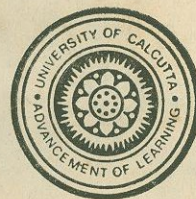


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# SOCIAL WELFARE AND PUBLIC POLICY IN LATE IMPERIAL RUSSIA\*

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I am deeply grateful to the organizers and members of this Conference for the honour they have done me in requesting me to preside over the Non-Indian Section of the Association's deliberations. I can think of few reasons why they should have done so: but I am deeply touched by the gesture.

The fact that this Section exists at all in the Association's agenda is a recognition of the possibility that interesting questions can be raised by Indian historians in this area to improve our own sense of existing research and to contribute to scholarship. In Bengal, the former has been done most ably by Kuruvilla Zacharia, Susobhan Sarkar and Prodyot Mukherjee: and the interest has an even longer lineage if the work of Benoy Sarkar is taken into consideration. Major research contributions, later have been made by Partha Sarathi Gupta in his research on British history.

I myself have been interested in problems of Russian welfare policy, and I have tried to introduce a sense of these problems both in my teaching of European history and in the few talks I have been asked to give.

I wish to talk about these problems today: if only to raise some questions regarding the way the turn-of-the century Russian history is taught. I hope you will bear with this rather narrow and nit picking discussion but it may throw some light on the development of the welfare state in Europe and may therefore also be of general interest.

## Social welfare and public policy in late Imperial Russia, 1890-1904

At the turn of the century, Russian authorities undertook legislation to increase supervision over a variety of public services which were hitherto of mild concern in St. Petersburg. The measures coincided with social reform at other levels and with comparable steps taken by governments elsewhere.

This paper traces the nature of the legislation, its motives, and the response it excited. Officials in Russia, it will be clear, did not

\*Presidential Address: Non-Indian Section, Conference of West Bengal History Association (September, 1990)

conceive of their actions purely in terms of welfare. Official actions were connected with ideas of public security, fiscal ends or sound administration. Such an approach attracted the criticism of those who were concerned professionally or ideologically with the issues of public well-being: criticism primarily of the increasing regimentation of public services. Ultimately the reforms became a focus for revolutionary opposition during 1904-1905: and their repeal became a platform of the Liberation Movement.

## The provisions of reform: (a) Specific services

The reforms established more rigorous regulation than hitherto over services in the charge of elected local authorities. Increased regulation of these institutions was ensured; and new schemes of assistance to agriculture were organized. Legislation concerning specific services touched on a number of areas.

### (i) Elementary Education

Primary and elementary schools run by local authorities (over 35,000 at the time) were, in 1892, required to be transferred to the Church: and in the local schools's committees, which made teaching appointments, civil service confirmation was required for zemstvo nominees (1874). The number of nominated members on these committees was increased in 1896.<sup>1</sup>

### (ii) Public Health

Major hospitals were brought under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (6th June 1895): a significant measure, given the important role played by these hospitals in an overall scheme of treatment centres, research and medical education run by local authorities.<sup>2</sup>

### (iii) Insurance

Compulsory and voluntary insurance schemes (organized by private companies and elected local authorities) were brought under a newly-created "Insurance Committee" of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The business of the Insurance Syndicate companies was thus firmly under central government surveillance: as was the compulsory fire insurance arranged for farmers in areas of specifically designed "peasant" settlement.<sup>3</sup>

1. B. B. Veselovskii, *Istoriya Zemstva za sorok let* (SPB, 1909), Vol. 1.  
2. N. Frieden, *Russian Physicians in an era of reform and revolution* (Princeton, 1981).  
3. *Vestnik Evropy*, October, 1894.

(iv) *Civil Suppliers*

The Ministry of Internal Affairs assumed full control over supplies (control over reserve stocks of grain in country areas, loans from such stores, purchase of supplementary supplies etc.)<sup>4</sup>

(v) *Assistance to agriculture*

What had been primarily an area of local government interest became an area of direct central government activity with the subordination of the work of local authorities to provincial agricultural committees and an Inspectorate of Agriculture. A special fund, administered by the Ministry of Agriculture, was set up to deal with large scale improvements in agriculture (29th June 1900).<sup>5</sup>

(vi) *Veterinary Services*

Close supervision was established (12th June 1902) over the implementation by zemstva of the 3rd June 1879 law requiring immediate slaughter of diseased cattle and the levy of a due from cattle owners to provide compensation to the owners of slaughtered stock.<sup>6</sup>

(vi) *Public assistance*

Social welfare was now associated by officials with active involvement of central government. A major Commission presenting its findings in 1893 had little hesitation in recommending a centrally administered national scheme in which zemstva played limited executive functions<sup>7</sup>.

