Alexander Guchkov and the End of the Russian Empire

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most engaging public personalities in the last years of the Russian Empire was Alexander Ivanovich Guchkov (1862–1936). A political biography of Guchkov, whose career in the national limelight—in the legislature (the State Duma), in the war-industries committees during World War I, and in 1917 in the Provisional Government—was central to the story of the collapse of the old order, is long overdue. There has been too little study of the major figures of late tsarist history except, for the most part, those of the revolutionary movement. All who knew Guchkov, ranging from the Empress Alexandra who once beseeched her husband to “hang him,” to Paul Milyukov, Guchkov’s long-time liberal adversary in the Duma, who in exile memorialized him as a “Big Man,” testified to his preeminence in the drama of the prerevolutionary Russian state.

Bits and pieces of Guchkov’s life have been chronicled in books and articles by both Soviet and western scholars although there is no overall treatment in any language. Soviet historians invariably describe Guchkov as a spokesman for his class, the haute bourgeoisie, whereas western scholarship divides between an emphasis on the links of class and ideology, on the one hand, and the contention, on the other, that Guchkov’s role as a political actor overshadowed ties to the business community.

To overlook Guchkov’s capitalist origins would be pointless; equally so his hostility to radical initiatives which threatened industrialists and other defenders of private property. As will be apparent, however, the claim here is that Guchkov had a more complicated and applicable program than mere defense of industrial interests. His appetite ran to military affairs and foreign policy, areas which bordered so minimally upon the expressed concerns of the bourgeoisie that its surer representatives abandoned Guchkov’s political party, the Octobrists, shortly after its inception.

As source material for this account, Guchkov’s memoirs present certain difficulties. Compiled from memory shortly before his death in Paris in 1936, they say nothing about the family background or about the period in exile after the Bolshevik take-over in 1917. Furthermore, they gloss over important episodes within the compass of Guchkov’s active years, such as the war-industries committees. Therefore this is not a full-scale biography, although mention will be made of the early and later periods based on scattered available materials. Despite this limitation much about Guchkov’s life still can be reconstructed. Apart from the memoirs I have relied on published primary sources containing Guchkov’s speeches; on memoirs of leading individuals who knew Guchkov; and on unpublished
sources, including personal correspondence with Guchkov’s daughter. From time to time I consulted secondary interpretative studies by Soviet and western scholars to further illuminate the workings of the tsarist political system. One aim of this monograph is briefly to present a facet of the Russian past that will be of interest to the general reader as well as the specialist.

In writing even a small book one incurs many debts of gratitude. John Thompson, who introduced me to the rigors of graduate training at Indiana University, read an earlier version of the manuscript and made helpful suggestions. Louis Menashe of the Polytechnic Institute of New York encouraged the work in its beginnings; much of the first chapter is drawn from his investigation of the Guchkov family. Vera Traill, Guchkov’s daughter, who currently resides in England and is a charming and gifted writer in her own right, provided numerous colorful anecdotes about her father. Others took time from their labor to critique the paper, including Lowell Newton and Sherrill McConnell of the University of Louisville, Robert Burnett of Armstrong College, and Tom Johnson of Doane College. Karen Shaw, my typist, withstood numerous last-minute changes, patiently and efficiently. They, of course, are not responsible for any errors or shortcomings contained herein. Thanks go also to the International Research and Exchanges Board for the generous assistance which allowed me to extract material from Soviet libraries while working there several years ago on another project. Finally, my wife spent hours improving the clarity of the manuscript; without her patience, as well as that of Ann and Todd, my two children, this study could not have been done.

All dates in the text are “Old Style,” in accordance with the Russian calendar which until 1918 was thirteen days behind the rest of Europe. The transliteration system is a common-sense one: ‘yu’ for ‘iu’ and ‘ya’ for ‘ia.’ Similarly I have avoided soft signs and apostrophes in the middle of words because they are unintelligible to readers unfamiliar with the Russian language.
I. The Family Background: 1862–1904

Alexander Ivanovich Guchkov was born in Moscow on 14 October 1862 (O.S.). He spent his boyhood there living in comfort and wealth of interesting origins. His great-grandfather and founder of the family dynasty, Fyodor Alekseevich, was a serf-entrepreneur. That phenomenon was the result of two factors: the impoverishment of the soil in and around the central Moscow region, where Fyodor lived, and the favorable disposition of rulers and landlords towards manufacturing as a source of revenue. Because agriculture in the north brought small returns, many landlords put their serfs on quitrent (obrok); if a peasant showed a talent for making money, the landlord extracted a higher rent. From the peasants’ standpoint this was far less onerous than the labor obligation (barshchina) commonly applied by landlords in the fertile black soil areas that were brought under the plow during the eighteenth century. Many serfs who paid only obrok were able to leave their villages and seek work elsewhere. They were helped along in the last third of the eighteenth century by the government of Catherine the Great which stimulated the interest of serf-owners in factory enterprise by removing all restrictions on commercial and industrial activities. “No affairs,” read the decree of 1767, “concerning commerce and factories can be enacted through compulsion.” The Manifesto of 1775 encouraged the manufacture of textile goods by allowing “everybody and anybody to start any type of mill to make in these mills any type of handicraft.”

Under these conditions Fyodor’s master, a landowner of modest means from the Maloyaroslavets district of the Kaluga Province, was all too happy to release the boy from his chores to earn more money, or obrok, as a cloth-maker in nearby Moscow. Sometime in the 1790s Fyodor, barely a teenager, landed in Moscow as a weaving apprentice in a small cloth shop, with a beginning monthly wage of twenty kopeks plus full board in a communal dormitory and plenty of borsh or cabbage soup and rye bread. This agreement was fifty-fifty, that is Fyodor kept half his earnings and sent the other half to his owner.  

1 Useful biographical information for this chapter comes from the following sources: Astrov, Vospominaniya; Buryshkin, Moskva kupecheskaya; Afanaseev, Sovremenniki: Alborn biografi; Menashe, “Alexander Guchkov and the Origins of the Octobrist Party: The Russian Bourgeoisie in Politics, 1905”; and several unpublished manuscripts in the author’s possession, including a history of the Guchkov family in the nineteenth century by Menashe, and several letters and communiques by Vera Traill, Guchkov’s daughter.
2 Cited in Lyashchenko, Istoriya narodnogo khozyaistvo SSSR 1:403.
By every measure Fyodor was a remarkable Russian: an Old Believer devoted to his faith but also to his work. Like his great-grandson, Alexander, he neither smoked nor drank. In rapid succession Fyodor went from being an apprentice to master weaver to owner of a small weaving shop on the outskirts of Moscow. By the time Napoleon’s armies crashed into Russia in 1812, Fyodor’s shop had expanded tenfold and his wares were on display not only in Moscow but in Nizhni-Novgorod, site of the nation’s most distinguished annual fair. By the 1820s he was rich, with an accumulated capital of several million rubles; he was also free, having bought his way out of bondage around 1814. By the 1840s the average annual value of the Guchkov manufactures stood at one-half million rubles, with a payroll of 900 workers. By the 1850s the textile business, now under the supervision of Fyodor’s two sons, Yefim and Ivan, employed over 1,800 workers and set a standard of manufacturing excellence admired by foreign and native observers alike.

What is perhaps surprising is that Fyodor’s story—the jump to affluence against a backdrop of nonconformist religious values—was not unique. Many of Moscow’s leading business families came from Old Believer backgrounds. Their names read like a Who’s Who of nineteenth-century Russian business giants. In addition to the Guchkovs there were the Konovalovs, the Ryabushinskys, and the Morozovs, among others. All of these families came from the north-central provinces, where obrok prevailed, and all made their fortunes in textiles. Saava Vasilevich Morozov, godfather of the Morozov clan, could just as well have been Fyodor Guchkov. Born in 1770, Saava was apprenticed as a child to a weaver in the cotton industry. By age nine the enterprising boy had his own dyeing shop and by 1812—at about the same time as Fyodor—Saava bought his way out of bondage. By the 1840s his textile mills, among the largest in the world, sprawled over a complex of one dozen buildings.

The relationship between entrepreneurial talent and Old Believer loyalties is an intriguing subject. According to one historian, freedom from convention and a stress on personal responsibility produced a disproportionate quota of businessmen among Old Believers, while their frugality led them to plow profits back into business, rather than to squander them on luxurious living. Whatever the case religious values often gave way, or weakened perceptibly, within a generation. Thus, Yefim and Ivan Guchkov, while true to their father’s money-making instincts, left behind his Old Believer customs and joined the Orthodox Church.

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4 Old Believers: a religious minority that opposed reforms in the seventeenth century which brought Russian Orthodox Church observances more in line with the Greek Church. Because they would not obey the official church they suffered harsh persecution in the centuries following the break with Orthodoxy.


7 They joined a branch of the regular church, the Edinoverie, which accepted the Orthodox hierarchy while practicing Old Believer rituals.
join the official church was probably a natural one. Not only had the regime effectively dispersed the Moscow sectarian community, but Tsar Nicholas I had decreed that children born of Old Believers who had rejected Orthodox marriage were illegitimate.

Whether sincere, or more as a practical expedient, with their conversion to the accepted church in Russia the Guchkovs took their place as pillars of the local establishment. Yefim served as mayor of Moscow from 1857–1859; his son Ivan Yefimovich (1833–1904), Alexander's father, also entered politics by winning election to the municipal council in 1872. Both Yefim and Ivan bore the title of Hereditary Honorable Citizen as the mark of excellence accorded the business aristocracy by the tsarist government.8

Alexander's childhood world thus mixed local politics with business as the normal order of things; indeed the reorganization of municipal administration in 1870 ushered in a new era of community self-government in which the merchant class (kupechestvo) commanded a greater and greater role throughout Russia.9 Boris Chicherin, mayor of Moscow for a short time in the 1880s, remembered that the kupechestvo regularly held down a majority of seats on the town council.10 Nicholas Astrov, secretary of the council from 1897–1905 and tireless advocate of urban reform throughout the reign of Nicholas II, wrote of the many close relationships in the duma, especially among the merchantia. Whole clans of merchants, it seems, belonged to the council; the Bakhrushins, for example, whose philanthropic feats were legendary, sent six of their kin to the council between 1885 and 1893. "At one point the entire Bakhrushin family sat in the duma, presenting an interesting picture of a family with strong ties to public work."11

In the 1890s Alexander and Nicholas, the two Guchkov brothers with an appetite for politics, made their appearance on the public stage. Nicholas, one of the Alexander's two older brothers, was a professional civil servant throughout the decade; later, from 1905 to 1912, he served as mayor of Moscow. In 1891, Alexander himself, like his father before him, became an Honorary Justice of the Peace. Two years later he was elected to the municipal council board and, in 1897, to the council itself. There are two references, one serious and one not so serious, to Alexander's early political activities. The first, by Astrov, approvingly records that the Guchkovs belonged to that council faction which championed progressive causes around the turn of the century.12 The second recollection comes from Alexander's daughter:

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9 Under the municipal statute of 1870 there was a three-class system of voting, but because representation in the towns was based on the amount of taxes paid rather than property owned, the middle class came to dominate the dumas, or municipal councils. For a good survey of the city councils see Kizevetter, Mestnoe samoupravlenie v Rossii, pp. 110–53.
10 Chicherin, Vospominaniya: Zemstvo i Moskovskaya duma, p. 177.
11 Astrov, Vospominaniya, pp. 259–60.
12 Ibid., pp. 264–65.
His [Alexander's] public life...began at the Moscow City Council, and he erected the first *pissoir* in Russia—the circular half-opened urinal still extant in France. This brought in scores of indignant protests, one of which he liked to recall: "Respected Sir! Kindly remove the indecent contraption which you planted right in front of my house as both my teenage daughters now spend their lives looking out of the window." 13

