REFORM MEETS REALITY:
EGOR GORDIENKO AND THE EARLY
PRIMARY EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES
OF COUNT DMITRII TOLSTOI

by

JOHN CHARLES THOMAS HAMILTON

B.A., The University of British Columbia, 1994

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

( Department of History )

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard.

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

August, 1999

© John Charles Thomas Hamilton, 1999
In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.
Abstract

By examining in detail an article by Professor Egor S. Gordienko, “Zemstvo i narodniya shkoly” (“The Zemstvo and the Popular Schools”) published in the “liberal” journal, Vestnik Evropy (The Messenger of Europe), in January 1870, and by situating Professor Gordienko within the frame of the contemporary debates about literacy, elementary education, and local governance in post-emancipation Russia, this thesis demonstrates how one “small deeds” liberal used available journalistic means to propagandize against government policy, to get around government restrictions against publication of zemstvo debates and to push forward his own agenda in Kharkov uezd.

The commitment of Egor Gordienko, zemstvo member, to the dissemination of literacy was an important factor in moving the liberal project of social betterment forward in Kharkov uezd, despite the serious impediments it faced, not least of which was the opposition of the central government to local control over administrative and educational initiatives.

In light of a western historiography of the period which has focussed on both the more prominent and more obscure, subalterm groups, Gordienko is a subject with appeal, not just because of his committed political activism, but because he represents too a pragmatic, liberal impulse, for which there is little current historiographical sympathy and which is too easily overlooked in a history of idealistic responses to extreme repression.
Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................... ii

List of Figures ............................................................................................... iv

Acknowledgements ......................................................................................... v

CHAPTER I  The Context

Introduction ..................................................................................................... 1

Liberalism in 19th-Century Russia ................................................................. 5

The Zemstvo Role in Elementary Education in Post-emancipation Russia ... 11

Vestnik Evropy and the Vestnik Evropy Circle ............................................. 18

Egor Gordienko: A Brief Biographical Sketch ............................................ 22

CHAPTER II  The Response

“Zemstvo i narodniya shkoly” (The Zemstvo and the Popular Schools) ... 27

Conclusion .................................................................................................... 49

Bibliography ................................................................................................. 53
List of Figures

Figure 1. Egor Stepanovich Gordienko .............................................. 25
Acknowledgements

I should like, briefly, to acknowledge the help of those who made my task easier. These include, Mr. Jack Mcintosh, Slavic Bibliographer, University of British Columbia Library; the Resource Sharing staff of the University's Library who, with their colleagues in the archives of the University of Helsinki, Finland, found for me extremely helpful biographical material on Egor S. Gordienko. As well, Vitaliy Timofiiiv, deserves thanks for his timely assist, as does Professor Glen Peterson. Professor Allen Sinel, Department of History, whose subtle guidance and firm support encouraged me in this endeavour, has earned my enduring respect and friendship.
CHAPTER I: The Context

Introduction

In 1869 Count Dmitrii Tolstoi, Minister of Education, with the concurrence of the State Council, moved to impose increased central administrative control over elementary schools in Russia, by instituting an elementary school inspectorate and developing model schools in each of 33 zemstvo provinces and in Bessarabia. Responsibility for elementary schooling had been cursorily addressed in the Zemstvo Statute of 1864 and in school legislation, later that year. Both zemstva and central government had vaguely defined, even conflicting roles and responsibilities. This confusing situation, which Tolstoi hoped to address, had persisted for five years. In that time, some zemstva had moved actively to address the illiteracy and paucity of schooling in their districts.

In the wake of the promulgation of Tolstoi's regulation, and, it seems, in direct response to it, Dr. Egor Stepanovich Gordienko, member of the Kharkov uezd zemstvo, submitted an article, "Zemstvo i narodniya shkoly," ("The Zemstvo and the Popular Schools") to Vestnik Evropy, a "liberal" journal published in St. Petersburg. M. M. Stasiulevich, editor, printed Gordienko's article in January, 1870. The article was a vehement response to the state of educational and administrative reform in 1869 and a forceful argument in favour of local autonomy. My thesis will situate Gordienko's article within a "liberal" and activist political context, within the narrower frame of the contemporary debate over responsibility for elementary schooling, and will address aspects of subsequent western historiography about the development of elementary education in Post-emancipation Russia.
Egor Gordienko was passionately committed to the use of all practical means to effect a programme of both literacy and, as possible, a more structured programme of elementary schooling in Kharkov, both *uezd* and city. His approach to issues seems to presage those "small deeds" liberals of the later 1870s, who "court[ed] support from below and above, in each case through local, nonpolitical means," for whom "the *zemstvo* offered unparalleled and officially sanctioned contact with 'the people'". The activities of "small deeds" liberals were directed at goals deemed within the bounds of the possible.

A close reading of Gordienko's article on the role of the *zemstvo* in the provision of rural, elementary education reveals many of the tensions at work between a centralizing bureaucracy intent on a controlled dissemination of formal schooling, with all that that implies for social and political control, and the *zemstva* and local school boards, whose administrative responsibility for elementary education was defined in statute. For Gordienko the urgent need was for steps to improve literacy and numeracy among the peasants of Kharkov *uezd*. Neither Kharkov nor Russia had the time to wait for the building of sufficient government-prescribed schools, for the development of acceptable curricula by the Ministry, the writing and publishing of approved primers, nor the miraculous appearance of the funds to underwrite such a programme. Gordienko's support for such elementary schooling will be demonstrated; his call for local activism in its absence may represent both a commitment to increasing peasant literacy and a more general argument between an autocracy trying slowly and without risk to devolve power and local agencies righteously anxious to seize that power and use it. I will suggest that the more logical (and, admittedly, more charitable) reading is that, while relations
between government and zemstva were contentious, Gordienko's agenda did have, as a primary goal, the speedy dissemination of literacy by all means available. Gordienko saw literacy as crucial to Russia's economic and civic development; Great Russian literacy, he argued, was also crucial to the maintenance of a national identity in the face of a more highly literate, industrialized and militarized Europe. The memory of the Crimean defeat was still, fifteen years on, an instructive one. Prussia's victory over Austria in 1866 was hailed by Bismarck as the victory of Prussia's schoolmasters. A literate army was, demonstrably, technologically more capable than an illiterate one.

I have alluded to the tensions between the central government and local authorities. Such was the fear of the central government of the potential for political cooperation (or collusion) among zemstva, that the Zemstvo Statute of 1864 expressly forbade their discussion of matters of mutual interest and, after 1867, the provincial governors, central government appointees, had the right (almost always exercised) to censor all publications of the zemstva, including accounts of assembly sessions. With these prohibitions in mind, I will suggest, Egor Gordienko made cunning use of the publicist discourse to circumvent regulations and to make known exactly those ideas and accounts which were expressly forbidden to be "published".
Notes

1. The zemstvo (pl. zemstva) was a “provincial and district self-governing institution for local economic administration from 1864-1918; an institutional vehicle often for the liberal movement in Russia.” James A. Mallory, “Zemstvo”, The Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet History, vol. 45, Academic International Press, Gulf Breeze, FL:1987, p. 234. In the wake of emancipation the relations among former serfs and manorial landlords required mediation; state peasants, once freed from state control, needed institutions to function in government's stead. Among the purposes of the zemstva was this crucial role. Zemstva were established at the level of gubernia (province) and uezd (district). The latter might include, before 1870, the central city of the area and a number of towns as well as the agricultural villages and communes contiguous to them. Kharkov uezd, by Gordienko's account contained 400 recognized schools and an additional 300 private or literacy schools. After 1870, major cities had their own dumy.

2. Consistent with the primary source material, I have used transliterated Russian spellings (modified Library of Congress model). I am aware that with the establishment of an independent Republic of Ukraine, it may be now more correct to refer to Professor Yehor Hordiienko and to Kharkiv.

3. The Russian adjectival form, “narodniya” is not translated into English without difficulty. “Narod” can mean “people” or “nation.” Richard Pipes investigates the evolution of the political terminology of Russian Populism, “narodnichestvo” and “narodnik” and finds that meanings vary even within Russia over time. See Pipes, Richard, “Narodnichestvo: A Semantic Inquiry,” Slavic Review, vol. XXIII, 1964. With respect to education, schooling and schools, narodniya is often translated as “public” and many secondary sources refer to public education or public schools, inadvertently creating a linkage for the contemporary reader that is, at best, misleading. I have used, variously, “popular,” “elementary,” “rural,” and “primary” in translating “narodniya.” In the context of Gordienko's article, any one of these may, from time to time, be appropriate. In our understanding of the terms, “public schools” or “public education” are not. Gordienko was writing about the provision of basic, elementary education in literacy, numeracy and certain other skills, to a population that, for the most part, possessed none of these and for whom schooling itself was a novelty.


