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«Russians into Peasants?»
The Politics of Self-Organization and Paradoxes of the Public Modernization Campaign in the Countryside in Late Imperial Russia

1. The Problem of Social Dynamics in Late Imperial Russia

Viewing Russian imperial history as a complex, open-ended process and not as a straight-forward vector culminating in the 1917 collapse is a relatively recent phenomenon, inaugurated most notably by the 1991 magisterial collection «Between Tsar and People».

A growing body of studies has emerged that more or less explicitly departs from what is informally called the «Haimsonian orthodoxy» that has dominated the historiography of Late Imperial Russia in the West for almost three decades, since the publication in the mid-1960s of Leopold Haimson’s groundbreaking two-part article «The Problem of Social Stability in Urban Russia, 1905–1917».

Haimson’s paradigm retrospectively sealed the fate of the Russian Empire by advancing a structuralist formula of «dual polarization» (between the tsarist government and educated society, and between the latter and the working class) as the main characteristic of the *longue durée* processes that shaped the last decades of Imperial Russia. The revisionist approach of the 1990s instead concentrated on social practices and intermediate groups that «bridged» the alleged polarization in Russian pre-revolutionary society. However, the new research agenda was from the very beginning effectively limited by the methodological assumptions put forward in the classic texts that initiated this new historiographic trend. A special role was played by the articles «The Sedimentary Society» by Alfred Rieber and «Combined Underdevelopment: Discipline and the Law in Imperial and Soviet Russia» by Laura Engelstein. Both articles

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1 An early draft of this paper was presented at the Russian-German workshop «Beyond the Nation: Writing of European History Today» (Universität Bielefeld/St. Petersburg State University/Zentrum für Deutschland- und Europastudien), St. Petersburg, November 21–23, 2003. I gratefully acknowledge valuable comments of Alexander Etkind, Jürgen Feldhoff, Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, Peter Hertner, Benjamin Schenk and other participants.


presented a methodological quintessence of highly acclaimed recent books by those historians.4

Alfred Rieber replaced Haimson’s clear-cut image of Russia as a society composed of (predominantly) capitalist classes with a subtle vision depicting a social fabric woven from a mosaic of social identities, archaic and modern, coexisting simultaneously and overlapping with each other.5 Rieber’s snapshot revealed a «sedimentary society», but could not provide insight into the direction of its evolution in late Imperial Russia. However, this static picture was perceived by many as a diagnosis of social processes underway in early 20th-century Russia. Here is where the popular thesis originates about the fatal «fragmentation» of Russian pre-revolutionary society that allegedly explains its collapse in 1917.6 Laura Engelstein did for a new stage in the studies of Russian culture and ideologies what Alfred Rieber did for a new social history of Russia. She was among the first to introduce the themes and concepts developed by Michel Foucault to the field of Russian history, and provided valuable commentary on their applicability to a new historical context. In her «Combined Underdevelopment», Engelstein opened a new venue for the studies of ancien régime society as a (partially) modern society of professionals and intellectuals who used modern «techniques» and produced modern «discourses». She also laid grounds for subsequent interpretations of the Soviet regime as «an alliance between the old tutelary state and the new disciplinary mechanisms».7 Her critical and balanced application of Foucault kept Russian studies from being overwhelmed by a vulgar reading of this European thinker so widespread in American academia in the early 1990s. At the same time, she built into her model of emerging pockets of modernity in Imperial Russia a rather simplistic juxtaposition of advanced «Europe», where the disciplinary power of professionals (i.e., institutions of civil society) was guaranteed and regulated by the law, and «Russia», where «both the reign of law and the ascendance of bourgeois discipline remained largely

6 A catalogue of fatally fragmented social entities in pre-1917 Russia can be found in a 1996 article by Robert McKeen, which summarized the first stage in the revision of «Haimsonian orthodoxy» and triggered an important discussion in Revolutionary Russia: «One of the outstanding features of the Duma political system was the fragmenta-

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hypothetical.»

Engelstein based her powerful argument about the vulnerability of modern institutions in Russia on metahistorical speculations, using «Europe» as a self-explanatory trope, relying on the then nascent literature on Russian professions, and avoiding any reference to relevant European historiography. As a result, the subsequent studies of modern ideologies and social practices in Late Imperial Russia were overshadowed by the sense of their inherited inadequacy and failure to emulate some normative «European» scenario.

Thus, an attempt in the 1990s to revise a «Haimsonian orthodoxy» – which was structuralist in a Marxist or rather Braudelian sense, and was moved by the «trauma of 1917» and the necessity to explain its historical inevitability – was itself bound by the equally structuralist criteria of «normality» (class social structure, institutionalized civil society, party politics, etc.) and a Sonderweg vision of Russian development, largely caused by a lack of interest in a truly comparative perspective. Little wonder that, when multiple empirical lacunae were filled in by a new wave of research on professions, local social networks, and interaction of different social groups at various levels, a conflict emerged between the general methodological scheme of post-Haimsonian studies and the newly studied, rich body of sources suggesting a different vision of the late imperial society.

2. A Battle for Civil Society

This conflict found its most powerful expression in a debate about the perspectives of civil society in late Imperial Russia, which, given the social composition of Russian society, is often referred to as the problem of turning «peasants into citizens».

I would like to begin where the late Scott Seregny left the topic of Russian peasants’ transformation into «Russian citizens» in the early 20th century in articles published over the past couple of years. Following David Moon, Seregny applied Eugen Weber’s formula «peasants into Frenchmen» to the Russian case in its political reading – «peasants into Russian citizens» – studying the growing involvement of Russian peasants with a nascent rural civil society in

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8 Ibid., 348.
9 In a recent book, Peter Holquist has brought these themes of the existence of some «aggregated Europe» and its «normative historical scenarios» to a lapidary formula: «The absence of the institutions necessary to secure a true civil society [...]» (Peter Holquist, Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia’s Continuum of Crisis, 1914–1921 (Cambridge/Mass., 2002), 14. Note the sources of these bold generalizations: L. Trotsky, The Russian Revolution, 3 vols. (New York, 1932), vol. 1, 4–6.
the 1910s. He thus joined the ranks of American and foreign historians who over the last decade have reassessed the role of local self-government agencies (zemstvos) and rural professionals in the service of zemstvos and government in mobilizing and integrating the peasantry into a broader society, and stressed an amazing success of those attempts at dismantling the traditional peasant isolationism and passivity. Still bound by the powerful legacy of the partial revision of Heimsonian historiographic canon, Seregny stopped short of acknowledging the building of a universal civil society in pre-1917 Russia as a success.

Josh Sanborn, another historian who in recognition of a huge body of primary sources has challenged the common wisdom of the inherited fallacy of Russian nascent civil society, has taken a more radical view on the problem. Methodologically, he abandoned the archaic structuralist approach toward defining «the norm» and viewed the modern nation «more as a «category of practice» than [based] upon states of consciousness or properties of collectivities». Studying social practice in its «eventuality» dynamics rather than distilling «ideal types» from an unavoidably limited pool of processed data, he views the development of modern forms of social interaction like civil society or nation as a process.