That the descendants of Fyodor Alekseevich—the second, third, and fourth generation Guchkovs—rose to social and political prominence in Russia's ancient capital is hardly unique. As early as the first half of the eighteenth century, because of its central geographical location, Moscow was the hub of a manufacturing region specializing in textiles. The next hundred years or so saw even more rapid changes. By the mid-1800s, for example, the city accounted for over half (58 percent) of the total national turnover in textiles. From 1860–1870 the city constructed five new railroads and by the end of that decade Moscow's rail connections ran from Riga on the Baltic down through the cities of Yaroslavl and Nizhni-Novgorod on the Volga to port towns on the Sea of Azov. 14 Railroad expansion meant business expansion. In 1879 the city had over 12,000 commercial outlets (stores, shops, restaurants, hotels); by 1890 that figure stood at 15,000. 15

Moscow's economic transformation altered her social relations as well, though not as rapidly. As late as the 1850s, on the eve of the period of explosive growth, the aristocracy dominated public opinion, whereas merchants "served humbly and paid attention to whatever the ruling dvoryane said." 16 By the 1870s, however, merchants so dominated the local scene that Moscow was considered by many to be a merchant city. In the words of one newspaper:

The merchant is on the move. He is in demand. The merchant is in fashion. From him one expects the "real word." And in everything he is willing. . . . All that is outstanding in Moscow is in the hands of the merchant—or under his feet. 17

One manifestation of the elevated status of the kupechestvo was the pursuit of commercial gain by many of the nobility. According to the 1882 census, five hundred of the hereditary nobility living in Moscow owned industrial establishments while another 234 participated in commercial ventures. 18 In addition to their landed possessions in several nearby provinces the Shipov brothers, for instance, invested in the mining operations of the Moscow district. A. P. Shipov was the chairman of the Moscow branch of the Russian Manufacturing Council. 19

15 Ibid., pp. 165, 175.
16 *Moskva v eya proshlom i nastoyashchem* 4:13.
18 Cited in Laverychev, *Krupnaya burzhuaziya v poreformennoi period* p. 66.
19 Ibid., see Jo Ann Ruckman, "The Business Elite of Moscow," for detailed analysis of Moscow's merchant leadership.
Another indication of the changing times was the fact that more and more businessmen sought to measure their value to the community in ways that went beyond the accumulation of fortunes. The illiterate provincial merchant of the first few decades of the nineteenth century was, as a Soviet scholar reminds us, slowly giving way during the reigns of Alexander II (1855–1881) and Alexander III (1881–1894) to his still clan-nish but more cultured successor.20 Merchant families were endowers of hospitals, schools, and charities. The Tretyakovs, for example, donated their priceless collection of art to the city; today, in the capital of the Soviet Union, the Tretyakov Gallery stands as a monument to that act. Another family, the Mamontovs, established a private opera; in their home one encountered famous writers, artists, and painters.21 As for the Bakhrushins, in 1893 they gave 600,000 rubles for the building of an orphanage.22

As the cultural horizons of the businessman expanded, so too did his education. The education varied. Some members of the generation which reached manhood by the 1890s went to extreme lengths to secure the best training for their business careers. Such was the case with Alexander Konovalov, an outspoken progressive within business circles in the years immediately preceding World War I, who traveled across Europe to France to learn the textile trade.23 Other individuals, however, either stayed away from business altogether or positioned themselves for both business and non-business pursuits. Fyodor Ivanovich, the twin brother of Nicholas Guchkov, graduated from the Alexandrovskoe Military School and set out to become a professional army officer; Nicholas, on the other hand, took a law degree from Moscow University as a prelude to a lifetime of public service.24

As for Alexander’s education, we are reduced for the most part to broad outline. His early years were spent at a gymnasium where fraternity-like rituals within the student body alternated with “quiet, monotonous, and colorless” days of schoolwork.25 Following graduation from the gymnasium, Alexander attended Moscow University where he studied history and, in one seminar, sat alongside the young Milyukov and the future dean of Soviet historians in the 1920s, M. N. Pokrovsky.26 Guchkov was a good student whose passion for books and history did not diminish with the passage of time. Even in later life, in the midst of heavy public responsibilities, “he spent his entire leisure over books, mainly history, econom-

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20 Ibid., p. 80.
21 Ibid., p. 81.
22 Moskovskaya gorodskaya duma 1897–1900, pp. 103–106. This publication of the Moscow town council contains biographical sketches of leading council members.
23 Biografii chlenov vremennoi pravitelstva, ispolnitelnogo komiteta gosudarstvennoi dumy i chlenov ispolnitelnogo komiteta soveta rabochikh i soldatskikh (n.d., n.p.), p. 5.
25 Astrov, Vospominaniya, p. 87. Astrov attended the same school and remembered the Guchkov brothers as good students.
ics, or Greek classics." Upon receiving his diploma in 1885, Guchkov went off to Germany for five years of study of the classics at the universities of Berlin and Heidelberg.

Neither municipal affairs nor business nor the study of the past, however, consumed Alexander's early life. His daughter writes that her father "soon got bored and restless within the cozy, narrow world of municipal activities and started on his travels." In 1891 he visited Nizhnigorod Province to assist victims of the Great Famine. For the next thirteen years his life consisted of spectacular trips to distant parts of the world, mixed with adventure and a taste for danger. These excursions abroad included Anatolia (1894), where he witnessed the Turkish massacre of Armenians; China (1898), where he walked along the Great Wall; South Africa (1899), where he fought with the Boers only to be wounded and captured by the British and taken to a London hospital for recovery; and China again (1900), where he watched the Boxer Rebellion. "But what the hell was a Russian chap doing in the Boer War?" the daughter asks of her father:

Fighting the British Empire . . . he deemed it his duty to weaken to the best of his ability the greatest rival of the expanding Russian Empire. He didn't care a hoot about the Boers, but he set off for the Transvaal fully equipped and armed with a small volume of Heine's Book of Songs in his pocket. . . . The war in the Transvaal was for young Alexander a long-awaited opportunity: while still in school he planned to assassinate Disraeli for his anti-Russian policy. Fortunately his father put his foot down and did not allow the boy to go to London.

In 1901, now approaching his thirty-ninth birthday, Guchkov returned home long enough to get married. Maria Zilotti had known Alexander for ten years, having been introduced during a luncheon given in honor of Guchkov, "either to celebrate his safe return from the Gobi desert or from the Wall of China." For Maria it had been love at first sight although the object of her affections was too involved with his travels to take much notice of the young girl. Her patience finally was rewarded when "one night in Moscow under a full moon he suddenly proposed to her, with no preliminary courtship whatever." Whatever hopes Maria may have entertained for a settled homelife soon vanished; within eighteen months her husband, who could "not keep away from wars and strife and insurrections," scurried down to Macedonia in the Balkans to watch a local uprising against the Ottoman Turks.

Alexander's relative indifference toward the family business mirrored an essential attribute of the Russian merchant class. It is a truism among western historians that the Russian bourgeoisie was in constant flux. Many

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28 Afanaseev, Sovremenniki, 1:82.
32 Ibid.
entrepreneurs came from peasant backgrounds and a good number, having acquired their wealth, sought to enter the aristocracy or to engage in less strenuous economic pursuits. The Alekseevs, among the most powerful of Moscow's business elite, tried very hard to mingle with the aristocracy; Nicholas Alekseev, mayor of Moscow from 1889 to 1893, had a policy of marrying his daughters off to noblemen. And while the fourth Guchkov generation disdained absorption into the nobility, they too gradually fell away from the family firm. Altogether there were four brothers. Fyodor, it will be recalled, opted for a career in the military. Nicholas and Alexander, active in public matters, also entered the world of high finance by investing their money in banks and insurance companies. When their father died in 1904, these two along with the youngest brother, Konstantin, sold the textile firm. Only Konstantin stayed directly in business while Nicholas, secure in his investments, began a busy life in city government. P. A. Buryshkin, Alexander's contemporary and able historian of the Muscovite merchant class, notes that "although Alexander descended from an authentic merchant background he was not considered to be one, of them, but instead a politician."  

Buryshkin's description of Guchkov merits further comment. An informed and interesting assessment of Guchkov comes from an American scholar, Louis Menashe, drawn from studies of Moscow's merchant elite during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Menashe agrees in part with Buryshkin: Guchkov was indeed a public servant but one who championed the bourgeoisie in "an indirect and ultimate sense"—in the sense, that is, that the bourgeoisie sought the guarantee of a modernized monarchy to advance their interests and to protect themselves against the violent intervention of the workers. Soviet historians are more straightforward: Guchkov was a representative of his class and the Octobrist Party, which he helped to found in 1905, was the political muscle of big business. For that matter Guchkov once intimated much the same thing when he told Milyukov that "you are strong in science and books but I have the rooted feeling of a Muscovite kupets (merchant) which unmistakably prompts everything I do."  

There can be no question that Guchkov's super patriotism, not to mention his concern for social order—a concern voiced repeatedly through the political years—represented the outlook of the Russian industrial community as a whole throughout this period. Beyond this, however, the story of the business class, and of Guchkov's involvement in the affairs of busi-

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33 Vishnyakov, Svedeniya o kupecheskom rode Vishnyakovvykh 3:92.  
34 Buryshkin, Moskva kupecheskaya, pp. 172–73.  
36 See especially Chermensky, Burzhuaziya i tsarizm v pervoi russkoi revoliutsii 1905–1907 gg. and Avreh, Stolypin i tretya duma. Elsewhere Avreh claims that the Octobrists were rural in social base but bourgeois in leadership and program. See Avreh, "Stolypinskii bonapartizm i voprosy voennoi politiki v 3-ei Dume," Voprosy istorii, 1 (1956):20.  
ness, elude neat generalization. To begin with, Menashe himself has shown and we have remarked here that the social origins of Russian capitalism diverged conspicuously from the patterns of early industrial capitalism in western Europe. It is also clear that wealthy Russians displayed a wish to be at one and the same time rich capitalists and professional men and, even, titled aristocrats. More to our concern, although the Octobrist Party included businessmen in its ranks, Buryshkin expressly refused to term it a trade-industrial party. Rather, as will be evident, the Octobrists, with Guchkov in the lead, were a combination of propertied elements from town and country who practiced, however ineffectually in the end, the politics of counter-revolution. They agreed upon the need to restore order as well as to sponsor reforms to prevent a repetition of the frightening events of 1905. The reform which mattered most concerned not business or labor but the peasants, and led to a significant shift in the state's agrarian policy.

As for Guchkov personally, it is not at all easy to discern a decisive relationship between his class upbringing and his actions in the Duma. During his period in the national limelight he showed virtually no interest in such vital matters as Russia’s tariff policies or the intricacies of international trade. He did not speak to the question of relations between industry and labor. His memoirs are silent on issues that exercised the imagination—and sometimes the fury—of industrialists everywhere; silent, for example, on the overarching issue of the nation’s economic development and on measures of state policy for furthering that development. Following his defeat in 1912 in the elections to the Fourth Duma, Guchkov became slightly more active in business-related matters. Thus in the spring of 1914 he became a member of the Council of the Association of Industry and Trade. However he does not seem to have taken part in the congresses of the organization. Finally, leadership in 1915 and 1916 of the war-industries committees did not signify absorption in business per se; instead it reflected Guchkov’s devotion to military matters and to the success of the Russian army in the field.