Liberalism in 19th-Century Russia

Liberalism! This is the slogan of every educated and sensible person in Russia. This is the banner which can unite around it people of all spheres, all social Estates, all convictions...In liberalism lies the whole future of Russia.¹

There is perhaps no more vexed problem for the student of the Great Reform era of 19th-Century Russia than to tease from the debates and discourses of this highly politically-charged time, a sense of political and philosophical alignments that has meaning for a latter-day audience. Political debate, as we understand it in a western, liberal democracy, was not possible in Tsarist Russia. Those representative institutions that serve as vehicles for political argument did not exist. Ideas and social theories, imported wholesale from western Europe, were found, in confrontation with the local cultural and social environment, to be blunt instruments. Equally the terminology that accompanied these ideas and theories was foreign. Russification of western terms did not satisfactorily respond to the need for a vocabulary for debate. Absent the traditions from which these ideas and theories had sprung, Russians had no native points of reference to which they might turn.² Our difficulty in grasping meaning was equally a problem for those who were active at the time. One most elusive character was then, and continues to be, judging by the overwhelming English-language literature on the subject, the Russian liberal. A difficulty is the fact that there were very few self-styled “liberals”. There were members of obshchestvo³ (in this sense meaning “gentry society”), who espoused reform, but these were a fractious group, given to highly personal disputes and to journalistic vendetti. Obshchestvo was also used to mean “society” in many contexts, not least, after
1861 and the Emancipation Statute, in the term sel'skoe obshchestvo to designate the peasant village community. The term “liberal” was generally used by opponents of reform (of both extremes) as a pejorative and the majority of those who had chosen some middle path avoided the term to describe themselves.

Konstantin D. Kavelin, who subsequently figured in the launch of Vestnik Evropy in 1866, receives much and deserved credit as the man “who initiated the first phase of specifically liberal writing and who...began to advertise himself as a 'Russian liberal'.”

Gary Hamburg posits four preconditions for the emergence of a cohesive liberal consciousness in the middle 1850s. These included the persistence of serfdom, despite a conviction that its collapse was imminent; a yearning among the educated for greater freedom as a direct result of the oppressive Nicholaevan regime; a profound ambivalence in public circles about the Crimean defeat; and the death of Nicholas I. Perhaps even more important to the development of a Russian liberal consciousness was the presence of an educated cohort whose education had included extended visits and studies in western Europe and for whom the experience was seminal.

However Hamburg's thesis is not without merit; it was only in 1855-56, when all four of his preconditions had been met, that “Russian liberalism in the programmatic sense” came into existence, with the enunciation by Boris Chicherin and Kavelin of a programme for reform. In his essay, "Contemporary Tasks of Russian Life," (Sovremennyje zadachi russkoj zhizni) Chicherin elucidated seven principles of a programme that were “connoted by the term liberalism” and were essential for Russian prosperity. These were: freedom of conscience, emancipation from servile status,
freedom of speech, freedom of the press, academic freedom, publication of all government proceedings, and public legal proceedings. This programme has been characterized as a minimum liberal agenda, but it is one of the most pronounced characteristics of specifically “Russian” liberals that they sought reform “from above;” they believed in the necessity of a strong government to protect the state from the depredations of the licence that had consumed western and central Europe in 1848.

That aspects of Chicherin's and Kavelin's liberal programme — emancipation, juridical and legal reforms, elimination of some pre-censorship — were realized by the Great Reforms and administrative changes that followed, did not mean that liberals were universally pleased with the reforms as they were designed and implemented. But for “those who act exclusively through legal means, refraining from revolutionary methods of struggle,” the movement from Nicholaevan despotism to Alexander II's relative glasnost, to emancipation and the juridical and administrative reforms of the 1860s must have seemed revolutionary, in its most exact sense.

A second difficulty in reaching a satisfactory definition of the Russian liberal may be the fluidity of meaning of the term throughout the latter half of the century. This was compounded by the increasing exasperation of many liberal progressives with the rate of progress made in further developing those institutions which the reforms of the early 1860s made possible. Many who were at one time “liberal” in philosophy, eventually moved leftward to socialism or populism, or, as in the case of Dostoevsky and, notably, Chicherin himself, moved right, sometimes violently so, in reaction.

Those who maintained the liberal faith throughout the period of reform and
immediately afterward were men of a certain era and class, Ivan Turgenev's "fathers," his own contemporaries, better described as Westernizers. It was these men, who came of age in the 1830s and 1840s, who saw the need for further reform, who persisted in telling the government that it must move more quickly while, at the same time, insisting that zakonnost', the rule of law, and devolution, not illegality and revolution, must be the watchwords. They might not always have characterized themselves as liberal; they were progressives, pragmatists. They were not wedded to ideology so much as to deliberate and considered action. These were the "small deeds" liberals. Realizing the magnitude of the government's task, satisfied to take what they could get, they were confident that they were laying a foundation for larger accomplishments in time. Charles Timberlake nicely summarizes their thinking and their agenda:

[the liberals] constituted a minority movement in an underdeveloped society...[their] assumptions about the unpreparedness of the Russian peasantry to participate in self-government led them to expect no immediate spectacular success. They set about a long-range plan to use the institutions created by the Great Reforms to complete the emancipation of the peasantry...they sought, especially through the zemstvos, to improve the peasant's material conditions and to prepare him through education to play a new role in a society undergoing rapid transformation. They assumed an educated peasantry would inevitably choose self-government over autocracy. For this reason, the liberals considered the construction of schools a political act.  

It will be fruitful to bear this characterization in mind as we approach the reading of Gordienko's article on the responsibility of the zemstvo for the dissemination of literacy and elementary education and the means by which such dissemination might be effected.
Notes


2. Laura Engelstein argues that Russian liberals suffered not only from a “disjuncture” between the imported liberal notions of western Europe and the local cultural and social environment but also from the wholesale approach with which they bought the western, liberal discourse — they could not and did not (at this period) achieve a capacity to look critically at liberal thought; nor were they able to construct a polity within which citizens might use the arsenal of liberal thought to struggle with the imperfections of their civic condition. Western, liberal thought never engaged more than a small minority of Russians and they found themselves not only in conflict with authoritarianism but also with those who sought a “Russian” way out from under the oppression of autocracy and increasingly, as the century waned, from the extremes of socialism (ideas also imported from western Europe and which Russian intellectuals proved to be equally incapable of mitigating or contextualizing). Laura Engelstein, The Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search for Modernity on Fin-de-Siècle Russia (Cornell, 1992), p. 8.

3. Abbott Gleason, Young Russia, The Viking Press: New York, 1980, pp. 2-3. Gleason characterizes obshchestvo as a term without analogue in either English or French political life in the 19th-century. It “indicate[d] those active in the life of the nation: men of affairs, artists, thinkers, and even rebels — provided they were not peasant rebels...” After the Great Reform era, the term obshchestvennost replaced obshchestvo, reflecting “the fading of aristocratic values, the increasing disjunction between birth and talent...[and] the rise of the liberal professions.”


5. Charles Timberlake maintains that by the mid-1860s the term liberalism had fallen into disuse, having been replaced by terms such as “gentry liberalism and bourgeois liberalism.” Timberlake suggests that even the constitutional democrats of the later 19th-century never adopted the term “liberal” to describe themselves until after they had safely escaped the 1917 revolution to live as émigrés. Essays on Russian Liberalism, ed. C. E. Timberlake, University of Missouri Press: Columbia, MO, 1972, pp. 5-6.


7. Hamburg, Boris Chicherin, pp.109-112. Hamburg cites, at length, Kavelin’s letter to T. N. Granovskii on the occasion of Nicholas’ death as an example of the feelings generated by the “sudden release from the pall of oppression.” Kavelin concluded his letter by expressing the hope “to live until I am seventy in order to hate him with all my heart and with every fiber (sic) of my being.” K. D. Kavelin o smerti Nikolai I. Pis’ma k T. N. Granovskomu, pp. 607, 611, cited in Hamburg, p. 113.

8. Hamburg, Boris Chicherin, p. 11.

9. Chicherin, “Contemporary Tasks of Russian Life,” pp. 134-139. Because of censorship restrictions, Chicherin’s article was published by Alexander Herzen in London in Voices From Russia. Such was the inflammatory nature of the ideas Chicherin (and Kavelin) put forward that Herzen held publication until 1857. Hamburg, Boris Chicherin, p. 144.


The Zemstvo Role in Elementary Education in Post-emancipation Russia

Timberlake's allusion to the use of the zemstva as organs of social betterment by the liberals, eventually far exceeded the role enunciated for them in the statute of 1864 and subsequently. Zemstvo activity in support of elementary schooling is perhaps best-known. There exists a comprehensive western historiography on the subject of the development of elementary education in post-emancipation Russia and the zemstvo's role in that development. This historiography examines government initiatives, pedagogical developments and the response of Russia's peasants to efforts to provide them with basic skills of "gramotnost" — literacy and numeracy. It has also challenged the effectiveness of the zemstva as a vehicle for the promotion of peasant education and literacy.

