judicial reform of 1864 was intended to create a law-abiding citizenry, legal reform in the Soviet Union similarly attempted to establish a

[283] Szekely, 332.

"state governed by law."[284] After the October Revolution, the legal system was rebuilt "according to the principles of Marxist-Leninist ideas," relating to the class struggle and the need for a strong state "to defeat enemies and build socialism."[285] Theory and ideology "came before law," and this "victory of socialism over the law" remained in place until Gorbachev came to power. Gorbachev's training as a lawyer instilled in him the belief that "democracy cannot exist and develop without the rule of law."[286]

The question of judicial reform became a topic of public debate among intellectuals. For example, an interview of the Director of the USSR Academy of Sciences' Institute of State and Law Academician V. Kudryavtsev was published in 1986, where he discussed the need for "better trained lawyers, more rights for defense counsel," and some form of oversight "to counter courts' violations of legality."[287] The new plan for the "socialist legal state" was to avoid arbitrariness, red tape, and "strengthen democracy through law."[288] This legal "revolution" began at the 19th Party Conference in 1988, where Gorbachev attempted to create a program to "separate the legal system from the power system," as well as clarify laws to reduce arbitrariness.[289] The focus shifted from the collective to the individual as the resolution "On Legal Reform," which secured guaranteed and protected rights for individuals in the Soviet Union.[290] Significantly, for the first time in Soviet history, "no appeal to a higher law of class interests would take

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284 Sakwa, 127.
285 Ibid.
286 Ibid.
287 "Does the Judicial System Need Reform?" *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 38, no. 42 (1986): 1.
288 Sakwa, 127.
289 Ibid, 128.
290 Sakwa, 128.

precedence over due process," and Party officials were no longer above the law.[291] However, the dominance of the Party remained as the "ultimate judge of what was legal and tolerated" in the name of socialism and the working class."[292] Over the years this caused much dissident activity, particularly from those attempting to create pressure to repeal Article 6 of the 1977 constitution, which guaranteed Party dominance.[293]

On December 1, 1988 new amendments to the constitution were passed, including the creation of a Congress of People's Deputies with 2,250 seats, 1,500 of which would be chosen in general elections. The Congress of People's Deputies resembled Alexander II's zemstvos in that their purpose was to represent all members of society. The amendments "restricted state power to a certain degree but did not introduce a pluralistic constitution."[294] These amendments enhanced the independence of the judiciary, reduced prison sentences, required judges to be elected by higher Soviets, and decreed courts were to strictly follow the constitution. In addition, two anti-dissident articles pertaining to anti-Soviet propaganda and slander were removed from the penal code.[295] During the Supreme Soviet meeting in 1989, some fought to separate the judicial system completely from "the arbitrariness of the party and the state apparatus," but the final draft failed to do so.[296]

A new constitution was to be drafted by the Constitutional Commission, chaired by Gorbachev himself, as established by the Congress in June 1989. This constitution, which would replace the 1977 constitution, was intended to focus on the concept of

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[291] Ibid.
[292] Ibid.
[293] Ibid.
[294] Sakwa, 129.
[295] Ibid., 132.
[296] Ibid.

respect for individual liberties. This commission drafted dozens of laws, ranging from press freedom to religious freedom. However, because economic reform, particularly in terms of giving more independence to enterprises and allowing for foreign investment, required a legal framework as a basis, economic laws had to be hastily created in order to successfully implement certain aspects of economic reform.[297]

Reform of the Soviet Political System

The political system of the Soviet Union "was palpably anti-pluralistic," and the highest authority rested in the Party organs with much of the "day-to-day decision-making power lodged in the ministries."[298] Gorbachev hoped that political reforms would limit the Party bureaucracy to allow for more social and economic freedom in society. The political reform was a long-term process with three major components, the first being electoral reform. As part of Gorbachev's plan to activate society, democratic elections were introduced "into party, economic and social life," designed to act as a "main weapon for democratization."[299]

The Soviet Union was a one-party state with compulsory voting in uncontested elections. If there were a choice, it was between Party members. This single party system had led to widespread patronage networks and rampant corruption; the new electoral reform attempted to combat the political system by forcing it "to operate in the context of competing and open politics."[300] The process of electoral reform began with Soviet experts studying the results of electoral reform in Poland and Hungary, and "some of the

