

THE RESPONSE OF THE RUSSIAN DECEMBRISTS TO SPANISH POLITICS IN THE AGE OF FERDINAND VII

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SUMMARY: I. THE DECEMBRIST REVOLT OF 1825.- II. RUSSIA AND SPAIN.- III. THE DEVELOPMENT OF SECRET SOCIETIES IN RUSSIA AFTER THE NAPOLEONIC WARS.- IV. THE DOMESTIC CAUSES OF THE DECEMBRIST REVOLT.- V. THE DECEMBRISTS' WRITINGS.- V.1. Pavel Pestel's *Russian Law*.- V.2. Nikita Murav'iov's constitution.- VI. RUSSIAN PERCEPTIONS OF THE SPANISH RISING OF 1820.- VII. LESSONS DRAWN BY THE DECEMBRISTS FROM THE SUPPRESSION OF THE SPANISH RISING.- VIII. CONCLUSION.- IX. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abstract: The article begins by describing the so-called Decembrist Revolt, a mutiny of Russian officers in 1825. It then examines the development of secret societies in Russia after the Napoleonic Wars and the various internal causes of the revolt, before focusing on the external context of the revolt, especially events in Spain during the Napoleonic period and in the decade following Napoleon's defeat. In particular, the article discusses the extent to which Decembrists made use of the constitution promulgated in 1812 in Cádiz in their own constitutional projects, the significance that the Decembrists attached to the Spanish rising of 1820 against the restored Bourbon monarchy, and the effect that the suppression of the Spanish liberal experiment in 1823 had on them.

Key Words: Decembrists; European liberal movements after the Napoleonic Wars; Russian constitutional projects; Russian political thought; Russo-Spanish historical contacts.

I. THE DECEMBRIST REVOLT OF 1825

On the morning of 14 December 1825¹ a battalion of the Moscow Regiment and some Grenadier and Marine Guards assembled in Senate Square in St Petersburg, where Etienne Falconet's famous statue to Peter the Great stands². These military men – or rather their officers – were hoping to take advantage of a constitutional crisis that followed the sudden death of the Russian Emperor Alexander I on 19 November in Taganrog on the Sea of Azov.

¹ The date is given in the Old Style (OS), i.e. according to the Julian calendar then used in Russia, which in the nineteenth century was twelve days behind the Gregorian calendar used in the West (i.e. the New Style, or NS). Dates of events in Russia are given in this article in the Old Style, whereas dates of events in western Europe are given in the New Style.

² This is the "bronze horseman" of Pushkin's famous narrative poem of that title ("Mednyi vsadnik").

It had emerged that Alexander's expected successor, his brother Constantine, who enjoyed some popularity as a result of a largely undeserved reputation for liberalism, had previously renounced his claim to the succession following his morganatic marriage to a Polish Catholic lady. Unfortunately, though, the manifesto drawn up at Alexander's behest by the Moscow Metropolitan Filaret affirming the transfer of the right to the throne from Constantine to his younger brother, Nicholas, had been kept secret. Consequently, there was doubt whether Nicholas's instruction to the army to swear an oath of allegiance to him on 14 December was legitimate. Many regiments, and also civilian servants of the regime, complied with Nicholas's instruction, but now a substantial number of officers and the men they led were refusing to do so.

The insurgents, numbering some 3,000 men, faced a much larger number of troops loyal to Nicholas, who had been forewarned of the conspiracy. Prince Sergei Trubetskoi, whom the conspirators had nominated as revolutionary "dictator" precisely in order that the planned revolt should not founder on lack of decisive leadership, failed to appear, having sought refuge in the Austrian Embassy. The insurgents vacillated. Nicholas, hoping to avoid bloodshed, sent General Mikhail Miloradovich, the Governor of St Petersburg, to try to persuade them to take the oath, but Miloradovich was shot and mortally wounded by one of the mutinying officers. Attempts by the Metropolitan Serafim and the Grand Duke Michael, the youngest of Alexander's three brothers, to make the mutineers disperse also failed. Fearful that the insurgency might gain support from the large crowd that had gathered, Nicholas seized the initiative as night approached. Grapeshot was fired at the insurgents and then cannons were used. Some insurgents attempted to regroup on the frozen River Neva on one side of Senate Square, but were scattered or drowned as cannon balls broke the ice. Over 1,200 were killed, according to official figures, including many civilians. During the night the blood was washed from the square and the bodies were disposed of. Many were thrown in the river, where the ice was broken or where holes were cut; some of the wounded, it was said, suffered the same fate as the corpses. More than 700 people were arrested. Some three weeks later a further revolt took place, among the Chernigov Regiment based at Tul'chin in Podolia, in the Ukraine to the West of the River Dnepr, but on 3 January about 800 mutineers led by Lieutenant-Colonel Sergei Murav'iov-Apostol were defeated by a loyal cavalry force³. Murav'iov-Apostol himself was severely wounded and captured and the revolt ended⁴.

As soon as the mutiny in St Petersburg had been suppressed Nicholas launched an exhaustive investigation into it, in the course of which 579 individuals were questioned. This investigation, in which Nicholas himself played an energetic part, ended in the summer of 1826. In all, 289 men were

³ Murav'iov-Apostol's father, incidentally, had served as Russian ambassador to Spain in the early years of Alexander's reign.

⁴ For transliteration of Russian personal names and place names I have used the system to which the main British journal in the field, *The Slavonic and East European Review*, adheres, except that I have transliterated the Russian vowel "ë" as "io", which provides a better indication of the sound of this vowel than the transliteration "e". Apostrophes in this system of transliteration (as in the names Murav'iov, Tul'chin) indicate the Russian soft sign. I have followed the convention of translating the names of members of the Russian royal family (Alexander, Catherine, Nicholas) but have given the forenames of all other persons in transliterated form.

sentenced to some form of punishment. On 13 July, five of these were hanged: Murav'iov-Apostol and another member of the southern conspiracy, Sub-Lieutenant Mikhail Bestuzhev-Riumin; Colonel Pavel Pestel', the leader of the southern conspiracy, who had been arrested on 13 December, just before the revolt on Senate Square; Kondratii Ryleev, one of the leaders of the northern conspiracy; and Piotr Kakhovskii, who had shot Miloradovich). A further 116 were dispatched to eastern Siberia for various terms of forced labour and exile, in 31 cases life-long. Many of the "Decembrists"⁵, as the insurgents came to be known, were voluntarily accompanied to their place of exile by their wives⁶.

⁵ The term "Decembrist" (*dekabrist* in Russian) did not come to be widely used until the 1860s.

⁶ A large corpus of primary sources has long since been available for the study of the Decembrists. This corpus includes the Decembrists' testimonies to the investigating commission and other archival documents published in the series *Vosstanie dekabristov*, Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo (subsequently Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, then Izdatel'stvo "Nauka", latterly ROSSPEN), Moscow and Leningrad, 1925-2008, 21 vols. The corpus also includes numerous collections of the Decembrists' writings (e.g., in chronological order of publication: *Dekabristy: Otryvki iz istochnikov*, ed. Iu. G. Oksman, Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, Moscow and Leningrad, 1926; *Izbrannye sotsial'no-politicheskie i filosofskie proizvedeniia Dekabristov*, ed. I. A. Shchipanov, Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, Moscow, 1951, 3 vols; *Dekabristy: Poeziia, dramaturgiia, proza, publitsistika; literaturnaia kritika*, Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, Moscow and Leningrad, 1951; *Dekabristy: Antologiiia v dvukh tomakh*, compiled by VI. Orlov, Khudozhestvennaia literatura, Leningrad, 1975; *"Ikh vechen s vol'nost'iu soiuz": Literaturnaia kritika i publitsistika dekabristov*, Sovremennik, Moscow, 1983. Some of the Decembrists left memoirs: see, e.g., [N. I. Lorér], *Zapiski dekabristsa N. I. Lorera*, ed. M. N. Pokrovskii, Gosudarstvennoe sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoe izdatel'stvo, Moscow, 1931); [I. D. Iakushkin], *Zapiski, stat'i, pis'ma dekabristsa I. D. Iakushkina*, ed. S. Ia. Shtraikh, Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, Moscow, 1951; A. E. Rozen, *Zapiski dekabristsa*, Vostochno-sibirskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, Irkutsk, 1984. There is a useful collection of English translations of documents in Marc Raeff, *The Decembrist Movement*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, 1966.

There is also an enormous secondary literature on the Decembrists. The main monographs in English are by Mikhail Zetlin, *The Decembrists*, translated by George Panin, International Universities Press, New York, 1958), and A. G. Mazour, *The First Russian Revolution, 1825. The Decembrist Movement. Its Origins, Development and Significance*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1961 (first published in 1937). For authoritative shorter surveys in general histories of nineteenth-century Russia see especially Hugh Seton-Watson, *The Russian Empire, 1801-1917*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1967, pp. 183-198, and David Saunders, *Russia in the Age of Reaction and Reform, 1801-1881*, Longman, London and New York, 1991, pp. 87-115. For a briefer discussion see Simon Dixon, *The Modernisation of Russia 1676-1825*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, pp. 207-209. There is an important recent monograph in French: see Julie Grandhaye, *Les décembristes: Une génération républicaine en Russie autocratique*, Publications de la Sorbonne, Paris, 2011. There was much interest in the Decembrists among Russian historians of the late tsarist period; V. I. Semevskii, *Politicheskie i obshchestvennye idei dekabristov*, Tipografiia Pervoi Spb. Trudovoi Arteli, St Petersburg, 1909, is still valuable. The major Soviet students of the Decembrist movement are Nikolai Druzhinin and Miliitsa Nechkina: see especially N. M. Druzhinin, *Dekabrist Nikita Murav'iov*, Izdatel'stvo politkatorzhan, Moscow, 1933 (republished in Druzhinin, *Izbrannye trudy*, vol. 1: *Revolutsionnoe dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX v.*, Izdatel'stvo "Nauka", Moscow, 1985, pp. 5-304); and M. V. Nechkina, *Dvizhenie dekabristov*, Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, Moscow, 1955, 2 vols, and *Dekabristy*, 2nd ed., "Nauka", Moscow, 1982. For a recent survey of historiography on the Decembrists, see Grandhaye, *Les décembristes*, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-22. For a penetrating discussion of Soviet historiography on them, see John Gooding, "The Decembrists in the Soviet Union", *Soviet Studies*, vol. 40, n° 2, 1988, pp. 196-209; Gooding exposes the tension between the interpretation offered by Druzhinin, who values the liberal, federalist strand in Decembrism, and the staunchly Leninist interpretation offered by Nechkina. On the literary heritage of the Decembrists, see the collection *Literaturnoe nasledie dekabristov*, ed. V. G. Bazanov and V. E. Vatsuro, Izdatel'stvo "Nauka", Leningrad, 1975, and on the treatment of Decembrism in Russian

The Decembrists had many sympathizers in the Russian armed forces and high society. They were also close, indeed in some cases themselves belonged, to the literary elite that was beginning to flourish in Russia. (It should be noted that the military, social and cultural elites overlapped in Russia at this time.) We should beware, though, of exaggerating the extent of support for the conspiracy in these circles. David Saunders is surely right to take issue with the celebrated Russian literary historian D. S. Mirsky, who claimed that the Decembrists represented their generation as a whole⁷. In any case, the Decembrists themselves were sharply divided both by personal animosities (particularly between the domineering Pestel' and more moderate members) and by major political differences (especially differences over the respective merits of federalism and centralism and of constitutional monarchy and republicanism and over the need for regicide)⁸.