Earlier, tentative approaches to the education of peasants had included efforts by P. D. Kiselev, Minister of State Domains, to establish primary schools for state peasants under Nicholas I. The state peasants having been emancipated in 1864, "these approximately 2,500 primary schools became the joint concern of the Ministry of Education and the zemstvos" in 1867.\^1 Efforts, such as those by Kiselev, accounted for the provision of schooling to, perhaps, scores of thousands of peasants in a population which, by 1864, numbered approximately 45,000,000 former state peasants and emancipated manorial serfs.

How best to approach the education of these many millions was a question not easily answered. The enthusiasm of the intelligentsia and of enlightened, liberal members of the gentry for mass education, and the fear of conservative and reactionary elements of its consequences meant that no simple solution would serve. The resulting Zemstvo
Statute of 1864 and another on primary education in that same year attempted to clarify responsibilities.

Education was among the nonobligatory responsibilities assigned to the zemstvo institutions. The July 14, 1864 statute on primary schools defined primary schools as those supported by the peasant communes and aided by various state departments. The stated purpose of primary instruction was “to affirm religious and moral understanding in the people and to spread basic useful knowledge.”

Among the “various state departments” referred to above were the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of War, the Orthodox Church and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Each of these had control over schools that had existed before the establishment of the zemstva. One of the shortcomings of the 1864 statute was, in the view of conservatives, the inadequate provision for sufficient state control over schooling. To those local authorities trying to realize the mandate of popular education, the division of “the economic and pedagogical supervision of the schools” was an impediment. Financial authority over schooling was granted to those institutions funding them, while control over instruction was given to provincial and district school boards, answerable to St. Petersburg and including representatives of various ministries and the Synod, as well as a few representatives from the zemstva. The boards, not the zemstva had responsibility to establish schools and monitor them, but the zemstva (and in peasant communities, the peasants) were responsible for funding their building and maintenance.

With Karakozov’s assassination attempt on Alexander II's life in 1866 and the subsequent retreat from liberalism in the government, attempts were made to clarify some aspects of this complex division of authority and to assert more direct central control over
elementary education. Count Dmitrii Tolstoi, named Minister of Education in 1866, introduced regulations in 1869, providing for the appointment of special school inspectors; “the inspectors [whose duties were elaborated in 1871 and 1873] were made permanent members of the school boards...their duties...included responsibility for the quality of instruction, teachers' performance, and opening new schools and closing unsatisfactory ones.”

Theoretically, Tolstoi had taken steps to improve the control of the centre over education and to ensure some uniform, if not very high, level of quality throughout the system, by establishing the post of inspector and providing for the establishment of model schools in the thirty-three zemstvo provinces. These specific steps seem to have provoked Egor Gordienko to take pen in hand. However, the school inspector was given an impossible task and inadequate resources with which to implement the Ministry's mandate. It is not surprising that, in 1874, the statute on primary education of 1864 was replaced with another that tried further to clarify the roles of the various participants in educational administration and establish directors of primary schools as the supreme pedagogical authorities in zemstvo provinces.

Tolstoi's efforts and those of his successors had produced paltry results. Twenty years on the situation with respect to mass elementary education in Russia remained disastrous. Only 2.3% of Russia's population attended school in 1895, and the school-age range had been reduced from seven-to-fourteen years to from eight-to-eleven years of age. This latter fact explains, in part, the claim of an increase in the percentage of school-age children in school.

Such numbers certainly lend credence to Ben Eklof's notion that the zemstvo
schools had little impact on popular education. At the same time they also suggest that
the “unregistered” schools outside the official system, to which Eklof accords much
credit, while they may have provided a relatively larger proportion of the newly literate
with basic skills, also had little effect in providing elementary education to the population
as a whole. Eklof’s project is to demonstrate peasant agency in the campaign for primary
education through their founding of *vol’nye shkoly* (literally free schools, essentially
literacy schools available to any who cared to learn). He takes care to differentiate
between literacy and schooling. Such a distinction is both important and necessary and is
one that Egor Gordienko addresses in his article on *zemstvo* responsibility in popular
education.

Gordienko anticipated Eklof’s analysis and applauded the peasant *vol’nye shkoly*
as an important tool in the battle for literacy. He, further, suggested that such schools
ought to be supported by the *zemstvo*. Eklof points to the impossibility (later in the
century) of assessing accurately the number and impact of “literacy” schools because
government did not take account of them and because of *zemstvo* involvement in their
funding and their eventual takeover and transformation into *zemstvo* schools.
Gordienko’s article suggests that, in Kharkov at least, *zemstvo* awareness of and
involvement in such schools began almost with the establishment of the *zemstvo*
institution and that Eklof’s distinction between peasant and *zemstvo* schools is at best a
nice one.

In the period immediately following emancipation, the argument that “the proper
intellectual and moral development of the peasantry” depended on education, was put
forward by innumerable thinkers, scholars and journalists. Schooling was called upon to break the “pernicious cycle” of ignorance which led to “idleness, intemperance and improvidence” and thus to crime and poverty. Such a view was not new in Russia. Schooling had long been a project for imposing social order. Max Okenfuss traces the roots of this project in Russia to the public schools developed under Catherine II. In his exegesis of O dolzhnosti cheloveka i grazhdanina (On the Duties of man and Citizen), a civics text “fundamental to Catherine’s enlightened reputation,” he characterizes Catherine’s schools as “the pedagogical underpinning of crowd-control in a rebellious, multi-national empire.” That this pedagogical philosophy, heavy with German influences, might be well-received in post-emancipation Russia ought not to surprise us. A conservative process of socialization, in which literacy is one tool for social and political control, rather than a liberating influence on the individual, is a logical, even natural, response to social upheaval on such a massive scale. The tension between conservative and liberal views of literacy is at play, as we shall see, throughout Gordienko’s article; he supports schooling, but his fundamental argument is that, in the earliest stages of this process, the imparting of literacy ought to have primacy.

One reason for Gordienko’s emphasis on literacy over schooling may have been the universally illiteracy of the mass of the population. The population of Russia, unlike those of central and western European countries, had never experienced the burgeoning literacy that was a product of the Reformation and Catholic Reformation. Schooling in Europe was able to stand on a foundation of a more general literacy. Though he was not without grander, social goals, Gordienko’s motives in pushing forward literacy and
schooling seem to have had more to do with providing peasants with the tools of their own economic and political agency than with the development of control mechanisms for a population already cowed by centuries of virtual slavery and economic inertia. To this end, we will see, he used the institution of the zemstvo (and later, the Kharkov city duma) to support his agenda, all the while seeking to expand its role and responsibilities, as government moved to reassert central control.
Notes

1. Sinel, The Classroom and the Chancellery, p. 79.


Vestnik Evropy and the Vestnik Evropy Circle

Egor Gordienko's commitment to the dissemination of literacy and to elementary education was widely shared. Among those members of the gentry and intelligentsia for whom mass elementary education was the *sine qua non* of reforming Russia were prominently the members of the group who began the journal of history, politics and literature, *Vestnik Evropy (The Messenger of Europe)*, in 1866. *Vestnik Evropy* (and those who wrote in its pages) has been characterized as representing the most classically liberal element in the publicist discourse¹ while, at the same time, being “the one new journal successfully [to publish] representatives of both sides”² in an increasingly polarized debate over the further course of reform in post-emancipation Russia. This discourse was carried on in a burgeoning number of literary and non-literary journals, particularly in the period immediately after the new press regulations of 1865, which eliminated pre-publication censorship for journals, newspapers, and books of 160 pages or more.³ In the pages of the so-called “thick” journals (*Vestnik Evropy* was soon publishing six thousand pages a year!) learned and well-known thinkers debated the issues of the day.

*Vestnik Evropy* itself had its origins in the circle of the defiant professorate of St. Petersburg University, including that same Konstantin Kavelin, who along with Chicherin, had enunciated the explicit liberal reform agenda in 1855-56. M. M. Stasiulevich, A. N. Pypin, Boris Utin and V. D. Spasovich resigned at Kavelin's urging and in the wake of massive arrests, in 1861, of students protesting new regulations concerning the University. These men, characterized as “westerners” formed the nucleus
of a group committed to reform and particularly to university reform. "They advocated autonomous institutions, responsive to those dependent on them, and providing some local control within the framework of autocracy." Government responded to the turmoil in a heavy-handed fashion, abolishing any indicators of corporate feeling within the university, taking draconian steps to eliminate political protest, and restricting admissions. In the face of continued student agitation and the resignations of these five professors, Alexander II shut down the university at the end of 1861.

Alexis Pogorelskin examines the origins of Vestnik Evropы. With their resignations and the closure of St. Petersburg University, some of the "westerners" entered into a period of some frustration. Kavelin, sent to western Europe by a new Minister of Education, Golovnin, to research the structure of universities there, remained abroad for over two years and Utin was employed by the Ministry of Justice in drafting of judicial reforms. But, Spasovich, Pypin, and Stasiulevich were forced to take up journalistic endeavours. Dissatisfied with the journalistic outlets afforded them, Stasiulevich, at Spasovich's instigation, applied to start a new journal in 1866, devoted to "historical-political scholarship" and to revive the name Vestnik Evropы.