The opposite views are never advocated by selecting a different set of sources or events, but by appealing to the general methodological considerations mentioned above. However, this has become even more complicated a task after Joseph Bradley’s 2002 article in American Historical Review. Probably for the first time, Bradley put to the test the structuralist critique of Russian modernization as a corrupted emulation of «European» standards set against a broad historiographic

13 Bertrand Patenaude was perhaps the first to apply the Weberian formula to the Russian case, although more as a rhetorical device than a coherent concept, and in the context of the Russian Civil War. See B. M. Patenaude, «Peasants into Russians: The Utopian Essence of War Communism,» The Russian Review 54 (1995), 562. Jane Burbank made an indirect reference to this formula in a 1995 article by discussing an evolution «from peasant to citizen», and in a much more elaborated and nuanced form: J. Burbank, «A Question of Dignity: Peasant Legal Culture in Late Imperial Russia,» Continuity and Change 10 (1995), 391–404, particularly 400–402. The actual appropriation of the explanatory paradigm «Peasants into Frenchmen» by historians of Russia in the formula «Peasants into Russians» took place over the last decade, particularly following discussions in Revolutionary Russia (June 1996) and Slavic Review (Summer 2001).


17 Ibid., 289. He contextualized this approach in a recent book Drafting the Russian Nation: Military Conscription, Total War, and Mass Politics, 1905–1925 (Dekalb/III, 2003).

context. Drawing from an impressive pool of recent studies on Great Britain, France, Germany, and the United States, he discusses the specificity of civil society formation and social modernization in general – not in some imaginary homogeneous «West» or «Europe», but in actual national contexts. The resulting picture is a complex one that leaves no room for that myths that are so common in historiography of Russia: Russian «sedimentary society» finds its counterparts in «advanced Europe», while the lack of legal guaranties for modern institutions in Russia cannot be regarded as a unique Russian phenomenon or as having played any decisive role in the initial and intermediate stages of modernization.19

In this perspective, the very nature of the debate about the prospects of civil society’s development in late imperial Russia is changed. «Civil society» often served as a new marker and euphemism of a present-day, discriminatory, orientalist attitude shared by a part of the Western academic community.20 The more qualified and less ideological approach offered by Bradley reserves for «civil society» the status of a useful analytical category, helping to conceptualize the processes of social interaction, depriving it of any sacral or symbolic meaning.21

Placing late Imperial Russia’s modernization processes into a broad comparative perspective removes many methodological obstacles and historiographic stereotypes that denied on principle the very possibility of a «genuine» modernization in that country, opening the floor for debates on the scale and intensity of those processes in various quarters of Russian society. At the same time, after a decade of heated and largely scholastic debates about the «authenticity» of Russian nascent civil society, many crucial historical problems remain unseen, unexamined, and unanswered. To begin with, the very «translation» of Eugen Weber’s formula into the Russian context should have posed a formidable problem: given that Russia was a multiethnic empire, the transformation of «peasants into Russians» would have meant their «russification» rather than integration in a modern political nation. Hence, many historians added the important term «citizen» – resulting in «peasants into Russian citizens» – to their formulas and necessitating a debate on the degree that citizenship was on principle accessible under the Russian ancien régime. Thus, relativizing the «Russianness» by replacing the noun in the original Weber’s formula with an adjective, neither proponents nor critics of the concept of a growing civil society in pre-revolutionary Russia have questioned the other element of the dilemma – the peasants.

19 Ibid., 1102.
20 This argument was put forward in a delicate form by Mariia Todorova in Kritika, no. 4 (2000).
21 «[...] civil society may be a necessary but not a sufficient condition for liberal democracy [...] Civil society and its institutions do not guarantee a future devoid of political trauma; the development of civil society in ancien régime France did not prevent the Terror, and in Germany it did not prevent Nazism and the Holocaust.» Bradley, «Subjects into Citizens: Societies, Civil Society, and Autocracy in Tsarist Russia», 1099.
3. Could the Peasantry be «Russian?»

In fact, even the most careful and informed scholars believe in the fundamentality of this social category. In the book that has set a new benchmark in the studies of rural Russia for decades to come, David Moon discusses «Russian peasantry» as a social entity with clear characteristics and boundaries, and even calculates their quantity as separate from other «Slavic peoples (Ukrainians, Belorussians, and Poles), and Finnic, Turkic, and Baltic peoples». Quite aware of the challenges he faces, Moon selects a number of criteria of «Russianness», yet he does not explain, why Orthodox «Ukrainian peasants» differed from «Russians» more than «Russian» Old Believers; why individualistic peasants of the Russian North or Siberia were closer to commune-minded peasants of Central Russia and not to Ukrainian farmers; why life «inside the borders of what had been the realm of the Muscovite tsars» did not make «Russians» of the numerous Turkic and Finnic peoples of the Volga region. The general problem is, of course, an attempt to ascribe a modern national identity to the social group that is pre-modern by definition. But the idea that all varieties of non-privileged agricultural population, from Poland to Sakhalin, from Archangelsk to Turkestan, could be lumped together under a single category of «peasants» seems to be equally problematic. Even if limited to «Russian» peasantry (which could be possible in some situations empirically, but never for a single methodological reason), the analysis of this category would encounter such different cultural, social, economic, and technological patterns that any generalizations would have been limited to a few meaningful regularities. To say that «peasants» in the Russian Empire were evolving into «Russian citizens» is simply to suggest that the majority of the empire’s population residing in the countryside were about to become more self-conscious, and the opposition between the two phases of development remains unclear. Couldn’t peasants indeed become publicly active while still living in their villages?

If we turn to the public debates about the «agrarian question» in post-reform Russian society (1861–1917), we will discover that contemporaries had the opposite view of the problem from that accepted by modern historians. By the turn

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23 Ibid., 18.
24 In the twentieth century, the notion of «the agrarian question» became virtually obsolete in economic and sociological studies almost everywhere, except the Soviet Union. Due to a peculiar character of Soviet scientism, which together with Marxism mummified an extensive layer of concepts and terms of late-nineteenth century social science, this notion was widely used well into the 1970’s. A detailed article on the «agrarian question» in the *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia* carefully reconstructed this notion in accordance with Marxist orthodoxy. Even so, the very definition of the term («the question about laws of capitalism [...] and relations between classes [...]»), and the examples of the «agrarian question» in different societies and historical periods suggest that the most adequate modern equivalent to this archaic concept is discourse on social, political, and economic processes involving agriculture and rural population. See «Agrarnyi vopros,» in *Boššaiia sovetskaia entsiklopedia*, third ed., vol. 1 (Moscow, 1970), col. 555–567. Thus, discussions of the agrarian question can be interpreted as a public discourse on agriculture almost by definition. Elvira M. Wilbur distinguishes

