The greatest excitement has prevailed in Russia for the last few weeks since it became known that representatives of the Zemstvos of thirty-four provinces of the Empire were going to meet at St. Petersburg in order to discuss the necessary reforms in the general political organization of the country. The very fact that such an authorization had been granted was equivalent to an invitation to discuss a scheme of a Constitution; and so it was understood everywhere. When the Zemstvo delegates were leaving their respective provincial towns they were sent off by groups of enthusiastic friends, whose parting words were: 'Return with a Constitution!'

Their original intention was to make of their conference a solemn official gathering which would speak to the Government in its official capacity, but at the last moment the Minister of the Interior refused to grant the necessary authorization; and as the Zemstvo delegates declared that they were decided to meet nevertheless, they were informed that they could do so only in private, and that their conference would be treated as a private gathering, but that their resolutions could be handed by a few delegates to
the Minister of the Interior, and through his intermediacy to the Emperor. This is how this Conference, which surely will become an important historical date, took place on the 19th, 20th, and 21st of November at St. Petersburg.

The decisions of the Conference were expressed in eleven resolutions, which, as will be seen presently, are now becoming the program of an agitation which is gradually spreading all over Russia. Moreover, in contrast with all the petitions addressed to the Czar on previous occasions by certain Zemstvos, the present memorandum is couched in far more dignified language and in definite terms. It begins by mentioning the abnormal character of State government which has developed since the beginning of the eighties [1881], and consists in a complete estrangement of the Government from the people, and the absence of that mutual confidence which is necessary for the life of the State’ (Section 1). ‘The present relations between the Government and the people’—they say further on—‘are based on a fear of the people’s self-administration, and on the exclusion of the people from the management of State affairs’ (Section 2). The result of it is that while the bureaucracy separates the Supreme Power [read The Emperor] from the nation, it thus creates the very conditions for an entire lawlessness in the administration, in which the personal will of every functionary takes the place of law (Section 3). This destroys confidence in the Government and hampers the development of the State (Sections 3 and 4). Consequently, the Zemstvos express the following desiderata, which deserve to be given in full, because in such history-making documents as this the wording is almost as important as the general idea:

(5) In order to put an end to this lawlessness of the Administration, the inviolability of the individual and the private dwelling must be proclaimed and thoroughly carried out in life. Nobody can have a punishment or any restriction of his rights inflicted upon him with-
out a sentence having been pronounced to this effect by an independent magistrate. For this purpose it is moreover necessary to establish such a responsibility of the members of the Administration as would allow of their being legally prosecuted for each breach of the law, in order thus to secure legality in the actions of the functionaries.

(6) For the full development of the intellectual forces of the nation, as also the expression of the real wants of society and the free exercise of public opinion, freedom of conscience, religion, speech, and press, as also of meeting and association, must be guaranteed.

(7) The personal and political rights of all the citizens of the empire must be equal.

(8) Self-administration being the main condition for the development of the political and economical life of the country, and the main body of the population of Russia belonging to the class of the peasants, these last must be placed in the conditions that are necessary for the development of self-help and energy, and this can only be obtained by putting an end to the present subordinate and lawless position of the peasants. Therefore it is necessary: (a) to equalize the rights of the peasants with those of all other classes; (b) to free them from the rule of the Administration in all their personal and social affairs; and (c) to grant them a regular form of justice.

(9) The provincial and the municipal institutions which are the main organs of local life must be placed in such conditions as to render them capable of performing the functions of organs of self-administration, endowed with wide powers. It is necessary for this purpose: (a)
that the representation in the Zemstvos should not be based on class principles, and that all forces of the population should be summoned, as far as possible, to take part in that administration; (6) that the Zemstvo institutions should be brought nearer to the people by instituting a smaller self-administrative unit;¹ (c) that the circle of activity of the Zemstvos and the municipal institutions should include all the local needs; and (d) that these institutions should acquire the necessary stability and independence, without which no regular development of their activity and their relations to the organs of the Government is possible. Local self-government must be extended to all the parts of the Empire.