And yet, in spite of their weaknesses, the Decembrists did pose a serious threat to the Russian political order. Their revolt betrayed the alienation of a section of the noble elite nurtured on classical and Enlightenment ideas who had grown disillusioned with the policies of Alexander I after Russia's triumph in the Napoleonic Wars and who made the first public challenge to Russian autocracy. The revolt differed fundamentally from the palace coups by which both Catherine the Great⁹ and Alexander himself had come to power, in 1762 and 1801 respectively, since it represented an attempt to introduce a new form of government in Russia. Admittedly, it had no immediate practical effect on the nature of the Russian polity other than to make autocratic rule, as Nicholas would practise it, yet more repressive and severe. Nevertheless, it did serve as the basis for a heroic, altruistic tradition in which future opponents of tsarist autocracy from different social backgrounds and of various political complexions could proudly situate themselves. For all the variety in their opinions and their confusion over objectives, the Decembrists may in retrospect be seen as having taken the first step on the path that led by way of further ill-thought-out conspiracies in the 1840s and 1860s to the revolutionary movement which began to develop with greater force in the 1870s and which would eventually topple the autocratic regime in 1917.

literature, see L. Frizman, *Dekabristy i russkaia literature*, Khudozhestvennaia literatura, Moscow, 1988.

Reference is made to further primary and secondary sources, including work on individual Decembrists, in subsequent notes to this article. The main English, French and Russian sources are brought together in the bibliography at the end of the article.

⁷ See Saunders, *Russia in the Age of Reaction and Reform*, *op. cit.*, pp. 93 ff., who quotes from the article by D. S. Mirsky, "The Decembrists, (14 (26) December, 1825)", *The Slavonic Review*, vol. 4, n^o 11, 1925, pp. 400-404.

⁸ The degree of unity or disunity among the Decembrists is a major historiographical question, which separates, for example, Druzhinin (see *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX v.*, *op. cit.*), who stresses the differences between the Northern and Southern Societies of the Decembrists, from Nechkina, who strives to present the movement as more homogeneous. See also Gooding, "The Decembrists in the Soviet Union", *op. cit.*, pp. 198-202. Grandhay, in her recent study, tends in my opinion to emulate Nechkina in underestimating the divisions.

⁹ i.e. Catherine II, who ruled from 1762 to 1796.

II. RUSSIA AND SPAIN

In many important respects the situation in which Russia found itself in the first quarter of the nineteenth century differed markedly from that in which Spain found itself. Napoleon never exercised control over such a large proportion of Russia's vast territory as he did over Spain in the years after his occupation of it in 1808. The period between the date when the *grande armée* crossed the River Neman, in June 1812, and the date when its last remnants left Russia, in December that year, was relatively short. No institution equivalent to the Cortes that began to meet in Cádiz in 1810 in the absence of Ferdinand VII sprang up in Russia, and in any case native political authority did not collapse in Russia as it had in Spain after Ferdinand's abdication and his confinement in France. Russia had no overseas empire (save for the lands it occupied in the north-west of the American continent, principally Alaska, which was sold to the United States in 1867) and it therefore had no need to take account of rebellious colonies. The Russian Orthodox Church, following its subordination to the state by Peter the Great¹⁰, was a less powerful institution than the Catholic Church in early nineteenth-century Spain. In Spain, finally, a non-noble urban class with a consciousness of its economic and political interests was perhaps better developed than in Russia. The Decembrists, while they were not all of high noble background, emanated on the whole from the nobility, and many of them (especially in the Northern Society) were from its higher echelons. Decembrism was not a movement of the third estate, let alone a popular movement¹¹.

And yet there were also similarities in the historical situation of Russia and Spain, besides the fact that in the distant past both countries had defined themselves through a prolonged struggle with a non-European and non-Christian occupying people (the Tatars, in Russia's case, and the Moors in Spain's). In both countries the modern royal house could be perceived as an alien institution. (Catherine the Great, the grandmother of Alexander I and Nicholas I, was German. So too was Alexander's and Nicholas's mother, Sophie Dorothea of Württemberg, the second wife of Catherine's son Paul, who ruled from 1797 to 1801.) Furthermore, in both Russia and Spain, attitudes towards political modernization could become entangled with attitudes towards foreign influence and native values. Again, as Alexander Martin has observed, in Russia — as in Spain, though to a lesser degree — peasant guerrilla bands had been formed during the Napoleonic occupation which could pose a threat to the regime once the French were gone¹². Most importantly for our purposes here, the Napoleonic Wars helped to awaken constitutional dreams in both countries. Men of liberal leanings gathered in Masonic lodges. Secret societies sprang up. Liberal ideas took root in some circles in the armed forces.

These similarities in the experience of Russia and Spain in the immediate post-Napoleonic period may be partly explained as a common consequence of the impact of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars in nations confronting their backwardness. At the same time, the Russian revolt to which the European post-war instability led may also be seen as a distant echo of the

¹⁰ i.e. Peter I, sole ruler from 1696 to 1725.

¹¹ Grandhaye deals with the Decembrists' social origin in *Les décembristes, op. cit.*, pp. 47-54.

¹² Alexander M. Martin, "Russia and the legacy of 1812", in *The Cambridge History of Russia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006, 3 vols, vol. II, p. 160.

Spanish revolt of 1820 against the restored absolutism of Ferdinand VII. It is the Decembrists' reception of the constitution promulgated in Cádiz in 1812, their perception of events in Spain in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, and the effect of those Spanish events on them that I shall examine in this article. However, before dealing with these matters, I should set the scene by describing the emergence of secret societies in Russia after the Napoleonic Wars and by explaining the domestic reasons for the development of political dissent in Russia in this period.

III. THE DEVELOPMENT OF SECRET SOCIETIES IN RUSSIA AFTER THE NAPOLEONIC WARS

The Decembrist Revolt was not a spontaneous occurrence but an attempt to exploit the interregnum that followed the death of Alexander in order to put into effect political plans that had been developing for approximately a decade. Since the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the future Decembrists had been participating in various organizations which in retrospect can be seen in some way to have prepared the ground for the revolt. Among the more innocuous of these organizations were literary societies, such as the Free Society of Lovers of Russian Literature (*Vol'noe obshchestvo liubitelei russkoi slovesnosti*), which existed between 1816 and 1825¹³, and the more ephemeral Green Lamp (*Zelionaiia lampa*), which met in the years 1819-1820 and was attended by the poets Anton Del'vig and Aleksandr Pushkin (the seminal figure in the flowering of classical Russian literature). These societies engaged with European literary movements and reflected the growth of a new national self-consciousness. The Decembrists also attended Masonic lodges, which had begun to develop in Russia in the eighteenth century and which remained important social, cultural and spiritual institutions in the Alexandrine period (1801-1825). Lev Tolstoi's Pierre Bezukhov is introduced to a Masonic lodge near the beginning of his spiritual journey in *War and Peace*, which is set mainly in the period between 1805 and 1812¹⁴. Among the Decembrists already mentioned in this article Pestel', Ryleev and Trubetskoi had all been Masons. Freemasonry fostered belief in the possibility of self-perfection and in the need to maintain a high standard of personal conduct. Its elaborate rituals and ceremonies and degrees of initiation also helped to develop habits that would hold political conspirators in good stead¹⁵.

At the same time, the future Decembrists began to conceive of, found and refashion secret societies with both philanthropic and political goals. Thus, as early as 1814 the creation of an Order of Russian Knights (*Orden russkikh rytsarei*) was mooted in Moscow by Major-General Mikhail Orlov and Major-

¹³ The Society was initially called The Free Society of the Champions of Enlightenment and Philanthropy (*Vol'noe obshchestvo sorevnovatelei prosveshcheniia i blagotvoreniiia*). It disbanded itself immediately after the Decembrist Revolt.

¹⁴ See Tolstoi, *War and Peace*, vol. II, part 2, chapters 1-4.

¹⁵ For a corrective to the view that Freemasonry was in general a liberal or potentially revolutionary phenomenon in Russia, see Saunders, *Russia in the Age of Reaction and Reform*, *op. cit.*, p. 94, and the article he cites by Lauren G. Leighton, "Freemasonry in Russia: The Grand Lodge of Astraea (1815-1822)", *The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 60, n° 2, 1982, pp. 244-261, especially pp. 247, 257-258.

General Matvei Dmitriev-Mamin. The title of the order suggests noble, quixotic intent. The founders' quite modest aim was to enlarge the Senate, making it more representative of the nation, and to make the tsar's right to promulgate laws, raise taxes and wage war dependent on the consent of that body¹⁶. However, nothing came of these plans.

In 1816 a Union of Salvation (*Soiuz spaseniia*; the name again indicates a sense of high mission) was founded by the brothers Aleksandr and Nikita Murav'iov, Sergei Murav'iov-Apostol and his brother Matvei, Ivan Iakushkin and Trubetskoi. Pestel' (the son of a high-ranking tsarist official of German origin) and another future Decembrist, Mikhail Lunin¹⁷, also soon became members. In 1817 this society changed its name to The Society of True and Loyal Sons of the Fatherland (*Obshchestvo istinnykh i vernykh synov otechestva*: the new name evokes strong patriotic feeling). The goals of the Union of Salvation included the establishment of a constitutional monarchy and the abolition of serfdom. The rules of the Union were infused with high ethical standards and insistence on irreproachable personal conduct as well as a resolve to combat ignorance and oppose official corruption. Differences of political opinion between moderate and more radical men were already in evidence in this Union, which attracted between twenty and thirty Guards officers in all.

