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THE WESTERN BORDERLANDS OF THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE, 1710-1870

Edward Thaden

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I

The Podolian cycle of Włodzimierz Odojewski chronicles the futile efforts of two young noblemen in the extreme southeastern corner of interwar Poland to fight during 1943-44 for what they thought was the Polish cause. A Polish trilogy on this theme, published in 1962, 1964, and 1973,¹ reminds us of the fascination the borderlands, or kresy, have had for Poles and of the domination they and other non-native elites and rulers once exercised over a vast region stretching from the Gulf of Bothnia in the north to the Dniester River in the south and from the Baltic Sea in the west to the Dnieper in the east. Great Russians, Poles, Germans, and Swedes competed for the control of this area since the thirteenth century. In it the major religions of Europe--Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Protestantism--clashed. Its indigenous population consisted of Estonian, Finnish, Latvian, Lithuanian, Belorussian, Polish, and Ukrainian peasants, who were generally serfs or at least economically dependent on landowners alien to them in language and culture. Only in certain areas of Finland and Poland did the peasants speak the language of the local nobility.

Between 1710 and 1815 the Russian Empire annexed western borderlands that, in 1815, accounted for about one-fifth of the land area of European Russia exclusive of the Caucasus. From the very beginning Russian rulers and their officials wanted to bring this area closer to the rest of the empire, and under Catherine II and, again, under Nicholas I a concerted effort was made to introduce Russian laws, institutions, and language. Yet, during the first century and a half of Russian rule, these borderlands retained their distinctive economic and social structures and networks of internal communication.

Our brief overview of the history of Russia's western borderlands will focus on the Baltic provinces (Estland, Livland, and Kurland), Finland, and the lands annexed from Poland after 1722, especially during the crucial decades of the 1830s, '40s, '50s, and '60s. Elites in these borderlands retained social, economic, and even political control locally until the second part of the nineteenth century, usually managing to harness the forces of change for their own particular purposes. In Estland, Livland, Kurland, and Finland Russian interference in local affairs was kept to a minimum.

We will only refer in passing to two regions that might seem geographically and historically within the western borderlands of

the empire: namely, Bessarabia and the Left-Bank Ukraine. Russia acquired Bessarabia in 1812, then recognizing the laws, customs, and autonomy of this borderland; however, Russian officials soon lost faith in the ability of the local Rumanian boyars to manage their own affairs and abolished Bessarabian autonomy in 1828. In the Left-Bank Ukraine Cossack rights and privileges steadily eroded following the defection of Mazepa to Charles XII in 1708, and by the early 19th century this area had been fully integrated into the social, economic, and political structure of the Russian Empire. It should be noted, however, that the history of Russia's relations with privileged borderlands began in the Left-Bank Ukraine with the Treaty of Pereiaslav of 1654, more than a half century before Peter the Great annexed Estland and Livland in 1710.

Between 1710 and 1712 Estland and Livland rights and privileges were confirmed in capitulation agreements and letters of privilege issued to the corporations of the nobility or Ritterschaften, and the upper strata of the German population in the towns. Russia guaranteed the rights of the Lutheran Church, returned to the landowners the land that had reverted to the Swedish Crown in the 1680s and 1690s, confirmed German as the language of the courts and administration, and left local government and police and the administration of the courts and the church in the hands of town councils or of the Diets, councils of the nobility, and other autonomous bodies controlled by the Ritterschaften. Peter I, however, ignored German protests concerning the inclusion in these agreements of a conventional clausula majestatis and the limitation of the granted rights and privileges to "the present government and times." The two provinces did not receive the higher court they had requested but were obliged to live with the subordination of their local courts to the higher authority of the Russian Justice College and Senate. Although the rights of the Lutheran Church were formally recognized by Russia, it lost the former position it had enjoyed in Swedish times of being the only officially sanctioned and tolerated church in Estland and Livland. Furthermore, on more than one occasion Peter acted arbitrarily and in disregard of local rights and privileges in his dealings with the privileged Estlanders and Livlanders between 1710 and 1725.²

Despite this occasional assertion of Russian sovereign rights, there can be little question about the special position of these two provinces within the empire during the first part of the eighteenth century. Peter I, it is interesting to note, granted them their privileged status at about the same time he began to dismantle Ukrainian autonomy. Why did he follow such divergent policies in the Ukraine and the Baltic provinces? The mere fact of Mazepa's betrayal of Russia in 1708 is only part of the answer, which must also be sought in connection with Peter's work of internal reform.

The Petrine military, political, and social reforms profoundly affected the relationships of the Left-Bank Ukraine and of Livland

and Estland to the rest of the empire. By the end of Peter's reign a large European-style, standing army had come into existence, the foundations of a modern bureaucracy had been laid, and the central state had undertaken to regulate in minute detail the activities of its subjects in the manner of the European Polizeistaat of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Ill-disciplined, unruly Ukrainian Cossacks were not particularly well suited for the purposes of this "regulated" state; Baltic Germans, who had served in the modern army of Sweden, attended German and Swedish universities, and run Swedish institutions of local government in Estland and Livland, were.

Peter almost had to turn to the local Germans if he wished to retain in Estland and Livland what he considered the high level of Swedish bureaucratic efficiency. The Swedes had contributed significantly to the development of local institutions of self-government in these two provinces, but trained Swedish officials closely supervised the activities of the local Germans. Russia had neither the money nor the trained personnel to continue such supervision. The one way institutional continuity could be assured was, therefore, to have the Baltic Germans take over functions formerly performed by Swedes and to expand the scope of the activities and the local institutions of self-government. Even the offices of the Russian governors and governors-general in Riga and Reval soon came to be staffed almost exclusively by local German burghers and nobles.