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[297] Sakwa, 130-131.
[298] Brown, 137
[299] Sakwa, 133.
[300] Sakwa, 133.

lessons were incorporated in the limited trials with multiple candidates in the June 1987 local elections, when competitive elections were held in some 5 per cent of constituencies."[301]

A new election law, promulgated in December 1988, guaranteed the right to free discussion of "political, personal and professional qualities of candidates and the right to campaign for or against them."[302] At first, however, not all seats in the Congress of People's Deputies were elected by popular vote. The Congress was composed of three chambers of 750 members each, and "competitive general elections were to take place for only two of them."[303] The third chamber was made of one hundred percent guaranteed seats to the Communist Party, the trade unions, and other major Party organizations like the Komsomol. The nomination process for representatives was difficult and cumbersome. In the initial 1988 election law, the nomination process included two stages. In the first stage, names had to be "proposed by a factory, office, registered association or at a local meeting of not less than 500 people and accepted by at least half those present."[304] In the second stage, the candidates had to be vetted at pre-election meetings where the "candidate again had to receive the support of over half those present."[305] This made it difficult for radicals to enter the Congress because there were no formal criteria for the approval of candidates, which "gave the party bureaucracy in the localities great scope for manipulation."[306]

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301 Ibid., 134.
302 Ibid.
303 Ibid.
304 Sakwa, 135.
305 Sakwa, 135.
306 Ibid.

Though this electoral law was meant to break up the patronage system and lessen corruption within the Party and bureaucracy, any threat to the Party's power was still not tolerated, and "no group was allowed in any official way to challenge the Communist Party or to publicize their views in the media." This made a multi-party system difficult to achieve, even though it had been an announced goal of electoral reform. The March 1989 election was the first trial of the new law, where "two-thirds of the Congress's 2,250 deputies were to be elected by secret ballot in constituency elections."[307] After the second stage of nominations, a total of 2,901 candidates appeared on the ballot, of which 85 percent were CP members. In many constituencies, the Party bureaucracy allowed only one name forward through the second stage, "usually a party official," which led to an even higher proportion of Party members on the ballot than in past-uncontested elections.[308] However, some radicals did manage to get elected, such as "radical journalist" Yuri Chernichenko, and Nikolai Ivanov, "the leading prosecutor against Brezhnevite corruption."[309] Twenty percent of Party officials standing for election were defeated, including thirty-four candidates who lost despite running unopposed, defeated by "cross-out" campaigns started by their constituents. Though these Party officials did not have to resign their Party posts at first, after 1989 "their positions became untenable once they had been defeated in the popular vote."[310]

In December 1989, the Congress abolished the quota system that guaranteed seats for the Party and for Party organizations. In future elections, all seats would be put to popular vote, including the post of Party secretary, that is, Gorbachev himself. The

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307 Ibid.
308 Sakwa, 136.
309 Ibid., 138.
310 Sakwa, 138.

second stage in the nomination process from the election law of 1988 was also abandoned.[311] At the Congress, some Party members also mentioned allowing the "collectives of specialized secondary and higher education institutions the right to nominate candidates" for the Congress, in hopes of expanding youth participation in elections.[312]

Before the electoral reform, ballots were not truly secret; it was a common practice to drop an unmarked ballot into the ballot box, as making any marks on the ballot would "draw attention to oneself as a probably negative voter."[313] Though voters had the legal right to a secret ballot, in practice citizens would not ask for one for fear of unwanted attention from the KGB. In the 1989 elections, however, voters were required to make a mark on their ballot in order for it to be counted, thus giving a sense of anonymity to the voting box for the first time because every citizen had to make the marks. Thus the national elections in 1989 were historic for the Soviet Union as it was the first election "to combine universal adult suffrage with secrecy of the ballot and the competitive principle in at least a majority of seats."[314]

The second component in the reform of the Soviet political system was, as mentioned previously, the creation of the Congress of People's Deputies. The Congress was originally supposed to be tasked with electing the "inner body, the bi-cameral, 543-member Supreme Soviet."[315] Though the Supreme Soviet was supposed to meet for a longer period than the Congress, the Congress ended up staying in session much longer

