SOVEREIGNTY AS A CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUE
IN IMPERIAL RUSSIA, 1905 - 1915

by

JOHN FRANKLIN HUTCHINSON
B.A., University of Toronto, 1961

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department
of
SLAVONIC STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

The turbulent reign of Tsar Nicholas II has been treated by many historians, but few of them have delved deeply into the important constitutional issues which arose during the crucial years 1905-1915. Undoubtedly, the most important constitutional problem of the period was the exercise of sovereignty. Where did sovereignty reside in theory, and who exercised it in practice? Was the Tsar the sovereign power, or was sovereignty exercised on his behalf by someone else? Could the Tsar have become a constitutional monarch by limiting his own sovereign powers? Did the October Manifesto establish a constitutional monarchy, and if not, what was its real significance? These are some of the most important questions which are discussed in detail in the thesis.

The political events of the decade are examined in the light of the constitutional problems raised in 1905. The evidence presented suggests that the importance of the October Manifesto as a constitutional document has been exaggerated, and that the Fundamental Laws of 1906 were far more significant than has been generally believed. Count Witte's role in preserving the imperial prerogative powers is analysed in some detail. It is argued that the Fundamental Laws left the Emperor's legislative prerogative intact, and that the Duma therefore lost its raison d'être long before its first convocation. This loss caused the first two Dumas to challenge the constitutional system established by the Fundamental Laws. The Third Duma achieved a kind of pragmatic authority during the Stolypin regime, but after 1911 the Duma ceased to play any kind of effective role in the governing process.
Finally, it is argued that Nicholas II was incapable of exercising intelligently the extensive prerogative powers which the Emperor retained after 1905. His deficiencies of character and his reactionary political ideas made it impossible for reasonable men to serve as his ministers. In August of 1915, the worsening military situation necessitated an unequivocal decision by the Tsar as to whether he would accept once and for all the establishment of a constitutional monarchy. From the course of the negotiations between the Progressive Bloc and the cabinet, it would appear that a final transfer of the imperial legislative prerogative to the Duma was not contemplated; rather, the legislative prerogative would be exercised by a ministry of public and military leaders on behalf of the Emperor. This Nicholas could not bring himself to accept. He chose to rule rather than reign, and ruled as a virtually absolute monarch until 1917, when he suddenly found he had no choice at all but to abdicate.
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INTRODUCTION

On 17/30 October, 1905, the Emperor Nicholas II of Russia, hitherto an absolute monarch, issued a Manifesto announcing his intention to limit his own autocratic sovereignty. Henceforth, no law would be enacted without the consent of the State Duma, a body composed of the elected representatives of the people of Russia. Taken at face value, the Manifesto amounted to a promise that a constitutional monarchy would be set up in Russia, and that the Emperor would surrender to the State Duma his prerogative power as supreme legislative authority in the Empire. The purpose of this study is to ascertain the extent to which this promise was fulfilled.

For Imperial Russia to become a constitutional monarchy, it was necessary that effective limitations be placed on the absolute sovereignty of the Tsar. After the October Manifesto, the central problem in Russian constitutional history is the degree to which the Tsar shared, or refused to share, his prerogative powers with the Duma. Unless the Duma became the supreme legislative authority in the Empire, the promises contained in the Manifesto would remain unfulfilled.

What, then, is a sovereign power, and how can it be recognized? The French philosopher, Bertrand de Jouvenal, has presented an admirably clear and concise definition:

The distinguishing characteristics of a Power which is sovereign are--its possession of a legislative authority, its capacity to alter as it pleases its subjects' rules of behaviour, while recasting at its own convenience the rules which determine its own, and, while it legislates for others, to be itself above the laws, *legibus solutus*, absolute.
Under this definition, it will be obvious that the Emperor was the sovereign power in Russia before 1905. It is argued in this study that it is equally obvious that he remained the sovereign power after 1905. True, he announced his intention to yield the supreme legislative authority to the State Duma, but this transfer of authority never took place. The Fundamental Laws of 1906 reaffirmed the sovereign power of the Emperor, and he remained the supreme legislative authority until 1917.

But the struggle to limit the sovereignty of the Emperor did not end in 1906. The First Duma demanded not only the transfer of supreme legislative authority, but also the establishment of parliamentary government, including a ministry responsible to the Duma. The Second Duma made the same demands. The Third Duma, sobered by the fate of its predecessors, avoided a direct confrontation with the Emperor over the issue of legislative authority, but by subtle and quiet methods, it was able to establish certain powers for itself within a severely limited sphere. The Fourth Duma also avoided a battle over the formal legislative authority, but it attempted to make a practical limitation on the Tsar's authority by winning his approval for a 'ministry of confidence', (a ministry made up of men who enjoyed public confidence, not a ministry responsible to the Duma). Thus the period began with attempts to place formal, written limitations on the sovereign power of the Emperor, and ended with attempts to place informal, pragmatic limitations on this power. The question of sovereignty is therefore the central issue.

The text of the thesis has been organized chronologically chiefly because each new attempt to limit the sovereignty of the Emperor rested
on the experience of a previous failure. The opening chapter describes the sovereign powers and prerogatives of the Emperor as they existed before 1905. The circumstances which led up to the October Manifesto and its significance as a constitutional document are analysed in Chapter II. The Fundamental Laws of 1906 are discussed in a third chapter, and the interpretation offered is that they failed to make any substantial change in the sovereign powers of the Emperor. The next three chapters are concerned with the activities of the State Dumas from 1906 until the death of Stolypin, Nicholas II's most powerful minister. Chapter VII analyses the reassertion of personal autocratic sovereignty after 1911, and the political ideas of Nicholas II as they emerged at this time. The final chapter is devoted to the constitutional crisis of 1915, the last attempt to limit the Emperor's sovereignty before the Revolution in 1917.

It is true that there is a wealth of literature on this period of Russian history, but very few historians have paid sufficient attention to the constitutional problems involved. Sir Bernard Pares, English champion of the Anglophile Kadets, saw this period as a gallant attempt to set up a parliament on the English model in Russia. While his historical scholarship is impeccable, Sir Bernard too often saw problems through Kadet eyes, and occasionally his emphasis was misplaced. In the opinion of this writer, he gives too much attention to the 'grand design' of the October Manifesto, and not enough to the harsh realities of the Fundamental Laws of 1906. A more recent author, Richard Charques, has given a more balanced view of the period, but in his general account the finer constitutional
points are justifiably omitted. Increased attention to these problems is
to be noted in the work of Alfred Levin and S. G. Levitsky, and one looks
forward to further studies which will amplify their conclusions.

At a time when many countries all over the world are attempting
to establish constitutional systems of government, it is of the utmost
importance that historians should devote their attention to earlier
examples of this same process. Imperial Russia provides an excellent
example of a country with no constitutional tradition attempting to
establish limited monarchy on the European model. The ultimate failure
of these attempts makes their investigation all the more important as it
emphasizes the role which personalities and emotions can play in these
matters. This is not to say that we learn from the past, but rather that
the historian must interpret history for his own generation. The problem
of sovereignty and its limitation is indeed one of the basic issues facing
this generation.

\footnote{Power, the Natural History of Its Growth, tr. by J. F. Huntingdon,
London, 1947.}
CHAPTER I

THE AUTOCRATIC TRADITION

Autocratic power—of all powers the most dangerous, for it causes the fate of millions of men to hang upon one man's grandeur of mind and soul.

--Prince Yashchvil to the Emperor Alexander I, 1801.

Autocratic power inspires fear and anxiety in any country because the sovereign powers of an autocrat are, by definition, unlimited. The awful reality of autocratic power is that the state is entirely personified in the Autocrat. There is no distinction which can be made between the law of the state and the personal will of the Autocrat. In Imperial Russia, the law was, quite simply, the will of the Emperor. Thus, "...law in Russia did not serve as a middle term between the Tsar and the people, but, identified with the person of the Tsar, served to emphasize the identity of the ruler and the state." The Emperor was the law, and, at the same time, was above the law. He was the perfect embodiment of sovereign power. Furthermore, as the earthly protector of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Emperor wielded a power which was infused with divine authority. As Nicholas I proclaimed in his Fundamental Laws:

The Tsar of all the Russias is an autocratic and absolute monarch. God himself commands us to obey the Tsar's supreme authority, not from fear alone, but as a point of conscience.

Since the Emperor was the fountainhead of power, all the political and judicial institutions of the Empire could only be manifestations of his sovereign power. From a constitutional point of view, they were merely agencies or extensions of the personal will of the autocrat.
All the ministers, for example, were appointed by the Emperor and held office at his pleasure. Since each ministry acted independently of the others, its importance depended in large measure on the degree of royal favour which the minister enjoyed at any given moment. There was, of course, continual vying for royal favour, the most notable instance of which in Nicholas II's reign was the rivalry between Plehve and Witte.

The ministers sometimes met together with the Imperial and State secretaries, and without the Tsar, as the Committee of Ministers (Komitet Ministrov). This was not a cabinet, nor was its chairman a Prime Minister. He simply presided over the meetings, which were held from time to time "...to discuss measures within their competence and to co-ordinate them in the interests of the state before presenting them for the sanction of the Emperor." This Committee was abolished in 1906.

The Council of Ministers (Sovet Ministrov) was a more formal body, chaired by the Tsar and meeting only at his command. It consisted of the Ministers, high-ranking state officials (e.g. the Procurator-General of the Holy Synod), and two members appointed by the Emperor. The Council, fairly obviously, discussed state business which required the presence of the Tsar. It was this body which was reorganized as a "cabinet" after the Revolution of 1905.

The Council of State advised the Emperor in the exercise of his legislative prerogative. It consisted of a Chairman and an unlimited number of members appointed by the Emperor. The Tsar reserved the right to announce which members would be active during any one year, so that less than half the members usually attended its general sessions. To the Council
were attached four departments which prepared the measures for discussion. They were: Legislation; Civil and Ecclesiastical Affairs; State Economy; Industry, Science and Commerce. Each department met separately, and communicated its projects to the full Council in general session.

The Council discussed the budget and state expenditures. It examined projects of legislation, approving or rejecting them, but not modifying them. Rejected proposals were returned to the department concerned with suggestions for improvements. As the Ministers were ex-officio members, the debates of the Council revolved around them, and the members usually voted for the Minister whose argument they found most convincing.

The work of the Council was hampered by the age and limited knowledge of its members, most of whom were former governors, ministers, and ambassadors, and who consequently understood only one area of state activity. A few of the younger senators did most of its actual work. Men with expert knowledge could be summoned before the Council, but they rarely gave testimony because the Minister concerned was unwilling to admit his ignorance of the subject, and preferred to defend the proposal himself.

Furthermore, the Council was a purely advisory body and had no legislative initiative, so that "...in effect the Council was really nothing but a court of conciliation for quarreling ministers and government offices in general". After the rebuff which the Councillors received from the Tsar at their jubilee celebration in 1901, most of them lost their enthusiasm and steered away from raising basic political problems, feeling that they no longer enjoyed the confidence of the Supreme Power.
The highest court in the Empire, the Senate, was also the tool of the Emperor. It had neither legislative nor executive initiative, and existed solely in order to register and promulgate laws made by the Emperor. If the latter announced a decision which ran contrary to the Fundamental Laws, the Senate was powerless to declare the new measure unconstitutional. The law of the Empire was, once again, the most recent manifestation of the will of the Autocrat.

It is clear that none of the institutions of the Imperial government was more than an extension of the autocracy. Indeed, the governing class never entertained the suggestion that the Supreme Power might be shared with some other body in the state. Some historians have maintained that M. M. Speransky's Plan of 1809 amounted to the introduction of a constitutional form of government, but his most recent biographer, in a thoughtful and perceptive study, has shown that this Plan left the autocratic power intact. In fact, Speransky's proposed Duma was little more than a revised Zemskii Sobor, having no power of legislative initiative and existing as a purely advisory body.

The prejudice against constitutional monarchy was dogma to the Russian ruling class in the nineteenth century. The Marquis de Custine, who visited Russia in 1839, reports a conversation with Tsar Nicholas I, wherein the Tsar stated bluntly,

I can understand the republic--it is an open and sincere government, or at least it can be; I can understand the absolute monarchy, since I am the head of such a government; but I cannot comprehend the representative monarchy--it is a government of lies, of fraud and corruption, and I would withdraw as far as China rather than ever adopt it.
This attitude was shared by Alexander III, who hastily removed the supposedly liberal Count Loris-Melikov, whom he had inherited from his father's reign.

The prejudice against constitutional monarchy was shared by the tutor of the last two Tsars, K. P. Pobedonostsev, who later became Procurator-General of the Holy Synod. The views of Pobedonostsev permeated the Russian court during the two decades prior to 1905, and it is therefore worthwhile to examine his theories, as they provide an insight into the mind of Nicholas II.

Neither original nor wholly consistent, Pobedonostsev's philosophy is nonetheless striking for its fanaticism and intolerance. He was a fervent champion of autocracy, who opposed even an advisory Zemskii Sobor as an infringement on the royal prerogative. On the other hand, he wished the actual executive functions of government to be discharged by a capable and enlightened bureaucracy. "His autocrat was in effect a figurehead... he sought to replace the aristocracy or nobility with a group of middle-class executive managers or efficiency experts." He was bitterly opposed to the traditional bureaucracy, which he regarded as a collection of useless lackies, and his advice to Alexander III was "cherchez des capables".

Everything he wrote was an attack on the liberal constitutionalism of nineteenth-century Europe. Arbitrary power, he believed, could never be replaced by the authority of law. Such a hope is a "vain fancy", resulting in "violence worse than that which went before".
In a democracy, political freedom becomes a fiction maintained on paper by the paragraphs and phrases of the constitution; the principles of monarchical power disappear; the Liberal Democracy triumphs...such conditions inevitably lead to anarchy, from which society can be saved alone by dictatorship—that is, by the rehabilitation of autocracy in the government of the world.¹¹

Like many Russians, not all of whom were as reactionary as he, Pobedonostsev believed that "the greatest evil of constitutional government lies in the formation of ministries on parliamentary or party principles."¹² Visitors to Russia late in the century report that many people firmly believed that, when and if they were granted a parliament, there would be no parties formed, because of the inherent unity of the Russian people.

The cornerstone of Pobedonostsev's thought was Russian Orthodoxy. The Church alone was good and true, while man was debased and evil. Only the Church, he believed, was fit to guide the people. Democracy, the popular press, and trial by jury were all aspects of the demagogy of evil mankind. The inconsistency here is obvious, and has been pithily stated by T. G. Masaryk: "Vox populi vox dei when populus acknowledges the Orthodox faith; but vox populi vox diaboli when populus demands a parliament and the suffrage."¹³

It must be said in justice to Pobedonostsev that his low opinion of representative government was not without some foundation in fact. Could one expect fin-de-siècle French or Austrian parliaments to draw the praise of a foreign observer? Contemporary events seemed to reinforce Pobedonostsev's belief that, "the extension of the representative principle is accompanied by an abasement of political ideas and the vulgarisation of opinions in the mass of the electors."
Nicholas II wholeheartedly accepted Pobedonostsev's condemnation of parliaments and his praise of autocratic power. The Tsar was, however, a man of little education and mediocre intellectual power. He himself could not cope with the affairs of state, and he resented anyone who was his intellectual superior. Therefore he discarded a most vital part of Pobedonostsev's philosophy—the necessity for the autocrat to rely on a capable and enlightened bureaucracy. To Nicholas, loyalty was a more important quality than ability. Jealous of his most capable minister, Stolypin, Nicholas was only too glad to replace him with such nonentities as Kokovtsov and Goremykin. It was this weakness in the Tsar's character which was his own undoing. He retained the ideology of autocracy, but he failed to establish it on a sound footing. He worshipped the superstructure of his power, but he ignored its base. Thus when war came in 1914, Tsarskoe Selo proved itself to be not a bastion of autocracy but a house of cards.

It is ironic that Pobedonostsev might have been describing the reign of his own pupil when he wrote that

the first necessity of power is faith in itself and its mission. Happy is power when this faith is combined with a recognition of duty and moral responsibility! Unhappy is it when it lacks this consciousness and leans upon itself alone! Then begins the decay which leads to loss of faith and to disintegration and destruction.
FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER I


9 *Ibid.*, p. 120.


CHAPTER II

THE REVOLUTION OF 1905

Like Hamlet, Nicholas II was tormented by his father's ghost. Alexander III had been a powerful monarch, as formidable in character as he was in appearance. For fourteen years he had been to the Russian Empire what Gibraltar had been to the British—the symbol of strength and endurance. When he died, he left behind an image which was to cast a dark shadow over the reign of his vacillating and weak-willed successor. His son was, however, perceptive enough to appreciate the impact of his father's reign, and he tried, insofar as he was able, to emulate the policies of the last great autocrat.

Alexander III was no liberal, and his son strove to maintain the ideal of a powerful autocracy. Yet the autocracy was to be tempered with justice, for his father, despite his intolerance of liberalism, had been called 'peacemaker' by the people. Nicholas had no wish to play the despot, and he firmly believed in benevolent rule. He would do nothing, however, to subvert the power which he had inherited. It was a sacred thing, and he believed it his solemn duty to bequeath that power intact to his successor. For these reasons, therefore, the subject of constitutional reform was taboo at the court of Nicholas II for the first decade of his reign.

By 1904, the political situation had worsened to such an extent that the Emperor was forced to allow some discussion of the constitutional
question. Two Ministers of the Interior, D. S. Sipiagin and V. K. Plehve, had been assassinated by revolutionary terrorists. If something were not done to pacify the country, the offices of public administration could not be filled. No one wished to present himself as a target for terrorist bombs.

With these thoughts in mind, Nicholas appointed as Plehve's successor Prince P. D. Sviatopolk-Mirsky, a man of vaguely liberal sentiments. Mirsky's first act was to announce that the government would henceforth base its activities on "an attitude of sincere trust in public and class institutions and in the people." The new Minister soon received replies from the public institutions. The zemstvo assemblies and municipal dumas expressed their support for his policies, provided that the government's efforts would be directed toward the establishment of some form of representative government—a 'regime of equity', as they called it. Their ideas were clarified at a Congress of zemstvo and public men held in St. Petersburg in November, 1904. A resolution was adopted calling for public participation in the framing of laws and the discussion of the annual budget. It was further suggested that a means should be devised whereby the public could scrutinize the legality of the actions of government administrators.

Here, then, was the basis for what might have been a settlement of the constitutional question. The inclusion of elected representatives of the zemstvo and municipal organizations in a reformed State Council would have pacified the liberal nobility and most of the public men. It would not for the moment have satisfied the more radical zemstvo leaders, but if
it were presented as the basis for a gradual broadening of the political structure, even they could not have opposed the substance of such a plan. A few weeks later, the Ministers assembled for a conference with the Tsar at Tsarkoe Selo. The zemstvo resolution was embodied in a report given by Prince Mirsky on the need for a reform of the State Council. The inclusion of elected representatives had the support of most of the Ministers, but the intractable opposition of the Tsar proved decisive. Nicholas would agree to the presence of public men only if they were 'elected' by the government. S. Y. Witte, Chairman of the Committee of Ministers, saw that the situation was hopeless, and abandoned attempts to change the Tsar's mind. The results of the conference were published in the Decree of December 12, 1904. Its various clauses called for the restoration of public order, the extension of freedom of speech, religious toleration, and local self-government, the ending of discrimination against national minorities, and the abolition of the extraordinary judicial powers of the Land Captains.

In theory, the Decree was a step forward, even though it rejected the demands of the public men. Effectively enforced, it could have alleviated much hardship, and won some much-needed support for the government. In practice, however, the liberal measures of the Decree were a dead letter from the beginning. The Tsar, still under the influence of K. P. Pobedonostsev in these matters, refused to sanction any concessions to the aspirations of nationalists and dissenters. He was particularly intransigent on the subject of concessions to the Jews, and was to remain so to his dying day.
Despite the Tsar's obvious opposition, Witte did not curtail his efforts to put at least some of the ideals of the Decree into practice. Witte was by no means a constitutionalist, but he had conceived a grand scheme for transforming the loose, sprawling Romanov Empire into a great modern state. A financial genius, he saw himself as the loyal servant of a powerful, absolute monarch, a sort of Russian Richelieu. Unfortunately for him, Nicholas was neither as formidable nor as intelligent as Alexander III, who had been Witte's ideal of enlightened absolutism. Therefore it was necessary to play the opportunist, in order to strengthen his position, and Witte was ready to do just that. In the words of V. I. Gurko, who knew him well, he became "a veritable virtuoso in intrigue." Unfortunately for him, he was not always successful.

The Tsar was not so stupid that he did not realize the danger of Witte's burning ambition to his own position in the state. He therefore took the unusual step of relinquishing the Chairmanship of the Council of Ministers, and appointed Count D. N. Solsky, President of the State Council, to act in his place. He did this not because he wanted to bolster Count Solsky's position, but because he wanted to diminish the power of the much too energetic Witte.

Before the Council could meet with its new Chairman, the Empire was shaken by 'Bloody Sunday', January 9, 1905. The country was aghast at the news of this senseless slaughter of innocent people. A scapegoat had to be found quickly, and within a week Prince Mirsky was dismissed from the Interior. His successor, A. G. Bulygin, was a bureaucratic nonentity. The real power in the capital was given to D. F. Trepov, who was appointed Governor-General of St. Petersburg. Trepov was a notorious reactionary, and his increasing power pleased no one except the Tsar, who thought very highly of him.
When the Solsky conference finally met, the question of public participation in legislation was immediately raised. The Tsar agreed to the presentation of a draft proposal for reform, and empowered Bulygin to attract most deserving persons, vested with public confidence and elected by the people, to undertake the preliminary examination and consideration of legislative projects.

It seemed that, despite the appointment of Trepov, the Tsar was prepared to authorize a measure of constitutional reform. One can imagine the surprise of the members of the conference, therefore, when on February 18 a Manifesto was published which strongly reasserted the autocratic principle. It read, in part,

> Let all Russians stand firm around Our throne, true to the traditions of Our past...and support the autocracy for the good of all Our faithful subjects.\(^4\)

Witte, unable to reconcile the seeming inconsistency of Nicholas' behaviour, suggests that Pobedonostsev and the Empress were behind this piece of trickery.\(^5\) However, Gurko is probably closer to the truth in his judgment that "...in the Tsar's mind, the establishment of an advisory elected body would not lead, and was not supposed to lead, to any infringement of the autocratic principle."\(^6\) Nicholas' conduct in later years clearly showed that he did not believe that even an elected Duma with legislative powers should lead to any infringement of his royal prerogatives.