(10) For creating and maintaining a close intercourse between the Government and the nation, on the basis of the just-mentioned principles, and for the regular development of the life of the State, it is absolutely necessary that representatives of the nation, constituting a specially elected body, should participate in the legislative power, the establishment of the State’s budget, and the control of the Administration. [The minority of the conference, consisting of twenty-seven persons, accepted this paragraph only as far as the words 'should participate in the legislative power.¹']

¹ The smallest self-administrating unit is now the district (uyezd), which embodies from 100,000 to 200,000 inhabitants. The next unit below it, the canton (volost), has also a self-administration, but only for the peasants. The Zemstvo resolution asks for a self-governed canton, composed of all the inhabitants, while the peasant self-government would be limited to the village community. It must be said that all the peasant self-government, introduced in 1861, had been entirely wrecked under Alexander III. by the introduction of special 'land-chiefs,' nominated by the Governor of the Province, and endowed with unlimited rights.
in the overthrow of that institution will be made so long as the peasant masses do not bring their insurrections to bear upon the decisions of the present rulers. They must be told, therefore, frankly and openly by the educated classes, what the intentions of the latter are concerning the great problem which is now at this very moment facing millions of Russian peasants: 'How to live till the next crop?' Let us hope, therefore, that those who have started the present agitation with so much energy will also see that they must tell the ninety million Russian peasants the improvements in the economical conditions of the toiling masses which they can expect under the new régime, in addition to the acquisition of political rights.

P. Kropotkin.

FOOTNOTES

(11) In view of the gravity and the difficulties of both the internal and external conditions which the nation is now living through, this private conference expresses the hope that the supreme power will call together the representatives of the nation, in order to lead our Fatherland, with their help, on to a new path of national development in the sense of establishing a closer union between the State’s authority and the nation.

This memorandum, signed by 102 delegates out of 104—two abstaining—was handed to Prince Sviatopolk Mirsky, and through him to the Emperor. Four more resolutions were taken later on by the same Conference, and they offer a special interest, as they represent a first attempt at legislation upon a definite subject in the form, well known in olden times in this country, of a Royal petition. Three of these resolutions, which concern education, blame the Government for its negative attitude in this matter, and ask full freedom for the Zemstvos to deal with it; while the fourth demands the abrogation of the state-of-siege law and an amnesty in the following terms:

Considering that the Law of the 26th of August 1881, embodying the Measures for the Maintenance of Order in the State [state-of-siege law] is one of the chief causes which favor the development of lawlessness in the Administration and breed popular discontent, which both stand in the way of mutual confidence and unity between the Government and the population, the Conference finds that the repeal of this law is desirable. Besides, taking into consideration that the system of administratively inflicted penalties, which has been applied lately on a large scale in virtue of that law, has produced a great number of victims
of the arbitrary actions of the Administration who are now suffering various penalties and limitations in their legal rights, the Conference considers it its duty to express itself in favor of a complete remission of all penalties inflicted by mere orders of the Administration. It expresses at the same time the hope that the Supreme Power will introduce pacification in the country by an act of amnesty for all persons undergoing penalties for political offenses.

The Press was not permitted to mention the Zemstvo Conference, or to discuss its resolutions; but the latter were hectographed in thousands of copies at St. Petersburg, reprinted in a more or less clandestine way in many cities, and spread broadcast all over Russia. On the other side, as soon as Sviatopolk Mirsky had made his declarations about the need of 'confidence between the Government and the nation'—confirming his declarations by the release of a small number of 'administrative' exiles—the Press at once adopted quite a new tone. The need for a new departure, under which the nation would be called to participate in the government of the country, began to be expressed in a very outspoken way. All the main questions concerning the revision of taxation, the necessity of not merely returning to the original law of the Zemstvos (altered in 1890), but of revising it in the sense of an abolition of the present division into ‘orders’; the necessity of reestablishing the elected Justices of the Peace, and of granting a thorough self-government to all the provinces of the Empire; the equality of political rights of all citizens, and so on—these and numbers of similar questions are discussed now with the greatest liberty in the daily Press, and nobody conceals any longer his disgust of the reactionary régime which has swayed Russia for the last thirty years.

Of course, censorship continues to make its victims. The review Law (Prawo) has already received two warnings, and of the two new dailies, one (Son of the Fatherland), which came out under a...
to a number of villages. He has to perform an incredible amount
of work, traveling all the year round, every day, from village to
village, over impassable roads, amid a poverty which continually
brings him to despair—read only Tchékoff’s novels! And, therefore,
nobody but a ‘populist’ will stay. And it is the same with the mid-
wife, the doctor’s aid, the agricultural inspector, the cooperator,
and so on. And when several Zemstvos undertook, with their lim-
ited budgets, to make house-to-house statistical inquests in the vil-
lages, whom could they find but devoted ‘populists’ to carry on the
work and to build up that wonderful monument, the 450 volumes
of the Zemstvo inquests? Read Ertel’s admirable novel, *Changing
Guards*, and you will understand the force which these teachers,
doctors, statisticians, etc., represent in a province.