By the mid-eighteenth century Baltic special rights and privileges came under attack on a number of fronts, but these rights and privileges were confirmed at the beginning of Catherine II's reign. The German-born empress turned out, however, to be no friend of borderland rights and privileges, for as early as February 1764, she wrote to Prince Aleksandr Viazemskii, the newly appointed procuror-general of the Senate, that "Little Russia, Livland, Finland, and Smolensk were to be Russified (obruset') with the mildest means possible so that they would cease looking to the woods like wolves."³ Catherine, to be sure, used the word "Russify" in the sense of making the borderlands conform to the laws and administrative norms of the Russian center, not in the modern dictionary sense of forcibly making Russians out of non-Russians. Smolensk and Little Russia (i.e., the Left-Bank Ukraine) had been acquired from Poland in the 17th century and had been almost completely absorbed into the political and social structure of Russia by the time Catherine ascended the throne. The empress needed only to eliminate a few last vestiges of local autonomy in these two provinces. The small part of Finland Russia had annexed from Sweden in 1721 and 1743 was not a major consideration. Livland and Estland were another matter. Catherine delayed somewhat in applying her centralizing policy to them, but during the last 13 years of her reign they, too, lost their autonomy.

As a would-be enlightened absolutist ruler of the second part

of the eighteenth century, Catherine II valued uniformity, centralization, order, and rationality in law and government. Her major administrative and social reforms were the Provincial Reform of 1775 and the Charters to the Nobility and Towns of 1785. The Provincial Reform and the Charter to the Towns aimed at rationalizing the organization and functioning of local government and involving the provincial nobility and townsmen in administration and in socially useful activities that would help relieve the chronic shortage of personnel in the provinces. The Charter to the Nobility reassured the nobles concerning their rights and privileges, corporate status, ownership of property, and control over the serfs and sought to create conditions for their active participation in the affairs of Russian society. As is well known, the Charter did not succeed very well in accomplishing the objectives the government had in mind in 1785. It was, however, welcomed by the Russian nobility.

By 1785 the Russian poll tax, Provincial Reform, and Charters to the Nobility and Towns had been extended to Estland, Livland, and Old Finland, calling into question the monopoly of political control a handful of patricians and registered nobles had until then exercised. The traditional Germanic institutions of these provinces had been transformed, in appearance at least, into Russian institutions operating according to laws and norms prescribed for all of the empire.

In the lands acquired from Poland after 1712 it was especially in Mogilev and Polotsk (renamed Vitebsk in 1802) gubernii that the officials of Catherine II had an opportunity to impose Russian patterns of political and administrative organization. Although Mogilev and Polotsk gubernii (today's eastern Belorussia and eastern Latvia) were somewhat more populous and larger than Estland and Livland, their 93,000 square kilometers and one and a quarter million inhabitants represented but a small part of the approximately seven to eight million inhabitants and almost half a million square kilometers added to Russia between 1762 and 1795. As early as 1778, with the introduction of the Provincial Reform of 1775, Russian courts, administration, laws, and language in the offices of the state bureaucracy replaced the hitherto dominant Polish legal-administrative order of Mogilev and Polotsk gubernii. Local Polish civil law, however, remained in effect. Poles retained control of the courts and of the organs of administration and self-government below the level of the state officialdom in gubernia and district offices and institutions.⁴

In Kurland and in the Ukrainian, Lithuanian, and remaining Belorussian lands acquired by Russia in the Second and Third Partitions of Poland, these officials had only a few years to try to introduce the 1775 Provincial Reforms and the 1785 Charters to the Nobility and Towns. In 1796 Paul I decided no longer to insist on total administrative uniformity and to restore to the empire's Baltic and "Polish" provinces their former special rights and privileges.

Generally speaking, Catherine II's efforts to achieve administrative and religious uniformity in Russia were premature. Failing to establish legality and order in the society and government of the center of the empire, Catherine and her advisers were scarcely in a position to impose Russian norms on the borderlands. And even if Catherine had succeeded in achieving a rule of law in Russia, she would have been well advised not to introduce Russian laws and institutions into the right-bank Ukraine and Lithuania as hastily as she did at the time of the Second and Third Partitions. In any case, it is clear that much confusion resulted from inevitable conflicts between traditional Polish and newly introduced Russian administrative and legal practices. In Estland and Livland the Russian authorities lost much of their reformatory zeal as they observed events in France and evidence of increasing social unrest among the Estonian and Latvian peasants. Yet in 1796 Paul I did not have to go as far as he did in setting Livland, Estland, Old Finland, and the areas annexed from Poland after 1772 apart from the rest of the empire as provinces with special rights and privileges. His formulation and institutionalization of the special status of the western borderlands greatly complicated the task of nineteenth-century officials who worked to establish effective control over this area and to integrate it into a uniform pattern of legal and administrative order for the entire empire.

II

Baltic and Polish nobles enjoyed the favor of both Paul I and his son Alexander I, but factors other than the particular predilections of individual tsars would seem to explain what then happened in the western borderlands. For, it is clear that neither Paul nor Alexander intended to permit these borderlands to develop separately from the rest of the empire. Alexander I, for example, confirmed the rights and privileges of the Livland and Estland Ritterschaften but introduced the new qualifying clause, "insofar as they are in agreement with the general decrees and laws of our state."⁵ If Alexander and his father Paul were willing to allow the nobles of the western borderlands to deviate from norms observed elsewhere in the empire, this was chiefly in what pertained to strictly local affairs. Despite the restoration of privileges, governors-general, civil and military governors, boards of public welfare, and gubernia financial and treasury offices still represented the authority of the central government in this area on the basis of Catherine II's Provincial Reform of 1775.

It was especially in the areas of peasant reform and education that privileged elites in the western borderlands then gained new ground. In both of these areas of reform Congress Poland, the Baltic provinces, and Finland seemed to be ahead of the rest of Russia. The peasants of Finland had never been serfs, those of the

Congress Kingdom were emancipated in 1807. Organized elements in the Baltic provinces were at least willing to discuss emancipation, which was not the case for the nobility in the interior of the empire. In Poland the Commission of National Education, founded in 1773, had laid the foundations for a viable network of schools. The Lutheran pastors of the Baltic provinces and Finland had long since been involved in educational work among peasants, as a result of which the ability to read was not uncommon among Estonians, Finns, and Latvians.⁶

The first serfs in the empire emancipated with the approval of the Russian government were those living in the Baltic provinces. In the mid-1790s the Estland and Livland Diets resumed the discussions of peasant reform that had begun in the 1760s. After the death of his mother Paul I favored action on reform proposals made by the Estland and Livland Diets but delayed because of his reservations about the wisdom of peasant reform restricted to one small part of the empire. Alexander I had no such reservations and welcomed the initiative of the Baltic nobility. At first the government closely followed the discussion of emancipation in the Baltic Diets. Thus, Russian officials influenced the drafting of the 1804 statute that regulated the obligations of the Livland peasants and assured leaseholders, with certain exceptions, a hereditary right to cultivate their holdings. After 1804, however, the influence of the Russian government on these discussions declined.