In any event, the result of the Manifesto was to unify the Ministers solidly behind the proposal for the establishment of an advisory Duma, consisting of representatives elected chiefly by the peasantry. Kryzhanovsky, an official in the Ministry of the Interior, had the audacity to suggest that, although the peasants were the most conservative element
of the populace, they were also the stupidest, and the most incapable of dealing with questions of government. Despite the obvious element of truth in this criticism, no changes were made in the draft, since the Ministers were anxious to demonstrate their unanimous opposition to the 'autocratic manifesto'. Thus the Bulygin project was unanimously endorsed and was passed on to the Emperor, who could now either disregard or accept the advice of his ministers.

Meanwhile, the question of the electoral franchise was causing a rift in the zemstvo ranks. In February, the Congress had passed a resolution favouring the so-called 'Four-Tailed Formula'—universal, direct, equal, manhood suffrage. By April, an open split had developed. The majority continued to support the earlier resolution, but a minority, who favoured the rapprochement implicit in the Bulygin proposals, voted in favour of an advisory Duma elected on the basis of the 1864 Zemstvo Election Law. This would have meant that the majority of voters would come from the peasant class. This minority of moderate liberals, already led by D. N. Shipov, were to break with the radicals after October and form the nucleus of the future 'Octobrist' party.

During the next two months, the government remained silent, neither accepting or rejecting the Bulygin proposals. As the war situation worsened every day, the articulate public increased its demands for 'a regime of equity'. The news of the disastrous battle of Tsushima reached St. Petersburg on May 15. This, coupled with the appointment of Trepov as Assistant Minister of the Interior on May 21, enraged public opinion. On
May 24, a Joint Congress of Nobility, and Zemstvo and Municipal Representatives, was held in Moscow. They sent a petition to the Tsar asking that "...persons enjoying public confidence...be summoned to share in the government." The following day, the Union of Unions Congress in St. Petersburg called for a constituent assembly elected on the basis of universal suffrage, without regard to sex, religion or nationality. Three weeks later, the Congress of Municipal Representatives denounced the Bulygin proposals and called for a decree of basic civil rights, and the freedoms of speech, press, and assembly. In July, the zemstvo-constitutionalists joined the Union of Unions, thus creating a formidable body of opposition to any further delays by the government in granting a legislative Duma.

Nicholas, undaunted by a public opinion he refused to acknowledge, finally called a conference at Peterhof. The agenda for the conference was a discussion of the Bulygin proposals. No member of the government, with the exception of Count Solsky, attended the conference. Nicholas called in at this juncture only his most faithful and most conservative advisers—Counts Ignatiev, Naryshkin, and Bobrinsky and, of course, K. P. Pobedonostsev. Several Grand Dukes also attended. The Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich, Governor-General of Moscow, was to have attended, but he had been assassinated a few weeks before by a terrorist bomb. That this formidable gathering of reactionaries should have approved the Bulygin proposals is a testament to the enormous effect which that assassination had had on Russia's ruling classes. If the Tsar's uncle were not safe from attack, then the revolutionaries could not be defied any longer.
The result of the conference was the Decree of August 6, by which the Tsar approved the establishment of a consultative Duma, to be elected chiefly by the peasantry. It was empowered to discuss all laws and the budget, although the government did not bind itself even to acknowledge the advice of the Duma. Members were to enjoy parliamentary immunity during sessions of the Duma. Most important of all, the electoral law could not be changed without the consent of the Duma.

Count Witte has levelled scathing criticism at the Decree of August 6. Because the Duma was to have "...all the prerogatives of a parliament except the chief one," he calls the whole affair "...a typical invention of our bureaucratic eunuchs." He is, of course, anxious to have his readers believe that he had no part in drawing up the plans, so that he may appear as the great liberal who in October opened a new era for Russia, after the efforts of the incompetent bureaucrats had proved such a miserable failure. We are already acquainted with Witte's chameleon-like politics, and it is no surprise to find that he was, in fact, a party to these discussions. Count Kokovtsov provides testimony that during the entire discussion of the Bulygin project in Count Solsky's conference, Witte, as Chairman of the Ministers' Committee, took the most active part. He never once suggested that the advisory character of the Duma would satisfy no one. Witte's attempt to dissociate himself from the infamous Bulygin Duma must be regarded as part of the liberal pose which he struck when it suited his ambitions.

The Bulygin Duma never met. A sop to the moderates, it failed to satisfy a much larger group who insisted on a legislative, not a
consultative body. A much more important aspect of the work of the Solsky Conference was the introduction into Russia of the cabinet principle of government. Some Ministers, among them Witte, believed that although the Tsar would not grant a 'ministry of confidence' (one responsible to the Duma), he would agree to a unification of the work of the various ministries. Nevertheless, there was much haggling over a nomenclature which would not offend the Supreme Power. A 'Prime Minister' might "impair the prestige of the Emperor in the eyes of the people." Count Solsky insisted that the new 'cabinet' take the name of the old Council of Ministers, and that its leader be known merely as the Chairman.

Count Witte was much more interested in how the cabinet would function, whatever its title. His view was that the future Chairman should approve all reports made by his colleagues to the Tsar, and should attend when the reports were made. He was opposed by the majority, who feared such a concentration of power in the hands of one man. Kokovtsov, the Minister of Finance, suggested that it would be sufficient if reports were approved by the Council as a whole. Witte's reply was to be a significant indication of his own course of conduct—

"Write what you will; as for myself I know what I shall do if I have the pleasure of being Chairman of the future Ministers' Council—I shall have ministers of my own selection and shall not worry about their individual reports."

Evidently Witte's statement that he would relieve the Tsar of his prerogative power of choosing ministers did not reach the ears of Nicholas, who was favourably impressed by the idea of a unified cabinet. On October 13 he telegraphed to Witte:
Until the confirmation of the Cabinet Law, I direct you to coordinate the activities of the ministers, whom I instruct to restore order everywhere. Only in the tranquil current of the Empire's life will it be possible for the Government to cooperate in constructive work with the future freely chosen representatives of my people.\(^{13}\)

Having received this message, Count Witte was convinced that he would, in fact, be appointed Chairman of the new cabinet-council, and he began to plan his strategy.

It would be impossible, he believed, to restore "the tranquil current of the Empire's life" without new concessions on the part of the government. The consultative Duma had satisfied no one, and strikes and unrest were reaching such proportions that in a few days only the army, if it remained loyal, could restore order. But Witte had no liking for military dictatorship, especially since he himself did not stand to benefit from one at this time. On the other hand, a great show of liberalism might win over the public for long enough to enable the government to restore order. A foreign loan was needed to bolster the sagging economy, and Witte was the only man with a solid reputation in international financial circles. Once the loan were negotiated, the government would be strong enough to revoke the most objectionable aspects of its earlier liberalism, and the people, already settled back into the routine of daily life, would ignore the further incitements to rebellion from the enraged liberals who had taken the government at its word. Thus the government would be in control of the country, and Count Witte would be in control of the government. In the days which followed, he was to prove himself as masterful a tactician as he was a strategist.
On October 14, the Tsar asked Witte to prepare a report on the measures necessary for a restoration of public order. The report, drawn up largely by Witte's good friend, Prince A. D. Obolensky, was presented the following day. According to the report, Nicholas had only two alternatives; to put down the rebellion by a military dictatorship, or to grant a constitution. The Tsar, realizing the gravity of the situation, asked Witte to rewrite the substance of the report as a manifesto for publication, and to present it in final form the next day. This was done, in the presence of Baron Frederichs, Minister of the Imperial Court, General Roediger, Minister of War, and the Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich. The same day, Nicholas received alternate draft manifestoes from two members of the State Council, Baron Budberg and I. L. Goremykin.

Witte had not anticipated this last development. He was greatly angered that the Tsar should pay any attention to the advice of Goremykin, whom he considered a bungler. This new turn of events infuriated him, for although he had suggested that Nicholas "consider this problem in conference with other government officials," he never for a moment intimated that the Tsar "should seek light from...such nonentities as Goremykin." Fortunately for Witte, Nicholas allowed him to accept office on his own terms. Baron Frederichs brought the three drafts to Witte that night, and he was then in a position to state categorically that he would accept the Chairmanship only if his draft manifesto were, in fact, the one to be published over the royal signature.

The Tsar must have realized that there was really no alternative to accepting Witte on his own terms. Neither Goremykin nor Budberg
inspired confidence among the ministers. It is doubtful whether either one could have formed a united cabinet. Certainly neither was in a position to secure the all-important foreign loan. The only other alternative was to appoint a military dictator, but the Grand Duke Nikolai, who was the obvious choice, would have no part of such a plan. Besides, a dictatorship was a negative solution which would at best merely postpone the crisis. The gravity of the situation was described by Nicholas in a letter to his mother written two days later:

Witte put it quite clearly to me that he would accept the presidency of the Council of Ministers only on the condition that his programme was agreed to, and his actions not interfered with. He and Alexei Obolensky drew up the Manifesto. We discussed it for two days, and in the end, invoking God's help, I signed. My dear Mama, you can't imagine what I went through before that moment; in my telegram I could not explain all the circumstances which brought me to this terrible decision...I had no one to rely on except honest Trepoff. There was no other way out than to cross oneself and give what everyone was asking for.\[15\]

For Nicholas it was indeed a 'terrible decision'. He had betrayed the heritage of absolute sovereignty which had been his to transmit intact to his successor, and in doing so he had violated the whole basis of dynastic monarchy. He obviously considered this to be the greatest sin of his life. The power of the Romanovs came from God—small wonder he should cross himself before signing the Manifesto.

But sign he did, and on the 17th Witte was called to Peterhof and was told that his draft had been accepted. Later the same day the Manifesto was published.
The constitutional provisions were these:

1. To grant the population unshakable foundations of civil freedom on the principles of real inviolability of person, freedom of conscience, speech, meetings, and associations.

2. Without stopping the appointed elections to the State Duma, to bring to participate in the Duma, as far as possible in the shortness of the time left before its summons, those classes of the population which at present are altogether deprived of electoral rights, leaving afterwards the further development of the principle of universal suffrage to the newly established Legislative Order (according to the law of August 6/19, 1905, Duma and Council of State).

3. To establish as an unchangeable principle that no law can obtain force without the consent of the State Duma, and that to the elected representatives of the people there should be guaranteed the possibility of actual participation in supervision of the legality of the actions of the authorities appointed by us.16

On the same day, October 17/30, 1905, was published a document which has become known as Witte's "Civil Liberties Decree". This decree was a modified version of a report which Witte had submitted to the Tsar. The report is of the utmost importance because it contains a list of 'principles which should guide governmental action', principles against which the record of the government in the ensuing decade must be judged. Therefore, the text is reproduced here in full:

The unrest which has seized the various classes of the Russian people cannot be looked upon as the consequence of the partial imperfections of the political and social order or as the result of the activities of organized extreme parties. The roots of that unrest lie deeper. They are in the disturbed equilibrium between the aspirations of the thinking elements and the external forms of their life. Russia has outgrown the existing regime and is striving for an order based on civic liberty. Consequently, the forms of Russia's political life must be raised to the level of the ideas which animate the moderate majority of the people.
The first task of the Government is immediately to establish the basic elements of the new order, notably personal inviolability and the freedom of the press, of conscience, of assemblage, and of association, without waiting for the legislative sanction of these measures by the Imperial Duma. The further strengthening of these foundations of the political life of the country must be effected in the regular legislative procedure, just as the work of equalizing all the Russian citizens, without distinction of religion and nationality, before the law. It goes without saying that the civic liberties granted to the people must be lawfully restricted, so as to safeguard the rights of the third persons and peace and the safety of the State.

The next task of the Government is to establish institutions and legislative principles which would harmonize with the political ideals of the majority of the Russian people and which would guarantee the inalienability of the previously granted blessings of civic liberty. The economic policy of the Government must aim at the good of the broad masses, at the same time safeguarding those property and civil rights which are recognized in all the civilized countries.

The above-outlined foundations of the Government's activity will necessitate a great deal of legislative and administrative work. A period of time is bound to elapse between the enunciation of a principle and its embodiment in legislative norms or, furthermore, the introduction of these norms into the life of the people and the practice of the Governmental agents. No Government is able at once to force a new political regime upon a vast country with a heterogeneous population of 135 million, and an intricate administration brought up on other principles and traditions. It is not sufficient for the Government to adopt the motto of civic liberty to inaugurate the new order. Alone the untiring and concerted efforts of a homogeneous Government, animated by one aim and purpose, will bring it about.

The situation demands that the Government should only use methods testifying to the sincerity and frankness of its intentions. Consequently, the Government must scrupulously refrain from interfering with the elections to the Imperial Duma, and also sincerely strive to carry out the reforms outlined in the decree of December 12, 1904. The Government must uphold the prestige of the future Duma and have confidence in
its work. So long as the Duma's decisions are not out of keeping with Russia's grandeur, the result of the age-long process of her history, the Government must not oppose them. In accordance with the letter and spirit of his Majesty's manifesto, the regulations relating to the Imperial Duma are subject to further development, in proportion as the imperfections of that institution come to light and as new demands arise. Guided by the ideas prevalent among the people, the Government must formulate these demands, constantly striving to satisfy the desires of the masses. It is very important to reconstruct the Imperial Council on the basis of the principle of elected membership, for that alone will enable the Government to establish normal relations between that institution and the Imperial Duma.

Without enumerating the other measures to be taken by the Government, I wish to state the following principles which, I believe, must guide the authorities at all stages of their activity:

1. Frankness and sincerity in the establishment of all the newly granted rights and privileges.
2. A firm tendency toward the elimination of extraordinary regulations.
3. Coordination of the activities of all the governmental agents.
4. Avoidance of measures of repression directed against acts which do not threaten either Society or the State, and
5. Firm suppression of all actions menacing Society or the State, in strict accordance with the law and in spiritual union with the moderate majority of the people.

It goes without saying that the accomplishment of the outlined tasks will only be possible with the broad and active cooperation of the public and on the condition of peace, which alone will enable the Government to apply all its forces to fruitful work. We have faith in the political tact of the Russian people. It is unthinkable that the people should desire anarchy, which, in addition to all the horrors of civil war, holds the menace of the disintegration of the very State.
These two documents, the October Manifesto and Witte's Report on Civil Liberties, represented the government's answer to the constitutional question. The granting of civil liberties and a legislative Duma was regarded as a triumph by the zemstvo-constitutionalists. The Shipov faction, in particular, was delighted and immediately took steps to found the 'Union of October 17', a body of men dedicated to the task of effecting a rapprochement with the government on the basis of the concessions contained in the Manifesto. Those to the left of the Shipov moderates reserved judgment until the crucial electoral law was published. The merchants and industrialists hoped that the electoral law would enable the bourgeoisie to predominate in the Duma. The left intelligentsia would be satisfied for the moment with a bourgeois constitutional monarchy, but only as the first step toward their ultimate goal, a democratic republic. They refused to acknowledge the real concessions which the government had made, and would not accommodate their beliefs to the new circumstances created by the Manifesto. Had they been willing to work with the government for a while, the rightists might have found that the Duma was not the horror they believed it to be, but the radical liberals, by refusing to compromise, fully justified the worst suspicions of the government.

As for the remainder of the population, they found the whole idea of 'constitutionalism' to be irrelevant to their problems. The workers were largely socialist in sympathy, and regarded even a bourgeois republic as only the beginning for the ensuing social revolution. The
peasants were not consciously either republican or monarchist, but they were convinced that the socialist solution to the land problem was the best available, and gave their support to the socialists in questions agrarian. The truth is that the peasants would support whichever group offered them the most land. They cared not a whit for constitutional forms and grand statements of civil liberties.

In retrospect, the October Manifesto satisfied only Count Witte, for whom it was a personal triumph, and the moderate liberals, who saw it as heralding a new era of peaceful government and social progress in Russia. The Tsar was deeply horrified at what he had done, and his sense of shame was not an auspicious foundation for a constitutional monarchy. Yet, despite Nicholas' trepidation, it appeared that a capable ministry could be formed, since the Shipov group provided a nucleus of popular 'public men' who would attract the support of many zemstvo workers. This was not an unpleasant prospect for the battered ship of state, but the vessel was to run aground on the rocks of Witte's ambition.
FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER II

1 Gurko, op.cit., p. 297.
2 Ibid., p. 66.
3 Ibid., p. 371.
4 Ibid., p. 369.
7 Ibid., p. 376.
8 Witte was created a Count for his services in concluding the Treaty of Portsmouth with Japan.

9 Witte, op.cit., p. 230.
11 Witte, op.cit., p. 231.
12 Kokovtsov, op.cit., pp. 67-68.
13 Witte, op.cit., p. 239.
14 Ibid., p. 317.
17 Witte, op.cit., pp. 234-236.
CHAPTER III

PREPARATIONS

From the point of view of the constitutional historian, the Manifesto of October 17/30 had one very serious defect—it failed to establish the rights and limitations of the royal prerogative. It was not to be expected, of course, that the Manifesto would be a document of the dimensions of the Grand Remonstrance or the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. The Manifesto came from above, not from below, and this fact alone determined much of what it did and did not contain. Furthermore, it was a product of the relatively primitive traditions of Russian constitutional law and political thought, and was therefore only the embryo of a 'constitution' in the Western sense. Consequently Miliukov and the Kadets were not satisfied with such a rudimentary document, and continued to agitate in favour of a full and omniconpetent constitution drawn up by a National Assembly, a suggestion which smacked of French Revolutionary politics. It is no wonder that the establishment viewed the Kadet programme with horror, and made every effort to reduce their influence in the country.

The Kadets had, however, missed the point of Western constitutionalism. The essential principle of the constitutional monarchy, whether rudimentary or advanced, is the acceptance of a division between 'king' and 'Crown'. As early as the fourteenth century, for example,
writs for the Parliament of England ordered that members come together to
discuss 'negotia regis et regni'--the business of the king and of the
kingdom. It was understood that, while the business of the king was the
exclusive prerogative of the monarch, the business of the kingdom was open
to discussion and regulation by 'the common community of the land in parlia-
ment assembled'. Once this division was accepted, England was a 'constitu-
tional' monarchy, in the sense that the monarch did not have absolute control
over both the business of the king and of the kingdom. From then on, her
constitutional history was the record of a constant battle to expand the
'negotia regni' at the expense of the 'negotia regis'.

For Russia, then, the important thing was not to establish the
'negotia regni' in its entirety straightaway, although this was the condi-
tion which Miliukov, misreading English constitutional precedents, advanced
as the necessary preliminary to Kadet participation in a government. The
most important thing was to establish the idea of a division between the
business of the king and the business of the kingdom. Unfortunately, it was
on this crucial subject that the Manifesto had absolutely nothing to say.
It should have been made clear in the Manifesto that the calling of the Duma
was the Tsar's business, while the delineation of its powers would be esta-
bled by consultation between the Tsar and his government and the elected
members when the institution had assembled. Instead, because the Manifesto
was not explicit on this point, not only the calling of the Duma but also
the delineation of its powers became the business of the Tsar and his
Ministers. The result was, of course, that all state business was assumed
to be 'negotia regis'. The Duma was not granted competence to discuss the business of the kingdom; rather, it met at the Tsar's pleasure to discuss certain aspects of the Tsar's business. In such a situation, the royal prerogative remained largely intact, since the residual power was left to the monarchy. Despite the Tsar's fear and trembling, then, he in fact lost very little when he signed the Manifesto of October 17/30.

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The six months which followed the publication of the Manifesto were taken up with preparations for the first meeting of the State Duma. In the constitutional sphere, the two most important events were the negotiations for a ministry at least partially composed of public men, and the drawing up of the Fundamental Laws. These two events bear witness to the failure of the Manifesto to define adequately the limitations of the royal prerogative. It was this weakness which was to give free rein, for a time, to the ambitions of Count Witte.

Witte's first problem after October 17/30 was to appoint a cabinet. In an effort to convince the country of his liberalism, he met first with three representatives of the Bureau of the Congresses of Zemstvo and Municipal Public Men--Prince G. E. Ivov, F. A. Golovin, and F. F. Kokoshkin. These men flatly refused to participate in any government which would not call a constitutional assembly. This was an unreasonable demand, and showed no evidence of a wish to compromise with the government. Clearly, the intention of this group was to provoke, but Witte foiled these designs by breaking off the negotiations.

He then approached some of the most prominent Octobrists, including A. I. Guchkov, D. N. Shipov, Prince S. D. Urusov, and Prince E. N. Trubetskoi.
There was a possibility that these negotiations might have succeeded, if only Witte had been able to rid himself of an earlier promise to P. N. Durnovo that the latter would be appointed Minister of the Interior. Durnovo was appointed, even though Witte changed his mind and made an attempt to persuade the Tsar not to confirm the appointment. Once the Octobrists found out that Durnovo had been given the Interior Ministry over their nominee, Urusov, they refused to join Witte's cabinet. Shipov and Guchkov pointed out, quite sensibly, that if they remained outside the cabinet, they could swell the tide of moderate sympathy, while their joining under these circumstances would have no effect at all on radical opinion.

These conversations with Witte were reported in the Octobrist organ Novoe Vremia, an incident which brought Witte a stern rebuke from the Tsar. The Prime Minister thereupon ceased his efforts to broaden the membership of the Cabinet. Nicholas could have used his prerogative to exclude Durnovo, but he chose not to, and thus Witte's planned show of liberalism had backfired. Had Witte been sincere in believing that the membership of the cabinet had to be broadened, he could have resigned over the issue. He chose, however, to remain in office, and remarked petulantly later that "further acquaintance with these men convinced me that they were not fit for the responsible ministerial posts."

