

## PEASANT LAND AND PEASANT SOCIETY IN LATE IMPERIAL RUSSIA

*Krest'yanskoe khozyaystvo Evropeyskoy Rossii 1881–1904*. By A. M. Anfimov. Moscow: Nauka, 1980. Pp. 240. Rb. 2.70.

*Ekonomicheskoe polozhenie i klassovaya bor'ba krest'yan Evropeyskoy Rossii*. By A. M. Anfimov. Moscow: Nauka, 1984. Pp. 232. Rb. 2.00.

*Russkaya derevnya na perelome, 1861–1880*. By N. M. Druzhinin. Moscow: Nauka, 1978. Pp. 287. Rb. 2.50.

*The Zemstvo in Russia*. Edited by T. Emmons and W. C. Vucinich. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983. Pp. xii + 452. £22.50.

*Studies in Russian Historical Geography*. Edited by J. H. Bate and R. A. French. Academic Press, 1983. Vol. 1, pp. viii + xviii + 238; Vol. 2, pp. xxix + xviii + 252. £20.00/\$35.00.

*The Urge to Mobilize. Agrarian Reform in Russia, 1861–1930*. By G. L. Yaney. University of Illinois Press, 1982. Pp. viii + 599. £15.00.

*When Russia Learned to Read*. By Jeffrey Brooks. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985. Pp. xxii + 450. £26.90.

*Zapiski Russkogo Krest'yanina*. By Ivan Stolyarov. Paris: Institut d'études slaves, 1986. Pp. 202. F. 80.00.

### I

In the 1860s, when serfdom was abolished in much of the Russian empire, peasants held land in a variety of ways: as 'allotment land', which was normally farmed in common, rented land, either leased from other peasants or the gentry, or as land purchased outright from various landowners. Rented land and land purchased (unlike allotment land) was cultivated by families independent of the *mir* (or *obshchina*), the organization of the peasants in common.

It is only recently that a number of accounts have appeared that deal comprehensively with the nature of this system of peasant land tenure.<sup>1</sup> They stress that most peasants preferred a mixture of systems of landholding and land use both in the 1860s, as well as during the decades that followed. Though the period witnessed the formation of an impressive number of large independent farms by former serfs, it is clear that, for the majority of the peasantry, there was no primary commitment, either to the *mir* and cultivation in common (an old Populist contention), or to the creation of independent units, by separating land from the *mir* and by purchasing or renting property away from the *mir* (the assumption of some of those involved in the 'Stolypin

<sup>1</sup> The best account available to-date is G. T. Robinson, *Rural Russia under the old regime* (New York, 1932). The work of pre-Revolutionary scholars and social activists (K. R. Kachorovskii, V. P. Vorontsov and P. P. Maslov especially) is still of great use. But it is polemical in nature and often based on very limited evidence. Some of this literature is dealt with in D. Atkinson, *The end of the Russian land commune, 1905–1930* (Stanford, 1983).

reforms' of 1906-1911): both these interests were at work in peasant society, and the peasant family normally followed a system of mixed landholding. Even if, as Chayanov argued, peasants were concerned primarily with prosperous subsistence, land acquisition was to be a constant feature of the countryside: it was motivated by requirements of land management, the vicissitudes of a family income derived from many sources, and, finally, in many cases, almost elemental land hunger. Similar considerations necessitated the conservation of the authority of the *mir* and the cultivation of land in common: an aspect of peasant society, understated by Lenin for polemical reasons, but now restored to a position of importance both by Soviet and Western scholars.<sup>2</sup>

Capitalism in Russian agriculture, it is implied here, was *sui generis*: quite different from the phenomenon in England and France, where independent farming units were standard. Acquisitiveness was self-evident in the existence of differentiation (or stratification) in peasant society: but the ultimate result was not the same as elsewhere. The case is reasonably substantiated: but it might require qualification once there is more evidence concerning the influence (in the village) of peasants-turned-landlords and peasant farmer-traders.<sup>3</sup>

This review discusses much of this recent literature on the subject of the evolution of peasant landholding and land use in late Imperial Russia: especially the studies of Soviet historians A. M. Anfimov and N. M. Druzhinin, and the revisionist work of the American scholar G. L. Yaney. The review reconsiders the literature concerning the impact of the emancipation on peasant landholding; it shows the nature of peasant proprietorship after the 1860s, and the tenacity of the system of mixed landholding, demonstrated vividly after 1905, when, despite government encouragement, peasants were reluctant to abandon common cultivation. It will be clear that peasant conventions of cultivation did adapt to economic change: and this remarkably coincided with new expectations reflected in the popular literature of the late nineteenth century. Change in cultivation was also connected with the involvement of peasant farmers in the improvement initiatives of local government and various social organizations.

The literature under review does not seriously revise existing assumptions of whether the Russian peasantry were increasingly poor or increasingly prosperous during this period. The majority of the authors are agreed on the traditional thesis of desperate poverty: which is as unwise as a current preoccupation elsewhere with proving that provincial Russia was prospering at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> Given how little is known about land acquisition patterns and craft incomes, a dragging preoccupation with issues of standards of living is clearly unwarranted. Certainly rural Russia was not verdant and bountiful solely in eyes of her landscape painters. Prosaic soil chemists and geographers, such as Dokuchaev, were to dwell upon her riches: and there were to be many, several of them peasants, who were to profit from the Russian land. To deny this is as incorrect as to argue that the 'black people' of the countryside were prospering

<sup>2</sup> D. Thorner, R. E. F. Smith and B. Kerblay (ed. and trans.), *A. V. Chayanov and the theory of peasant economy* (Homewood, 1966). V. I. Lenin, *The development of capitalism in Russia* (Moscow, 1974).

<sup>3</sup> T. Shanin, *The awkward class* (Oxford, 1972), contains an excellent assessment of the literature on differentiation. There is no major account to date of the influence of independent peasant proprietors and traders on the life of the village.

<sup>4</sup> J. Y. Simms Jr., 'The crisis in Russian agriculture at the end of the nineteenth century: a different view', in *Slavic Review* (1978).

with each new day. There is not enough known about these issues for hard-and-fast judgements: and while that is the case, polemics about standards of living are probably best left alone.