What, then, can be said about Guchkov? There seems universal agreement that his instincts indeed ran to political combat although not always successfully. His frantic appeal in 1913 to the party faithful to oppose a reactionary regime failed miserably to bear fruit and the same can be

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39 Menashe’s characterization of Guchkov as a spokesman for long-term business interests leaves unanswered the question of why business itself looked elsewhere before World War I for a political voice.


said about Guchkov’s aspiration as leader of the largest party in the Third Duma—to erect a bridgehead between the legislature and the ministry on which to build a program of moderate progressive change. In the first instance many Octobrists in 1913 refused to heed Guchkov’s prophecy of imminent disaster; in the second the Octobrists proved far too disorganized—in part because Guchkov’s style of leadership was too personal and self-centered—to sustain a coalition of moderates at the center of Russian politics. Still, too much can be made of this. Guchkov’s methods of leadership were the result of a close working relationship with Peter Stolypin, the prime minister, and of the calculation that power, and hence the capacity for action, lay at the top of the government and not on the floor of the Duma or in the public arena. Although the Octobrists did not complete their legislative agenda, they kept alive, albeit tenuously by the outbreak of World War I, the reality of the legislative institution and therefore the possibility of a constitutional monarchy. Some of the credit for this goes to Guchkov.

The attraction to military affairs provides another context for an evaluation of Guchkov. While studying at the great universities in Germany, he was exposed to the view that the foundation of empire—the Reich—rested on military might. In Germany the army was an instrument, the instrument, of imperialist policy and it is no accident that, once in politics, Guchkov attended to the military with a passion which at times bordered on fixation. The army gave structure and substance to the empire but Russia’s army had performed so poorly over a lengthy span of Guchkov’s life that it scarcely could be considered a source of pride or national cohesion. Guchkov’s world was an arena of competing nations in which the interests of the leading European states were defined in global terms. His youth coincided with Russian imperial expansion in Asia. By the 1880s the tsarist state had fulfilled most if not all of the prerequisites of an imperialist state in its struggle with Turkey and Persia, in the pacification of the Caucasus, in the conquest of Central Asia, and in the headlong rush into the Far East. Guchkov was concerned, to say the least, but the implications of Russia’s big-power status and the threat of war; above all by the possibility that administrative and military chaos could prove fatal for a regime unable to meet the external crises to which it was exposed. No doubt the seeds of that awareness were planted, however unconsciously, in the 1890s. His compulsion to visit the most troubled corners of the world—China during the collapse of the Manchu dynasty; Turkey during the Armenian insurrection against the Ottoman state; South Africa during the days of the Boer war against the British—may have been a way of “tempting the end to come,” so to speak. But just as surely it brought him face to face with the catastrophic consequences for old empires of inept leadership. The eventual realization that his country was governed by an anachronistic regime increasingly overshadowed the belief that the empire was the best possible means of proving to the world that Russia was a great power.
Nor is it remarkable that Guchkov espoused the cause of constitutionalism, of better local government, of improved education, and of participation of the educated segment of the public in the councils of high government. The Age of Imperialism drew reformers and liberals to its banners, both because leading liberal nations of the day were themselves caught up in imperial ventures and because many believed that imperium in foreign policy would succeed only if it was grounded in social and political progress. It was a time when “democracy” was in vogue and when many considered it to be not only the finest but the ultimate form of government; a time, also, when nationalists in many countries came to equate constitutions with strength and to believe that public support was the prerequisite for governments exposed to dangerous international crosscurrents.42

Seen in this light Guchkov emerges as a reflector of change and portent of revolution. But we are telling the story out of sequence. The highlights of his first four decades barely foreshadow the intense nationalism or preoccupation with empire-wide issues so characteristic of the next ten years. Public service in the Moscow municipal assembly set a weak precedent, say, for the future president of the Third Duma or the Minister of War under the First Provisional Government in 1917. On the eve of the conflict in Asia, Guchkov was little more than a near-legendary world traveler with a mild appetite for work in city government.43 The next few months, however, thrust him into the eye of the hurricane which engulfed the throne and capital. It all began with the struggle against Japan.

42 For a stimulating treatment of this theme as it relates to the modernization of imperial Japan in the late-nineteenth century, see Akita, Foundations of Constitutional Government in Modern Japan, 1868–1900.

43 Milyukov recalls a theatrical play (unnamed) by one G. Kolyshko, in which the main character, an inveterate traveler, was in real life none other than Guchkov. The play, according to Milyukov, was a “spectacular success.” See Posledniya Novosti, 5441, 15 February 1936.
II: The Making of a Politician: 1905–1907

The war in the Far East was a complete nightmare for the Russian people. For one thing it was thousands of miles from the nation’s heartland; for another, the tsar’s army found itself hopelessly outclassed. The Japanese army swept from victory to victory, climaxing with the fall of Port Arthur in January 1905 and the Battle of Mukden soon afterwards. In May, the Japanese navy added insult to injury and brought down the final curtain by smashing the Russian fleet in the straits of Tsushima.

The military disaster in Asia embarrassed the monarchy and coincided with a revolutionary upsurge in St. Petersburg. January 1905 opened with a workers’ demonstration march to obtain better conditions from the authorities for the factories of the capital. When distraught soldiers fired on the peaceful petitioners, the ensuing carnage ignited a public backlash which swelled the ranks of the opposition. Previously nonviolent elements now joined the fray. Over the following weeks schools had to be closed for fear of student violence; that spring the existing but heretofore separate professional organizations came together in an All-Russian Union of Unions to demand a constitution and a bill of rights. By the summer and fall months chaos spread over vast regions of Russia, to towns and countryside alike. Soldiers returning from the Far East mutinied in Moscow, Kiev, and St. Petersburg; sailors did likewise at Kronstadt, the giant naval base outside the capital. Russia’s manufacturing and metropolitan centers exploded in unrest, leading in October to a general workers’ strike in St. Petersburg and an uprising of equal violence in Moscow in December.¹

The Revolution of 1905 was both far-reaching and complex. The scope of the violence was evident when peasants, many from remote villages of Russia, directed their anger in nationwide protests against the regime.² At the same time, in parts of the country, 1905 was the result not only of political and social disrepair but of nationalism as well. In several non-Russian areas revolutionary cadres directed their energies against Russian oppression; such was the case in Estonia, for example, where sentiments for local autonomy were voiced and where the year “proved to be a milestone in the search for a distinctive national and cultural identity.”³

¹ This account of 1905 comes primarily from Chamberlain, The Russian Revolution 1917–1921 1: ch. 3.
² Keep, The Russian Revolution, p. 4.
Protests against injustice were particularly widespread in Poland, above all at Lodz, where 2000 people died or were wounded during three days of fighting against Russian troops.

Throughout 1905 the regime tried to save itself by various concessions. In early March, Nicholas declared his intention to convoke a “consultative assembly”; in further efforts toward pacification he proclaimed religious toleration and repealed some legislation against ethnic minorities. On 6 August an imperial manifesto created an elective national council (Duma) with consultative power. None of these measures, however, satisfied Russia’s oppositionally-minded public men. For many years prior to 1905 they had urged the government to convert itself into a constitutional monarchy. Their platform was the zemstvo, the institution of rural self-government set up in 1864 during the so-called era of Great Reforms. In 1904 zemstvo constitutionalists joined hands with several clandestine political groups—political parties were illegal before 1905—and established the Union of Liberation. Among its founders were Russia’s political luminaries: I. I. Petrunkevich, the dean of the zemstvo constitutionalists; Milyukov, formerly a professor of history who had become an outspoken constitutionalist; and the Marxist economist, M. Tugan-Baranovsky. The Union of Liberation called for the introduction of a central representative body to be chosen by universal, direct suffrage.4

In 1905 other zemstvo officials reiterated Union demands for an end to the autocracy but then, at their own congress in July, passed a resolution urging the broad masses to look to them for direction and leadership.5 This congress, which met for four days in Moscow, marked a turning point. Previous zemstvo meetings had limited themselves to definitions of principle but the July assembly turned to the people and preached a “friendly cooperative war” against bureaucratic tyranny.6 Furthermore, immediately after the congress, acting on the advice of Milyukov, a smaller group of constitutionalists met and coupled the demand for a new political structure with a call for the compulsory expropriation of private land for the benefit of the peasantry.7

It was in this atmosphere of revolutionary turmoil and mounting hostility to the autocracy by zemstvo activists that Alexander Guchkov began his political career. For Guchkov 1905 began, predictably enough, not in Moscow but thousands of miles away, this time with the Russian Red Cross serving the army in Manchuria. At the Battle of Mukden, the bloodiest of the war, Guchkov stayed behind to tend the troops and was captured by the Japanese. This delayed his return home but he managed to reach Moscow in late April.

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5 Belokonsky, Zemskoe dvizhenie, pp. 332–34.
6 Kizevetter, Na rubezhe dvukh stoletii, p. 386.
Dropping in at the town duma, I learned from Astrov, the secretary of the duma, that I had been chosen a member of the congress of zemstvo and municipal delegates. . . . I was startled by the growing revolutionary mood in the zemstvo.  

Concern for the drift of events, and for the radical thrust of the zemstvo movement, found no public expression until September, when Guchkov made his debut at a large gathering in Moscow of zemstvo and municipal officials. He attended the conference in his capacity as a member of the Moscow town council and initially said nothing on the constitutional question. He did, however, feel strongly about another issue, the so-called nationality question. During the debates the liberals proposed the creation of an autonomous region with a separate legislature for Poland. Guchkov was quick to reply:

You say that our state should become a federal union, but what limit you will place on the number of federal regions, what power you will preserve for the central authority you do not say . . . No one knows how far this business of fragmentation will go.

The congress ignored Guchkov's pleas and the very next day endorsed a resolution on the autonomy of Poland "after the establishment of a proper national legislative body."

Guchkov's passion for empire or, rather, his passionate dislike for the concept of a federated state structure, was sincere and deeply felt. However the same cannot be said about the line of argument advanced in his memoirs against the claim of Polish separatism. The first point—"that only the upper layer of Polish society was interested in autonomy"—clearly was conjectural and the second—that "it was enough to equalize Polish rights with those of Russian citizens and to introduce local self-governing organs"—little more than a rationalization. While it is true that over the next several years the Octobrists threw their weight behind schemes to reorganize local administration and even to extend the zemstvos to the western regions, where many Poles lived, it is also true that they, and Guchkov, made sure that the Polish inhabitants did not achieve a voice in civic affairs commensurate with their numbers or influence.