Most of the month of December was occupied with conferences on the electoral law for the Duma. Kryzhanovsky, an official in the Ministry of the Interior, presented a revised version of the Bulygin electoral law which merely included new categories of electors. Another proposal was put forward
by the public men Shipov, Guchkov, and Trubetskoj. Their plan was clearly moving in the direction of universal suffrage. Witte was strongly in favour of the official government plan, but claims that Count Bobrinsky almost persuaded the Tsar to accept the Shipov plan. In the end, Nicholas voted with Witte. According to Witte, he had to use the influence of the Tsaritsa to persuade the Tsar, but the latter says that he was acting on his firm convictions when he declined to support the Shipov plan.

The acceptance of a revised version of the electoral law was a major defeat for both moderate and radical constitutionalists. The rejection by the government of universal suffrage as the ultimate goal of the electoral law was in contravention of the Manifesto, which had specifically recognized "the further development of the principle of universal suffrage." Although the Manifesto had left this work to 'the newly established legislative order', the action of the Tsar in voting for the Kryzhanovsky plan made it clear that he was already determined to prevent the development of a broadly democratic electoral law.

At this time the electoral law for the State Council was published. Half of its 196 members were elected by regions and 'interests' in this manner: the Church, six; the nobility, eighteen; science, six; economics (commerce and industry), twelve; provinces with zemstvos, thirty-four; provinces without zemstvos, sixteen; Poland, six. The elected half of the State Council was thus composed of solid property owners, both landed proprietors and businessmen. The other half of its membership was appointed by the Emperor. He could name as many members as he wished, but could
designate only 96 to sit in any one year. A list of prospective candidates was submitted by the Chairmen of the State Council and the Council of Ministers, but Kokovtsov claims that the success of the list depended on whether these two gentlemen enjoyed the Emperor's favour at the time.\textsuperscript{6a} Given this system of electing and appointing members, it was no surprise that the State Council proved itself to be an ultra-conservative body.

Meanwhile, Count Witte was making concerted efforts to preserve the royal prerogative powers. When the work of revising the Duma statute began in February, 1906, he suggested the public should not be admitted to the sessions of the Duma. His remarks about the lack of maturity of the Russian people were so biting that they called into question the rationale behind the Manifesto. In the end, the Tsar refused to sanction closed meetings of the Duma.\textsuperscript{7} Defeated on this proposal, Witte went on to suggest that in the event of a clash between the Duma and the reformed State Council, the final decision would rest with the Emperor.\textsuperscript{8} It takes little political acumen to see in this a clear attempt to preserve the autocracy intact, since clashes would have been almost unavoidable under the circumstances. Even Nicholas saw the real meaning of such a provision, and despite his love for autocracy, he had in all conscience to oppose such a flagrant violation of his Manifesto.

There is some evidence that the Emperor was rapidly becoming antagonized by Witte's tactics. As early as January 26 (1906), he wrote to the Dowager Empress that he was relying increasingly on the advice of Trepov.
he (Trepov) is absolutely indispensable to me: he is acting in a kind of secretarial capacity. He is experienced and clear and cautious in his advice. I give him Witte's bulky memoranda to read, then he reports on them, quickly and concisely. This is of course a secret to everybody but ourselves.  

Furthermore, Nicholas did not wish to trust Witte with preparing the revisions in the Duma Statute. The drawing up of new Fundamental Laws was entrusted to Count Solsky, who passed on the commission to the Imperial Secretary, Baron Uxkull-Gyllenband. Witte was enormously disappointed that the task had not been given to the Council of Ministers, where he could direct the proceedings from the beginning. As it turned out, he was shocked by the liberalism of the draft proposals, and made every effort to curtail the sphere of operations of the Duma. In addition, he abandoned his earlier position that the Laws should not be published before the Duma was convoked. He now believed that they should be promulgated as quickly as possible, lest the deputies be "drawn into dangerous and futile controversies about the extent of their rights and the nature of their relation to the Supreme Power." That such controversies would have arisen is undeniable, but it is questionable whether they would have been futile. The drawing up of some sort of working division between Tsar and Duma was fundamental to a constitutional monarchy in Russia, and it was just this aspect of Uxkull-Gyllenband's draft that Witte found so objectionable. His refusal to permit any distinction between the business of the Tsar and the business of the country showed clearly that he had neither respect for, nor understanding of the basic principle of constitutional monarchy.
The failure of the Manifesto to establish "king" and "crown" as separate but interconnected entities enabled Witte and the Tsar, each for his own reasons, to subvert the aims of the constitutional reformers by publishing the new Fundamental Laws before the Duma was convoked. In a sense, this act may be viewed as a coup d'état for the monarchy. The Emperor was concerned to retain as many as possible of his prerogative powers, so that he would not be bound by an assembly, by a ministry, or even by Witte, should a situation arise in which he felt it necessary to act on his own. Witte, on the other hand, also wanted to save the royal prerogatives, because the authority of his position derived from his enjoyment of the royal confidence. He could never hope to lead a ministry which derived its authority from the Duma; he had, therefore, every reason to see that the authority of the monarch was preserved at all costs. Despite the difference in motives, Nicholas II and Count Witte were of one mind on the subject of restricting the competence of the Duma.

It was no wonder, then, that the Fundamental Laws of 1906 were a resounding victory for the monarchy and the official classes. The Duma was forbidden to exercise any kind of control over the ministers, who were to remain responsible solely to the Emperor. The assembly was also forbidden to discuss foreign, military, or naval affairs except as they should enter into a discussion of the budget. Thirdly, the civil service was to remain under the exclusive control of the Tsar and his ministers, and no high official in the service could be prosecuted without royal consent. It might have been thought that royal control of the cabinet, foreign policy, armed
forces and the civil service would have been an adequate guarantee against
the 'encroachments' of an elected assembly. This was not the case with
Nicholas II. Many other powers were specifically reserved for the monarchy.
A brief resumé will indicate the thoroughness with which the list was drawn
up.

The Assembly was forbidden to enforce the provisions of the October
Manifesto, change the method of selecting members of the Senate, abolish
administrative exile, grant political amnesties, abolish the death penalty,
deprive the nobility of its rights, or rescind laws of the Council of
Ministers on any subject whatsoever. Article 15 left the proclamation of a
state of siege solely in the hands of the Emperor, thus giving him the power
to remove vast areas of the Empire from the jurisdiction of the government
and the courts. In matters of economics, it was forbidden to tamper with
the estates of the monarchy or of the landowners, exempt anyone from taxation,
or exercise control over the expenditures of the Ministry of the Imperial
Court. The latter provision soon became a catch-all device for all kinds
of expenses which the government did not wish to be included in the budget.
Lastly, and perhaps most damaging of all, the Duma was forbidden the right
to address the Tsar directly; such addresses had to be made through the
Minister of the Imperial Court.

The crucial problem of legislative initiative is treated in some
detail in the Fundamental Laws. According to Article 7, legislative power
is exercised by the Emperor, concurrently with the Duma and the State Council;
no law can be passed (Article 86) without the approval of the two legislative
bodies. The Emperor's right to initiate legislation is unlimited, while neither the Duma nor the State Council can revise the Fundamental Laws on their own, but must await his initiative. The Duma and State Council can only initiate propositions concerning the repeal, or the temporary suspension, of active laws and the enactment of new laws, with the exception, of course, of the Fundamental Laws (Article 107). If the Duma passed a proposition for a law, the ministry concerned would draw up the law (if it agreed with the proposition) and submit it to the Duma for approval. If the ministry did not approve the proposition, it could draw up the law as it saw fit and submit it to the Duma; in this case the Duma could only accept or reject the ministry's draft. Again, if the ministry disapproved of the Duma's proposition, it could simply 'shelve' the matter, thereby thwarting the Duma's efforts.

To be perfectly precise about the constitutional point involved, one must say that the Duma could exercise initiative in all areas not within the scope of the Fundamental Laws, but under no circumstances could the Duma itself draw up Bills and pass them on its own; it could only accept or reject Bills drawn up by the ministries at the suggestion of the Duma, the State Council, or the Emperor. Only the Emperor possessed legislative initiative in the sense that the final wording of the law always corresponded to what he had proposed. The Duma and the State Council were restricted from exercising full initiative by the ministries, who acted as agents of the Supreme Power in the drawing up of Bills.

The Ministers also possessed a restricted legislative initiative, in that they could ask the Emperor to command them to draw up a Bill, but
in this case the final decision rested with the Emperor. Thus it can be said that the Fundamental Laws guaranteed complete freedom of legislative initiative only to the Emperor, but in practice a powerful minister could enjoy this freedom so long as he remained in the favour of the Emperor.

The Fundamental Laws made quite clear the intention of the authors not to leave anything to chance. All measures of importance were defined to fall within the prerogative powers of the Tsar. Instead of granting to the Duma a general surveillance over the 'business of the kingdom', however nebulous and ill-defined, the Laws left the Duma with nothing but the crumbs from the royal table. The Duma was, in fact, almost superfluous to the system of government established by the Laws of 1906. This fact, more than anything else, probably accounts for the somewhat erratic radicalism which characterized its first meetings. Having nothing on which to concentrate their efforts, the delegates attempted to discuss everything. Had they been conceded certain prerogative powers of their own, wherein they might have taken the initiative, it is likely that their energies could have found a channel for constructive achievement.

The Fundamental Laws aroused a storm of protest among Russian liberals. With justification, they accused the government of breaking faith with those who had accepted its earlier pronouncements at face value. The new Laws went far towards prohibiting just what the Manifesto had promised, namely, that the Duma should participate "in supervision of the legality of the actions of the authorities appointed by us." Some of the more important liberals--Muromtsev, Miliukov, Hessen, and M. M. Kovalevsky--had examined a
draft of the Laws before publication, and had roundly condemned their contents. Of the many changes which they suggested, only two were accepted: the power of the Emperor to issue decrees was restricted, and the Council of Ministers was given the right to sanction all imperial orders. The first of these revisions was not obeyed in practice, and the second was meaningless from the beginning, so no real benefit came from these last-minute revisions.

The Tsar could only have been pleased at the extent to which his prerogative powers were conserved by the Fundamental Laws. For this, he owed a debt of gratitude to Witte, whose influence had been paramount in the discussions. Nonetheless, the Emperor had not forgiven Witte for consorting with those dangerous radicals, the public men. Witte was still, in his view, politically unreliable. The Tsaritsa constantly warned Nicholas that Witte was a dangerous rival to his autocratic position. When the results of the Duma elections became known in March, it was clear to Nicholas that the time for action had come. Witte could not be trusted to deal with such a radical assembly. On 20 March, 1906, the Emperor told Kokovtsov that the results of the elections "did not promise any good, and that he was aware of the constant hesitations and even contradictions in the proposals of his Chairman of the Ministers' Council..."

Meanwhile Witte, not realizing that his days were already numbered, was blithely making preparations for what he considered the triumph of his career, the securing of a substantial foreign loan. The Kadets tried to persuade the French government that the loan could not be concluded without the approval of the Duma, but they were unsuccessful in their efforts. Witte
was therefore able to present the Tsar with the promised loan, expecting by this action to be hailed as the Saviour of Russia. A few days later, he submitted his resignation and, to his bitter disappointment, it was accepted. The truth was that once the loan had been completed and the monarchy had been saved from the potential disaster of 1905, Witte was of no further use to the Tsar.

It is true that Witte had proffered his resignation several times before. One suspects that these events were attempts to destroy the power of Nicholas' personal advisers, particularly Trepov. Witte found it exasperating that Nicholas should prefer the advice of Trepov and Durnovo to his own, and it is probable that he saw the success of the loan as a device by which he might force Trepov's dismissal from his position as Court Commandant. Nicholas, however, had other plans, plans in which there was no room for the ambitious Count, and the latter thus found himself summarily dismissed.

At first sight, the dismissal of Witte appears to have been an act of supreme ingratitude on the Tsar's part. More than anyone else, Witte was responsible for the preservation of the royal prerogatives throughout the trying months of 1905-6. Yet it is clear now, as it must have been to Nicholas then, that all these efforts were really directed toward maintaining the source of power on which Witte depended for his position. By maintaining the Tsar's powers, he also maintained the powers of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers. It did not seem to trouble Witte that the Fundamental Laws were quite inconsistent with the spirit of the October Manifesto. He went so far
as to claim, in his Memoirs, that only he, of all the Prime Ministers of the Duma period, had acted in accordance with the constitution:

Russia was unable to reap the benefits of my triumph over our great difficulties, for, unfortunately, the ruling group was not enlightened and generous enough honestly to adhere to the principles announced in the constitutional manifesto of October 17, 1905. 15

The truth is that Witte himself destroyed those principles by formulating the Fundamental Laws in such a way as to reduce the Duma to impotency. He cleverly framed the Manifesto so that it appeared to grant a legitimate sovereignty to the Duma, while in fact it did nothing of the kind. Everything of importance was retained among the prerogative powers. Even such a reactionary as Goremykin saw that Witte's 'constitution' was only "a parody on Western European parliamentarism." 16
FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER III

1. This is the interpretation of a well-known school of English constitutional historians, including Bishop Stubbs, T. F. Tout, and, more recently, B. Wilkinson.


3. N. to M. F., 27 October 1905, p. 191.


5. A petty quarrel took place over the responsibility for this proposal. Witte (p. 343) claims that they arrogantly announced that they were drawing up a proposal, while Shipov maintains that they did so at Witte's request. (Gurko, p. 709). Witte probably wished to cast further aspersions on their abilities in order to hid his own responsibility for what happened.

6. N. to M. F., 8 December 1905, p. 201.


7. Ibid., p. 105.

8. Ibid., p. 106.


10. Witte, op.cit., p. 349.


14. Nicholas to Witte, 16 April 1906; Witte, op.cit., p. 361.

15. Ibid., p. 310.

CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST DUMA

No one expected the First Duma to be a peaceful gathering. All those concerned understood that a battle was about to begin, the outcome of which would decide who would be the effective sovereign in Russia. On one side were the zemstvo constitutionalists, the public men, the moderate liberals, the constitutional democrats, and the radicals. All these groups, with the exception of the radicals, were firm believers in the principle of constitutional monarchy. To them, the issue was not that of limiting the sovereign power of the autocrat--Nicholas II had, in theory, done that himself by signing the October Manifesto--but of arranging for a real sharing of power whereby this limitation would have meaning in practice. Thanks to the efforts of Count Witte, the principle of limited monarchy which was implicit in the October Manifesto had been largely negated by the Fundamental Laws. The task of the First Duma, as seen by the constitutional monarchists, was to point out the contradiction between the Manifesto and the Fundamental Laws, and thereby to seek for a rapprochement with the government which would ensure to the Duma an effective sovereignty within the new constitutional structure.

The opposing forces in this approaching battle were composed of the Tsar, the court, the ministers, and the government bureaucracy. In their eyes, the constitutionalists were little better than revolutionaries, whose ultimate aims were the seizure of power and the abolition of private property.
It was their belief that the demands for modification of the Fundamental Laws and the inclusion of Duma leaders in the cabinet were only the beginnings of an organized conspiracy to destroy the Imperial Government. They would have abolished the Duma, had they not feared the consequences of such an act; therefore, they confined themselves to the vague generalization that they were "...quite prepared to meet all the desires of the representatives of the people in the direction of improving our legislation and enforcing the principle of lawfulness in the work of state administration."¹ Fine words, as far as they went, but in cases of conflict between the government and the representatives of the people, the principle of lawfulness was always interpreted to favour the government's case.

The Emperor and his Court were even more suspicious of the Duma than were the members of the government. The Emperor's great problem was to reconcile the existence of the Duma with his rather vague but stubbornly held concept of personal sovereignty. Immediately after agreeing to the Manifesto, he experienced pangs of conscience at having signed away the heritage of his ancestors. A few weeks later, however, he had rationalized the situation. He began to believe that he was sacrificing himself in order to save the throne for his descendents. He told Witte on 6 December, 1905:

I know perfectly well that I am agreeing to the establishment of an institution which will be my enemy. Yet I am thinking of the future; I am thinking of my son. I wish to create a new centre of authority in the country to insure the strength of the country at large.²

Once the country had been pacified, his views began to change. He was particularly appalled by the results of the elections to the First Duma.
In a letter to Witte dated 16 April, 1906, the purpose of which was to accept the Count's resignation, the Emperor deplored

the excessive liberalism of the franchise law of December 11th,
the inactivity of the population, and the complete non-interference with the election campaign on the part of the authorities, which is never practiced in other countries.3

The Emperor had taken stock of the opposing forces, and had found them to be stronger than he had expected. It was clear already that he would not allow another election to be conducted without either a change in the electoral law or interference by the government in the electoral procedure.

Nicholas was preparing to defend himself from the frontal assault which he expected the Duma to launch on the monarchy. His choice of Witte's successor was most important, for the man who held the premiership would have to defend the government's policy in the Duma. He would be Russia's first 'constitutional' Prime Minister, and on his shoulders would be much of the responsibility for the success or failure of the Duma experiment. What was needed was a capable, imaginative administrator who was also a practiced diplomat, willing to work tirelessly for the well-being of the Empire, disregarding narrow and sectional interests for the good of the whole. The post required, in fact, a statesman of the calibre of Prince Menshikov or Count Speransky. Instead, the Tsar's choice fell on I. L. Goremykin, an unimaginative bureaucrat, half senile, and exceptional only for the obstinacy with which he clung to his outmoded ideas. Witte had only boundless contempt for his successor, who "had nothing except his huge whiskers to distinguish him from thousands of bureaucratic mediocrities."4 Kokovtsov had no better opinion of
Goremykin, and bluntly told the Emperor that he was known for his indifference and narrow-minded conservatism. He was somewhat astonished when the Tsar admitted that there might be some truth to what he said. But Nicholas went on to point out that Goremykin's indifference was, in his opinion, his best and most attractive quality.

What is important to me [said the Emperor] is that Goremykin will not act behind my back, making concessions and agreements to damage my authority. I can be perfectly sure that I shall not be given any surprises or made to face any faits accomplis, as was the case with the electoral laws. And that was not the only case.

Distrust of Witte's tactics was not the only reason why the Tsar forced this onerous office on an old man who had no desire to accept it, and did so only out of loyalty to his sovereign. Witte has discerned the backstairs influence of Trepov in this appointment. While there is no conclusive evidence on the subject, it seems probable that, in his jubilation at eliminating Witte, Trepov would only support the candidacy of someone who would never be capable of Witte's ambition. Goremykin certainly fitted these qualifications. Furthermore, Goremykin's conservative views were in tune with those of the Emperor and his closest advisers. For example, during the discussions in February of the law on the security of property, Goremykin stated his belief that the Duma should be forbidden to discuss the confiscation of private estates, and should be dissolved if it disobeyed its instructions. Therefore, on the eve of the convocation of the Duma, with the liberal papers (Russkaya Vedomosti, Russkoe Slovo and Rech') demanding a Duma ministry, Nicholas sought out the most trustworthy representative of
that bureaucracy which had faithfully served his autocratic father, and appointed him Prime Minister of the new 'constitutional' Russia:

In more peaceful times, Goremykin might have been the Walpole of Russian history, with all the virtues and defects of a good bureaucratic administrator. Unfortunately for him, there were no sleeping dogs to let lie in the Russia of 1906. Goremykin's attitude only infuriated the Duma deputies. It could not be said, in all honesty, that he welcomed even suggestions for improving legislation from the representatives of the people, although this was the announced policy of the government. V. I. Gurko has attempted to illustrate Goremykin's attitude by the apocryphal statement, "You Duma members may consider the new legislative projects; if you reject them, the old ones will do." This is somewhat of a distortion, as the government supplied the Duma not with 'legislative projects' as commonly understood, but with proposals of the utmost triviality. Goremykin's chief concern was that the government be "strong and skillful enough to retain its authority in the midst of all this incredible nonsense."

It was, then, partially due to Goremykin's attitude of indifference that the government and the First Duma were soon at loggerheads. The failure of the government to put before the Duma some worthwhile legislative projects was much resented by the deputies, and led them to state their position somewhat too arrogantly for their own good. In a rather peremptory fashion, they dispatched to the Tsar a list of their demands. Although all these demands were beyond the competence of the Duma as established in the Fundamental Laws, two in particular were direct challenges to the whole concept of
sovereignty on which the Laws had been based. The Duma deputies demanded that the ministry be responsible to the elected representatives of the people and that the State Council be abolished.

From the point of view of the Tsar and his ministers, the Duma might as well have asked for the moon. It was inconceivable, not to say preposterous, that the Emperor should voluntarily sign away his authority to a motley assembly of anglophile intellectuals, wild-eyed revolutionaries, and illiterate peasants. Even if he had believed them to be capable of good government, his religious belief that the Emperor held a commission from God to rule His people would have prevented him from violating his coronation oath. It was within the power of the autocrat to impose a voluntary limitation on his own sovereignty, but it was out of the question that he should agree voluntarily to 'reign but not rule'. There was, to be sure, some room for compromise in that the Emperor could appoint anyone he chose to the ministry, be he bureaucrat, public man, or Duma deputy; however, the sole responsibility of the minister to the Emperor was definitely not negotiable.

The demand that the State Council be abolished was also inadmissible. The government was scarcely more convinced of the utility of the State Council than of the Duma. The considerable revision which the Fundamental Laws had made in the composition and duties of the State Council meant that it was really, like the Duma, in its infancy. It was too early yet to tell whether the reforms had been effective or not. In theory, the State Council had been conceived as a buffer institution between the Imperial Power and the Duma. Two other possible roles were, however, more likely: either it would lapse
into the staid conservatism generally characteristic of an upper house, or it would become deadlocked within itself, with the elected members supporting the Duma and the appointed members supporting the government. Nevertheless, there was a possibility that the State Council might become an effective part of the constitutional structure, and certainly it was not sensible to abolish it before it had an opportunity to show what it could do. If it became deadlocked, here again there was room for compromise on the number of elected representatives to be included in it. The Duma had been entirely too brusque and presumptuous in raising the issue of sovereignty in absolute terms so early in the day.

The result of such impetuous action was that the Duma received a stern rebuke from the government. The Tsar at first considered whether he himself would appear in the Duma to answer the Address, but he was warned by Kokovtsov that such an action.