## II

Before the 1860s, in European Russia, there were three major categories of serf: those attached to manors, those attached to the state and those of the imperial family. State and manorial peasant accounted for the greater part of this enserfed population (between 40 and 50 per cent respectively, depending on the areas concerned). Before the emancipation, land held by peasants was essentially of two types: allotments (*nadeli*), which had been given to the serfs for quit rent or labour service, and other land purchased or rented by them. These 'types' of land were, apparently, considered distinct. Allotment land was normally farmed in common by those who had it: sowing was in open fields, under the three-field rotation (with the fallow field as the major means of rejuvenating land). Repartition of allotment land, among village members, took place at varying times. The reasons would differ, but normally repartition occurred because of changes in household size or cultivating ability. Cultivation and repartition was organized by the *mir* (normally the collective of heads of household of a village). These practices were the convention of much of European Russia, with the exception of the Ukraine, where the cultivation was carried out as described, but where land was never repartitioned among households. The conventions nowhere affected land purchased or rented by peasants, individually or in groups. Such land was outside the control of the *mir* – though by no means unimportant to the manorial peasant's economy.

Land bought and rented by serfs was an important part of the serf economy: and recent acknowledgement of its value stresses that the abolition of serfdom was less of a watershed in land tenure than has been commonly supposed. Ownership of land was an established feature of state serfs. In his study of the central industrial region, V. A. Fedorov points out that it had become a characteristic of the manorial economy by the time of the emancipation: it had been noticeable among manorial serfs for over a century, though only given legal sanction in 1848, when they were permitted to buy land with the approval of, and in the name of their lords. About five hundred cases (some involving three hundred buyers or more) can be readily established for the 1750–1860 period, and affect over 85,000 dessyatins (about 250,000 acres), in the six provinces of this region: since the sources cover a period when serf ownership was not legally recognized, this evidence merely establishes the phenomenon and does not record its scale. The process of acquisition was akin to the 1807 case in Yaroslav, where the noble Chernosvitov advanced Rb. 2440 to 369 serfs to buy 669 dess. – and was to be repaid over eight years. *Pomeshchiki* encouraged purchase since it improved the viability of serf cultivation, which had become a major problem in areas of poor soil. Serf acquisition of land posed no serious social or material threat to the gentry, since before 1848 serfs had no property rights whatever. For similar reasons, the gentry rarely obstructed the renting of land – even allotment land. Vorontsovs, Naryshkins, Opochinins, Men'shikovs, Sheremetevs and others rented out desmesne land to serfs; and the Golitsyn estates in Tver' (1840s), the Yaroslav estates of A. A. Orlova-Chesmenskaya (1813) and the Sheremetev estates of Iukhotsk and Voshchazhnikov, in Yaroslav (1845–1847), provide cases of serfs renting out allotments, either because they could not run them or because they wished to work away (often in the manufacturing centres of the region). By and large, on the eve of the emancipation, allotments were

limited in size, and there is some evidence that most innovation in cultivation, in this region, was carried out on land which had been bought or leased: a report for Tver' indicates that peasants placed greater hopes on their 'own' land than on allotments, where repartitions could take place and new dues be imposed by manorial lords. Such conclusions for the central industrial region have been long supported by I. D. Koval'chenko's research on a broader area, including the lower Volga and the central black earth region (the evidence being drawn from estates in Tambov, Penza, Ryazan, Tula, Kursk and Saratov).

The most serious limitation of recent research lies in the failure to assess the representative nature of individual estates. This makes it difficult to evaluate the importance of proprietorship (or allotment), all-Russian figures being available only for *c.* the period after 1858. Considerable uncertainty remains, therefore, regarding the position of various types of landholding in the peasant economy. On the one hand, there are statistical indications that peasant proprietorship (i.e. the purchase of land) was meagre in 1861: the 1877 figure (including post-emancipation acquisitions) is 5.5 per cent of privately held land. On the other hand, 'private land' mentioned here clearly included uncultivable land, which the peasant was hardly likely to buy; secondly, the actual land deemed 'peasant' (5 million dessyatins or *c.* 13 million acres), may have been in the possession of a large number of peasant cultivators. Finally, the number of pre-1861 peasant proprietors may have been even greater if even a part of the 12 million dessyatins attributed, in 1877, to 'merchants', 'meshchane' and 'others' (i.e. legal social classes other than peasants) is taken into consideration (for certainly many of these were serfs who re-registered themselves after emancipation).<sup>5</sup>

In these circumstances, there is doubt regarding where the emancipation and its land settlements made for the greatest difficulties in the peasant economy. The 1861 legislation guaranteed legal freedom to the serf as well as a portion of the allotment land held before the legislation. The peasants were required to pay 'redemption dues' for the land received: these would be made over to the state over a number of years. The state itself would compensate landlords for the revenue, labour and land lost. All land purchased by the serf before 1861 was to be retained by him, if he could prove purchase. In several cases, under these regulations, there was a major decrease in peasant allotment holdings. But, given pre-1861 acquisition and cultivation patterns, it is impossible to be sure about the importance of losses of allotment lands – and certainly not as sure as Alexander Gerschenkron has been in his writing on the subject.<sup>6</sup> More obviously critical were the problems created by the exclusion of households from commons and forest belonging to the manor, the appanage administration or the state lands' administration. This was particularly so in the case of state peasants who were given practically all their earlier allotment holdings in 1866, when a form of emancipation was established for them. Other problems which were to confront the serfs arose in the course of the land settlements on the ground. Gentry and serfs conflicted over what land was to be handed over to the latter, generating tensions

<sup>5</sup> V. A. Fedorov, *Pomeschch'ichi krest'iane tsentral'nogo promyshlennogo rayona Rossii* (Moscow, 1974); I. D. Koval'chenko, *Russkoe krepostnoe krest'yanstvo v pervoy polovine XIX v* (Moscow, 1967). V. N. Kashin, *Krepostnye krest'iane-zemlevaladel'tsy nakanune reformy* (Leningrad, 1933). N. M. Druzhinin, *Russkaya derevnya na perelome* (Moscow 1978). Fedorov shows clearly that it is impossible to substantiate arguments regarding whether allotment land was decreasing or increasing overall in the first half of the nineteenth century. In the past, there have been attempts to prove decrease (by V. I. Semevskii, I. I. Ignatovich and I. D. Koval'chenko) and increase (by B. G. Litvak).

