

## Social stratification in Russian higher education

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## Social Stratification in Russian Higher Education

Higher education came to the Russian Empire as a privilege. From its beginnings in the 18th century it conferred special rights to graduates; soon thereafter, the state set out to restrict university admissions to youth largely of upper-class, privileged background. As the numbers of students grew and the importance of educational qualifications increased among the country's bureaucratic and professional elite, higher education became ever more closely bound to the dramatic social changes occurring in Russia. By the early 20th century it reflected in its internal evolution certain of the conflicts leading the country to revolution. In this it was not unique among European nations; a half-century before, students in Western institutions of higher education had a direct part in the revolutionary movement. Nowhere else, however, were conditions as acute as in the Russian Empire. The revolution of 1917 brought to a violent end the old social order. It had a profound impact on the country's educational system. Yet ironically a form of privilege re-emerged as the new Soviet state sought to manipulate admissions to higher education to further its program of social revolution.

This theme of education as privilege provides the central focus of the discussion in the following pages on social stratification in Russian higher education. The pattern of class representation among the students depended in part on specific policies applied by the state and educational authorities. It also was influenced by the aspirations of segments of the Russian population to obtain access to higher learning as a path of upward—or horizontal—mobility, a means of protecting a jeopardized social position or of rising to higher status. By assessing the relative weight of government policy and social aspirations we can hope to reach an understanding of the forces which determined the changes in social recruitment from slow growth to sudden expansion between the mid-19th and early 20th centuries.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Enrollment figures can be found in Vera Romanovna Leikina-Svirskaja, *Intelligentsiia v Rossii vo vtoroi polovine XIX veke* (Moscow, 1971), 55–56; William Johnson, *Russia's Educational Heritage* (N.Y., 1969), tables 32 and 33, 287–89; Nicholas Hans, *History of Russian Educational Policy* (N.Y., 1964), table 13, 421.

### *The Social Structure of Tsarist Universities:*

Our indicator of social stratification in tsarist Russia is the legal system of estates then in effect. Its social categories for grouping the population provide the sole evidence of student origins in school records. Unfortunately they bore only a remote connection to the real occupation and actual social standing of the families. Lacking more reliable data, we must use their crude labels. The estate most nearly approaching the designation of "elite" was that of nobility, usually grouped in the records with state bureaucracy. Originally the nobility had constituted the service pool for administrative and military needs of the tsarist state, and had received in exchange the exclusive right to landed estates and serfs. On the eve of the serf emancipation in 1861, only one-fourth held land providing substantial wealth, and probably one-half needed supplementary income to support their families. Emancipation of the serfs meant for many nobles financial ruin and emigration to the cities, where often they sought administrative service for themselves and higher education for their sons as principal means to avoid becoming *declassé* in fact if not legally.

Despite this process of partial melding of landed nobility and bureaucracy, the latter slowly emerged as a distinct and powerful group in Russian society. Non-nobles could enter state and local bureaucracy, and might hope to achieve the title of hereditary nobility if they advanced to high rank. Yet the majority of the bureaucracy remained dependent upon their service for livelihood, avoiding the purchase of estates even when noble by legal title. The boundaries between the landed nobility and bureaucracy were vague, but occupational patterns and property holdings were sufficiently distinct to justify calling the bureaucracy the new elite of the Empire.

Among the urban population, only the estates of merchantry and "honorary citizenry" could claim some of the honor attached to the nobility. The merchant estate came by the end of the 19th century to include many temporary "merchants" who had paid the required legal fees solely to have the right to engage in large-scale commerce and industry. The honorary citizens constituted an assorted group of urban professionals whom the state sought to honor—and encourage—by a special mark of social status. In effect, the two estates represented an upper middle class, mingling more traditional and new occupations.

Occupying a special category in Russian society was the priesthood, until the 1860s a closed estate socially isolated by legal restrictions. Guardians of the spiritual well-being and political loyalty of their flock, the parish priests struggled on miserable incomes to raise large families. Freedom granted in the 1860s to pursue new occupations and to enter other estates brought an influx of priests' sons into higher education. The priesthood, like the merchantry and nobility, was very small. The national census of 1897 revealed that these three estates each represented approximately one percent of the Empire's population.

Most closely resembling a lower middle class was the estate designated as "petty bourgeoisie (*meshchanstvo*)," usually grouped with the urban artisans. Both titles could be acquired by special legal procedures, but were usually passed on from parents to offspring with no requirement as to means of livelihood. The occupations practiced by those belonging to these estates filled a large range of urban trades and professions, including by the end of the 19th century a number of white-collar posi-

tions as well as some skilled trades and petty commerce. The petty bourgeoisie constituted about 10 percent of the inhabitants of Russia at that time.

The single largest estate of the land was the peasantry. The category had designated until the mid-19th century the serf population, working the land as the chattel of landowners or of the state. The abolition of serfdom granted them legal personality but left in effect many of the constraints which kept them formally bound to their village and estate of birth. The economic growth of the urban areas of the country transformed millions of these legally classified "peasants" into urban migrants, working often as laborers in factories, day laborers, and some as small-scale entrepreneurs, middlemen and tradesmen. Among the peasants working as farmers, a few succeeded in turning their agricultural activities into a source of substantial wealth. It is fair to assume that those rare peasant offspring who appeared among Russia's students were from the urbanized peasants or the relatively well-to-do farmers, lower class only relative to noble or merchant. The poverty and lack of educational opportunity of most Russian peasants effectively deprived their children of formal education, save perhaps a year or two of grammar school, until the very end of the tsarist regime.