...would establish a dangerous precedent, that it would bring him into direct conflict with the popular assembly, whereas his role was naturally that of supreme arbiter in conflicts between his government, responsible to himself alone, and the representatives of the people.13

It might be thought that Kokovtsov's theory would cast the Tsar in the role that was originally to have been that of the State Council. This is not so; there could be no arbitration in the conflict which Kokovtsov describes. The only road open to the Tsar would be to support the government against the Duma, for if he once were to decide in favour of the Duma, then a Duma ministry would be the logical outcome of his actions. Thus, rather than involve the
Tsar, the government decided to "stand between the supreme power and the people's representatives and answer the Duma's address in its own name." On May 13, Goremykin read the government's answer to the Duma. It was a stern lecture he delivered, dismissing every demand the Duma had made as "inadmissible". A riotous scene ensured, during which the Kadet deputy Nabokov uttered the cry which was to be the permanent and only answer of his party to all questions of sovereignty during the next decade, "Let the executive power bow before the legislative!" The Duma's reply was expressed in a resolution which called on the government to resign in favour of a Duma ministry. Here again, the Kadet faction was so concerned with following the 'correct' English precedents that it forgot that the Tsar had the power to refuse the resignations of the government even if they were offered. It would have been more realistic, although no more profitable, if they had called on the Tsar directly to invite the present government to resign.

In the ensuing deadlock, it was, significantly, the Tsar who first moved toward a compromise solution. The new Minister of the Interior, P. A. Stolypin was authorized to propose a coalition ministry, which was to include S. A. Muromtsev, D. N. Shipov, V. D. Kuzmin-Karavaev, and P. N. Miliukov, and was to be chaired by P. A. Stolypin. This proposal was defeated by Miliukov, who refused to hear of anything but a Kadet ministry. The Tsar then suggested a reforming ministry, under the leadership of D. N. Shipov, which would dissolve the Duma, introduce proposals for reform and present them to a newly-elected Duma. The Shipov ministry was also vetoed by Miliukov.
Meanwhile, in the Duma, the Kadets had got wind of the government's agrarian proposals, which were to be based on the denial of compulsory alienation of land. With the support of the Kadet President of the Duma, S. A. Muromtsev, who aided and abetted this unconstitutional procedure, the Kadets carried an appeal to the country for a civil disobedience campaign which was to last until the Duma brought in its own agrarian proposals. This act served as the excuse for dissolution of the First Duma, which took effect on 9 July, 1906.

The real reason for dissolution was the deadlock which made any constructive work impossible. Miliukov had been intractable in the face of sincere attempts to arrive at a compromise on the part of the government. He certainly overestimated his own strength, and underestimated the resourcefulness of the government, particularly of Stolypin. Even in voting the appeal to the country, the Kadets did not have an absolute majority in the Duma. Miliukov's belief that only the Kadet party had the confidence of the Duma and of the country is certainly open to question. Muromtsev seriously compromised his party's constant sermonizing about constitutionalism by his role in these extraordinary proceedings. Furthermore, the lack of public outcry after the dissolution shows clearly that Miliukov exaggerated the importance of the Duma in the eyes of the public.

The unofficial leader of an irresponsible opposition, Miliukov made no attempt whatever to understand the position of the government. As one critic pointed out, Miliukov would only negotiate if the government accepted
the principle of parliamentary government in which the dominant party selects and controls the cabinet—a concept of responsibility hardly understandable to bureaucratic ministers who, like those in Imperial Germany and in contrast to the British Cabinet, thought only in terms of individual responsibility to the Emperor.

If the Tsar and his government were disappointed at the failure of a coalition ministry, so also were the moderate constitutionalists, who had based their platform on just such a compromise solution. The Kadet attitude forced them to reconsider their position as mediators between the government and the more radical liberals. D. N. Shipov regretted that the Kadet leadership had not been flexible enough to meet the circumstances.

...if the representatives of the Kadet party were brought to participate in the government and to accept the heavy responsibility connected therewith, the existing mood of the party would undoubtedly change and its representatives, who would become members of the cabinet, would come to consider it their duty to reduce considerably the party programme...

The Octobrists were to become even more disillusioned with the Kadet leadership after the Viborg Manifesto incident. This fiasco served only to emphasize the gap which separated the Kadet deputies from the moderate liberals. Henceforth, the Octobrists would be willing to work with any member of the government who diligently applied himself to putting the country's business in order, provided he consulted with the Duma in so doing. They would now oppose the formation of a ministry which included the dogmatic and bumptious Kadet leaders. The watchword of the Octobrists became "constitutionalism, not parliamentarism".
The action taken at Viborg was, in the opinion of the Kadets, morally justifiable. Certainly it had neither legal nor constitutional justification, and the signatories were rightly treated as criminals. In the words of Stolypin, they had "openly summoned the people to rebellion against the existing order." The government was quite happy to decree that all deputies who had signed the Manifesto would be ineligible for election to the Second Duma.

The Viborg Manifesto has considerable importance in Russian constitutional history as an expression of the Kadet position. The text of the document is largely a mixture of apologia and propaganda. The opening sentences are, however, worthy of closer attention.

The Duma has been dissolved by a [ukase of July 21st. You elected us as your representatives, you gave us instructions to fight for the country and for liberty. In accordance with your instructions, and with our duty, we drew up laws to ensure freedom to the people. We demanded the removal of irresponsible ministers who transgressed the laws with impunity and suppressed freedom. But first of all we wished to formulate a law for the distribution of land to the working peasantry... This version of the events leaves unsaid the fact that on two occasions the Kadets refused to entertain proposals for compromise with the government. Nor does it mention their refusal to work with the public men. It charges the government with irresponsibility, although it has been clearly shown that the Kadet opposition was by no means free from the same accusation.

It must be concluded, therefore, that the Kadets had their own clearly-defined idea of political morality. Hence, the word "Constitutional" in the party's name referred not to the constitution in force in Russia at the time, but to some system of legality which the Kadets intended to set up
when they attained power. On this basis, they believed themselves morally justified in opposing the government to which they had taken an oath of allegiance, and in proposing the unconstitutional measures (such as the land distribution project), which originated in their 'sense of duty'. The attack on "irresponsible ministers who transgressed the laws" was also the product of this belief in moral justification; otherwise, the phrase has no meaning. If it were to refer to the laws in effect in Russia at the time, it was their enforcement and not their transgression to which the Kadets objected so strenuously. Hence the expression must refer to a moral code of behaviour which the Kadets believed should be followed in the running of a state. The Viborg Manifesto was an incitement to revolution issued not in the name of a violated constitution, which would have been a constitutional act, but in the name of the doctrine of popular sovereignty. Henceforth, the Kadets must be regarded as forming part of the unconstitutional opposition, along with the Trudoviks, Socialist-Revolutionaries, and Social-Democrats.

* * * * *

Unlike the Kadets, Goremykin was jubilant over the dissolution of the First Duma, since the Emperor had simultaneously released the old man from the premiership. The new Premier was P. A. Stolypin, Minister of the Interior in Goremykin's cabinet, who did not give up that portfolio when he took on the premiership. As this was a suitable occasion for other cabinet changes, two ministers absolutely opposed to popular representation in any form were dismissed. The departure of Stishinsky and Prince Shirinsky-Shikhmatov enabled Stolypin to negotiate with the Octobrists, who had opposed their inclusion in the cabinet.
There was naturally some discussion in government circles as to whether a new electoral law would follow the dissolution of the Duma. Indeed, Goremykin had requested that the State Council not be dissolved along with the Duma, "for, should it be necessary to issue an important state act, such as a change in the statute on elections to the Duma, this could be done through the State Council, which now includes public representatives." It was, however, the decision of the cabinet to put off any change in the law until after the election to the Second Duma. But the very evening of Stolypin's appointment, Kryžhanovskiy was requested to begin work on a more restrictive electoral law.

Despite the fact that he was already contemplating a change in the electoral law, Stolypin began to enter into negotiations with men whom he knew would not be a party to any change in that law. He approached three groups of public men with the proposal that some of them join his cabinet. These were: M. Kovalevsky and V. Kuz'min-Karavaev of the small Party of Democratic Reform, Count Heyden, M. A. Stakhovich and N. N. L'vov of the Party of Peaceful Reconstruction, and A. I. Guchkov, D. N. Shipov and A. F. Koni of the Union of October 17. On 15 July, 1906, Shipov and L'vov had a long conversation with Stolypin at the latter's summer house, and fortunately for the historian, Shipov left a full account of what transpired at that meeting.

Shipov was under no illusions about Stolypin's motives in asking them to join the cabinet. Stolypin, he believed, "feared public hostility to his measures and saw in our participation in the cabinet a means of reconciling
the excited public with the government." If Stolypin was seriously planning to change the electoral law, he was probably hoping to nullify the opposition of the public men by inviting them into a 'reform' cabinet so that his future coup against the Duma would not find them leading the 'excited public'.

Stolypin did, in fact, tell them of his intention to enact reforms before the convocation of the Second Duma. They objected that a substantial program of reform should not be undertaken without the consultation of the Duma. Stolypin's reply was a clear indication that as Prime Minister he would be concerned with efficiency and utility, not with constitutional forms.

We [Shipov and L'vov] pointed out that no measure which required the sanction of a legislative chamber could be carried out without the confirmation of the legislative institutions, and said that we were at a loss to understand how, since the Manifesto of October 17, the government could decide what kind of reforms were needed without first consulting the people's representatives. P. A. Stolypin then said that as far as he was concerned he saw clearly what measures were immediately required; he was critical of the legislative capacity of the State Duma, at least in its early sessions, and again emphasized his conviction that the government would be able without any delay to grant to all classes of the population what they really needed.

We called his attention to the fact that the Sovereign Power granted the population the right to participate through their elected representatives, in the determining of the country's political life, and asked how His Majesty's government could violate this right?

Shipov went on to predict that unless Stolypin came over to their point of view, he would fail to pacify the country. He then advanced the conditions under which the public men would agree to join the cabinet. These were as follows: that half of the portfolios be given to public men, including that of Minister of the Interior; that the cabinet issue a public
statement of its aims; that on the basis of the Manifesto of October 17, a programme of legislation be drawn up for submission to the new Duma; that capital punishment be held in abeyance until the legislative bodies had decided on its proper use.

Shipov's programme was a fine statement of the moderate position, but it overlooked the fact that the Fundamental Laws had largely annulled the October Manifesto. Stolypin, more of a realist, and sensing the strength of his own position, replied that "...now was not the time to talk about programs; public men must trust their Tsar and his government and, in view of the difficult position in which the country found itself, must accept unselfishly the invitation of the government."32

Shipov and L'vov saw that further discussion was useless, and departed for St. Petersburg. At the request of their colleagues, they sent a letter to Stolypin, putting their conditions in writing. On 18 July, Stolypin wrote to Shipov expressing his regret that "...you refuse to render your valuable and much desired collaboration to our efforts to be useful to the country."33 Thus ended the last attempt to reach agreement between the government and the public men. A month earlier, Stolypin had found his own efforts at compromise blocked by the intractability of Miliukov; now, he himself was responsible for the breakdown of the July negotiations.

The question arises, why was the government prepared to compromise in June but not in July? The sudden rejuvenation of the government must be attributed largely to the ease with which the First Duma was dissolved. The government had been frankly afraid of a new outburst of revolutionary activity,
and was greatly relieved to find that Miliukov had vastly overestimated his party's popularity with the country. If the people cared so little for the Kadets, the government was willing to risk finding out whether the public men could also be dispensed with. Stolypin was beginning to sense the new power of his position, and he was not prepared to sacrifice his reform programme on the altar of constitutionalism. The Tsar, too, did not wish to see his first minister shackled by the conditions which the public men would have imposed. The apathy which surrounded the dissolution reinforced his belief that Russia was not ready for self-government. Furthermore, he was by temperament inclined to be rather enthusiastic about any new appointment, at least for the first few weeks. All his confidence now reposed in Stolypin, and the latter was not slow to take advantage of the situation. If the public men wanted to enter the cabinet on his terms, well and good; if not—he would carry on the government just as well without them. If Miliukov had not exaggerated his position, and if the government had not been taken in by his statements, the public men probably would have been given portfolios in June, but the events of the ensuing weeks reduced their chances to nothing, because their bargaining position was lost. Stolypin administered the coup de grâce by refusing the Octobrists' request that the date of convocation of the Second Duma be advanced. This, he said, would be a violation of the Fundamental Laws. With consummate hypocrisy, he went on in the same breath to repeat his intention to enact basic reforms without consulting the Duma.
The negotiations with the public men were a kind of epilogue to the proceedings of the First Duma. The government had come into battle armed with the Fundamental Laws, and had emerged unscathed. The Kadets had seriously compromised themselves by issuing the Viborg Manifesto. The Octobrists had been forced into a corner, and could do nothing to extricate themselves. The Tsar and Stolypin found themselves in a position of new strength, and they could afford to ignore opposition grumblings about the 'spirit of the October Manifesto'. Stolypin expressed well the government's attitude when he told his cabinet that henceforth, "...the vital interest of the country must be placed above this or that provision of the law." Stolypin had learned his lesson from the brief but flamboyant career of the First Duma; it remained to be seen whether the opposition forces had done the same.
FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER IV

1Kokovtsov, op.cit., pp. 138-139.

2Reported by Gurko, op.cit., p. 469.

3Witte, op.cit., p. 361.


5Kokovtsov, op.cit., p. 126.

6Ibid., pp. 126-127.

7Witte, op.cit., p. 330.

8Ibid., p. 354.


10There is some dispute as to whether Witte left Goremykin with a draft programme of legislation to put before the Duma. Kokovtsov states that Goremykin told him that nothing of this kind had been done; Gurko, on the other hand, says that a number of projects were drafted. Nevertheless, it is clear that Goremykin had no intention of allowing the Duma to discuss anything of importance. See Kokovtsov, op.cit., p. 123; Gurko, op.cit., p. 458.

11Quoted in Kokovtsov, op.cit., p. 124.

12For the other demands, see R. Charques, The Twilight of Imperial Russia, London, 1958, p. 154.

13Kokovtsov, op.cit., p. 139.

14Gurko, op.cit., p. 472.

15Quoted in Kokovtsov, op.cit., p. 140.

16For the exact wording of the resolution, see Ibid., p. 141.

17The government's opinion of the 'Kadet Duma' is described vividly in Ibid., p. 142.

18The Leader of The Moderate Party of Democratic Reform.

Goremykin aroused much controversy by announcing the policy of the government through an article in the official gazette. According to A. P. Izvolsky, this was "...evidence of his scorn for the national assembly, and it was the form of the communication rather than its contents which aroused the unanimous indignation of the deputies." Recollections of a Foreign Minister, New York, 1921, p. 179.

Tuck, op. cit., p. 128. This concept of responsibility was so strong that the ministers often silently faced attacks in the Duma for a policy which the Emperor had forced them to accept. The extent to which the ministers acted without consulting one another is shown by Kokovtsov's admission that he was not informed either of Stolypin's negotiations or of Goremykin's decision to dissolve the Duma. See op. cit., pp. 150-151.

D. N. Shipov, Vospominaniia i Dumi o Perezhitom, Moscow, 1918; translated in Gurko, op. cit., Appendix 3, p. 713.


Quoted in Gurko, op. cit., p. 491.

The translation is from R. W. Postgate, Revolution from 1789 to 1906, New York, 1962, p. 891.

B. A. Vasil'chikov succeeded Stishinsky as Minister of Agriculture; P. P. Izvolsky succeeded Prince Shirinsky-Shikhmatov at the Holy Synod. Their appointments were not announced until after the failure of negotiations with the public men.

Gurko, op. cit., p. 487.

Kokovtsov, op. cit., p. 154.

Shipov joined the Party of Peaceful Reconstruction in 1908.


Ibid., p. 718 and ff.


33 *Loc. cit.*

34 Gurko, *op. cit.* p. 493.


Despite Stolypin's importance as the last great statesman of Imperial Russia, there is a regrettable lack of first-hand materials pertaining to his career. The circumstances of his death prevented him from writing his memoirs. In any case, he was by nature a man of action, rather than of deep thought, and therefore one must attempt to infer his philosophy of government from what he did, and from the little that he said on the subject.

It is significant that he accepted office without questioning the Duma's right to exist as a valid part of the constitutional structure. There is no doubt that the Tsar and the court would have been amenable to any suggestion that it be abolished. Yet Stolypin did not make such a suggestion; he merely obtained the dismissals of the two ministers most opposed to representative government and went ahead with the business of electing and convoking another Duma. At the same time, however, he opened negotiations with the public men and then blocked all attempts at compromise with them. He ridiculed the legislative abilities of the Duma, and enacted his own program of reforms by means of Article 87 of the Fundamental Laws, a procedure of doubtful legality. It appeared that he was being hypocritical in maintaining the Duma's existence while acting without consulting it. To dismiss him as a mere hypocrite, however, would be a superficial judgment indeed. One must inquire more deeply into the reasons which lay behind these tactical manoeuvres.
Stolypin had served his apprenticeship in the provincial administration before coming to St. Petersburg. He had been drawn to the attention of the Imperial government because of the capable job he had done as Governor of Saratov gubernia during the troubled years of war and revolution. His bureaucratic background naturally led him to regard the executive and administrative functions of government as being more valuable than the legislative. Russia, he felt, was not yet ready for the establishment of a legislature. The climate was not right, in the Russia of 1906, to expose such a frail seedling to the open air; he, the master gardener, would have to nurture the soil and prepare it very carefully. This explains why he was unwilling to consult the Duma about a reform programme which was, in part, designed to lay a base for the future healthy existence of the Duma itself. As an experienced administrator, he believed that he knew better than the politicians under what conditions the new 'constitutional' Russia could be made to flourish.

There were also practical reasons why Stolypin wished to retain the Duma, even if its functions had to be curtailed to please the Supreme Power. In St. Petersburg he was a man alone, an upstart from the provinces. He needed, to be frank, more than just the Emperor's confidence to achieve the necessary power to ensure the success of his reform programme. He could not be sure of the Tsar, for Nicholas' enthusiasm was a fleeting thing; in the eyes of the court he was and would always be a parvenu; the old, aristocratic bureaucracy regarded him with suspicion because he smacked of the new order. His one source of strength could be the Duma, if he could prove to the government that he could pacify the country and keep the Duma under control at the
same time. What he forgot was that in order to do this, he would have to give some evidence to the moderate group in the Duma that he was genuinely interested in seeking a rapprochement. He seemed to think that it would be sufficient if he merely protected the Duma from all attempts to dissolve it, and did not realize that this existence, without a purpose, was useless.

There is no doubt that Stolypin favoured limited monarchy to absolute monarchy. He supported the prerogative powers of the Tsar because he, Stolypin, would be able to exercise these powers as Chairman of the Council of Ministers. He did not, however, want to see any of these powers transferred to the Duma, for that institution had yet to prove itself a reliable organ of government. Stolypin's 'constitutionalism' was descended from the theories of Speransky, not from those of Herzen or the liberals. He was more concerned with the infusion of legality into the political system than with the extension of the representative principle. The criterion of good government was, in his view, its efficiency. Thus he naturally saw himself as being responsible only to the Emperor. Whether he enjoyed the confidence of the Duma meant little to him; it was convenient, but certainly not necessary, that it should be so.

As a progressive bureaucrat, he was totally incapable of understanding the outlook of anyone who did not worship his idol—an efficient administration. He expected the Duma to approve wholeheartedly of his reform programme, despite his use of Article 87 to enact it. He wrote to V. I. Gurko just after the dissolution of the First Duma explaining his plans:
There are 180 days before the Second Duma assembles. We must make good use of them so that when the Duma meets we may appear before it with a series of reforms already realized. This will demonstrate the government's sincere desire to remove from the existing order all things incompatible with the spirit of the times.\(^2\)

The inference here is that Stolypin himself is wholly capable to decide what is in accord with the spirit of the times and what is not. Stolypin was not one to play the humble role of first servant of the state. He expected his government to work with the precise efficiency of a well-oiled machine. Thus he never accepted advice or assistance from sources which he did not trust absolutely. For example, the agrarian reforms were almost entirely the work of Stolypin and V. I. Gurko, despite the fact that the zemstvo agronomists had provided the Duma with much information which would have been very useful in drawing up these measures. He preferred advice from reliable sources to that of the zemstvo 'third element', which was, in his eyes, a revolutionary force. He was very suspicious of the legislative committees of the Duma, which invited zemstvo and other experts to testify regarding draft legislation. He was also opposed to the development of any kind of intimate relations between Duma deputies and their constituents, and attempted to prevent the deputies from addressing the electors in the interval which followed dissolution.\(^3\)

Stolypin's unwillingness to work with the zemstvo groups in drawing up his reforms stemmed from the fact that his outlook was fundamentally different from theirs. The zemstvo workers and public men were really public servants in the modern sense of the word, and to them the general well-being
of the country was an end in itself. The end of Stolypin's reforms, on the other hand, was the improved well-being of the Tsar's subjects, not as an end in itself, but in order to bolster the position of the government and of the dynasty. This was the goal of the 1906 reforms, and if the Second Duma would support Stolypin's programme on this basis, then he would do what he could to keep it in existence as a more or less representative body.

The Duma which met to discuss the reform programme was fundamentally different from its predecessor. Not only did it lack the one-party dominance so obvious in the First Duma; its composition ranged much more widely to the extremes of right and left. The Kadets, decimated after the Viborg fiasco (see above, Chapter IV) and by governmental interference in the elections, were reduced to less than a hundred seats. The Labour Group had 101 deputies, and the extreme right and the extreme left each had another hundred deputies. Within these broad classifications there were also sub-groupings, so that the Duma as a whole was indeed a heterogeneous assemblage. Neither the extreme right nor the extreme left were interested in anything but their own factional purposes. The left wished to use the Duma only as a forum for the dissemination of revolutionary propaganda, while the reactionaries who followed Purishkevich were agitating for dissolution and constantly blocking any constructive activity.

Because of the lack of a united opposition, and because the reform programme was essentially a fait accompli, the issue of sovereignty appeared in the Second Duma in a much different form than it had in the First Duma. Goremykin's inactivity, coupled with the Kadet preponderance, had paved the
way for a direct challenge to the constitutional system established by the Fundamental Laws. The First Duma's Address and the Viborg Manifesto were thoroughly imbued with the principles of representative government and the doctrine of popular sovereignty. The government had successfully defended itself against this frontal assault on its position by dissolving the Duma.