In 1818 the Union of Salvation was superseded by a larger Union of Welfare (*Soiuz blagodenstviia*), which lasted until 1821. The Union of Welfare had branches in Tambov and Nizhnii Novgorod, Poltava and Tul'chin, Kishiniov (in Bessarabia, now the capital of Moldova) and other provincial cities of the Russian Empire, as well as in St Petersburg and Moscow. This was a secret society (although, in truth, many people were aware of its existence). More radical members of the Union of Welfare, such as Pestel', continued to hope for fundamental political change, including the establishment of constitutional government and the abolition of serfdom, but the Union was able to attract a large number of men, probably as many as 200, because its main overt aims were broadly liberal and humanitarian. These aims were set out in a "Green Book" (*Zelionaiia kniga*), which closely followed the precepts of the Prussian Tugendbund (League of Virtue), except that the "Green Book" did not express loyalty to the reigning monarch and ruling dynasty. The Union aspired to educate the people and improve them morally and to assist the government in promoting the common good and mitigating the plight of the serfs¹⁸. It was generally agreed, at a meeting held in St Petersburg in January 1820, that republican government should be introduced, but a proposal put forward by Pestel' that the government should have dictatorial powers was rejected. The Union was dissolved in 1821 following a conference in Moscow early in that

¹⁶ Saunders, *Russia in the Age of Reaction and Reform*, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

¹⁷ On Lunin, see S. B. Okun, *Dekabrist M. S. Lunin*, 2nd ed., Izdatel'stvo Leningradskogo universiteta, Leningrad, 1985. For a collection of Lunin's writings and letters, see S. Ia. Shtraikh, ed., *Dekabrist M. S. Lunin: Sochineniia i pis'ma*, Trudy Pushkinskogo doma pri Akademii nauk, Petersburg, 1923. Lunin served as a model for Dostoevskii's character Stavrogin, and is mentioned by Dostoevskii's narrator, in *The Devils* (*Besy*, also translated as *The Possessed*), in which the revolutionaries of the 1860s and their predecessors in the nobility of the age of Nicholas are portrayed in a very negative light: see, e.g., Richard Peace, *Dostoyevsky: An Examination of the Major Novels*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1971, pp. 152-153.

¹⁸ For extracts from this document in English, see Raeff, *The Decembrist Movement*, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-99.

year, partly because of continuing tensions among its members. The more moderate republican officers hoped that a lull in activity would enable them to detach themselves both from their less politically committed fellow-travellers and from their more politically radical associates, the most powerful and stubborn of whom was Pestel'.

It was at this point that two new secret societies were formed, a Northern Society and a Southern Society, in which the political nature of the officers' opposition to autocracy became clearly defined. The Northern Society (*Severnoe obshchestvo*), which was based mainly in St Petersburg and enjoyed some support in Moscow, was led by Nikita Murav'iov, Nikolai Turgenev¹⁹, Evgenii Obolenskii and Trubetskoi, and in 1823 Ryleev became influential in it. The Southern Society (*Iuzhnoe obshchestvo*), led by officers in Tul'chin, was dominated by Pestel'. It was swollen by the arrival of former officers of the elite Semionovskii Guards Regiment in St Petersburg, which had been disbanded after a mutiny in October 1820 sparked by the severity of a new commanding officer, Colonel Grigorii Shvarts. The Southern Society hatched plots to kidnap or assassinate the tsar or stage a mutiny, but nothing came of them. Mention should also be made of a Society of United Slavs, formed in 1823 by the brothers Andrei and Piotr Borisov and Iulian Liublinskii and consisting of approximately thirty-five middle-ranking officers of the lower nobility. This society was stationed in Leshchin, near to Vasil'kov (Ukrainian Vasylkiv) in the Kievan region, where there was a branch of the Southern Society. It had Pan-Slavist ambitions (although its inclusion of the Hungarians in its list of the Slav peoples whom it hoped to assist could not have inspired confidence in its ability to fulfil its ambitions!). The Society of United Slavs fused in 1825 with the socially and intellectually more powerful Southern Society²⁰.

IV. THE DOMESTIC CAUSES OF THE DECEMBRIST REVOLT

There are numerous internal factors that can be regarded as in some way having helped to cause the Decembrist Revolt. It should be pointed out, first of all, that Alexander himself had shown signs, in the early years of his reign, of wishing to modify Russia's autocratic form of government. Tutored in his youth by La Harpe, a Swiss devotee of radical French doctrines, he had reflected before he came to the throne in 1801 on the possibility of establishing a constitution and some form of political representation. In 1802-1803 he worked with an "unofficial committee" of four friends of long standing, the Counts Viktor Kochubei, Nikolai Novosil'tsov and Pavel Stroganov and the Polish Prince Adam Czartoryski²¹. The friends discussed the problem of

¹⁹ Nikolai Turgenev (1789-1871) was a capable official in Alexander's administration and an elder relation of the future novelist Ivan Turgenev. He wrote an essay on the theory of taxation, which was published in 1818. He was abroad at the time of the Decembrist Revolt, but was found guilty of involvement in the conspiracy and sentenced *in absentia*. He remained in the West throughout the reign of Nicholas. His work *La Russie et les Russes*, au Comptoir des Imprimeurs, Paris, 1847, 3 vols, is an early example of dissident émigré literature directed at a western readership (and hence it was written in French).

²⁰ On this Society, see M. V. Nechkina, *Obshchestvo Soediniennykh Slavian*, Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, Moscow and Leningrad, 1927.

²¹ See W. H. Zawadski, *A Man of Honour: Adam Czartoryski as a Statesman of Russia and Poland 1795-1831*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993.

serfdom and the machinery of government (though the discussions yielded no substantial results). Censorship was relaxed. The periodical press and book printing expanded. One of the dominant figures in the administration in this period, Mikhail Speranskii, was permitted to attempt to reform the bureaucracy²². Even in the period after the Napoleonic Wars, when the Holy Alliance of Austria, Prussia and Russia that Alexander had inspired was anxiously watching for signs of liberal or revolutionary sentiment in Europe, Alexander was prepared to grant a constitutional charter to the Congress Kingdom of Poland, providing for a bicameral parliament. In the speech with which he opened the Polish Sejm in 1818, he even vaguely suggested the possibility of establishing a similar political system in Russia²³. He himself admitted, when in 1821 the activity of the Russian secret societies was reported to him: « vous savez que j'ai partagé et encouragé ces illusions et ces erreurs. Ce n'est pas à moi à sévir »²⁴.

However, a more immediate cause of the unrest in the elite after the Napoleonic Wars than Alexander's flirtation with liberal ideas was the frustration caused at the war's end by a continuation, or even intensification, of what now seemed an outmoded despotism. The epic struggle for national survival in 1812 and the victory over Napoleon had produced a surge of patriotic fervour, pride and optimism. It is worth stressing that many of the Decembrists – Lunin, Nikita Murav'iov, Sergei Murav'iov-Apostol, Obolenskii, Ryleev, Trubetskoi, for example – had distinguished military records. Pestel' had been wounded in September 1812 at the Battle of Borodino, the key battle in Napoleon's Russian campaign, at which the momentum of the *grande armée*, to use Tolstoi's image in *War and Peace*, was severely checked like that of a billiard ball that has been struck by a player when it collides with another²⁵. These men, then, could not be accused of lack of love of their country. There was also a strong sense of national unity, stronger than there ever would be again in tsarist Russia. After all, this was a victory attained by all social classes, peasant soldiers as well as noble officers. Furthermore, the Decembrists belonged to a generation whose education had cultivated in them a consciousness of obligations as well as rights and a strong sense of civic duty, illustrated by heroic examples of virtue from classical antiquity. The mood of the period is captured by the idealistic conservative journalist Sergei Glinka, who hoped that the resistance to Napoleon might bring about a moral awakening in the nobility and lead to social transformation²⁶. The expectations raised by this intoxicating mix of patriotism, civic idealism and the *esprit de corps* fostered by shared danger and military action could not easily be dispelled once the war had ended.

“Great wars in modern times”, Hugh Seton-Watson observed, “have often produced a belief that after it is all over things will be better than they were

²² See Marc Raeff, *Michael Speransky: Statesman of Imperial Russia, 1772-1839*, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1957.

²³ Alexander instructed Novosil'tsov to draft such a constitution. Novosil'tsov's document was found and published, to the displeasure of Nicholas, by Polish insurgents during the Polish Revolt of 1830-1831.

²⁴ Quoted by Seton-Watson, *The Russian Empire*, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

²⁵ See Tolstoi, *War and Peace*, vol. III, part 3, chapter 2.

²⁶ Alexander Martin, *Romantics, Reformers, Reactionaries: Russian Conservative Thought and Politics in the Reign of Alexander I*, Northern Illinois University Press, De Kalb, 1997, especially pp. 73-84.

before. Sustained patriotic effort tends to create a demand for a 'New Deal'"²⁷. Alexander, however, retreated after the war into a religious mysticism. Whereas at "the fine beginning of Alexander's days" (*Aleksandrovykh dnei prekrasnoe nachalo*), to use a resounding phrase of Pushkin's, the tsar had entertained liberal views that were progressive for the time, now he surrounded himself with reactionary advisers. A crude parade-ground disciplinarian, Count Aleksei Arakcheev (whose protégés included the notorious Colonel Shvarts mentioned above) became his closest confidant²⁸. (The word *arakcheevshchina*, coined from this man's name, has come to evoke the atmosphere of the post-Napoleonic epoch, bringing to mind the set of policies and values associated with Arakcheev, including the establishment of military colonies in which peasants underwent army drill when not attending to their agricultural tasks.) Prince Aleksandr Golitsyn, a convert to religious 'awakening', served as Minister of Education from 1816. The obscurantists Mikhail Magnitskii and Dmitrii Runich, notorious for their imposition of moral and political correctness on the Universities of Kazan' in 1819 and St Petersburg in 1821 respectively, gained influence in educational administration and helped to create a climate in which it was difficult to spread enlightenment²⁹.

In these conditions, as hopes of reform faded, post-war euphoria gave way to despondency. It seemed as if Russia was unworthy to enjoy the fruits of the revolutionary and Napoleonic period that were being granted to other European peoples, including the Poles. It is a recurrent theme in statements made by Decembrists after the revolt that France, the country of the defeated enemy, which some of them had observed as members of the Russian army that had pursued Napoleon in 1814 or in which they had been stationed in the post-war period, came to seem superior to their homeland. In the Russia to which they returned, arbitrary power, official corruption, brutality and the institution of serfdom persisted. The following extract from a digest of the testimony provided by Decembrists during the official investigation into the revolt vividly illustrates the disillusionment that they experienced during the post-Napoleonic period.