The more the Zemstvos develop their activity, the more this
‘third element’ grows; and now it is they—the men and women
on the spot, who toil during the snowstorm and amid a typhus-
stricken population—who speak for the people and make the
Zemstvo speak and act for it. A new Russia has grown in this
way. And this Russia hates autocracy, and makes the Zemstvos
hate it with a greater hatred than any which would have sprung
from theories borrowed from the West. At every step every honest
man of the Zemstvo finds the bureaucracy—dishonest, ignorant,
and arrogant—standing in his way. And if these men shout,
‘Down with autocracy!’ it is because they know by experience
that autocracy is incompatible with real progress.

These are, then, the various elements which are arraigned in Rus-
sia against the old institutions. Will autocracy yield, and make sub-
stantial concessions—*in time*, because time plays an immense part
under such conditions? This we do not know. But that they never
will be able any more to stop the movement, this is certain. It is
said that they think at the Winter Palace to pass a few measures
in favor of the peasants, but to avoid making any constitutional
concessions. However, this will not help. Any improvement in the
condition of the peasants will be welcome. But if they think that

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2 The Memoirs of Prince Meschersky contain extremely instructive data in
this respect.
a sort of ultimatum—it cannot be called a petition—addressed by the educated portion of the nation to the Emperor. In most provincial cities the return of the Zemstvo delegates is being made the occasion of influential meetings, at which the members of the Provincial Assemblies (the District Assemblies will follow suit) send to St. Petersburg their approval of the resolutions; while numbers of landlords and other influential persons in the provinces seize this opportunity for adding their signatures to those of the Zemstvo delegates.

Wherever a few educated persons come together, nothing is spoken of but the coming Constitution. Even the appalling war has been relegated to the background, while the constitutional agitation takes every day some new form. In the universities, both professors and students join it. The former sign the resolutions, while the latter formulate similar resolutions, or organize street demonstrations to support them. Such demonstrations have taken place already at St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Kiev, and they surely will be joined by working men as soon as they spread southwards. And if they are dispersed by force they will result in bloodshed, of which none can foresee the end.

Another important current in the movement was created by the celebrations of the fortieth anniversary of the Judicial Law, which was promulgated on the 2nd of December 1864. Large meetings of lawyers (avocats), followed by banquets, at which all professions of ‘intellectuals’ were represented, including members of the magistracy and, occasionally, of the administration, have been held at St. Petersburg, Moscow, Saratov, Minsk, Tomsk, and so on; and at all these meetings the program of the Zemstvos, reinforced by strong resolutions requiring the repeal of the exceptional state-of-siege law and condemning the whole régime under which Russia is now, was voted and transmitted to the Minister of the Interior. At Moscow the resolutions passed at the meeting of the lawyers were worded very strongly, as may be seen from the following characteristic abstracts:

Zemstvos, as a rule, have accomplished something. They have laid the foundation of a rational system of popular education. They have placed sanitation in the villages on a sound basis, and worked out the system which answers best the purpose of free medical help for the peasants and the laboring classes. They elected Justices of Peace who were decidedly popular. And some of the Zemstvos are doing good work by spreading in the villages better methods of agriculture, by the supply of improved machinery at cost price, by spreading cooperative workshops and creameries, by mutual insurance, by introducing school gardens, and so on. All this, of course, within the narrow limits imposed by the present economical conditions, but capable, like similar beginnings in Western Europe, of a considerable extension.

Another important feature is that the Zemstvos draw into their service a considerable number of excellent men, truly devoted to the people, who in their turn exercise a decided influence upon the whole of the Zemstvo institution. Here is a country district in North-Western Russia. Its district assembly consists of twenty noblemen elected by the nobility, one deputy from the clergy (nominated by the Church), one functionary of the Crown (who sits by right), five deputies elected by the second ‘order’ of mixed landowners (merchants, peasant proprietors, etc.), and nine peasants from the third ‘order,’ representing the village communities. They decide, let us say, to open a number of village schools. But the salaries of the teachers are low, the schoolmasters’ houses are poor huts, and the assembly people know that nobody but a ‘populist,’ who loves the people and looks upon his work as upon his mission, will come and stay. And so the ‘populist’ comes in as a teacher. But it is the same with the Zemstvo doctor, who is bound to attend...