The conflicts in the Second Duma were not over limited autocracy versus popular sovereignty, but over the manner in which this limited autocracy was exercising its powers. Article 87 of the Fundamental Laws had been planned as a device by which the government could continue to function when the Duma was not in session. Stolypin's use of it to enact his reform programme was certainly contrary to the spirit, if not the letter, of the Laws, and the Kadet deputies especially challenged the constitutionality of Stolypin's actions. In the absence of an independent supreme judicial organ, there could be no final binding verdict handed down. Either the Senate or the State Council had the experience and the wisdom necessary to pronounce on the legality of the question, but since Stolypin obviously had the support of the Tsar, these bodies were quite unwilling to oppose the Imperial will. In fact, the government had presented the Duma with yet another fait accompli in using Article 87 and, bearing in mind the state of public apathy toward the fate of the Duma, there was nothing the deputies could do except vent their bitterness to each other in the lobbies of the Tauride Palace.

From Stolypin's point of view, the use of Article 87 had several advantages which far outweighed the cost of accusations about his pseudo-constitutionalism. It was the most efficient way to enact the reforms, since they could be put into effect immediately; it also prevented distortion or
alteration of the programme by the Duma. It also served to demonstrate to the Duma that the cabinet was not floundering and that the government was making every effort to restore order and a measure of prosperity throughout the country. Furthermore, it served as an announcement to the Duma that its role in legislation would be purely advisory and that on the most important measures its opinion would have no effect at all if it ran contrary to government policy.

Even in its opposition to the government's methods, the Second Duma was unable to achieve a purposeful unity. Only the Kadets and the Octobrists objected to the reform programme on constitutional grounds; the left-wing parties wished to discuss only the economic implications of the programme. Again, the Kadets were strongly in favour of the Duma's exercising its prerogative to confirm that part of the budget which was submitted to it, while the leftists wished to make a general attack on the machinery which drew up the entire budget. For the Kadets, discussion of the budget was "...a vital foundation stone for the new parliamentary structure." The socialist parties, however, wanted to use the budget debate as an excuse for another vote of no confidence in the government.

The extreme right managed to throw the assembly into chaos by presenting a motion condemning terror as a political weapon. This resolution placed the Kadets in a most difficult position. Although they were making a real attempt to act with restraint so that the government would allow the Duma to become more of a parliament, on the other hand, they could not forget their revolutionary legacy from the days of the Union of Liberation. They
were unwilling to condemn terror because it would alienate the Social Democrats and the Socialist Revolutionaries, and the Kadets desperately wanted these parties to remain sympathetic to the Duma as the embodiment, however imperfect, of the representative idea. Thus the Kadets were forced to sit on the fence while the rightists gleefully portrayed them to the government as bloodthirsty revolutionaries.

The same lack of unity is demonstrated by the interpellations which were conducted by the Second Duma. The Kadets tried hard to make the interpellations meaningful and worthwhile, but they were frustrated by the right, who wished only to embarrass the government. Stolypin viewed the interpellations as another attempt by the Duma to arouse the people against the government. Consequently, the ministers refused to cooperate with the Duma and, no matter what the offence, were protected by the government whenever the Duma sought to attack them for irregularities in administration. The Duma's attempts to interpellate, coupled with its refusal to condemn political terror, served only to increase the feeling in official circles that it should be dissolved.

Only in opposing the field courts-martial were the Kadets able to form a united front of the opposition parties. These courts, which operated throughout most of the provinces of European Russia in 1906-7, were Stolypin's answer to continued acts of terrorism by the revolutionary organizations. Their justice was swift and harsh, and the hatred engendered by them against the government was growing constantly. They had been instituted under Article 87, so their power was due to expire in April, 1907. The Kadets
brought in a bill some weeks before this which would have abolished their powers immediately. Purishkevich and the extreme right group were almost hysterical in defending the courts, but the Kadet bill was passed by a large majority. The triumph of the left wing was short, however, for the State Council vetoed the bill and the Tsar declined to intervene in the controversy. Thus Stolypin was able to let the extraordinary courts carry out their duties for two more months, and was thereby able to present himself to the Tsar as the pacifier of Russia.

In the interpellations, in the dispute over the budget, and in the haggling over political terror, the Second Duma revealed its fundamental unworkability. Although it had not directly challenged the sovereignty of the Tsar and his ministers, it had pointed out the inadequacy of the budgetary regulations and the misdirection of the government's agrarian policy. Furthermore, it had overstepped the bounds of good taste in daring to criticize the torture of rebellious workers by the police in Riga and one of the deputies, Zurabov, had even questioned the bravery of the Imperial Russian Army. The Tsar was aghast. One week after the Zurabov incident, he made his feelings known to Kokovtsov.

"...Is there any need for further proof that we can no longer tolerate such action unless we are prepared to be swept away by the storm of revolution? I understand why Stolypin insists that simultaneously with the dissolution there must be proclaimed a new electoral law, and I am ready to wait a few more days, but I told him that I considered the dissolution of the Duma as settled, and that I hoped that I should not be kept waiting longer than necessary for the completion of the work on the new law, which, in my opinion, was proceeding much too slowly..."
Two of the rightist ministers, Swanebach and Durnovo, began to urge Stolypin to dissolve the Duma. At court, there was considerable agitation for dissolution, and the Tsar himself was becoming impatient at Stolypin's refusal to face the inevitable. 8

Stolypin had known since he assumed office that another Duma could not be elected without drastic changes in the electoral law. Kryzhanovsky had been at work on the draft of a new electoral law since August, 1906. The difficulty was not in drawing up the law, but in the manner of its promulgation. According to the Fundamental Laws, any change in the Duma electoral law had to be approved by the Duma, and Stolypin had been trying to convince the deputies that he was a stickler for constitutional legality. Nevertheless he knew, as did all the ministers, that the dissolution would have to be accompanied by a revision in the electoral law, or there would be no third Duma. 9

Since there was no legal way of changing the electoral law, it would have to be done illegally. Swanebach was the first to advocate the publication of the law by sovereign ukase. The only opposition to this came from the Foreign Minister, Izvolsky, but he soon changed his mind. Once Kryzhanovsky's draft had been approved by the cabinet, Stolypin seems to have become convinced of the necessity to publish it by decree. A manifesto was framed which announced to the people that the constitution had been violated because of the necessity of obtaining a workable lower house. 10 The ukase to the Senate announcing the change in the electoral law employed the meaningless
formula, "confirmed by the extraordinary powers of the Ministers' Council." Stolypin rationalized his position by taking the realistic view that it was better to have a less representative Duma than to have no Duma at all.

Kryzhanovsky, testifying before the Investigating Commission of the Provisional Government in 1917, has raised a very interesting point in connection with the foregoing events. He said that the cabinet was agreed that the Tsar had every right to abolish or to limit an institution which he himself had founded. Since Nicholas II had not taken an oath to support all laws issued during his reign, he himself was not violating any promise by issuing an Imperial Ukase announcing the new electoral law. This argument has merit, and cannot be dismissed by the constitutional historian as a mere rationalization. In the absence of an independent supreme judiciary (apart from the Tsar himself), the only way in which the inviolability of the Fundamental Laws of 1906 could have been guaranteed would have been a new oath by Nicholas, modifying his earlier Coronation Oath. Had the Tsarevich Alexei ever ascended the throne, he would have bound himself to observe the Laws of 1906, but the Laws which Nicholas had sworn to uphold were those in force in the reign of Alexander III. Thus, although it is true that the new electoral law violated the Fundamental Laws of 1906, it is also true that these Laws were not inviolable until the reign of Nicholas' successor. Curiously enough, no one suggested the necessity of a new royal oath in 1906. Professor Miliukov, who of all people should have recognized the delicacy of these constitutional questions, was busy jockeying for a cabinet position, and the other 'constitutionalists' wasted their breath accusing the government of violating the 'spirit of October 17'.
After the decision to dissolve the Duma had been taken, the government set about creating an excuse for dissolution. The method chosen was both underhanded and clumsily executed. An agent of the Okhrana was planted among the Social-Democratic deputies to 'discover' that they were implicated in a plot to propagandize the army. Implicit in this plan was the question of the inviolability of Duma deputies. On 1 June, Stolypin revealed the 'plot' and demanded that the Duma turn over the 55 Social-Democrat deputies to the authorities for trial. This was tantamount to saying that any legalized party (i.e., left of the Octobrists) could be prosecuted by the government at any time.

Once again the disunity of the Second Duma revealed itself. The right-wing groups were in favour of expelling the deputies immediately. The Kadets regarded Stolypin's demand as an infringement of the Duma's rights and suggested, with the support of the centre groups, that a committee be formed to discuss the situation. The Social-Democrats wanted some dramatic demonstration in which the Duma would confront the government on behalf of the doctrine of popular representation. Along with the Narodnik Socialists, they moved that the Duma refuse to confirm the budget and annul the agrarian reform programme. This motion failed when they were unable to obtain the support of the Kadets.

Stolypin was not prepared to await the findings of the Duma committee. On 3 June, the Second Duma was dissolved by Imperial Ukase. The accompanying manifesto accused the Duma of failing to work for the good of Russia, failing to condemn political terror, deliberately delaying confirmation of the budget,
using interpellations to undermine the authority of the government, and of harbouring conspirators in its ranks. Elections for the Third Duma would take place under the new electoral law on 1 September, and the convocation was set for 1 November, 1907. It was, then, a coup d'état, and a very successful one at that. By demonstrating that the Fundamental Laws of 1906 were not inviolable, Stolypin answered those who asked if the Tsar were not bound by his own act to accept a limitation on his sovereignty. This was the end of the "demi-semiconstitutional monarchy", the end of the sham legality which had lasted less than fourteen months. The Duma had been reduced by Stolypin almost to the impotence of a Bulygin Duma. Stolypin could not eliminate, however, the memories of the conflicts of 1905-1907. The absolute sovereignty of the Tsar had been challenged, had been limited, and had been largely re-established, but the issue would remain to plague the government for another decade. For the moment, however, Nicholas was triumphant; the Duma had challenged him and he had slapped it down, as he told his mother he would in March. And what remained of Stolypin's facade of legality? One can imagine him shrugging and paraphrasing the Biblical text, "The Tsar has given and the Tsar has taken away..."
FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER V

1 The content of the reforms is not under discussion here, but details of the various measures are given in R. Charques, op.cit., pp. 161-166.

2 Quoted in Gurko, op.cit., p. 494.


4 Accurate figures are not available because of the regroupings which took place during the session. A good estimate is that of Charques, op.cit., p. 168:

Social Democrats: - 65 Polish Kolo - 47
Socialist Revolutionaries - 34 Octobrists - 32
Narodnik Socialists - 14 Moderate Right - 40 - 50
Trudoviki -101 Extreme Left - 22
Kadets - 92

5 The text of Article 87 is as follows:

"If, in the absence of the Imperial Duma, extraordinary circumstances necessitate some measure before it can be examined according to legislative procedure, the Council of Ministers shall refer it directly to His Majesty the Emperor. However, this measure cannot contain any modifications of the Fundamental Laws of the State; nor of the Organic Laws of the State Council or of the Duma, nor of the electoral laws for the Council or the Duma. The measure ceases to be in force if, within the two months which follow the resumption of the work of the Duma, the Minister or the proper Director-general do not submit to the Imperial Duma a project of law corresponding to the measure in question, or if the project is not adopted by the Duma or the State Council."


It is to be noted that the Article did not specify who was to judge when 'extraordinary circumstances' prevailed; nor did it specify that the project submitted later to the Duma was to duplicate the original ukase--it was sufficient if the project 'corresponded' to the ukase. Furthermore, Chasles points out that there was nothing to prevent the government from publishing the same ukase again even if it had failed to gain ratification in the Duma.


7 Kokovtsov, op.cit., p. 181.
8 See evidence of V. N. Kokovtsov in *Padenie Tsakskogo Rezhima*, Moscow, 1924, VII, pp. 97-100. Hereafter cited as *Padenie*.


14 The phrase is that of Charques, *op.cit.*, ch. 7.

15 N. to M. F., 29 March 1907, pp. 228-229.
CHAPTER VI

A TIME FOR PRAGMATISM

The Third Duma, convoked in November 1907, was predominantly an assemblage of conservative Russian property-owners. The centre and left-wing groups, sobered and chastened by the events of the last fourteen months, were grateful that the Duma was still in existence, no matter how unrepresentative it was. The right wing, exhilarated by the Stolypin coup, viewed the new Duma as a triumph for the monarchy, and could hardly wait to demonstrate their loyalty to the Emperor. Stolypin himself was also pleased with the results of the elections. Here was a body he could manage, a body which would not be constantly agitating for hasty and hazardous reforms, either in the constitutional or in the economic sphere.

The Third Duma was composed of three large groups of roughly 150 deputies each. The Kadets and the socialists made up one group—the electoral law had done its work well—of left-wing parties; the Octobrists and other moderates occupied the centre; the various nationalist and reactionary groups made up the right wing. Because of the rough numerical equality of these groups, and because of the natural mediating role of the centre, the Third Duma began by taking on a predominantly Octobrist character. The Second Duma had dramatized the futility of factional struggles, and the restrictive electoral law had to some extent reduced the doctrinaire nature of the party programmes. Stolypin's personal outlook was conservative rather than reactionary, so that he was not opposed to the Octobrist via media. If the
outlook of the Octobrist party can be summed up in a few words, they would be these: that participation by the Duma in the legislative process was more important than the degree to which the Duma truly represented the Russian people. This was not, in fact, a compromise with the Stolypin regime. The Octobrist programme had always stressed participation rather than representation—"a pragmatic view perhaps, but it was a time for pragmatism."

The Octobrist party contained not a few men who were well-qualified to participate in the legislative process. For the most part, they were enlightened conservative gentry and big businessmen who had served in responsible positions in government and in society. Aleksandr Guchkov, the leader of the group, had for years taken a prominent role in the zemstvo movement. Nikolai Khomiakov, the first President of the Third Duma, had been a senior official in the Ministry of Agriculture. Shidlovsky and Zvegintsev had also held high posts in the government service. As a group, the Octobrists were remarkable for their ability, the more so when they are contrasted with the decimated left-wing groups and the narrow, bigoted reactionaries who owed their election to the efforts of the Ministry of the Interior. The centre group was composed of talented men who could have occupied the most senior positions in the government, but who "...were only prevented from rising higher by their enlightenment."

Although the Octobrists wanted the Duma to work with, rather than against the government, they were certainly not a 'government party'. They were unpopular at court, and Stolypin was, in fact, condemned by the court circles for his alleged sympathy with the Octobrists. There was, however, no formal agreement between Stolypin and Guchkov. They did not work against
each other because it was to their mutual advantage not to do so. Realists both, they took a practical, and to some extent cynical view of the situation. Stolypin had staked his position on the new electoral law, and if the Third Duma had to be dissolved, he would be dismissed along with it. Guchkov knew this; he also knew that, under these circumstances, Stolypin's successor would be one of the reactionaries. Therefore it was to the advantage of Guchkov, and of the Duma as a whole, to support Stolypin as far as possible. This support would, in turn, strengthen Stolypin's position vis-a-vis the other ministers, not all of whom were his loyal colleagues. The Minister of Justice, I. G. Shcheglovitov, was particularly notorious for his sympathy with the reactionaries. Clearly then, an informal rapprochement between Stolypin and Guchkov was necessitated by the exigencies of the political situation.

The Octobrists began by committing a faux-pas which did little to enhance their already poor reputation at court. In drafting the Duma's reply to the Tsar's opening message, the Octobrists, with the support of the Kadets and socialists, deleted the word 'autocrat' from the titles of the monarch. For the Octobrists, this was a significant revision, since they understood that Nicholas II had limited his own power by granting the Manifesto of October 17/30, 1905. For the left, however, this omission was treated as a protest against the continuing irresponsible absolutism of tsardom, and this was how the incident was interpreted at court. The right-wing deputies immediately capitalized on the situation and presented their own reply in an audience with the Tsar. A. I. Dubrovin, leader of the ultra-reactionary Union of the Russian People, wrote a polemical pamphlet accusing the Octobrists of working to subvert the monarchical principle in Russia. The court seized
on the incident as yet another proof of Stolypin's willingness to tolerate insolence from the Duma. It would seem, however, that Stolypin carried the day, since there were no official recriminations forthcoming. There was truth in the Octobrist argument, and Nicholas either recognized this fact or else felt that he could afford to overlook the affair because of the overwhelmingly conservative character of the Duma. In reality, he had no alternative. One could not restrict the electoral law further; if the Third Duma had to be dissolved, the Duma as an institution would have to be abolished. Neither Stolypin nor the Tsar was prepared to take this step and thus alienate the large number of conservative gentry and businessmen upon whose support they depended in the struggle to eliminate the revolutionary movement.

After this first relatively minor conflict, the Third Duma settled down to work. The deputies had learned well from the events of the previous two years. There was no attempt to challenge the constitutional system established by the Fundamental Laws of 1906. There was no move made to liberalize the harsh electoral law of 1907. There was no concerted agitation for control of the executive by the legislature. In short, the Duma did not try to usurp the legitimate functions of any other organ of the government. Instead, the emphasis was on the Octobrist idea of 'participation' in the governing process. This involved not the gradual taking over of the functions of the other organs (which was the aim of the first two dumas), but the construction of a useful role for the Duma as one organ within the existing constitutional structure. Participation in this sense was effected not by usurpation, but by the invention of new techniques and procedures which enabled the Duma to conduct its business and play its role more effectively.
Indirectly and unobtrusively, the Third Duma established a kind of limited sovereignty of its own within the constitutional structure.

The Stolypin coup had not robbed the Duma of its right to discuss large parts of the budget. While it could never wield the "power of the purse" in the full sense of the term, it could discuss, directly or indirectly, almost everything except the expenses of the Ministry of the Imperial Court. In addition to the annual budget presented by the Minister of Finance, each minister (except the Minister of the Imperial Court)\(^4\) had to explain his departmental estimates to the various Duma committees. The deputies soon realized that they could exert a subtle pressure on uncooperative and recalcitrant ministers by simply delaying the passing of that department's estimates. They could also exert this pressure on several ministers until the latter had convinced one particular minister that his unpopular measures were bringing the business of the government to a standstill. Pressure of this kind had its limitations, of course, but it did at least exist. An attempt was made in January, 1908, to include at least a token estimate from the Ministry of the Imperial Court in the Duma's discussions, but this proposal was solidly opposed by the government. Rather than lose the advantages they had already gained, the Octobrists let the plan die in the Duma's Budget Committee.

These committees of the Duma, which in scope corresponded roughly to the various ministries of the government, were the most important device by which the Duma established itself as a useful part of the governing process. Oddly enough, these committees, which the Kadets especially came to realize were invaluable to the overall strength of the Duma, were a hangover from the Bulygin project, to which the liberals had objected so strongly.\(^5\) Each
committee was composed of representatives of all parties, the number of representatives being proportional to the strength of the party in the Duma. Here again, doctrinaire party attitudes tended to moderate in the course of time. Many deputies found the party programmes to be either a distortion of, or irrelevant to the actual situation. This was the sort of practical experience which had hitherto been denied to the Russian intelligentsia, and it was of enormous benefit in broadening their outlook.

The ministers found it to their advantage to cooperate with the Duma committees as far as possible. It was the committees which heard the estimates of the various ministries. It was wise for the minister to consult with the chairman of the committee concerned in order to ensure that his estimates would not arouse too much opposition. In addition to the chairman, each committee had a spokesman, who acted as a sort of 'shadow minister' in the Duma, and who spoke for the committee on any subject within its sphere of competence. Naturally these spokesmen often became as well-informed as the ministers of the government. A. I. Shingarev, spokesman of the Finance Committee, was a constant thorn in the side of Kokovtsov throughout the Third Duma.6 Guchkov managed to establish quite a strong position for himself as Chairman of the Committee on Imperial Defence. His attacks on Alexeyev, who had been Viceroy of the Far East in 1904-5, for mismanagement of the war effort won him acclaim in the Duma and hatred at court, as Alexeyev was a favourite of the Empress. Another popular cause supported by Guchkov was the removal of the grand dukes from their positions as inspectors-general of the armed forces. Some of them resigned voluntarily and continued to
serve in other ranks, because they saw the dangers of the sinecure system which Guchkov attacked. The sound, reasoned arguments of Shingarev, Guchkov, Anrep (who crusaded for educational reform) and other deputies brought new prestige to the Duma and made it a force to be reckoned with.

The growth in number and in scope of the Duma committees naturally gave rise to the question of whether the Duma had an unlimited right to appoint such committees. In 1908, for example, rumours of mismanagement of the railways led to a proposal that the Duma appoint a committee to investigate the transportation system. The government opposed the measure as being *ultra vires* the Duma. The argument was that the Ministry of Ways and Communications coordinated both public and private transport enterprises, but that the Duma had no right to meddle in private businesses as this was a privilege "...not provided for by the principles upon which it was organized." This was a dubious argument, and Kokovtsov went on to reveal what must have been the real reason for the government's opposition to the proposal. If the Duma approved the project and the State Council vetoed it, the Tsar would be placed in the unenviable position of having to choose between two groups of conservative and loyal supporters of the regime. On the other hand, if the State Council approved the project and the Tsar accepted it, those ministers who had opposed it would feel that they no longer had the confidence of the Tsar. It was a complex problem, but by no means insoluble. It is difficult to believe that any harm would have been done if the government had allowed the Duma to proceed within certain carefully defined limits. Instead, the incident blew up in everyone's face and ended in bitterness on all sides.

Miliukov, in a speech justifying the Duma's right to appoint 'parliamentary'
committees, aroused Kokovtsov's wrath, and the latter fired back, "Thank God we have no parliament yet!" At this remark the anglophile Kadets threw a sort of collective tantrum, exaggerating out of all proportion the significance of the comment. It was not, however, the sort of thing which Stolypin would have said, and even the moderate Octobrists resented this covert insult to the contribution which the Duma was making. The end result was that the railway committee project was shelved until tempers cooled down.