**The provisions of reform (b) Local government organisation**

A number of services were affected by increased administrative control of elected local authorities (*zemstva*). These were bodies elected by local ratepayers and property owners which had run the bulk of the services mentioned above.

The zemstva were brought firmly under central government supervision by a statute of 1890. The legislation extended the powers of provincial Governors (the local agents of the Ministry of Internal Affairs) to intervene in local government affairs. And it created a

4. B. B. Veselovskii, *op. cit.* vol. 2.

5. *Russkaya Mysl*, 1891, No. 6.

6. B. B. Veselovskii, *op. cit.* vol. 2.

7. *Vestnik Evropy*, August/September, 1893.

new institution, the provincial board, dominated by Civil Servants, to vet zemstvo appeals to other administrative and judicial authorities.

The local authority of zemstva was further diminished by the abolition of the position of Justices of the Peace — officials elected by the zemstva — and the creation in their place of land captains nominated by central government. These steps weakened the already circumscribed administrative position of local government — which had no control over the police force and was rarely consulted by central functionaries.<sup>8</sup>

**The provisions of reform (c) Local government finance**

Officials also moved to end the almost complete autonomy given to local authorities in the way they distributed the burden of rates and the way they organized funds for individual services.

The establishment of a statutory reserve fund for the construction of country roads (1895) was a development in this direction. A statutory requirement was also established that local authorities would have a Circulating Fund, which would act as a reserve for current expenses, and whose use was determined and restricted by law. And an ordinance was passed to the effect that local government funds were henceforth to be kept with local branches of the State Treasury: which limited the freedom of zemstvo councillors to use (and invest) funds as they wished.

Critical to central control of local government finance were the measures of 1894 and 1900 concerning how rates were to be determined and how far they could be increased. Until the law of 1894, zemstva had complete freedom how to levy rates on land and forests — their principal source of income. They merely had to consider "income" and "value" of property. How this should be assessed was never stated and a great variety existed in how local rates were levied.

The law of 1894 required the setting up of provincial statistical committees which would determine "income" and "value" of property: committees with substantial civil service representation. To ensure, however, that rates should not become burdensome, a further measure of 1900 limited the extent to which local government expenditure could be increased over the previous year's. Only with

8. The best account of these changes is in P.A. Zayonchkovskii, *Rossiyskoe Samoderzhavie v kontse XIX stoletiya* (Moscow, 1970).

permission from the Ministry of Finance could the limit of expenditure be set aside.<sup>9</sup>

### Official attitudes

Encouragement for such policies came from successive Ministers of Internal Affairs : D. N. Tolstoi, I. L. Goremykin, D. S. Sipyagin and V. K. Plehve. The measures also received shape and direction from K. Pobedostsev, Procuror of the Holy Synod and a major advisor to Alexander III and Nicholas II, and S. Yu. Witte at the Ministry of Finances.

The policy was often prompted by a deep seated antipathy to elected of local self government.

Pobedonostsev undoubtedly favoured the existence of elected bodies in government, to inject "a measure of freedom" into public services : and Witte was primarily concerned with the confidence introduced in the overall working of public administration by the existence of different "types" of institution. But, in principle both were opposed to further administrative importance or autonomy to such institution. And this was true of civil servants such as D. N. Tolstoi, and influential publicists such as M. N. Katkov and P. Meshcherskii<sup>10</sup>.

Considerations of security were a powerful motive here. On the eve of the wave of terrorism that had been organized by the "Narodnya Vol'ya" (from 1877), large numbers of revolutionaries had been employed in country areas as physicians, teachers, and local government functionaries : some had been associated with the assassination of Alexander II in 1881.

"Liberals" influential in local government (such as F. I. Rodichov and I. I. Petrunkevich), had refused unconditional assistance to officials in combatting terrorism. And many failed to comment on the regicide of March 1st. The narodnik apostate L. N. Tikhomirov underscored much of this in his popular pamphlets : and it was a common view of "conservatives" that public services in the countryside had become a hotbed of sedition and revolutionary activity<sup>11</sup>.

Insurance, civil supplies and assistance to agriculture attracted

9. B. B. Veselovskii, *op. cit.* Vol. 1.

10. The best account of the discussions in government circles at this time is T. S. Pearson, *Russian Officialdom in Crisis* (Cambridge, 1989)

11. V. P. Meshcherskii, *Moi Vospominania* (SPB, 1897-1912), and L. A. Tikhomirov, *Demokratia Liberal'naya i Sotsial'naya* (Moscow, 1893)

attention for other reasons. The disparity in some services from county to county, was clear in official data. And the economic mismanagement of zemstvo insurance schemes, together with the malpractice of members of the Insurance Syndicate of private companies, had claimed the notice of officials.

The Famine of 1891-92 had indicated poor zemstvo supervision over subordinate volost authorities, charged with maintaining services of grain,<sup>12</sup> while the large number of petitions concerning the indigence of the rural population and the crisis of agriculture indicated the insufficiency of local government schemes for assistance to agriculture; and the limitations of the existing nature of public assistance<sup>13</sup>.

An opinion existed among civil servants that it was the duty of government to take direct action in such areas of necessity. And it was such ideas that motivated officials to intervene in these issues. Subjects, it was argued, had a right to expect such action. This was stressed in discussions of public assistance in the Grot Commission (1893) when the duty of the state to care for the poor was recognized.<sup>14</sup>

A caveat, expressed in the process of arriving at this principle, was that comprehensive organization of services was out of the question, being too large a task for government. Finance Minister Witte was insistent that the "needs" of the country were "innumerable", but "the means of satisfying them are limited". He advised caution in the way new responsibilities were undertaken<sup>15</sup>.

Such caution was responsible for the legislation on local government finances. For the measures of 1894 and 1900 were to be the means whereby circumspection was to be introduced into determination of local rates and local government expenditure. Officials had been concerned about zemstvo petitions for larger funds. They were also worried by the burdensome nature of local rates in some districts. The measure to establish proper ways to determine "income" and "value of property" was (in 1894) considered a solution to both problems, without excessive subsidy or credit. And the measure of 1900 introduced central regulation of increases in local

12. *The Famine in Russia, 1891-92* (New York, 1975).

13. A. M. Anfimov, *Ekonomicheskoe polozhenie i klassovaya bor'ba krest'yan v Evropeiskoi Rossii* (Moscow, 1984).

14. *Vestnik Evropy*, August/September, 1893.

15. T. H. von Laue, *Sergei Witte and the Industrialization of Russia* (New York, 1963)

finances while statistical work under the 1894 statute was not over-

The composition of zemstva had provided grounds for such care. For the structure of elected local bodies, according to official reports, was a source of erratic and wasteful organization of local finances. N. N. Kutler, Director of Taxes, complained, in 1894, that:

... the insufficient stability in zemstvo enterprises often results simply from the fact that a new group of assembly members held views on zemstvo needs which differ from those of the old group.

Officials of the Ministry of Finance considered that only through greater regulation of local finances could the problems of shortage of funds and the burden of taxation be solved. The regulations of 1894 and 1900 were a product of this view: the view, expressed in the State Council that:

... the Zemstva should be obliged to accord their activity with a fixed program which should be worked out for a fixed period and, according to regulations, confirmed.<sup>16</sup>

The effectiveness of central legislation under the new laws was to be ensured through widespread dependence on the landed nobility, as well as on official surveillance. The use of experts was regarded with suspicion since, as in the case of local authorities, these were politically suspect, or insufficiently conversant with local moods and conventions.

Prompted by A.D. Pazukhin and S. S. Bekhteev, Count D. N. Tolstoi and his sympathizers gave preference to the nobility in the elected local government in the statute of 1890. They also established parish-level salaried land captains of 1889. The latter were given wide administrative and judicial powers in areas of "peasant" settlement. These measures were partly a product of views prevalent in 1885 (the anniversary of Catherine II's charter to the nobility) that the nobility as a legal estate was more politically reliable than classes of "property owners" or groups of "rate-payers": that their loyalty of local commonsense should be used in matters of government more extensively.

If such personnel were effective, problems of excess bureaucracy and ignorance of local affairs would not, it was argued, plague

16. B. B. Veselovskii, *op. cit.* vol. 1, and *Ministerstvo Finansov* (SPB, 1902).

changes in provincial institutions. The effective re-organization of public services became a possibility.<sup>17</sup>

#### Critics of the new policies

The reforms attracted severe criticism in the liberal press. Questions were posed in *Russkaya Mysl* as to whether the nobility as a legal estate was exceptionally reliable: in turn raising doubts about administrative institutions dependent on this estate. Russia's was a "service nobility" in name only: individual members were as preoccupied with issues of family as with issues of service, the contention ran. The contribution of "gentlemen" in local government in the recent past, it was argued, was closely linked to the demands placed on them by an all-class electorate.

In the more radical *Vestnik Yevropy*, K.K. Arsenev was heavily critical of the specific legislation concerning public services. In the case of changes in insurance and agriculture, he could find no reason for new controls, since supervision of some sort already existed (from the provincial Governors). Plans for public assistance were considered topsy-turvy since they acknowledged that state funds in the project would be minimal, and that elected local government would supply the major funds: surely, Arsenev argued, interest in public welfare on the part of social organizations should be considered before the nature of national organization was worked out. Other criticisms of government policies were as follows.