While "Stasiulevich... consistently refused to allow The Messenger of Europe to be seen as the spokesman of any particular cause or individual," there was never any doubt about the liberal leanings of its editor nor of most of its contributors. It is not surprising, therefore, that Vestnik Evropы served as a vehicle for the debate on that issue most crucial to the propagation of the liberal agenda, education in general and elementary education most particularly. Stasiulevich began with the first numbers to write a series of
articles entitled “Pedagogical Chronicle” (*Pedagogicheskaya Khronika*), which appeared at the front of each number, indicating the importance Stasiulevich attributed to educational affairs. Detailing among others, issues in western European educational and pedagogical circles, Stasiulevich attempted to report current educational theory and practices in western Europe as possible models for Russia.\(^8\) He also published other well-known educational theorists and practitioners, including Baron N. A. Korf.

It is within this context of direct editorial participation in the debate over issues of education that the contribution of Egor Gordienko may most satisfactorily be considered. Notwithstanding Stasiulevich’s reputation for openness and evenhandedness and his preoccupation with western models of schooling, it is unlikely that Gordienko’s article, a direct response to Count Dmitrii Tolstoi’s most recent innovations in asserting central government control over elementary education, would have appeared in so timely a fashion, had it not represented a point of view with which Stasiulevich must have had some sympathy. However, in light of Stasiulevich’s almost constant opposition to Tolstoi’s policies — he delights in Tolstoi’s dismissal in 1880,\(^9\) it may well have been the case that any competent polemic directed against Tolstoi and his policies might have made it into the pages of *Vestnik Evropy* at this time, whether Stasiulevich supported its contentions and conclusions or not. Stasiulevich’s agenda aside, the publication of his article must have given Gordienko enormous satisfaction. Using the journal as a vehicle for the promotion of his own thinking and to reveal, for those who would see, the content of the debates of the Kharkov uezd zemstvo, Gordienko demonstrated just that political adroitness that government feared might, in the collective, be strong enough to threaten it.
Notes


3. Daniel T. Orlovsky, The Limits of Reform: The Ministry of Internal Affairs in Russia, 1802-1881, Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, 1981, p. 162. The regulations shifted “primary responsibility for content...to editors, publishers, writers and printers.” They would thereafter be answerable to the Ministry of Internal Affairs for violations of the press code, rather than to the Ministry of Education which had previously been responsible for censorship functions.


6. In choosing the name, Stasiulevich revived the name of an earlier journal, published by Nikolai M. Karamzin, thus “conjur[ing] up an association with historical scholarship...[and] the 'westernizing' activity of Stasiulevich and the members of his circle at the university.” Stasiulevich also held that a failure with a scholarly journal would not have the consequences that might follow the failure of a specifically political one. Pogorelskin, “The Vestnik Evropy Circle,” p. 97.


8. Sinel reports that Stasiulevich's ardent support of the Prussian Realschule, as a model for Russia, evoked a voluminous defence of Tolstoi's (and his own) model of real'noe uchilishche from M. N. Katkov, publisher of Moskovskie vedomosti, throughout 1872. Sinel, The Classroom and the Chancellery, pp. 158-159.

Egor Gordienko: A Brief Biographical Sketch

Before undertaking a detailed examination of Egor Gordienko's article, "The Zemstvo and the Popular Schools," it may be useful to our understanding of his point of view to provide a brief biographical sketch.

Egor Stepanovich Gordienko was born into the nobility of Kharkov gubernia, in Okhtyrka in 1812 and died in Kharkov city in 1893. At the age of twenty, in 1832, he entered Kharkov University, opened in 1805 in response to Alexander I's education statute of the previous year. He graduated from Kharkov University, specializing in pharmacology and chemistry and received his Doctor of Medicine degree in 1838. He spent the two subsequent years studying and travelling in France, Germany and England, returning to teach chemistry at Kharkov in 1841. He maintained contacts in western Europe and was a corresponding member of the Pharmaceutical Society of Paris from 1841.¹ His early work in the analysis of the chemistry of the mineral waters of Slovianske (he published a monograph in 1843) led him to establish a plant for the manufacture of artificial mineral water in Kharkov. While a member of the faculty of Kharkov University, Gordienko gave public lectures on chemistry and made speeches on a number of topics of social and political interest to him. In 1843, for example, he delivered a speech "O fabrichnoi promyshlennosti v Kharkovskoi gubernii voobshche i prigotovleniiia spirtykh zhidkosti v osobennosti"² ("On Factory Manufacturing in Kharkov Province in General and on the Production of Alcoholic Beverages in Particular"). His establishment of a factory to manufacture artificial mineral water was, not least, an attempt on his part to encourage manufacturing and development in

²
Kharkov. Gordienko's association with the University was cut short in a battle over an academic appointment in 1858. In a scenario that smacks of the "you-can't-fire-me-I-quit!" sort, Gordienko resigned his professorship in September and was dismissed by the university in November.³ He remained, however, committed to the institution and most especially to the support of indigent students. Gordienko continued to make contributions to fund poor students and support the expansion of the university library in 1858, in 1873 to fund lectures for indigent students and, in 1874, donated 3000 rubles to capitalize a stipend in his name. His reputation among his professorial colleagues remained high and he was unanimously elected an honorary member of the department upon his dismissal.⁴ At the time that he wrote the article under discussion, in 1869, Gordienko was a member of the Kharkov uezd zemstvo. When, in 1870, the statute creating the city dumy was promulgated, Gordienko took up the position of head of the dum of Kharkov city. His prominence in the city and in the uezd administrative bodies, at the time of his writing of "The Zemstvo and the Popular Schools," lends a significance to his article that it might not otherwise have had. In a time fraught with difficulty for those who demonstrated a political point of view, Gordienko boldly moved to the forefront. He "wrote about education, zemstvos, railroads and peasants in the region."⁵ (A subsequent article in Vestnik Evropy in 1870 is "A Review of Russian Sheep Breeding" and deals with the introduction and maintenance of merino stocks in Kharkov province.)⁶ He demonstrated a consistent commitment to the reformist agenda, working to improve Kharkov city transportation, sanitation and conditions in local prisons. These tasks were complicated by the necessity of the dum and uezd zemstvo to make
“obligatory expenditures,” mandated by the central government, but financed locally through taxation. Other, local initiatives had to be financed from other revenues.⁷

Despite his prominence and his commitment to the improvement of social conditions generally within the city and the district, his involvement in the development of education in Kharkov was perhaps the aspect of his work which was dearest to his heart; at the time of his death nearly a quarter of a century after he sent his article, “The Zemstvo and the Popular Schools” to Stasiulevich, he left all his property to “public education.”⁸

Gordienko was a man of high principle and occasional high dudgeon! A portrait photograph, taken while he was still a professor at the university, reveals a Saturnine countenance, at once haughtily remote, but intensely present. (See Figure 1.) This characterization is borne out by the tone of Gordienko’s article, which is both highly pragmatic and almost polemically strident — a man of great intelligence and interest and one for whom the self-evident facts of a situation ought first and boldly to be addressed. Policies had to be flexible enough to accommodate reality. He understood the practical necessity for Russia of a literate population.
Figure 1. Egor Stepanovich Gordienko.

Source: Meditsinskii fakultet Kharkovskago universiteta za perviya 100 let ego sushchestvovaniya, (1805-1905)
Notes

1. S. A. Popov in Meditsinskii Fakultet Kharkovskago Universiteta za perviya 100 let ego cyshchestvovaniya (1805-1905), eds. I. P. Skvortsova and D. I. Bagaleya. The Medical Faculty of Kharkov University in the First 100 Years of its Existence (1805-1905), University Press: Kharkov, 1905-1906, p. 92.

2. Popov, Medical Faculty of Kharkov University, p. 38.

3. Popov, Medical Faculty of Kharkov University, p. 51.

4. Popov, Medical Faculty of Kharkov University, p. 96.


7. Information about Gordienko’s involvement in sanitation, prisons and urban transport comes from Vitaliy Timofiy, PhD., lately of Kharkiv University, who included these among the areas of Gordienko’s activities in an e-mail message to the author. Timofiy characterizes Gordienko as “very highly regarded, very liberal minded, very politically active.”

CHAPTER II: The Response

“Zemstvo i narodniya shkoly” (“The Zemstvo and the Popular Schools”)

Now that, with the help of railways, we have been brought closer to Europe, now that we have opened ourselves [to her], we are obliged to engage in open and free competition with educated peoples and it will be to our disadvantage to undertake the struggle without better tools, without education.¹

Gordienko argued immediately following that it was crucial to provide literacy, that “we will be defeated, from the outset, unless our people learn to read and write in Russian...” and expressed the view that, in the absence of Russian literacy, the people would be forced to acquire these skills in another European language. A Russian presence in Europe required the existence of a population educated in Russian.² His pragmatic approach was first to a project of mass literacy and only subsequently to a programme of more structured elementary education; this put him at odds with the government in St. Petersburg.