One of the most favourable developments in the Third Duma was the cessation of attacks on the Duma itself by the deputies of the extreme right. On 28 April, 1908, Purishkevich announced that the extreme right had approved the October Manifesto. This did not, of course, mean that all the reactionaries had overnight become Octobrists, but it did mean that they would no longer be agitating constantly for the dissolution of the Duma without just cause. The rightists continued to adopt a more strictly nationalistic outlook than did the Octobrists, and this gradually became their most outstanding characteristic. One material advantage which the reactionaries gained by acceding to the Manifesto was the restoration of government subsidies to their press and electoral activities. Stolypin had cut off these subsidies during the Second Duma, but they were now restored and substantially increased.

Although the Third Duma was becoming a useful and viable part of the government, conflicts still arose over some quite minor issues, largely because of the whims of the Tsar. In 1909, the Duma and the State Council both passed a legislative proposal concerning the credits for the new Naval General Staff. Appended to the project was a list of the suggested personnel
of the General Staff. Strictly speaking, the appointment of staff officers was the prerogative of the Emperor under Article 96 of the Fundamental Laws, but in practice these appointments were made on the advice of the ministry concerned in consultation with the Duma committee. The Duma passed the bill with a substantial majority. Durnovo, one of the prominent right-wing members of the State Council, brought up the technical irregularity of the measure but, rather than split hairs, the Council also passed the bill. Stolypin himself had presented the project to the Emperor for his approval. Despite all this, Nicholas rejected the bill flatly as a violation of royal prerogative. It seems likely that Durnovo, working through the Empress, had managed to persuade the Tsar that he should not approve the project. The Tsar showed very poor judgment in refusing to sign. In doing so, he was merely wasting the time and efforts of his most loyal supporters in the Duma and State Council, and to no good purpose—the principle involved was of the utmost triviality. After the events of 1905-6, he seemed incapable of deciding what was a threat to his sovereignty and what was not, and he could always be persuaded to oppose something if convinced that it challenged the imperial prerogative power.

It is interesting to note that there was one instance when the Third Duma "proved itself even more imperial than the emperor himself." This was the question of the relations of Finland to the imperial government. The Fundamental Laws of 1906 had preserved the old system whereby the Tsar acted on Finnish affairs with the advice of the State Secretary for Finland and the Finnish Diet. In 1910, the Emperor decided that because of the
increasing importance of military policy, Finland should be represented in the Imperial Duma so that its military affairs could be discussed in the Duma. An Imperial Rescript to Stolypin (14 October, 1910) asked him to submit a proposal to this effect to the Duma.

Meanwhile there had been a change in the party structure of the Duma. Count Bobrinsky, a man of mediocre intelligence but a good organizer, had formed a strong Nationalist group out of the bulk of the right wing and the uncommitted moderates. Fervently pro-Russian and intensely imperialist, the new party made its debut on the Finland bill. They proposed that the Imperial Duma should be given competence not only over the military affairs of Finland, but over a whole host of other matters as well. 12 In effect, their amendments amounted to a withdrawal of the rights of the Finnish Diet and offered instead only a handful of deputies in an overwhelmingly Russian legislature. The Emperor and Stolypin were delighted with these amendments, which they had not dared to include in the original bill. During the discussion of the amendments, it became clear that the house was almost evenly divided. The rump of the extreme right, the Nationalists, and about half of the Octobrists were in favour of the amendments. The rest of the Octobrists wanted to modify them, while the Kadets and the socialists opposed both the bill and the amendments. Miliukov, the leader of the Kadets, committed one of the great tactical blunders of his career by calling for a party boycott when the vote came. The amendments were carried by a majority of less than a hundred votes. The Nationalists were triumphant and the Kadets thoroughly discredited. The boycott had served no useful purpose, and it ended all chance for presenting moderate amendments if the Nationalists had failed to carry their proposals.
The appearance of the Nationalist Party in late 1910 spelled doom for the informal accord which had existed between Stolypin and the Octobrists. Stolypin's land reforms had been aimed at the creation of a class of loyal and conservative small landowners. The electoral law of 1907 had ensured the preponderance of the landowning classes in the Duma. Part and parcel of this conservatism was the reassertion of Russian nationality, that official \textit{natsional'nost'} which had been introduced into the ideology of tsarism by Count Uvarov in the 1830's. Bobrinsky's Nationalist Party seemed to be the fulfilment of both these trends, and Stolypin welcomed its birth with open arms.

The Chairman of the Ministers' Council was glad to be able to jettison the Octobrists, who were becoming more of a liability than an asset. The Tsar's enthusiasm for his chief minister was wearing thin with the passage of time. The court continued to attack him for his 'sympathy with the Duma'. The Empress was turning against him, as she turned against anyone whom she thought was preventing her husband from exercising his autocratic powers to the full. She also resented Stolypin's toleration of Guchkov. She loathed the Octobrist leader because of his attack on the grand dukes, and because of his increasingly frequent references to the mystical and obscurantist tendencies of the court. Stolypin realized that her feelings would soon have their effect on his relations with the Emperor, if indeed they had not already done so. Furthermore, the pragmatic Stolypin was finding it increasingly difficult to work with the equally pragmatic Octobrists. Convinced that the Duma was not in immediate danger of dissolution, they began
to weigh his proposals with more care, and could not always be counted on to support them completely. The subtle pressures exercised on the ministers by the Duma committees were becoming more and more annoying. For all these reasons, Stolypin decided that an alliance with the Nationalists could do nothing but good for his shaky position.

One of the first results of the new 'entente' was the introduction into the Duma of a proposal to create zemstvo institutions in the western provinces of the Empire. The electoral arrangements for the zemstva were such that they would ensure representation for the Russian peasants of the region at the expense of the Polish landowners. This was what appealed to the Nationalists, and they gave the bill their wholehearted support. Incidentally, this provision which gave power to the peasants at the expense of the gentry for political reasons also revealed that the 1906 reforms had been primarily political rather than economic in conception. The zemstvo extension bill, as it came to be called, raised all sorts of grave problems with regard to the prerogatives of the Tsar and the rights of the Duma and State Council, problems which showed clearly that the issue of sovereignty was by no means dead even in the relatively cooperative Third Duma.

Thanks to the reliable Nationalist majority, the bill was speedily approved in the Duma. The major constitutional crisis arose when the State Council rejected those clauses of the bill which provided for the voting to be weighted in favour of the Russian population of the area. The argument advanced by Durnovo and Trepov, who led the opposition to the bill in the Council, was that weighted voting was contrary to the principles on which the
zemstvo organizations had been created by Alexander II. This argument was an attempt to conceal the fact that the natural sympathies of the Council were with the landowners, even though they might be Poles and Roman Catholics. Stolypin was incensed by the decision of the State Council, and immediately threatened to tender his resignation. He also informed the Tsar that he would not accept an appointment to the State Council as long as Trepov and Durnovo continued to be members of it, thereby forcing Nicholas into accepting or rejecting his resignation. There would be no room for 'friendly persuasion'; Stolypin was set on forcing the issue. The Tsar, however, rather shrewdly saw that he could avoid taking a stand for or against the bill if he treated the matter as a clear-cut question of ministerial responsibility. "What" he asked Stolypin, "would become of a government responsible to me if ministers came and went, today because of a conflict with the State Council, tomorrow because of a conflict with the Duma? Think of some other way out..."15 However much Nicholas may have wanted to accept Stolypin's resignation, he could not do so over this issue. For one thing, the argument about ministerial responsibility was absolutely true, and this was one subject on which the Tsar had very definite ideas. Furthermore, one suspects that he himself strongly approved of the pro-Russian aspects of the bill.

The 'way out' which Stolypin proposed was to employ again Article 87 and thus present the Council with a fait accompli. The houses would have to be prorogued for three days, during which time the bill would be promulgated as law by sovereign ukase. He was confident that the Duma would ratify the decree, since it had already passed the bill, although he expected to receive
another sermon from the Kadets for misusing Article 87. He also proposed to the Tsar that Trepov and Durnovo be temporarily relieved of their seats in the State Council, to ensure that the decree would be ratified by that body. In reality, there were only two other courses of action open to him. He could have dropped the bill entirely, but he was not a man to surrender so easily. He could have waited for a time and submitted it to both houses again, but he was not prepared to wait for several months to do this. He felt so strongly about the bill that he was prepared to risk another violation of the constitution. On 12 March, 1911, the Duma and the State Council were prorogued and ordered to reassemble three days later. The ukase was published on 14 March. Trepov and Durnovo were requested to absent themselves from the State Council for six months; Durnovo agreed but Trepov resigned, thereby becoming a sort of martyr in the eyes of the Council.

A. I. Guchkov has indicated the reaction of contemporaries to the events described above:

By this act Stolypin aroused the entire Russian public against him. The Left wing and the Centre were indignant at such a flagrant circumvention of the constitution, while the Right wing was indignant at his treatment of its leaders in the State Council. I was Chairman of the Duma at that time, and in spite of my good relations with Stolypin I was obliged to protest against his violation of parliamentary rights. My position enabled me to make this protest by resigning from the chairmanship of the Duma. This was particularly necessary in order that no suspicion might be aroused that I and the Octobrist party, which I headed and which had fully supported Stolypin's law regarding western zemstvos, were in sympathy with his unconstitutional actions.16

As was the case in 1907, the Senate again failed to interfere and prevent this violation of the provisions of the Fundamental Laws. As the guardian of legality, it should have been the duty of the Senate to refuse to publish an ukase which had been promulgated in flagrant violation of the
constitutional order. The Senators may have rationalized their inactivity in 1907 by considering the two opposition Dumas to be the sort of exceptional circumstances required to justify the use of Article 87, but there could be no such argument in 1911. In fact, the use of Article 87 was doubly bad when one takes into account the fact that the bill had already been rejected by one of the two chambers. One cannot, however, lay the blame entirely at the door of the Senate, for the real villain in this state crime lived at Tsarskoe Selo. Too weak-willed to choose the harder way, Nicholas gave in to Stolypin, and once again alienated some of the strongest supporters of the monarchy.

The Duma's right to interpellate ministers also became an issue in connection with the zemstvo extension bill. In April, when the decree was submitted for ratification, the Duma attempted to interpellate Stolypin regarding his government's policy in the western provinces. Stolypin countered by refusing to answer questions, saying that the policy had been decided by the Council of Ministers at a meeting chaired by the Emperor himself. The Duma, he said, had no right to interpellate the Council of Ministers when it functioned as an organ of the Supreme Power. Stolypin would have been better advised simply to refuse to answer, as provided for in Article 59 of the Organic Law of the Duma, for he put his head into a hornet's nest by taking the tack that he did. The brilliant Kadet deputy, V. A. Maklakov, challenged the validity of Stolypin's argument.

...The Prime Minister ought not to forget that even though the Emperor presided over the Council of Ministers, as is his right, he does not become, in doing so, a member of it;
nor does the Council rise to the level of the Monarch. The Emperor only ratifies the decisions adopted by the members of the Council of Ministers without accepting the responsibility for the act itself. Consequently, the Council of Ministers continues to be responsible for all its actions and acts, and must account for their legality before the Duma.  

Maklakov's argument was irrefutable. If the Council of Ministers became an organ of the Supreme Power merely by the addition of the Emperor's presence, then the same case could be made for anyone who received instructions from the Tsar either personally or by Imperial Rescript. The latter were, of course, only agents, not organs, of the Supreme Power, and were thus capable of error, whereas the Supreme Power itself was infallible. (Constitutional theory did not take account of the Tsar's unfortunate habit of sending contradictory instructions to various ministers). Stolypin was thus overruled, not only by Maklakov's argument, but by the very Article which he cited in his own defence. The Council of Ministers was not subject to the authority of the Senate, and could therefore be interpellated by the Duma. Stolypin finally had to consent to answer the Duma's questions.

The promulgation of the zemstvo extension bill was Stolypin's last great triumph. On 1 September 1911, he was shot to death by an agent-provocateur in Kiev. Not one member of the Imperial family attended his funeral. Nicholas had held him responsible for the uproar created in March, and their relations had worsened rapidly in those last months. Thus passed from the scene the most capable and enlightened minister of the reign. He had done as much as any man could to restore the foundations of the monarchy which had been so badly shaken in 1905. Yet, if he was not an enemy of constitutional government, neither was he its friend. He had kept the Duma
alive, yes, but only on his own terms. He worked with it when it suited him, but he did not turn from the coup d'etat when he believed it to be necessary. He began by announcing his concern for legality in government, but he is remembered for the electoral law of 1907 and for his repeated misuse of Article 87. The Octobrists asked only that the Duma be allowed to participate in the governing process, and the pragmatic accord between Stolypin and Guchkov allowed it to do so. However, when Stolypin saw that he could get unquestioning support from the Nationalists, he discarded the Octobrists with relief. He holds an important place in Russian history because of his undying efforts to restore the strength of the Russian state. He never ceased to work for the good of the dynasty, despite the unfavourable attitude which prevailed towards him at court. None of his successors was capable of carrying on his work to any satisfactory degree, so that without him the government was like a ship adrift. Nonetheless, the Stolypin years, it must be agreed, were very much of a mixed blessing for Russian constitutional history.
FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER VI

1For examples of Senatorial interpretations of the electoral law which damaged the left's chances for election to the Third Duma, see S. N. Harper, The New Electoral Law for the Russian Duma, Chicago, 1908, pp. 10-14, and 36-41.


3The text of the pamphlet was in this vein:

"The elections brought to power the Octobrists who, with an extreme eagerness, immediately disclosed their ambitions on 13 November, 1907, when they declared to the Duma that the Emperor no longer possessed his autocratic power."

Quoted and translated from N. Savickij, "P. A. Stolypin", Le Monde Slave, 1934, No. 4, p. 396.

4The Minister of the Imperial Court never appeared in the Duma except on state occasions.

5The Bulygin project conceived of the committees as doing the day-to-day work of the sessions, and anticipated that plenary sessions of the whole Duma would be held only infrequently. The idea of these "government reform commissions" had originally come from the reform proposals of Count Loris-Melikov, drawn up in 1881.

6See Kokovtsov, op.cit., Part III and ff.

7Ibid., p. 203.


9Kryzhanovsky, Padenie Tsarskogo Rezhima V, pp. 402-416.

10See Kokovtsov, op.cit., pp. 218-224.


12Among the subjects proposed were: the use of Russian in Finland, the principles of Finnish administration, police justice, education, the formation of companies and associations, public meetings, the press, the customs tariff, the monetary system, and the means of communication. See loc.cit.
13 See N. Riasanovsky, Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia, 1825-1855, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1959.

14 See below, Chapter 7.

15 Kokovtsov, op.cit., p. 264.


17 P. Chasles has pointed out the flagrant illegality of Stolypin's action:

"He did not have recourse to Article 87 because it was urgent to legislate in the absence of Parliament; rather, he prorogued Parliament in order to be free to have recourse to Article 87. It was a reversal of means and ends..."


18 The Duma could not interpellate the Emperor or any organ of the Supreme Power, including the Council of National Defence, the Military Council, the departments of the State Council, the Ministry of the Imperial Court, and the Chancellery. It did, however, have the right "to interpellate the ministers and the heads of departments, who by law are subjected to the authority of the Senate...". See Polnoe Sobranie Zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii, St. Petersburg, 1906.

19 Tret'ya Gosudarstvennaya Duma, Stenograficheskie Otchety, Session IV, Part III, p. 2887.

20 See note 18.
CHAPTER VII

THE MONARCHY AND POLITICS

The characteristic feature of Russian politics after the death of Stolypin was the reassertion of the personal sovereignty of the Tsar. Most of the Tsar's prerogative powers, it has been shown above, were retained in the Fundamental Laws of 1906, and could have been reasserted strongly at any time. Stolypin, although by no means a "constitutional" Prime Minister, had at least kept the exercise of royal prerogative within rational bounds, but after his death in 1911 even these limits disappeared. None of Stolypin's successors was anxious to accept the fact of the Duma's existence, nor did they establish the informal accords through which Stolypin had worked first with the Octobrists and then with the Nationalists. Kokovtsov and Goremykin were both representatives of the St. Petersburg bureaucracy, and both were chosen to preserve the status quo, not to pacify the country. The preservation of the status quo required of them only that they retain the confidence of the Tsar—their relations with the Duma were hence quite immaterial to them. There was, in any case, less reason to establish an accord with the Third Duma in 1911 than there had been in 1907. For one thing, the now dominant Nationalists were much less concerned with 'participation' in the legislative process than the Octobrists had been. They were content to support the increasingly repressive measures of Russification put forward by the government, and challenges to governmental estimates became less and less frequent. Furthermore, by 1911 all members of the Duma tended to be more
concerned with the forthcoming elections than they were with the immediate political situation. Thus Kokovtsov was not under pressure from any source to establish good working relations with the Duma.

This combination of a nondescript Prime Minister and a docile Duma paved the way for a reassertion of the personal sovereignty of the Tsar. Overshadowed first by Witte and then by Stolypin, the Tsar had not been an effective force in Russian politics since the early years of his reign. After 1911, however, he began to play a more extensive role in the governing process, and it is necessary to analyse in some detail his character and political beliefs.

Nicholas II's most outstanding personal trait was his weakness of will. Totally lacking in intellectual power, he was neither a builder nor a reformer, and had no grand idea of where he was leading Russia. He was putty in the hands of anyone stronger than himself, and the examples of his weakness are too numerous to mention. Nevertheless, because of his weakness, Nicholas was also a very stubborn man. Once he had been convinced that a particular course of action was right, he clung to his belief with the single-mindedness of a Jesuit missionary. This stubbornness is not hard to understand. Being incapable of formulating a policy by himself, he was equally incapable of revising his position in the light of new events or of new information. This fact alone accounts for most of the seeming inconsistencies of his behaviour.

The Tsar's weakness of will also led on occasion to outright cowardliness. He shirked all responsibility for his actions. In 1905, for example, he did nothing to dispel the rumour that Count Witte had foisted the
October Manifesto on him as a diktat. Justifiably annoyed, Witte sent him
a memoir describing the circumstances which surrounded the signing of the
Manifesto. 1 Nicholas gave the memoir to Baron Frederichs to return to Witte,
saying, "The facts in Witte's memorandum are described correctly. However,
do not make this statement to him in writing, but orally." 2 Later, after
Witte's resignation, the Tsar asked him to return "...all letters and tele-
grams with his autographed commentaries," 3 presumably so that Witte could
never reproduce these documents in his memoirs. All the important political
figures of the reign record similar incidents which attest to the Tsar's
cowardly behaviour. None of them was as bitter as Kokovtsov, who arrived
home from a pleasant audience with the Tsar to find a letter containing his
dismissal awaiting him! This sort of conduct was not likely to engender warm
loyalty for the sovereign among his ministers.

The Tsar's moral cowardliness often created unpleasant situations,
but his stubbornness usually had very serious consequences. It was well
known, for example, that he was absolutely opposed to the idea of self-
government in Russia. This belief can be traced to his upbringing at the
hands of Alexander III and to the influence of his wife, of which more will
be said below. His definition of self-government included any form of public
participation in the governing process. Hence he opposed all efforts to form
a coalition ministry after the dissolution of the First Duma, the only kind
of ministry which really could have put into practice the principles
enunciated in the October Manifesto. 4 As far as the Tsar was concerned, the
publication of the Fundamental Laws of 1906 relieved him of any obligation
to live up to the promises of the Manifesto. He firmly supported Stolypin,
even when the latter violated the Fundamental Laws, but it must be noted that all these violations were in the interests of the government and were directed towards the preservation of order in the state.

Another issue on which Nicholas showed himself to be particularly intractable was the Jewish question. In December, 1906, Stolypin, as Minister of the Interior, proposed the lifting of some of the most serious restrictions on the Jews. The Council of Ministers embodied his proposals in a recommendation to the Tsar. Nicholas' reply was characteristic:

I am returning [it] to you without my confirmation...

Despite most convincing arguments in favour of adopting a positive decision in this matter, an inner voice keeps on insisting that I do not accept responsibility for it. So far my conscience has not deceived me. Therefore I intend in this case also to follow its dictates. I know that you, too, believe that 'A Tsar's heart is in God's hand'. Let it be so.

Nicholas' particular intractability on the two questions of self-government and the Jews is significant, for it lends credence to the often-heard statement that he was a firm supporter of the Union of the Russian People, the reactionary organization founded by A. M. Dubrovin in 1905.

If the doctrine of the Union of the Russian People was the sum total of the Emperor's political thought (and it would seem that this was the case), then one can establish with reasonable certainty the Emperor's idea of autocratic sovereignty. The doctrine of the Union was really nothing more than the political theory of Pobedonostsev, slightly adjusted to take account of post-1905 developments. The Emperor, it was held, is the source of all law and, as such, is above the law. Autocracy is the best form of government for
Russia because the interests of the Emperor and his subjects are identical. The Emperor is not swayed by oratory, and can thus follow a consistent policy, while assemblies are always subject to demogogy and factionalism. If Russia must have an assembly, the Union believed that it should be a replica of the Zemskii Sobor. 

We urge the establishment of a State Duma with the right of immediate report to the Sovereign, the right of inquiry of the ministers, the right of actual control over the unofficial activities of the ministers, and the right to solicit the Supreme Consent of the Emperor to questions raised in the Duma.

and again:

the State Duma, avoiding all attempts to limit the Supreme Power, must be all-Russian. It is obliged to give correct information about the actual needs of the people and the state. It must be prepared to carry out by legal means prepared reforms emanating from the Supreme Power.... It must not be allowed an arbitrary will...

According to Dubrovin, the Duma would merely have the privilege of supporting the actions of the Tsar. It would, in fact, have been even more of a debating society than the Duma envisioned in the Bulygin project.