The most brilliant hopes for the prosperity of Russia marked the beginning of the reign of Alexander I. The nobility relaxed; the merchants did not complain about credit; the military served without hardship; scholars studied whatever they wished; everybody could say what they thought; and from the great good of the present everybody expected better things still. Unfortunately circumstances did not allow this to happen, and the hopes grew old, unfulfilled. The unlucky war of 1807 and other costly campaigns ruined finances. Napoleon invaded Russia and it was then that the Russian people perceived their power, it was then that the feeling for independence – first political, later also national – was kindled in every heart. This was the origin of the ideas of liberty in Russia. The government itself pronounced the words: liberty, liberation. Itself it disseminated works

²⁷ Seton-Watson, *The Russian Empire*, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

²⁸ For a biography of Arakcheev, see Michael Jenkins, *Arakcheev: Grand Vizier of the Russian Empire*, Faber and Faber, London, 1969.

²⁹ On these conservatives (and also on the diplomat Aleksandr Sturdza, the son of a Moldavian father and Greek mother, who viewed the Holy Alliance sympathetically as a utopian league of Christian states that was capable of restoring religion as the basis of national identity), see Martin, *Romantics, Reformers, Reactionaries*, *op. cit.*

on the abuses of Napoleon's unlimited power. The war was still in progress when the returning soldiers' grumblings first spread among the people: "We have spilled our blood," they said, "but they force us to sweat again at *corvée*; we have freed the country from the tyrant, but our lords tyrannise us again." Having returned to the fatherland, the armies – from general down to soldier – continuously spoke of how good it was in foreign lands³⁰.

Thus, surveying the mood among a substantial section of the social, military and literary elite of the post-Napoleonic period in the broadest perspective, one can say that the freedom with which these men were concerned was no longer freedom from occupation by a foreign power. Rather it was freedom to act as citizens in their own country, enjoying the benefit of institutions that guaranteed political liberty and a role in government for representatives of their class. Moreover, loyalty to the Emperor and loyalty to the fatherland (*otechestvo*, or Latin *patria*) were no longer unquestionably compatible now that notions such as the public good and citizenship were in the ascendancy. On the contrary, it was beginning to seem as if it would be necessary actually to oppose the state, or even to contemplate regicide, in order to prove oneself a loyal "son of the fatherland" (*syn otechestva*).

V. THE DECEMBRISTS' WRITINGS

The ideas I have been describing found expression in a large literary corpus produced by those involved in the revolt and in the literary circles and secret societies that had prepared the ground for it. This corpus contained writings across a wide range of genres from poetry, drama, prose fiction, travel writing and criticism to rules for the organizations the Decembrists founded and constitutional projects. As David Saunders points out when he surveys the engagement of writers with progressive ideas in the last years of Alexander's reign, five of those arrested for their involvement in the conspiracy – Aleksandr and Nikolai Bestuzhev, Vil'gel'm Kiukhel'beker, Aleksandr Odoevskii and Ryleev – had made their names as *littérateurs* before the revolt took place³¹. Aleksandr Bestuzhev, under the *nom de plume* Marlinskii, was to become a notable writer of Romantic prose fiction. Kiukhel'beker produced poetry, drama, criticism and a *récit de voyage*. Ryleev was a major early representative of the civic poetry that flourished in nineteenth-century Russia. The Decembrists also contributed to, or themselves edited, periodical publications, such as the almanacs *The Pole Star* (*Poliarnaia zvezda*, co-edited by Aleksandr Bestuzhev and Ryleev in 1823-

³⁰ Quoted from Raeff, *The Decembrist Movement*, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

³¹ Saunders, *Russia in the Age of Reaction and Reform*, *op. cit.*, pp. 91-92. On Aleksandr Bestuzhev (1797-1837), see Lauren G. Leighton, *Alexander Bestuzhev-Marlinsky*, Twayne, Boston, 1976, and Susan Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994. On Kiukhel'beker (1797-1846) and Odoevskii (1802-1839, who was a poet and cousin of the important prose writer Vladimir Odoevskii), see the entries by Donald Rayfield and Nicholas Crowe respectively in Neil Cornwell, ed., *Reference Guide to Russian Literature*, Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, London and Chicago, 1998. There are also entries in this reference guide on Aleksandr Bestuzhev and Ryleev. On Ryleev (1795-1826), see also Patrick O'Meara, *K. F. Ryleev: A Political Biography of the Decembrist Poet*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1984.

1825) and *Mnemosyne* (*Mnemosina*, edited by Kiukhel'beker with Odoevskii in 1824-1825)³².

One clear and specific example of Spanish literary influence on the Decembrists is the genre of the political catechism, which had been used in Spain in the fight against Napoleon in the period 1808-1814. The Decembrists took up this genre, appreciating the propagandistic potential of a series of simple questions and answers as a means of communication with a pious, uneducated audience. The conservative Russian writer and journalist Faddei Bulgarin had translated into Russian a "Political Catechism of the Spanish People", and extracts from this translation, which was first published in Russia in 1823, had found their way into several Russian journals. Inspired in all probability by this translation, and by an abandoned attempt by Nikita Murav'iov to emulate the Spanish author, Sergei Murav'iov-Apostol produced "An Orthodox Catechism" in which he presented the tsar as an anti-Christ who opposed the divine will by denying liberty and happiness to his people.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.

Question. What did God create man for?

Answer. That he might believe in Him, be free and happy.

Question. What does to believe in God mean?

Answer. Our God Jesus Christ, who came down to Earth to save us, left us His holy Gospel. To believe in God means to follow in all things the true meaning of the commandments set out in it.

Question. What does to be free and happy mean?

Answer. Without freedom there is no happiness. The Holy Apostle Paul says: "Ye are bought with the price of blood, be not ye the servants of men" [1 Corinthians, 7.23].

Question. So why are the Russian people and the Russian army unhappy?

Answer. Because the tsars have taken their liberty from them.

Question. So, do tsars go against God's will?

Answer. Yes, of course, God said: he that is greatest among you shall be your servant [Matthew, 23.11], but tsars only torment the people.

Question. Must we obey the tsars when they act against the will of God?

Answer: No! Christ said you cannot serve God and mammon [Matthew, 6.24]; the Russian people and the Russian army suffer because they submit to the tsars.

Question. What then does the holy law command the Russian people and soldiers to do?

Answer. To repent of their long servility, take up arms against tyranny and misfortune, and swear an oath: "Let there be only one king in the heavens and on earth, Jesus Christ"³³.

³² *The Pole Star* was republished in Soviet times: see *Poliarnaia zvezda, izdannaiia A. Bestuzhevym i K. Ryleevym*, Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, Moscow and Leningrad, 1960.

³³ See *Dekabristy: Otryvki iz istochnikov*, ed. Iu. G. Oksman, Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, Moscow and Leningrad, 1926), pp. 389-390. The document is also available online at <http://www.hrono.ru/dokum/1800dok/1825murav474.php> (accessed on 22.04.2012). The translation given here is my own. On Murav'iov-Apostol's catechism, see Grandhaye, *Les*

However, the most important works written by the Decembrists, from the political point of view, are the constitutional projects produced by Nikita Murav'iov and Pestel', which embody the guiding principles of the Northern and Southern Societies respectively³⁴. It should be borne in mind that neither Murav'iov's constitution nor Pestel''s was completed and that all the versions that we have (there are two extant versions of each text) are fragmentary, since both authors took precautions to ensure that their projects did not fall into the hands of the authorities. I shall deal first with Pestel''s document, entitled *Russian Law*, which bears much less resemblance than Murav'iov's to the Spanish constitution of 1812, being written in a spirit closer to that of the French Jacobins³⁵.

V.1 Pavel Pestel''s *Russian Law*

Pestel' conceives his *Russian Law*, on which he worked over the period from 1817 to the winter of 1823-1824, as a statement of the obligations and rights of government and people, the principles on which a new political and social order should be based, and the reforms that he believes need to be carried out. Or, as Pestel' expressed it in his lengthy sub-title, the document was

the Inviolable Deed of State of the Great Russian People, serving as an Ordinance for the Improvement of the State Structure of Russia and containing a Sound Instruction both for the People and for the Provisional Supreme Government³⁶.

décembristes, *op. cit.*, pp. 163-164, and Isabel de Madariaga, "Spain and the Decembrists", *European Studies Review*, vol. 3, n° 2 (April 1973), pp. 150-155, where it is argued that Murav'iov-Apostol's attempt to involve the common soldiery in the revolt by appealing to their religious feelings lent the revolt in the south of Russia a closer resemblance than the northern revolt in St Petersburg had to the rising of 1820 in Spain. However, the message conveyed by Murav'iov-Apostol's catechism appears to have baffled the troops to whom it was read out.

³⁴ The two versions of Murav'iov's constitution were published in Druzhinin, *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX v.*, *op. cit.* (see pp. 253-267 for the first draft and pp. 268-288 for the second). Both extant drafts of Pestel''s document are published in *Vosstanie dekabristov*, *op. cit.*, vol. VII, which is entirely devoted to Pestel''s writings. Both projects can also be viewed online, at http://az.lib.ru/m/murawxew_n_m/text_0030.shtml and http://az.lib.ru/p/pestelx_p_i/text_0020.shtml respectively (accessed on 27.04.2012). Short extracts from each project are published in English in *A Documentary History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism*, translated and ed. W. J. Leatherbarrow and D. C. Offord, Ardis, Ann Arbor, 1987, pp. 42-58.

³⁵ The Russian title of this work, *Russkaia Pravda* (sometimes also translated as *Russian Justice*), reminds the Russian reader of the first known Russian legal code, written under Germanic influence in the eleventh century. The document is conceived as having a certain symmetry: there are two counterbalancing series of chapters about the people, on the one hand, and the government, on the other, and even the sets of four chapters in each of those sections are divided into two equal halves (see Pestel''s Introduction, Article 13, in the second draft).

³⁶ On Pestel', see in particular Patrick O'Meara, *The Decembrist Pavel Pestel: Russia's First Republican*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, 2003; *Russian Law* is examined on pp. 72-88 of this book. The language of Pestel''s sub-title is elevated and archaic. The word that I have translated as "inviolable" (*zapovednyi*) suggests a biblical commandment (as in *desiat' zapovedei*, "The Ten Commandments"). The word that I have translated as "ordinance" (*zavet*) is also the Russian word for biblical "testament", as in *Vetkhii zavet* ("The Old Testament"). The word *Nakaz* (translated here as "Instruction") is the term used as the title of a famous document

Pestel' envisages the abolition of serfdom and the detested military colonies, the abolition of the various social estates and the ending of noble privilege³⁷. The nation's farmland will be divided into two halves. In one half a plot will be found for every citizen who needs land as a means of livelihood. The other half will be exploited by the state and private owners for their own profit and in order to produce a national surplus³⁸. The supreme legislative body in Pestel's state will be a unicameral assembly (*Narodnoe veche*) of representatives of the people, elected by a process that functions at various levels, up from the smallest administrative unit³⁹.