The pursuit of this project moved Gordienko to submit his thoughts to Stasiulevich for publication. He began with a brief history of recent educational initiatives by the government and applauded the announcement of the intention to support the opening of three one-year and one two-year model schools in each of thirty-three zemstvo provinces.³ Throughout his article, Gordienko made reference to the legal measures that supported the dissemination of schooling and he did so in this instance, referring to the edict of March 6, 1867 requiring the Ministers of Internal Affairs and Education to make appropriate provisions for the future establishment of “schools or other learning facilities” in the villages peopled by former state peasants.⁴ Gordienko’s
recourse to existing edicts and laws as support for his arguments was crucial. In a political environment fraught with dangers, referral to government policies as the basis for one's position could mitigate the reaction one might expect from government to criticisms or opposition, such as Gordienko's own response to Tolstoi's moves. By acknowledging the establishment of model schools as consistent with the legal mandate of government, he was positioning himself legitimately within the established terms of the debate. A commitment to the principle of zakonnost, the rule of law, was fundamental to Russian liberals, serving both to counter the arbitrariness of autocracy (proizvol) and to underpin a future constitutional form of government. A more emphatic expression of Gordienko's commitment to strictly lawful behaviour can be found in his analysis of the activities of the zemstva in implementation of government edicts:

...we confess that sometimes steps taken in error are praised, even officially...they point to fortunate results; but these successes, if successes they be, depend on the fact that the means stated [in law] are got around, that the law was adopted otherwise...we will not be wrong if we say that each and every government instruction must be implemented faithfully and precisely and that, with this same precision, boldly and truthfully, ought information to be made known about the consequences of the steps indicated [to be taken].

Gordienko argued, further, that those laws that appeared in the form of provisional regulations ought to be subject to an accounting of their utility and applicability so as to guide the government in the promulgation of permanent laws, "strict and invariable. Acting otherwise," he said, "we will bring in misguided government and will be the perpetrators of our own misfortune." For him, the role of the zemstvo, its sacred duty, was to speak truthfully and faithfully to the government about the effects of
its laws, but also, to adhere strictly to those laws, once they had been enunciated:

The zemstva are not given the right to arrange affairs according to their own judgement, but their task is to speak openly and sincerely about their [local] conditions, to pray and to plead that their zealous prayer be heard on high, [in St. Petersburg].

Thus, Gordienko placed himself squarely in the liberal camp; “those who act exclusively through legal means,” as Vodovozov defined “liberal,” while at the same time proposing a consultative role for the zemstva, the realization of which the government was anxious to prevent). However, having established his bona fides, he took no pains to mask his disenchantment with the progress of educational reform, both in its inception and in its implementation.

True to his calling as a “zemstvo man” and aware that his prominence, both as an educator, albeit a retired one, and in the affairs of Kharkov, gave him an entrée into and a voice in the publicist debate, Gordienko spoke “boldly and truthfully” about local conditions, about his own assessment of Count Dmitrii Tolstoi’s recent moves to exert more control over education in the provinces, specifically the introduction of the School Inspector, and about his own thinking as to how best to achieve the desired end of popular literacy. He situated himself as a truth-teller, whose motives were to bring the provincial reality to the forefront of the publicist debate over education. We shall be misled, however, if we accept this positioning at face value; Gordienko pointed to the “zadnei mysli,” secret thoughts and hidden agendas of others. He himself was a sophisticated manipulator, as we may determine from his political accomplishment. There was more to his own agenda than the propagation of literacy. With keen attention to the law and with
an awareness of its importance to a stable society, Gordienko proposed administrative, political and social change the like of which had not even begun to be realized until the time of his own death, in 1893.  

Gordienko envisioned an activist role for the zemstvo, not least because its members were more familiar with local conditions and were best situated to supply redress for the inadequacies they found. He argued strenuously for the autonomy of the zemstva in all aspects of rural schooling, from the construction of schools to the development of curricula. The zemstvo was the one body which was familiar with local conditions and whose agenda was straightforward and responsive to local need, he maintained. Central administrative departments found local conditions elusive and difficult to grasp, and they had, as well, their own problems, objectives and mandates, not least the concern to recover tax arrears from impecunious peasants. “Where will the peasant find the money...He will turn over even the ten-kopeck piece that he has saved to buy a primer for his son.” Administrative departments preferred to deal with illiterates rather than literates, Gordienko suggested; the former asked fewer questions about the purposes of tax collection. The zemstvo's revenues came, in large part, from a land tax, which peasants increasingly resisted. James Mallory points out that, “[tax collection] was left to the local police, who, as the tax collector for the state, saw to it that the central government was satisfied first.” Zemstvo financing was not easily accomplished.

In response to difficulties in raising revenues, which included not just peasant poverty and resistance to taxation, and the demands of the central government, but also the heavy redemption payments levied on the emancipated serfs, Gordienko argued for
“in-kind” contributions by the peasantry to the construction of schools. He caricatured the Ministry’s plans for school construction and opposed them to his own solution:

If a school is built in the bureaucratic way, that is, with an approved plan, with estimates, under the supervision of a buildings committee and with commercial involvement, the building will cost no less than 500 rubles. Then it is still necessary to...take into consideration that each ruble raised by public subscription becomes, when it reaches the Treasury, tens of rubles but, moving back [to finance school construction], through these manoeuvrings, diminishes to ten kopecks. This sometimes happens.12

Gordienko was no naïf! The logical conclusion, he suggested, to the “bureaucratic” approach was to assume that the construction of schools in the zemstvo provinces would cost many hundreds of millions of rubles and, therefore, would proceed only tardily and with great difficulty. In the face of such staggering costs, it must have been apparent how futile the whole educational project was. Such an argument was often called upon to support inaction. But Gordienko’s solution flew in the face of bureaucratic convention. “No one can build huts more cheaply than peasants,” he maintained, “Just leave the matter entirely to them and they know how.” Offer them a place near the road, salvage a log beam or two designated for building bridges. They will roof the structure with communal thatch; a dirt floor serves (they are used to walking about and even sleeping on an earthen floor). If they have no bricks to construct a stove, they will have to buy those, and glass, of course, for windows. But this will cost no more than thirty rubles. The izba is plain and without pediment or inscriptions but, if the peasants are well-taught there, then it is a school!13 (Gordienko’s tone, with reference to the peasants, may seem condescending to more politically correct ears; in his defence, we might remember that a paradigm shift had occurred with suddenness and relatively peacefully in
Russia. The emancipation of 45,000,000 serfs and peasants and their transformation into “persons” was little short of cataclysmic in the rigid atmosphere of Russia. That attitudes remained confused and that vocabulary had not kept pace should not surprise us. It ought also to be acknowledged that a certain paternalism was a necessary, even unavoidable component of the baggage of the 19th-century Russian liberal.

It was not just in the building of schools that Gordienko wanted to enlist local resources. Gordienko took a dim view of direct philanthropy as the means by which a project of such significance as mass education might be accomplished. He insisted that financing and management must eventually be in the hands of the zemstva.\textsuperscript{14} Philanthropy was acceptable but such donations in support of peasant education must, he maintained, be made directly to the zemstvo and the determination of their allocation left to the zemstvo to make.

The construction of buildings was one step in developing elementary education. Staffing them was another. Gordienko addressed the difficult problem of the shortage of teachers for the new schools of Kharkov uezd. By decisions taken at meetings of October 3, 1866, June 19, 1867 and March 17, 1868, the Kharkov uezd zemstvo had determined to establish three model teacher-training schools, to staff them with expert pedagogues at a salary of two hundred rubles a year; to establish a fund to provide stipends to “the most capable and most developed” peasant boys and to train them to be teachers. Their obligations upon graduation were to act as teaching assistants for three years at an annual salary of seventy-five rubles and an additional six years as teachers in their home villages. As teachers, they were to be paid a salary of one hundred rubles per annum. This sum,
though not large, would be sufficient, Gordienko argued, as they would have returned, in all probability, to the parental home to live. As the *zemstvo* envisioned the outcome, they were also to be exempted from wearing a uniform and from military service. Gordienko made the *zemstvo*’s motives explicit:

The main point rests in this; that our teachers respond to real conditions among peasant society, that the peasants will have greater trust in teachers from their own families, they will more readily surrender their children to their own schools, support the teachers from their own lot; bring them by the basket, bread or eggs, chickens, a piglet, etc. Let it be by peasant disposition and custom...[for] the fate of the school depends in large measure on the commitment of the peasant community, without which it will not exist.

Gordienko’s and the *zemstvo*’s plans are practical, inasmuch as they respond to local needs by calling on local resources, as these are available. But something more than mere pragmatism is at work here. We would do well to remember Timberlake’s contention that “the liberals considered the construction of schools a political act.”

Gordienko wrote that the School Boards, even at the district level, were heavy with representatives of the centre. He offered, as a model for addressing this issue, the example of the actions of the Kharkov *uezd zemstvo*.

By invitation [of the *zemstvo*], people independent of service, but devoted to social well-being, came together in goodwill and took upon themselves the duty of being “guardians” of the schools in their districts. They oversee order in the schools, keep an eye on students, on the paying out of salaries to the teachers and grants to the student, adding to these latter from their own personal means.