The serfs in Estland, Kurland, and Livland were freed between 1816 and 1819. The shortcomings of Baltic emancipation are well known. The serfs were emancipated without land and remained economically dependent on the Baltic German nobility. In Livland the emancipation law of 1819 no longer assured peasant leaseholders what had been promised in 1804: a hereditary right to the holdings they cultivated. In all three Baltic Provinces peasant mobility continued to be limited. Even after an initial transition period the peasant could only leave or move within his native province if he had permission from the local landowner and from officers of the peasant community. Moreover, emancipation confined to these three provinces meant that the social and economic differences distinguishing their development from that of the rest of the empire were further accentuated.

For all its shortcomings the Baltic emancipation provided Estonian and Latvian peasants with opportunities for local self-government and elementary education that existed for few other peasants in Russia during the first part of the nineteenth century. The Baltic peasant became a member of a rural community that elected its own officers; he was called upon to help organize and support rural elementary schools and to participate in the administration of local affairs. The placing of responsibilities in the hands of peasants was a very significant step in the development of Estonian and Latvian public attitudes. Concerning the Latvians, Andrejs Plakans has written:

As never before, issues could be discussed, answers to local problems experimented with, and the techniques of local government learned by individuals who had never before had such opportunities. Since local governmental problems tended to be similar over large regions of the provinces, and were confronted in roughly similar forms by each new generation of the peasantry, there could be built up traditions of expertise.⁸

Such expertise, it should be noted, was communicated in Estonian and Latvian, giving these two peasant tongues a new meaning in the eyes of the inhabitants of the Baltic countryside.

Because of the work of the Lutheran Church, the Moravian Brethren and the Swedish government (in Estland and Livland but not Kurland during the seventeenth century), the literacy rate of the Baltic Provinces in the first part of the nineteenth century was high for eastern Europe. During the decades following the emancipation of the Latvian and Estonian serfs an elementary school system was gradually organized, accelerating the further spread of literacy in the three Baltic provinces. This system was controlled by German pastors and landowners, but its relative success was at least in part due to the commitment to education and willingness to support it on the part of the local peasants. Among them capable and literate leaders slowly emerged.

Alexander I's education reform of 1802 was influenced by the advice of two Poles, Prince Adam Czartoryski and Count Seweryn Potocki, and was based to a considerable extent on the statutes of the Polish Commission of National Education. The administration of the system of national education established in 1802 was decentralized among six school regions with headquarters in Dorpat, Kazan, Kharkov, Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Wilno. In the secondary and higher schools of the Dorpat and Wilno School Regions, German and Polish were the respective languages of instruction. Textbooks and educational programs were determined by councils of the local German or Polish-speaking university professors. The educational affairs of Finland and Congress Poland were then administered in almost complete isolation from those of the rest of the empire. Four of the eight universities in the Russian Empire between 1816 and 1830 were located in the western borderlands, their languages of instruction being Polish (Warsaw and Wilno), German (Dorpat), and Swedish (Abo/Helsingfors). Elementary education in these borderlands was controlled by the local nobility and clergy.

In a word, Russian officialdom was then in no position to prevent German, Polish, and Swedo-Finnish educational administrators from using the schoolroom to develop local particularism and to instill attitudes and values in the minds of young people that alienated them from Russia. In Finland and the Baltic Provinces, however, it was possible to combine particularism with loyalty to the tsar and empire; in Congress Poland, Lithuania, and the right-bank Ukraine, it was not.

Up to 1830 Poles continued to administer the educational affairs of almost all the lands in Russia that had formerly belonged to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Inspired by the work of the Commission of National Education in the period between the First and Second Partitions of Poland, a new generation of Polish educational administrators aimed at revitalizing Polish society by organizing a network of secular schools that emphasized education in the spirit of patriotism and civic virtue. Within the territory of Congress Poland these efforts had been resumed in 1807 when Napoleon brought into existence the Grand Duchy of Warsaw. In Belorussia, Lithuania, and the right-bank Ukraine, they were associated with the name of Prince Adam Czartoryski, a personal friend of Alexander I, Russian assistant foreign minister between 1802 and 1806, and the curator of the Wilno School Region between 1803 and 1823.

The Polish revival did not go entirely unnoticed by Russian officials. In 1823 nationalistic ferment among Wilno university students led to an investigation conducted by N. N. Novosil'tsev, who then replaced Czartoryski as curator. And in 1824, as a result of the complaints of Vitebsk Governor N. N. Khovanskii about the poor Russian instruction and the anti-Russian spirit prevalent in the Polish schools of the Belorussian provinces, the educational affairs of Mogilev and Vitebsk gubernii were transferred from Wilno to the St. Petersburg School Region; and in 1829 a separate Belorussian School Region was established.⁹

At the same time, Alexander I kept the constitutional experiment in Congress Poland within narrowly prescribed limits. He made his own brother Konstantin Pavlovich commander-in-chief of the Polish army and sent Novosil'tsev to Poland as a special and all-powerful Russian commissioner (a post not provided for in the Constitutional Charter) with the right to sit on the State Council in Warsaw. Interference by Novosil'tsev and Konstantin in the affairs of the Polish government soon made Poles skeptical about Alexander's willingness to respect the terms of the Constitutional Charter. Beginning in 1819 signs of opposition in the Sejm and nationalistic and revolutionary sentiments among the Polish youth induced Alexander to approve the introduction of censorship and other repressive or precautionary measures in Congress Poland. These measures produced a gradual worsening of Polish-Russian relations.