Pestel's concern to ensure that all citizens play a part in the electoral process in a large territorial entity where democracy cannot be direct implies a respect for popular opinion and for the democratic form of government. Moreover, the term *veche*, which he uses to designate his supreme political assembly, brings to mind a democratic institution that flourished in some free medieval Russian cities, especially Novgorod and Pskov which were part of the Hanseatic League of cities in the Baltic region until their independence was destroyed by the Muscovite sovereigns of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In fact, though, Pestel' is an extremely authoritarian political thinker. He expresses concern about the detrimental effects of disunity in a society if individual wills are not tightly controlled. The members of society, he believes, are naturally and inevitably divided into those who command and those who obey. In the political sphere, the people have a duty to obey the government, although they are entitled – Pestel' admits, in accordance with the theory of social contract – to expect the government to strive for the public and private good⁴⁰. Again, although *Russian Law* proclaimed religious tolerance, acts by members of non-Christian faiths which were deemed “contrary to the Spirit of Christian Laws” would be prohibited⁴¹. The press would be free, but all societies would be banned⁴². Pestel's government, as the regulator of public and private morals, would vigilantly and strictly supervise the people's amusements and entertainments to ensure that the people did not succumb to corrupting influences⁴³. Even the size of townships, as seats of bad morality, would be regulated: a town should accommodate no more than 5,000-10,000 males, Pestel' believed⁴⁴. Finally, Pestel' considered it necessary for there to be a ten-year period of dictatorship prior to the introduction of a form of democracy, in order to ensure that the new political order would be established without impediment.

in which Catherine the Great set out principles drawn largely from Montesquieu and Beccaria with which she wished to guide the deliberations of a Legislative Commission that she set up in the 1760s soon after she came to the throne.

³⁷ Chapter III (“O sosloviakh v Rossii obretaiushchikhsia”), Articles 4, 6 and 9, in the second draft, and Articles 11 and 12, on manorial peasants and domestic serfs, in the first draft. This and subsequent references to Pestel's *Russian Law* are to the online text cited above.

³⁸ Chapter IV (“O narode v politicheskom otnoshenii”), Articles 9-12, in the first draft.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, Article 16, in the first draft.

⁴⁰ Introduction, Articles 2-4, in the second draft.

⁴¹ Chapter II (“O plemenakh Rossiiu naseliiushchikh”), Article 2, in the second draft; see also Chapter V (“O narode v grazhdanskom otnoshenii”), Article 19.2, in the first draft.

⁴² Chapter V (“O narode v grazhdanskom otnoshenii”), Article 17.2, in the first draft.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, Article 17.3, in the first draft.

⁴⁴ Chapter I (“O zemel'nom prostranstve gosudarstva”), Article 5, in the second draft.

Not only is the state that Pestel' imagines authoritarian; it is also highly centralized, "unitary and indivisible". Pestel' vehemently rejects the federal model enshrined in the Constitution of the United States, arguing that such a model is particularly inappropriate in a country which is so vast as Russia and which contains such an ethnically diverse population. By the same token, Pestel' argued — as the conservative historian Nikolai Karamzin was arguing in his *History of the Russian State* in the same period — that history demonstrated the vulnerability of Russia when centrifugal forces prevailed in it⁴⁵. This opposition to federalism is felt in Pestel''s insistence on Russian domination of the post-tsarist state to which he looked forward. Pestel' warned ethnic groups with small populations or weak cultural traditions not to dream of independence but to reconcile themselves (for their own security, Pestel' claimed) to fusion with the dominant nationality (in this instance Russians, of course). He explicitly propounded one rule for powerful peoples, whom he deemed capable of nationhood, and another rule for those peoples who, he thought, would never achieve it⁴⁶. Thus Finland, the Baltic regions of Courland, Estland and Livonia, Little Russia, New Russia and White Russia, Bessarabia, the Crimea, the Caucasus and Siberia would have no measure of regional autonomy. Russia would magnanimously offer independence to Poland, it is true, but that independence would only be granted if Poland accepted major conditions⁴⁷. Poland's borders, moreover, would be drawn in a way that suited Russia. Neighbouring territories of strategic importance to Russia would be annexed; Pestel' mentions in this connection Moldavia, Caucasian regions that Russia had not yet conquered, the Aral Steppes and part of Mongolia⁴⁸. Thus, although it is a critique of tsarist autocracy, Pestel''s *Russian Law* reads in places like an apologia for empire, as when Pestel' describes the commercial benefits that would flow to Russia from complete domination of the Caucasus, which he believed should be achieved, if necessary, by ruthless military means and the resettlement of recalcitrant indigenous peoples⁴⁹.

In the introduction to *Russian Law*, where he reflects on fundamental principles, Pestel' echoes the opening articles of the Spanish constitution of 1812. "La Nación española", write the signatories of the constitution of Cádiz, "es libre e independiente, y no es ni puede ser patrimonio de ninguna familia ni persona"⁵⁰. The Spanish authors have articulated a rejection of the conception of the nation as a private fiefdom which Pestel', as an opponent of Russian autocracy, finds useful, and he repeats and expands this formulation: "the Russian People is not the possession or Property of any individual or Family. On the contrary, the Government belongs to the People . . ."⁵¹ Like the authors of the constitution of Cádiz, Pestel' pays close attention to the process by which

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, Article 4, in the second draft. On Karamzin's history (*Istoriia Gosudarstva Rossiiskogo*), see Derek Offord, "Nation-building and Nationalism in Karamzin's 'History of the Russian State'", *Journal of Modern Russian History and Historiography*, vol. 3, 2010, pp. 1-50.

⁴⁶ Chapter I ("O zemel'nom prostranstve gosudarstva"), Article 1, in the second draft.

⁴⁷ i.e. adoption of a political system similar to that which Pestel' proposed for Russia and dissolution of the Polish aristocracy.

⁴⁸ Chapter I ("O zemel'nom prostranstve gosudarstva"), Article 2, in the second draft.

⁴⁹ Chapter II ("O plemenakh Rossiia nasel'iaushchikh"), Article 14, in the second draft.

⁵⁰ *Constitución política de la Monarquía Española. Promulgada en Cádiz a 19 de Marzo de 1812*, Article 2.

⁵¹ Introduction, Article 7, in the second draft; translated in *A Documentary History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism*, *op. cit.*, p. 53 (slightly amended).

representatives of the people will be elected to his supreme assembly and he sets out the rights of citizens in the event of their arrest or detention⁵².

And yet, in the final analysis the affinities between the constitution of Cádiz and Pestel's *Russian Law* are not great. For one thing, much of Pestel's text is devoted either to Pestel's own views about political and economic matters or to treatment of specifically Russian matters, such as the nation's borders, the peoples that inhabit Russian territory and the estates and groups that make up Russian society. Nor is the tone of *Russian Law* so measured as that of the Spanish constitution: Pestel has great confidence in his opinions and makes categorical assertions in a manner that brooks no opposition. Most importantly, Pestel's centralist and authoritarian ideas are a far cry from the ideas of the authors of the Spanish constitution. Pestel belongs to a tradition in Russian political thought that privileges the common well-being over individual liberty, the public good over private happiness. He therefore cannot be seen as representing any form of liberalism⁵³. The importance of the Spanish constitution for Pestel, then, lay primarily in its symbolic power as a rebuke to absolute rulers who might consider the nation their personal domain rather than in its specific provisions about means of maintaining a balance of power between a hereditary monarch and a representative assembly.

V.2 Nikita Murav'iov's constitution

Murav'iov's constitution comes much closer than Pestel's coercive tract to the constitution of Cádiz in both content and spirit. That is not to say that Murav'iov's criticism of Russian autocracy is any less severe than Pestel's. The first extant draft of his text is prefaced by a critique of the arbitrary nature of autocracy, of the sort that Aleksandr Radishchev had provided in the famous *Journey from St Petersburg to Moscow* which he had printed on his own press in 1790⁵⁴. "The experience of all nations and all epochs", Murav'iov writes in his preface,

has proved that Autocratic Power is equally ruinous for both rulers and societies; it accords with neither the rules of our holy faith nor with the principles of sound reason. One cannot allow the *arbitrary rule* of one man to become the basis of Government. One cannot accept that all rights belong to one side and all duties to the other. Blind obedience can be based only on fear and is worthy of neither a reasonable ruler nor reasonable ministers. By putting themselves

⁵² Chapter V ("O narode v grazhdanskom otnoshenii"), Article 10, in the first draft.

⁵³ Russian liberalism found itself pressed from both right and left, and its representatives tended to rely on the benevolence of the authoritarian state for the implementation of the reform they desired. On Russian liberalism and its vulnerability to attack from both the conservative and the socialist wings of the intelligentsia, see Derek Offord, *Portraits of Early Russian Liberals: A Study of the Thought of T. N. Granovsky, V. P. Botkin, P. V. Annenkov, A. V. Druzhinin, and K. D. Kavelin*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985, and "Perilous voyage: Alexander Herzen and the legacy of the Russian intelligentsia", in *The Times Literary Supplement*, n° 5688, 6 April 2012, pp. 14-15.

⁵⁴ There is an English translation of Radishchev's work: see Aleksandr Nikolaevich Radishchev, *A Journey from St Petersburg to Moscow*, translated by Leo Wiener, ed. Roderick Page Thaler, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1958. See also the note that Radishchev wrote to a translation of Mably's *Observations sur l'histoire de la Grèce*, published in 1773, in *A Documentary History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism*, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

above the laws sovereigns have forgotten that they are thereby outside the laws, outside humanity! That they cannot have recourse to the laws in matters concerning others and not acknowledge their existence when the matter concerns themselves. There are two possibilities: either the laws are just – in which case why do they not wish to submit to them themselves – or they are unjust – in which case why do they subject others to them? All European nations are securing laws and freedom⁵⁵.

Like Pestel' too, Murav'iov appropriates Article 2 of the constitution of Cádiz as a means of underlining his rejection of autocracy. "The Russian people, free and independent", runs the first article of the first chapter of Murav'iov's second draft, "is not and cannot be the property of any single person or family"⁵⁶. Article 3 of the Spanish document ("La soberanía reside esencialmente en la Nación, y por lo mismo pertenece a ésta exclusivamente el derecho de establecer sus leyes fundamentales") is used by Murav'iov for the same purpose: "The source of *Supreme power* is the people, to whom belongs the exclusive right to make *fundamental decrees* for itself" (Article 2)⁵⁷. Like Pestel' again, Murav'iov will abolish serfdom (Articles 13, 25, 27) and Arakcheev's military colonies (Article 28). He too insists that people be free to choose their own trade (Article 16) and practise their religion (Article 42). He too requires that all Russians be equal before the law (Article 10) and that they have the remedy of *habeas corpus* against arbitrary detention (Article 19).