The presence of these various social groups among the country's student population is revealed—imperfectly and incompletely—in the governmental statistics on enrollment in higher education. The Ministry of Education kept the most complete records, but these apply only to the universities. The technical schools were under the jurisdiction of a wide variety of agencies, whose methods of tabulation were uncoordinated and frequently nonexistent. Thus we must look for clues indicating the general trend in figures on enrollment which are in fact only a partial listing. The changing pattern of university enrollments, for which alone we can construct a continuous series, is displayed in Table 1. The most notable change was the gradual decline in the percentage of the nobility/bureaucracy, falling from 67 percent to 35 percent.

These figures hide a much more dramatic fall in the proportion of hereditary nobles. In 1914, they constituted only eight percent of the total; 30 years before, in 1880, their share of the student population was 23 percent. In absolute numbers, they were slightly more numerous in 1914 than in 1880, but the expanding enrollments were engulfing the old elite. The mid-19th century was their moment of predominance—almost 60 percent of the students at St. Petersburg University were nobles;<sup>2</sup> 20 years later, they represented only 23 percent.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the proportion of sons of bureaucrats remained relatively constant, keeping pace with the rising enrollments. It rose slightly from 19 percent to 24 percent at St. Petersburg University between 1859 and 1880; overall, it rose from 23 percent in 1880 to 27 percent in 1914. The bureaucracy had established itself as a substantial beneficiary of higher education.

The other significant trend is the increase in proportion of sons of the petty bourgeoisie. If those of the peasantry are added to their numbers, the Russian universities by 1914 included among their students over one-third from the lower and lower-mid-

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2. Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv v Leningrade [abbrev. TsGIAL], *fond* (f.) 773, *opis* (o.) 95, *delo* (d.) 172 ("St. Petersburg University Report for 1859"), *listy* (ll.) 333-34.

3. Leikina-Svirskaja, 62.

*Table 1: University Students: Social Composition by Estates, 1865–1914*

<u>Estate</u>	(Percent Distribution)					
	1865	1880	1895	1900	1907	1914
Nobility/Bureaucracy	67	47	46	52	45	35
Priesthood	9	23	5	8	11	10
Merchantry/Honorary citizenry	3	8	7	12	12	11
Petty Bourgeoisie	5	11	32	20	22	23
Peasantry	13	3	6	5	6	13
Other	4	8	4	3	4	6

Sources: A. Rashin, "Gramotnost' i narodnoe obrazovanie v Rossii," Istoricheskie zapiski, v. 37 (1951), 78; V. R. Leikina-Svirskaiia, Intelligentsiia v Rossii (Moscow, 1971), 62–64.

dle classes. The displacement of the nobility and gradual rise of these new classes suggests a gradual process of "democratization" in the social composition of Russia's student population. This generalization appears appropriate as well when the meager figures on the social origins of students in technical schools are examined. In the early 1870s, the nobility/bureaucracy dominated these schools almost to the same extent as the universities (55 percent of the students in six technical schools).<sup>4</sup> By 1914, their proportion had declined to 25 percent (the relative share of bureaucracy and nobility is impossible to determine); that of the petty bourgeoisie and peasantry had risen from 35 percent to 54 percent.<sup>5</sup> The long-term trends in the two groups of advanced schools thus coincided.

It is very difficult to read into the statistics on estates the actual social background and condition of the students. Thanks to a student-organized survey in one of the country's leading technical schools, we have a detailed profile of one important segment of the student population in the last years of the tsarist regime. The St. Petersburg Technological Institute was surveyed by a student group to elicit information on the political attitudes, social background, and financial condition of the students in order to draw a political portrait of the "typical" Institute youth. The 2,000 students tended to resemble their cousins across the river in the university by the relatively strong representation of the noble-bureaucrat group, 38 percent of the total (according to figures for 1913). However, like the other technical schools, the petty bourgeois-

4. TsGIAL, f. 908, o. 1, d. 125, l. 88.

5. Hans, Table 34, 290 (figures drawn from enrollment in five technical institutes).

*Table 2: Selectivity Index: All Russian Students 1914*

<u>Estate</u>	<u>Population of Russian Empire, 1897 (percent)</u>	<u>Russian Students 1914 (estimated)</u>	<u>Selectivity Index (Student/Population Ratio)</u>
Nobility/Bureaucracy	1.4	30.3	21.6
Merchantry/Honorary Citizens	0.5	12.5	25
Priesthood	0.5	6.4	12.8
Petty Bourgeoisie	10.6	28	2.6
Peasantry and Cossacks	79.4	18.5	0.2

Note and Sources: The census of 1897 is the only reliable source on estate distribution for the late tsarist period; the estimated student population is James McClelland, "Higher Education in Soviet Russia, 1921-28," Past and Present, 80 (August 1978), Table 5, 137. Census figures appear in Obshchii svod po Imperii (St. Petersburg, 1905), 1:160-63.

sie provided a large number of students, 30 percent, and the peasantry another 13 percent, while merchantry and honorary citizens constituted 14 percent.<sup>6</sup> The questionnaires sent to all the students were returned by only one-half, but the social break-down of this group corresponded very closely to the total student body. As in earlier times, the majority of the students lived on incomes which bordered on poverty; 60 percent revealed that their monthly expenses were below the level considered sufficient for satisfactory housing and food. About five percent reported that they could not count on a daily main meal. Only 20 percent had incomes which allowed them to live comfortably. Although this group probably came largely from families of merchants and nobles, among the privileged estate of the empire were many families living on small incomes, often obliged to work at salaried positions to make ends meet. Only half of the students could count on their families to provide them with full financial support.<sup>7</sup> In other words, for one-half of the parents the entry of their sons in the Institute represented the hope of real social and economic advancement in Russian society.