<sup>6</sup> A. Gerschenkron, *Cambridge economic history of Europe*, vi, pt. 2.

which were to be followed by affrays, uprisings and a general situation of turbulence. Land, after all, was changing hands irrevocably. And in such a situation, decisions were heavily contested: this was especially so since surveying was almost negligible (even in 1894, only 15 per cent of allotment land had been properly surveyed) and where it took place, it was incomprehensible to the peasants; moreover, injustice was seen everywhere, since those who made awards were the settlement arbitrators – themselves members of the gentry. The result was a reworking of the pre-emancipation system with minor variations, and a highly charged atmosphere. Allotments were passed over: though frequently scattered and far from the villages where owners resided. There was no disturbance of traditional systems of common cultivation; ownership was made over to villages of ex-serfs, rather than to individuals; the *mir* was to be responsible for collecting redemption dues for land made over.

N. M. Druzhinin's impressions on the impact of emancipation differ from this account on certain points. Druzhinin is more trenchant in his arguments about peasant losses, using fragmentary evidence to show that the peasants were hard put to retain land they had purchased in their lord's name; he also emphasizes the severity of the redemption dues which had to be paid for allotment land, assessing this in terms of contemporary land prices. Both issues are important. But the unrepresentative nature of evidence makes the first point untenable. The second point (concerning the severity of redemption dues) is well taken, since, as Alexander Gerschenkron has pointed out, dues were considerably in excess of existing land prices. But even as the point is made, special attention requires to be paid to future inflation rates in land prices, especially after 1881, before which a number of peasants were not involved in the process of allotment acquisition: for it was in accordance with this that the calculating peasant proprietor was to decide on the extent of his deprivation. Since the settlements in 1861 were to be a reference point in future conflicts between ex-lord and ex-serf, and ex-serf and the government, such matters are not to be lightly passed over.

Druzhinin's study is weakened elsewhere by apparent contradictions. He admits that there was a lobby in central government which wished to ensure a fairly just settlement. And he is convinced of the ability of this lobby to withstand the attacks of pro-gentry lobbies of the time. He points out the survival of the main committee on the settlement of rural institutions, despite the demands for its abolition by sections of the nobility who wanted settlements favourable to the landowners. Again, he shows how the imperial government resisted the major pressure groups who demanded the liquidation of state forests and state land holdings – and their immediate sale – in order to promote proprietorial agriculture. On the other hand, Druzhinin contends the impotence of independent-minded statesmen when it came to settlements on the ground, pointing out the difficulties of arbitrators such as Volodimirov (Pskov) and L. N. Tolstoy (who developed his prejudices against local government in these days). These 'just' arbitrators, Druzhinin argues, had a difficult time, and went in fear of their lives. Obviously, such contradictions are to be explained by a delineation of levels of government effectiveness. But Druzhinin is concerned to show that no 'governmental justice' could assist a peasant confronted by an avaricious gentry. Hence, he does not consider explanations that might permit impressions to the contrary: and prefers to leave the matter unsettled.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> N. M. Druzhinin, *Russkaya derevnya*. For the emancipation see P. A. Zayonchkovskiy, *Provedenie v zhizn' krest'yanskoy reformy 1861g.* (Moscow, 1958), which has recently been translated into English. See also A. Gerschenkron, *Cambridge Economic History of Europe*.

Other matters taken up by Druzhinin and, later, for the 1881–1904 period by A. M. Anfimov, deserve closer attention. For instance, certain areas of European Russia were not immediately affected by the course of events described above. And this point is well taken since it illustrates the variety of land tenure in late imperial Russia and warns against common generalizations. The Baltic provinces, where emancipation was introduced prior to 1861, were not the only exception in this regard. In the Belorussian provinces, the lower Volga and in sections of the Urals and the north, there were a large number of serfs who lived under exceptional legislation. The *chinsheviki* and *vol'nye liudi* (Belorussia), as well as various categories of tenant, the *odnodvortsy* (old state retainers) and factory serfs were among those involved: and despite legislation in 1882, 1886, 1888 and 1892, many of these remained in a state of dependence as late as 1914. Those concerned were only some 800,000, however, and, in the greater part of European Russia, the legislation of 1861 (for manorial serfs) and 1866 (for state serfs) was what mattered.<sup>8</sup>

### III

After 1861, in the greater part of European Russia, allotment land, rented land and small areas of purchased land constituted the 'freed' peasant household's farming area; but the entire unit was clearly considered insufficient by the peasant cultivator. As Druzhinin points out (and Anfimov develops for the period after 1880) land purchase and land rent were to continue and to increase after emancipation. Gentry were willing to rent out or sell since many were unable to adapt their estate management to the handling of tracts they had not seriously controlled in the past. The ex-serf was compelled to rent or buy: a natural consequence of some allotment losses and, certainly, restricted and complex access to allotments, grazing land and forest. In the late 1870s, a new urgency entered the matter. The gentry sold, leased or share-cropped their land more extensively, as agricultural prices, both locally and internationally, began to fall. By 1900, ex-serfs had acquired 13 per cent of their existing holdings by purchase, with money saved or through loans from district loan banks, local council (*zemstvo*) schemes or the Peasant Land Bank (which began operations in 1883). The bulk of this purchase (60 per cent) was carried out after 1882. Demand was exceptionally high in the central black-earth and lower Volga, as well as in provinces where flax cultivation was well developed (Smolensk and Tver'). Leasing of land from the gentry was also considerable – amounting to over 20 per cent of land in peasant hands in 1900.<sup>9</sup>

Much of what happened was a consequence of land hunger and a large increase in rural population (some 25 millions over 1863–97). The region most affected was the central black-earth region: here, unlike the central industrial provinces and the Urals, there was little industry to mitigate rural overpopulation; nor, unlike the Steppe and the Lower Volga, was there land to clear. The 'commission on the centre' (1902) placed the all-empire figure for rural unemployment as high as 50 per cent: and a quarter of those concerned were in the central black-earth region.<sup>10</sup>

It is clear that a part of the problem of rural unemployment was dealt with by the increasing number of jobs in factories (especially in the last decade of the nineteenth

<sup>8</sup> A. M. Anfimov, *Krest'yanskoe khozyaystvo Evropeiskoy Rossii, 1881–1904* (Moscow 1980), pp. 67 ff.