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of the 20th century, neither top bureaucrats nor professional economists nor the populist intelligentsia doubted the «Russianness» of themselves or the peasants, but were at pains to harmonize ever differentiating notions of the «people», «agriculturists», «peasant social estate», and «villagers» – once captured in the single epistemological and (perhaps) social entity of the «peasantry». In fact, the abolition of serfdom in 1861 launched the process of continuous social engineering and the discursive construction of «peasants». From now on, any ideological projection on the peasantry could be followed potentially by an actual change in the peasantry’s socioeconomic or legal conditions. Historians studying debates between the Reform’s architects – top bureaucrats, noble members of the provincial Editing Commissions (drafting legislation proposals for consideration in St. Petersburg), and general educated public in 1857–1861 may disagree in their interpretations of the nature of the Reform and intentions of the actors involved. However, nobody questions its significance in the process of differentiation of a legally and economically amalgamated complex of the gentry-serf estate into separate entities: the nobility and private land propriety vs. the peasantry and communal land holding of individual households. It was not until the emancipation of serfs in 1861 that the peasant emerged as a universal category, not defined by its legal bond to the owner and economic dependency on the landlord. In fact, as Mikhail Dolbilov, who studies the Reform of 1861 as a discursive event par excellence, notes, the very possibility of an holistic vision of the «peasantry» as a homogenous group emerged out of the legislation that artificially constructed two legal and economic subjects in the countryside out of an actual variety of social groups: the gentry and the peasantry. We may add that the magnificent emancipation reform also overshadowed the theme of non-Russian agricultural populations (i.e. the majority of non-Russian ethnoconfessional groups) in the public debates for decades to come and even in subsequent historiography. Only Orthodox Slav peasants had been enserfed, hence post-emancipation discourse fixed only on these groups of petty agriculturists. That is why from the very beginning the new holistic notion of «peasantry» meant «Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian peasantry» by default.
Peasantry, or rather its constructed image, was idealized initially by the authorities and populist-minded public alike. Its ancient sacral bond to the land was celebrated as giving impetus to rising political and ethnocultural nationalist sentiments. By the end of the 19th century, however, this ideal image was compromised by the actual performance of «peasantries» in different regions of Russia, with the famine of 1891–1892 putting a final blow to the trend of Russian public discourse that idealized the peasantry. By the turn of the century, different political factions within Russian educated society shared a common awareness that a «true» peasantry was yet to be shaped out of the heterogeneous mass of unprivileged agriculturists – whether by endowing them with all arable land in the realm as a result of revolution and egalitarian agrarian reform, by rationalizing and intensifying agriculture, or by replacing the communal land ownership with private petty land ownership. Few journalists or government officials would have questioned the «Russianness» in their identity, but the concept of «peasantry» was problematized and its integrity questioned. Hence, to fit Russian realities a hundred years ago, Eugene Weber’s formula would have to have been adapted to «from Russians into peasants» – such was the order of priorities in public discourse of the time. Moreover, it seemed that the very «national» principle (often understood in ethnographic terms) contradicted the idea of rationalizing the peasant economy. Sticking to traditions (and often literally inventing new ones) hampered reorganization of household production and the re-allocation of labor resources for purely «ideological» reasons.

Of course, the idea of «Russianness» in the multiethnic Russian Empire itself posed a tremendous practical and analytical problem. It seems that «Russian nationalism» failed to separate itself from Russian imperialism and to evolve into some form of a modern nationalism, whether political, racial, cultural, etc. Yet of the available time (as opposed to 38–54 percent during the pre-emancipation period) by the initiative of the peasants themselves, who were not controlled by their lords anymore and suffered from a relative overpopulation. The last argument, however, looks questionable, as the Volga Muslims living in the same socioeconomic conditions had about 75 holidays as opposed to 240 of the Russian Orthodox, Catholics had 90–100 holidays, and Protestants only 65–75. See B. N. Mironov, «Vsiakaia dusha prazdniku rada: trud i otdykh v russkoi derevne vtoroi poloviny XIX – nachala XX v.,» in Problemy sotsial’no-ekonomicheskoi i politicheskoi istorii Rossi XIX–XX veka, ed. A. N. Tsaumatali (St. Petersburg, 1999), 200–210.

For a most recent comprehensive discussion of this problem see the thematic issue «Searching for the Center: Russian Nationalism» of the international quarterly Ab Imperio, no. 3 (2003).
turning the Weberian formula upside-down should not be viewed as just another peculiar Russian paradox. In a most influential attempt at revising Eugen Weber’s explanatory paradigm, James Lehning has offered a very similar perspective. French educated society created its own vision of the «French peasant» and then negotiated a compromise protocol of social interaction with the peasantry, adjusting mutual projections to each other’s practical needs.32 «Frenchmen into peasants»…?

4. The Problem of «Actors of Modernization»

Quoting Lehning, we may view Russian educated society’s debates about the future of the peasantry as an instrument «by which one culture creates its own version, in its own terms, of another».33 In the wake of the 1891–1892 famine that shocked the imagination of Russians used to thinking that they lived in an «agricultural country» and in the situation of domestic economic recession and the aftermath of a global agrarian crisis with its dramatic drop in grain prices, Russian educated society created a very critical version of the peasantry. Russia’s unprivileged agriculturists were increasingly viewed as an inert and unorganized group of inefficient producers. That was a dramatic departure from the populist beliefs that had dominated public opinion during the previous decades, which saw the Russian peasant as an innate genius of land cultivation. After the revolution of 1905, there was a growing consensus among the educated public that the way out of the agrarian crisis was the «road, little known to […] the farmers, but well studied by people of science and rational practice.»34

«And no matter how long peasants stubbornly continue to believe that the three-field system has existed almost from the creation of the world, they will [eventually] have to introduce a new order and move to grass-cultivation and the multifield [system of] production.»35

Quite in line with the dominant rhetoric of the 1860’s, peasants were viewed as the custodians of ancient [national] traditions,36 but that was no longer a cause of celebrations. It was not sufficient just to be «good Russians»; peasants needed to learn to become efficient agriculturists. Russian educated society changed its self-appointed historical role from emancipators (revealing the «true» essence of the people) to modernizers (teaching people new skills and knowledge). «Modernization» is an abstract sociological concept. In Imperial Russia, as elsewhere, there

32 J. R. Lehning, Peasant and French: Cultural Contact in Rural France during the Nineteenth Century (Cambridge, 1995).
33 Ibid., 3.
34 F. Sev, «K voprosu o merakh uluchsheniia krest’ianskogo khoziaistva (Doklad 4–mu Samarskomu gubernskomu agronomicheskому soveshchaniu),» in Otchet o deiatel’nosti i sostoyanii sredstv Samarskogo obshchestva uluchsheniia krest’ianskogo khoziaistva za vtoroe trekhletie ego suschestvoval’nosti (1 7/XI 1910 g. po XI 1913 g.) (Samara, 1914), 183.
35 M. Frankfurt, «Zanimaites’ skotovodstvom (Pis’mo k krest’ianam iuga-vostoka Rossii),» Samarskii zemledelets, no. 19 (October 1, 1916), 517.
were *actors of modernization*, social groups and institutions that consciously embarked on the task of implementing certain measures perceived as contributing to the modernization of society. Modern historians tend to criticize the «Kulturträger» rage among the Russian elite, accusing it of thirsting for cultural domination and discursive manipulation a la Foucault,\(^{37}\) or stressing the rationality of peasant agriculture, quite in line with the old populist arguments, and its adaptability to changing environmental and economic realities.\(^{38}\) This criticism might be well deserved, but it cannot make irrelevant the Russian public’s grave concerns at that time period about the future of agriculture, nor does it exhaust the complexity of social interaction and the elaboration of new social practices. In fact, many arguments of contemporary historians originate in the discourse of Russian modernizers of the early 20th century and thus poorly serve their task of assessing the past events on the grounds of modern explanatory models and possibly improved knowledge.