These findings from the institute suggest that one must use with great caution the indicators of social inequality for Russian higher education. The only quantitative method measuring inequality suitable to the available data on stratification, with all their imperfections, is the index of selectivity. Table 2 presents the results of calcula-

6. *Teknologicheskii institut: sto let (1828-1928)* (Leningrad, 1929), 1:38.

7. M. V. Bernatskii (ed.), *K. kharakteristike sovremennogo studenta* (St. Petersburg, 1911), 20-21, 47, 59.

tions for all students in 1914. It reveals, as could be expected, that the nobility and merchantry were the most over-represented, peasantry the most under-represented among the students. The soundest conclusion to be drawn from these figures is that higher education continued to cater to the *legally* privileged, though the actual social standing of these students from the nobility/bureaucracy or merchantry frequently differed little from their unprivileged classmates. What factors explain their tenacious hold over advanced learning? What contrary forces were behind the gradual, belated rise of the "middle classes" among Russia's students?

*The Causes of the Social Transformation:*

The answers to these questions may be found in the changing patterns of official policy toward social recruitment into higher education and of popular attitudes among Russia's social classes toward the desirability and accessibility of that peculiar form of training for adult life. Government attitudes oscillated between restrictive and expansionist practices, reflecting the contradictory concerns of increasing the trained elite of the country and of assuring the political reliability of educated Russians. At the beginning of the 19th century, Alexander I had indicated a desire that advanced learning, then still in its infancy, be open to all Russians of talent (except, of course, serfs). The fear of revolution prompted his successor, Nicholas I, to alter this policy. His minister of education, Sergei Uvarov, declared in 1835 that a proper system of public education should "offer opportunities to each one to receive that education which would correspond to his mode of life and to his future calling in society."<sup>8</sup> Ten years later, he stated clearly his wish that the elitist education provided by the secondary schools (gymnasia) and universities be reserved for "noble and bureaucrat children, while the middle estates will turn to the district schools."<sup>9</sup> This static view of education corresponded to a static view of society, in which social position counted for more than merit and access to higher education remained a privilege of birth. In this manner the virus of social discontent and political radicalism was to be kept from penetrating Russian society.

Ironically, in those years the state had to cajole and entice the landed nobility to send their offspring to civilian schools. Alexander I for a time barred entry to the bureaucracy to anyone without some secondary training; Nicholas I opened special secondary schools providing virtually free room and board exclusively to the nobility. Gradually the realization spread among the provincial landed nobility that their offspring might find profit and prestige in advanced schooling. In the sarcastic words of the novelist Goncharov, these petty nobles became aware "that people could not make their way in life—that is acquire rank, orders of merit, and money except through education," which to them constituted "something called a diploma" acquired by "not merely a knowledge of reading and writing but of other hitherto unheard-of subjects."<sup>10</sup> By the 1840s, this policy appeared successful. The gymnasia

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8. Quoted in Nicholas Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia* (Los Angeles, 1959), 141.

9. Quoted in Allen Sinel, *The Classroom and the Chancellery* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973), 18.

10. Ivan Goncharov, *Oblomov*, trans. N. Duddington (New York, 1960), 135.

were filled predominantly with sons of nobles and bureaucrats, who made up over all 80 percent of the enrollment.<sup>11</sup> In those years two special advanced secondary schools catering to the nobility came into prominence, the Alexandrovsky (originally Tsarskoselskii) *Lyceum* and the School of Jurisprudence. Both prepared a carefully chosen group of noble youth for high government service and successfully carried out Nicholas' ideal of incorporating advanced education into a rigid estate hierarchy.<sup>12</sup> Though the universities never achieved such social "purity," the state's preferential policies, combined with rising interest in education among the nobles and the absence of both widespread opportunity and incentive on the part of the middle classes, produced a social hierarchy in the universities much as Nicholas had desired.

The educational policies of Alexander II opened higher education to other strata of the population. Following Russia's defeat in the Crimean War, the leaders of the empire suddenly perceived that more and better advanced learning was a national priority. The new minister of education preached the message that "learning is an urgent need."<sup>13</sup> University enrollments suddenly doubled. Technical schools, previously providing inferior vocational training, were elevated to the status of advanced institutes conferring social distinction on their graduates. The problem of socially undesirable elements among the student body soon reemerged following the attempted assassination of the tsar in 1866 by a part-time student. Clear criteria were needed to separate the chaff from the grain. The new minister of education, Dimitrii Tolstoi, found these in controls on numbers admitted and in rigorous studies, arguing in 1875 that advanced learning was for an aristocracy "of intellect, knowledge, and hard work."<sup>14</sup> Tolstoi's view reflected in part an elitist conception of higher education as the crucible in which the talented from all classes became infused with the spirit of enlightened reason (*Bildung*); it also justified the indispensable increase in student enrollment.

The enticement of new occupational opportunities and the widespread recognition of the distinction of learning combined to create a rush of students from the middle as well as upper privileged classes. The St. Petersburg Technological Institute, founded in 1833, had barely survived in its first two decades in the midst of noble disdain and real hostility toward professionalization among the merchants and industrialists of the country. Similarly, the Medical-Surgical Academy in St. Petersburg, offering the best medical training in the country, managed in those years to fill its student ranks only by recruiting a large number of priests' sons trained in secondary religious schools and malleable enough to accept an alternate career as military doctor. Both schools benefited by Alexander II's reforms, becoming large, advanced institutions of specialized learning and acquiring the reputation of centers of "real"—i. e., scientific—learning. No longer shunned by the upper classes, the Tech-

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11. A. G. Rashin, "Gramotnost i narodnoe obrazovanie v Rossii v XIX i nachale XX v.," *Istoricheskie zapiski*, 37 (1951), tables 47 and 48, 72.

12. Allen Sinel, "The Socialization of the Russian Bureaucratic Elite: Life in the Tsarskoe Selo Lyceum and the School of Jurisprudence," *Russian History*, 3 (1976), 1-32.

13. Quoted in K. Timeriazev, "Probuzhdenie estestvoznaniia," *Istoriia Rossi v XIX veke* (St. Petersburg, 1909), 7:2.

14. Sinel, *The Classroom*, 207.



nological Institute found a majority of its students among sons of nobles or bureaucrats, trained in the elitist secondary schools, the gymnasia.<sup>15</sup>

The influx of an important contingent of students from modest, even poor background marked the appearance of educational aspirations among the middle classes during the 1870s. For these students, educational ideals focused on the opportunity for financial security and social honors. Some came from noble families whose fortunes were in serious decline. Others were from the upper and middle urban estates, as well as the priesthood, all increasingly numerous among university students between 1865 and 1880. Their presence was conspicuous among the upper class contingent because of "their excessively long coats, strong regional accents in conversation, their snuff pouch, and clumsy movements."<sup>16</sup> Poverty knew no estate limits, however. The prevalence of economic hardship among the university students was confirmed by a student survey in Kiev University in 1870, which revealed that over one-third of the respondents had no financial support from outside (parents, school, or state) and 70 percent were living on what the surveyors regarded as insufficient means.<sup>17</sup> Financial hardship plus difficult studies produced numerous drop-outs from the advanced schools (a memorable literary image of one appearing in the character of Raskolnikov in Dostoevsky's novel *Crime and Punishment*). Students whose lofty educational ideals focused on rational thought and commitment to political and social progress were dismayed by the apparently crass vocational interests of the "poor and undistinguished" students. These latter, in the writer Dimitri Pisarev's opinion, sought "the shortest road to rank, honor, large earnings, and consequently all the blessings and enjoyments of life."<sup>18</sup> Pisarev's goal of intellectual revolt was a luxury which the poor students, however much they might sympathize with it, could not afford.

What did they hope to obtain through schooling? Testimony of contemporaries uniformly answered that the rapid development of Russian economy, society, and the state was at the origin of the new influx of less advantaged students. The director of the Technological Institute explained in 1872 the flood of poor students in his school as a consequence of "the success of industry, the development of a widespread railroad network requiring a large number of specially trained technicians, and constantly increasing penetration of scientific elements into industrial production."<sup>19</sup> The Industrial Revolution in Russia was beginning to stimulate social mobility and professionalization, and the social profile of the advanced schools reflected the opportunities for social ascent these changes created.

Even more possibilities for employment were appearing in the burgeoning state and local administrations. These positions required higher learning credentials, in exchange for which they offered secure, honored positions in society. In 1875 a government commission observed that advanced schooling was "more than ever before attractive to poor youth," who saw that a university diploma would "open to them a

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15. TsGIAL, f. 908, o. 1, d. 125, l. 88.

16. "Russkii vrach," *Sovremennik*, 89 (October, 1861), 582.

17. M. Benasik, *Studenchestvo v tsifrakh* (St. Petersburg, 1909), 8-10.

18. Dimitrii Pisarev, "Nasha universitetskaia nauka," *Izbrannye pedagogicheskie sochineniia* (Moscow, 1951), 125-26.

19. TsGIAL, f. 733, o. 158, d. 127, l. 37.

variety of enticing careers which did not even exist before."<sup>20</sup> Even educational authorities regretted the careerist attitude of this new type of student, seeking "not knowledge, but privileges and rights." As a result of the training being given these middle-class students, advanced schooling was facilitating "a transfer from one class of the population to another rather than the acquisition of education."<sup>21</sup>

Deplorable to the old elite, the educational path to social advancement opened up undreamed-of possibilities to the unprivileged and poor, whose numbers in Russia were legion. Among them were the Jews, to whom Alexander's reforms provided temporary hope for escape from the ghettos through education. When one Jewish medical student was expelled in 1874 for participating in student unrest, his father sent a petition to the minister of the interior begging for his son's readmission. "I am a poor man," he wrote, "without any capital or property and completely at the mercy of the future, for I depend [for my livelihood] on my work in the offices of the sugar factory." He had labored for forty years and had spent his "very last savings for the education of my son, in whom I place my sole support and hope."<sup>22</sup> The evidence thus suggests clearly that an awareness of the new possibilities for social advancement created by the sudden demand for an educated elite quickly penetrated the upper and middle classes of Russia, creating educational aspirations that were often impossible to achieve.