<sup>9</sup> V. A. Vdovin, *Krest'yanskii pozemel'nyy bank* (Moscow, 1952). A. M. Anfimov, *Krest'yanskoe*, pp. 55–67, 117 ff.

<sup>10</sup> A. M. Anfimov, *Ekonomicheskoe polozhenie i klassovaya bor'ba krest'yan Evropeyskoy Rossii* (Moscow, 1984), pp. 11 ff.

century): many of these workplaces were established in the countryside and were easily accessible to peasant farmers. In an important set of essays, which form a sound introduction to Russian historical geography (edited by J. H. Bate and R. A. French), J. H. Bate and W. L. Blackwell show the rural base of sections of Russian industry in the late nineteenth century: and, in an excellent essay, R. A. Gohstand outlines the commercial basis of this system of industrialization as a whole.<sup>11</sup>

A. M. Anfimov shows that migration (to Kuban, Western Siberia, etc.) was also an attempted solution to land and employment shortage. He further points out the importance of craftwork, agricultural labour, hawking, trade, etc., which involved three quarters of the population in the central industrial provinces and half the population of the black-earth region (at the turn of the century). Anfimov correctly emphasizes that income and involvement were by no means uniform over the country: nor was there a necessary correspondence between land held and the controlling share, say, in a trading or craft-manufacturing enterprise. A peasant farmer of the central black-earth region, whose landholdings were small, might clearly establish his fortunes through such enterprise. Anfimov does not, however, deal with reasons why and where craft occupations continued to be important at this time of increasing machine manufactures production: and this is an important issue since it shows how and where small scale enterprise and rapid industrialization could go together, to provide a solution to problems of rural unemployment and land hunger. An explanation, clearly, is that in some areas the complexion and position of crafts changed. The railways, for instance, improved the competitiveness of some crafts of the central black-earth region. In the central industrial provinces, on the other hand, established trades faced great difficulties, a result of the import or production of machine-made goods (nets, boots and nails were affected), the rise of timber contractors and the limited effects of state conservationist policies (which affected both felling and the production of wood manufactures). But here again, in some cases, after initial difficulties local government came to the aid of crafts in the region; moreover, there was an increase in the volume of goods to be transported and consequently there was more work for those concerned with river conveyance to railway entrepôts.<sup>12</sup>

The vicissitudes of craft incomes, and the varying impact of industrial employment and migration (especially in the black-earth region) meant that land was to be of continuing importance in the last decades of the nineteenth century. An accurate impression of land acquisition and land use is, therefore, fundamental to a proper sense of the evolution of peasant society and the nature of peasant incomes.

The major catalyst in the process of peasant land purchase after 1883 was a mortgage bank set up by central government, the Peasant Land Bank. This was especially so after 1895, when the Peasant Land Bank's statute was altered and it was permitted to purchase land to sell where necessary. Through an examination of the bank's activities, a picture may be established of the kind of proprietorship which was becoming entrenched in much of European Russia at this time, as the landed gentry sold off much of their property. The picture is revealing, since it shows the variety of pressures at work in peasant society at this time.

A. M. Anfimov gives an up-to-date résumé of the activities of the Peasant Land Bank

<sup>11</sup> J. H. Bate and R. A. French (ed.), *Studies in Russian historical geography* (Florida, 1983). A large number of the essays cover the medieval and early modern period, or areas outside European Russia (Russian Alaska, Central Asia, etc.). The essays mentioned, together with the studies by Judith Pallot, mentioned below, are relevant for the issues considered in this review.

<sup>12</sup> I. F. Tiumev, 'Ot Rzhveva do Uglicha', in *Istoricheskii Vestnik*, 1876, t. 3, nos. 1-2.

in European Russia: a part of which is based on D. I. Budaev's earlier study of the Smolensk countryside. Clearly, most land acquisition through the Peasant Land Bank (75 per cent) was through peasant associations, in which different members had different numbers of shares. These were preferred both by the Bank, and by buyers, to other alternatives: personal purchase was too expensive, since 25 per cent of the value of the property had to be deposited immediately. In the case of purchase by the village, or rural society, in which potential buyers lived, and which organized cultivation of the allotment land transferred after emancipation, obligations were not always shared out evenly, though land might be; situations could arise where the more prosperous paid the share of the less prosperous, under the entrenched system of collective responsibility (*krugovaya poruka*). Such a situation could be avoided in associations, which appealed to buyers with a variety of interests and incomes.<sup>13</sup> The bodies varied considerably in nature. One type of association was the Vasil'evsk Association (El'ninsk county, Smolensk), where 20 households (all with allotment land and holdings purchased earlier) bought 126.5 dess.: the holdings here were comparatively small and the inequalities among participants often substantial. There were associations where individual holdings were larger: in Kazan' village, Vyazma county, for instance, there were two such associations – one of seven shareholders, buying 362 dess., and one of four shareholders, buying 231 dess. Distribution of land within an association could and did change over time: Karp Stepanov, for example, a member of Sannikovsk Association, Sychevsk county, Smolensk, bought eleven shares from seven other members of the association during the period 1901–1910.<sup>14</sup>

Members of associations, as in the Vasil'evsk case, retained their allotment land. Karp Stepanov, the wealthy peasant proprietor mentioned above, did not sever his links with allotment land, and, indeed, rented that of others, acquiring a portion from one Dar'ya Ivanova 'until her death'. Association shareholders frequently acquired land in order to support the farming of allotment land. In the confusion of the land settlements after 1861, allocations to ex-serfs had been often scattered, the erstwhile lord retaining strips in between: and allotment owners sought to obtain these *otrezki* (cut-offs) in the years that followed, since farming became difficult without them. Associations and individuals attempted to buy such land in order to sustain allotment farming. Ultimately, in the last decades of the century, interest in allotment land grew in strength. Land hunger, high rents and high land prices demanded attention to all land in a peasant's possession. Nor would the law permit the peasant to disencumber himself easily of his property, since to do so required a deposit of the full price of the allotment. After 1894, the situation became even more difficult, as sale required the permission of land captains in conference (i.e. a body higher than those of the *mir*).<sup>15</sup>

Certainly, there were peasants who disassociated themselves from allotments and villages: and whose connexions with allotment owners were those of a landlord. Thus a well-to-do peasant proprietor of the village of Gorodische (Vyazma county, Smolensk) bought 368 dess. — of which 30 dess. were strips important to the cultivation of allotment land: his sons set up the settlement of Shadovo, comprising four households which had, between them thirteen horses, forty cows, eleven barns, eight houses and four sheep. This small estate hired eleven labourers. Shadovo clearly constituted the centre of the peasant proprietor's establishment and supplied the bulk

<sup>13</sup> A. M. Anfimov, *Krest'yanskoe*, pp. 55–67.