Naturally enough, the name of Count Witte was anathema to the Union of the Russian People. Besides being responsible for the October Manifesto, Witte was also "...in league with the Kadets, the radicals, Satan, the Jews, the Catholics, and Japan." The Count, for his part, describes the Union as "dark-minded and ignorant...the leaders are unhanged villains." Witte's resignation from office was greeted with approval by the Union, and the Fundamental Laws of 1906 were hailed as a reassertion of the absolute sovereignty of the Emperor. Simultaneously, the party newspaper denounced the 'mistaken idea' that the October Manifesto had been a constitutional charter for Russia.
The Union ran candidates for the First Duma, but when they failed to secure any effective representation, the Union announced that the Duma should be abolished. Having observed the conduct of the First Duma, Dubrovin concluded gloomily that the Kadet members were insane, and should be transferred "...into a psychiatric hospital for treatment." When it was announced that a Second Duma would be convoked, the Union again announced its intention of securing a rightist majority. Nicholas II, in a message to Dubrovin, replied

I shall continue to reign as the Autocrat and to no one but God shall I render account of my doings.... Tell your friends that with God's help and with the assistance of the Union I shall destroy my enemies.14

The Union failed again in the elections to the short-lived Second Duma, but in the Third and Fourth Dumas it was well represented by the irrepressibly vocal V. M. Purishkevich. By this time the Emperor was wearing the badge of the Union in public. Dubrovin received another message from the Tsar:

The basic position of the Union is included in the Fundamental Laws of the Russian Empire, and that is why every loyal citizen, besides Union members, is bound to one duty only. This obliges him not only to recognize, but to honour as sacred the holy will of the Tsar Autocrat, not for fear's sake, but for the sake of conscience.15

There is no need to dwell here on the militant racism and anti-Semitism of the Union of the Russian People. There is a wealth of literature on the pogroms and the 'Black Hundred' gangs which were sponsored by the Union. The point should be made, however, that Nicholas subscribed to the racist theories of the Union, as well as to its political doctrine.
For the Emperor, then, autocratic sovereignty was a trust from God, and should be exercised personally by the Tsar, accepting no limitations on this power from the ministers, the State Council, or the State Duma. Circumstances had thus far prevented him from putting his beliefs wholly into practice—so long as the country had to be pacified, Nicholas was unable to overcome the opposition of Witte and Stolypin to the untrammeled exercise of personal sovereignty. Furthermore, his natural weakness of character prevented him from asserting his will. By 1911, however, the situation had changed substantially. The country was relatively quiet, Stolypin was dead, and the Duma was carrying on with relatively few disturbances. Urged on by his domineering and power-seeking wife, Nicholas began to play the autocrat more often than he had done before.

Stolypin's colourless successor, Kokovtsov, was apprised of this change of mood during one of his first audiences at Tsarskoe Selo. The Tsar spoke bitterly of his former first minister, who "...was always so anxious to keep me in the background." He made it clear to Kokovtsov that the latter was to be an administrator, not an initiator of government policy. The Empress supported her husband by condemning Stolypin's rapprochement with the Duma moderates. She told Kokovtsov that she hoped he would never range himself "...with those horrible political parties which only hope to be able to seize power or to subjugate the government." The royal couple had little to worry about as Kokovtsov, by his own admission, did not inspire the confidence of the Duma moderates. He accepted the royal warnings, and was soon telling a deputation of Nationalists who were seeking a continuation
of Stolypin's policies that "...they attributed more authority to the Chairman of the Council of Ministers than he actually possessed."\textsuperscript{18}

Kokovtsov's lone and short-lived victory over the Tsar was the choice of his own candidate for Minister of the Interior. The Tsar wished to appoint the reactionary A. N. Khvostov, but Kokovtsov argued adamantly for the appointment of the more moderate A. A. Makarov. The Tsar finally agreed, but only because he accepted Kokovtsov's argument that Makarov's appointment would end political squabbling. Apart from Makarov, Kokovtsov was in the difficult position of having inherited all his cabinet colleagues. While this did not result in a unified policy, it nevertheless reassured the Tsar that Kokovtsov would never become as powerful a President as Stolypin had been. Indeed, some members of the Council worked against Kokovtsov, in particular Krivoshein, who deliberately curried favour with the Empress.

The main problem which Kokovtsov faced as first minister was the presence of the notorious Rasputin in the Imperial Household. In January, 1912, the Tsar advised Makarov that the press was to be forbidden to mention Rasputin. Appreciating public reaction to such a decree, Kokovtsov, Makarov, and Sabler (the Procurator-General of the Holy Synod), through the medium of Baron Frederichs, tried to persuade the Tsar to send Rasputin back to Siberia. The Tsar's unfavourable response to this request was learned of by the Duma, and criticism became even more widespread. In order to put a stop to the outcry, the President of the Duma, M. V. Rodzianko, was allowed to prepare a report on Rasputin based on the files of the Holy Synod, in order that he might thereby convince himself and the Duma of Rasputin's blameless
character. Meanwhile Makarov, who was so unwise as to give the Tsar some compromising letters from the Empress to Rasputin, was dismissed for his pains. Nicholas chose as the new Minister of the Interior, N. A. Maklakov, a notorious reactionary and a great friend of Prince Meshchersky, the editor of the ultra-right wing Grazhdanin. Maklakov had to his credit a long record of hostility to the zemstvo organizations. He immediately tightened the control of the press by the censors.

The last days of the Third Duma were marked by constant bickering. When Rodzianko submitted a most unfavourable report on Rasputin, he incurred the wrath of the Tsar. Nicholas told Kokovtsov that the conduct of the President of the Duma was "revolting", and that he would not receive him at an official audience. This was a violation of the Fundamental Laws, which guaranteed to the presidents of the legislative chambers the right of free access to the Emperor. Kokovtsov was, however, shrewd enough to point out to the Emperor that a hostile Duma would refuse to pass credits for Nicholas' pet scheme, the naval construction programme. The Tsar conceded, and the naval estimates were passed, but by this time the Empress had cooled the Tsar's early enthusiasm for the programme. The Duma continued to criticize Rasputin, and on the very last day of the sitting opposed the estimates of the Holy Synod for the construction of parish schools. Consequently, the Emperor's reception for the Duma deputies, the preparation of which had cost Kokovtsov much time and effort, was marked by a certain coolness on the part of the Tsar. It was a poor conclusion to five years of hard work by the deputies.
The elections for the Fourth Duma were quiet enough, and their results made no great changes in the composition of the Duma. The representation of the extreme right was increased by the election of a number of priests, and the Nationalists also increased their representation slightly. The Kadets and socialists were returned in almost the same numbers as in the Third Duma. The most important change was the loss of deputies by the Octobrists, who were severely crippled by the electoral defeat of A. I. Guchkov. This last event caused much rejoicing at Tsarskoe Selo, however, for as Kerensky has pointed out,

The Empress rightly considered the leader of conservative constitutionalism as the most dangerous adversary of her own political plan: "the reestablishment of unlimited absolutism." The loss of Guchkov left the Octobrists disunited in the face of the overwhelming ascendancy of the Nationalists and Rightists. Kokovtsov got on badly with both these parties. The Nationalists accused him of betraying Stolypin's policies, while the Rightists never forgave him for refusing to increase their subsidies during the election campaign.

Rasputin's continued presence at Court seriously damaged the prestige of the monarchy in the eyes of the moderates. In the months which followed Stolypin's death, it became increasingly more evident that the Emperor wished to destroy even that severely limited sovereignty which the Third Duma had so carefully fostered. The moderates therefore began to go over to the ranks of the opposition. Already before the opening of the Fourth Duma, Guchkov launched the slogan, "Against the participation of irresponsible men in state affairs. For a government responsible to the nation's
In June, 1913, on the initiative of the Octobrists, the Duma passed a motion of censure against the government for delaying the introduction of constitutional reform. The government entirely ignored this resolution. At the Octobrist Party Congress in November, Guchkov introduced a resolution that the parliamentary faction of the party should resort in full measure to all legal forms of parliamentary combat, such as the freedom of the tribune, the right of interpellation, the rejection of bills and the refusal of credits.

Guchkov's action was motivated by resentment that the Octobrist ideal of 'participation' in the legislative process had been frustrated by the policies of the government. If this goal were to be attained now, it could only be done if three conditions were fulfilled: the severance of relations between the Imperial family and Rasputin, the dismissal of Maklakov and preferably also of Kokovtsov, and a change of attitude on the part of the Emperor. In order to further these immediate aims, Guchkov was, in effect, urging that the Octobrists become a full-fledged opposition party, employing leftist tactics for the attainment of moderate ends.

Guchkov's resolution was the cause of bitter controversy, and its adoption resulted in a split in the party. The majority, who supported Guchkov, became known as 'Left Octobrists', while the conservative minority, led by M. V. Rodzianko and Nikolai Shidlovsky, continued to support the original moderate tactics of the party, and took the name of 'Zemstvo Octobrists'. This split in the Octobrist Party was of the utmost importance, since it paved the way for the formulation of a united opposition programme.
Meanwhile, Kokovtsov's relations with the Duma did not improve, while his relations with the Imperial Family seriously deteriorated. Even Maklakov had not been able to strangle criticism of Rasputin in the press, and for every new scandal the Empress held Kokovtsov responsible.

...in her mind, Rasputin was closely associated with the health of her son and the welfare of the Monarchy. To attack him was to attack the protector of what she held most dear. Moreover, like any righteous person, she was offended to think that the sanctity of her home has been questioned in the press and in the Duma. She always thought that I [Kokovtsov], as head of the government, was responsible for permitting these attacks, and could not understand why I could not stop them simply by giving orders in the name of the Tsar. She considered me, therefore, not a servant of the Tsar but a tool of the enemies of the state and as such deserving dismissal. ²³

Kokovtsov's days as President of the Council of Ministers were indeed numbered. Prince Meshchersky's Grazhdanin kept up a constant tirade against him for attempting to usurp the Tsar's authority, and for being (of all things) a "Duma bootlicker". ²⁴ In January, 1914, he was finally dismissed. His successor, recommended by Prince Meshchersky, approved by the Empress and Rasputin, and chosen no doubt for his unquestioning loyalty and remarkable ability to ignore the Duma, was the venerable bureaucrat, Ivan Logginovich Goremykin. Given a political situation in which even the moderates had lost their faith in the monarchy, it would now take only the slightest added stress on the structure of the state to bring on a full-scale political crisis.
FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER VII

1 See above, Chapter 2.

2 Witte, op.cit., p. 185.

3 Ibid., p. 189.

4 Although Stolypin's sincerity in these negotiations has been called into question (see above, Chapter 4), it was quite obvious to the public men that the Tsar was opposed to any kind of coalition ministry except on his own terms.

5 Kokovtsov, op.cit., p. 167.

6 For a statement of the policy of this party based largely on the files of the party paper, Russkoe Znamya, see S. D. Spector, The Doctrine and Program of the Union of the Russian People in 1906, unpublished essay for the Certificate of the Russian Institute of Columbia University, 1952.

7 Ibid., p. 33.

8 Ibid., p. 35, n. 2.

9 Ibid., p. 29 (emphasis added)

10 Ibid., p. 39, n. 2.

11 Witte, op.cit., p. 192.


13 Ibid., p. 37, n. 1.

14 Ibid., p. 38.

15 Ibid., p. 25.


17 Kokovtsov, op.cit., p. 282.

18 Ibid., p. 275.

19 Count N. P. Ignatiev, The Minister of Education, was Krivoshein's nominee.


CHAPTER VIII

THE CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS OF 1915

War tests the strength of states as well as the strength of armies, and on 19 July/1 August, 1914, Germany declared war on Russia. The war placed a gigantic strain on the constitutional structure of the Russian state. In times of war sovereignty becomes a complex problem in any country, because the state must do much more in the way of regulating the life of its citizens than is done in peacetime. Many more decisions must be taken, and to each new decision is attached a sense of urgency which colours all discussion and affects every action. When a state is at war, civil sovereignty must of necessity take a back seat to military sovereignty, and this rapid transition imposes a severe burden on even the most firmly grounded constitutional systems. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that Imperial Russia found itself in a grave situation.

The Tsar's first act was to appoint the Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaievich Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Army, thereby waiving his own prerogative to assume this position. The establishment of Army Headquarters (Stavka) under the Grand Duke (by the Statute of Field Administration, 16 July, 1914) brought fundamental changes in the organization of the state. Besides having complete authority over all military forces at the front and in the rear, Stavka also had full control over the administration of all areas in which there were military operations or installations, either at the front or in the rear. According to the Statute,
neither the cabinet nor any other civil authority had any voice in the administration of these areas. Administrative personnel could be changed at the discretion of the Commander-in-Chief. (This power was exercised in practice by the Chief of the General Staff, General Yanushkevich.) Throughout the war, vast areas of the Empire were under the complete control of Stavka, including Finland, Petrograd, Archangel, the Baltic Provinces, Poland, the Caucasus, and Vladivostok. If the Council of Ministers had any questions or recommendations about the administration of these areas, it had to bring them to the attention of Stavka. Ministers could correspond with, or travel to Stavka, but "...even they had the greatest difficulty in obtaining replies, and could not challenge any of the decisions which had been reached." The deplorable state of relations between the army command and the civil government can be surmised from the fact that the Statute of Field Administration omitted any mention of the Council of Ministers or of its President.

As the Duma was not in session when war was declared, it was natural that the deputies should have expected a speedy convocation in order that the organization of facilities and services in the rear might be discussed. The declaration of war had provoked a tremendous outburst of national feeling, and even the traditional factionalism of the Duma had given way to the upsurge of patriotic sentiment. The Duma was at this time prepared to work even with the government of Goremykin, but it could not work unless it was convoked.

Rumours reached the Duma leaders at this time that Maklakov had persuaded the Council of Ministers that the Duma should not be convoked until
the Autumn of 1915. Such a plan violated the Fundamental Laws, as it was stipulated that the Duma should meet at least once a year in order to approve the budget. Evidently Goremykin was prepared to drain the treasury and rely on foreign loans rather than risk convoking the Duma in wartime. Such legislation as was necessary could be passed under Article 87. Naturally the Duma leaders were annoyed when Goremykin refused to meet them for a discussion of the situation. Working through Krivoshein, however, they managed to extract the concession that the Duma should meet 'not later than February', 1915. The convocation took place at last on 27 January, but Goremykin would permit only a three-day session devoted exclusively to the consideration and passage of the budget. There was nothing the Duma leaders could do but attend the session under Goremykin's conditions.

After the January session the government set its face resolutely against any further contact with the Duma, but after only a few months, the government found itself in an awkward situation. The munitions scandals were only one example of the hopeless disorganization which was hampering the war effort. The prestige of the government was declining daily as people began to realize that all the blame for the munitions scandals could not be laid at the door of General Sukhomlinov. Inevitably, that patriotic sentiment which had accompanied the declaration of war began to be transformed into a growing resentment against the incompetence of the government. Cries for constitutional reform came from outside the Duma for the first time since 1905. To these demands Goremykin had no answer, but while he remained silent, two other members of the cabinet spoke out. Their words
dramatized effectively the disunity of the government at that time. The Minister of Justice, I. G. Shcheglovitov, told the French Ambassador that "constitutional liberalism is a heresy as well as a stupid chimera...If political reforms are necessary they must be carried out only in the spirit of autocracy and orthodoxy." Three weeks later, M. Paleologue was told by A. V. Krivoshein that "...the plain duty of Ministers is to remove the causes of the friction which has been observable for several months between the Government and public opinion; it is a sine qua non of victory." Krivoshein made it clear that although he favoured a further restriction of the Imperial power, he would not support constitutional reform until after the war. He was nevertheless willing to support, for the moment, the forming of a ministry in which the public could have confidence. Between his position and that of Shcheglovitov there was a world of difference, and the remainder of 1915 was occupied by the struggle between these two points of view.

Increased attacks on the government for its lack of unity, coupled with the vital necessity of reorganizing the war effort, produced substantial changes in the personnel of the Council of Ministers in June and early July. The Tsar, in answer to Rodzianko's constant badgering, finally consented to summon the Duma 'in the near future'. Having made this decision, he was faced with the necessity of dismissing Maklakov, Sabler, and Shcheglovitov, if he wished to retain the services of the more progressive ministers, led by Krivoshein and Kharitonov. The three reactionary ministers signed their own writs-of political execution by opposing both the calling of the Duma and
the continuation of the war at a cabinet meeting on 3 June. For Nicholas II, the continuation of the war was a point of honour, and it was no surprise that Maklakov was dismissed the following day. In his place was appointed Prince N. B. Shcherbatov, a firm supporter of the military effort. A week later, General Sukhomlinov was replaced as War Minister by General Polivanov. Although the Tsar did not believe that Sukhomlinov was personally implicated in the munitions scandals, he was unwilling to leave unanswered any cause for complaint against the war effort.

On June 14, an important meeting of the Council of Ministers was held at Stavka under the chairmanship of the Tsar himself, who was visiting Headquarters at that time. Over the objections of Shcheglovitov, Sabler, and Rukhlov, a Manifesto was issued stressing the need for national unity, and announcing that the Duma would be summoned 'not later than August'. Also over the objections of the reactionaries, a committee was appointed to discuss the question of autonomy for a restored Poland. At the same time a special council on defence was set up to include ministers, senior officials of the bureaucracy, and members of the State Council and the Duma. The special defence council had been proposed by Rodzianko, and it met with the warm approval of the Emperor. As a result of the work of this meeting it became a foregone conclusion that Sabler and Shcheglovitov would have to be replaced. Three weeks later, on 5 July, A. D. Samarin was appointed Procurator of the Holy Synod in place of Sabler, and on the following day, A. A. Khvostov was appointed Minister of Justice to succeed Shcheglovitov.
Sir Bernard Pares has called the cabinet meeting of 14 June "...the most decisive step taken so far towards co-operation between the Government and the public." Yet it must be said that the cabinet changes in no way signified a change of course on the part of the Emperor. He was not turning away from the reassertion of personal sovereignty which had marked the years 1912-1914 towards a new constitutional arrangement. He was simply taking precautions to ensure that his goal, the successful conclusion of the war effort, would be achieved as quickly and as efficiently as possible. If the Tsar had really wished to co-operate with the public, he would have removed the Chairman of the Council of Ministers. Instead, Goremykin was left at the head of the Council as a warning to the would-be reformers that no further changes were contemplated.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of these cabinet changes is that they represent a triumph for the influence of Krivoshein and the Grand Duke Nikolai over that of the Empress and Rasputin. According to V. I. Gurko, Prince Shcherbatov, Pólivanov, Samarin and Khvostov were appointed on the advice of the Grand Duke. There had been

...an agreement between the Stavka and Krivoshein, who enjoyed at that time special influence with the Emperor

...Pólivanov was advanced mainly by the Stavka, Samarin and Shcherbatov by Krivoshein, and Khvostov by his friend Goremykin.

Gurko reveals that Krivoshein once hoped to succeed Goremykin, and wanted a cabinet "...whose members should be, as far as possible, representatives of the public." Although Miliukov speaks favourably of Krivoshein as being acceptable to the Duma leaders, Gurko reports that Krivoshein later decided that he was not capable of heading the government. In any case there are no
grounds for believing that Nicholas ever seriously considered him as a successor to Goremykin. For the reasons stated above, it was absolutely essential to retain Goremykin as Chairman of the Council of Ministers. If Krivoshein ever did plan on succeeding Goremykin, his dream was frustrated by the Tsar. The 1915 cabinet changes did, however, go a long way towards bolstering Krivoshein's position in the Council of Ministers.

The Tsar was under no illusions about his wife's opposition to the ministerial changes. It is perhaps significant that the important decisions in this matter were taken at Stavka, rather than at Tsarskoe Selo. The Empress had already objected to Polivanov's appointment because of his known friendship with Guchkov, and because he was "our Friend's [Rasputin's] enemy." The very day of the cabinet meeting she wrote to Nicholas, demanding that he "be more autocratic." The next day, she sent him a long and revealing message from Rasputin:

...you are to pay less attention to what people will say to you, not let yourself be influenced by them but use yr. own instinct & go by that, to be more sure of yourself & not listen too much nor given to others, who know less than you...He regrets that you did not speak to Him more about all you think & were intending to do & speak about with yr. ministers & the changes you were thinking of making... [sic]

Although Nicholas had carefully prepared her for the appointment of Samarin, M. Paleologue reports that she was "absolutely thunderstruck" when the full extent of the cabinet changes became known.

The Empress was also very angry about the announced convocation of the Duma in August.
...our Friend begged you several times to do it as late as possible & not now...here they will try to mix in & speak about things that do not concern them. Never forget that you are & must remain authocratic [sic]. Emperor,—we are not ready for a constitutional government [Grand Duke] N [ikolai]'s fault & Witte's it was that the Duma exists, & it has caused you more worry than joy.\[15\]

A week after this letter had been written, the Duma leaders began to demand that Goremykin summon the Duma at once. The Empress hastened to write to Nicholas,

...oh please dont [sic], its not their business, they want to discuss things not concerning them & bring more discontent—they must be kept away—I assure you only harm will arise—they speak too much.

Russia, Thank God, is not a constitutional country, tho' those creatures try to play a part & meddle in affairs they dare not. Do not allow them to press upon you—its fright if one gives in & their heads will go up.\[16\]

The Tsar, however, was still at Stavka, under the influence of the Grand Duke and Polivanov. Persuaded by them that an early convocation of the Duma would increase public enthusiasm for the war effort, he telegraphed Goremykin to announce that the Duma would be convoked on 19 July. Two days later, Nicholas returned to Petrograd, where he was confronted by Samarin on the subject of Rasputin. Samarin refused to continue at his post unless Rasputin has left Petrograd when the Duma assembled. On 9 July, Rasputin had left for his native village of Pokrovskoe, but M. Paleologue notes that the Empress told him he could return right after the Duma session, "which wouldn't take long."\[17\]

Despite the opposition of Rasputin and the Empress, the Duma assembled on 19 July. Appreciating the Emperor's fervent interest in the war effort, many deputies were resolved to place co-operation ahead of constitutional reform. Only by linking the co-operation of the Duma with the
military fate of Russia could the deputies ensure that the existence of the Duma would be protected by the Emperor. They therefore gave an enthusiastic reception to General Polivanov, who was the first minister to address the Duma. The French Ambassador was most impressed by the evident determination of the Duma "...to organize the co-operation of the national representatives with the government in such a way as to make all the productive resources of the country available for the army." Despite the facade of moderation, it was evident that the majority of deputies now considered the present cabinet, headed by Goremykin, to be incompetent to solve the problems of the day. The Duma could co-operate only with a 'ministry of confidence' which presumably would have included such men as Polivanov, Krivoshein, Kharitonov, Guchkov, Shingarev, and perhaps Miliukov, with Krivoshein as Chairman. It was absolutely necessary for the Emperor to rid himself of his beloved Goremykin and of his backstage advisers, Rasputin, the Empress, and Prince Meshchersky. A united front of Nationalists, Octobrists, and Kadets emerged, demanding a 'ministry of confidence' chosen by the Emperor and responsible to him, while the Left Kadets, Trudoviks, and Social Democrats wanted a ministry chosen by the Duma and responsible to it. By sheer strength of numbers, the united front carried the day, and Miliukov went on to outline the reforms which were considered absolutely indispensable for the continuation of the war effort. V. A. Maklakov, in a brilliant speech, summarized the Duma's attitude in the slogan, "The right men in the right place." The resolutions were sent on to the Council of Ministers, and the Duma proceeded to a discussion of the defence council and to the impeachment of General Sukhomlinov.
Before the Council of Ministers had a chance to discuss the resolutions of the Duma, an even greater problem arose. On 6 August, Goremykin informed the Council that the Emperor had decided to exercise his highest prerogative: to take command of the army at the front. There can be no doubt that this decision was largely the result of the influence of the Empress. She feared and hated the Grand Duke Nikolai, and resented his interference in the June cabinet changes. She longed for revenge, and by playing on the Tsar’s religious conception of his office, she managed to convince him that his place was at the front, leading the Russian Army and sharing in the sufferings of his people. This sort of argument appealed to Nicholas who, it should be remembered, was constantly duped by the ‘spontaneous’ demonstrations of loyalty arranged by the Union of the Russian People. Having made his decision, the Tsar advised Goremykin that it was irrevocable.

From a military point of view, Nicholas’ decision was at best unjustified; from the political point of view it was a calamity. His departure for the front would leave the civil administration in the hands of the Empress and Rasputin, who had already returned from Pokrovskoe. The cabinet, under the indifferent Goremykin, would be powerless to curb the reactionary policies of the Empress, and the Duma would be dismissed immediately. All the ministers, with the exception of Goremykin, were agreed that the Tsar must be dissuaded from his decision.

Polivanov and Shcherbatov spent the next week trying to persuade the Tsar to abandon his plan, but to no avail. On 15 August the cabinet
requested a special meeting under the chairmanship of the Tsar. Meanwhile Krivoshein, through Polivanov, suggested a 'National Government', headed by the War Minister. This idea smacked of a military dictatorship, however, and Nicholas was not likely to agree to this now when he had already rejected this solution during the equally trying days of 1905. In any case, the Empress would have opposed a ministry headed by "our Friend's enemy." That she had regained her influence over the Tsar at this time is demonstrated by the dismissal on 19 August of Dzhunkovsky and Orlov, both avowed enemies of Rasputin. Hence it was not surprising that at the special cabinet meeting held next day, Nicholas repeated his decision and emphasized once again that it was irrevocable.

Faced with the Tsar's impending departure, the cabinet decided that the threat of resignation was the only avenue open to them. Without Goremykin, they met at the Foreign Office and drew up a letter in which they again appealed to the Emperor to repent of his decision. They drew attention to

...the irreconciliable difference between our Chairman and us in our estimate of the situation in the country and of the policy to be pursued by the Government. Such a state of things is inadmissible at all times, and at the present moment it is fatal. Under such conditions we do not believe that we can be of real service to Your Majesty and to our country.

This letter was given to Nicholas just before he left Petrograd for Tsarskoe Selo en route to Stavka to take command. Undoubtedly he showed it to the Empress while at Tsarskoe Selo, and her reaction to it can be imagined. The next day she wrote to him revealing in her own words how much she had tried to influence him while he was at Tsarskoe Selo:
Had you given in now in these different questions, they would have dragged out yet more of you. Being firm is the only saving...forgive me, I beseech you...for having left you no peace & worried you so much—but I too well know yr. marvellously gentle character & you had to shake it off this time, had to win your fight alone against all... you will save your country & throne through your firmness.22

A few days later, she told the British Ambassador,

I have no patience with Ministers who try to prevent him from doing his duty. The situation requires firmness. The Emperor, unfortunately, is weak; but I am not, and I intend to be firm.23

The Empress had been waiting a long time for the situation in which she now found herself, and she was determined to reassert personal, autocratic sovereignty to the full, disregarding the State Council, the Duma, and even the ministers if necessary.

Throughout the August crisis, the Duma had by no means been idle; developments had taken place which offered one last change to avoid a return to the evils of unlimited autocracy in its pre-1905 form. A 'Progressive Bloc' had been formed in the Duma and a programme had been drawn up which could provide the basis for negotiations with the government. If an agreement could be reached between the Bloc and the cabinet; and if the Tsar could be persuaded to approve the agreement, there was a strong likelihood that the crisis would not end in disaster.

The formation of the Progressive Bloc has been described in detail by one of the principal participants, P. N. Miliukov. It was, in his opinion, "...a last attempt to find a way out of a situation which was daily becoming more terrible."25 The emergence of this united front in the Fourth
Duma was facilitated particularly by the split in the Octobrist Party, which had brought Guchkov's group into closer contact with the Kadets. Eventually the Octobrists even accepted the Kadet agrarian programme. The increased political experience of all parties made them less dogmatic and more realistic than they had been in the early years. Finally, the war had served as a binding agent, uniting previously irreconcilable groups in the face of a common external threat. Given the state of Russia in 1915, it was not difficult to find a number of measures on which a majority of the Duma could unite.

The Council of Elders (Senioren-Konvent) of the Duma decided to form the Bloc during the first week of August. One of the most important questions facing them was the composition of a ministry which could be trusted to enact the programme of the Bloc. The Duma majority (Nationalists, Octobrists, and Kadets) desired a government which would guarantee "...union with the whole country and enjoy its confidence." This formula had the support of the Union of Zemstvos, which had advanced the same slogan at its June Congress. The left-wing groups of the Duma, supported by the Union of Towns, called for "a ministry responsible before the popular representation," but they were defeated by the majority. Thus the institution of a full parliamentary regime, with a cabinet responsible to the legislature, was not part of the programme of the Bloc. Even if this programme had been approved by the Goremykin cabinet, the choice of future ministers would have been left to the Tsar, in accordance with the Fundamental Laws of 1906.
On 11 August it was decided to begin negotiations with members of the State Council, in order that the Bloc might have a strong base in both legislative chambers. The left wing of the State Council, led by Meller-Zakomel'sky and Grimm, held several meetings with the Council of Elders, and on 15 August they agreed to support the Block in the State Council. This unprecedented rapprochement opened the way for legislation on the initiative of the Duma. Not until 1915 was there substantial support for the Duma in the State Council, and this agreement enormously increased the potential strength of the Duma. For the first time since 1905, the Duma could pass a measure with reasonable assurance that it would get at least some support in the upper house.

On 25 August, four days after Nicholas left for the front to take command of the Army, the programme of the Progressive Bloc was published. It was by no means a revolutionary document. It did not advocate either a palace revolution or a parliamentary regime. It did not demand any formal limitations on the prerogative powers of the Tsar. It asked only for

...the formation of a united Government, consisting of persons who have the confidence of the country and are in agreement with the legislative institutions as to carrying out, at the earliest time, a definite programme.

[There would have to be] ...A decisive alteration of the methods of government hitherto employed, founded on distrust of public initiative; in particular:
(a) A strict observance of the principle of legality in administration.
(b) A removal of the dualism of military and civil power in questions which have no immediate relation to the conduct of military operations.
Most members of the cabinet were impressed with the programme of the Bloc, and were determined to raise the question of negotiations with the leaders of the Bloc.

Meanwhile the Emperor, unaware of these developments in Petrograd, wrote to this wife, (25 August, 1915)

I am so glad that you have spoken to old Goremykin and have consoled him [i.e., about the ministers' letter] Please tell him, next time, from me, that as soon as the Council of State and the Duma finish their work they must be adjourned, no matter whether I shall be back by that time or shall still be here!  

Goremykin was undoubtedly overjoyed by this news, for he was finding it increasingly difficult to control the course of events in Petrograd. Despite his opposition, the cabinet had met unofficially with the leaders of the Bloc at Kharitonov's house on 27 August. During the discussion, it became evident that there was "...little in the programme of the Bloc that presented any insurmountable obstacle to agreement."  

On the following day, 28 August, 1915, was held the most crucial cabinet meeting of the reign of Nicholas II. The political situation in which the cabinet found itself was intolerable. The Tsar, against the advice of his ministers, had gone to the front and left the governing of Russia in the hands of the Empress, Rasputin, and Goremykin. The ministers had attempted to resign rather than serve under these conditions, but their resignations had been ignored. All the important public organizations—the Union of Zemstvos, the Union of Towns, and the War Industries Committee—were crying out for a ministry in which the public could have confidence. The Progressive Bloc had outlined the personnel of such a ministry, and had brought forward a programme of measures which would create an atmosphere of
public confidence and would ensure the successful continuation of the war effort. The Tsar, however, seemed bent on ignoring his ministers and proroguing the Duma. Continuing indecision could lead only to chaos and revolution, which had to be prevented at all costs.

Kharitonov first reported to the cabinet the results of the meeting with the leaders of the Bloc. The question which bothered the ministers most was the selection of new ministers to enact the programme of the Bloc. They were anxious lest the Tsar lose this prerogative power to the Duma, but Kharitonov allayed their fears by pointing out that the programme permits the calling by His Imperial Majesty of persons who enjoy public confidence, to whom would be commissioned the forming of a cabinet according to their discretion, for the establishment of definite mutual relations with the State Duma.33

Kharitonov ended by making it quite clear that further negotiations with the Bloc were not only possible, but desirable. He suggested that under these circumstances, the prorogation of the Duma might not be a wise step, at least for a time.

To forestall further discussion, Goremykin announced that the Duma would be prorogued because that was the will of the Emperor; it remained only for the Council of Ministers to choose an appropriate day for it to take place. Most of the ministers agreed that the Duma should be prorogued, but in a friendly fashion, on the understanding that negotiations between the Bloc and the cabinet would continue. General Polivanov voiced what proved to the the opinion of the majority:
...at the last session, before resorting to the publication of the Supreme Ukase of prorogation, it should be the duty of the President of the Council of Ministers to come forward in both legislative chambers with the government's announcement, and to state in a conciliatory tone that there is no irreconcilable difference of opinion with the Bloc. This announcement should be brief, and it should add that it is useful to cause the dismissal not from considerations of principle but of a practical nature.34

Prince Shcherbatov was in full agreement with the War Minister:

...among the population, the conviction is held that the government stands aside and wishes to do nothing, excusing itself because of the military situation. Therefore our appearance before the legislative institutions is in the interests of the government itself, which by this method can inform the country about its work and further intentions. It is even more important that, in general, the programme of the Progressive Bloc by largely accepted... Having heard this, many who have been wavering will be in favour of conciliation.35

The other ministers agreed with Polivanov and Shcherbatov, but Krivoshein refused to be satisfied with this course of action. He was exasperated by Goremykin's attempt to divert discussion from what he considered to be the most important question,

...the relationship of His Imperial Majesty to the government as presently constituted and to the demands of the country regarding an executive power invested with public confidence. Let the monarch decide how it will please him to guide our future internal policy, whether by disregarding such requests, or by reconciliation, having chosen in the second case a person enjoying public sympathy and charging him with the formation of a government. Without settling this cardinal question we cannot leave here. Personally I support the second course of action—the Emperor should choose a person and commission him to form a cabinet which fulfills the expectations of the country.36
Goremykin attempted to ignore Krivoshein's remarks, but Sazonov, Ignatiev, and Kharitonov all supported the view that a change of the cabinet must be carried out simultaneously with the prorogation of the Duma. Goremykin was, at last, made to understand that the final decision was to be the responsibility of the Tsar, not of the Council of Ministers.

We, the senior servants of the Tsar, [said Krivoshein] are taking on the unpleasant task of proroguing the Duma, and together with this we are strongly declaring to the Emperor that the general internal situation of the country necessitates changes of the cabinet and, of course, of policy. One or another decision by His Majesty on this basic question will predetermine the composition of the future government.\[37\]

To this Goremykin replied that he did not intend to deliver an ultimatum to the Tsar:

The responsibility for proroguing the Duma I take on myself without anxiety, being of the conviction that this measure is indispensable for the calming of the country and for the organization of defence. But it is impossible for me to force on the Emperor persons who are disagreeable to him. As I have said before, perhaps my outlook is archaic, but it is too late for me to change.\[38\]

At this point, Samarin tried to mediate between Krivoshein and Goremykin. He recognized the necessity for a change of cabinet, but he also sympathized with Goremykin's unwillingness to leave the decision to the Emperor. It was not fair, Samarin argued, to present the Emperor with the problem of choosing a new cabinet unless he was given a clear indication of the programme which it should carry out.

It is necessary to present to His Majesty the indispensable foundations of a programme of policy which conforms to the changed conditions of the internal and external situation, and simultaneously to report that in its present composition, the
Council of Ministers has neither solidarity nor internal unity, especially with regard to the important events which are developing, and that we therefore intercede regarding the creation of another government to replace us, one which would be strong enough to put the programme into effect. If such a declaration from us receives approval in principle, then our duty is to point out an acceptable person, since these general phrases about public confidence in fact mean nothing...

The wisdom of Samarin's argument was appreciated by the cabinet, and Goremykin closed the meeting by promising to report in detail to the Emperor everything that has been discussed.

After this most important meeting, events moved very quickly indeed. On 30 August the Emperor received Goremykin at Stavka. Just what was said at this audience will never be known, but it is reasonable to assume that Goremykin gave the Emperor a highly coloured version of the proceedings at the cabinet meeting. It is doubtful that he even mentioned the cabinet's feeling that both the personnel and the policy should be changed. More than likely, he told the Tsar only that the Duma must be prorogued before some mutinous ministers made a deal with the leaders of the 'revolutionary' Progressive Bloc. In any case, Goremykin returned with permission to prorogue the Duma, and nothing more. The Ukase was signed on 2 September, and next day Rodzianko had the thankless task of reading it to the Duma. The Ukase contained no mention of the negotiations with the Bloc, nor did it indicate how long the prorogation would last. None of the ministers attended the sitting. At a cabinet meeting on 2 September, Goremykin told the ministers only that the Duma had been prorogued indefinitely, and that the Tsar had commanded all ministers to remain at their posts. When some ministers attempted to object, Goremykin closed the meeting.
The hope for a 'ministry of confidence' had been dashed to bits. The course of action suggested by the ministers had been motivated only by loyalty to the monarch, yet they had been ignored once again. Nicholas II chose to regard the whole affair as a "...question of internal reform which must wait till after the conclusion of peace." \(^{40}\)

The prorogation of the Duma touched off a two-day strike in Petrograd, but it was quickly suppressed by the Gendarmerie. The only other significant reaction to the Tsar's decision was another influx of telegrams of commendation, carefully organized by the Union of the Russian People. Nicholas was most impressed by this demonstration of loyalty, and wrote to his wife,

...all this clearly shows me one thing: that the Ministers, always living in town, know terribly little of what is happening in the country as a whole. Here I can judge correctly the real mood among the various classes of the people... \(^{41}\)

The Tsar was so disturbed by his ministers' lack of perception that he summoned them all to Stavka on 16 September and administered a severe rebuke for their disobedience. Afterwards, he telegraphed to the Empress, "The conference passed off well. I told them my opinion sternly to their faces." \(^{42}\)

Next day he wrote to her regarding the need to dismiss those ministers who "do not wish to work with old Gor [emykin], in spite of the stern words which I addressed to them." \(^{43}\) On 26 September, Shcherbatov and Samarin were dismissed, and one month later, Krivoshein was also relieved of his position. Thus the cabinet had been cleared of those members to whom the Empress had objected so strongly.
After August, 1915, the Fundamental Laws of 1906 ceased to be the basis on which the governing of Russia was conducted. Unlimited autocracy with all its attendant evils once again became the prevailing system of government. Only the Empress and Rasputin benefited from the constitutional crisis of 1915, for after that they were able to exercise unlimited arbitrary rule. The Tsar, on the other hand, not only lost control of his own power as sovereign by going to the front; he had also rejected the last compromise which might have preserved the dynasty. Had he accepted the recommendations of the cabinet and agreed to the formation of a 'ministry of confidence', he would have emerged from the crisis an autocrat limited in practice but not in theory. In this situation, he would have retained many of his prerogative powers, but instead of preserving some of them, he chose to preserve all of them, thereby losing everything.
FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER VIII


3 Quoted in Paleologue, op.cit., I, p. 259.


5 One of the few acts of Nicholas II which ran counter to the aims of the Union of the Russian People was the Manifesto of August, 1914, which announced that Poland would be restored as an autonomous state under the suzerainty of the Russian Tsar. See ibid., pp. 84-85.

6 Pares, op.cit., p. 247.

7 Gurko, op.cit., p. 555. As early as September, 1914, Paleologue had taken special notice of "...Krivoshein, whose personal authority, lucid intellect and political talents seem to have won him a high degree of confidence and favour with Nicholas II." op.cit., Vol. I, p. 135.

8 Gurko, op.cit., pp. 555-556.

9 Miliukov, op.cit., p. 191.

10a Not only was Nicholas away from his interfering wife; he was also subject to pressure from the Grand Duke Nikolai. It seems clear from the Grand Duke's behaviour during the next few months that he was in favour of a coalition ministry led by either Polivanov or Krivoshein. The Grand Duke's military experience explains his understandable desire that the government have the support of the public organizations, on which the army depended for medical and other supplies.


12 A. F. to N., 14 June 1915, p. 94.

13 A. F. to N., 15 June 1915, p. 95.


15 A. F. to N., 17 June 1915, p. 100.

General Dzhunkovsky had been Commander of Gendarmerie and Aide-de-Camp to the Emperor. Prince Orlov was Director of the Imperial Military Household.

21 Pares, op.cit., p. 270.

22 A. F. to N., 22 August 1915, p. 114.


25 Ibid., p. 206.

26 Ibid., p. 214.

27 Loc. cit.


29 Quoted in Pares, op.cit., p. 272.

30 Loc. cit.

31 N. to A. F., p. 71.

32 Pares, op.cit., p. 275; Yakhontov, op.cit., p. 119.

33 Yakhontov, op.cit., p. 119.

34 Ibid., p. 122.

35 Ibid., pp. 122-123.

36 Ibid., p. 124.

37 Loc. cit.
38 Ibid., pp. 124-125.
39 Ibid., p. 125.
40 Quoted in Buchanan, op. cit., II, p. 5.
41 N. to A. F., 9 September 1915, p. 85.
42 N. to A. F., 16 September 1915, p. 90.
43 N. to A. F., 17 September 1915, p. 91.
CONCLUSION

In the constitutional history of Imperial Russia, it must now be agreed that the October Manifesto was little more than a scrap of paper. It was favourably received by some contemporaries, and has been praised by numerous historians, as the basis for a grand new period of co-operation between the Russian people and its government. It promised the effective limitation of the legislative prerogative of the sovereign and the transfer of this prerogative to the legislative chambers. In fact, however, the Manifesto proved a worthless document. It left the establishment of the competence of the legislature in the hands of the autocracy. Thus, that loyal servant of autocratic government, Count Witte, was able to frame the Fundamental Laws of 1906 in such a way as to ensure that the prerogative powers of the monarchy could neither be usurped by, nor transferred to, the Duma. The Fundamental Laws so restricted the competence of the Duma that the latter lost its raison d'être. Deprived of the power to initiate legislation, it could only ratify or reject proposals drawn up by some other organ of the government. Furthermore, it had no power to prevent a measure which it had rejected from becoming law by means of an imperial decree under Article 87. Shorn of any useful legislative function, it could at least have offered advice to the government on the state of the country, but it was unable even to do this because the Fundamental Laws failed to establish the principle of negotia regni—the business of the kingdom.

The first two Dumas challenged the system established by the Fundamental Laws, and found themselves dissolved for their presumption. The
Third Duma accepted the system and was able to play a small but effective part in the legislative process. It was nevertheless unable to exercise the legislative prerogative—it could only influence in a very restricted manner the exercise of this prerogative by the government. The Fourth Duma was likewise unable to direct the legislative process, the more so as civil sovereignty increasingly had to yield before military sovereignty after the outbreak of war.

In restricting the competence of the Duma, the Fundamental Laws made all the more necessary the capable and purposeful exercise of the royal prerogative powers. Since the Tsar was incapable of exercising these powers wisely, his chief minister found wide scope for his own ambitions and abilities. Count Witte had so vexed Nicholas II by his own powerful ambition that he was never permitted to exercise the powers he had so skilfully preserved for the monarchy. The Tsar, fearful of ambitious men, would have preferred the inert and inept Goremykin as his Prime Minister, but the situation in the country necessitated a strong man at the centre, and the Tsar was forced to appoint the able and dynamic Stolypin. In the hands of Stolypin the authority of the autocracy was so ably asserted that the person of the autocrat was almost obscured. After Stolypin's assassination the Tsar was determined to reassert his personal sovereignty as well as his sovereign authority. His political ideas, originating in the doctrine of the Union of the Russian People and in the mind of his wife, were neither intelligent nor appealing, and his reassertion of personal autocratic sovereignty led even the firmest supporters of autocratic monarchy to question their loyalty.
When the legislative prerogatives of a sovereign power are being exercised by a group such as Nicholas II, the Empress, Rasputin and Goremykin, one cannot expect that power to survive even the smallest national crisis. The outbreak of war, necessitating the establishment of a competent military authority to replace a bungling civil government, placed an intolerable strain on the political system established by the Fundamental Laws of 1906. By August of 1915 all of the Tsar's ministers saw the dangers inherent in this situation, which the Tsar was about to complicate by his decision to take command of the Army. The only workable solution was for the Tsar to consent to a coalition ministry of capable representatives of the military authorities and of the public organizations. In rejecting this proposal, the Tsar ensured the final collapse of his own imperial authority. Unable to accept honestly the role of constitutional monarch, he chose a path which could only lead to the destruction of the monarchy itself.
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