Guchkov's stand on the nationality issue placed him outside the zemstvo mainstream and against the leading liberals of the day. Furthermore, within six weeks of the September congress other events convinced him that the liberal zemstsy were unreliable political allies. In October, still

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8 "Iz vospominaniy A. I. Guchkova, Posledniya Novosti, 5616, 9 August 1936. Guchkov's memoirs were published shortly after his death in this Russian emigre newspaper. The paper, published daily in Paris, was edited by Milyukov. Hereafter references to the memoirs will be cited as P. N., with the number and date of issue.
9 The minutes of the congress were published in Russkiya vedomosti, 13–18 September 1905.
10 Ibid., 17 September 1905. In his memoirs Guchkov dates his popularity with the tsar to his stand on the Polish question. See P. N., no. 5616, 9 August 1936.
11 Russkiya vedomosti, 18 September 1905.
12 Ibid.
struggling to preserve itself intact, the regime was forced to admit defeat when confronted by a general strike which for several days paralyzed the country. In this emergency Nicholas II turned to Count Sergey Witte, chairman of the Committee of Ministers and a close adviser to the throne. With characteristic dispatch, this elder statesman offered this sovereign two alternatives: either to establish a military dictatorship or to grant the people a constitution. With the bulk of the army still in Asia and the condition of the available forces very uncertain, the emperor reluctantly chose the latter suggestion.\textsuperscript{13}

An imperial decree of 17 October 1905 promised the Russian people civil liberties and a representative legislative assembly based on a democratic franchise. But the October Manifesto, as it came to be known, failed utterly to satisfy the liberals or to slow the strike movement in the factories. Even before the issuance of the Manifesto many delegates from the September congress had organized themselves into the Constitutional Democrats, popularly called the Kadets and led by Milyukov. At their first meeting in mid-October the Kadets demanded a parliamentary regime with a constitutional monarch. The day after the proclamation of the Manifesto a celebrated meeting took place in the Moscow town hall. In it, one observer recalls, a Kadet politician proposed that all stand and honor those who had given their lives for the conquest of freedom. “N. I. Guchkov and his brother, A. I., pointedly refused to stand. This provoked noise and argument.”\textsuperscript{14}

By early November it was plain that the liberals under Milyukov viewed the Manifesto as a springboard for a final assault on the autocracy. In the meantime, in his search for an alternative to the more militant elements in society, Guchkov had found many friends in the town assemblies and among the zemstvo rank and file. Perhaps the most influential figure in this regard was Dmitry Shipov who for ten years (1894–1904) had chaired the most powerful zemstvo in the empire, the Moscow provincial assembly. Shipov abhorred violence and furthermore believed that all state reform should “be accomplished gradually and with caution so as not to provoke political strife in the land.”\textsuperscript{15} Above all he shared Guchkov’s deep dislike of Kadet tactics. Shipov characterized Kadet maneuvers for mass support as a “tactical measure which stirred up the people and heightened tension in the land.” By the end of October, Shipov was responsive to Guchkov’s exhortations to “ally all public factions which are opposed to the Constitutional Democrats.”\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{13} It appears that a key factor in the tsar’s final decision was the advice of the grand duke, Nicholas Nicholayevich, who “categorically confirmed that it was impossible to resort to military measures due to insufficient troops.” From the memoirs of D. N. Lyubimov, unpublished manuscript, East European and Russian Archives, Columbia University, p. 325.

\textsuperscript{14} Memoirs of Lyubimov, p. 311.

\textsuperscript{15} Cited in Maklakov, The First State Duma, p. 150. Maklakov was a member of the Kadet Party.

\textsuperscript{16} Shipov, Vospominaniya i dumy o perezhitom, pp. 394, 403. See Rainey, “The Union of 17 October,” for an astute analysis of Shipov’s political philosophy.
A final effort by Guchkov and Shipov to find some common ground with the Kadets came to naught. The moment came during the final nationwide congress of zemstvo and municipal men which convened on 6 November to debate "the changed political situation in Russia." During the sessions the chasm between the moderates and liberals widened. The Kadets conditioned their backing of the government on the grant of full political amnesty and the immediate convocation of a constituent assembly based on universal suffrage. The moderates, on the other hand, were satisfied with the October Manifesto. Clarifying his position Guchkov requested a general (but indirect) electoral law, a constitutional monarchy, and civil liberties, "all of which have been promised by the Manifesto." 17

But the congress moved forward under the Kadet banner. Guchkov tried successively to slow the assembly's leftward march: to change the wording of a resolution on "full amnesty for political and religious crimes" to a "review of all cases of political criminals not affected by the government's amnesty for religious offenders"; and to add the words "and unconditionally condemns violence and assassinations as a means of political struggle" to the sentence "the congress demands the abolition of the death penalty." The atmosphere of the debate was tense and Guchkov's efforts produced noisy disturbances with the final result that he was ruled out of order by the chair. 18

Debate and rancor intensified over the sticky questions of Polish autonomy and martial law. Undaunted by repeated setbacks, he again championed the unpopular view, defending the application of harsh measures in the border regions, berating the assembly and telling it that under certain conditions martial law was both necessary and logical:

In Poland there is an armed insurrection. Revolutionaries began the violence. If one speaks about the prevention of violence he should speak about prevention from both sides. Yet the majority proposes to chastise one side, the government, by abolishing martial law, and to grant amnesty to the other. We must not extend our hand toward the extreme parties. 19

When the congress ignored the impassioned plea and by solid majority voted in favor of autonomy, Guchkov led a walkout of those opposed to the vote but not before telling the Kadets that they wished to "destroy the unity and strength of the fatherland." 20 Unable to resist the urge to reply, Milyukov devoted Rech, the Kadet party newspaper, to an indictment of Guchkov whose answer appeared in the very same issue. Of the many enemies abroad, he sarcastically rejoined, few were as menacing as those from within who would woo Russia down the thorn-laden path of decentralization. Decentralization was bad enough for it would occur

17 Russkiya vedomosti, 8–9 November 1905.
18 Ibid., 12 November 1905.
19 Ibid., 10 November 1905.
20 Ibid., 13 November 1905.
“at the expense of the fundamental Russian population.” Even worse was the fact that the Kadets would abolish the state authority altogether and substitute a republic, “thus destroying the heritage built up by our ancestors.”

Even before the November congress had concluded its business a group of men “who at one time or another had been alienated from further participation in the zemstvo and municipal meetings” met in Moscow to create a new political voice. Guchkov, with Shipov’s help, prepared a “declaration to the electorate” and established the central committee of the Union, with headquarters in Moscow. Four days later, on 14 November, a dozen individuals in St. Petersburg followed suit and formed their own central committee. The two committees operated independently but Moscow, under the direction of Shipov, “was the nerve center of Octobrism.”

As the name indicates, the Octobrists drew their inspiration from the Manifesto with its assurance of a constitutional monarchy. The imperial decree invested the elected representatives with legislative power and the privilege to debate all issues openly. The Octobrists were content with these reforms and felt that the popularly chosen deputies should cooperate with the government to effect them. Whereas the Kadets did not explicitly demand a republic or favor the preservation of the monarchy, the Octobrists definitely reserved a place for the tsar in their constitutional scheme. Thus Guchkov told the first party congress in February 1906 that “we must not reject that which old Russia created. The principle of monarchy which played such a tremendous role in Russia must be transplanted into the new Russia.”

Basically, as Guchkov reminisced in 1913 in an address to the party faithful, the Octobrists aimed at a reconciliation of “government and society . . . and at a peaceful, painless transition from the old to the new. . . .” The old in this case referred to divisions within the culture based on class while the new meant distinctions based on education, individual merit, and property. True to the latter distinction the Octobrists called for an end to religious intolerance (which meant legalized marriages outside the Orthodox Church and the freedom to practice one’s faith), extended local self-government, and more education, particularly at the primary level. Progress would be gradual, however, and the new institutions would be buttressed by men of substance and social standing. Universal suffrage was out of the question and while everyone in the long run would benefit from the intended changes, the propertied classes

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21 Rech, 10 March 1906.
22 Shipov, Vospominaniya, pp. 404–405.
24 Russkiya vedomosti, 9 February 1906.
25 Guchkov, Rechi po voprosam gosudarstvennoi oborony i ob obshchei politike, 1908–1917, p. 106.
would, in the meantime, control the public arena. Much, obviously, would depend on their work in the promised legislative assembly.

The domestic agenda was loaded with issues but none deserved closer scrutiny, the Octobrists surmised, than the poverty of the peasant. Village misery, which was a chief ingredient in the Revolution of 1905, would be alleviated through a combination of lower rents, liberal credit programs, and the transfer of certain crown lands to private peasant ownership.\(^{26}\) While originally supporting the peasant commune as “an institution of civil liberty,” when the government the following year advocated the elimination of the commune, Guchkov made individual land tenure the very cornerstone of the Octobrist agrarian policy.

Less attention in the party platform was given over to the theme of Russia’s industrial future. While discussing the “labor problem”—the Octobrists supported sickness and disability insurance as well as the right to form unions (but not compulsory unionization)—the simple fact was that agrarian problems took precedence over those of industry. The Octobrists did not, to be sure, believe that Russia would forever remain an agricultural country; nor did they as a matter of principle favor rural over urban interests. Rather they believed that the requirements of political and social peace dictated a resolution of the peasant problem before all else.

Last but far from least the Octobrists sallied forth under the banner of Great Russian nationalism. They spoke of the indivisibility of the state, of its unitary character, and of opposition to the autonomy of Poland. The affirmation of empire was amply visible in the months and years to come. It was evident at the first party congress in February 1906 when Octobrists from Byelorussia, the Ukraine, and Poland—all Russians—called for the creation of Orthodox electorates from their regions to insure Russian representation from districts which were non-Russian and non-Orthodox.\(^{27}\) It was also evident in attacks on another minority, the Finns, when Octobrist delegates to the Third Duma pressed for legislation to equalize the rights of Russian citizens living in Finland. So pronounced at times was the addiction to empire that it is tempting to lump the Octobrists together with extremists of the right and within the government who resisted any modification of the traditional formula of Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality. Here, however, two qualifications are in order. First, Octobrist nationalism was not a unified or monolithic ideology. On the one hand it could reveal itself in nasty assaults on the patriotism of the left, in particular the Kadets; Guchkov himself once held the Kadets to be responsible for the military defeat suffered at the hands of the Japanese.\(^{28}\)

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\(^{27}\) Guchkov opposed the resolution, contending that opposition to autonomy did not and should not entail the repression of non-Russian groups. See Shipov, Vospominanija, pp. 421–22.

\(^{28}\) Gosudarstvennaya Duma. Stenograficheskie Otchety, Tretii Sozyv, Sessiya 5, p. 1065. Hereafter cited as GDSO., with the convocation, session numbers and pagination.
On the other hand, unlike the right, Octobrist nationalism just as easily and as often could mean demands for more rights for more people, including the peasants. This was a positive and popular component of nationalism. Thus in his final year in the Duma, Guchkov lambasted the State Council, Russia’s upper house, for its refusal to abolish class privileges and to provide peasants with opportunities for meaningful self-government.29

The second point has to do with the fascination of many people during this period with Russia’s status as a great power. Traditionally Russian liberals and non-conservatives had not identified with the cause of an adventurist foreign policy; jingoism in the nineteenth century had been the preserve of ultra-conservative neo-Slavophile elements linked to tsarism for military purposes. The shock of defeat at the hands of the Japanese along with the more sedate political climate in the years beginning in 1907 drew many individuals who once had shunned patriotic display into the nationalist camp. The new nationalism found expression in the public press and in political behavior. Its spokesman was the liberal polemicist and ex-Marxist Peter Struve. In articles and newspaper columns Struve bemoaned Russia’s declining influence in areas adjacent to the realm and in the Balkans especially. He preached expanded ties with Russia’s Slavic neighbors to the south and closer public scrutiny of the nation’s foreign policy. His disciples were many, but none so faithful or articulate as the liberal industrialists from Moscow who echoed the master’s theme of “national greatness.” In 1910, V. P. Ryabushinsky, a businessman and inspiration for the creation in 1911 of the business-oriented Progressist Party, published an anthology entitled Velikaya Rossiya (Great Russia). Struve’s ideas here received their best expression; in apocalyptic tones Ryabushinsky extolled the virtues of a healthy militarism,” observing that “dying peoples always have rotten armies” and “the lag of military affairs in a country is an ominous symptom: often it is the beginning of the end.”30

It would be wrong to credit Guchkov with having influenced Struve or Ryabushinsky; there is no evidence to suggest this. Struve’s nationalism was born of liberalism’s dark hour following the 1905 Revolution whereas Guchkov’s was rooted psychologically in the unreflective patriotism of generations of Muscovite merchants. However by the first decade of the twentieth century nationalism was acquiring a broader constituency with the potential of shaping public policy, and popular nationalism, from whatever source, posed a mean dilemma for the autocracy: how to respond to demands for an aggressive foreign policy while weakened from within.