<sup>14</sup> D. I. Budaev, *Smolenskaya dereznia v kontse XIX i nachale XX vv* (Smolensk, 1967), pp. 177 ff.

<sup>15</sup> A. M. Anfimov and P. N. Zyryanov, 'Nekotorye cherty evoliutsii russkoy krest'yanskoy obshchiny v poreformennoy Rossii (1861–1914)', in *Istoriya SSSR*, 1980, No. 4.



of the family's income. But it is interesting that it was not the sole source of income. For rent was considered an important additional source and the Shadovo family rented the scattered strips it had bought to the village of Spornaya, whose allotment cultivation clearly needed the land.

The case of Shadovo, however, was unusual among the new proprietors, even if it was not exceptional. As A. M. Anfimov points out, the greater number (over 60 per cent) of peasant proprietors in 1905 had bought less than ten dessyatin of land. The owners of Shadovo were like M. Egorova, with her 372 dess., bakery and shop (Yazykovo, Dorogobuzhsk county) or Karp Saplenkov (Zhigulevo, Sychevsk county) who bought 3300 dess. for Rb. 24,000 from the Moscow Timber Manufacture Association in 1895. They were peasants who involved themselves in the grain trade over large areas, and (in the central industrial region and the central western provinces) in the timber trade. They retained their links with the ex-serf estate in various ways, but they cannot be considered typical of that estate: often they entered the legal category of the merchant (*kupechestvo*) in course of their activities.<sup>16</sup>

The Peasant Land Bank gave opportunities both to these new landlords as well as to smaller peasant proprietors; and for the latter, allotment land was important and meaningful. For the peasant proprietor with allotment land, land he bought had a number of purposes: it could be an area for his own experiments; or it could be land acquired with others to bridge a gap within a field where a part of his allotment share lay; in the latter case, the land would, of course, be shared and cultivated in common. Whatever the situation, there was little question that this proprietor would abandon his allotment lands. The disadvantages of common cultivation, such as the impossibility of using new rotation systems, were widely discussed at the time, but they do not seem to have disturbed peasant proprietors. This is explained in part by the system of common cultivation itself. Land under this system of cultivation was organized into three open fields, and each family given strips, making up their due, in the spring and winter field. All families harvested together and cattle were grazed either in the fallow field or on cropland after harvest. The function of each field (spring, winter, fallow) changed every year. Provisional adjustment of strips (*skidki* and *nakidki*) could be arranged within a field, but clearly the system did not permit the introduction of new rotations and crops for enriching the soil (clover etc.), unless the *mir* decided on it.<sup>17</sup> Systematic manuring of a particular set of allotments was impossible. This was especially so since repartitions were frequent late in the century, even after the 1894 law required a twelve year delay. On the other hand, as was pointed out by defenders of the system in the committees on the needs of agriculture (1902-4), farming costs were kept low and problems of access to water and roads less severe than would have been the case otherwise. It is by no means surprising in such conditions that both separate proprietorship and communal cultivation enjoyed their own share of popularity. Many new proprietors, acquiring land through the Peasant Land Bank, were by no means displeased with their continued involvement in communal cultivation.

Peasant cultivation in 1904, according to Anfimov, must still be seen as substantially connected with allotment land and with common cultivation. It was rare for households to depend solely on allotment land: and even in an area of low land purchase, in Kaluga, in Peremyshl'sk county, over 80 per cent of households had either

<sup>16</sup> D. I. Budaev, *Smolenskaya*.

<sup>17</sup> The most thorough discussion of the three-field system is for an earlier period. M. N. Confino, *Systèmes agraires et progrès agricole* (Paris, 1969). A summary of the views of the Russian and Soviet agronomist, D. N. Pryanishnikov, is given in A. M. Anfimov, *Krest'yanskoe*.

rented or purchased additional land. But only in exceptional cases did cultivation on rented or purchased land outweigh cultivation on allotments. Evidence of two provinces representative of the Lacustrine and central agricultural regions, Smolensk (Vyazma and Sychevsk counties) and Orel (Dmitrovsk and Kromsk counties) confirms this: as does evidence from Yaroslav, which is fairly representative of the central industrial region. Sown area on allotment holdings was substantially greater than on rented or purchased land. The importance of allotment holdings meant a commitment to common cultivation. But, as pointed out above, common cultivation had its advantages. Figures for the central industrial region, moreover, show an important measure of innovation taking place on land under common cultivation: multi-field crop rotations or sowing of clover or similar root-crops and grasses occurred in the case of 20 per cent of households. Peasants holding allotments also adapted their common cultivation to market forces. For instance, buckwheat and millet declined as items of cultivation as did rye, while oats (in the Baltic), barley and wheat were on the rise. The increase (in the period 1881-1905) in wheat production is especially noticeable in the southern provinces. This was a clear response to better prices for some crops rather than others. To Anfimov, such developments come as no surprise, for all his statistics show that capitalism and differentiation were at work in the Russian countryside. Rent figures, figures for livestock ownership, figures for land purchase and for implement ownership show that there were those in the village who were determined to improve their incomes and extend their cultivation: and there were those who could not adapt fast enough, had to rent off allotment land, become agricultural labourers or spend some time in factories. Inevitably, some of the shrewd farmers concerned would make the systems of common cultivation operate in favour of higher profits.

Anfimov is quite sure, however, that the institutions and conventions of the *mir* were a brake on the influence of the more aggressive, profit-minded cultivators. He points out that the latter did not always have their way: that institutions such as repartition were by no means a catspaw in the hands of the rural rich. In fact, after 1894, repartition would frequently occur, in defiance of the law, at short intervals, and peasants were willing to accept fines and punishment for this. In the open field, peasants knew precisely how much each strip was worth, and, consequently, felt it necessary to exchange periodically, to adjust discrepancies and anomalies. Anfimov acknowledges certain equalizing tendencies within the *mir*, while thoroughly convinced of the differentiation taking place within it. Commenting on communal and association purchases of land, he makes the telling comment:

Communal and association forms of land purchase did not prevent the deprivation of peasants of land. But at the same time, these forms of land purchase impeded the concentration of land in the hands of the rural bourgeoisie; although land purchased was distributed according to investment, i.e. in accordance with the sum invested by peasants, and passed from the weak to the strong, this process was slowed down by the fact that land did not cease to be collective (communal or association) property.<sup>18</sup>

Other factors strengthened the mixture of allotment and independent cultivation among the peasantry. Government policy itself was important in this regard. The abolition of poll tax and salt tax was of importance to some of the poorer cultivators, as was government remission of redemption dues in the 1880s: these were some of the factors that ensured that they did not have to rent their allotment holdings, in order to survive. Less understood, though critical to the controls on the wealthier within the

<sup>18</sup> A. M. Anfimov, *Krest'yanstvo*, pp. 60, 103-4, 133, 177 ff.

*mir*, were the frequent interventions by the senate (the Russian supreme court) in the patterns of property division within the commune. The actual conventions governing inheritance of allotment land were (under the emancipation) to be determined by peasant customary law (*obychnoe pravo*). This was practice which applied only to ex-serfs and it varied from region to region and time to time. It was certainly not considered immutable among the peasantry, and was one area where the strong in the *mir* could exert their influence. In the 1880s and 1890s, however, decisions taken by peasant courts, deciding on the basis of custom, were being challenged by the senate: on the basis of what the senate members thought was customary law (largely based on 1877 compilations on peasant right). Gross manipulations of the peasant courts, therefore, came up against an important obstacle.<sup>19</sup>

Those with small holdings of allotment land and limited incomes were assisted also by the initiatives of elected local government bodies (*zemstva*) and the activities of improvement societies.<sup>20</sup> The work of such institutions included: agronomical assistance to the rural areas from the *zemstva*; the setting up and expansion of agricultural societies in the provinces of European Russia (they had already become established in the Baltic states in the mid century); the extension of insurance facilities by the *zemstva* in the 1880s and 1890s, and, critically, the setting up of grain elevators in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. From these, both wealthy peasant proprietors and small peasant property owners, with a heavy reliance on allotments, gained a good deal. And, with such assistance, they were able to profit from the price increases of agricultural commodities after 1894.

Much of the activity of the *zemstva* and the agricultural societies were guided by the interests of the landed gentry who dominated these institutions. In the south of the empire, concerns with the necessity to attract agricultural labour directed the policies of some *zemstva*. In the central industrial and central agricultural provinces, the landed gentry were motivated by the need to make agriculture a sufficiently paying affair for the peasantry, as this made their own sources of income (renting and selling land) the more secure. Clearly, however, the interests of the landed gentry did not only have an exploitative significance: to help the peasant, here, appears to have meant to help oneself. *Zemstvo* initiatives came to mean more than a means of exploitation for the landed gentry. This was assured also by the close involvement of many peasants in the working of the district *zemstva*: they were induced to participate in the *zemstva* as a natural corollary of their interest in a number of other institutions set up in the 1880s and 1890s – temperance societies, firefighting associations, village schools, rural clinics, model farms, etc. The educated *zemstvo* functionaries and principled gentlemen associated with this work were responsible for policies which were as much concerned with broader issues of social welfare as well as a narrow self interest.<sup>21</sup>

The wide ramifications of the activities of the *zemstva* are hardly touched on in Soviet research and this is true also of the essays on these institutions edited by W. Vucinich and T. Emmons.<sup>22</sup> Most contributions to this collection have a central concern –

<sup>19</sup> V. A. Aleksandrov, 'Obychnoe pravo v Rossii v otechestvennoy nauke, XIX–nachale XX v.', *Voprosy Istorii*, xi (1981) P. N. Zyryanov, 'Obychnoe grazhdanskoe pravo v poreformennoy obshchine', in *Ezhegodnik po agrarnoy istorii*, Vyp. vi (Vologda, 1976).

<sup>20</sup> The *zemstva* were all-class elected local government institutions set up for most of the provinces of European Russia in 1864.

<sup>21</sup> *Entsiklopedicheskii Slovar'* (Brockhaus Efron), 'Sel'skokhozyaystvennyia obshchestva'. B. B. Veselovskii, *Istoriya Zemstva za sorok let* (St Petersburg, 1909–11), vol. 2. T. M. Kitaniina, *Khlebnaya Torgovlya Rossii v 1875–1914 gg* (Leningrad, 1978).

<sup>22</sup> T. Emmons and W. C. Vucinich (eds.), *The zemstvo in Russia* (Cambridge, 1982).

finding the origins of the 1902-5 *zemstvo* movement, while looking at how local government worked in Russia. Similar points are highlighted: that the *zemstva* were institutions of the privileged nobility, that peasant members had no interest in them, and that those who were interested in making something of local government (doctors, teachers, statisticians etc.) were frustrated at every turn by the landed gentry. The main point of unity between sections of local government was their hearty loathing of central government: the gentry were now outside the ranks of the civil service (because the service demanded too much education and their land too much time) and represented the agrarian interest, languishing under the fall in prices and the repercussions of Witte's policies after 1891; professionals had a number of grievances, the best-known of which were state persecution for political convictions or attempts at bureaucratization by the central government (in the area of medicine, for instance). In all this, remarkably, there is almost no consideration of what the agrarian interest did for itself. There are discussions of *zemstvo* taxation, *zemstvo* finance, complaints against the *zemstva*, but the author, Thomas Fallowes, ignores the role of *zemstvo* services in provincial society and local conflicts about how these services would evolve. There is nothing on principles, policies and the specific ramifications of the two. The activities and voluble participation of peasants in district *zemstva* is ignored by Dorothy Atkinson. Roberta Manning stresses the importance of the agrarian interest in *zemstvo* politics, but she does not discuss why the agrarian interest increased *zemstvo* rates in the 1880s and 1890s, or to what ends those rates were put. A major part of *zemstvo* work was concerned with creating security in rural Russia, and this should not be ignored. The collection of essays is excellent in bringing forward questions associated with the relations of the *zemstva* with *fin de siècle* Russian institutions, but practically all the contributors ignore the aspect of local government which was stressed by their greatest historian, B. B. Veselovskii: that they were spokesmen for the rural rich, for agriculture and for many concerned with the material state of the Russian countryside. Only Roberta Manning is concerned with this problem, but she does not seem to be interested in the broader implications of the 'agrarian interest'.