\[\text{Taking a district of North-Eastern Russia where, owing to the small number of nobles, the first two ‘orders’ vote together, we have three functionaries of the Crown sitting by right, twelve members elected by the first two orders (three nobles, the remainder are merchants, etc.), and seven peasants representing the village communities.}\]
European Russia is divided into fifty provinces, out of which thirty-four have now the institution of the Zemstvo. This means that in these provinces each district has an assembly, elected by all the inhabitants, for the management of quite a number of local matters. Each assembly nominates its own executive, and all the district assemblies nominate a Provincial Assembly, which also has its executive, and is presided over by the provincial President of the Nobility. The towns have their own municipal government. The district elections, however, are made separately by the three ‘orders’—the nobility, the mixed landowners (merchants and peasant proprietors), and the peasants belonging to the village communities. Besides, as the foundation of the electoral rights is the value of landed property owned by each person in the district, and the nobility are the chief landowners, the result is that in most assemblies the number of peasant representatives is inferior to those of the other two orders taken together. Only in certain north-eastern provinces such as Vyatka have the peasants a dominating voice. This is, at least, how the Zemstvos were constituted till 1890, when the would-be ‘Peasant Czar’ further reduced the number of peasant delegates.

It would seem that under such an organization the Zemstvos would soon become mere administrative boards, on which the country squires would find a number of well-paid positions. So it was indeed at the outset in some central provinces, where the landlords of the old school had the upper hand. But on the other hand there were also provinces, such as Tver (an old nest of ‘Decembrists’), Voronezh, Poltava, partly Ryazán, etc., in which the nobility, owing to various circumstances, took the lead of the reform movement. In these provinces, as also in the north-eastern ones, in which the peasants dominate, the Zemstvos became an active force for introducing in the villages all sorts of useful institutions on a democratic basis. These two sorts of Zemstvos became the leaders of the others. This is why, notwithstanding all the obstacles opposed to them by the Central Government, the

And, finally, their last resolution expresses what every educated Russian is thinking, while at the same time it contains a reply to the Czar’s manifesto of April 1903. It runs as follows:

It appears from all the life of Russia for the last forty years that it is absolutely hopeless to endeavor to introduce in our country the reign of Right, so long as the arbitrary rule of bureaucracy continues to exist, even though all sorts of rights may be inscribed in our code.
Nothing short of a thorough reform in the fundamental laws of the State can secure the ends of justice and law—such is the conclusion of the Moscow lawyers.

Striking facts were produced at these meetings. Thus, the following figures just published by The Messenger of Law will illustrate the lawlessness which prevails under Nicholas the Second in all matters concerning political offenses. From 1894 till 1901, not one single political affair was brought before a court of justice or an examining magistrate. All inquests were dealt with by police officers or functionaries of the Ministry of the Interior. As to the numbers of such cases, they are simply extravagant. Thus in 1903 no fewer than 1988 political cases, concerning 5,590 persons, were opened, in addition to all those which were pending. In the same year, 1,522 inquests, involving 6,450 persons, were terminated. Out of this number 1,583 persons were liberated, 45 were sent before courts-martial, and no fewer than 4,867 persons were submitted to various penalties, including imprisonment, inflicted by the Administration, without the interference of any magistrate. Out of these, no fewer than 1502 were sent into exile, for terms up to ten years, to various remote provinces of Russia and Siberia! Nothing on this scale was done even under Alexander the Third, the corresponding figure for the last year of his reign being only 55 (in 1894).

The Judicial Law of 1864 contained certain guarantees against the arbitrary action of the police. But, as has been indicated during the last few days, already in 1870 and 1875 the preliminary inquest was taken out of the hands of independent examining magistrates and was handed to the ordinary police and the State police officers. No fewer than seven hundred by-laws have been issued since 1864 for tearing the Judicial Law to pieces—limiting the rights of the courts, abolishing trial by jury in numerous cases, and so on; so that—to use the expression of the Saratov lawyers’ meeting—‘all the principles of the law of Alexander the Second have been annihilated. This law exists only in name.’

An orgy of insolent police omnipotence now began: the wholesale deportation of all discontents; massacres of the Jews, of which the instigators, such as the Moldavian Krushevan, editor of the Bessarabets, were under the personal protection of the Minister; an orgy of wholesale bribery, general corruption, and intimidation. And Nicholas the Second had not one word to say against that man! Only now, when Plehve’s successors have brought to the Czar the copies of all his Majesty’s correspondence with the Grand Dukes, which Plehve opened and had carefully copied for some unknown purpose—only now they go about in the Winter Palace exclaiming: ’It is Plehve who is the cause of all that agitation! It is he who has brought upon us all this odium!’ As if Plehve was not their last hope—the last card of autocracy! Truly has the lawyer Korobchevsky said before the Court, in defense of his client Sazonoff: ‘The bomb which killed the late Minister of the Interior was filled, not with dynamite, but with the burning tears of the mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters of the men whom he sent to the gallows or to die slowly in prison or in Siberia!’