However, unlike Pestel' (whose arguments in *Russian Law* may in some respects be framed as a rebuttal of Murav'iov's views), Murav'iov favours federalism over centralism. He regards regional assemblies as a bulwark against the potentially oppressive centralized state. He envisages the division of Russia into thirteen states (the same number of states as the number whose representatives drafted the Constitution of the United States, it should be noted) and two regions, Moscow and the Don (Article 43). Each of these states will have its own legislative assembly. Only decisions affecting the state as a whole will be taken by the legislative assembly in the capital. That assembly will be bicameral. One house will be a Chamber of Representatives (one for every 50,000 male inhabitants) elected for two years by the citizens of the states and regions (Articles 60-72). The other house will be a Supreme Duma of forty-two members (who must fulfil a property qualification) elected by the governing institutions of the states and regions (Articles 73-77).

Murav'iov's enthusiasm for federalism and his advocacy of a bicameral parliament, as well as his opinion about the number of states his federation should contain, are plainly inspired by the American political model, and many of the provisions in his constitution clearly originate in the Constitution of the United States drafted and ratified in 1787. For instance, his Article 74, on the

⁵⁵ Murav'iov's italics. This translation is taken from *A Documentary History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism*, *op. cit.*, p. 42 (slightly amended).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 43. All further quotations from Murav'iov's constitution are taken, unless otherwise stated, from the second draft of his constitution. References to articles in this draft are provided in the text of this article.

⁵⁷ The italics in the quotation to which this note refers belong to Murav'iov. The word "nation" (cf. Nación in Article 3 of the Spanish constitution) might be an equally acceptable translation of the Russian *narod* (translated here as "people") in the early nineteenth century.

terms for which representatives will serve as Senators, is drawn from Article I of the American constitution, where we find the following:

Immediately after they shall be assembled in Consequence of the first Election, they shall be divided as equally as may be into three Classes. The seats of the Senators of the first Class shall be vacated at the Expiration of the second Year, of the second Class at the Expiration of the fourth Year, and of the third Class at the Expiration of the sixth Year, so that one third may be chosen every second Year . . . (Constitution of the United States (hereafter *CUS*), I, 3.2)

Likewise, when in Article 75 he considers the eligibility of candidates for election to the Supreme Duma, Murav'iov roughly repeats the following:

No person shall be a Senator who shall not have attained to the Age of thirty Years, and been nine Years a Citizen of the United States, and who shall not, when elected, be an Inhabitant of that State, for which he shall be chosen. (*CUS*, I, 3.3)

Or again, Murav'iov's Article 76 is largely derived from Article I, Sections 3-5 of the Constitution of the United States, which reads: "the Senate shall chuse their other officers, and also a President pro tempore, in the Absence of the Vice President, or when he shall exercise the Office of President of the United States". Murav'iov also closely adheres to his American model on all of the following: impeachments; the conduct of business in the two houses of Congress; the remuneration of representatives, their inviolability while they are going about their political business, and the prohibition on their holding of public offices while they are serving in Congress; the procedure for the passage of bills through the two chambers, with or without the consent of the head of state; and the actions in which no state in the federation is permitted to engage, such as declaration of war, maintenance of troops and naval forces in time of peace, the conduct of relations with foreign powers, and the minting of money⁵⁸. Murav'iov repeats the requirements of the authors of the Constitution of the United States that "Faith and Credit" be given in each state of the federation "to the public Acts, Records, and judicial Proceedings of every other State", that the citizens of each state be entitled to the privileges and immunities of the citizens of other states, and that each state render to another state any citizen of the latter who is seeking refuge from the law in the former⁵⁹. His definition of the functions of the "Supreme Official" (*Verkhovnyi Chinovnik*) of his state is also largely drawn from the American constitution, where the President is empowered, permitted or required to command the armed forces, solicit the opinion of the principal officers of departments of the executive, make treaties, appoint ambassadors, consuls, ministers and judges, receive the ambassadors of foreign states, and deliver a State of the Union address⁶⁰. Finally, the oath that will be sworn by Murav'iov's "Supreme Official" also resembles, *mutatis mutandis*, that sworn by the American President, which runs: "I do solemnly swear . . . that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United

⁵⁸ cf. Murav'iov, Article 77, and *CUS*, I, 3.6-7; Murav'iov, Articles 78-82, and *CUS*, I, 4.1-2, and I, 5.1-4; Murav'iov, Articles 83-86, and *CUS*, I, 6.1-2; Murav'iov, Articles 89-90, and *CUS*, I, 7.2-3; Murav'iov, Article 78, and *CUS*, I, 10.1-3.

⁵⁹ cf. Murav'iov, Articles 79-80 of the first draft, and *CUS*, IV, 1-3.

⁶⁰ cf. Murav'iov, Article 101, and *CUS*, II, 2-3.

States, and will to the best of my Ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States”⁶¹.

However, it is important to note that while the role of the Russian “Supreme Official”, as Murav’iov conceives of him, resembles that of the President of the United States, this Russian head of state will still be a male monarch, whose “authority is hereditary in a direct line from father to son” (Article 101.1), not the president of a republic. Murav’iov refers to him as the “Ruler” as well as the “Supreme Official” (Article 105). Indeed this ruler will continue to be called an “Emperor”. His title is carefully described: “He is granted the title of *His Imperial Majesty* – none other is permitted”. The People’s Assembly “determines the formal ceremony with which this title is conferred upon a new Emperor” (Article 101.21-22). In this respect, then, Murav’iov’s reformed Russian polity will be closer to the polity imagined in the constitution of Cádiz, where it is stated that “El Gobierno de la Nación española es una Monarquía moderada hereditaria”⁶², of which Ferdinand is named as the reigning king⁶³, than to the United States. Consequently, Murav’iov is preoccupied with questions which do not concern the statesmen of the independent republic of the United States but which do concern liberals in early nineteenth-century Spain, such as the protection of the national assembly from monarchic interference or suppression and the relationship of the head of state with foreign powers. He also needs, of course, to take account of European events in the Napoleonic era that have taken place after the promulgation of the Constitution of the United States. The constitution of Cádiz – of which we know Murav’iov possessed copies in both Spanish and German editions⁶⁴ – therefore has great relevance for him, and he appears to be significantly indebted to its authors.

Both the Spanish constitutionalists and Murav’iov take care to ensure that their democratic assembly will not be constrained by the presence of the king when they are debating or voting. “Las Cortes”, say the Spanish authors,

no podrán deliberar en la presencia del Rey.

En los casos en que los Secretarios del Despacho hagan a las Cortes algunas propuestas a nombre del Rey, asistirán a las discusiones cuándo y del modo que las Cortes determinen, y hablarán en ellas; pero no podrán estar presentes a la votación⁶⁵.

⁶¹ cf. Murav’iov, Article 101.23, and *CUS*, II, 1.7.

⁶² *Constitución política de la Monarquía Española*, *op. cit.*, Article 14.

⁶³ “El Rey de las Españas es el Señor Don Fernando VII de Borbón, que actualmente reina” (*ibid.*, Article 179).

⁶⁴ See the list of books in Murav’iov’s library that was published by Druzhinin in *Revolutsionnoe dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX v.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 248-253. Murav’iov also had in his library a two-volume *History of Spain from the Earliest period to the Close of the Year 1809* by John Bigland, published in London in 1810, a French version of a work by Francisco Martínez Marina on the history of the national assemblies of the kingdoms of Castille and León, and a French edition of the writings of the Dominican Bartolomé de Las Casas, who had been the first, in the sixteenth century, to complain of the treatment of the American Indians by the Spanish colonists and to call for their emancipation from slavery. Nikolai Turgenev too had a copy of the constitution of Cádiz, as we know from an entry in his diary in 1820, but had not yet read it (*Dnevnik i pis’ma Nikolaia Ivanovicha Turgeneva*, ed. E. I. Tarasov, Tipografiia Imperatorskoi Akademii nauk, St Petersburg, 1911 and 1913 (vols I and II respectively), then Akademicheskaja dvenadtsataia gosudarstvennaia tipografiia, Petrograd, 1921 (vol. III): see vol. III, pp. 225-226).

⁶⁵ *Constitución política de la Monarquía Española*, *op. cit.*, Articles 124.1 and 125.

“The People’s Assembly”, says Murav’iov, “will neither debate nor vote in the presence of the Emperor” (Article 99). Murav’iov also builds on the concern of the Spanish constitutionalists about the king’s absence from the realm. “No puede el Rey ausentarse del Reino sin consentimiento de las Cortes”, runs Article 171.2 of the constitution of Cádiz, “y si lo hiciere, se entiende que ha abdicado la Corona”. Murav’iov is careful to list arguments, which appear to be his own, against such absences:

The Ruler of the Empire may not leave the Empire without creating serious difficulties:

1. The conduct of Government business would be slowed down.
2. The balance of power would be disturbed.
3. It would be unbecoming for the first servant of the People not to be among his public.
4. The nation, in the person of the ruler, might suffer gross insult from Foreigners.
5. Such a journey would entail the sort of expense prohibited by this Constitution.
6. Moreover, when out of the Fatherland the Emperor would be more likely to be influenced by envious foreigners and become an instrument of their evil designs. (Article 105)⁶⁶

The provisions that arise from these considerations are surely drawn from the Spanish model: “for these reasons under no circumstances may the Emperor travel beyond the frontiers of the Fatherland, not even to Russia’s overseas colonies” and “The Emperor’s departure from Russia will be understood as tantamount to his having abandoned it and having abdicated his Imperial calling” (Articles 105 and 106)⁶⁷.

There would seem to be miscellaneous other similarities between the constitution of Cádiz and Murav’iov’s constitution. Like the Spanish authors, for instance, Murav’iov deals at an early stage with qualifications for citizenship, and his conditions for temporary or permanent loss of citizenship will seem familiar to readers of the Spanish document. “A citizen loses rights of citizenship *temporarily*”, writes Murav’iov,

1. if he is legally declared not of sound mind;
2. if he is on trial; . . .
4. if he is declared bankrupt;
5. if he defaults on payment of public dues; . . .
7. if he is without known abode, occupation and means of support.

Permanently:

1. if he acquires citizenship of a Foreign State;
2. if he accepts service or a post in another country without the consent of his government;

⁶⁶ Translated in *A Documentary History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism*, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-50 (amended).

⁶⁷ Murav’iov was aware of the incompatibility of his prohibition on foreign travel by the Emperor with his definition of the Emperor as commander-in-chief of the armed forces (see Druzhinin, *Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX v.*, *op. cit.*, p. 282, n. 7).