In 1906, to return to the subject at hand, the Octobrist platform permitted any organization or individual who accepted the premises of its

29 Cited in Novoe vremya, 15 November 1911.
principles to join the Union. This accorded well with Shipov’s belief that highly exclusive political organizations intensified class strife and damaged the prospects of broad election appeals.\(^{31}\) Initially therefore the Union was little more than a gathering of diverse propertied groups who resolved to unify within the framework of the October manifesto. Not until the exodus in the fall of that year of Shipov and other prominent Octobrists would Guchkov begin to recast the Union into a political body more attuned to the realities of vote-getting and practical campaign strategy.

Socially the Octobrists pulled their support from the middle and upper classes. This fairly diverse array included wealthy businessmen, a smattering of officials from the two capitals and provincial centers, and a generous slice of gentry moderates schooled in the zemstvo movement. One Soviet historian has labeled the Octobrists as the party of the “big bourgeoisie.”\(^{32}\) Another Soviet scholar is much more cautious in his assessment. While the Octobrists did indeed win the endorsement of industry and later, during the Third Duma, contained most of the members with business backgrounds, the actual business segment of the party was not large. One third of the Octobrist Duma delegation in 1907 were businessmen, most of whom came from Moscow and St. Petersburg.\(^{33}\)

These caveats notwithstanding, the mere appearance of the Octobrists significantly altered the makeup of Russia’s political elite. For centuries professional civil servants and the upper gentry had dominated the ruling circles. Political supremacy, in short, reflected the agrarian underside of Russian culture. The rapid industrialization and urbanization which characterized the closing years of the nineteenth century now drew more and more individuals with roots in the emerging sectors of society to the pinnacle of political life. And although Guchkov did not qualify as an industrialist per se, his business background and urban connections fit him to the changing times.

Guchkov’s constitutionalism was wholly consistent with his patriotism; more than that, it was a consequence of his deep-seated nationalism. His aim was to create a strong Russia capable of taking its place in the family of advanced, civilized nations. He believed that constitutionalism would lead to success in this endeavor; furthermore that one of the government’s gravest weaknesses was that it did not have the reliable support of any sector of public opinion, either for the war with Japan or for any other venture. Properly composed the Duma would overcome public alienation from the regime; it would mobilize people not only to support the state but also to assist in its improvement. Guchkov’s reformism derived not from abstract principle but from a calculated assessment of Russia’s condition in the world. Alexander Kerensky, the future head of the 1917 Provisional Government, said it this way:


\(^{32}\) Chermensky, Burzhuaziya i tsarizm, p. 201.

\(^{33}\) Of the more than one hundred Octobrists in the Third Duma, approximately thirty-five came from urban electoral districts. See Avrekh, Stolypin i tretya duma, p. 11.
Guchkov realized that without popular representation and a radical renovation of the whole structure of the ship of state, Russia was threatened by disaster at the very first clash with the outside world. . . . He told me that from the beginning . . . he had been in a hurry to consolidate Russia from within so as to be able to deal with external clash when it finally came.34

In 1906 Guchkov had other reasons to be worried about Russia’s future. Not only had he witnessed a horrendous war but the Kadets, often at the expense of the Octobrists, exercised great influence over public opinion which still was to the left of the Manifesto. Anxious to rally oppositional forces during the electoral campaign for the First Duma, Milyukov struck hard at the Union of 17 October. “Into the party,” he wrote with relish, “bolted the grey public frightened by the strike and gunfire in the streets.” Appeals to the “dark instinct of chauvinism” would secure the support of the man in the street for the purpose of destroying the revolution and reimposing the tyranny of bureaucratic oppression. In truth, Milyukov preached, the Octobrists were little more than the gangsters of the Black Hundreds, notorious anti-Semites and ultra-nationalists who offered the electorate nothing but new chains.35

The campaign was a disaster for the Octobrists. Electors chose only three members of the combined central committees to represent their interest in the Duma. Altogether some two dozen Octobrists sat in Russia’s first legislative body and Guchkov was not among them, having been rejected by the voters in the heavily working-class Lefortovsk district in Moscow.36 In the meantime the Kadets did extremely well. Out of a total of 524 delegates they held down 182 seats. In addition they could count on the backing of many of the two hundred unaffiliated peasant representatives as well as the smaller parties of the left, such as the Laborites (Trudoviks), with 107 delegates.37

Much of the election result was traceable to differences in organization. The Kadets demonstrated a high degree of unity whereas the Octobrists allowed their local chapters to pursue their own electoral strategies.38 At the same time it must be said that success in the political arena, at least in this instance, entailed more than organization. By the very nature of their program the Octobrists were dependent on the willingness of the government to fulfill the promises of the Manifesto. To their chagrin the regime, very shortly after the declaration establishing the Duma, curtailed the power of the legislature by various means. While no law could go into effect without the Duma’s consent, a decree of 20 February 1906 transformed the State Council, which had functioned for a century as an advisory body of dignitaries to the tsar, into an upper house with authority

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34 Kerensky, Russia and History’s Turning Point, pp. 103–04.
35 Rech, 16 March 1906.
37 Sidelnikov, Obrazovanie i deyatelnost pervoi gosudarstvennoi dumy, p. 192.
38 Chermensky, Burzhuaziya i isarizm, pp. 239–45.
Half of the Council's membership was to be appointed by the tsar, the other half elected by the clergy, provincial zemstvos, gentry, business groups, and institutions of higher education. Through the Fundamental Laws, issued in March, the regime provided additional safeguards against the incursions of a popularly chosen assembly: one accorded the emperor an absolute veto over all legislation; another gave him control of the armed forces and the conduct of foreign policy; still another provided him with authority to introduce emergency laws between sessions of the legislature.

These stipulations did not emasculate the Duma altogether; in the area of the armed forces, for example, new expenditures still had to be approved, a proviso which Guchkov and the Octobrists would exploit in due course. Soviet scholarship is nonetheless divided on the subject of the exact authority of Russia's legislature. One historian has taken the view that the Fundamental Laws reduced the Duma to a consultative body. Another, citing the same evidence, argues that "with the publication of new laws the emperor renounced two of his most significant prerogatives—unlimited legislative authority and the autonomy of state budget." Recent western scholarship, on the other hand, is quite cautious. Geoffrey Hosking, a British scholar, notes that the new laws were ambiguous, thus symbolizing the painful and uncertain transition from a centuries-old autocracy to a limited monarchy. Practically everyone agrees that the resultant political system was something of a hybrid: a demi-semi-quasi constitutional monarchy which defies exact classification.

The dilution by fiat of the privileges of the Duma distressed Guchkov. His disappointment, recorded in his memoirs, was aimed primarily at the tsar. Even prior to the publication of the Fundamental Laws he had on more than one occasion met the Russian ruler and his opinion of Nicholas II was hardly flattering. The initial encounter came in the summer of 1905 when the tsar summoned Guchkov to report on the work of the Red Cross in Manchuria. The meeting took place at Peterhof, the summer residence of the royal couple, and lasted an "entire evening," with the Empress Alexandra in attendance. Guchkov urged Nicholas II to convene a popularly-chosen national assembly—a zemsky sobor—to give counsel in overcoming the revolutionary crisis. He also appealed for a royal reception for zemstvo and municipal delegates and afterwards claimed that a delegation

40 Ibid., pp. 91–96.
41 Ibid., p. 96.
42 Chermensky, IV gosudarstvennaya duma i sverzhenie tsarizma v Rossii, pp. 23–24.
43 Hosking, The Russian Constitutional Experiment, pp. 1–14.
44 Guchkov writes that "the sovereign was well acquainted with me because during the war I had corresponded constantly about the Red Cross with Elizaveta Fyodorovna, the emperor's sister-in-law, who apparently showed him the letters." P. N., no. 5616, 9 August 1936.
was received owing to his request. Finally, he pleaded for complete candor concerning the war and told the tsar to admit that "in the past many mistakes had been made which will not be repeated." Nicholas, always charming, listened attentively, interrupting at intervals to say "Yes, you are right." Guchkov left, satisfied that the advice would be heeded, only to learn from a friend a few days later that his conversation at Peterhof—a conversation which occurred scarcely twenty-four hours following Guchkov's—had resulted in a pledge by the tsar to say nothing about the tragic events of the war.

In December 1905, not long after the announcement of the Duma, a more portentous incident occurred. Count Witte invited four "independent men of society" to an imperial conference to discuss the nature of the electoral laws for Russia's first legislative assembly. In addition to Guchkov there was Shipov, who acted as a spokesman for the Moscow provincial zemstvo, Baron Korf, head of the St. Petersburg provincial zemstvo, and Count V. A. Bobrinsky, leader of the nobility of the Tula province. Minutes before the audience with Nicholas II, Count Witte, seemingly distraught, called Guchkov and Shipov aside into his private office. The gist of the hurried conversation was a plea on the prime minister's part that the two Octobrists avoid any mention before the tsar of the October Manifesto, above all the suggestion that the Manifesto implied the end of the autocracy and the sharing of power with society. "Obviously," Guchkov sadly noted, "the sovereign considered the monarchy unchanged, just as before."

It was for this reason—disillusionment with Nicholas II—that Guchkov twice declined invitations to join the Council of Ministers. The first opportunity came in 1906 but when Count Witte disclosed that P. N. Durnovo, a hide-bound conservative detested by liberals and moderates alike, was the tsar's choice for the politically sensitive post of Minister of Interior, Guchkov refused the offer. The second opportunity for a ministerial portfolio came in the summer of 1907 from Peter Stolypin, Witte's successor as chairman of the Council of Ministers and a man with whom Guchkov had established personal ties. On this occasion Guchkov and N. N. Lvov, who belonged to the Kadet Party, were called in. "Stolypin told me that he not only valued our participation in the government because of his confidence in us but that generally he felt it correct to bring people in who did not belong to the bureaucracy in order to create a

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45 Ibid. The reference here is to the delegation of zemstvo activists, led by Prince E. Trubetsky, which visited the tsar in June 1905.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid., no. 5619, 12 August 1936.
49 Guchkov first became acquainted with Stolypin in 1906 at the home of Alexander Stolypin, brother of the prime minister and a correspondent for Novoe vremya. Apparently the meeting grew out of Stolypin's desire to greet the man who so publicly had defended the use of military field tribunals to repress the revolutionary movement.
favorable impression on the country." The negotiations were intense: Stolypin offered Lvov the post of Minister of Agriculture and Guchkov that of Minister of Commerce and Industry. Guchkov conditioned acceptance on the presence of "additional public figures in the government" and presentation by the ministers of a full reform program (he did not say exactly what he had in mind). He then recommended specific individuals for specific posts, including his old mentor at Moscow University, Professor Vinogradov, for the position of Minister of Education.

Stolypin listened sympathetically and dispatched Guchkov to the tsar for further talks. During the ensuing conversation, which lasted for "over an hour," Guchkov realized that "despite his genuine desire to bring us into the ministry," Nicholas was "so convinced of the safety of his throne that he found it unnecessary to formulate a new internal policy." Upon returning to St. Petersburg from the imperial residence at Peterhof, Guchkov told Stolypin that "under these conditions participation in the government was useless... I would be completely powerless." Bitterly dejected, Stolypin and Guchkov agreed that at "some point it might be necessary to save Russia and the dynasty from the sovereign himself." Little did either man realize how prophetic their premonitions were.

Guchkov's refusal to enter the government may be judged a political blunder; he himself seemed to admit as much in 1910 when he assumed the presidency of the Duma in order to influence Nicholas more closely. But that observation, like so much else in Russian history, smacks of hindsight. Far more meaningful is another question: why, given his distrust of the tsar, did Guchkov in 1906 rest so much hope on the reformation of the monarchy? Part of the answer no doubt derived from his political philosophy, stated in 1910 in his presidential address to the Third Duma:

I am a convinced adherent of the system of constitutional monarchy—beyond the form of a constitutional monarchy I cannot conceive of the peaceful development of contemporary Russia with all the peculiarities bequeathed by Russian history and rooted in Russia's existence.