Among the obstacles to success, difficult studies presented the most immediate problem. Those students with the educational background and means to pursue their interests in good conditions stood a much better chance of graduating than others. A special report on graduates from Moscow University in the early 1870s found that, by comparison with overall enrollment, sons of the nobility were more highly represented among graduates than the lower class students, particularly the clerical students. The key factor was not social origin, however, but access to good secondary education. The clergy's offspring were less likely to have received a gymnasium education than noble youth, since most came from the secondary clerical schools, the seminaries.<sup>23</sup> Hence they had a much harder time surviving the rigors of university education. The result was to maintain the influence of privileged social background among the graduates of advanced schooling.

The government set out in the 1880s to fight the rising tide of middle class students. As in the time of Nicholas I, the motive was the fear of political radicalism among the students of unprivileged social class. The assassination of Alexander II in 1881 by a terrorist group led his son, Alexander III, to seek restrictive policies toward higher education. The most famous of these new measures tried to choke off the flow of undesirable students at the source—in the gymnasia. Named the "cooks' circular," this decree issued by the ministry of education in 1887 ordered that "with the exception of those gifted with extraordinary capacities," the "children of coachmen, servants, cooks, laundresses, small tradesmen, and the like" be discouraged from attending the gymnasia. In this revival of the static view of "the nature of things," the

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20. Quoted in L. Kamosko, "Izmeneniia soslovnogo sostava," *Voprosy istorii*, Oct. 1970, 204–5.

21. TsGIAL, f. 733, o. 158, d. 210, 11. 13–14.

22. TsGIAL, f. 1282, o. 1, d. 339, 11. 287–88.

23. TsGIAL, f. 908, o. 1, d. 125, 1. 89.

minister declared that the "existing inequality of fortune" was "unavoidable" and that children should remain in "the sphere to which they belong."<sup>24</sup> In the same years, quotas were applied for the first time to Jewish youth seeking admission to the gymnasias and universities; Moscow and St. Petersburg universities could permit only two percent of their students to be of Jewish origin. The impact of these policies on university enrollments was dramatic; the table on student social origins reveals in the late 1890s a drastic decline in the proportion of the petty bourgeoisie, the very class most affected by the "cooks' circular" and anti-Jewish decrees.

The pressures for admission were nonetheless growing, most particularly among the country's Jewish population. When one young Jewish boy from the southern Ukraine was unable to enter his local gymnasium, his father, a well-to-do wheat farmer, obtained a place for him in the neighboring technical secondary school (Realschule). He was going, or so his father thought, to receive a good education in order to help manage the affairs of the farm. He did graduate from his high school and was even able to enter Odessa University; his formal schooling went no further, however, for he chose at that point to join the revolutionary movement, becoming as Leon Trotsky one of Russia's most brilliant Marxist radicals. This path to manhood represented precisely the educational pattern most feared by the state. Efforts of the secret police to keep tabs on the student population have provided us with records of another alternative chosen by Russian families—education abroad. A file on Russian students in the Paris School of Medicine in 1899–1900 reveals that 156 were enrolled at the school that year; of these, one half (76) were Jewish.<sup>25</sup> The choice of sending sons and daughters abroad for advanced learning was in most cases forced on the parents by government measures; that it was adopted at all is one clear indication of the rising aspiration for education among the Russian middle classes.

The socially restrictive policies of the Russian educational authorities preserved higher education in that country as the privileged domain largely of the nobility and bureaucracy. The rise of this new elite exactly parallels the growth of university education through the 19th century. Bureaucratic parents naturally sought to protect their social position by ensuring suitable training for their offspring. The social pressures behind this trend are vividly illustrated by the history of one famous Russian family. A son of a poor tailor from the Volga city of Astrakhan had in the years of Nicholas I been able, through hard work and much sacrifice, to receive an education at Kazan University, graduating from the Law Faculty. His immediate and most promising opening was teaching, but he soon moved into educational administration, playing an active role in the creation of a network of elementary schools in his district around the middle Volga town of Simbirsk. By the 1870s, his rank in the state administration was sufficiently high to earn him the title of hereditary noble. He had previously married the well-born and well-to-do daughter of a doctor. They had five children, all of whom graduated from gymnasias; some began advanced schooling. The eldest son, a brilliant chemistry student at St. Petersburg University, chose to put the salvation of the Russian people ahead of his own career, and was executed for

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24. Johnson, 155.

25. Hoover Institution, Okhrana Index 13h, Folder 3, "Relève des étudiants russes à l'École de médecine."

plotting against the life of Alexander III. The second son (who actually obtained his law degree at his mother's insistence) became as Vladimir Lenin founder of the Bolshevik party. Besides pointing up the futility of socially exclusive policies to guarantee student political loyalty, this Ulianov family history fits quite well the pattern of self-perpetuating prominence of the new (bureaucratic) elite among Russia's student population. In this respect the interests of the state leadership and of its bureaucratic servants were compatible, at the expense not only of the middle classes but also of the old landed nobility.