3. if he is sentenced by a Court to a dishonourable punishment involving *loss of Civil rights . . .* (Article 9)⁶⁸

Again, Murav'iov affirms the separation of powers which is enshrined in the constitution of Cádiz (and which prohibits the exercise of any judicial functions by the Cortes or the King or the exercise of any extra-judicial functions by civil or criminal tribunals⁶⁹), although he does not develop the point in the extant draft of his constitution and his wording indicates no particular provenance. "The government of each State", Murav'iov writes, "consists of three separate Powers which are independent of one another but which promote one end, namely: the legislative (*pravitel'stvuiushchei*), the executive and the judicial" (Article 115). Even at a purely formal level Murav'iov may be indebted to the Spanish constitution. Like the Spanish authors, he provides titles such as "On the Russian People" (cf. "De la Nación Española") and "On Citizens" (cf. "De los ciudadanos españoles"). Like the authors of the Spanish constitution again, but unlike those of the American constitution, Murav'iov numbers the articles in his document consecutively (there are 93 articles in the first extant draft and 134 in the second).

It must have been sobering, given the Decembrists' interest in constitutional matters and the respect in which the Spanish constitution was held by opponents of absolute regimes in the post-Napoleonic period, that the secretary of the Spanish Embassy in St Petersburg, Calderón de la Barca, should have been so dismissive, it seems, of Russian hopes of emulating Spain. "A l'Espagne la constitution est devenue nécessaire pour réunir tous les partis. Quant à votre Russie, mon cher", he patronizingly told Lieutenant Dmitrii Zavalishin, a member of the Northern Society and one of the few Decembrists to have a knowledge of Spanish, "vous ne devez pas même oser en penser, car avouez franchement que votre peuple est plongé encore dans une entière barbarie – pour vous il faut encore des siècles"⁷⁰.

VI. RUSSIAN PERCEPTIONS OF THE SPANISH RISING OF 1820

In addition to the essentially internal factors that might be adduced to explain the Decembrist Revolt, we should also take account of the external situation, the European climate in which the Decembrists were acting. (The extent to which Decembrism should be regarded as a native or alien phenomenon is a major question for historians of the movement.) The cultural westernization that the Russian nobility had undergone in the eighteenth century, particularly during the reign of Catherine the Great, had not only turned it into a corporation of a western sort but had also introduced it to ideas (the ideas of Montesquieu, Voltaire, Diderot, d'Alembert, Rousseau and other representatives of the Enlightenment), which served to undermine faith in absolute power, however enlightened monarchs might claim to be. Now, in the early nineteenth century, participation in the Napoleonic Wars had brought

⁶⁸ cf. *Constitución política de la Monarquía Española*, *op. cit.*, Articles 25.1, 25.5, 25.2, 25.4, 24.1, 24.2, 24.3 respectively.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, Articles 242-243, 245.

⁷⁰ *Vosstanie dekabristov*, *op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 364. I have standardized the French, in which there are various infelicities in the text published in the Russian primary source.

Russia more fully into the mainstream of European affairs and the Russian elite had gained a greater familiarity with European political, social and cultural life as a result. (This familiarization was assisted by the knowledge of foreign languages that had become commonplace in the Russian nobility and particularly by the habit of *francophonie* for numerous functions in both the public and private domains.) The disaffected noblemen became acquainted with liberal writings such as those of the Swiss-French novelist and political journalist Benjamin Constant and, of course, the constitution of Cádiz which I have been discussing. They became aware of the existence of representative political institutions such as the British House of Commons and the Spanish Cortes. It was in any case a period of Romantic artistic revolt as well as political rebellion. Poets exalted the talented individual who strove for personal liberation from the dead-weight of custom.

Not only did the Russian elite closely observe the political and cultural ferment that followed the Napoleonic Wars; they also felt themselves a part of it and readily identified themselves with its liberal or revolutionary manifestations. They noted the proliferation of patriotic secret societies such as the Tugendbund (a society dedicated to the moral regeneration of Germany) and the Carbonari, opponents of the conservative regimes imposed on parts of Italy after the Napoleonic Wars. (Two brothers of Italian origin, Aleksandr and Iosif Poggio, were involved in the Decembrist conspiracy⁷¹.) They observed the examples of politically motivated murder provided by Karl Sand, the student who in 1819 killed the dramatist August von Kotzebue (who was despised by radicals as a spy in the pay of Alexander I), and Louis Louvel, who in 1820 killed the duc de Berry (son of the future Charles X of France). They were particularly interested in the Philiki Etaireia, led by Alexandros Ypsilantis, a Greek soldier in Russian service who in 1821 launched an abortive invasion of Moldavia in the hope of eventually liberating the Balkans from Turkish rule.

A most important element in this European ferment was the resistance mounted in Spain during the years 1814-1819 to the restored absolute rule of Ferdinand VII and the uprising against Ferdinand in 1820, when on 1 January military units based in Cádiz and led by Colonel Rafael del Riego y Nuñez and Colonel Antonio Quiroga mutinied after they had been assigned the task of re-imposing Spanish rule on Spain's American colonies. When in March 1820 Riego's revolt spread to Madrid, forcing Ferdinand to restore the constitution of 1812, the Decembrists were greatly heartened⁷². Quiroga's letter to the king, Aleksandr Poggio testified, "was in people's minds"⁷³. Turgenev recorded his delight in his diary. "Glory to you, glorious Spanish army! Glory to the Spanish

⁷¹ On these brothers see Franco Venturi, *Il moto decabrista e i fratelli Poggio*, Einaudi, Turin, 1956.

⁷² Russian historians who have touched on the subject of the Decembrists' reaction to the Spanish revolt of 1820-1823 include: Semevskii, who has a passage on the effect of western constitutions and revolutions on the Decembrists (see his *Politicheskie i obshchestvennye idei dekabristov*, *op. cit.*, pp. 234-257, of which pp. 243-245 in particular concern Spain); Nechkina, *Dvizhenie dekabristov*, *op. cit.*, vol. I, pp. 277, 305-306, and vol. II, pp. 24-25, 30-31; O. V. Orlik, *Dekabristy i vneshniaia politika Rossii*, Izdatel'stvo "Nauka", Moscow, 1984, especially pp. 43-45 and 49 ff. The ground-breaking article in English is Madariaga's "*Spain and the Decembrists*", *op. cit.*; Madariaga had no space, however, to compare the Decembrists' constitutional projects with the constitution of Cádiz.

⁷³ *Vosstanie dekabristov*, *op. cit.*, vol. XI, p. 38.

people!”, he rejoiced on 24 March after he had heard news of the king’s agreement to abide by the constitution.

For the second time Spain is demonstrating what the spirit of a people means, what love of one’s Fatherland means. Today’s former Insurgents [*sic*] . . ., as far as one may judge from the papers, have conducted themselves in an extremely noble manner. They have declared to the people that they desire a constitution, without which Spain cannot prosper; they have declared that their enterprise may not succeed and that they will all die as victims of their love of their fatherland; but that the memory of this enterprise, the memory of a constitution, of liberty, will live on and remain in the hearts of the Spanish people.

The king, to judge by present circumstances, was able to do nothing better than declare the constitution . . . Perhaps Spain will show that it is possible to do something that up until now we have considered impossible⁷⁴.

Vladimir Raevskii, a member of the Union of Welfare who was arrested in 1822, was also infected by the enthusiastic mood inspired by the Spanish revolt. It was alleged that while carrying out teaching duties among the soldiers and cadets, he would discard the authorized teaching materials and replace them with his own notes, in which he had written the words “liberty, equality, constitution, Quiroga, Washington, Mirabeau” and that he would tell his students: “Quiroga, a colonel, made a revolution in Madrid and when he rode into the city the most important ladies and all the people came out to meet him and threw flowers at his feet”⁷⁵. Portraits of Riego and Quiroga, the Russian authorities noted with dismay, appeared in a shop in St Petersburg during the interregnum of autumn 1825⁷⁶. On a more practical note, Ryleev used the Spanish example to try to persuade Nikolai Bestuzhev to recruit to the Northern Society naval officers from Kronshtadt in the Gulf of Finland, thinking that this base might serve as a useful haven for Russian insurgents in the way that the Isla de León had served for the Spanish insurgents when they were preparing to take Cádiz⁷⁷.

The inspirational value of Riego’s actions is captured in Ryleev’s twenty-line poem “The Citizen” in which the poet, in the inflated declamatory style of the civic poetry of the age, warns his more timid compatriots how posterity will regard them if the Russian people fail to find their own Riego to lead them.

Shall I at the fateful hour/Bring shame upon the citizen’s dignity,/And emulate you, effete tribe/Of degenerate Slavs?/No, I am not capable in the embraces of voluptuousness/Of dragging out my young years in shameful idleness,/Or of languishing with turbulent soul/Beneath despotism’s heavy yoke./Let our young men, having failed to guess their fate, decline to comprehend the destiny of the age/And let them not prepare themselves for the future struggle/For the liberty of man which has been suppressed./Let them with composure cast their cool

⁷⁴ Turgenev, *Dnevnik i pis'ma Nikolai Ivanovicha Turgeneva*, op. cit., vol. III, pp. 225-226.

⁷⁵ [Iakushkin], *Zapiski, stat'i, pis'ma dekabrista I. D. Iakushkina*, op. cit., pp. 539-540.

⁷⁶ *Vosstanie dekabristov*, op. cit., vol. XIV, p. 189.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 73; see also O'Meara, *K. F. Ryleev*, op. cit., pp. 137-138.

glance/At the calamities of their suffering native land/And let them not read in those calamities their own impending disgrace/Or their descendants' justifiable reproaches./They will repent when the people, having arisen,/Finds them in idle langour's embrace,/And, seeking liberty's rights in the stormy revolt,/Finds among them neither a Brutus nor a Riego⁷⁸.

Not only did the Decembrists admire Riego, Quiroga and their followers; they also convinced themselves that audacious action of the sort that the Spanish officers had embarked upon could succeed. Riego had accomplished an uprising with just one battalion, just a few hundred men, Lunin and Murav'iov-Apostol pointed out in their respective societies⁷⁹. Zavalishin too used Spain as an example of how easy it was to carry out a revolution, how "a few people forced a King to give the People a Constitution"⁸⁰. Nor would it be possible, it was argued, for foreign powers to crush a revolt in Russia, as had been the case in Naples and Piedmont and as would happen in Spain as well, for Napoleon's defeat in 1812 demonstrated Russians' capacity to repel foreign invaders⁸¹. A further advantage of military revolt on the Spanish model, the Decembrists believed, was the likelihood that it would enable the changes they desired to be carried out without the bloodshed that could result when the passions of the mob were unleashed. (The memory of the savage Pugachov revolt of 1773-1774, a peasant uprising in the Volga region in the reign of Catherine the Great, remained fresh in the consciousness of the nobility.) "Our revolution will be like the Spanish revolution", Bestuzhev-Riumin thought. "It will not spill a drop of blood, because it will be carried out by the army, without participation by the people"⁸².