To begin with, it was exactly the discovery of the potential for evolution and the adaptability of the traditional peasant household that triggered the most well-known modernization campaign in the Russian countryside, a system of government measures known as Stolypin agrarian reform (begun in 1906).\(^{39}\) The chief ideologist and executor of the Stolypin land reforms, the Danish emigrant C. A. Koefoed, was serving as assessor to the State Noble Land Bank in 1901 when he took a business trip to the Mogilev Province (in present-day Belarus) and discovered a village that had by its own initiative replaced communal land holdings with individual farmsteads. «I drove around from farm to farm until it was dark, and questioned the owners, and when I lay down to sleep that evening on one of the farms, I knew that I had reached a turning point in my life. I had found the Russian village, where farms had been consolidated on the peasants’ own initiative, and for which I had searched in vain for twenty years. I had found my mission in life.»

[... ] It transpired that several villages had carried out land consolidation in the neighborhood of Somonovo, and by driving from one to the next of them I at last found the starting point of the movement – the village of Sagorodnaja in the neighboring province, Vitebsk.

The peasants in this village had wished to join together to buy a farm, the fields of which adjoined their village land. They had bargained and haggled for years, and one fine day in 1876, a group of Latvian peasants had arrived, who had outbid them and snatched the farm from under their noses.

\(^{36}\) Dolbilov, «The Emancipation Reform of 1861», 224.


\(^{39}\) For an extensive treatment of the topic and the creation of a government «version of peasantry» see D. A. J. Macey, *Government and Peasant in Russia, 1861–1906: The Prehistory of the Stolypin Reforms* (DeKalb/III, 1987).
Since the Latvian peasants, wherever they have settled in the world, run their farms as individual farms, like their forefathers from Arild’s times have done in their home country, it was only natural that these buyers shared the land between them in such a way that each of them received the share due to him, in the form of a well-rounded holding, on which he then settled.

The peasants in Sagorodnaja, who would have bought the farm which the Latvians had now shared between them, eyed the newcomers with anything but kind feelings, but nevertheless they observed their behavior closely. They were extremely interested in the Latvian peasants’ method of farming, and soon after, at the commune gathering, they began discussing the question of whether it could pay them to follow the Latvians’ example – share their village land between them and move out, each on his own holding, instead of continuing with the system of sharing the land between them which they had inherited from their ancestors, and which meant that each man received his share split up in bits and pieces.»

Koefoed wrote a memorandum and later a book advocating peasant land consolidation and the dissolution of peasant commune as a short path toward a more efficient agriculture and a better peasantry. Eventually, he was put in charge of the government legislation on the agrarian question; the rest is history. It was very important for Koefoed (Koffod in Russian spelling and in the writings of some modern historians) to stress that his plan offered nothing new or radically opposite to the peasant routine. On the contrary, the proposed measures just fostered and facilitated processes already underway in countryside. He (and most of his associates in the government) did not deny the peasantry’s rationality, nor did he claim that peasants could not learn and adapt to new ways of life. He just questioned the speed at which innovations spread among the peasantry. Judging from his case study in the Mogilev province, we may estimate this speed at about a mile per year. Given the size of Russian empire, this progress was not too encouraging. The problem of peasant technological backwardness in this more complex formulation has not yet been addressed by scholars. The key question here is not whether peasants were unjustly regarded as «backward», but whether they could keep pace on their own with rapidly changing socioeconomic realities: slashing agricultural prices, the demographic explosion in the village, and even changing landscapes.

42 In his dissertation, surprisingly little affected by the writings of Russian rural scholars of the early twentieth century, and dedicated to the agricultural, rather than agrarian history, David Kerans has arrived to the similar conclusion: «the peasant agrarian system – taken as a whole, with all its material, organizational and cultural components – was incapable of coping with the demographic and economic pressures of the era. Already by the turn of the century peasants were running out of ideas to improve grain yields […]». See D. Kerans, Agricultural Evolution and the Peasantry in Russia, Tambov Province, 1880–1915 (Ph.D. dissertation; University of Pennsylvania, 1994), 429.
Andrei Andreevich (Andreas Carl) Koefoed represented just one segment of a broad spectrum of public discourse on the modernization of the Russian countryside and the making of a «new peasant». The government modernization campaign was institutional by nature and forceful in implementation. Prime Minister Peter Stolypin is among the best-known reformers among historians and is often perceived as a symbol of Russian modernizers’ politics toward the peasantry. However, the well-known «Stolypin reforms» were preceded, contested, and, in the end, overshadowed by a different project to modernize Russian agriculture. Unlike other modernization campaigns, this project assigned governmental agencies virtually no decisive role, choosing instead to make educated society (obshchestvennost’) and the community of rural specialists the main actors of modernization. Simply stated, the efforts of tens of thousands of agricultural specialists were channeled into the single task of making a new economic man out of the traditional peasant by means of schooling and professional consultations under the umbrella of the zemstvos, cooperatives, and agricultural societies.43 Borrowing from the classical concept of «substitutes for lacking economic prerequisites» by Alexander Gerschenkron,44 we may describe such public modernization efforts as yet another substitute the national producers’ (first of all, the peasants’) lack of economic initiative and efficient state agencies. Instead of the state, it was a self-conscious group of individuals who embarked on a mission of economic modernization that became particularly visible during the inter-revolutionary decade. These people can be defined as actors of modernization, since they themselves, rather than any social institution, were the main instrument of modernization, which is understood here as an interaction of mental structures and social institutes. Although this campaign was never formally institutionalized, we can reconstruct its stage, the number and social composition of its participants, and the movement’s most influential discourses and ideologies.45

43 When in December 1909 the famous politician and publicist, Petr Struve, stated that «The question of the economic revival of Russia is first of all a question of making the new economic man,» he merely summed up public discussions of the previous half decade. P. B. Struve, «Ekonomicheskie programmy i ‹neestestvennyi rezhim›, » in P. B. Struve, Patriotica: politika, kultura, religiia, sotsialism (Moscow, 1997), 96.