But who are these new men of the Zemstvos—it will be asked—who come now so prominently to the front? Are they capable of playing the responsible part which history seems to bestow upon them?

When provincial self-government was introduced forty years ago there certainly was among the promoters of this reform some sort of idea like this: ‘Let the landlords, the merchants, the peasants, familiarize themselves, through the provincial and the district assemblies, with representative government and the management of public affairs.’ This is also how the reform was understood on the spot, and this is why the Zemstvos attracted at the outset so many of the best provincial forces.

The mode of composition of these assemblies is original. Russia, as is known, is divided into provinces, and each province into ten to twelve districts. Leaving aside Poland (ten provinces), Finland (which has its own Parliament), Caucasus and Asiatic Russia
that the old régime could not last long. Notwithstanding all pros-
ecutions, a quite new Russia had come into existence since 1881.
In the seventies it was only the youth which revolted against the
old régime. In our circles a man of thirty was an old man. In 1897
men of all ages, even men like Prince Viazemskiy, member of the
Council of State, or the Union of Writers, and thousands of elderly
men scattered all over the country, joined in a unanimous protest
against the autocratic bureaucracy.

It was then that Witte began to prepare the gradual passage from
autocracy to some sort of a constitutional régime. His Commissions
on the Impoverishment of Agriculture in Central Russia were evi-
dently meant to supply that intermediate step. In every district
of the thirty-four provinces which have the Zemstvo institutions,
Committees, composed of the Zemstvos and of local men invited ad
hoc, were asked to discuss the causes of this impoverishment. Most
remarkable things were said in these Committees, by noblemen
and functionaries, and especially by simple peasants—all coming
to one conclusion: Russia cannot continue to exist under the police
rule which was inaugurated in 1881. Political liberties and represen-
tative government have become a most urgent necessity. 'We have
something to say about our needs, and we will say it’—this was
what peasant and landlord alike said in these Commissions. The
convocation of an Assembly of the representatives of all provinces
of Russia had thus become unavoidable. But then Nicholas the Sec-
ond, under the instigation and with the connivance of Plehve, made
his little coup d’etat. Witte was shelved in the Council of State, and
Plehve became an omnipotent satrap. However, it is now known
that in 1902 Plehve had handed to Nicholas the Second a memoir
in which he accused Witte of preparing a revolutionary movement
in Russia, and already then the Czar had decided in his mind to get
rid of Witte and his Commissions. This he did, handing Russia to
that man whom the worst reactionists despised, even though they
called upon him to be their savior.

At St. Petersburg the fortieth anniversary of the Judicial Law
was celebrated by nearly 700 persons—lawyers, literary people, and
soon—and their resolutions were equally outspoken.

The martyrology of the Judicial Law [they said] is a striking illustration of the fact that under the
autocratic and bureaucratic régime which prevails in
Russia the most elementary conditions of a regular
civil life cannot be realized, and partial reforms of the
present structure of the State would not attain their
aim.

The Assembly confirmed therefore the resolutions of the Zem-
stvo representatives, only wording the chief ones still more defi-
nitely, in the following terms:

3. That all laws be made and taxes established only
with the participation and the consent of representa-
tives, freely elected by all the nation.
4. That the responsibility of the Ministers before the
Assembly of Representatives of the nation should be
introduced, in order to guarantee the legality of the actions and the orders of the Administration.

For this purpose, and in view of the extremely difficult conditions in which the country is now involved, the Assembly demanded the immediate convocation of a Constituent Assembly, freely elected by the people, and a complete and unconditional amnesty for all political and religious offenses, as well as measures guaranteeing the freedom and the possibility of responsible elections, and also the inviolability of the representatives of the people. This declaration was signed by 673 persons, and sent to the Minister of the Interior.

The anniversary meetings of the Judicial Law being over, the agitation has already taken a new form. It is the municipalities, beginning with Moscow and St. Petersburg, which now pass the same resolutions. They ask for the abolition of the exceptional laws and for the convocation of a representative Assembly, and they insist upon holding a general Conference of representatives of all the Russian cities and towns, which would certainly express the same desires.