The last quarter-century of the tsarist regime witnessed the virtual capitulation of the state to the pressures for professionalization through expansion of enrollments in higher education and for access to education by the middle classes of the country. This change began in the 1890s with the development of an extensive network of technical schools and institutes under the ministry of finance, most aware of the need for educational training, then accelerated after the revolution of 1905. So many openings in the technical institutes and universities could be filled only by granting entrance to the new middle classes and lower middle classes in greater numbers than ever before, creating what in the eyes of conservatives could only be called a socially promiscuous student body. The vocational interests of the middle classes led them to turn particularly to the technical schools. For five schools in 1914 with about one-third of the total professional enrollment, the merchantry and petty bourgeoisie contributed over one-half of the students, and sons of "peasants" another one-fifth.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Moscow University proved responsive to these pressures; as center of Russia's new industrial economy, it too was by 1916 predominantly made up of students from the urban, "enterprising" classes.<sup>27</sup> St. Petersburg University remained more heavily weighted toward the nobility/bureaucracy, since it was the chosen springboard for entrance into the state administration. Similarly, the newly created network of women's courses catered largely to the daughters of the country's elite (old and new). Overall, the trend toward democratization of the student population appears the result of the primacy of socioeconomic development, that is, of the needs of the state for educated Russians, and of the demands of the new classes for education for their offspring.

Some students regarded themselves, though, as in no way beholden to their parents. In contrast to the efforts of many to remain as adults in a position equivalent to or better than that of their parents, a sizeable group since the 1860s openly renounced all ties to parents and to the estate dignities of birth. This is not the place to discuss the forces which reshaped the mentality of this "student corporation."<sup>28</sup> The declaration of a student leader in St. Petersburg University in the late 1850s is indicative of the attitude he saw emerging among his classmates. He asserted in a speech to a student gathering that "in the face of learning, there are no estates or titles or uniforms." No longer were student youth to be divided by estate loyalties as "petty

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26. Johnson, table 34, 290.

27. M. Tikhomirov (ed.), *Istoriia Moskovskogo universiteta* (Moscow, 1955), 1:368-69.

28. See Daniel Brower, *Training the Nihilists: Education and Radicalism in Tsarist Russia* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1975), esp. ch. 4.

bourgeois, merchants, bureaucrats, officers, or well-born Russian nobles," for there remained "only adepts of learning."<sup>29</sup>

Though the entire student body never resembled such an exalted image of apostles of truth, student culture over the following half-century nurtured an attitude of alienation toward family and class among at least a part of the youth in higher education. When it became possible after the revolution of 1905 to conduct public opinion surveys, students had the opportunity to express themselves on this issue. One survey at Moscow University asked 1,700 students whether their parents had had any part in the elaboration of their philosophy of life; 58 percent denied that they had. When asked if the parents had had any influence on the choice of academic study, 84 percent denied that they had. The commentator of these statistics concluded that "the Russian intelligentsia has no family."<sup>30</sup> In effect, higher education made its own contribution to the fires of social conflict. From the ranks of these disaffected students came the cadres of the revolutionary parties, claiming leadership of the discontented lower classes in the movement to overthrow the tsarist regime.

### *The Bolshevik Pattern:*

Political realities, of diminishing importance for educational recruitment in the late tsarist period, became a major factor once again after the Bolshevik Revolution. The new leaders were themselves products of an elitist educational system, trained in rigorous humanistic subjects and survivors of the ruthless process of selection which eliminated so many youths. If some never completed their training, the choice was theirs, based on the decision that revolution was more important than an academic degree. The first commissar of education, Lunacharsky, appeared only briefly in the University of Zurich, where an interest in philosophy led him to Marxism and soon to the revolutionary Marxist underground in Russia. As new leader of the educational system, one of his first moves was to eliminate all entrance requirements to the university. A September, 1918 decree of the commissariat declared that university studies were open "to any person, regardless of citizenship or sex, who has attained the age of 16."<sup>31</sup> Democratization of higher education eliminated all handicaps, social, financial, or racial, to talented Soviet citizens seeking access to advanced learning. Lunacharsky's ideal educational system was one in which "every child of the Russian Republic enters a school of an identical type and has the same chances as every other to complete higher education."<sup>32</sup>

However, the concept of democracy had special meaning for the new revolutionary leaders. They had overthrown the old order in the name of and for the sake of the laboring masses. The exploiting classes, on the other hand, were by their very origins

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29. Cited in B. Modzalevskii, "Iz istorii Petersburgskogo universiteta, 1857-59 (Iz bumag L. N. Modzalevskogo)," *Golos minuvshago*, January 1917, 141.

30. M. Izgoev, "Ob intelligentnoi molodezhi," *Russkoe obshchestvo i revoliutsiia* (St. Petersburg, 1909), 197-98.

31. Quoted in Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Commissariat of Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1970), 77.

32. Quoted in Gail Lapidus, "Socialism and Modernity: Education, Industrialization, and Social Change in the USSR," in Paul Cocks et. al. (ed.), *The Dynamics of Soviet Politics* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), 201.

potential enemies of the people. The Soviet state had to support the people and to crush the former ruling classes who would, if given any opportunity, seek to sabotage and overthrow the new class dictatorship. Education was not exempt from class struggle. Some leaders immediately sought to introduce class policies into the classroom. One of these militant educators was E. A. Preobrazhenskii. For him there existed "a genuine class war at the doors of the advanced schools between the worker-peasant majority of the country ... and the [former] governing classes and strata linked with them." At issue was "the question of the numbers and social origins of the future specialists." Though "the bourgeois and intellectual strata of the population are frantically trying to maintain themselves and their children at the level of education and social position reached in the pre-revolutionary period," the working masses want "to have specialists from among their own kin in their own state."<sup>33</sup> The lines were drawn between education open to talent and proletarianization. The policies of the 1920s oscillated first one way, then the other as the Soviet state sought the solution to this dilemma.