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311 Ibid., 140.
312 "Supreme Soviet Changes Law on Elections," *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 41, no. 43 (1989): 18.
313 Brown, 115.
314 Brown, 115.
315 Ibid., 120.

than originally planned with public debate and discussion "breaking one taboo after another."[316] All the speeches and proceedings of the Congress were televised and broadcasted on the radio for the Soviet people to watch and listen to; in public opinion polls many citizens expressed hope in the promise of the Congress.[317] The speeches made by representatives touched on many topics relevant to Soviet life and reality, such as an outright attack on the KGB, and a call for the new Supreme Soviet to hold it accountable for their activities.[318] In fact, one of the first outcomes of the "initial sessions of the new Supreme Soviet was the setting up of a whole series of commissions and committees," including a permanent committee on Soviet defense and state security tasked with holding the military and state security agencies accountable to the legislature, instead of the Party.[319] The Supreme Soviet created a total of fifteen committees, including the Constitutional Commission tasked with drafting "new fundamental law" for the new constitution of the Soviet Union.[320]

The final component of the political reform was change within the Communist Party itself. In August 1988 Gorbachev presented "concrete proposals for the restructuring of the Central Committee apparatus," and these plans, along with statistics on the size of the Central Committee, were published for the public to read. By reducing the size of the Central Committee by 50 percent, Gorbachev hoped to usher in a new era of more responsible leadership. He counted on 40 percent of the Central Committee

316 Ibid.
317 Ibid.
318 Brown, 121.
319 Ibid., 121.
320 Brown, 122.

retiring or taking other jobs by the end of 1988.[321] Central Committee departments were trimmed from twenty to nine, and six new, more reform-orientated commissions, were created. Three of these new commissions were chaired by men close to Gorbachev and considered "serious reformers": Georgiy Razumovsky (Party construction and cadres policy), Vadim Medvedev (ideology), and Aleksandr Yakovlev (international policy).[322]

Gorbachev succeeded in getting a significant turnover, with over one hundred members resigning from the Central Committee at the first Party plenum in April 1989, after the Congress of People's Deputies elections. Many of these members had been convinced to resign rather than lose their seats in the next general election to be held in 1991. At the time, these changes were significant to the advancement of reform because they allowed Gorbachev to remove some of the "conservative dead weight" and opponents of reform from key Party institutions.

Unlike Alexander II, who was able to pass reforms with little difficulty because he held absolute power, Gorbachev was chained to the Politburo. Without the consolidation of political support, Gorbachev would never have been able to propose and execute his reforms, much less attempt to reform the political system itself. For this reason, Gorbachev had to play quite a large role in the reform of the Soviet political system, as he constantly needed to maneuver, appease, and compromise in order to remain in power and maintain support for the reforms.

Reform of the Political System: Consequences/Implementation

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321 Ibid., 126.
322 Ibid.

The election of March 1989 "marked an irreversible step in the evolution of perestroika as politics entered the streets and popular consciousness."[323] The enthusiasm for and participation in these first semi-free elections in the Soviet Union "testified to the passions that had been kept muzzled for so long." Despite the fact that the elections took place within a one-party system and about 85-87 percent of candidates were Party members, citizens finally had a real choice among "different candidates in terms of their policies and principles."[324] For the first time, instead of being silent spectators in the political arena, the people could voice their opinions and participate in politics.

An unintended consequence of allowing elections with choice, coupled with the opportunity for citizens to nominate candidates from outside the party apparatus, was a shift in the "occupational and class composition of the Congress of People's Deputies as compared with that of its predecessor, the unreformed Supreme Soviet 'elected' in 1984."[325] The percentage of workers in the Congress dropped from 49.5 percent to 23.1 percent and representatives of intellectuals and higher education rose. In particular, heads of universities, who had had no representation in the 1984 Supreme Soviet, made up 4.1 percent of the 1989 Congress. New occupations like lawyers and journalists appeared for the first time, while representation for other groups, such as senior KGB officials, dropped.[326] This diversification the Congress of People's Deputies demonstrated an important shift away from the Party and Party organizations.