Another factor which at the time influenced and perhaps distorted Guchkov's perception of reality was the continued flirtation of Kadets with revolution. The First Duma, dominated by Milyukov's party, lasted for just over two months, during which it clamored for a constituent assembly and refused to condemn terrorism. A serious clash came over the issue of land. The Duma wanted to give to the peasants the state, imperial, and church lands; the regime proclaimed alienation of private property unacceptable, even with compensation. When the Duma appeared directly to the people on the land question, Nicholas dissolved it.

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50 P.N., no. 5623, 16 August 1936.
51 Ibid.
53 Forty-eight hours before the dissolution of the Duma, Nicholas II appointed Stolypin chairman of the council of ministers. For a detailed description of events leading up to the dissolution, see Kokovtsev, Out of My Past, pp. 140–55.
For a short time Guchkov declined to appraise the fastmoving events. Upon his arrival in St. Petersburg in late July of 1906 following a vacation in Switzerland he was pressed by a newspaper correspondent to comment on the situation:

So far I am of the opinion that the government acted too hastily but some people who are acquainted with affairs tell me that the Duma spread such evil and dangerous propaganda that dissolution was merely a matter of common sense. Maybe this is so—I do not know.54

Any doubts Guchkov had soon vanished when the Kadets responded to dissolution with defiance. In mid-July, after troops had barred further entrance to the hall of the Duma, some 180 delegates, mostly Kadets and Laborites, went to Vyborg, in Finland, and drew up a statement which urged the people not to pay taxes or supply army recruits until the legislature met again. It was an empty gesture since the government, at Stolypin’s insistence, had announced that the Second Duma would convene the following year.

Nor did the Vyborg appeal evoke the hoped-for popular response. The Menshevik wing of the Russian Marxist Party (the Social Democrats) called for a general political strike but the number of strikes increased only briefly and unspectacularly. What the appeal did do was to forge an open alliance between Stolypin and Guchkov, with measurable results for the future of both. On 24 August Stolypin announced the establishment of military field courts to disperse the remnants of the 1905 Revolution. Summary executions of suspected terrorists followed and Stolypin was vilified in the press and by the liberals for his policy. Guchkov, by contrast, greeted the announcement with “particular pleasure” and chided those who refused to regard the “political personality” of Stolypin favorably. In an interview on 27 August with a correspondent of the New Times he gave full support to the premier. Seldom before, he told the reporter, had Russia been blessed with such talented and capable leadership.55 On 10 September he spoke again, this time in an open letter published in every major newspaper. The principal barrier to progress, he argued, was revolution, not repression. It was understandable then that Stolypin had employed harsh measures to crush the revolutionary forces. As for the Duma, it too stood condemned, for the government, while guilty of some haste, scarcely could ignore the legislature if it hoped to maintain peace in the land. The dissolution of the Duma was correct—it was powerless yet provocative and had failed to define the chief issue hanging over Russia: the threat of revolutionary violence.56

The identical views of Guchkov and Stolypin on law and order were strengthened by the latter’s insistence that he had no intention of going

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55 Novoe vremya, 27 August 1906.
56 Ibid., 3 September 1906.
back to the autocratic way of governing the country. Geoffrey Hosking, who has studied Stolypin’s political career as thoroughly as any western scholar, remarks that “Stolypin saw the Duma as a symbol of the cooperation between government and society which was necessary both for the repression of revolution and for fruitful reform.” More specifically Stolypin intended his “pacification” program—his all-out struggle against revolutionaries—as a prelude to important changes in Russia’s economic and cultural foundation. Throughout the summer and fall of 1906 he released a series of imperial decrees earmarked for the Second Duma. The proposals touched on local government, education, religion, and the peasants. By far the most important of these was the agrarian reform which would be approved by the Third Duma in June 1910. Stolypin’s agrarian policy provided for the consolidation of existing peasant striplands and the establishment of hereditary tenure. It aimed at a breakup of the peasant commune and the creation of a class of prosperous, independent, yeoman farmers—Stolypin’s so-called wager on the strong and sober. Presumably the emergence of a large group of satisfied peasants would transform the countryside from a morass of misery into a bulwark of the regime.

Guchkov’s favorable impression of Stolypin—and hence his willingness at the time to overlook the vacillations of the tsar—cannot be fully understood within a programmatic context. It was symptomatic of deeper realities, of attitudes and feelings—some conscious, some unconscious—manifesting themselves in a desire for a strong state which Stolypin seemed to embody. Guchkov and Stolypin shared certain personality traits. Both were men of action; both were guided more by day-to-day possibilities than by philosophic or abstract considerations; both, decidedly, were at home in the world of rough-and-tumble politics which characterized the post-1905 milieu in Russia. For the Octobrist leader that world required stern direction, capable of responding to disorder in the streets. Nothing better illustrates that conviction than a conversation in 1906 with fellow-Octobrist Count P. A. Geiden. Guchkov deeply respected Geiden, believing him to be a person of “state scale,” a man endowed with an “instinct for power.” Nevertheless Guchkov asked Geiden how he would have responded had he been Minister of Interior and received a telegram that in the streets of Baku the army and the Tatars were massacring each other. You know that to stop a slaughter it would be necessary to declare a state of siege and to act under military authority... What did Geiden say in answer to this? Of course he agreed that there was no other way out but then added that he would hand in his resignation. If even Count Geiden manifested such flabbiness, then what could be said about the remaining public figures?

Repression and reform then, were the order of the day. Stolypin’s decree concerning the peasants was especially pleasing to the Octobrists. In their

57 Hosking, Russian Constitutional Experiment, p. 23.
58 P.N., no. 5619, 12 August 1936.
new platform, framed at a party congress in May 1907, they too endorsed individual proprietorship as the solution to Russia’s rural poverty.

Not all were satisfied, however; in particular Shipov, who from the beginning viewed the military field courts as unjustifiably harsh. When Guchkov pressed his backing of Stolypin, Shipov, accompanied by several others, left the Union and formed a new grouping called the Party of Peaceful Renovation.59 Within a month Guchkov received the endorsement of the Moscow and St. Petersburg central committees. Guchkov’s statements, the joint communique read, did not violate the philosophy of the Union which had from its inception declined to join in the assault which less principled elements were launching on the government:

Total attacks on the bastion of authority only take the Union farther away from its goals; they shake the principle of the State in the minds of the people, thereby playing into the hands of anarchy and retarding the constitutional development of Russia.60

Guchkov now welded his followers into a tightly-knit group. He announced that in the future the Union would operate as an independent political organization and thus no longer was open to people from other parties.61 On 5 November, at a second joint session of the central committees, Guchkov defined the Union’s relationship to other parties. To the left of the Octobrists, he declared, were people who flirted with revolution while to the right were hide-bound reactionaries who still believed Russia to be an autocratic state. The Union condemned the philosophies of both extremes. Nevertheless, with the left-wing parties, especially the Kadets, the Octobrists shared dedication to the constitutionalism inaugurated by the Manifesto, and with right-wing groups, love for the Russian empire.62

Guchkov’s declaration, made in the heat of public battle over Stolypin’s field courts, came none too soon. Eight months later he found himself inside the State Duma as the leader of its largest party. The reversal of fortune stemmed entirely from the continued impasse between the Duma and the government. The Second Duma, which gathered in the spring of 1907, was from an operational standpoint even worse than the First. Like its predecessor radical parties dominated the assembly; but unlike the First Duma, extremists of the right now added their voices to the torrent of public anger. Socialist Revolutionaries and Social Democrats, the parties of the left, together commanded a hundred votes, the Laborites another hundred, and the Kadets a few less. On the right sat twenty-two delegates of the Union of Russian People, a die-hard group of nobles and clergy opposed to the unfolding of Russia’s constitutional experiment. Another

59 Ibid. The others in this instance included the noted industrialists P. P. Ryabushinsky and S. I. Chetverikov. See Dan and Cherevanin, “Soyuz,” pp. 198–204.
60 Novoe vremya, 29 September 1906.
62 Ibid., pp. 204–05. See also Rainey, “Union of 17 October,” ch. 7.
forty to fifty unaffiliated deputies (mostly peasants and priests) voted with the right.63

In this assembly the Octobrists numbered forty-four delegates. The increase in representation was unmatched, however, by an increase in power, as extremists from both sides of the assembly hall ignored occasional pleas by Octobrist spokesmen for compromise and moderation. About the only consolation was the formation of a cohesive voting bloc which alone distinguished their performance from the pitiful exhibition at the First Duma. The Octobrist Fraction emerged from a meeting of the Duma delegates along with select members of the central committees. Guchkov, who again was defeated in his bid for election, had in the meantime replaced Shipov as chairman of the Moscow committee. He presided over the first meeting of the Fraction but neither he nor any other member of the central committees attempted to control the voting behavior of the Duma deputies.64 Later on, during the Third Duma, the loose discipline within the Fraction would give rise to intraparty difficulties.

The Second Duma accomplished nothing. Extremists at both ends of the political spectrum hurled recriminations at each other; the government in turn trumped up a charge that the Social Democrats were planning to murder the tsar and demanded that the Duma hand over the members of that party for trial. The Duma flatly refused and after it sat for one hundred days, Stolypin dismissed it.65

Following the dissolution of the Duma the government finally decided to effect a drastic revision of the franchise by means of an imperial ukase. The Law of 3 June 1907 reduced the representation of the peasantry by nearly half; it gave landowners a controlling majority (51 percent); and it reduced the representation of the national minorities, such as the people of Central Asia, Siberia, and the Caucasus.66 Contemporary jurists believed the new arrangement was unconstitutional since the Fundamental Laws stipulated the consent of the Duma and the State Council for any change in the electoral law.67 Even Stolypin conceded that the law might have been promulgated somewhat irregularly but fell back on the excuse that it was the best that could be hoped for under the circumstances.68 The Octobrists seemed to agree: the public should not be too hasty in its judgment since the violation of constitutional guarantees had come at a moment of crisis.69

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64 For a thorough analysis of Octobrist intra-party organization, see Shidlovsky, Vospominaniya, 1: 203–05.
65 Levin, Second Duma, pp. 307–49.
68 Cited in Conroy, Peter Arkadevich Stolypin, p. 162.
69 Rech, 13 June 1907.
A. Ya. Avrekh, a Soviet historian, has tried to show that with the electoral law of 3 June the government had in mind the creation of "two majorities" in the Third Duma: an Octobrist-Right majority to find support for the government's nationalist and repressive policies and an Octobrist-Left majority to sanction social reforms when necessary.70 The theory, while ingenious, assumes too much. As Hosking notes, it "presumes well-nigh inhuman foresight" on the part of the regime and "there is not direct evidence that the government had in mind anything so precise."71 In any event from the regime's standpoint the electoral law served its purpose. The Third Duma opened its doors in November 1907 with an auspicious composition. The Octobrists were the chief beneficiaries of the law, holding down about one-third of the seats (150 to be exact). Of these almost two-thirds (89) termed themselves landowners while another 23 came from the world of industry and high finance.72 Guchkov, receiving a majority of the votes from his district in Moscow, took his place at the head of his party. His delight was shared by Nicholas II. That summer, at an official reception in St. Petersburg in honor of the nation's mayors, the emperor drew Nicholas Guchkov aside long enough to tell him of his joy at his brother's good fortune.73 Another chapter in the life of the Russian state system had begun, a chapter in which Alexander Guchkov was destined to play a key part.