This “guardianship” arrangement allowed the *zemstvo* to settle on the establishment of nineteen schools and Gordienko suggested that the district *zemstvo* might constitute itself as a school board, whereby they “would arrange their own affairs in keeping with their
own hearts' desires.” The guardians were agents of the zemstvo, serving at the zemstvo's invitation. The philanthropic nature of their contributions to student grants was in keeping with the sorts of donations Gordienko himself made for university students. Among those autonomous institutions, responsive to those dependent on them, Gordienko clearly saw the zemstva. This vision was not served by the imposition of yet another layer of central bureaucratic oversight, either in the form of school boards or inspectors.

I have suggested that the establishment, by Dmitrii Tolstoi, Minister of Education, of the position of School Inspector was, perhaps, the single event that precipitated Gordienko's writing of “The Zemstvo and the Popular Schools.” Gordienko himself addressed the issue of the inspectorate and his own exasperation with the interference by the centre in local affairs in a lengthy passage in his article. While acknowledging that the Inspector (who was, de jure, a member of the uezd school board) might be an individual of goodwill, Gordienko offered sympathy for the plight of the man whose financial resources were scarce and whose familiarity with the geographic area for which he was responsible was scanty. The Inspector would never be able “thoroughly to inspect 400 schools, scattered over the vastness of the whole province and fulfill the other duties assigned to him.” But even more crucial to Gordienko's argument for local autonomy than the enormity of the inspector's task was the fact that, in response to his findings, the Inspector was equipped to do little more than point out the obvious. In an almost comic account, a fiction to support his polemic against the imposition of the inspectorate, he recounted a typical school inspector's visit, as he foresaw it. Having found, for instance, that “in such and such a school...that literacy comes with difficulty [and] the teacher,
whether a retired non-commissioned officer or a junior deacon, teaches the children in Old Church Slavonic,” he “will point out the advantages of sound methods, of a system of mutual instruction, etc., together with a notice to the peasant community that the teacher is not suited for the school.” The community will respond, Gordienko wrote, that the Inspector is, of course, right but, it was only with difficulty that they managed to scrape together the paltry salary they pay the teacher. Gordienko details the inspector’s predicament.

The fictional inspector found that the peasants were willing to support schooling and that their children arrived for lessons, even in the dead of winter and half-naked. But, the teacher, as we have seen, was unsuitable. However, to fire the teacher would be to alienate the peasants who were persuaded to establish the school by this very teacher-founder. The religiously-based curriculum was outmoded, but to change it would mean to deprive the peasants of their access to the very religious precepts that sustained them in their dejected state. There was no standardized text; students read from a variety of primers, psalmbooks and sacred stories. One boy read from an illustrated psalter. His father had sold a sack of bread in Kharkov and bought the book for the boy’s use. To have told the father that the book was inadequate would be to insult parental feeling and to risk the father’s pulling the child out of school altogether. Equally importantly, the inspector had no funds with which to address any of these issues.

Gordienko points too to attitudes among the peasantry respecting education and their need for it, which may have had much to do with the inspector’s findings. Eklof writes of peasant agency as crucial to the eventual dissemination of literacy, but also
suggests (after Sinel) that:

The evidence seems to suggest that peasants were quite capable of making a distinction between the tools of literacy and numeracy provided by the schools and the larger socialization involved in the process of organized, prolonged schooling, and sought to devise strategies which provided their children with the former while reducing the impact of the latter.\textsuperscript{23}

Gordienko provides examples of such strategies, which may have been less premeditated than Eklof seems to suggest, but which did have the result of undermining the authority of the school while still providing opportunities to acquire a very basic literacy, sufficient to the peasants' purposes. As far as the boy with the illustrated psalter is concerned, “then, in the opinion of the peasants [if he can read the psalter], this is to have the crown of education and if the boy were to peruse the church psalms, this means his education is quite finished; the religious sensibility of the peasants is fully satisfied.”\textsuperscript{24}

Absenteeism was a major problem:

...the teacher says that often the children do not appear for a full month; the guilty pupil comes with a note with his excuse; his mother needed him to look after the baby, his younger brother, and would not let him go to school. Another was tending a calf; a third [could not come because] his clothes were worn out and he had nothing to wear. Many cannot give reasons. The Inspector makes a note to himself that the pupils began school on October 1 and many students began to appear only by \textit{Nauma} (December 1), and by April 1, when school finishes, the boys have [already] set off with their parents for the pastures as drovers or cowherds.\textsuperscript{25}

It would be fatuous to suggest that after hundreds of years of serfdom, the Russian peasantry had not developed a pronounced level of cunning and very highly-honed avoidance skills in dealing with authority — though this does not answer the question of exactly who among the illiterate peasantry was writing the notes explaining absenteeism!
This avoidance of authority would lend credence to Eklof’s contention that the peasants had developed strategies to stave off socialization in schools. However, it seems to me, only fair to suppose that massive and regular absenteeism was also and, perhaps, more directly a result of the need to cobble together a living off the land in a country where the growing season is notoriously short and the winters are severe. Gordienko’s contention seems to be that these latter circumstances are more prominently at play, rather than any deliberate strategy of avoidance. The Inspector, as the official designated responsible for discipline in the schools, would be eager to enforce

order, rules and forms. But how to bring under rules the pursuits of the peasant of his economic needs? He [the peasant] labours on in spite of the weather, sleeps where he is, has what and when he is able; and his son does not learn what he should, but what he can, to the extent that his means and family worries allow.26

In the face of these worries and overwhelmed by the enormous bureaucracy concerned with their education, (community, parish guardians, zemstva, school boards, clergy and, of course, this new administrative personage, the Inspector)27, the peasants do not know where to turn to have their needs for the acquisition of literacy addressed. “The rational decision follows, the truth presents itself to the peasants to look after themselves, satisfying their own needs.”28

Gordienko compared the situation in one village near Kharkov with the general attitude of the educational bureaucracy. In this village the peasants lacked sufficient arable to sustain themselves and so took to small trading and cottage industry. Recognizing their own need for literacy and finding no help otherwise, they opened their own literacy school (they rented a room for one ruble a month), hired a teacher, paid a
salary (and a bonus) and bought books. Twenty-five boys diligently attended — even in vacation times! Exclusive of the cost of books, the entire undertaking was financed for 72 rubles a year. Such were the circumstances of the village that the parish clergy, nominally so involved in educational oversight and teaching, were blissfully unaware of the school's existence. Contrast that, Gordienko suggested, with the widespread perception that education was a task of such enormity that it needed comprehensive supervision and oversight and the commitment of hundreds of millions of rubles per year. While higher academies and technical schools were answerable to single departments, elementary schooling was deemed so politically dangerous an undertaking that these schools were required to give an accounting to the village community and were answerable to spiritual, secular, educational, and police authority, and to the supervision of "numberless others." The worry of the centre that the children would be indoctrinated with radical political ideas was, on the face of it, ludicrous, as far as Gordienko was concerned. How, when the ninety percent of pupils — "pochti dikim", almost savages — were not older than ten years, attended school for two years, and barely knew their parents' names, he asked, can they be in political danger? Gordienko suggested a much reduced level of central supervision, giving inspectors access to the schools to check the political acceptability and legality of what was being taught. He argued, however, that as the Ministry of Education did not maintain the schools, it had no business asking how that was done nor in the design of the curriculum. Gordienko's educational agenda, in this period so shortly after the emancipation and the establishment of the zemstva, is clearly the dissemination of literacy, not that socialization which was so
important a component of the campaign for universal education in the 1890s and which
drove the Ministry's efforts in the 1860s and 1870s.

A discussion of elementary education in the earliest post-emancipation period
would be a feeble exercise if it did not address the issue of church and state. Gordienko
points to the role of the parish clergy (and their inability properly to fulfill it) in his
anecdote about the peasant school opened without the knowledge of the parish clergy in
the village in Kharkov uezd. The role of the Orthodox church, its Synod headed by a
layman and a department of state, was significant in education at all levels. Prior to the
statute on primary education of 1864, Gordienko reported, information was gathered, by
the central ministries, that led to the conclusion that “parish schools offer the chief means,
at present, for popular education,” there being, reportedly, 413,321 pupils in 21,420 such
schools.\(^32\) If, Gordienko suggested, these schools were so significant a source of
education, they ought to continue to receive support. But, it was found, he reported, that
many of the schools never existed and of those that did, “an exaggerated number of pupils
[w]as recorded in the rolls for calculations.”\(^33\) Compounding this problem was the quality
of instruction students at these schools might expect to receive. Junior deacons were
often designated as teachers; their labours supplemented by those of their wives and
grown-up daughters or of retired, literate soldiers or former house-serfs. Texts consisted
precisely of those psalters and inadequate primers that had caught the attention of the
school inspector in Gordienko's fictional account. There were, Gordienko maintained,
members of the clergy full of sympathy for popular education (these, though, were few
and difficult to find) but, in the main, the senior clergy were too busy with other parish
duties and the junior deacon with the scraping together of a bare subsistence to be of much use. “Thus,” he concluded, “to found a system of popular education based on the work of the clergy would be completely misguided and this appealing conjunction of parish and school affairs proves impossible in the application.”