5. The Emergence of the «Agrarian Segment» in the Public Sphere

At this point we approach a serious problem, both historiographically and methodologically, that only recently has become the subject of systematic exploration: how modernization or any adaptation to new circumstances can become possible in such an archaic polity as the Russian Empire and what the mechanisms of that internal transformation are.\textsuperscript{46} Institutionally, the Russian Empire was very rigid and did not possess an efficient bureaucracy or the traits of democracy and mass politics to both foster and implement changes that would have been perceived as necessary by the majority of the enfranchised population. The social composition of imperial society was rather amorphous and multifaceted, which made it difficult to form any coherent interest groups. Traditionally scholars have viewed the government and anti-government revolutionaries as the only actors of modernization in the undermodernized Russian Empire. However, new research reveals that\textit{imperial practices} were more complicated and relied in part upon the spontaneous (though restricted) activity of self-organized social groups. Esther Kingston-Mann described this type of social activism in early 20\textsuperscript{th}-century Russia as a particular «culture of modernization»,\textsuperscript{47} but we may speak of the emergence of a whole politics of self-organization, working beyond (but not necessarily against) official institutions to achieve certain publicly recognized objectives.

When one compares the history of modernization of agriculture in Russia to that of its sociopolitical antithesis, the United States, a striking similarity is revealed. In 1926, American sociologist William Bizzell distinguished five stages of American society’s involvement in the modernization of the countryside from the eighteenth to the twentieth century:

- The organization of agricultural societies;
- Interest in rural and community fairs;
- The establishment of the agricultural press;
- The opening of agricultural schools;
- And the establishment of state and federal agencies for the promotion of agriculture.\textsuperscript{48}

Despite the actual and imagined omnipotence of the Russian state, it intervened in the process of rural reformism only at the very last stage, when the educated progressive public (obshchestvennost’) and the\textit{zemstvos} had substantially succeeded in leading Russia through Bizzell’s previous stages – and in exactly the same order. In Russia, the first association discussing the problems of agriculture was the Imperial Free Economic Society, established in 1765.\textsuperscript{49} By 1861, about 30–40% of all natural resources were in state hands.

\textsuperscript{46} See the comprehensive collection of essays: A. Semyonov et al., eds.,\textit{ Novaia imperskaia istoriia Rossii i Evrazii} (Moscow, 2004).


\textsuperscript{48} W. B. Bizzell, \textit{The Green Rising} (New York, 1926), 12.

agricultural societies had surfaced for various periods on the Russian public horizon. It is quite understandable that their practical influence was minimal under the social conditions of pre-reform Russia. After the emancipation of the serfs in 1861, the nature of Russian agricultural societies gradually changed, and after the adoption of the Normal Regulations of 1897, they became a sort of cooperative enterprise constantly growing in number.\textsuperscript{50} Their success reflected the growth of public (and state) concern with agriculture, expressed in millions of rubles of subsidies a year, rather than the real effectiveness of agricultural societies that spent on average 20 per cent of their budgets on staff expenses.\textsuperscript{51}

New attitudes towards agriculture and rural careers gained momentum right after the First Russian Revolution. The number of periodicals and articles dedicated to agriculture in any year from the reign of Catherine II to the present provide an excellent device to measure Russian society’s interest in agriculture and engagement with agricultural problems. A study of agricultural press suggests that the scale of public interest in agrarian topics, the social composition of readers, and even political forces were behind the boom in «agrojournalism» at the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, for very few of the agricultural periodicals were profitable (and therefore ideological concerns, rather than revenues, stimulated publishers). The mass printed word contributed enormously to changing the social climate, preparing the stage for a new type of social activism.

As one can expect, the first periodicals dealing with agriculture were the Transactions (Trudy) of the Free Economic Society, the first issue of which was published on December 7, 1765. It took fifty-six years for a second periodical to appear, this time dedicated exclusively to agriculture. This was The Journal of Farming (Zemledel’cheskii zhurnal), founded in 1821 by the Moscow Agricultural Society.\textsuperscript{52}

By the end of the first century of the Russian agricultural press’ existence, there were some 20 periodicals in the entire Russian Empire dedicated to various aspects of land tilling: farming, stock-breeding, and forestry. Characteristically enough, until the 1890’s the majority of these periodicals targeted a very narrow circle of readers interested in theoretical aspects of agriculture. Few titles were published by the government; most of the others were published by imperial societies specializing in separate branches of the rural economy (sheep-breeding, forestry, etc.), and during the last third of the century by zemstvos. It was, probably, the impact of the 1891 famine and the united relief efforts by the intelligentsia that changed the face of agrojournalism (as it changed the pattern of public activity of

\textsuperscript{50} There were almost 4,000 agricultural societies in Russia on the eve of the World War I. Cf. V. V. Morachevskii, ed., Agronomicheskaiia pomoshch’ v Rossi (Petrograd, 1914), 108.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 223, 226, 227.

\textsuperscript{52} M. Vit, «Sel’skohoziaistvennaia pechat’ v Rossii (k ee piatidesiatletiui),» Agronomicheskii zhurnal, no. 7–8 (1915), 75.
In the 1890’s, a number of new, mainly weekly, periodicals appeared that targeted a new type of reader: still highly educated and well-to-do, but also having a practical interest in agriculture (hence the spread of weekly editions in contrast to the monthly and even yearly publications of previous epochs). At this stage, local zemstvos and provincial agricultural societies were the leading investors in the agricultural periodical press, demonstrating the decentralization of the emerging public discourse on the agrarian question. See R. G. Robbins Jr., Famine in Russia 1891–1892: The Imperial Government Responds to a Crisis (New York-London, 1975), 176–183; W. Bruce Lincoln, In War’s Dark Shadow: The Russians Before the Great War (New York, 1983), 26; B. Eklof, Russian Peasant Schools: Officiodalom, Village Culture, and Popular Pedagogy, 1861–1914 (Berkeley/Calif.-Los Angeles, 1986), 97; D. Kerrans, Agricultural Evolution and the Peasantry in Russia, Tambov Province, 1880–1915 (Ph.D. dissertation; University of Pennsylvania, 1994), 432.

In 1911 agrojournalism accounted for 5.5 percent of the periodicals published in the Russian Empire, which gave it an honorable third place among 28 other topics. See: I. V. Vol’fson, ed., Gazetnyi mir na 1911 god: Adresnaia i spravochnaia kniga (St. Petersburg, no date), col. 329–330. By 1912 its share had grown to 6.8 percent.

The precise figures were: for the government 14.3 percent, for zemstvos 15.7 percent, and for private publishers 15 percent.

The actual figures may vary depending on the criteria of selection adopted by different statisticians, but other sources confirm the basic trend. By 1917 almost half of all agricultural periodicals were less than 5 years old and 75 percent of all publications were founded after 1905.55 If we equate the number of specialized periodicals with the popularity of their topic, we can reconstruct the Russian press’ top hit topics.56 Agricultural periodicals held a firm third place and formed a niche of their own. An important feature of the Russian pre-revolutionary «agrarian segment» of the public sphere was its pluralism in terms of the social actors involved in its creation. Looking through the prism of agricultural periodicals, we can estimate those actors’ «weight» by the number of periodical titles published by each of them. In 1916, we witness a very diverse picture. Government agencies, the zemstvos, and private publishers each accounted for around 15 percent of the agricultural periodicals produced (45 percent altogether).57 The remaining 55 percent belonged to a loose conglomerate of various associations – cooperatives, agricultural

The number of agricultural periodicals in Russia, 1907–1914.54

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of titles</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>96</td>
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<tr>
<td>1908</td>
<td>101</td>
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<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>120</td>
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<td>1910</td>
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<td>1911</td>
<td>150</td>
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<td>1912</td>
<td>177</td>
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<td>1913</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>352</td>
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53 In the 1890’s, a number of new, mainly weekly, periodicals appeared that targeted a new type of reader: still highly educated and well-to-do, but also having a practical interest in agriculture (hence the spread of weekly editions in contrast to the monthly and even yearly publications of previous epochs). At this stage, local zemstvos and provincial agricultural societies were the leading investors in the agricultural periodical press, demonstrating the decentralization of the emerging public discourse on the agrarian question. See R. G. Robbins Jr., Famine in Russia 1891–1892: The Imperial Government Responds to a Crisis (New York-London, 1975), 176–183; W. Bruce Lincoln, In War’s Dark Shadow: The Russians Before the Great War (New York, 1983), 26; B. Eklof, Russian Peasant Schools: Officiodalom, Village Culture, and Popular Pedagogy, 1861–1914 (Berkeley/Calif.-Los Angeles, 1986), 97; D. Kerrans, Agricultural Evolution and the Peasantry in Russia, Tambov Province, 1880–1915 (Ph.D. dissertation; University of Pennsylvania, 1994), 432.

54 Based on data derived from Vit, «Sel’skohoziaistvennaia pechat’ v Rossii (k ee piatidesiatletiiu),» 76; Morachevskii, ed., Agronomicheskaia pomoshch’ v Rossii, 344.


56 In 1911 agrojournalism accounted for 5.5 percent of the periodicals published in the Russian Empire, which gave it an honorable third place among 28 other topics. See: I. V. Vol’fson, ed., Gazetnyi mir na 1911 god: Adresnaia i spravochnaia kniga (St. Petersburg, no date), col. 329–330. By 1912 its share had grown to 6.8 percent.

57 The precise figures were: for the government 14.3 percent, for zemstvos 15.7 percent, and for private publishers 15 percent.
and professional societies, and so on.\textsuperscript{58} This means that no political or institutional lobby was able to control the market for agricultural publications by virtue of ownership alone.

It is difficult to estimate the total number of copies of agrojournalistic newspapers, magazines, and journals that came out every day. Such information usually was not published, and police records are the main source of such data. Another obstacle for even approximate calculations involves the frequent shifts in the size of runs.\textsuperscript{59} We have information about 302 out of 310 periodicals published in 1916.\textsuperscript{60} These 302 periodicals together published about 6,872 issues, predominantly of magazines and journals. Multiplying this figure by the minimal estimated run of 2,000 copies per issue, we receive some 13,744,000 copies per year. This is a considerable quantity. Even with the paper shortage of the war years in a country with a generally illiterate population, there were still hundreds of thousands of people who might have read those fourteen million copies of periodicals (not counting hundreds of popular brochures and dozens of special monographs that appeared every year). The intensity of public discourse on agriculture in late Imperial Russia was obviously very great.\textsuperscript{61}

If professional periodicals were read predominantly by specialists, there was an intermediate range bridging the world of professionals and that of the broad public. These consisted of a considerable number of items on agrarian themes in general periodicals, reaching even those readers who were not professionally engaged in agriculture. There are statistics available on the number of publications on agricultural issues that appeared every year in late Imperial Russia.\textsuperscript{62} According

\textsuperscript{58} Morachevskii, ed., \textit{Spravochnik po sel'skohoziaistvennoi pechati}, xviii.

\textsuperscript{59} For instance, in 1910 there were printed 2,400 copies of the issues 8–10 of the magazine \textit{Nuzhdy derevni} (\textit{Village Needs}), 2,500 copies of the issues 6 and 7, and only 2,200 copies of the issue 23. See: Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GA RF), f. 102: Departament politsii; D-4; op. 119; d. 237 «O proizvedeniiah povremennoi pechati, izdavaiemyh professional'nymi organizatsiiami»; ll. 19, 24, 43. Ranging from 800 to 3,000 copies per issue (10,000 copies of \textit{Derevenskaia gazeta} and 8,000 of \textit{Khutorianin} were rare exceptions), the average run for an agricultural periodical was somewhere between 2,000 and 2,500 copies per issue.

\textsuperscript{60} One third of them (101 titles) were monthly publications, usually targeting specialists and well-educated landowners. Another third was split more or less equally between weekly and fortnightly editions (55 and 67 titles, respectively) of a rather popular nature. Few dailies and a number of journals with one to ten issues a year comprised the last third.

\textsuperscript{61} We can only indirectly assess the number of actual readers of the agricultural press. Not all issues of journals and magazines reached the readers; at the same time, many periodicals were subscribed by collectives, such as zemstvo boards, cooperatives, or village libraries, hence any single issue was read by a number of people.

\textsuperscript{62} For over 35 years, until his death in 1925, A.D. Pedashenko composed lists of all published pieces on agriculture, regardless of the source of publication: A. D. Pedashenko, \textit{Ukazatel' knig, zhurnal'nyh i gazetnyh statei po sel'skomy khoziastvu za... god} (St. Petersburg/Petrograd). Alexander Pedashenko classified all agriculture-related publications into 22 categories, and with such a tight net it is not likely that many of those publications had escaped his attention. He also made lists of periodicals that published articles on the topic during a given year. Some of those periodicals appeared only occasionally on his list, for their interest in the topic was only temporary. Still, their presence is very important as an indication of public involvement in the discourse on agriculture.
The role of the government in the preparing of a stage for broad public initiative is discussed in Macey, Government and Peasant in Russia, 1861–1906: The Prehistory of the Stolypin Reforms. Some discussion of the evolution of the government’s attitude toward rural professionals in connection with the agrarian question were published in various periodicals – a new piece on agriculture appeared every 22 minutes! The seemingly permanent growth of public interest in agriculture was brought to a halt by the outbreak of the war, but it was not until 1916 that the steady decline in the number of publications turned into a virtual collapse.