The reorganization of the Central Committee, particularly the changes in the economic departments in October 1988, was critical if Gorbachev's economic reforms

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323 Sakwa, 139.
324 Brown, 118.
325 Brown, 117.
326 Ibid.

were to succeed. The elimination of eleven of twenty departments in charge of oversight and intervention in different aspects of the economy, such as consumer goods, meant that enterprises would be able to proceed with an unprecedented amount of freedom, at least when compared with the level of scrutiny and control previously imposed.[327] The Central Committee's reorganization, particularly in its economic departments, was intended to "withdraw the Party from detailed economic tutelage."[328] The abolition of many departments whose sole purpose was "to supervise economic ministries and to intervene in economic decision-making [was] evidence of a new degree of seriousness of that intent."[329]

Gorbachev's Reforms: Implementation and Consequences

The effects of the reforms were varied and included many unintended consequences. The major impact of glasnost was the development of free speech and a free press. Newspapers, magazines, radio, and television were "uncovering and handling new topics," and generally the press was given more freedom.[330] Public opinion was "no longer cowed by fear," and became "a force in its own right."[331] However, glasnost also created a constant battle between the public and the authorities, as the public sought to extend the bounds of the "permissible." "Half glasnost" meant that eventually either "full freedom" or a controlled "freedom" of the press and information would be needed.

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327 Ibid., 130.
328 Ibid.
329 Brown, 130.
330 Gorbachev, *Perestroika*, 77.
331 Sakwa, 153.

Despite this battle between the public and the authorities, open discussion "by an awakened society" was widely encouraged as necessary for a reformed society and government. Unfortunately for Gorbachev, people began to look outside the communist system for answers.

Perestroika was not successful, at least in terms of modernizing the economy while remaining communist, and life became more difficult for many Soviet citizens.[332] Economic reform advanced very slowly, not only facing bureaucratic obstructionism from within, but also dealing with contradictions between the reforms and the structure of the existing systems. Just as Alexander II's new institutions struggled to exist side by side with institutions remaining from his father's reign, Gorbachev's reforms often struggled with decades old Soviet structures. For example, the new institutions uneasily coexisted with ministries that had almost identical function, thus leading to a struggle for survival. The economy itself was in limbo, caught between an odd mixture of command and market economies that pleased no one.

Though Gorbachev had hoped to institute reforms while retaining Soviet-style communism, it became clear to many that eventually a full transformation into a market economy would be required. The instability and chaos perestroika unleashed on the economy and on society in general created massive discontent and civil unrest. According to Soviet statistics, between January 1988 and November 1989,300 people were killed, more than 5,000 injured and 360,000 "forced to flee their homes because of pogroms, riots, and intercommunal clashes."[333] Other consequences included worker strikes, most notably multiple rounds of miner strikes as economic conditions worsened.

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[332] Ibid., 360.

[333] Sakwa, 362.

In late 1989, strikers demanded Gorbachev's resignation and the "removal of Communist Party organizations from the workplace."[334] Not only did the strikes demonstrate general dissatisfaction with the economy among workers and the general population, but also demonstrated growing anti-communist sentiment. In fact, in 1990 the Cabinet of Ministers "called a ban on demonstrations in Moscow from 26 March to 15 April."[335] The ban, which Gorbachev approved, ended up being ineffective, as Yeltsin called a demonstration for March 28 in which over a 250,000 people participated. This demonstrated that the government, and especially Gorbachev, could not enforce the ban, probably from fear of political backlash due to his own reduced power.

Reform of the legal system in the Soviet Union started to create a new sense of rule of law, "rather than bureaucratic whim," which subjected the Communist Party to the rule of law and "mov[ed] supreme power from Party to state institutions."[336] This meant that the Party was no longer legally untouchable; Gorbachev hoped his reforms would increase accountability for the Party and the government. Religious and political freedoms also "were to be guaranteed by the new constitution."[337] In terms of political and electoral reform, "democratization" and liberalization began to emerge, demonstrated by the competitive elections. Gorbachev "played a key role in introducing political pluralism and a whole range of freedoms," which upset "a system whose longevity had depended on its vigilance in combating manifestations of group autonomy or of political, intellectual, artistic, and religious liberty."[338] His reforms undermined the Party structure

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334 Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor,* 284.
335 Ibid.
336 Sakwa, 329.
337 Ibid.
338 Brown, *Gorbachev Factor,* 283.

and power, thereby undermining "his own power and authority."[339] Consequently, the unintended consequences of Gorbachev's reforms threatened not only his political power, but also the continued existence of the Soviet Union.