It was not the business of the zemstvo to teach prayers to children, Gordienko noted, nor the business of the church, one concludes, to provide elementary schooling. The zemstva had been given that mandate. Gordienko conceded, however, in one of his attempts to have it both ways, that seminarians and sextons might yet prove useful “in our project,” as teachers because their relationships to the people were different from those clergy assigned to parishes.

The fulfillment of the zemstvo mandate absorbed so much of Gordienko's energies in this initial period of reform and continued to engage him in the years after this when, as head of the Kharkov city duma and mayor, he was Kharkov's most prominent “citizen.” Sensible of the political constraints, various and variable, and of just how far he might push the limits, Gordienko cleverly promoted his agenda. In “The Zemstvo and the Popular Schools” Gordienko conceived and reported the transactions at zemstvo meetings as playlets. One member, from the best of motives — peasant poverty or the lack of funds to pay salaries — would argue for the least possible commitment to popular education. Another would argue for the zemstvo's assumption of obligatory support of compulsory education, far beyond the letter and spirit of the law, which neither mandated compulsory schooling nor included education among the zemstvo's obligatory responsibilities. The issue of the financing of popular education provides an example of how Gordienko, in the face of these extremes, could arrive at a sustainable middle course.
The Ministry of Education was charged by the Zemstvo Statute to make arrangements to establish schools — Tolstoi's model schools were one response to this responsibility — but the zemstva were given the responsibility to finance the building and maintenance of primary schools. Where was the money to come from? Not the government treasury; Gordienko reports that there were insufficient funds in the treasury for this purpose. Neither were the means to be found among the peasants, newly emancipated and lumbered with redemption payments. The idea that financing of education be “ascribed to the category of compulsory zemstvo obligations,” fomented an uproar at the zemstvo meetings and raised delicate questions of the need for (compulsory) schooling, the transfer of pecuniary obligations and the raising of taxes. Oil on troubled waters, a zemstvo member (Gordienko, one assumes) inserted himself into the fray “with sweet and friendly words.” What he could not achieve by force of reason or appeal to common sense, he would achieve through emotional blackmail: “Let them (the members of the zemstvo) out of duty, philanthropy, compassion, out of the honour of the zemstvo, do, through goodwill, that which it is impossible to impose as an obligation.” Noblesse oblige was still, according to Gordienko, a persuasive argument in the raising of funds (above the obligatory) to support the spread of literacy. When one “philanthropist,” realizing that he must contribute, demanded a personal accounting of the expenditure of his donation and specified conditions under which the money might be spent, insisting that these details be recorded in the minutes of the meeting, the sweet voice of reason argued that the oversight of the expenditure should rest solely with the zemstvo. Gordienko argued that the “chief equity” of the zemstvo was the individual “self-respect,
honour, dignity, and an innate incentive to independence and self-understanding” of every man. “It is our business to provide financial support; this is told us by the zemstvo statute and by the spirit of chivalry of the ancient Russian community, which now spills out among us.” Thus, the issue, couched once more in a clever fiction, became a moral rather than a legal one. Such arguments demonstrate Gordienko's guile; using extra-political means — a sort of emotional extortion from the well-meaning wealthy — to accomplish the mandate of financing of elementary schools.

Settling for what he could get, Gordienko continued to push for further reform and spoke of a not-too-distant time (he hoped) when:

the zemstvo then to fulfill [its] purpose will be given the opportunity to function independently, because of its intimate understanding and prosperity, without interference from outside departments and without the participation of school boards...we think that school affairs ought [then] to be in the same sphere of zemstvo management [as other zemstvo obligations].

Arguing for local autonomy, Gordienko remained a practical and pragmatic liberal in the senses that Timberlake defined. He understood both the enormity of the task of disseminating literacy and the practical impediments to the imposition of a highly structured system of schooling. Not least among these impediments was not so much peasant resistance as that peasant unpreparedness to participate to which Timberlake points. In his first few pages, Gordienko assessed the then current state of affairs in Russia. He abjured new pedagogical theories and remote programmatic administration and offered to explain the attitudes of both zemstvo and peasant to the new policies regarding education. He concluded this summary — which includes a lengthy
metaphorical passage about the treatment of the “sickness” of ignorance by caretakers with hidden agendas — by remarking that schools (for the present, at least) should be managed by whoever can build and maintain them. “Certainly,” he proffered, “this is an informal arrangement and not one mandated by law [but], anyone realizing what he knows has the right to teach the other so long as there are those who want to learn.” To learn, he suggested, as a hunter discovers how to learn; to learn a variety of practical arts and skills, to praise God, and to count and make notes. “And it seems, for the people, that this is enough, that if literacy were given them freely in this way, this would be plenty for the first stage of their education.” And such steps, while not mandated by law, were neither forbidden.

As important to Gordienko as providing literacy to the peasants was the elimination of central government interference and the promotion of zemstva in local affairs. His two themes are conjoined throughout his article. “Let him teach who wants and how he can, even if it means only a few more literate people. Freedom here is really understood as justice...” The government, he argued, having no financial obligations with respect to the building and maintenance of primary schools, equally, “[did] not have any rights or privileges” in determining how, when and where schools were to be established and what they were to teach. The supervisory responsibility of the ministry was entrusted to various agencies, including zemstva, but primarily, school councils and, with the regulation of 1869, to school inspectors. The anticipated shortcomings of all these actors provided much grist for Gordienko's mill and, while always sympathizing with the enormity of their responsibilities, he cited numerous anecdotal examples to
demonstrate how feebly they would discharge them.

The one agency, in Gordienko's view, which was best equipped to administer education and other affairs relating to the welfare of the peasants and the society at large, was the zemstvo. Certainly, in his accounts, their meetings were fraught with tensions, noisome and a forum for the display of extreme views, but, at the same time, he demonstrated, the Kharkov uezd zemstvo was able through an airing of various viewpoints, by compromise, and by appeals to "natural order" and "common sense,"\textsuperscript{46} to arrive at arrangements to push the project in a "progressive" direction and, importantly, to the benefit of society.

Gordienko understood that such arrangements were only temporary and that a number of questions remained to be dealt with. To forward his primary educational agenda, the dissemination of literacy, he was ready to use all the means at his disposal. Once that basic literacy had been achieved, he was willing to entertain plans for future, more structured schooling. His remarks in response to the call for the provincial school boards serve to elucidate his thinking with respect to broader issues:

Until that [future] time this simple arrangement will be enough; later when the people are of one will and have matured, it may be that we will need another organization. The need for peasant representation [at the level of provincial school boards] will not [foreseeably] arise for the zemstvo...it watches intently as [the peasant] farms the earth, ploughs it, sows [seeds] useful for his family, digs out weeds and teaches his children everything that he himself knows. One prays to God only for abundant rains.\textsuperscript{47}

It would be easy, but equally facile, to characterize such sentiments as paternalistic, as hardly progressive. But, in the context in which he was an actor, Egor Gordienko committed his time, energy and not inconsiderable personal financial resources to the
betterment of his city and district. While theorists and political agitators argued the end goals, Gordienko offered practical means to move forward in a measured and achievable manner. He sought no recognition for himself; he explicitly abjured *chin* and decorations for those involved in *zemstvo* affairs: “who seeks reward and neglects the popular good, instead of being a *zemstvo* man, becomes a bureaucrat.”

Here, it seems to me, we have his essential character and an insight into why his article appeared in the pages of *Vestnik Evropy*. By his words, certainly, but also by his commitment to action he embodied that very *zemstvo* man: a custodian of liberties and justice for those who had not yet been schooled in the skills necessary to enable them to be entrusted them immediately; an instigator and catalyst of the processes necessary to inculcate those skills; a man whose mature grasp of the political and social realities around him dictated a considered, pragmatic, but highly activist approach to reform. So strong was that commitment that, as we have seen, upon his death Gordienko left his entire estate to public education.
Notes

1. p. 215 / 216  E. S. Gordienko, “Zemstvo i narodniya shkoly.” «Teper, kogda my s pomoshchiu zhelesnykh dorog sblizilis tesnee s Evropoyu, kogda my otkryli sebya, nam predstoit otkrytoe u svobodnoe sopernichestvo s prosveshcheneniyeshiymi narodnami i nam nevygodno budet btpyat v etu borbu bez lichshago orudiya, bez obrazovaniya...»

2. Nicholas Hans attributes this emphasis on Great Russian education to “Slavophile and Populist leaders...” It would seem to have had some acceptance in liberal-progressive circles as well. Hans, p. 148.

3. While expressing “sincere gratitude” for the establishment of the model schools, Gordienko suggested that “Of course four such schools are inadequate for an entire province...” and while he acknowledged that the Ministry may have had it in mind to open other schools, he argued that “the need is urgent and the matter brooks no delay.” I shall return to this point as I explore the role that Gordienko envisioned for the zemstvo in furthering the establishment of schools, p. 228 / 12-20 Gordienko, “Zemstvo i narodniya shkoly.”