6. The Politics of Self-Organization

This newly emerged «agricultural segment» of the public sphere served not just as an information resource. A debate involving both agricultural experts (economists, scientists, and agronomist-practitioners) and the general public outlined a set of objectives to be achieved and identified a range of practical measures that would serve achieving those goals. The progress of the campaign was meticulously monitored in general and special periodicals, and recommendations concerning the correction of the course and relationships with other actors of modernization (state agencies, political parties, competing public initiatives like cooperatives) were formulated. In a word, we witness a system of uninstitutionalized yet coherent and sustained social activists’ policies aimed at social engineering that worked beyond (but not necessarily against) official institutions. In fact, state agencies could not match this spontaneous public movement in terms of the scale of mobilization or even sheer manpower. By 1913–1914, in the majority of provinces the coordination of «Stolypin reform» and resources were transferred to the zemstvos and their employees – rural professionals. Hence the relationships between the state and public self-organization were not necessarily conflicting, despite ideological controversies. The rise of public concern with the problem of peasant modernization owed much to a new politics of the state toward the «agrarian question», even though the Stolypin reforms themselves were widely criticized in general and special periodicals.63 Between 1895 and 1913, the annual expenses of the Department of Agriculture had risen more than 12 times (while during the same period, the 34 oldest zemstvos increased their spending for various agricultural measures almost 18 times). The number of agricultural schools under the auspices of the Department of Agriculture had increased 4.5 times, as had the

number of pupils. The most immediate result of the government’s «turn to agriculture» was the increase in the positions available to the professionals in zemstvo service or the «third element» (counting bureaucracy as the first and members of zemstvo boards as second «elements» of Russian privileged society). The rate of the annual increase of agronomists in the state and zemstvo service was 31.5 percent in 1910, 55.2 percent in 1911, and 40.2 percent in 1912, fluctuating between 25.3 percent and 95 percent during the period between 1907 and 1914. Still, new positions opened at an even faster pace. In 1910, the Moscow Agricultural Institute was 400 graduates short of meeting all the requests from local agronomy agencies. Although the government employed only one third of all agronomists, it played an important role in stimulating zemstvos to hire more rural specialists. As a result, by the beginning of World War I, there were altogether about 15,000 agricultural specialists in the vanguard of the modernization campaign, backed by a strong public involvement in the «agrarian question». Without going into details, we may describe their primary duties as communication with the villagers and the teaching of new techniques and the use of new instruments. They were to compel the villagers to see themselves not as just as rural folk, but as agricultural producers.

Though insignificant numerically in the sea of rural Russia, almost the entire group emerged over the incomplete decade after 1905. The movement was united by a common ethos and may be described as a social generation. Even in the highest heights of the profession, the new generation of agricultural specialists was over-represented. By 1914, one-third of the 150 top agricultural specialists directing government or public agricultural assistance at the provincial level roubles (of which 631,000 – to the precinct agronomists). See Morachevskii, ed., Agronomicheskaia pomoshch ’ v Rossi, i, ii.

64 Morachevskii, ed., Agronomicheskaia pomoshch ’ v Rossi, i, ii.
65 Agronomicheskii zhurnal, no. 8 (1913), 171; N. A. Alexandrovskii, et al., eds., Mestnyi agronomicheskii personal, sostoiavshii na pravitel’stvennoi i obshchественноi službhe i ianvaria 1914 g. Spravochnik (Petrograd, 1914).
66 Iu. Larin, Ekonomika dosovetskoi derevni (Moscow-Leningrad, 1926), 113.
67 From 1910 on, the Department of Agriculture every year doubled the sum of money granted to zemstvos and agricultural societies to cover the salaries of rural specialists. There was a catch, for these grants were given only on condition that the recipient institution would match the expenses for agronomy personnel ruble for ruble. In 1910, the Department of Agriculture allocated only 24,000 roubles to subsidize zemstvo agronomists, but by 1911 this sum had grown to 220,000 roubles, by 1912 – to 500,000 roubles (of which 350,000 were allotted specifically to the precinct agronomists), by 1913 – to 1,000,000 roubles (of which 631,000 – to the precinct agronomists). See Morachevskii, ed., Agronomicheskaia pomoshch ’ v Rossi, 167. With an average annual agronomist’s salary about 1,500 roubles, the government grant helped to sustain only 32 zemstvo agronomist jobs in 1910, but approximately 1,000 jobs in 1913 (the average salary of agronomists had increased to over 2,000 roubles by that time). Although quite aware of the potential trap in the government offer, even the most conservative zemstvo boards could not avoid the temptation of receiving extra money.
68 4,402 agronomists, rural specialists and instructors in zemstvo and 2,369 in state service (not counting 1,982 agricultural elders who had only primary education), 1,374 zemstvo veterinarians, 2,900 state veterinarians, and 2,638 zemstvo veterinary assistants. Alexandrovskii, et al., eds., Mestnyi agronomicheskii personal, 556–559; V. V. Koropov, Istoria veterinarii v SSSR (Moscow, 1954). 172, 184.
had graduated after 1905.69 The educated modernizers’ immediate partner in the countryside were «new» peasants, more dynamic and responsive than the conservative bulk of villagers. We can estimate the number of these «new generation peasants», who not only adequately responded to the agricultural specialists’ modernization efforts, but actively participated in their work.70 These peasants composed the majority of the voluntary correspondents of the zemstvo statistical bureaus. Their task was to report a few times a year about the prospective and actual harvest, the prices of land and grain, transportation, and, in some provinces, even the dynamics of the local markets.71 This alone made the voluntary correspondents the most economically conscious part of the peasantry, thinking in terms of market conjunctures and regarding agriculture as a phenomenon of «production» rather than as an element of the traditional peasant way of life. Zemstvo common practice to reward the voluntary correspondents with agricultural periodicals and popular brochures only reinforced the position of village correspondents as an «outpost» of rural modernization. Thus, a group of tens of thousands of peasants, the voluntary correspondents, constituted the basis for the productive efforts of the agricultural specialists and the bulk of peasant readers of agricultural periodicals.72 The booming rural cooperative movement73 and agricultural courses74 were the expanding frontline of the new encounter and

69 Based on data derived from: Alexandrovskii, et al., eds., Mestnyi agronomicheskii personal.

70 In the words of Scott Seregny, «Socially and culturally, these Pconscious’ peasants remained more closely tied to the village than many teachers of peasant origin and as such occupied a strategic position as intermediaries between the rural community and outsiders.» See S. J. Seregny, «Peasant Unions During 1905,» in Peasant Economy, Culture, and Politics of Imperial Russia, 1800–1921, ed. E. Kingston-Mann and T. Mixter (Princeton/N. J., 1991), 353.

71 V. V. Morachevskii, ed., Spravochnye svedenia o deiatel’nosti zemstv po sel’skomy khoziaistvu (po dannym na 1909 god) (Petrograd, 1910), 35, 127, 175, 368. Some zemstvos provided correspondents with special notebooks with questions to be answered during a year, and a timetable for them. The Kazan’ zemstvo notebook for 1915, for instance, included 64 questions, which were more or less evenly distributed from January to December. See Zapiskaia knizhka korespondentov statisicheskogo otdeleniia na 1915 god (Kazan’, 1914), 6–8.

72 In 1909, the 14 oldest provincial zemstvos alone had almost 17,000 full-time village correspondents. Morachevskii, ed., Spravochnye svedenia, xxx. This edition provided information about the statistical organizations of 22 out of 34 zemstvos, which altogether had over 19,000 voluntary correspondents. The total figure of correspondents must be somewhere beyond 30,000, for such «peasant-dominated» provinces as Viatka or Oлонет must have had many hundreds of correspondents. There is indirect evidence that Pskov province alone had over a thousand correspondents, although the exact figure was not reported. See Morachevskii, ed., Spravochnye svedenia, 424.

73 In absolute figures, in 1906–1911, 4,807 rural consumer societies were registered, 6.3 times more than all other types of consumer cooperatives altogether. A. Merkulov, «Koopertivnoe dvizhenie v Rossii,» Vestnik kooperatsii, no. 4 (1912), 150.