It is evident that the reactionary party is also at work, and a meeting of reactionists took place at the house of Pobiedonostsev, in order to discuss how to put a stop to the constitutional movement. They will leave, of course, not a stone unturned to influence the Czar in this direction, and, to begin with, they hit upon the idea of convoking meetings of the nobility in different provinces. They expected that such meetings would vote against a Constitution. But, beginning with Moscow, they met with a complete fiasco; the Moscow nobility adopted the same resolutions as the Zemstvos. More than that. A new movement was set on foot, in the old capital, in the same direction. A few days ago, at a meeting of the Moscow Agricultural Society, one of the members proposed a resolution demanding the abolition of the exceptional state-of-siege law promulgated in 1881. He met with some opposition, but after brilliant
Russia to the now omnipotent police officials, and made of Russia one great State prison. Thus began those gloomy years 1881-1894, of which none of those who lived them through can think otherwise than as of a nightmare.

To tell the truth, Alexander the Third was not exactly a despot in his heart, although he acted like one. Under the influence of the Slavophile, Konstantin Aksakoff, he had come to believe that the mission of autocracy in Russia is to give a certain well-being to the peasants, which could never be attained under a representative government. Towards the end of his life he even used to say that there were only two thorough Socialists, Henry the Fourth and himself. What induced him to say so I do not know. At any rate, when he came to the throne he adopted a program which was explained in a French review, in an article generally attributed to Turguéneff. Its main points were: a considerable reduction of the redemption tax which the ex-serfs paid for their liberation; a radical change in the system of imperial taxation, including the abolition of the 'poll-tax,' and the excise on salt; measures facilitating both the temporary migrations of the peasants and emigration to the Urals and Siberia; rural banks, and so on. Most of these measures were carried through during his reign; but in return the peasants were deprived of some of the most elementary personal and civil rights which they had obtained under Alexander the Second. Suffice it to say that instead of the Justices of the Peace, formerly elected by all the population, special police officers, nominated by the Governors, were introduced, and they were endowed with the most unlimited right over the village communities, and over every peasant individually. Flogging, as in the times of serfdom, was made once more an instrument of 'educating' the peasants. Every rural policeman became a governor of his village. The majority of the schools were handed over to Pobiedonostseff. As to the Zemstvos, not only speeches had been pronounced in support of the resolution it was voted with only one dissentient.

One may expect now that many other societies, economic and scientific, will follow the example of the Moscow agriculturists. In the meantime the public libraries, both municipal and supported by private contributions, have inaugurated a movement for demanding a release from the rigors of censorship. There is in Russia a special censorship for the libraries, and even out of those books which have been published in Russia with the consent of the censorship many works, chiefly historical and political, are not permitted to be kept in the circulating libraries. The Smolensk public library has now petitioned the Minister of the Interior asking for the abolition of these restrictions, and this petition is sure to be followed by many others of a similar kind, the more so as simply prohibitive restrictions are imposed upon the village libraries, the public lectures, and, in fact, in the whole domain of popular education.

It will be noticed that in all the above resolutions the form to be given to representative government has not yet been defined. Must Russia have two Houses or one? Will she have seven or nine Parliaments (like Canada) and a Federal Senate? What extension is to be given to the federative principle? And so on. All these matters have

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not yet been discussed in detail. It is only known that some Zemstvo delegates, under the presidency of M. Shipov, are discussing these vital questions. However, as the Zemstvos exist in thirty-four provinces only, out of fifty, of European Russia proper, and there are besides Finland, Poland, the Caucasus, Siberia, Turkestan, and the Steppe Region, no scheme of representative government can be worked out without the consent of these units. This is why the idea of a Constituent Assembly is gaining ground. All that can be said in the meantime is, that the Jacobinist ideas of the centralizers find but little sympathy in Russia, and that, on the contrary, the prevailing idea is that of a federation, with full home rule for its component parts, of which Finnish home rule may be taken as a practical illustration.

Such are, then, up to the 18th of December, the main facts of the constitutional agitation which is going on in Russia. And from all sides we hear the same questions: "Is it really the end of autocracy that is coming? Is Russia going to pass from autocracy to representative government, without a revolution similar to that of 1789 to 1793 in France? Is the present movement deep enough to attain its goal? And, again, are the Czar and his nearest advisers prepared to make the necessary concessions, without being compelled to do so by popular uprisings and internal commotions?"