5. p. 218 / 3-13 Gordienko, “Zemstvo i narodniya shkoly.”


9. I refer here and subsequently to the very active role of the zemstvo in the campaign for public education of the 1890s. See, Allen Sinel, “The Campaign.”


11. Mallory, James A. “Zemstvo” in The Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet History, vol. 45, p. 239. Christine Worobec notes that at the level of the sel’skoe obschestvo, the village community, established by the emancipation, a tax collector was elected from among the members of the community. Worobec, Christine D., Peasant Russia, Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, p. 17.


13. Gordienko, “Zemstvo i narodniya shkoly”, p. 231. By contrast, Baron N. Korf, also profoundly committed to universal compulsory education, offered a design for construction of a three-class school, devised a teaching schedule and curriculum and sold thousands of copies of his publications to the benefit of the Aleksandrov uezd zemstvo, which received all the profits to promote elementary education. Timberlake, “N. A. Korf (1834-83),” p. 12-35.


16. p. 233 / 4-12 Gordienko, “Zemstvo i narodniya shkoly.”

18. p. 233  l. 36-42  Gordienko, “Zemstvo i narodniya shkoly.”

19. p. 234  l. 9-10  Gordienko, “Zemstvo i narodniya shkoly.”

20. p. 221  l. 1-3  Gordienko, “Zemstvo i narodniya shkoly.” Brooks observes, “...the inspectors were made permanent members of the school boards...their duties...included responsibility for the quality of instruction, teachers’ performance, and opening new schools and closing unsatisfactory ones.” Jeffrey Brooks, “The zemstvo and the education of the people,” in *The Zemstvo in Russia*, p. 250. Gordienko remarks that the Inspector’s responsibility also includes little known private schools for a total of 700 public and private schools in the district. The Inspector’s resources total, therefore, two rubles per school. “Zemstvo i narodniya shkoly”, p. 223.


24. p. 222  l. 11-15  Gordienko, “Zemstvo i narodniya shkoly.”


26. p. 223  l. 35-41  Gordienko, “Zemstvo i narodniya shkoly.”


28. p. 224  l. 8-10  Gordienko, “Zemstvo i narodniya shkoly.”


33. p. 227  l. 31-31  Gordienko, “Zemstvo i narodniya shkoly.”

34. p. 228  l. 3-6  Gordienko, “Zemstvo i narodniya shkoly.”


36. p. 228  l. 7-11  Gordienko, “Zemstvo i narodniya shkoly.”

37. Daniel Orlovsky records that the Ministry of Internal Affairs had wanted the new mayors to be administrative officials separate from the dumas, but that, in the final regulation of 1870, the mayors were drawn from the dumas, were head[s] “of the new city assemblies and spokesmen for the city interests.” Orlovsky, *The Limits of Reform*, p. 157.


41. p. 230  l. 3-8 Gordienko, “Zemstvo i narodniya shkoly.”


43. p. 231  l. 34-42 Gordienko, “Zemstvo i narodniya shkoly.”

44. p. 218  l. 25-31 Gordienko, “Zemstvo i narodniya shkoly.”

45. p. 218  l. 32-36 Gordienko, “Zemstvo i narodniya shkoly.”


47. p. 234  l. 27-35 Gordienko, “Zemstvo i narodniya shkoly.”

48. p. 234  l. 21-23 Gordienko, “Zemstvo i narodniya shkoly.”, «kotoroe predstavlyaet k nagrade i perestanet slushit obshchestvennoy pol’ze; vmesto zemskago cheloveka on sdelaetsa chinovnikom.»
Conclusion

The importance of Gordienko's article on "The Zemstvo and the Popular Schools" rests not so much in the logic of his arguments, which are often provocatively disputatious, nor in the "liberal" character of his agenda, nor even in his assumption of the role of "zemstvo man." Each of these is a crucial aspect in determining where he stood. The Gordienko "line" was not unique to him; his selection as first head of the Kharkov City duma later in 1870, the year of the publication of his article, demonstrated that a majority of the Kharkov duma supported his views. His pragmatic agenda in education and his aggressive assertion of the right to autonomy of the zemstvo was widely supported throughout Kharkov province. The Kharkov gentry had long advocated "exclusive control over all civil expenditures affecting only their territory." Starr notes that the zemstvo statute of 1864, "specified that ["natural" zemstvo duties, such as road-building and quartering of troops] should henceforth be conducted on the basis of hired labour rather than direct corvée." The zemstva, Starr reports, decided otherwise: "As the Kharkov delegates reasoned, it would be unjust to force a peasant to pay a tax which he could not bear when he would willingly pay in labour." Thus Gordienko was arguing, in 1869, not with his fellow zemstvo members when he suggested that peasants build their own schools, but with Count Dmitri Tolstoi, Ober-Procurator and Minister of Education. Gordienko was secure in his backing.

As I have previously noted, Ben Eklof, among others, has challenged the success of the zemstva in the propagation of literacy, but more specifically, in the establishment of schools. He argues that peasant initiatives may have had more to do with the
development of literacy than the efforts of the zemstva. He may well be right. However, I suggest that Gordienko's article and his actions as a zemstvo man demonstrate that the two may have been complementary and even mutually supportive. “Let the peasants build the schools!” Gordienko argued. No-one knew how better than they! As for the minimal costs they would incur thereby, zemstvo representatives and gentry had a moral, indeed, a “Russian” duty to finance these initiatives. Was the result a peasant school or a zemstvo school? To Gordienko, if pupils were taught there, it was a school. In these very early stages of the project, decisions about ultimate proprietorship were an unnecessary complication; another of those issues best left to a more mature stage of development. In Gordienko’s vision, all rural primary schools would eventually be zemstvo schools, under zemstvo control.

In Russia, eighty percent of the population, many millions of people, strewn over an area many times larger than Europe west of Poland, were freed in 1861 and 1864. Providing literacy on this scale required what might be characterized as massive action by responsive institutions. For Gordienko these were necessarily the zemstva. Mackenzie Wallace, in his memoir of six years' residence in Russia, first published in 1877 and subsequently regularly revised, assessed the zemstva thus:

Many people [conclude] that the Zemstvo is a worthless institution which has increased taxation without conferring a corresponding benefit on the country. If we take as our criterion in judging the institution the exaggerated expectations at first entertained, we may feel inclined to agree with this conclusion, but this is merely tantamount to saying that the Zemstvo has performed no miracles...the Zemstvo has, however, done much more than the majority of its critics admit...it has done a very great deal to provide medical aid and primary education to the common people.
The zemstvo had accomplished all this despite restrictions on its activities which, perhaps, point to another and not insignificant reason why Gordienko wrote and Stasiulevich published the article. Publication of the records and debates of zemstvo meetings was proscribed; meetings among representatives of zemstva to exchange information in areas of mutual interest were forbidden. By supporting his arguments with little fictions; by putting the debates into the mouths of hypothetical zemstvo members, whose political viewpoints remain uncharacterized by the author; by exhibiting an appropriate sympathy and appreciation for the government's efforts, however inept and inadequate, however impossible the undertaking might seem; Gordienko is able slyly to promote his own agenda of mass literacy, to argue against central interference in local affairs and to provide his fellow zemstvo members throughout Russia with ammunition in their own battles with government. Few readers of Vestnik Evropy would have been unalert to the subject and nature of debates and their resolution in the Kharkov uezd zemstvo in the fall of 1869. One can imagine the bemusement and head-nodding with which a 19th-century Russian liberal audience might have read Gordienko's piece.
Notes

1. Representation in the city duma was based on a “three-curiae tax-based system” with a much reduced property qualification for those seeking election. Orlovsky maintains that this latter concession on the part of the Second Section in the drafting of the regulation had as its purpose “to take into account the relative dearth of urban dwellers belonging to the nobility.” Orlovsky, The Limits of Reform, p. 157.

2. S. Frederick Starr, Decentralization and Self-Government in Russia: 1830-1870, points out, that Kharkov province had, in 1862, supported an initiative “to turn tax affairs over to strong elective bodies, even to a local Zemskaya Duma, which would control fully its own autonomous sphere of taxation.” p. 224.


5. Donald Mackenzie Wallace, Russia, pp. 568-569.

6. As late as 1880 a senatorial commission was charged with examining zemstvo affairs to see if “an unobjectionable form [could] be found in which representatives of different zemstvos could meet to discuss specific problems of mutual interest [or if] the records and debates of zemstvo meetings [could] be published.” Orlovsky, The Limits of Reform, p. 183.
Bibliography

Primary Sources:


Skortsova, I. P., and D. I. Bagaleya, eds. Meditsinskii fakultet Kharkovskago universiteta za perviya 100 let ego sushchestvovaniya (1805-1905), Izdaniye Universiteta, 1905-1906. (The Medical Faculty of the University of Kharkov in the First 100 years of its Existence), University Press:Kharkov, 1905-1906.


Secondary Sources:


Reference:

