



Modernisation in Russia since 1900

Edited by Markku Kangaspuro and Jeremy Smith

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Foreword

The research project “The Conditions for Constructing New Russia. Interactions of Tradition and Europeanness in the Development of 20th Century Russia” examined developmental processes in contemporary Russia and the conditions delimiting its choices in the light of the central turning points in its twentieth century history. The central theme of the project concerned the interaction of Russia and Europe. Our aim has been to explore from a multi-disciplinary perspective what is new in post-1991 New Russia and what is a continuation of Russia’s own historical and cultural tradition. In other words, what in the tradition of Russia’s culture and history has set the conditions for its developmental and political choices? The project concentrated in particular on the changes in Russia’s relationship with Europe in the 20th century. The issue of the meeting of Europeanness (advocated by the *Zapadniks*) and traditional Russianness (the *Slavophiles*) shows concretely the two central factors that have affected Russia’s development. The question of Europeanness and its ideals of the Enlightenment, often interpreted as universal, has divided Russian society for centuries. Ultimately the question is whether Russian development leads towards modernisation in the European sense of the term or whether Russia will continue on its own developmental path, unifying, once again, European influences with Russian specificity. This also touches on the question of the aims of the West’s politics towards Russia and how realistic their aims are. Thus, what are the conditions stemming from and determined by the reality of Russia, its history and culture that affect fundamentally its future development and political choices?

This volume results from the collaboration between the Finnish participants in our project, and researchers at the University of Birmingham’s Centre for Russian and East European Studies, which has a long tradition of exploring modernisation in Russia, especially in Soviet industry. This collaboration resulted in two conferences, one in Helsinki in 2002 and one in Birmingham in 2003, which drew in additional international scholars. I would like to thank all the important people who have contributed to this publication without mentioning them individually. In particular I would like to thank Dr. Markku Kangaspuro and Dr. Jeremy Smith, the editors of this volume and the persons who carried the main responsibility in organizing the two conferences. For me personally, our joint conference and the publication derived from it has been a valuable experience, and the publication itself is an important contribution to the academic community. The Academy of Finland awarded a significant grant for the project’s work in 2000–2003.

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Introduction: Modernisation in Russian History

From at least the time of Ivan the Terrible up to the present day, it has been a major concern of Russia's rulers to overcome the perceived lag in development between Russia and her neighbours and global competitors. The gap between relative levels of production with the leading western powers has never been overcome, and the need to bridge this gap has preoccupied successive regimes. Until quite recently, the emphasis had been on the need to achieve military parity or superiority. Modernisation therefore included finding ways of making the economy more productive generally, and deploying more effective technologies. While economic and military needs may have lain at the heart of Russian drives to modernise, the project included, of necessity, important elements of social and political modernisation. In a direct sense, Peter the Great's reorganisation of the state bureaucracy, Alexander II's emancipation of the serfs, Stalin's collectivisation of agriculture and industrialisation, the emphasis on social equality and the welfare state after World War II, and the spread of democracy and institutional reform during and after *perestroika* have been part of the modernisation project. Indirectly, deliberate economic, social and political modernisation has led on to other elements of modernisation, often with unintended consequences. In the 20th century, industrialisation and modernisation had a major impact on all areas of life, dramatically changing the overall social structure, the position of women and non-Russians, and the welfare needs of society.

For much of Russian history, modernisation has been almost synonymous with westernisation. Russian backwardness has always been measured against the standard of the leading powers in Western Europe and, later, North America. This was particularly true of certain historical periods: Peter the Great's time, the aftermath of the Crimean War, after the Bolshevik revolution, during Stalin's industrialisation drive, and in the transition from communism to a free market. Russian liberals and westernisers in the nineteenth century explicitly advocated the adoption of western norms and institutions as the answer to Russia's problems. The same can be said for the European-oriented Russian Marxists from the founding father of Russian Marxism, G. V. Plekhanov, to V. I. Lenin. As several of the contributors to this volume point out, many of the efforts at modernisation in the 20th century were based on imitation of foreign models.

But modernisation has not been pursued purely by direct imitation of the West. While Peter adopted western forms in many symbolic spheres, his actual reform programmes were largely original, and elements of his military reform anticipated measures which were later adopted in the West. Catherine the Great introduced notions into the education and legal systems which were ahead of their time, while Alexander II's judicial reform gave Russia, for a while, one of the most advanced legal systems on the planet (at least on paper). Numerous Russian scientists, writers, and composers were world leaders in their fields from the late eighteenth through to the twentieth centuries. On a darker note, the police systems developed by Ivan IV, Nicholas I and Alexander III in many ways foreshadowed what was to become globally commonplace only in the 20th Century. Certainly Russian thinkers and political figures have, for the most part, advocated Russia's place as a world leader, not as an imitator. The semi-official doctrine of Moscow as the Third Rome assigned Russia the task of saving Christendom from moral and spiritual decay, setting up the Empire as the global guardian of spiritual values. Geoffrey Hosking has argued that similar messianic impulses were at work in the twentieth century, albeit in a spirit that was fundamentally alien to the Russian character, expressed in the doctrine of international communism. And even with the loss of the Superpower status enjoyed by the Soviet Union, the Putin administration has asserted in both ideological terms and in practise Russia's destiny to be the leading light in her part of the world. Thus modernisation in Russia has been based not just on recognition of Russia's backwardness, but on an equally strong conviction of Russian superiority and destiny.

The ultimate Russian visionary modernisers were the Bolsheviks. Marxism was a stepbrother to the ideas of the European Enlightenment at the time of industrialisation, and Russian Marxists shared the vision of a 'modern industrialised world' and enlightened society with their western 'modernist' counterparts. While competition with the West became a driving force, the Bolsheviks' utopian vision also led them to look beyond existing models – socialism was, after all, supposed to be superior to anything that existed under capitalism. The chief paradox facing the Bolsheviks was that they sought to implement this visionary programme in conditions of economic and cultural backwardness. Although the Soviets rarely used the term 'Modernisation', Lenin insisted that the central task of the Bolsheviks was 'to catch up and surpass the capitalist countries economically'. Stalin was even more explicit in his celebrated phrase 'We are fifty or a hundred years behind the advanced countries. We must make good this distance in ten years. Either we do it, or we shall go under.' While Lenin and Bukharin were certainly interested in the application of western models to Russian conditions, Stalin's industrialisation drive, while deploying imitation of western models and imported technology, used an original framework for the solution to backwardness – the planned economy. In the later Soviet period Khrushchev (implicitly) and Gorbachev (explicitly) were concerned to overcome the evident technology gap between the USSR and the West, particularly the United States. In certain spheres modernity now meant original innovation, which was pursued

in particular in culture, education, and the extension of personal and political rights. The conditions of socialism also allowed for the pursuit of original economic policies in an effort to modernise not just up to but beyond existing western levels. Modernisation by any means was a constant imperative in Soviet policy, but it could be achieved by a variety of means. Borrowing ideas and technology from the West and the development of original ideas and technology were aims which were frequently linked. As Sari Autio-Sarasma puts it in this volume ‘the aim of transferring technology was to absorb and diffuse western technology in order to create local innovations. The task of imitation was to transform the imitator into a pioneer...’

The innovatory aspect of Khrushchev’s period in office was characterised by his adoption of a series of widely derided ‘hare-brained schemes’. After Khrushchev, however, the visionary and innovative Russian tradition seemed to die out. In the transition from communism, modernisation remained an imperative, but the emphasis was again on imitating western models, some would say slavish and misguided imitation. As a number of chapters in this book testify, post-Soviet Modernisation based on western models has met with mixed fortunes, with negative outcomes resulting from either inappropriate or incomplete imitations. In other cases, as Richard Sakwa points out, we find the paradoxical situation where the model of modernity being pursued is itself anachronistic.

Rapid transformation from a predominantly rural to an industrial society caused a social and cultural upheaval almost without precedent in the modern world. The transformation of peasants into workers, an increasing role for women in the workforce, and the physical displacement of large parts of the population all presented challenges for which the state was not altogether prepared and which resulted in substantial changes to culture, living practices, identity, and beliefs. The economic and social difficulties following this forced, poorly prepared and top-down process at a time of increasing international tensions undermined the credibility and legitimacy of the Soviet government and led it finally to resort to the use of force instead of reform politics in governance. Stalin’s Purges can be seen as an example of a modern 20th century ruler’s unprecedented access to resources and technology which enabled him to wage external and internal wars, to control and if needed suppress his subjects. Although special treatment is not devoted to Stalin’s Purges in this volume, it is necessary to emphasise that the consequences of this tragedy were longstanding and drastic to society, as we can see from various chapters.

Educational and welfare modernisation also affected the social structure of the USSR, posing new challenges and creating unstable imbalances. Indeed, one of the central paradoxes of the Soviet system was that social and cultural modernisation ultimately outstripped economic modernisation, for which the centrally planned economy proved effective at one stage but obstructive later on. This imbalance between an educated and aware population on the one hand, and a stagnant economy and political system on the other, was one of the chief factors in the downfall of Soviet communism.

The Russian/Soviet approach to modernisation was very much top-down:

modernisation was a government aim and policy. Certainly in the economy, Russia has historically been characterised by a lack of initiative and a wariness of new technologies and methods from the shop-floor or the farm. A partial exception is the Internet, where development has been driven to some extent by young people, businesses and newspapers, presenting an alternative model for modernisation from below. While it is clear that the Russian security services have been keen to extend control over the Internet, they have, for reasons discussed by Cooper, failed to do so effectively. While the Internet may, therefore, provide a possible space for 'modernisation from below', at other times popular conservatism, which can be traced back to Russian peasant attitudes, has led to resistance to new technologies, which may have hampered the modernisation project. On the other hand, popular expectations have played an important role in pushing forward modernisation in areas such as welfare.

The linear pursuit of modernisation by Russian governments has been held back at various times by more than just popular conservatism. The fact that it took until 1861 for Russia to abolish a system of serfdom whose equivalents had long since disappeared throughout most of Europe is just one indication of the obstacles that prevailed for much of Russian history. Determination on the part of Russia's rulers to preserve a system of autocracy which rested on a social system established in the sixteenth century, the entrenched interests of the landowners and military elite whose positions depended on that system, and an almost constant state of warfare and territorial expansion all conspired to reinforce top-level resistance to modernisation, even when it was most needed. It took a unique tsar – Peter the Great – to first of all break this mould, and the shock of defeat in the Crimean War to provoke the most significant round of modernising reform in the nineteenth century. But Russia failed to go beyond the Great Reforms of the 1860s and 70s at a time when Germany was raising the stakes even higher in developing streamlined forms of economic, political and military organisation, and when demographic and societal change inside Russia was outstripping the political framework which controlled it. The consequence was a series of political and social revolutions which in the end overturned the old system and its conservative tendencies. A return to the old ways in the Brezhnev 'years of stagnation' led to similar consequences.

The pattern of reform and reaction which has so often been observed in Russian history can be illuminated by reference to the competing pressures of modernisation. Russia's size and geo-strategic position, its rigid social hierarchies, and the insulation of its peasant communities combined to both expose it to technologically superior and better organised foes, and to give rise to internal discomfort at the apparent lower level of civilisation enjoyed by Russia in comparison to some of her competitors. At the same time, these factors reinforced the autocratic tendencies of the state and the resistance to change of its bureaucratic apparatus. Russia's ability to rely on huge reserves of manpower further reduced the urgent pressures for change which were being felt elsewhere. At no time were the contradictory pressures more evident than during the reign of Catherine the Great who, after Peter, seemed

the monarch most likely to embrace a radical and europeanising agenda. Simultaneously inspired by the Enlightenment and fearful of the ripples of the French Revolution, urged on by advisers pushing for change while having to placate the entrenched nobility, expanding the frontiers of the Empire towards their largest extent while dealing ruthlessly with a series of peasant revolts at home, Catherine embarked on a number of fundamental reform programmes which aimed at least to bring Russia in line with advanced European countries, but few of which ever amounted to much. Russia aspired to be among the most modern European nations, but did not know how to get there except by the old methods. What Catherine's reign illustrates is how, under the specifically Russian conditions of a state exercising control over a large country while interacting only minimally with its society, contradictions arise from the uneven development of the different facets of social, public and economic life. This same contradiction has been in evidence in different ways since 1900, and constitutes one of the major themes of this book.

This volume is concerned directly with economic, technological, social and political modernisation understood as either catching up with existing models or original innovation. Six broad themes have clearly emerged in the preparation of the volume and the discussion of early drafts:

- 'Catching up' with or imitating the West
- Utopian visionary projects
- Technological innovation
- Social consequences of modernity
- Structural obstacles to modernisation
- Popular attitudes to innovation

In the past forty years, an often heated debate has been conducted, principally among social scientists, as to the meaning of modernisation and its usefulness as an analytic tool, some of which is summarised in Peter Gatrell's chapter. From the historical perspective, however, these complexities are of marginal significance in the Russian context given the prevalent theme of modernisation as an end to be pursued in itself or, in the eyes of some, to be resisted. In the traditional sense of catching up and surpassing competing models the concept here is treated as a straightforward one.

Understanding the historical context of modernisation in Russia is of great relevance to the study of contemporary Russia. The disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 and its new Western orientation caused a wave of enthusiasm in the West. It appeared that the centuries-old dispute of the Russian intelligentsia on the appropriate developmental model for Russia was solved. In the course of Russia's transition she had abandoned the Slavophile model of separate development. History was over, and what was left was the Western developmental model and Russia's *zapadniki* (westernisers). The West began to believe that one day it might remake Russia in its own image.

This optimistic evaluation generated a set of transition discourses in social sciences. As a consequence, in the late 1990s there has been a common sense of disappointment in the West. Change has not happened as soon as was expected and the results have not been as hoped. Instead of a Western type of civilised society, it appeared that Russia had given birth to her own type of capitalism with unforeseen results. Instead of speaking of transition it might be more accurate to speak of a certain kind of modernisation in Russia. It has had its ups and downs and its direction has not been so self-evident at some times as at others. The conditions of Russia's development are rooted in its history, which has laid the particular foundations of modernisation.

The process of modernisation in the late tsarist period set the tone for what was to follow, and this is the subject of Peter Gatrell's chapter. From this study the links between economic and social modernisation are immediately apparent – however much the state was involved as the instigator of industrialisation, the process itself gave rise to new social actors, new forms of discourse, and hence new sources of opposition. Markku Kangaspuro then examines how the Bolsheviks rose to the challenge of modernisation, highlighting the contradiction between ideology and social reality. This contradiction ultimately was expressed in an educational and social system which was well in advance of its economic base, a situation which, David Lane argues, was ultimately the main reason for its downfall.

The economy plays a large role in the exploration of modernisation in this volume, and R. W. Davies and Mark Tauger introduce in broad overview the Soviet experience in industry and agriculture respectively. Both find that, in spite of obvious weaknesses and obstacles, the rapid development of the Soviet economy under Stalin, and even to some extent the stable progress of later years, owed much to the successful pursuit of a modernisation strategy based in part on Marxist ideas and in part on western models. This last aspect is developed by Sari Autio-Sarasmö, who finds that the level of technological inter-action between East and West was much higher than might be expected in spite of the Cold War, and that the successful 'borrowing' of technology from the West also served to spur on domestic research and development efforts. Even stronger West-East influences were at work in the post-Communist transition but here, as Philip Hanson demonstrates, it was the development of institutions and models that counted more than technology. After a slow start, he argues, the development of these institutions and a modern business culture laid the foundations for further economic progress.

While Lane highlights the way that social modernisation outstripped economic and political development, Melanie Ilić shows that the impact of modernisation on Soviet women was somewhat more mixed: in spite of idealistic plans, economic modernisation did not bring the position of women up to western levels across a range of indicators. This lag between different sectors is also touched on by Richard Sakwa, who suggests that political modernisation, as expressed in styles of leadership, has failed to keep pace with the developing social, economic, and global environment. This is a familiar situation in Russian history, and the studies in the second part of the book highlight some of the problems arising from this basic contradiction,

Modernisation has been a constant theme in Russian history at least since Peter the Great launched a series of initiatives aimed at closing the economic, technical and cultural gap between Russia and the more 'advanced' countries of Europe. All of the leaders of the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia have been intensely aware of this gap, and have pursued a number of strategies, some more successful than others, in order to modernise the country. But it would be wrong to view modernisation as a unilinear process which was the exclusive preserve of the state. Modernisation has had profound effects on Russian society, and the attitudes of different social groups have been crucial to the success and failure of modernisation.

This volume examines the broad theme of modernisation in late imperial, Soviet, and post-Soviet Russia both through general overviews of particular topics, and specific case studies of modernisation projects and their impact. Modernisation is seen not just as an economic policy, but as a cultural and social phenomenon reflected through such diverse themes as ideology, welfare, education, gender relations, transport, political reform, and the Internet. The result is the most up to date and comprehensive survey of modernisation in Russia available, which highlights both one of the perennial problems and the challenges and prospects for contemporary Russia.



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