First of all, let it be well understood that there is nothing unforeseen in the demand of a Constitution, so unanimously expressed by the representatives of provincial self-government. Over and over again, for the last forty years, they have expressed the same desire, and it is for the third or fourth time that they now address similar demands to the Emperor. They did it in 1880-1881. They repeated it in 1894, as soon as Nicholas the Second came to the throne, and again in 1902 in connection with the Committees on the depression of agriculture. At the beginning of this year, when the war broke out and the Zemstvos decided to send their own field-hospitals to the seat of war (these hospitals, by the way, are described as the best in Manchuria), representatives of all the Zemstvos demanded legislative power; its resolutions would be submitted to the State Council and the Emperor in the usual way.\footnote{After the Council has voted, the Emperor decides himself whether he accepts the opinion of the majority or that of the minority. This opinion becomes the law.}

This measure had to be made public, and on the 1st (13th) of March Alexander the Second approved the draft of a manifesto which had to be issued to this effect. He only desired it to be read at a meeting of the Committee of the Ministers on the following Wednesday. He was killed, as is well known, a few hours later, and the next Committee of Ministers, which took place on the 8th (20th) of March, was presided over by his son, Alexander the Third. The meeting fully approved the manifesto, which had now only to be printed. But Alexander the Third hesitated. Old Wilhelm the First had advised him to yield; but the reactionary party, headed by Pobiedonostseff and Katkoff, was very active in the opposite direction. Katkoff was called from Moscow to exert a pressure on the Czar by the side of Pobiedonostseff, and Alexander was easily persuaded by Count Ignatieff and such a specialist in police matters as the Préfet of Paris, M. Andrieux, that the revolutionary movement could easily be crushed. Whilst all this was going on the Liberal Ministers, who were in favor of constitutional reforms, undertook nothing decisive, and Alexander the Third, who had already written to his brother: 'I feel so happy: the weight is off my shoulders, I am granting a Constitution,' yielded the other way. On the 29th of April (11th of May) he issued his autocratic manifesto, written by Pobiedonostseff, in which he declared: 'Amid our affliction, the voice of God orders us to vigorously take the ruling power in our own hands, with faith in Providence and trust in the truth and might of the Autocratic Power which we are called upon to reinforce and to protect against all attacks, for the welfare of the nation.'

One of the first acts of this personal power was the promulgation of that state-of-siege law which, as we saw, handed all classes of
the Chief of the State Police, Mézentsoff, revised the relatively mild sentences pronounced by the Court in the trial of 'The Hundred and Ninety-three,' and rendered them very much heavier; how, in reply to this, Mézentsoff was killed in broad daylight; and how this was the beginning of a fearful struggle between the Government and the revolutionists, which ended in a wholesale slaughter and transportation to Siberia of the best elements of a whole generation, including children sixteen years old, and in Alexander the Second losing his life—all this is well known. It is also known that he was killed the very day that he had made a timid and belated concession to public opinion by deciding to submit to the State Council a scheme for the convocation of an Assemblée des Notables.

This scheme is often described as a Constitution. But Alexander the Second himself never attributed to it this meaning. The proposal of Loris Melikoff, which received the approval of the Czar on the 17th of February (March 1), 1881, consisted in this: the Ministries were to bring together by the next autumn all the materials which they possessed concerning the reorganization of the Central Government. Then special Committees, composed of representatives of the different Ministries, as well as of persons invited by the Government for this purpose, would prepare schemes for reform of the Central Government ‘within the limits which would be indicated by the Emperor.’ These schemes, before submitting them to the State Council, would be discussed by a general Commission composed as follows: (a) Persons nominated by the Emperor out of members of the above Committees; (b) delegates from the provinces in which the Zemstvos have been introduced—two delegates per province, elected by the provincial Zemstvos—as also delegates from a few important cities; and (c) members nominated by the Government to represent the provinces which had no Zemstvo institutions. Only the members mentioned under (a) would have the right of voting; the others, (b) and (c), would only express their opinions, but not vote. The Commission itself would have no

the permission to meet together, to agree upon joint action in the organization of relief for the wounded, as well as for the families of the Reservists. On both occasions the authorization was refused and the meetings forbidden; but on both occasions the Zemstvo delegates held secret conferences at Moscow and discussed their affairs in spite of the menaces of Plehve (Shipoff went for that into exile). And in both cases they concluded that the convocation of a National Assembly had become an imperative necessity. The present move is thus a further development of several former ones. It is the expression of a long-felt need.

The necessity of a representative government for Russia was spoken of immediately after the death of Nicholas the First, and we are informed by Prince Tatischeff (Alexander The Second and his Times) that as early as in 1856 Alexander the Second had had a plan of a Constitution worked out. However, precedence had to be given then to the abolition of serfdom and the terrible corporal punishments then in use (which meant a judicial reform); besides, some sort of local self-government had first to be created. These reforms filled up the years 1859-1866. But in the meantime the Polish revolution broke out (in 1863), and it was then believed at the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the uprising was supported by promises of intervention given to its leaders by the Western Powers.