VII. LESSONS DRAWN BY THE DECEMBRISTS FROM THE SUPPRESSION OF THE SPANISH RISING

The liberal experiment of 1820-1823 in Spain was eventually suppressed with the assistance of the reactionary European powers, which at the Congress of Verona in 1822 had discussed the Spanish resistance to the restoration of absolute monarchy after the Napoleonic Wars and sent in French forces to restore the *status quo ante*. The Decembrists interpreted this turn of events as the clearest proof that monarchs could not be trusted to keep their word and that their promises were worthless⁸³. Ferdinand seemed to furnish the most striking

⁷⁸ The poem is partially translated and briefly discussed by O'Meara in his book *K. F. Ryleev, op. cit.*, pp. 194-195. I have used O'Meara's translation of ll. 1-8 and 17-20 of the poem and have supplied my own translation of the intervening lines. The original poem (whose first line in Russian is "la l' budu v rokovoe vremia") is sometimes entitled "Grazhdanin". It may be found in Ryleev, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, ed. A. G. Tseitlin, Academia, Moscow and Leningrad, 1934, pp. 265-266.

⁷⁹ *Vosstanie dekabristov, op. cit.*, vol. XI, p. 82, and vol. VI, p. 140.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 340.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, vol. XIV, p. 98.

⁸² Quoted in Madariaga, "Spain and the Decembrists", *op. cit.*, p. 146, from Nechkina, "Revoliutsiia napodobie ispanskoi", *Katorga i ssylka*, n^o 10, 1931, p. 3. See also *Vosstanie dekabristov, op. cit.*, vol. V, p. 31.

⁸³ *Vosstanie dekabristov, op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 340. There are numerous instances in the Decembrists' testimony of their use of Spain as a salutary example to people who are inclined

example of monarchic bad faith. Having been absent from Spain during the struggle for its liberation, on his return in 1814 he quickly abolished the constitution drafted while he had been away. In March 1820, when his palace was surrounded by troops led by General Francisco Ballesteros, he had agreed to the insurgents' demands, but in 1823 he had Riego arrested and then publicly hanged in La Cebada Square in Madrid on 7 November (NS). Kakhovskii was particularly indignant at Ferdinand's treatment of Riego. "The people of Spain, firm and steadfast, who had defended the independence and freedom of their fatherland with their blood", he wrote in a letter to Nicholas I after his arrest,

saved the king and the throne and the honour he had lost; they owed nothing to anyone but themselves and accepted Ferdinand on their throne. The king swore an oath to maintain the people's rights. . . Ferdinand soon forgot the people's deeds, broke his oath and infringed the rights of the citizens, his benefactors. The people rose against the perjurer; and the Holy Alliance forgot that Spain had been the first to stand up to Napoleon's violence . . . And the Alliance brought it about that French troops disgraced themselves by invading Spain. Ferdinand, under arrest in Cádiz, was sentenced to death. He appeals to Riego, again swears to abide by the constitution, to dispatch the French troops from the territory of the fatherland and asks that his life be spared. Honourable people are trusting. Riego vouches to the Cortes for the king; they release him. And what then? What is Ferdinand's first step? Riego is seized on his orders, arrested, poisoned and, half-dead, a holy martyr, a hero who had renounced the throne that the people had offered him, the man who had saved the king's life, by the king's order [he] is taken across Madrid on a cart of shame harnessed to a donkey and hanged like a criminal. What an act of Ferdinand's. Whose heart will not shudder at it?⁸⁴

Alexander I too, like Ferdinand, exemplified bad faith. In 1812 he had recognized the constitution of Cádiz at the treaty of Velikie Luki, but now that he saw the Spanish revolt as a threat to the Holy Alliance he favoured the re-establishment in Spain of a monarchy unconstrained by the constitution⁸⁵.

By a poignant twist of fate, it so happened that it was from Alexander himself, that the southern Decembrists learned of Riego's arrest in 1823. Alexander was visiting a camp at which some of them were present when this news reached him. A lone officer who congratulated the Emperor on this outcome was famously vilified in an epigram by Pushkin as a base flatterer⁸⁶. It also happened, as a result of Alexander's support for Ferdinand, that two future Decembrists, Aleksandr Beliaev and Nikolai Bestuzhev, sadly witnessed an episode in the suppression of the Spanish revolt in 1824, when French troops were retaking Tarifa from the remnants of a constitutionalist force led by Lieutenant-Colonel Valdés. Beliaev and Bestuzhev were among the crew of a

to trust the word of absolute monarchs: see, e.g., *ibid.*, vol. V, pp. 34, 62; vol. IX, p. 246; vol. X, pp. 117, 220; vol. XI, p. 73; vol. XVI, p. 48.

⁸⁴ Quoted from Ryleev, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, op. cit.*, pp. 665-666.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ A. S. Pushkin, ["*Na Vorontsova*"], *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, Leningrad, 1937-1949, 16 vols., vol. II, part 1, p. 378.

Russian vessel which was dispatched to the south coast of Spain. Beliaev recalled the episode in his memoirs.

A nation [the French: DO] which had shed so much blood in the name of liberty and humanity and shown the world such monstrous perversion of reason and of all that is human was now callously shooting Spaniards who had risen up for their liberty and again subjugated a country which had just begun to revive⁸⁷.

Bestuzhev's recorded impressions of the events in Spain were more immediate. He wrote four letters under the title "Gibraltar" which were published in 1825 in the *Pole Star*, the journal co-edited by his brother Aleksandr and Ryleev. He too described with sympathy the resistance of the insurgents in Tarifa and their inevitable defeat by French troops supported by a French frigate⁸⁸. The two Russian sailors also met British sailors stationed in Gibraltar, attended their dinners and drank toasts to liberty. After our voyage to Spain, wrote Beliaev, "where we had seen people devoted to the cause of Spanish liberty, where we made friends with freedom-loving Englishmen, where we had listened to the march of Riego and enthusiastically raised our glasses to his memory, we of course became still greater enthusiasts for liberty"⁸⁹.

At a deeper level, Spanish events seemed to vindicate the more radical men among the Decembrists who questioned whether the establishment of constitutional monarchy would help their cause. Pestel', for example, thought those events, together with events in Naples and Portugal, provided indisputable proof that monarchic constitutions were unstable⁹⁰. Indeed, by confirming the belief of the more radical Decembrists that monarchs would never voluntarily surrender their power, whatever promises they might make, Ferdinand and his legitimist allies encouraged disaffected Russian officers to conclude that regicide would be necessary, as Pestel' had been telling them all along and as Ryleev's allusion to Brutus in his poem "The Citizen" seemed to suggest. Perhaps a *garde perdue* of assassins should be formed to assassinate the monarch and other possible claimants to the throne. Half-measures, Zavalishin agreed, were useless⁹¹. Whenever the Beliaev brothers objected to the suggestion that the royal family be killed, Zavalishin would retort:

You say that you love your Fatherland but you do not wish it true well-being; surely it is not better that there should be a civil war afterwards and that all the good institutions should have been for nothing; and what's more, that a few true Patriots should die like *Riego* . . .⁹²

⁸⁷ A. P. Beliaev, quoted by O. V. Orlik, *Dekabristy i vneshniaia politika Rossii, op. cit.*, p. 50.

⁸⁸ N. A. Bestuzhev, "Gibraltar", in *Poliarnaia zvezda, izdannaiia A. Bestuzhevym i K. Ryleevym, op. cit.*, pp. 604-618; see especially pp. 615-616. Valdés and a few other insurgents who escaped from the French took refuge in Gibraltar. The fact that several constitutionalist ministers had also been granted asylum in Gibraltar, as Bestuzhev notes (*ibid.*, p. 616), is taken by Grandhaye to imply criticism on Bestuzhev's part of Russia's involvement in the foreign intervention in what was essentially a civil war in Spain: see Grandhaye, *Les décembristes, op. cit.*, pp. 184-185.

⁸⁹ Quoted by Orlik, *Dekabristy i vneshniaia politika Rossii, op. cit.*, p. 50.

⁹⁰ *Vosstanie dekabristov, op. cit.*, vol. IV, p. 91.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 29.

⁹² *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 337; italics in the original.

Bestuzhev-Riumin too cited Spain as evidence for his view that regicide was necessary if a constitution was to be introduced.⁹³ Kakhovskii was of the same mind: “The breach of the constitution in France, and its complete destruction in Spain”, he said, “were the reasons which compelled me to agree to the extermination of the imperial family”⁹⁴.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The history of pre-revolutionary Russia after the Decembrist Revolt was not marked, as Spanish history continued after the 1820s to be marked, by any significant degree of oppositional political activity among army officers. Indeed it has been argued, with some justification, that the Decembrists themselves “were not so much officers or noblemen as rebellious intellectuals”, an intelligentsia that happened to be in uniform⁹⁵. Rather it was from the intelligentsia, on the one hand, and from sporadic and localized peasant revolt, on the other, that the challenge to the autocratic state would chiefly come until a wider political movement developed in the early twentieth century, again in time of war (the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 and the First World War that began in 1914). The Spanish tradition of the *pronunciamiento*, then, did not establish itself on Russian soil.

Thus from the Russian point of view, the significance of the Spanish constitution of 1812, the revolt led by Riego in 1820 and the suppression of the liberal experiment by Ferdinand VII with the assistance of Europe’s reactionary powers does not lie in the establishment of a particular type of political opposition to absolute rule in Russia. Nor does it lie primarily in the adoption by Russians of specific political positions that had been occupied by Spanish agitators and statesmen in the years 1812 to 1823. It is true that the constitution of Cádiz of 1812 was a landmark for liberal associations in Europe in the period of reaction directed by Metternich in the decades after the Napoleonic Wars and that this constitution helped to inspire one the Decembrists’ major constitutional projects. However, the institutions that the Spanish constitutionalists sought to establish and the values they prized – limited monarchy, democratic assemblies, the separation of powers, the rule of law, respect for the individual – would in the long run prove less attractive in nineteenth-century Russia, where liberalism failed to establish itself, than visions of harmonious community, of which both conservatives and socialists dreamed. The significance of Spanish politics in the age of Ferdinand VII, as far as the Russian historian is concerned, therefore lies chiefly in the inspirational and instructive value of events in Spain for that section of the elite that was responsible for one of the most important episodes in Russian pre-revolutionary history.

IX. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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⁹³ *Ibid.*, vol. V, p. 153.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 364.

⁹⁵ Seton-Watson, *The Russian Empire*, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

the Decembrists are extensively treated. It does not include work on other aspects of Russian history, literature or thought that are cited in the footnotes to the article.

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