Gorbachev had hoped his reforms would activate society, and in this respect he succeeded. Millions of Soviet citizens were actively participating "in open and contentious public life," as a "culture of democracy began to replace the climate of fear," and a civil society was born. The elections in spring 1989 and the local elections in 1990 "marked a watershed" moment in Soviet history, and confirmed the rebirth and rejuvenation of "an active citizenry."[340]

Why did Gorbachev's reforms fail?/end of the USSR

Gorbachev's reforms, like Alexander II's, were intended to move the country forward, but instead threatened the power of both government and ruler. Though Gorbachev's hopes of activating society succeeded, his main rationale for launching the reforms was to modernize the country and improve the economy while remaining "communist." Given that the reforms led directly to the dissolution of the USSR, Gorbachev clearly failed in at least one respect.

One of the major obstacles to reform was the opposition Gorbachev faced from all sides. Opposition to Gorbachev and his plans led to significant compromises, which pleased no one, as had been the case for Alexander II. Ordinary citizens immediately felt the consequences of these changes in their everyday lives; as examples, the anti-alcohol campaign "served to alienate many," and the anti-corruption campaign "closed various

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339 Ibid.

340 Sakwa, 369.

channels by which the bureaucratic system could be circumvented."[341] Standards of living did not improve, and "in material terms, [life] became harder for the majority of Soviet people."[342] The transition to a partially mixed market economy was especially difficult for every-day Soviet citizens, because not only did it mean "harder work and higher prices," but unemployment was also introduced into the system.[343]

The reforms angered the bureaucracy, which Gorbachev constantly criticized and also purged. Party bureaucrats were often the targets in political reform legislation as well as in anti-corruption speeches. Using the language of class revolution against what Gorbachev's supporters called the "'exploiter class' of functionaries in party, state, and industry," became a form of "controlled coup against the bureaucracy and ultimately against the Party apparatus itself."[344] By excising sections of the Party apparatus in an attempt to reduce corruption, increase efficiency, and modernize the Party with a new generation of reformers, Gorbachev undermined his own position. The Party apparatus was the basis for his power, so his fight against corruption, bureaucracy, and Soviet "tradition" was likely to result in his removal or worse.

Communist Party conservatives "objected to liberalizing economic laws" and other forms of market characteristics on "ideological grounds."[345] Gorbachev's arguments in favor of market competition, and salaries based on skills and production standards, suggested a move toward capitalism. Therefore, Party hardliners argued that the

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341 Sakwa, 360.
342 Ibid.
343 Ibid.
344 Sakwa, 364.
345 Ibid., 360.

perestroika was capitalism with a "socialist face."[346] Gorbachev later sought to appease them, but it was too late.

This became clear on August 18, 1991 when a small group of Party hardliners, including Prime Minister Valentin Pavlov, General Valentin Varennikov, Minister of Defense Dmitry Yazov, and Gorbachev's Chief of Staff Valery Boldin, attempted to oust Gorbachev.[347] These men detained Gorbachev and his family in his offices in the vacation town of Foros in Crimea. While he was in detention, they tried to intimidate him into declaring emergency rule, which implied a return to "repressive measures to restore 'order.'"[348] When their attempts to force Gorbachev to declare emergency rule were unsuccessful, they tried to force him to resign, but he refused, and the coup failed four days later. Yeltsin exploited the August coup to enhance his own prestige; he had been in "contact with world leaders during Gorbachev's detention."[349] Though Gorbachev still retained power on paper, the coup was a blow from which he would never recover. At this point Gorbachev's former liberal supporters defected to Yeltsin, so he turned to Party conservatives in a fruitless effort to find support. However, "Gorbachev failed to realize" that this faction had either endorsed the coup or had done nothing to prevent it. The Party had now lost "what had been left of its credibility."[350]

As the union republics sped towards secession in fall of 1991, Gorbachev and the Communist Party continued to lose authority at a rapid rate. The 1989 Law on Baltic Economic Independence gave Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia "broad powers to manage