This revolution had the worst imaginable consequences for Russia. It closed the reform period. Reaction set in—the reaction which has lasted up to the present day, and which has cost Russia hecatombs of her best and most devoted men and women. All schemes of constitutional changes were abandoned, and we learn from the same author that the reason which Alexander the Second gave for this abandonment was his fear for the integrity of the Empire. He came to Moscow in 1865, and there, at his Illysny Palace, he received Golovhavtoff—that same President of Nobility in one of the districts of the Moscow province who had forwarded to the Czar an address, in the name of the nobility he represented,
demanding a Constitution. The words which Alexander is re-
ported to have said to Golovnystolff during the interview are most 
characteristic: ‘I give you my word,’ he said, ‘that on this same 
table I would sign any Constitution you like if I were sure that this 
would be for the good of Russia. But I know that if I did it to-day, 
to-morrow Russia would go to pieces. And you do not desire such 
an issue. Last year you yourselves [the Moscow nobility] told me 
that, and you were the first to say so.’ There is no reason to doubt 
the authenticity of these words. They are just what Alexander the 
Second would have said, and while he was uttering them he was 
quite sincere. But, as I have explained in my Memoirs, his was a 
very complicated nature, and while the menace of the Western 
Powers, ready to favor the dismemberment of the Empire, must 
have strongly impressed him, the Autocrat also spoke in him, 
and still more so the man who demanded above all to be trusted 
implicitly. On this last point he was extremely sensitive.

Be that as it may, the idea of giving Russia a Constitution was 
temporarily abandoned; but it cropped up again ten years later. The 
great movement ‘towards the people’ was then in full swing. The 
prisons were overflowing with political prisoners, and a series of 
political trials, which had taken place with open doors, had pro-
duced a deep impression on the public. Thereupon Alexander the 
Second handed in a scheme of a Constitution, to be reported upon 
to the Professor of Civil Law and the author of a book much spoken 
of on this subject—K. P. Pobiedonostseff!

What the appreciations of Pobiedonostseff were, we do not 
know; but, as he has expressed his views on representative gov-
ernment in a number of works, we may be certain that his report 
was negative. His ideal is a Church, as strongly organized as the 
Catholic Church, permeating all the life of society and assuming, 
if need be, a fighting attitude against the rival Churches. Freedom 
and Parliamentary rule are the enemies of such a Church; conse-
quently, he concludes, autocracy must be maintained; and Russia 
is predestined to realize the happiness of the people under the 
rod of the Church. The worst was that Pobiedonostseff succeeded 
for years in maintaining a reputation for honesty, and only lately 
has it become evident that, although he does not care for wealth, 
he cherishes power and is most unscrupulous as to the means by 
which he maintains his influence at Court.5

In 1876 Alexander the Second was thus besieged with doubts. 
But then came the uprising in Servia, the Turkish War, the Berlin 
Treaty, and once more the inner reforms were postponed. The Turk-
ish War revealed, however, such depths of disorganization in the 
State machine that, once it was over, the time had apparently come 
for making a serious move in the constitutional direction. Discon-
tent "was general," and when the trial of "The Hundred and Ninety-
three” began at the end of 1878, and full reports of it were given in 
the papers, the sympathies of the educated classes went all in favor 
of the accused, and all against their accusers. The moment was op-
portune; but one of those omnipotent functionaries who had been 
nurtured in the atmosphere of the Winter Palace, Trépoff, gave a 
different turn to affairs.

The history of the years 1878-1881 is so fresh in the memories 
of all that it need not be retold. How, immediately after the ex-
citement produced at St. Petersburg by the above trial, Trépoff, 
the head of the St. Petersburg Police, ordered one of the ‘politi-
cals’ to be flogged in prison; how thereupon Véra Zasulitch shot at 
Trépoff, and wounded him; how Alexander the Second, inspired by

4 They had asked indeed that the integrity of the Empire should be main-
tained, and that Poland should not be separated from Russia.

5 See, for instance, his article in the North American Review, September 1901, in which he threw the responsibility for the law in virtue of which students, for university disturbances, were marched as private soldiers to Port Arthur—a law of which, we now know, he himself was the promoter, and which led to such serious disturbances—upon the Minister of Public Instruction, already killed by a student, and the Minister of the Interior, who was killed soon after that by Bal-
mashoff.