All sides could at least agree that special measures needed to be taken to help the working classes overcome their great educational handicap and to provide assistance to those workers seeking to enter higher education. The first practical step in this direction was taken in 1919 by Communist students in a Moscow technical school, who organized special preparatory courses for workers applying to their school. The idea was adopted by the commissariat of education that fall, which called for "preparatory courses at all Russian universities with the aim of preparing workers and peasants for higher education in the shortest possible time." Finally, a year later the Council of People's Commissars of the Russian Republic gave these courses for workers (in Russian *rabochii fakultet*, shortened to *rabfak*) legal status, specifying that admission to such schools was open to workers and peasants sent by Communist party organizations, labor unions, factory committees or local governmental organs. Non-party individuals not engaged in manual labor were excluded, no matter who might recommend them.<sup>34</sup> The movement spread quickly. By 1926 there were 65 *rabfaki* with 33,000 students. Of these, slightly over one-half declared themselves workers, and another 39 percent peasants.<sup>35</sup> These figures are really only approximations, since evidence of social origins was frequently falsified. Nonetheless, the program represented a radical departure in educational recruitment, a program never attempted in any country before and one which successfully opened up higher education to many thousands of workers who in earlier years would have had little chance of such educational opportunities.

Proletarianization of higher education quickly raised the proportion of workers and peasants in universities and technical schools. Specific governmental guidelines designated 8,000 openings in the universities in 1925 (out of a total of 18,000) for *rabfak* graduates, and another 5,000 for individuals recommended by party, Young Communist or trade union organizations.<sup>36</sup> Moscow University claimed to be admit-

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33. Lapidus, 204.

34. V. V. Ukraintsev, *KPSS: Organizator revoliutsionnogo preobrazovaniia vyschei shkoly* (Moscow, 1963), 71-73.

35. Lapidus, table 11.1, 208.

36. Lapidus, 203.

ting 70 percent from the laboring classes among its entering class of 1924.<sup>37</sup> Overall figures on institutions of higher education in 1926 show that almost one-fourth of the students were classified as workers, and the same percentage as peasants. The offspring of the middle and former upper classes (noted as “white-collar employees” and “other”) represented now only one-half of the enrollment.<sup>38</sup>

The continued presence of the children of socially undesirable classes was hardly surprising. The educational leaders and school authorities both continued to seek compromise between proletarianization and talent. Students capable of undertaking difficult advanced studies were most frequently of middle and upper-class origins. State policy openly encouraged families of technical specialists who worked for the Soviet state, “progressive” even if their origins were bourgeois or noble, to send their children to advanced institutes. The heritage of generations of students from these classes could not be eliminated immediately, particularly as long as intellectual ability was considered important. At insignificant little schools such as Smolensk State University, a new creation of the Soviet state, recruitment into medical school posed real problems. A survey of some of the medical students conducted in 1924 revealed that only half could furnish documents certifying that they were of politically acceptable social origin, proletarian or working peasant. The survey also revealed that the students were remarkably alike in lacking party or Young Communist affiliation, and in having to support themselves by work to supplement miserable stipends, living on the verge of poverty.<sup>39</sup> The picture was a familiar one; like the tsarist leaders, the Communists of the 1920s had to live with a socially promiscuous mixture of students, and had to maintain a system of higher education on a slim budget.

The second factor preserving the place of the former advanced classes in the educational institutions was the reluctance of many Russians even to consider such education desirable. The impact of open enrollments in the universities had at the start led to an increase of middle-class students. One Moscow University professor commented that “the proletarian masses did not come to us; it was the intelligentsia that came.”<sup>40</sup> Though the *rabfaki* helped alter attitudes, the change (like that of the landed nobility in the early 19th century) was slow in coming. A survey in 1925 among 2,000 peasant families revealed that only three percent even conceived of the possibility of the completion by their sons or daughters of higher education.<sup>41</sup> When educational specialists studied the length of time rural and urban children remained in school in the 1920s, the results of rural distrust of advanced schooling were clear. Few rural boys and girls completed secondary education. As in late tsarist times, a stay in school of two or three years was sufficient for peasant children, whose parents still worked their own land and thus needed family labor.<sup>42</sup>

Democratization was a boon to the Jewish families. All restrictions on Jewish enrollment were lifted by the Soviet state. The result was a rapid rise in the proportion

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37. *Istoriia Moskovskogo universiteta*, 2:102.

38. Cited in Lapidus, table 11.1, 208.

39. Merle Fainsod, *Smolensk under Soviet Rule* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), 343–44.

40. Quoted in Fitzpatrick, 77.

41. Cited in David Lane, “The Impact of Revolution: The Case of Selection of Students for Higher Education in Soviet Russia 1917–1928,” *Sociology*, 7 (1973), 247.