#### IV

It was after 1905 that the full complications of peasant land tenure and land usage became evident – when the central government introduced a new phase of land settlement, associated with the so-called Stolypin reforms of 1906-11. Under this legislation, peasants were permitted to remove their strips from the open fields and the control of the commune, and have them consolidated into a farm. This initially required government approval (law of 9 November 1906), and later could be done practically at will (law of 14 June 1910). In introducing the legislation, St Petersburg is thought to have been concerned to revitalize Russian peasant cultivation, to remove many from under the yoke of common cultivation. By 1914, the reform had only affected a limited area of peasant society, despite, according to the Soviet scholar S. M. Dubrovskii, government attempts to force communes to divide.<sup>23</sup> There are important recent accounts of the results of the Stolypin reforms which allow access to government investigations over large areas. George Yaney's recent monograph uses much of the material on government responses and policies concerning the land settlements – and permits a sense of peasant practices as seen from this vantage point. The book is eccentric in presentation, but also questioning, unconventional and

<sup>23</sup> S. M. Dubrovskii, *Stolypinskaya zemel'naya reforma* (Moscow, 1963).

ultimately absorbing. There is also an important survey of the reforms by Judith Pallot in the collection of essays on the historical geography of Russia, mentioned earlier.

George Yaney argues that in the late 1900s there was considerable response to the government's measures encouraging consolidation of allotment land. He shows that there were many who wished to set up their own independent farms, separating houses and farm buildings from the main body of their village (*khutor*), or preserving the buildings as they were, as part of the village (*otrub*). But Yaney emphasizes that peasants were not interested solely in such units – which would have indicated a major disenchantment with communal cultivation. By 1 January 1915, of 5.8 million households petitioning for settlement, 2.5 million wished to set up *otruba* or *khutora*. But of these, 1.7 million did so as whole villages – i.e. they formed whole villages which wished to rearrange their cultivation and distribution pattern. Moreover, 3.3 million households wished to participate in some form of 'group settlement'. This frequently involved ending the 'interstripping' which characterized the countryside, where the strips of one village were interspersed among the lands of another: one of the anomalies of the emancipation settlements, when more attention had clearly been paid to previous practice and immediate usefulness, and less to future systems of cultivation. Yaney finds similar patterns among those who actually consolidated. Of 1.75 million households involved in settlement projects, 650,000 carried out some form of group settlement, while 850,000 underwent individual settlement (the number acting in villages being unspecified). Yaney concludes that what many peasants wanted was land settlement which would not fundamentally alter their methods of land organization, i.e. that they did not wish to abandon communal cultivation. They wished, rather, to put to an end the many anomalies of previous settlements.

Yaney contends that the intentions of the St Petersburg government have been traditionally oversimplified. He does not accept that the government was unequivocally committed to creating a countryside full of 'squares' rather than 'strips': that it was the concerted aim of St Petersburg to create a Russian yeomanry. Various priorities, it appears, took precedence at different times and there was considerable confusion of opinion in government about what was to be done. Legislation itself indicated such a confusion, and circulars for implementation show changes in attitude. For instance, according to the law of 6 November 1906, if a peasant wished to separate his allotment strips from the village, he could do so only if it was not 'difficult' for the village: moreover, the village could retain his land and compensate him if it so wished. Clearly a forcible rearrangement of land was not intended. In fact, after 1908 the government came to accept that 'group land settlement' was more popular than other forms of land settlement. In a circular of December 1908, which was to guide local committees implementing the reforms, it was clearly stated that high among priorities should be 'intra-village land settlement, either group or individual'. According to Yaney, Russian government was divided over what land reform should be. St Petersburg was poorly informed about rural Russia (which he establishes with a survey of commissions of the late nineteenth century and a review of the government's functionaries in the countryside). So central government was willing to learn as implementation of policy proceeded. Yaney is heavily critical of the Soviet historian Dubrovskii's contentions that consolidation was forced on the peasantry, but he admits that 'there is another side to Dubrovskii' and 'later in his book he points out that land settlement benefited many peasants and that in many cases peasants adopted *khutors* and *otrubs* willingly'.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup> G. L. Yaney, *The urge to mobilize* (Illinois, 1982), pp. 156 ff., 260, 238, 296.

Judith Pallot arrives at impressions similar to Yaney's, but her concerns are different. She is in no way concerned with the way Russian government worked. She is interested in response to the settlement from peasant cultivators, pointedly indicating that they were not interested in setting up independent units separate from villages. She focuses on group settlements under the reform and stresses that peasants were interested in putting an end to the anomalies of previous methods of dividing the land. Sometimes they would set up independent farmsteads, but would revert to common cultivation should the need arise. In the village of Nikolaevsk, Pallot mentions, a group of peasants had settled on *otruba*: later, they destroyed the boundaries between *otruba*, restored the three field crop rotation and reverted to communal grazing.<sup>25</sup> In her pre-occupation with such happenings, however, Pallot ignores the peasants who did set up independent units. She mentions the existence of these, but does not bring them into her narrative. It is uncertain whether these new proprietors were those who followed the inclinations of the founders of Shadovo or Karp Saplennikov in Smolensk, or whether they were yet one more variant in the scheme of peasant land organization.

## V

The Stolypin reforms were a response to the agrarian revolution of 1905–6, as well as to a sense of the 'backwardness' of Russian peasant cultivation. The revolution had made it clear that there were tensions of a remarkably dangerous character at work in the countryside. Social conflict was evidently an unavoidable if unpalatable aspect of Russian rural society.

Peasant antipathy to both government and to the landed gentry had been clear at the time of emancipation – when it took on the form of large-scale violence. Such antipathy was to continue in later decades, fuelled by conflict over the use of wood and grazing land and animosities over rent arrangements and the employment of agricultural labour. By the 1890s, however, tensions ceased to be expressed in large scale violence: they came to simmer, Anfimov points out, and the number of affrays decreased in this period. Expectations in the countryside, it is clear elsewhere, were not determined solely by concepts popularised by socialist revolutionaries of various hues, or by more conventional notions of 'rebellion in the name of the Tsar'.<sup>26</sup> Peasant expectations came to be interwoven with new forms of literature which were popular in rural Russia as much as elsewhere in the Empire.