74 Between the First Russian Revolution and World War I, the funding for such educational activities increased almost 40 times. In 1913, some 1,580,782 peasants attended 43,763 one-day lectures in 11,762 villages. During the same year, almost 100,000 peasants studied in 1,657 short-term courses, and in 1914, there were 2,500 courses planned (because of the war, only half of them actually took place). See A. Lazarenko, «Rasprostranenie sel’skokhoziaistvennykh znaniy veshkol’nym putem,» Se’skokhoziaistvennoe obrazovanie, no. 10 (1915), 485, 487, 490, 493.
dialogue, negotiating a new status for modernizers and creating new positions among the peasantry vis-a-vis rural professionals. Thus in a single year, 12,000 agricultural specialists and their assistants were able to reach a very significant section of the peasantry.

The results of these public campaigns are measured not by the percentage of people who changed their legal status or the terms of their property ownership, but by changes in thinking and in the psychological climate. If the peasants adopted even a small proportion of the recommended improvements in their technique, experimented with crop rotation schemes, changed the traditional calendar for agricultural work, or made their first steps in marketing their products, the efforts of rural professionals (agronomists, economists, educators) were productive. While administrative measures seem radical, fast, and unified, they cannot change the economic man, and consequently, the pattern of economic and social development.

7. From Russians to Peasants ... and Back?
Even before the war crisis and revolutionary upheaval put an end to the project of making a new economic man – the peasant – by means of public initiative in the countryside, the initial program of turning «Russians into peasants» had reached its limits. The very success of peasant mobilization made the initially irrelevant problem of «Russianness» an acute one. Russians were being turned into what kind of peasants? To reach a rural population not speaking Russian, agricultural specialists with the more or less eager support of the zemstvos introduced educational courses and publications in local languages; first in Ukrainian and then in Tatar. Agricultural periodicals in the Russian Empire were published in a dozen languages, and some national groups were even more active in the promotion of «agrojournalism» than were the «Russians» (i.e. not just «ethnic» Russians, but all those embracing Russian imperial culture).75 Some agricultural societies and cooperatives, the spearheads of agricultural modernization, were predominantly non-Russian in their composition, to the point that the Russian

75 In 1912, about three quarters (73.14 percent) of all periodicals were published in Russian, and we find exactly the same proportion of Russian-language publications (73.12 percent) among the agricultural periodical press. This means that the «Russians» were equally responsible for the growth of the general and the special agricultural press. On the contrary, some nationalities (Jews, to some extent Poles) showed much lesser interest in agriculture than in other topics, while others (Estonians, Lithuanians, and Ukrainians) were much more enthusiastic about agrojournalism than ordinary. I. V. Voroshilov, ed., Gazetnyi mir: Adresnaia i spravochnaia kniga, second edition (St. Petersburg, 1912), col. 522–523, 525. Thus, the average percentage of all periodicals in Yiddish was almost three times higher than the figure for the agrarian press. And quite the opposite, Lithuanian was used twice as often in agrarian periodicals than it was in the general press. This indicates a higher degree of the Lithuanian (and also Estonian and Ukrainian) national intelligentsia’s involvement in the agrarian question, than was common among many other nationalities.
language was often used only for official reports and correspondence. Many agronomists, training courses for peasants, and cooperatives in Ukraine operated de facto in Ukrainian and by 1917 local activists had become determined to make the Ukrainian language the official language of peasant modernization. The establishment of agricultural schools with instruction in native languages became a powerful factor for the consolidation of local elites and their upward mobility, as a huge demand for agricultural specialists catapulted people with even just primary vocational training into lower-middle-class positions, making them influential within the district or even provincial-level social networks. The success of education initiatives in local languages (particularly adult education programs and libraries) triggered a chain reaction. The enthusiastic response of the peasantry to the activity of rural professionals gave the latter a feeling of growing national unity, but not necessarily one that was «imperially Russian». The elite and often latent nationalism of intellectuals participating in the public modernization campaign found its «people», who were now ready to comprehend the ideology of nationalism. At the same time, villagers who got accustomed to thinking about global and abstract phenomena of «production», «market», or «international relations» (during the war) became the social basis for emerging mass peasant nationalisms, affecting in turn the ideology and worldview of intellectuals.

Thus, in the context of the Russian Empire’s multiethnicity, the universal processes of modernization and development of civil society had a peculiarly national dynamic. The truly massive public modernization campaign in the countryside initially gave secondary importance to the task of integrating peasants into «a nation» and had been more concerned with the making of a «new peasant» as a new economic man. As a result, Russians did begin becoming «peasants». But at the peak of the campaign’s success, it met its most serious challenge. The notion of «Russianness» came to be questioned by a mobilized and increasingly self-conscious «new peasantry». As it turned out, the successful integration of the peasantry into large society produced nationalist pressures that an old and vague «imperial nation» could not accommodate as a political nation of democratic representation nor as a federation of national territorial units. Although its collapse in February 1917 owed much to the newly emerged national and nationalist movements, we will never know whether the Russian ancien régime could have accommodated these new popular ethnic nationalisms and democratic «imperial» nationalism if there had not been the First World War and the subsequent revolution. World War I and the revolutionary upheaval of 1917 also

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76 In 1909, the Batum Agricultural Society included 140 members, 113 of which were Turkic agriculturists with a very poor (if any) command of Russian language. See Batumskii sel’skii khoziaiin, no. 7 (1909), 196.

77 Cf. «So stranits soiuuznoi pechati,» Vestnik koooperativnykh soiuuzov, no. 2 (February 1917), 50.

interrupted a decade of Russia’s rural professionals’ modernization efforts, which makes it difficult to assess the results of this movement quantitatively, although the very unprecedented degree of peasant mobilization in 1917–1921 could be explained by the success of previous decade’s public modernization campaign.

Aus Russen Bauern machen? – Die widersprüchlichen Wege gesellschaftlicher Selbstorganisation und öffentlicher Modernisierungskampagnen auf dem Land im späten Zarenreich


Transformer les russes en paysans? La politique de l’auto-gestion et les paradoxes des mobilisations publiques pour la modernisation dans les campagnes du bas Empire tsariste

La dynamique sociale des dernières décennies de l’empire tsariste fait l’objet de nos jours de lectures fort différentes. Des tendances modernisatrices nouvelles, autonomes par rapport à l’État, sont à l’œuvre dans le mouvement de réformes agraires. Elles mobilisent au premier chef des couches nouvelles d’experts agraires et les couches moyennes et supérieurs qui dirigent les administrations autonomes provinciales (zemstvos). Indépendamment des réformes agraires du ministre Stolypine, cette mobilisation publique est à son apogée entre les révns de 1905 et de 1917. L’essor des journaux agricoles et de réseaux locaux et régionaux de correspondants en est un bon indicateur. Ce mouvement modernisateur fortifie en même temps les sentiments nationaux des populations rurales non-russes, également touchées par ces activités réformatrices.

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