Nicholas I, unlike his brother, was no Polonophile. He particularly disliked what he considered irresponsible talk about the reunion of Congress Poland with Lithuania, which he considered to be a "Russian province." He strongly disapproved of the Polish colors and composition of the Lithuanian Army Corps, which Konstantin had commanded since 1817 in addition to his military responsibilities in the Congress Kingdom. By the middle of the 1820s, it should be noted, Konstantin Pavlovich had become among highly placed Russians the most influential advocate of a conciliatory policy toward the Poles. In 1829 Nicholas I followed his advice in coming to Warsaw to be crowned as King of Poland and swear to uphold the Polish Constitutional Charter.

Many Poles, however, wanted more than mere autonomy and special rights at the discretion of the Russian authorities in St. Petersburg. The would-be leaders of Poland were no longer divided magnates and their dependent clients of the eighteenth century. The partitions, heroic efforts at internal reform and resistance, the flourishing of Polish scholarship at the Universities of Warsaw and Wilno, the work of civic and national education throughout the Russian part of the lands of partitioned Poland, the beginnings of industrialization in Congress Poland, and the emergence of Warsaw as the unquestioned urban center of the western borderlands (the third city in the empire with a population of more than 130,000), all combined to produce a degree of unity and cohesiveness among educated Poles that they had tended to lack previously. The process Tadeusz Lepkowski has described as the "birth of a modern people"¹⁰ was well under way.

III

Between 1831 and 1855 the codification of Russian laws, cautious peasant legislation, the policy of official nationality, the manifest interest of Nicholas I in a well-regulated society, and administrative centralization in government all worked to bring the borderlands closer to the rest of Russia. Yet it was especially during the reign of Nicholas I that Finland's leaders firmly established the political and social institutions upon which Finnish autonomy was based. In Poland the punitive measures introduced after the insurrection of 1830-31 failed to reshape Polish szlachta society according to the prescriptions of the Russian bureaucracy. Russia could not even control the social and intellectual development of the western gubernii, where the majority of the population consisted of Eastern Slavs related to the Great Russians in language and religion. Congress Poland remained a country dominated by Polish Catholics, patrolled by Russian soldiers and gendarmes, supervised at the top by a few senior Russian officials but actually run by the Poles themselves.¹¹

Meanwhile, social, economic, legal, and political changes in the Baltic provinces widened the gap separating them from the rest of the empire. In the 1840s and 1850s the social unrest among Baltic peasants obliged the provincial Diets to consider legislation permitting the landowners' former serfs to acquire and own land. Beginning in 1846 the Baltic Committee (Ostseekomitee) met in St. Petersburg to coordinate work on Baltic reform met in St. Petersburg to coordinate work on Baltic reform met in St. Petersburg to coordinate work on Baltic reform. Dominated by a majority of Baltic nobles and their sympathizers, this committee helped to assure that the final Baltic agrarian laws, which Alexander II approved during the 1850s and early 1860s, would not seriously challenge the German landowners' control over the Baltic countryside. As a result, the legislation concerning land tenure and ownership and the organization and functions of local institutions of peasant self-government

differed greatly from that of the the rest of the empire. Marked differences between the social and economic organization of the Baltic countryside and that of the interior of the empire continued until 1917.

In the decades following the Polish insurrection of 1863 railways railways, urbanization, accelerating economic growth, and centralizing administrative, judicial, and social reforms brought the western borderlands closer to the rest of the empire than ever before. During the eight years preceding the Polish insurrection, however, significant social and political changes took place in these borderlands that greatly complicated and retarded their subsequent unification with the rest of Russia. In the first years of the reign of Alexander II the emperor and his principal advisers, fearing peasant unrest and needing to concentrate on the central task of reform, pursued a generally conciliatory policy in the borderlands. At that time, as S. Frederick Starr has pointed out, many influential Russians saw Russia's recent setbacks as the consequence of shortcomings of Nicholas I's rigid, over-centralized, and ineffective bureaucracy. To correct such shortcomings measures were taken to encourage local initiative and self-government and to give governors more powers and a greater degree of control over their local bureaucracies. Because of these circumstances and the prevailing climate of opinion in St. Petersburg early in the reign of Alexander II, it was important for the western borderlands that men sympathetic to their special needs occupied the post of governor-general in Warsaw (Field Marshal M. D. Gorchakov), Riga (Prince A. A. Suvorov and Baron Wilhelm von Lieven), and Helsingfors (F. W. R. von Berg and P. I. Rokasovskii).

Only in the right-bank Ukraine, Belorussia, and Lithuania did the Russian government then continue to follow the more or less Russificatory policies of Nicholas I. To be sure, the government and Russian publicists of that day considered Belorussians and Ukrainians to be Russians. Although certain concessions were then made to the wishes of this area's dominant Polish minority, Russian remained the official language of its schools and local administration. Its courts and municipal and guberniia institutions continued to operate as part of the general legal-administrative system established by Catherine II's Provincial Reform of 1775. In the early 1860s Russian officials saw no reason not to proceed with plans to extend Russian agrarian, judicial, educational, and other reforms to the western gubernii.¹²

The integration of these gubernii into the legal-administrative and social structure of the empire sometimes produced results not anticipated by St. Petersburg officialdom. Thus, considerable social unrest resulted from inventory and state-peasant reforms that were supposed to win Belorussian and Ukrainian peasants for Russia. During 1863-1864 a number of the most effective leaders of the Polish insurrection in the western gubernii were men who had been trained in Russian military schools or in local, Russified secondary

and higher schools. Fluent in Russian and moving freely within the borders of the empire, they easily came into contact with the Russian revolutionary movement and established a communications network that assured a steady flow of information and new ideas among Polish students and nationalist leaders located in St. Petersburg, Moscow, Kiev, Warsaw, and Wilno. Contact with such Russian revolutionary intellectuals as N. G. Chernyshevskii, A. I. Herzen, and N. A. Serno-Solov'evich certainly contributed to radicalize the Polish opposition movement. Poles who had lived in the interior of Russia played a major role in the Polish insurrection of 1863-1864.¹³

The national composition of the population of the western gubernii did not make it easy for the Poles to organize an anti-tsarist insurrection. They were most successful in obtaining support for the Polish cause among some 1.4 million Lithuanians, who made up about 13% of the population of the western gubernii in 1863. In contrast to the Lithuanians, the more than four million Ukrainians in the western gubernii (38% of the population) gave very little support to the Polish insurrection; indeed, a large number of Ukrainians used the rebellion as a pretext to take their own action against Polish landowners. On the other hand, Polish influence was somewhat stronger among some 2,600,000 Belorussians (about one-fourth the population of the western gubernii), especially in the western and partly Catholic areas of Belorussia. Konstanty Kalinowski, the author of Muzyckaia pravda and today--despite his Polish-szlachta origin--a Belorussian national hero, did manage to attract a number of Belorussian supporters for the insurrection in western Belorussia; Ludwik Zwierzdowski, on the other hand, ran into the resistance of the local Orthodox population when, in the spring of 1863, he tried to organize a peasant uprising in eastern Belorussia. Of all the nationalities of the western gubernii, with the exception of the socially backward Latvians in Latgale, the Belorussians were the least successful in organizing their own national movement.¹⁴

Although it shared some of the weaknesses of the Belorussian movement, the Ukrainian national movement greatly benefited from the decentralization and relaxation of political controls early in the reign of Alexander II. The Ukrainian cultural renaissance began in the later part of the eighteenth century. Under Nicholas I Russian universities at Kharkov and Kiev introduced young Ukrainians to romantic nationalism and stimulated their interest in Ukrainian ethnograph, folklore, and language. A setback for the Ukrainian national revival was the arrest, imprisonment, and exile of V. M. Bilozers'kyi, M. I. Kostomarov, P. A. Kulish, Taras Shevchenko, and other members of the Cyril and Methodium Society in 1847. Amnestied by Alexander II, they resumed Ukrainian literary, scholarly, and journalistic activities in St. Petersburg in the late 1850s. Their example and influence helped to give birth to Ukrainian cultural societies in Poltava, Chernigov, Kharkov, Kiev, and elsewhere. Ukrainian elementary schools for children and Sunday schools for adults were organized, Ukrainian belles lettres,

scholarships and textbooks for schools published, and Ukrainian culture in the form of theatrical performances, concerts, and lectures promoted wherever possible. The Russian authorities, however soon curtailed Ukrainian cultural and educational activities, and between 1863 and 1905 the government systematically suppressed the Ukrainian language and culture in schools and public life. This policy of suppression and the illiteracy and social and economic backwardness of the Ukrainian peasantry impeded Ukrainian national development. But a beginning had been made, especially during the 1850s and early 1860s. In the long run, the existence of the second to the largest Slavic people could not be denied.¹⁵

Of all the emerging peasant-peoples of the western gubernii, the Lithuanians were the most successful in laying the foundations for a viable national movement. Lithuanian national leaders came chiefly from the families of well-to-do peasants in Samogitia and trans-Niemen Lithuania (Uzmemune). In western Samogitia near the Prussian and Kurland borders middle and well-to-do state peasants had profited from favorable market conditions and the reforms introduced by Kiselev. In Lithuania south of the Niemen, a number of peasants, who had been emancipated in 1807 together with the Polish serfs of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, had sizeable holdings. Prosperous peasants in Samogitia, Uzmemune, and elsewhere in Lithuania sent at least one son to school to prepare for the priesthood. Not all of these sons turned out to be priests, for many of them did not enter the Church but became moderate or radical members of the secular Lithuanian national movement. The initial stage of the Lithuanian national movement was, however, dominated by the Church.¹⁶

The bishop of Samogitia between 1850 and 1875, Motiejus Valancius, was the son of a local peasant. A student at Wilno University before the insurrection of 1830-1831, he and other Lithuanians came into contact in Wilno with Poles interested in the language, culture, and history of Lithuania. In the decades following the closing of Wilno University hundreds of historical, ethnographic, and popular religious works were published in Lithuanian. Bishop Valancius, himself, was a talented writer who wrote ethnographic tales and other didactic works widely read among the peasants. His influential treatise of 1858 on temperance appeared in some 40,000 copies. Between 1858 and 1864 the temperance society sponsored by Valancius attracted 83.3% of the Catholics in Kovno gubernia. Equally important, he continued efforts of his predecessors to promote education, increasing the number of church schools in Samogitia and improving their administration and the supervision of teachers. Being a social conservative who did not approve of revolution, Valancius strongly criticized peasant involvement in the insurrection of 1863-1864; and in 1864 he offered to cooperate with tsarist officials in seeing to it that a prominent place would be given to instruction in Russian in Catholic schools as long as Lithuanian would also be taught. Soon, however, in reaction to the closing of Lithuanian church schools and to the ban on the publication of

Lithuanian books not printed in a new, especially adapted Cyrillic alphabet, he began to organize a system of underground Lithuanian elementary schools and the smuggling into Russia of Lithuanian books and anti-Russian pamphlets printed in Latin letters. He became a formidable opponent of Russification. The struggle he and the Roman Catholic clergy led against the Cyrillic alphabet and the Russification of education politicized the peasants, making them more aware of their cultural and national identity as Lithuanians than they had ever been before.¹⁷

The Poles were the one major nationality in the western gubernii which declined in relative importance during the second part of the nineteenth century. The punitive and discriminatory measures of the Russian government after 1863 wiped out the limited gains they had made during the period 1855-1863. In Belorussia the Poles were not only displaced by Russian administrators, priests, and school teachers but also by Russian nobles as the owners of the greater proportion of manorial land, especially in the two eastern gubernii of Mogilev and Vitebsk. In the right-bank Ukraine, the Polish economic position was somewhat stronger, but the enmity between Poles and the Ukrainian nationalist intelligentsia and emancipated peasantry augured ill for the future of the Poles in the three southwestern gubernii of Kiev, Podolia, and Volynia. Even in the two Lithuanian gubernii of Kovno and Wilno, where Poles retained control of about three-fourths of manorial land as late as 1904, the dominance of Polish civilization and culture locally was increasingly challenged by an independent Lithuanian church hierarchy, the Lithuanian nationalist movement, social unrest among landless peasants, and the growing economic power of the Lithuanian middle and well-to-do peasants. Yet, though their relative numbers declined, the Poles in the western gubernii remained a sufficiently vital social and economic force locally to continue to disturb the sleep of tsarist officialdom even into the twentieth century.¹⁸