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346 Ibid., 361.
347 Brown, *Gorbachev Factor,* 299.
348 Ibid., 294.
349 Brown, *Gorbachev Factor,* 299.
350 Ibid., 301.

resources, [the] economy, finance, and set budgets," a major step towards full independence."[351] Their independence was officially recognized on September 6, 1991; "four days later Armenia declared its independence," and Moldova and Georgia "already considered themselves to be independent."[352] The "final blow" to the Soviet Union was the meeting on December 8, 1991 between Yeltsin and the presidents of Belorussia and Ukraine (without Gorbachev's knowledge), where they announced "the Soviet Union was ceasing to exist."[353] They began a transition to what they called a "Commonwealth of Independent States." Finally, on December 25, 1991 Gorbachev officially resigned, handing his power over to Yeltsin, as the Russian Federation became the official successor state to the USSR.

Glasnost, perestroika, and Gorbachev's other reforms all helped to activate society, as well as highlight the many serious problems (particularly economic problems) that required radical reforms beyond Gorbachev's original plan. Glasnost allowed Soviet citizens to speak out, which led to the popular demand for an end to Party rule. In Russia, Yeltsin seemed to embody their hopes for meaningful change. Seventy-four years after the Bolshevik Revolution, it took only seven years of Gorbachev's rule to bring about the end of the Soviet Union and the creation of independent states from the union republics.

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351 "The Law on Baltic Economic Independence," *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 41, no. 49 (1990): 8.
352 Brown, *Gorbachev Factor,* 303.
353 Ibid., 304.

Conclusion

Alexander II's and Gorbachev's efforts to implement major reforms while maintaining their political authority illustrate Alexis de Tocqueville's aphorism that "the most dangerous moment for a bad government is when it decides to reform"[354] very well. When Alexander ascended the throne in the middle of the Crimean War, the Russian Empire was on the brink disaster: a looming financial crisis, a weak and humiliated military, repressive censorship, rigid social and economic stratification, which included millions of enserfed peasants. When Gorbachev was elected the General Secretary of the CPSU in 1985, the Soviet Union suffered from a stagnant economy, a passive and disillusioned population, unsustainable military spending, and a repressive, hyper-centralized one-party state. Both men were determined to reform their respective "bad governments," but as de Tocqueville suggested, their reforms caused chaos, instability, and "dangerous" threats to their personal power and authority that ended in assassination for Alexander and the collapse of a once powerful communist empire for Gorbachev.

The tripartite support of autocratic power in imperial Russia came from the Church, the nobility, and serfdom. These began to fray in the 18th century as Peter I abolished the Patriarchate to fold the Church into the state. Catherine II cut the ties of the nobility to the state through her 1785 charter, freeing them from state service. Serfdom, the remaining pillar, was abolished by Alexander II's landed Emancipation. As discussed above, the Emancipation, coupled with the other Great Reforms, led to major social turmoil, spawned revolutionary movements, and undermined the autocracy.

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354 Jonathan Steinberg, *Bismarck: A Life*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 129.

Gorbachev's power derived from communist ideology, the primacy of the Party, the Soviet Union's status as a superpower, and hypercentralization. Although Gorbachev correctly realized that Soviet military spending was unsustainable in the context of the faltering economy and, cut the military budget, he made powerful enemies. Perestroika and glasnost undermined the Party by attempting to democratize it. Similarly, Gorbachev's insistence on questioning everything made him "weak" in the minds of most Soviet citizens.

Both Alexander II and Gorbachev had also hoped to activate society through their reforms and "encourage the development of a vigorous civil society as the basis for a viable state and an effective economic system."[355] For example, Alexander and Gorbachev intended censorship reform to promote critical thinking and make the government more transparent than it had ever been. Under both leaders, censorship reform succeeded in activating society, but also in creating unintended consequences; through increased discussion and political awareness came not only instability, but a real threat to the power of the ruler as the people had a little taste of freedom and began demanding more. Both had hoped relaxed censorship and increased transparency would develop between the public and the government. Instead, these changes fueled discontent as people started to realize what they had been missing and began demanding more.