The demand for literacy and the values spread through it are the subject of an excellent study by Jeffrey Brooks on the reading habits of his period. Brooks develops earlier work on schools and literacy, pointing out the large network of local government schools that had come into existence by 1914 – substantially the result of large funds put into a 'universal education' programme by the imperial government after 1905. Peasants themselves were keen on literacy, as is clear from the large number of petitions for schools faced by local government bodies (*zemstva*) even prior to this: literacy was seen as a means of acquiring extremely important skills such as knowledge of law and administrative procedure, account-keeping, etc. Once acquired, however, as Brooks points out, literacy also placed at the disposal of readers a vast output of writers and publishers hardly known to students of Russian classical literature. This

<sup>25</sup> Judith Pallot in J. H. Bate and R. A. French (ed.) *Studies in Russian historical geography* (Florida, 1983), vol. 1.

<sup>26</sup> A. M. Anfimov, *Ekonomicheskoe*. D. Offord, *The Russian revolutionary movement in the 1880s* (Cambridge, 1986). D. Field, *Rebels in the name of the Tsar* (Boston, 1976).

form of literature, together with books on the lives of saints and other religious themes formed the staple of the country reader.

Russia's new reading public was to be served by well-known writers, such as Anton Chekhov, who wrote for cheap magazines and newspapers early in his literary career: but they also found they were catered for by a number of less distinguished publishers of St Petersburg (e.g. V. V. Kholmashkin and T. Kuzin) and Moscow, where the publishers D. I. Presnov, A. M. Zemskii and S. Leukhin operated. Detective novels and stories of temptation, debauchery and redemption were the fare supplied by these publishers – and by the *kopek* newspapers *Moskovskii listok* and *Kopeika*: they made authors such as Pastukhov and Verbitskaya household names, and were responsible for introducing the detective fiction from elsewhere – such as Sherlock Holmes and Nat Pinkerton – to the Russian reader. Much of this was the *lubochnaya* literature – so called after the *lubki*, or popular pictures which had been sold earlier to a semi-literate or illiterate public.

The new literature was well known in provincial towns. In fact, guardians of social morality complained of its popularity. Through returning workers and local sales, the pot-boilers came to take their place in rural Russia. A number of themes were handled: banditry, success, Russianness, and superstition. Stories varied. There was the popular tale of Vasilii Churkin, a notorious bandit of Moscow province, who died c. 1880. The novel was serialized by N. I. Pastukhov in his paper *Moskovskii Listok*, and contained descriptions of Churkin's women, his feasting, his demonic qualities and his ruthless murders of the innocent. A. A. Verbitskaya specialized in the passionate tales of talented women who led exciting lives, like the heroine of 'The Keys of Happiness', Mania, who 'drifts back and forth between a cultured and progressive Jewish magnate and a reactionary aristocratic monarchist who "loved like a savage"'. The most significant political overtones of the literature was the difference noticeable in attitudes towards the state and the community, at the beginning of this century, especially after the 1905 Revolution. Brooks points out that in an earlier phase, challenges to the authority of the state (by the bandit Vasilii Churkin, for example) evoked little sympathy: there was no approbation for these vicious figures. They posed no threat to the state's monopoly over justice. Later, private detectives and Robin Hood figures (such as Robert Gaisler or Ataman Vilde) began to appear. Here, official justice is scorned and the hero is often an outlaw.

Major attempts were made to control the spread of the literature of the *lubok*: to limit its popularity. Alternatives, which were more 'moral', were encouraged by the church, the state and by groups of dedicated intelligentsia, spearheaded by eminent individuals such as Leo Tolstoy or N. A. Rubakin; they were determined to improve the tastes of the new reading public. Literature was distributed through popular readings in the countryside, through public reading rooms, in the army or through government institutions (as was the case with the *Sel'skii Vestnik*) free of cost. In this improving literature (it cannot be called anything else), there was care not to emphasize lust, money and the recurrent theme elsewhere of the city and of city life as the path to success. It was clearly literature that was both ubiquitous and free: so it had its readers. But there is doubt that it was ever popular, like the literature of the *lubok*, which, in rural Russia, was a major factor in the creation of the idioms of expectations.<sup>27</sup>

Clearly, as the complex story of peasant landholding and rural reading habits

<sup>27</sup> Jeffrey Brooks, *When Russia learned to read* (Princeton, 1985).

indicates, the history of the peasantry of late imperial Russia cannot be told in terms of large masses of sweating people concerned with toil, subsistence and rudimentary cultivation. The recently published memoirs of Ivan Stolyarov (a 'Russian peasant') give a fresh sense of the time (often despite the author's intentions): and provide a fitting last word on this subject.<sup>28</sup>

Stolyarov was born into a peasant family of the village of Karachun in Voronezh province. His parents were hardly literate and were never to be prosperous. Their limited world view can be seen from their reactions to their son's decision to attend a secondary school on his completion of the course at his parish school: 'What would come of my studying no one knew. My parents stressed that among the normal run of people of our village, no one had left his birthplace. They had been born, had lived and had died in the same spot. No affectionate son would leave his parents.'

Stolyarov describes peasants as an isolated group - with little in common with people of the town, fixed in faith, superstition, agriculture and their traditional crafts. But he also describes how his own family attempted to make additional income from trade, succeeded for a while and then succumbed, partly due to the intrigues of village officials. Stolyarov's reading at parish school introduced him to literature of a kind different from the religious scraps which his parents had associated with the written word. His own ambitions took him through training in higher schools of agriculture, and finally, following his involvement in the revolution of 1905, to France and Toulouse. He returned to Russia in 1916, emigrating in 1930, when he felt under threat from his own government. While in Russia, Stolyarov never lost touch with Karachun: and his life provides a vivid instance of the currents to which country Russia was open; a far from uninteresting example of the remarkable course a peasant's life could follow in the times described.

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<sup>28</sup> Ivan Stolyarov, *Zapiski russkago krest'yanina* (Paris, 1986). The memoirs have a thorough introduction by Basile Kerblay and a useful glossary of terms.