The cultural, economic, and spiritual center of Poles living in the Russian Empire was Warsaw, which had several hundred thousand inhabitants and was still Russia's third city around 1860. In the late 1850s Alexander II and his viceroy in Warsaw, Field Marshal M. D. Gorchakov, followed a rather conciliatory policy in Poland. They made certain minor concessions to Polish wishes, such as the opening of a medical school in 1857 and allowing Polish leaders to begin public discussion of agricultural reform. The policy of detente in Congress Poland culminated in 1861-1862 with the granting to the Poles of a considerable degree of autonomy and the appointment of Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich as viceroy and the Pole Marquis Alexander Wielopolski as the head of the civil administration of the Kingdom of Poland. In 1862 the administration of Polish education once again came under the control of Poles with the abolition of the Warsaw School Region, and a Polish Main School (Szkola Glowna) was established in Warsaw. The Main School was, in fact a university, but it only became known by that name after 1869, when it was transformed into a Russian-language university.¹⁹

The gains made by Poles in the Congress Kingdom were not entirely wiped out by the policy of repression and Russification that followed the insurrection of 1863-1864. The agrarian reforms introduced by Wielopolski in 1861 and 1862 and by the insurgents and the Russian government in 1863 and 1864 completed the long process of uwłaszczenie for the Polish peasant, making possible for the first time his becoming a full-fledged member of the Polish nation. Although Polish education had been completely Russified by the 1880s, Congress Poland continued to have a sizeable professional intelligentsia that spoke, wrote, and thought in Polish. Even after the Polish universities at Warsaw and Wilno closed following the insurrection of 1830-1831, Poles still received professional training in Polish in specialized secondary schools, at the Universities of Cracow and Lwow, or at the Medical-Surgical Academy (after 1857) and the Szkola Głowna (after 1862). In the 1860s there were some 12,000 Polish-trained doctors, pharmacists, technicians, engineers, officials, school teachers, and other professional specialists in Congress Poland.²⁰ Their ranks were considerably augmented during the ensuing decades by further urbanization and economic expansion in Congress Poland. Their relative strength and continued identification with Polish culture and nationality almost assured the failure of Russification during the 1880s and 1890s. Congress Poland remained an essentially Polish world in which Russians could only feel uncomfortable as outsiders and strangers.

In the Baltic Provinces, Baltic Germans, Estonians, and Latvians all benefited from the relaxation of centralizing pressured at the beginning of Alexander II's reign. For the Baltic Germans a more conciliatory Russian policy began as early as 1849 with the replacement of Riga Governor-General E. V. Golovin with a Germanophile educated in Switzerland and Göttingen, Prince Aleksandr A. Suvorov. Because of Suvorov's influence an important language law of 1850 that made the use of Russian obligatory for the official business of the state bureaucracy in the Baltic Provinces was not enforced for almost twenty years. In 1852 Baltic German Georg Friedrich von Bradke became curator of the Dorpat School Region; he soon obtained official approval of the German student corporations, which had existed secretly under Nicholas I, and abolition of the ban on offering university appointments at Dorpat to German-speaking foreigners trained abroad. Bradke and his successor Alexander Keyserling, a distinguished natural scientist, expanded and consolidated a distinctively German secondary and higher educational system in the Baltic Provinces. In the secondary schools of this system and at Dorpat students were educated in the spirit of a separate Baltic world cut off from the rest of the empire and culturally and intellectually linked with Germany. The most eloquent and influential spokesman for this world was Professor Carl Schirren of Dorpat University, whose Livländische Antwort an Herrn Juri Samarin did so much to encourage aggressive assertions of German ethnic identity in the Baltic Provinces.²¹

Meanwhile, Suvorov, his successor Baron Wilhelm von Lieven, and members of the Baltic Committee and other high-placed Baltic Germans and their allies in St. Petersburg worked early in the reign of Alexander II to delay or avoid altogether the introduction of Russian reforms into the Baltic Provinces. Only the municipal reform of 1870 and the military reform of 1874 were extended to the Baltic provinces before the eighties, while important Russian police and judicial reforms of the sixties reached the shores of the Baltic Sea as late as 1888 and 1889. Other aspects of Baltic reform-- despite the protests of patriotic journalists and certain government officials--were considered in the provincial diets and the Baltic Committee separately from the affairs of the rest of the empire. This applied especially to all reforms affecting the Estonian and Latvian peasants, who obtained the right to buy land (Bauernland) but on terms determined not by Russian officials but by the local Baltic German nobles. Alexander II and his principal advisers had no intention of disrupting the existing patterns of property ownership, social organization, and agricultural production in the Baltic Provinces. Legislation prepared by the Baltic provincial diets during the 1850s and 1860s, not the Russian statutes of February 19, 1861, remained the foundation upon which the agricultural order of the Baltic countryside rested until 1917.²²

This retardation of the social, economic, and administrative amalgamation of the Baltic Provinces with the rest of the empire also had important consequences for Estonians and Latvians. The separate Baltic schools system provided a majority of Estonians and Latvians with at least several years of elementary instruction in their own native languages by the 1860s. A small but growing class of prosperous Estonian and Latvian farmers (who had received the right to own land as a result of the agrarian legislation of the 1850s and 1860s) and rural school teachers made up the principal social basis for emerging Estonian and Latvian national movements. Newspapers permitted by the relaxed censorship early in the reign of Alexander II, such as Perno postimees, Majas viesis, and Peterburgas avizes, found a steadily expanding reading audience among a predominantly literate Estonian and Latvian peasant population. Estonian and Latvian intellectual leaders rarely knew Russian well, having been educated in local German secondary schools or at Dorpat. They were, however, becoming more and more aware of their own national identity. With every decade the number of books, journals, brochures, and newspapers published in Estonian and Latvian increased, and cultural, economic, and educational organizations gradually appeared to defend the national and material interests of Estonians and Latvians and to assert their independence of the tutelage of both Baltic Germans and Russians. By the 1880s the cultural and social development of the Estonian and Latvian peoples had proceeded too far to be reversed by the Russification that only then began in earnest.²³

Finally, the Finns made even greater gains during the first decade of the reign of Alexander II. Timing was important, for

they obtained the original concession upon which their expanded autonomy depended before powerful officials in St. Petersburg who favored administrative decentralization began to lose influence in government circles on the eve of the Polish insurrection of 1863-1864.