42. Lane, table 5, 248.

of Jewish students, particularly in the western areas (the former Pale of Settlement). In the entire country, they represented 16 percent of the students in higher education in 1927, while in the Ukraine their proportion was 26 percent. Their importance in some of the professional schools, such as medicine, was even greater; 45 percent of the Ukraine's medical students were Jewish in 1927.<sup>43</sup> Since most of the country's Jews had been engaged in small-scale trade and artisan activity, their social credentials were good, and their ability to master challenging academic subjects was probably greater than that of a comparable group from the Russian population. Ultimately the Russian Communists, like their tsarist predecessors, turned to anti-Jewish discriminatory policies to preserve Russian predominance in higher education.

Women students also took advantage of the new policy of enrollments and the inducements to seek new careers previously open only to men. In the cities, the proportion of girls completing secondary education was greater than that of the boys by the late 1920s.<sup>44</sup> Their impact on higher education was especially noticeable in the technical schools, where they represented 42 percent of the students in 1928.<sup>45</sup> In the new Soviet society, the emancipated woman frequently sought specialized skills through education. Stalin's second wife, Nadezhda Allilueva, came from a Bolshevik worker family in which education was encouraged for all, including the daughters. She completed her secondary education in the midst of revolution and civil war. A decade later, she returned to study in the Industrial Academy of Moscow, where for a time she worked alongside a young worker Communist from the Ukraine named Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev.

The makings of the new Soviet elite were visible in institutions such as this one. The working class had by the mid-1920s occupied a share of the openings in higher education greater than its proportion of the entire population.<sup>46</sup> The result represented in one sense a continuation of the democratization process evident in the late tsarist years, testimony to the increasing desire for higher education among larger and larger numbers of Russians from all classes. It also reflected the new political power of the proletariat, many of whose members had—like Khrushchev—entered the party since the revolution and were seeking to achieve economic expertise through learning as well as political power. One Western scholar has recently argued that the Young Communist organization and new worker Communists pushed particularly hard to have the Soviet state open up to workers and peasants special access to higher education by ending the policy of democratization and introducing socially discriminatory policies. She suggests that they did so primarily to be able to use education as a means of “upward mobility *out* of the working class and peasantry” for entry “into the new ruling elite of the Soviet state.”

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43. Salo Baron, *The Russian Jew Under Tsar and Soviets* (New York, 1964), 273.

44. Lane, table 5, 248.

45. Lapidus, 207.

46. See James McClelland, “Proletarianizing the Student Body: The Soviet Experience during the New Economic Policy,” *Past and Present*, 80 (1978), 134–35. He calculated that the selectivity index for students of working class origin was 1.1 in 1923/24, and had risen to 1.6 in 1927/28. By contrast, that for “employees” (i.e., all students whose parents were not engaged in manual labor) was 6.3 in the latter year; peasants remained greatly underrepresented among the students (index of 0.2).



Their educational aspirations developed more rapidly than governmental policy was ready to admit. Until the late 1920s, their appeals went unheeded. Academic standards remained high, with the natural result that few of the worker recruits to advanced schooling graduated. By 1928, a mere 10,000 Communists had completed some sort of advanced schooling.<sup>47</sup> Only a radical change in educational policy would permit these politically active workers to achieve the educational credentials necessary to occupy influential positions in the state and economic apparatus of the new Communist regime.

With Stalin's rise to power, proletarianization of higher education became state policy. The days of free enrollment in higher education were ended; purges of the student body sought out and expelled the "socially alien elements" (who probably in many cases found openings in other institutes, so chaotic were conditions and so easily were documents falsified). When the educational system expanded rapidly during the First Five-Year Plan, many of the new openings went to adult workers and peasants sent to receive special training as part of the new party elite. This Soviet "affirmative action" brought by one estimate 150,000 adult workers into the Soviet student body between 1928 and 1932.<sup>48</sup> The dilemma of democratization *versus* proletarian power was resolved in the Stalinist manner. Once again higher education became the tool of political leaders seeking above all to protect and enhance their own power.

In effect, Stalin achieved in a decade what the tsarist regime had gradually created in the first half of the 19th century. The autocracy needed a bureaucracy to implement new policies of social and political reform. It found its first recruits largely among the old elite. Yet the process of social expansion of the state administration created its own pool of recruits for higher education. One hundred years later Stalin, once he had decided on the necessity of "proletarian cadres" for his new regime, cultivated the ambitious new Communists from the working class, offering them special educational advantages and an active role in his socialist society of the 1930s in exchange for their loyalty and service. They, like the state bureaucracy of the 19th century, sought advantages for their children, using higher education as the means to protect family status from generation to generation.

In conclusion, this study of Russian higher education and social stratification points to the primacy of politics. Admission to institutions of advanced learning reflected above all the policies imposed by the regime. One might also conclude that the disadvantaged groups in Russian society seeking schooling proved remarkably ingenious in finding openings in spite of the restrictive policies. Higher education was perceived by the early 20th century as the path to social advancement by middle as well as upper classes, and in the 1920s this awareness apparently spread among the working class. But admissions could not respond naturally to these pressures from below as long as the government applied its discriminatory practices. Between the regime and society, the struggle was an unequal one. Control over higher education gravitated to those in power. Those who served the state well could find among their rewards access to higher education. This rule was true in the 1840s and remains so today.

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47. Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union, 1921-1934* (New York, 1979), 16-17, 110.

48. Fitzpatrick, 187-88.