Both leaders also wanted to reform their country to become economically (and agriculturally) prosperous, but more importantly, they wanted to reform and rapidly. Despite their good intentions, it proved almost impossible for a "bad government" to reform itself, let alone rapidly, without threatening the power and existence of the regime.

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[355] Sakwa, 358.

Alexander had no intention of weakening his own autocratic power, just as Gorbachev had no intention of ending communism in the USSR. They both sought to solve without fundamentally changing their respective political systems.

While it may always be chaotic when a "bad government" attempts to reform itself, Alexander II's and Gorbachev's consistent efforts to compromise with their opponents during the reform process only worsened an already unstable situation. In both case these compromises either the conservatives or the liberals in their country. Under Alexander II, the People's Will and other revolutionary groups felt he was moving too slowly with the reform process, while his nobles felt he was moving too quickly. Gorbachev was facing a similar dilemma, with so-called liberal reformers like Yeltsin attacking him for moving too slowly, while Party conservatives foresaw that the reforms threatened communism. The outcomes in both cases demonstrate the problems of trying to please all parties when a country is dealing with major problems or on the verge of severe crisis.

While Alexander tried to appease the peasants, the liberal intelligentsia, and the nobility, Gorbachev tried to appease the people, the Party, and the liberal intellectuals. Unfortunately, these groups were so far apart that it was impossible to bridge the divide quickly. Alexander's and Gorbachev's experiences demonstrate extreme difficulty of moderating and successfully implementing change in a time of crisis. Moderate reforms work only when a country is stable, united, and thriving. In Russiam compromise inflamed an already poor situation, angering all sides and fanning the flames of rebellion.

Of course, the differences between Alexander II's and Gorbachev's situations cannot be overlooked. Alexander was tsar in an autocracy, holding total power (in theory,

at least); furthermore, he and the peasants believed the autocracy to be divinely ordained, a gift from God to the Romanovs. Gorbachev's power, on the other hand, depended on support with the leadership ranks of the Communist Party. Therefore, unlike Alexander, Gorbachev needed to tread lightly in all aspects of his reforms, because if he lost the support of other Party leaders on the Politburo and the Central Committee, he would be ousted (an issue Alexander did not have to consider). Gorbachev's failure to implement his reforms fully did not reflect lack of commitment on his part, but rather, the political minefield he faced: too many wrong steps, and he was out.

Alexander II and his reform-minded advisers and ministers were able to implement their reform programs without oversight (with the exception of the abolition of serfdom). Not only did Gorbachev have to answer to the Party, glasnost meant that he also had to respond to the Soviet people. For example, when Alexander II's Minister of War implemented his military reform program, he did not have to worry about public reaction as long as he had the tsar's support. The only exception was the Emancipation.

How useful, then, is this comparison? The massive instability that ensued as a result of their reforms was similar, and despite the differences in their circumstances, both reform periods support de Tocqueville's about reforming bad governments very well. Were Alexander and Gorbachev "doomed," as my title somewhat ironically suggests? Historians reject "predestination," but given Russia's long history of resistance to political change, they both faced major cultural impediments to their reforms from the outset. As Russia's history demonstrates, Russians not only resist change, if that change seems to come from the West, they are particularly resistant. Authoritarian rule has been the norm. In 1613, for example, when Russia's future was debated at the zemskii sobor

(estates general) held at the end of the Time of Troubles, the representative elected Mikhail Romanov tsar with full autocratic powers because the Troubles had shown them the dangers of noble oligarchic rule. However, when Peter I used his absolute power to "westernize" Russia, the people rebelled. After the autocracy was toppled in 1917, the power vacuum led to the Bolsheviks' rise to power, with Lenin as the authority figure. Even after Stalin's death and Khrushchev's attempts to destalinize, many Russians preferred a Stalin to the bumbling Khrushchev. One of Gorbachev's many problems is that his tendency to compromise made him appear "weak" in the eyes of the populace. And certainly Putin's meteoric rise in the last years of Yeltsin's disastrous "democratic" reign, reinforces the cultural preference for a "strong" leader. If Alexander II and Gorbachev were not inevitably doomed to failure, Russia's historical resistance to change combined with the inherent danger of a "bad government" reforming itself made their demise highly likely. The odds were against them.

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