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Noack, C.

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Education : Russian

Author: Noack Christian

Education, which earlier had either been provided by church schools or depended on private initiative constituted one of the cornerstones of Peter the Great's Westernization programme. Until the Great Reform of Alexander II in the 1860s and '70s, the Russian state retained practically a monopoly on secular educational institutions and defined educational standards and curricula, while primary education remained in the hands of the churches. Compulsory primary education was introduced only after the October revolution, and illiteracy remained common among the rural population well into the 20th century.

The Russian educational system answered the perceived needs of the state administration. Examinations taken at universities or gymnasia were entry requirements to state and army services or entitled graduates to jump a few steps in the table of ranks introduced for the state service by Peter the Great. Such an overtly utilitarian *Bildungsprogramm* was not too attractive, and until the early 19th century Russians had to be encouraged to study by the promise of social privilege to secure a sufficient supply of educated state servants. The reluctance of the nobility to enter state service, in particular after the abolition of compulsory service in 1785, opened up state-run educational institutions to all ranks of society except the serfs. Through education and state service non-nobles could achieve the status of personal or even hereditary nobility. Education thus laid the ground for social ascent.

The first institutions of higher learning in Russia emulated French, Dutch and German models. The Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg (1725) combined research and teaching until the latter was entrusted to the University of Moscow, founded in 1755. Pupils were prepared for the entry of higher learning institutions either through private tutors, very often Europeans, or through the two preparatory gymnasia for noblemen created on Russian soil. For the academy and the universities, faculty was recruited in Western Europe throughout much of the 18th and early 19th century.

In terms of institutional growth and the nationalization of the curriculum marked the first third of the 19th century in Russian higher education. A Ministry of Education was created in 1802, the empire divided into six large educational districts. Although plans to cover the empire with a comprehensive school system were delayed by the Napoleonic wars and Alexander I's growing apprehension of possible political consequence of broad admission, the Empire possessed already seven universities in 1826. Three had been newly founded on Russian soil in Kazan', Harkov' (1804) and St. Petersburg (1819); others were reopened under Russian jurisdiction in non-Russian territories: Dorpat (Tartu; 1802), Vilnius (1803), Helsinki (1809) and Warsaw (1816). The Polish universities were closed after the insurrection of 1830-1831 and replaced by a Russian University in Kiev in 1834.

Beyond that, the empire counted three lyceums, 60 gymnasiums, 370 district public schools and about 600 parochial schools. The state network was complemented by more than 300 private-run schools, mostly for the nobility. In the last years of Alexander's reign and under Nicholas I, an increasingly conservative outlook characterized admission policies. Education was seen as a privilege of the gentry, and specialized schools were to cater for the needs of the other classes. *Realschulen* teaching more applicable subjects were supplementing the gymnasia, which specialized on a classical curriculum preparing pupils for further studies at the universities. Restrictive admission rules and tuition fees brought the number of gymnasia pupils

from gentry background up to 80 per cent in the 1850s.

The curricula of the era were decidedly practical, state-oriented and politically conservative, which did not prevent the universities and gymnasias to become inroads for contemporary Western thought. In the 1830s and 1840s, Russia's student body was particularly influenced by German idealistic thinking and Romantic nationalism. Sergej Uvarov (1786-1853), Minister of Education between 1832 and 1848, hoped that notions of nationality and organic Russian development could be reconciled with the conservative and paternalistic political outlook of autocracy. Under his tutelage, the space accorded to Russian language, history and literature grew sensibly at the expense of classical subjects, a trend never to be reversed. For example, in 1835 the faculty of letters at Moscow state university had one chair for Russian History, one for Russian Literature, and one for Slavic Literature and Dialects, out of a total of nine. As it soon turned out, however, Russian intellectuals were not particularly impressed by Uvarov's conception of conservative nationalism, famously enshrined in the formula "Orthodoxy, Autocracy and Nationality (*narodnost'*)". Even if many members of the gentry shared an interest in the preservation of the existing social order based on serfdom, hardly any public figure, with the notable exception of Gogol' in 1846, made their peace with a bureaucratic state machine, which was either seen (among "Westeners") as preventing the spread of civic freedoms or as destroying the historical foundations of Russian individuality, the peasant commune and popular religiosity (among "Slavophiles").

As a result of subversive discussions by students and faculty, surveillance in institutions of higher learning intensified. The universities saw their autonomy severely curtailed in 1835, and after the 1848 revolution rectors and deans were held personally liable for the contents of lectures. Recruitment of foreigners was forbidden in 1852, as was any activity by the student bodies unless explicitly sanctioned. The relationship between the educated elite and the state was thus further strained, fuelling subversive activities by students during the reform period and lay the ground for the emergence of the revolutionary movement of the 1860s and 1870s.

The crushing defeat in the Crimean War clearly demonstrated the many deficiencies of state system under Nicholas I, including its educational policies. Restrictions imposed on universities in the last years of Nicholas's rule were rescinded, as were social limitations. As a result enrolment in the universities increased by 34 per cent between 1855 and 1859. A new faculty statute returned much of the liberties lost by the universities in 1835. Finally, in the quest for a fresh modernizing impetus, the 1864 "Statute on Elementary Schools" and other reforms of the 1860s and 1870s liberalized and extended the school system. Acknowledging both the necessity for broad literacy and its own limited resources, the state encouraged the creation of educational societies and committees, or rural self-administrations (*zemstvo*), to expand educational facilities, especially primary and vocational schools.

Until the late Imperial period, Russia's educational system thus remained characterized by intense cultural transfers and cultural contacts. Many young Russians became acquainted with contemporary Western thinking in the shape of individual teachers, be it professors at the universities or through private tutors, who were mainly of French origin in the 18th century and of German origin during the first half of the 19th. Young Russians were also sent to study abroad, increasingly closely monitored by the state after the Napoleonic wars, in which many Russians as members of the army had made first hand experiencers in the West. Returning to Russia, these travellers brought back necessary skills and knowledge, but also a *Bildung* that more often than not inspired a critical view on the prevailing political and social conditions in their own country.

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