In the years immediately following the Crimean War, Finnish spokesmen urged the Russian Emperor to convoke the Finnish Diet, which had not met since Alexander I had addressed it at Borga in 1809. Alexander initially reacted cautiously, because granting the Finns the right to have a diet would then have provided the Poles with an argument to ask for the revival of the Polish Sejm. Foes of administrative centralization in St. Petersburg, on the other hand, wanted to encourage local initiative everywhere in the empire and, therefore, viewed sympathetically the special needs and desires of the Finns. Furthermore, in Finland there seemed to be a solid basis for Russo-Finnish understanding, for both conservative bureaucrats and the so-called Fennomans, the two most influential groups in Finland at the time, believed that Finland's future depended on good relations and cooperation with Russia. Some Russian officials feared that if such elements were not encouraged by timely concessions, they might begin to look in the direction of Sweden for their spiritual and even political guidance.

In 1861 Alexander summoned a commission representing the four Finnish estates to enact provisional laws until circumstances would permit a regular diet to meet. Vociferous elements in Helsingfors protested vigorously, interpreting this action to be a violation of Finnish rights. Alexander gave way before these protests, first by reassuring the Finns concerning his intentions and then, at the height of the Polish crisis in June 1863, by consenting to the convocation of the Finnish Diet. The Diet's powers and functions were defined several years later, namely, by a statute passed by the Diet in 1867 and confirmed by the emperor in 1869. Meeting regularly after 1863, the Diet enacted legislation during the next several decades that speeded up Finland's modernization and encouraged further development of institutions and values that differed markedly from those of Russia.²⁴

IV

In sum, if we view the problem of diversity and convergence in Russia's western borderlands in the perspective of what the Annales historians refer to as the longue durée, it is clear that Russian political leaders only partly overcame the inertia of such forces as geography, economics, nationality, and traditional values and institutions. In some respects, these borderlands were undeniably brought closer to the rest of the empire. But the measures taken by Russia to achieve this end were generally of an administrative and bureaucratic nature and had relatively little impact on the daily life of the common people.

Catherine II's Provincial Reform of 1775 did integrate this area--with the exceptions of Congress Poland and Finland--into a general administrative framework encompassing the entire empire. By 1840 Russian laws had been introduced into the western gubernii, where the majority of the inhabitants of the western borderlands lived. The Uniates were separated from Rome and brought directly under the authority of the Holy Synod in St. Petersburg; some 100,000 Estonians and Latvians were converted to Orthodoxy during the 1840s. Russian became the language of instruction in secondary and state-supported primary schools in the western gubernii; the Russian language and instruction in Russian became part of the instructional programs of secondary schools in both Congress Poland and the Baltic Provinces. Thousands of nobles throughout the western borderlands learned Russian well and served loyally and effectively in the Russian army and civil service.

The Russian government lacked, however, the human and financial resources to alter significantly local social structures and patterns of behavior. On the whole, before the 1860s Russian officials rarely understood the importance of literacy, popular education, economic rationalization, and social modernization as a basis for national unity. Theirs was still the old-regime, cameralistic, and traditional outlook of seventeenth and eighteenth-century Europe. Meanwhile, local elites in the western borderlands, especially the Baltic Germans and the Swedo-Finns, often effectively used schools and social and economic modernization to further develop a particularistic local society in isolation from the rest of the empire.

Only after the Polish insurrection of 1863-1864 did St. Petersburg seriously consider a more far-reaching and coherent policy of administrative and cultural Russification. If the measures Russian officials then took were partly successful in the right-bank Ukraine and Belorussia, they generally failed in Congress Poland, Lithuania, the Baltic Provinces, and Finland. Ironically, at the very time many Russians aspired to build a modern nation-state, new national elites emerged in the western borderlands. More and more they came to demand separate national and cultural rights for themselves, while the older German, Polish, and Swedish elites continued to dominate the local economy, society, and cultural establishment. It proved difficult for tsarist Russia to undo the work of the centuries that had shaped the institutions, customs, cultures, and social values and structures of the empire's western borderlands. These borderlands had not converged with the rest of the empire; in 1863 there was more diversity than there had been a century earlier.

Footnotes

- ¹ On Odojewski's Zmierzch Świata (1962), Wyspa ocalenia (1964), and Zasypie wszystko zawieje (1973), see J. Krzyzanowski, "The Land of No Salvation," Polish Review, XXIII (1978), 17-30.
- ² The standard work on the relations of the Russian government with the Baltic Germans during the 18th century is Ia. Ia. Zutis, Ostzeiskii vopros v XVIII veke (Riga, 1946). The best general survey of the history of the Baltic provinces is still R. Wittram, Baltische Geschichte (Munich, 1954).
- ³ Sbornik IRIO, VII (1871), 348.
- ⁴ U. Lehtonen, Die polnischen Provinzen Russlands unter Katharina II. in den Jahren 1772-1782 (Berlin, 1907), pp. 174, 335-404, 542-74.
- ⁵ M. Haltzel, Der Abbau der deutschen standischen Selbstverwaltung in den Ostseeprovinzen Russlands 1855-1905 (Marburg, 1977), p. 5. A delightfully opinionated, idiosyncratic but extremely well documented study of the relations of the Livland Ritterschaft with the Russian government during the 19th century is A. von Tobien, Die livlandische Ritterschaft in ihrem Verhaltnis zum Zarismus und russischen Nationalismus, 2 vols. (Riga, 1925; Berlin, 1930).
- ⁶ On the features of Baltic society and life that stimulated discussion of the peasant question as early as the 1760s, see W. Lenz, Der baltische Literatenstand (Marburg, 1953), pp. 1-19; H. Neuschäffer, Katharina II. und die baltischen Provinzen (Hannover, 1975), pp. 401-12; N. Wihksninsch, Die Aufklarung und die Agrarfrage in Livland (Riga, 1933), pp. 163-76, 206-30; J. Zutis, Ostzeiskii vopros v XVIII veke, pp. 275-79, 287-94, 334-54.
- ⁷ Standard accounts of Baltic emancipation are still Iu. F. Samarin, "Krest'ianskii vopros v Lifliandii," Sochineniia (Moscow, 1877-1911); and A. Tobien, Die Agrargesetzgebung Livlands im 19. Jahrhundert, 2 vols. (Berlin-Riga, 1899-1900). For more recent treatments, see J. Kahk, Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie i krestianskii vopros v Estonii: V kontse XVIII i v pervoi chetverti XIX veka (Tallinn, 1962); and J. Zutis, Vidzemes un Kurzemes zemnieku likumi 19. g.s. sākumā (Riga, 1954).
- ⁸ A Plakans, "The Latvians," in Russification in the Baltic Provinces and Finland, 1855-1914 (manuscript of forthcoming book, Princeton University Press), pp. 426-27. What is said in this paper concerning internal developments among Latvians and Estonians is based on the cited article by Plakans and on a second article by Toivo Raun, "The Estonians," in this same volume, which I have edited.