70 Avrekh, Stolypin, pp. 3–10.
71 Hosking, Russian, pp. 44, 250.
73 P.N., no. 5626, 19 August 1936.
III. Politics by Usual Means: 1907-1914

The third Duma differed in several respects from its two predecessors. Much of the membership of the new assembly owed its very existence to the revision of the franchise. The Law of 3 June not only brought in more Octobrists but also reduced the Kadets to a fraction of their former selves. They now numbered only fifty-four delegates. Altogether the socialists came to thirty three of whom nineteen belonged to the Social Democrats. Against this showing there were about fifty extremists of the far right whose doctrinaire outlook rivaled that of the far left. Fervent monarchists all, and led by V. M. Purishkevich, a landlord from Bessarabia, they came to the Duma with but one aim: to resurrect by any and all means an unblemished autocracy. That goal was not entirely far-fetched for, as one historian noted:

Given the sensitivities of the “ruling circles” after the intense revolutionary experience, the rightest extremists could cause serious mischief by demands to honor the fallen police (offsetting interpellations focusing on police excesses), to arise and chant the national anthem, or by baiting the left extremists to attack the army, Great Russian nationalist sensibilities, and the autocracy.²

In addition to Purishkevich and his followers there were nearly a hundred other monarchists who conceded the existence of the Duma but wished no extension of its already eroded foundation.

Soviet accounts rightly depict the Third Duma as a group of men who stood behind the throne in defense of order and against revolution.³ But it would be wrong to say that conservatism doomed the legislature to inaction. For one thing references to class do not exhaust the reservoir of motivation. Social background and political behavior do not always go hand in hand. Nineteenth-century Russian history is filled with examples of idealistic aristocrats who championed the cause of freedom and the rights of man, often in blind disregard for their class interest. A recent investigation of the Third Duma conclusively demonstrates that factors such as geographic origin, education, and experience in local government positioned one class, the gentry, along a continuum ranging from constitutionalism to diehard defense of the status quo ante.⁴

Then again neither Guchkov nor Stolypin wished a return to the pre-1905 order. Shortly before the Duma opened its doors for the first session

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¹ Levin, The Third Duma: Elections and Profile, p. 110.
² Ibid., p. 148.
³ See, for example, Chermensky, Burzhuaziya, and Avrekh, Stolypin.
Guchkov confirmed his constitutionalism: "The wave of reaction, if it should rise, would force the Union of 17 October to carry on a definite and decisive oppositional mode." He later told Samuel Harper, the tireless American observer of Russian politics, that he had expected great things: the Duma's franchise might be mutilated but not its legislative competence. He reminded his listener that the Octobrists came to the assembly with great plans for cooperating with the monarchy in the enactment of a variety of legislation. The party's objective, he concluded, had been to control the Duma's most powerful committees, budget and defense, in order to facilitate contacts with the government. That task, he might have added, was challenging enough and, characteristically, Guchkov said little about himself or his personal hopes. But, as one scholar notes:

What was required was a leader whose view of politics was entirely that of a pragmatist. Fortunately . . . Guchkov was eminently suited for that role. He was utterly devoid of doctrinaire attitudes and possessed the ability to barter for votes after weighing possibilities in advance.

As for Stolypin, he too signaled a willingness to work with the Duma. In January 1908, less than three months after the opening of the legislature, the Council of Ministers affirmed that its members along with other government officials were liable to interpellation (that is, formal questioning) by the Duma and its committees. That policy was very much in keeping with Guchkov's overall strategy: to use the committees of the House to sponsor reforms and to help the government keep its house in order. For example if a minister were to carry his estimates or bills through the Duma, it was important that he himself should come to the legislature to satisfy the chairman of the relevant committee. The committees also were important because once their findings were laid before the entire assembly it was unlikely that the House would alter the decision.

The most important issue for Guchkov was military reform. Interest in the army and its improvement flowed from several sources. Since a good number of Octobrists had participated in the Japanese War "it was natural," Guchkov recalled, "that the idea occurred to us to become more closely acquainted with the army's defeat and to attempt to effect the necessary improvements" in its performance. A second consideration had to do with political strategy: the determination to debate foreign policy in order to outdistance the Kadets who had neglected in the first two Dumas to expose government ineptitude in the war. This strategy fitted

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5 Rech, 31 August 1907.
6 Guchkov to Samuel Harper, 22 October 1911. Harper Papers, Russian Travel and Study Notes, University of Chicago.
7 Hutchinson, "The Octobrists in Russian Politics, 1905–1917," p. 94.
8 Cited in Conroy, Peter Stolypin, p. 164.
10 P.N., no. 5626, 19 August 1936.
11 Guchkov personally attributed that neglect to the "negative attitude" of the intelligentsia—by which he meant the Kadets—towards the military profession. See ibid.
in well with the belief of many Octobrists that nationalism and patriotism, of which military power was a concrete expression, were ideals which might reduce if not eliminate the gulf dividing the nation and the regime.

The issue of military reform was also a timely vehicle for the articulation of Guchkov's view of Russia's position in the Balkans. More was at stake here than informed public opinion or rivalry with the Kadets. Ultimately Guchkov hoped that Russia would reap territorial gain from the rapidly disintegrating Ottoman Empire, including military access to the Straits of Constantinople. To accomplish this he favored a policy which would have promoted friendly ties with Bulgaria and Serbia, Russia's kindred Slavic nations, and protected them from encroachment by either Austria or Turkey. During his five-year stay in the Duma, Guchkov frequently visited the Balkans to examine conditions there at first hand; more than once he offered resolutions expressing the conviction that Slavic interests should be safeguarded; and more than once he warned his colleagues that failures in foreign policy would undo tsarism as surely as internal disruption.

Political calculations aside, the Octobrist program rested on an exceedingly shaky foundation; the government's good graces. The laws of the land reserved to the tsar the right of declaring war and making peace. Nevertheless Guchkov forged ahead and set up a commission on state defense to scrutinize all military estimates which came before the Duma. The commission, under Guchkov's chairmanship, busied itself with questions of military structure and organization while relinquishing financial demands to the budget committee. This was about as good an arrangement as could be expected. Any public probe of the army or war ministry was risky because in legal terms the Duma had overreached its prerogative.

The first result of Guchkov's venture into the military arena seemed to justify the risk. When he and his colleagues on the commission approached the Minister of War, General A. F. Rediger, they were welcomed as allies. In his relations with the Duma, Rediger was greatly aided by his reform-minded assistant, General A. A. Polivanov, whose office had been established in the wake of the October Manifesto to discharge the burdens of the war ministry within the reorganized administration.

Relations between the Duma and the ministry were further strengthened when Guchkov, feeling the need for professional assistance in military matters, approached General I. V. Gurko, an old acquaintance from the days of the Boer War. Gurko in the meantime had become the chief historian for the general staff's official account of the Russo-Japanese War. Contacts and conversations between Gurko's staff and Guchkov's commission were of value because they expedited the consideration of Rediger's proposals to the Duma.


Despite these good omens, other conditions in the military were too disorganized to be kept from the public eye. Relations with the naval ministry were nonexistent or even worse because the Duma encountered hostility whenever it suggested coordination with the war ministry in the planning of the nation's defenses. Ignored by naval spokesmen and determined to give priority to the army in the distribution of available funds, Guchkov and his associates played their trump card to force reorganization of the navy. In the budget debates of 1908, Guchkov drew the chamber's attention to the fact that the army and navy were completely independent and ignorant of each other's intentions. He angrily chastised the admiralty for not submitting its estimates to the budget committee on time and for not answering the Duma's interpellation on the condition of the fleet. He recommended that the Duma refuse to vote funds for anything beyond the pay of officers and the ordinary upkeep of ships and dockyards.14

The Duma followed Guchkov's instructions and attached a series of resolutions to the 1908 naval estimates, including a proposal to reorganize the admiralty and to create a naval general staff. Approval of additional funds for four new battleships—requested by the tsar with Stolypin's concurrence—was conditioned upon thoroughgoing reorganization. When the admiralty refused to cooperate the Defense Commission rejected the government's demand for eleven million rubles for battleships. After much debate the full assembly overwhelmingly voted down the credits.15

There was another matter that troubled Guchkov. However friendly Rediger might be, he did not, or to be more accurate, could not dictate the tempo of events. In 1905 the tsar had established the council of state defense (not to be confused with the Duma commission) and charged it with designing a comprehensive plan for the restoration of Russia's defenses. The council was independent of the war ministry. Much more offensive to the Duma was the fact that the council did not have to come to it for appropriations. The head of the council was the grand duke and the tsar's uncle, Nicholas Nikolayevich. Three other grand dukes, who held positions as inspector generals of the various service branches, also sat on the council.

When the government came before the Duma in 1908 with its annual budget request it had to confess that as yet no overall defense plan had been formulated.16 The Octobrists could only conclude that the grand duke's council, which had been in existence for three years, had failed to discharge its assigned task. Guchkov certainly felt that way: on 9 June, at the close of the first session, he delivered one of the most sensational speeches made in the Duma. He named one after another of the grand dukes who held responsible military posts and thus were in position to

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impede all progress. He called upon them to resign in the national interest, concluding:

The system which we call bureaucratic has perhaps nowhere made for itself so secure a nest as in our Ministry of War. We profoundly doubt that the reforms we have called for will be carried out. . . . But to call things by the right names is our duty. . . . Whatever the importance of other questions which pass through this hall, we must admit that at the historical moment in which we live, questions of national defense must come before all others both for their own importance and because they cannot be postponed.17

This was the first time a royal monarchist had criticized the royal family publicly. To the surprise of many, including Milyukov who rushed to Guchkov's side on the floor of the House following the speech, Nicholas did not dissolve the Duma.18 That same summer the imperial defense council was abolished. The result was to unify the army directly under the war minister and to make him responsible for its efficiency.19

Sir Bernard Pares, the English chronicler for many years of the Duma, remembered this as the best hour of Guchkov's professional life. Surely the Duma and its Octobrist leader could take pride in their record on defense issues; in their organization of the work of the assembly; above all, in the determination to reduce the secrecy which shrouded so much of the government's actions and deliberations. The Duma had, as Pares wrote, "taken the line of being clearly as patriotic as the government."20

Other matters seemed equally promising at the close of the first full legislative session. Perhaps the most noteworthy result was the passage of a bill to provide free primary education. A commendable feature of the bill as finally approved was the granting of subsidies from the ministry of education to local municipal and zemstvo officials for the elimination of illiteracy. The system was to be completely in operation by 1922.21

Another auspicious beginning had been made in the area of the budget. Milyukov remarked at the time that "if this Duma means anything it means publicity of the budget" and indeed the busiest of all committees was that of the budget under the Octobrist Alexeyenko.22 When the committee first convened it found the finances of the empire in disarray: the

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17 GDSO, III, 1: 2436–437. The stenographic record of the Duma debates shows that Guchkov was interrupted constantly by cries of "Bravo" and applause from the center and left benches and utterances of dismay from the right.

18 P.N., no. 5626, 19 August 1936.


21 For details of the education bill, see Golos Moskvy, 8 November 1908.

22 Milyukov, Tretya gosudarstvennaya duma i deyatelnost v nei fraksiy narodnoi svobody, p. 19.
national budget had not been balanced for twenty years and the budget of 1907-1908 showed a deficit of 189.5 million rubles. In addition the estimates were based on countless statutes and laws. One Kadet member of the committee wrote that it spent more than half its time certifying the legality of some 100,000 legal titles which, in certain instances, stretched back to the reign of Peter the Great. Under these conditions it was no small achievement for the Duma simply to submit the budget for public scrutiny. The occasion did not pass unnoticed. Towards the end of the first session Milyukov memorialized that the Third Duma was the first Duma actually to approve the budget.