#### (i) Civil Supplies

The assumption of central government control over civil supplies was based on the inability of zemstva to supervise volost authorities. Since institutions to ensure such supervision did not exist, zemstva could not be blamed. The new system left many functions to zemstva despite such criticisms, moreover, making it unclear how the service gained by the reforms.

#### (ii) Public Health

The new system merely complicated the management of large hospitals. Since no new government funding was planned, and local government funds were to continue to be the basis of hospital budgets, gains to the system were not clear.

#### (iii) Local finances

By freezing increases in 1900, the government discriminated

17. T. Pearson, *op. cit.* and P. A. Zayonchkovskii, *op. cit.*

against the most backward zemstva: especially those who had begun a program of reform.<sup>18</sup>

### B. Consequences

Since K.K. Arsenev, and those who collaborated with him constituted a liberal group that was influential in a number of bodies of local government (the zemstva of Tver', Moscow, Vladimir, Yaroslavl etc.), their criticisms of government policy became formalized rapidly in zemstvo petitions to St. Petersburg. These petitions in turn proved important instruments in intra-Ministerial intrigues in the capital. The opinions of liberals were felt even more widely since they were an important element in the prestigious Imperial Free Economic Society, the Moscow and St. Petersburg Committees for literature and a number of agricultural associations. Close connections between liberals and professionals (of the Pirogov Medical Association, for instance) made the opposition of greater importance.<sup>19</sup>

Press reports, intrigue in government departments and petitions ultimately halted the implementation of the Hospital Statute and the Veterinary Statute. This, however, hardly removed the resentment among those concerned with welfare, against the expanding role of central government where neither new funds nor new ideas were evident. And the upshot of that resentment was to be felt most severely in the revolutionary activities of 1904-1905.<sup>20</sup>

18. The articles in *Vestnik Evropy* and *Russkaya Mysl* cited above indicate the liberal views. The criticism of financial measures appears in B. B. Veselovskii and Z. G. Frenkel (ed.), *Iubileniy Zemskii Sbornik* (SPB, 1914).

19. N. M. Pirumova, *Zemsko-Liberal noe Dvizhenie* (Moscow, 1977).

20. B. B. Veselovskii, *Istoriya*, Vol. 1,2.

## THE CHOTANAGPUR TRIBAL REVOLT, 1831-32 : SOME METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

B. B. CHAUDHURI

The title under review\* is practically a reprint of the author's book. *The Kol Insurrection of Chotanagpur* (Calcutta, 1964). The text is identical. The 'revision' consists of addition of six appendices.

The *Kol Insurrection* was justifiably acclaimed as the first documented history of the rebellion, the first of a series of largescale revolts in the tribal belt of the Bengal Presidency. The book has not been replaced.

Earlier chroniclers of the rebellion mostly casually noticed it. We come across several stereotypes in the narrative of the event by British historians'. It was basically a colonial discourse. Tending to ignore the perceptions of the rebels, they thought the revolt worthy of notice primarily because it severely disturbed the pax Britannica, the 'law and order' in the region and outright wrote off the rebels as 'rioters', 'bandits', marauders' and 'barbarous tribes'. Some of them went as far as to assume that the alleged 'propensity to violence' of the rebel tribals inhered in the tribal culture itself. Notably, they did not recognise the 'peaceable disposition' of the tribals in normal times, but omitted to explain why they had suddenly turned violent.

Some of them, such as Bradley-Birt, did show a keen interest in the tribal culture<sup>2</sup>. However, this interest, primarily anthropological and ethnographical, lay in understanding the relatively enduring features of the tribal life, society and culture i.e. particularly the belief system. From the manner of Bradley-Birt's description of the revolt of 1831-32 one gets an impression that he considered the Munda belief system and the social organization as peripheral to the revolt. (Incidentally, he has not hastily concluded that the rebel 'violence' essentially derived from their culture).

Till the publication of Jha's book the most notable study of the

\* Jagdish Chandra Jha, *The Tribal Revolt of Chotanagpur (1831-32)*, Kashi Prasad Jayaswal Research Institute, (Patna 1987).

Particularly mentionable are: F.B. Bradley-Birt, *Chotanagpur, A Little Known Province of the Empire* (London 1910); E. Thornton, *The History of the British Empire in India*, Volume V, (London 1841-53) and H. Wilson (ed) *Mill's History of British India*, Vol IX, (Fifth Edition, London 1858)

2. Bradley-Birt, *op.cit.*, Chs. 1-2.