- ⁹ D. Beauvois, "Les écoles polonaises de l'Empire russe: Aspects du centralisme administratif de l'Université de Vilna (1803-1831)," VIIe Congrès International des Slavistes, Communications de la délégation française (Paris, 1973), pp. 35-49, 47-49; Sbornik materialov dlia istorii prosveshcheniia v Rossii izvlechennykh iz archiva Ministerstva narodnogo prosveshcheniia (St. Petersburg, 1893-1902), II, xci-xcii; III, xlix-li.
- ¹⁰ T. Ćepkoswki, Polska—narodziny nowoczesnego narodu 1764-1870 (Warsaw, 1967).
- ¹¹ On Congress Poland under Nicholas I, see N. Reinke, Ocherk zakonodatel'stva Tsarstva Pol'skogo (1807-1881 g.) (St. Petersburg, 1902; and A. P. Shcherbatov, General-Fel'dmarschal kniaz' Paskevich, Vol. V (St. Petersburg, 1909).
- ¹² The best general analysis of the government's centralizing policies in the western and other borderland gubernii is to be found in B.E. Nol'de, Ocherk russkogo gosudarstvennogo prava (St. Petersburg, 1911).
- ¹³ A. K. Koshik, "Inventarnaia reforma 1847-1848 gg. i krest'ianskoe dvizhenie na pravoberezhnoi Ukraine," Kiev University, Istoricheskii sbornik, 1949, no. 2, pp. 106-22; T.A. Koniukhova, Gosudarstvennaia derevnia Litvy i reforma P.D. Kiseleva (Moscow, 1975), pp. 230-32; Krest'ianskoe dvizhenie v Rossii v 1826-1849 gg.: Sbornik dokumentov (Moscow, 1961), pp. 426-31, 554-58, 609-30; A. F. Smirnov, Vosstanie 1863 goda v Litve i Belorussii (Moscow, 1963), pp. 141-157.
- ¹⁴ Smirnov, pp. 85-100, 201-9, 219-28, 341-45; P. N. Batiushkov, ed., Atlas narodoseleniia zapadno-russkogo kraia po ispovedaniiam (St. Petersburg, 1863).
- ¹⁵ D. Doroshenko, A Survey of Ukrainian History, ed. O. W. Gerus (Winnipeg, 1975), pp. 525-27, 535-44; K. K. Dubina, ed., Istoriia Ukrainskoi SSR (Kiev, 1969), I, 402-8 472-74; E. S. Shabliovskii, "N. I. Kostomarov v gody revoliutsionnoi situatsii (1859-1861 gg.)," Revoliutsionnaia situatsiia v Rossii v 1859-1861 gg.: 1970 (Moscow, 1970), pp. 101-23.
- ¹⁶ Koniukhova, pp. 172-76, 202-8; S. A. Suziedelis, "The Lithuanian Peasantry of Trans-Niemen Lithuania, 1807-1864: A Study of Social, Economic and Cultural Change" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kansas, 1977).
- ¹⁷ Suziedelis, pp. 451-74, 498-501; K. J. Čeginskas, "Die Russifizierung und ihre Folgen in Litauen unter zaristischer Herrschaft," Commentationes Balticae, VI/VII (1959), 6, 121-34; Iz istorii shkoly Belorussii i Litvy, ed. V. Z. Smirnov, Izvestiia Akademii Pedagogicheskikh Nauk RSFSR, no 131 (Moscow, 1964), pp. 194-215; J. Ochmanski, Litewski ruch narodowo-kulturalny w XIX wieku (Białystok, 1965), pp. 79-105.

18 Istoricheskiĭ obzor deiatel'nosti Komiteta ministrov, III-1, 159-227; IV, 213-23; P. S. Wandycz, The Lands of Partitioned Poland, 1795-1918 (Seattle, 1974) pp. 239-54; L. Wasilewski, Litwa i Białorus' (Cracow, [1912]), pp. 78-117.

19 Wandycz, pp. 156-70, 196.

20 Czepulis-Rastenis, Inteligencja, pp. 123-25, 210-48.

21 Haltzel, pp. 33-40, 59-62.

22 Ibid., pp. 43-64, 72-96; M. Kozins, "Agrarnaia politika tsarizma v Pribaltike v 60-kh godakh XIX v.," Ezhegodnik po agrarnoi istorii vostochnoi Evropy: 1960 g. (Kiev, 1962), pp. 454-57, 464; Tobien, Die Agrargesetzgebung, II, 234-40.

23 See footnote 7.

24 M. M. Borodkin, Istoriia Finliandii: Vremia Imperatora Aleksandra II (St. Petersburg, 1908); L. Krusius-Ahrenberg, Der Durchbruch des Nationalismus und Liberalismus im politischen Leben Finlands 1856-1863 (Helsinki, 1934); Estlander, Elva årtionden, I, 258-361.