Stolypin, for his part, seemed equally pleased with the work of the Duma. In March 1908 he told Sir Arthur Nicolson, the British Ambassador to St. Petersburg, that relations with the House were "cordial" and that its committees "now showed a real desire to work." He showed his appreciation by recommending an increase in salaries for the Duma deputies on the grounds that better pay would attract more qualified individuals to the legislature.

The long range impact of Guchkov's behavior—and of the Duma's probing interest in foreign policy—remained unclear, however. For in singling out the military for special attack Guchkov had, in the words of one scholar, "touched Nicholas's rawest nerve." From the outset the tsar had looked with disgust upon the Duma's actions, which he felt were a clear violation of matters reserved to him by law. At the start of the second session his suspicions were rekindled when Guchkov renewed the attack on the command staff of the army. He again personalized the issue by alleging that the commanders of the Priamur, Odessa, Warsaw, and Vilno districts were unfit. The seriousness of the charge is apparent when it is remembered that, as border district commanders, these men held the most strategic posts in the event of war. Rediger did not deny the substance of Guchkov's indictment; on the contrary, in response the minister lamely answered that he had to make do with the personnel at hand.

Guchkov's attack on the integrity of the army command resulted in the dismissal of Rediger and his replacement as war minister by General V. A. Sukhomlinov, a man famed for his devotion to the sovereign. In all likelihood the tsar's ire was fueled by the fact that Guchkov's criticism came in the midst of a serious and prolonged international crisis in the Balkans involving Russia, Serbia, Austria-Hungary, and Germany. The crisis can be traced back to the summer of 1908 when a group of Turkish army officers, known as the Young Turks, dethroned the aged Sultan

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23 Kutler, "Itogi byudzhetnoi raboty gosudarstvennoi dumy," Rech, 2 July 1908.
24 GDSO, III, 1: 2027.
26 John Walz, "State Defense Under Nicholas II" p. 86.
28 P.N., no. 5630, 23 August 1936.
Abdul Hamid. The Young Turks were nationalists who believed in the indivisibility of the Ottoman Empire. Their actions quickly alarmed St. Petersburg which feared that a strong Turkey might undercut Russia's influence in the Balkans or at the Straits. Within three months these fears materialized when Austria-Hungary took advantage of the confusion in Constantinople to convert her occupation of two tiny Balkan provinces, Bosnia and Herzegovina, into outright annexation. Serbia, bristling at the seizure of lands inhabited by Slavs which Belgrade regarded as its own, looked to Russia for assistance. In the spring of 1909 appeals went out from Belgrade to St. Petersburg. Events worsened dramatically when Austria, fearing the impact of Serbian nationalism on subjects of Slavic descent within the realm as well as the prospect of Serbian-Russian alliance, turned to Berlin. For years Germany's involvement in Ottoman affairs had ripened, due to the decision of Kaiser William II to contest Russian and British claims to the Near East. Interest in the future of the Ottoman Empire along with a desire to minimize Russian influence throughout the Balkans drove Berlin to back Austria in its struggle with Serbia. On 8 March Germany declared full support of the annexation of Bosnia. The announcement, tantamount to an ultimatum, warned Russia to accept the annexation or risk grave consequences. Appalled by the possibility of military hostilities with Germany, Russia backed down. The crisis was over.

War had been averted, and wisely so, for the tsarist government was ill prepared for confrontation in the midst of military reconstruction. At an earlier point in time the regime might have avoided public censure. In the nineteenth century, "in an age of secret diplomacy, the Russian people were in no position to restrain imperialism" or to affect foreign relations. However by 1909 public pressure—in the guise of the Duma and a legalized oppositionist press—did exist and the regime did not escape unscathed. Headlines screamed about the German ultimatum. Russkiya Vedomosti (Russian News), liberal mouthpiece of the Kadet Party, and not often given to flag waving, editorialized that the "price of peace was a demonstration of impotency" and characterized the Balkan imbroglio as a "diplomatic Tsushima" for the tsarist government. Slovo (The Word), another liberal daily, devoted a spate of articles to the theme of Russia's "national image." The articles pointed to a rebirth, an awakening, of pan-Slav sentiment within public circles long disdainful of nationalist ideology:

During the trials of the recent past, our national Russian feeling has grown, has changed, has become more complex and defined and yet more mature and stronger. It would not be befitting for us to ignore this development and to hide our faces.

For Peter Struve the swirl of events offered "fresh proof that a regime that did not derive its power from a national consensus could not con-

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30 Russkiya Vedomosti, 19 March 1909.
31 Slovo, 10 March 1909, cited in Oldenburg, Tsarstvovanie Imperatora Nikolaya II, 2: 68.
fidently face external challenges."\(^{32}\) Struve felt that the Balkans was a legitimate arena of imperial activity due to Russia’s proximity and long-standing cultural ties with the peoples of that region. Fifteen months earlier, well in advance of Austria’s seizure of Bosnia-Herzegovina, he had warned of an impending clash with Germany and Austria. In an article published in *Russkaya Mysl (Russian Thought)*, Struve posited a direct relationship between national “greatness” and an active Near Eastern policy. While critical of his government’s “relative neglect” of the Near East, in preference for a program of expansionism in Asia and the Far East, areas of scant concern for Struve, the harshest words were reserved for his own Kadet Party.\(^{33}\) The Kadets, their membership drawn from the ranks of the intelligentsia, had, according to Struve, eschewed patriotism out of disdain for the bourgeoisie and fear of alienating their constituency. The result was a double tragedy: failure to contest the right’s traditional monopoly of patriotism and to join with the Octobrists in the Duma in efforts to shape the content and direction of the nation’s foreign policy.\(^{34}\)

Against the backdrop of public clamor and throughout the diplomatic crisis, which spanned an eight-month period, the Duma did not sit idly by. The Octobrists held that Austria’s actions threatened Serbia and that Russia should stand by her Balkan friend in the event of war with Austria. Contacts in December 1908 between Alexander Izvolsky, the foreign minister, and Duma moderates, including Guchkov, over the need to fashion a policy aimed at reducing Austria’s presence in the Balkans, seemed promising. Guchkov especially was delighted by the negotiations, musing openly that, in contrast to parliamentary custom in western Europe, St. Petersburg normally did not submit its foreign policy to public scrutiny.\(^{35}\) Weeks later the euphoria evaporated when the tsar acceded to Berlin’s demand for acceptance of Austria’s hold on Bosnia-Herzegovina. Guchkov knew well that Russia’s army was unable to repel German attack, a conviction based on conversations with top military officials and on first hand inspection of German industrial power and military might during a trip to Berlin in 1908.\(^{36}\) He did not therefore condemn outright the posture of restraint. He did however suggest that drastic changes—in particular a command system based on expertise and not seniority, and the development of an industrial supply system for the army’s wartime needs—were vital to the national defense. Failing that, Guchkov intimated in an address to the Duma, Russia would fall prey to the imperial forces of the age:


\(^{33}\) Struve had joined the Kadet Party in 1905 and in 1907 was elected to the short-lived Second Duma.

\(^{34}\) Struve, “Velikaya Rossiya,” *Russkaya Mysl* 1 (1908): 143–57. Another liberal polemicist, Vasily Golubev, echoed Struve when he wrote that the unwillingness to contest the “patriotism of the right is one of the most distressing mistakes the progressive segment of our society had committed.” *Slovo*, 14 March 1909.

\(^{35}\) *GDSO*, III, 2: 2648–652.

\(^{36}\) *P.N.*, no. 5630, 23 August 1936.
I am convinced that the moderation which directs our foreign policy is governed most of all by recognition of our military unpreparedness. . . . But, gentlemen, we cannot forever regard the issue of foreign policy entirely from the standpoint of weakness. You know, if our toleration knows no end then the appetite of our neighbors will grow. . . . We cannot be put in the same position as Turkey was in.37

Unfavorable public response to the Bosnian crisis "convinced the government that it could no longer take political leaders into its confidence concerning foreign policy."38 The combination of internal dissension and international intrigue apparently was too much for the tsar. His anger at the Duma was directed primarily at Guchkov. Not long after Rediger's departure, Nicholas told his mother that he "had to dismiss the Minister of War who in the Duma not only did not refute the speeches of Guchkov but even agreed with him."39 He then told Sukhomlinov not to go to the Duma, adding that "I created it to offer advice and not to instruct me."40

The new war minister wholeheartedly agreed and returned to the legislature on but one occasion throughout his tenure in office. Henceforth his assistant, General Polivanov, assumed the unenviable role of being the buffer between the ministry and the Duma defense commission.41

In his memoirs Sukhomlinov leveled the charge that the Octobrists sought to lure the loyalty of the army away from the tsar.42 The accusation cannot be taken seriously—reliable defenders of the throne deny it43—but neither can Guchkov's disclaimers that the Duma played down its interest in the military to avoid offending Nicholas.44 Perhaps the passage of time had dulled the memory of his oft-repeated boast that the legislature exceeded the executive in taking the initiative for military appropriations.45

Certainly the extreme conservatives in Russian politics did not hesitate to exploit the opportunity provided by the conflict between Duma constitutionalists and the throne. In March 1909 Duma rightists, led by Purishkevich and N. E. Markov II, fired a series of verbal salvos at Guchkov. From the first day of the Third Duma they had insisted on the narrowest interpretation of the assembly's powers and a reaffirmation of the autocrat's prerogative in military affairs. Purishkevich thundered that Russia

37 See Novoe vremya, 9 March 1909, for the full text and commentary on Guchkov's speech.
38 Thaden, Russia and the Balkan Alliance of 1912, p. 24.
39 Bing, ed., Letters of Tsar Nicholas and Empress Marie, p. 240.
40 Sukhomlinov reported the conversation with the tsar to Polivanov. See Polivanov, Iz dnevnikov, p. 69.
41 Ibid., p. 77, Norman Stone's recent book shows Sukhomlinov to be a military reformer during the term of his ministry. Stone also notes that "because of [Sukhomlinov's] unrepeatedly autocratic attitude," his reforms were carried through without consultation with the Duma or its Defense Commission. This reinforces the view held here that with the advent of Sukhomlinov, the Octobrists lost much of their influence with the Stolypin ministry. See Stone, The Eastern Front 1914–1917, pp. 24–25.
42 Sukhomlinov, Vospominamiya, p. 175.
43 Oldenburg, Tsarstvovanie, 2: 46–47.
44 P.N., no. 5630, 23 August 1936.
45 See, for example, GDSO, III, 2: 1221.
need not cater to the "cotton-flannel" patriotism of men like Guchkov. He invoked the names of Kutuzov and Suvorin, champions of a "grand and glorious" past, symbolized by the "old officer class." He was followed by Markov II, who compared the Octobrists to the Young Turks, a comparison brought on by Guchkov's trip to Constantinople in 1908 to assess the results of the coup d'état against the sultan. He suggested that, like the Turkish rebels, the Octobrists were seeking to overthrow the monarchy. He predicted that the future would reveal "how terribly mistaken are those who think they see in the actions of the Young Turks an example for their actions."46

Stolypin also was brought into the picture with consequences far greater than the immediate issue of the military. Earlier he had sided with the Duma when it approved and funded a naval general staff. In effect this linked the prime minister to Guchkov's policy of asserting the Duma's prerogative in foreign policy; it also exposed him to the venom of the defenders of autocratic privilege who did not delay their response. Reactionaries in the State Council and in the press complained that Stolypin intended to limit the supreme power of the tsar by securing his support of the naval general staff. Momentarily undeterred, Stolypin did try to secure the tsar's affirmation of the bill and by implication of the Duma's power to grant funds in the military sphere. Days later Nicholas informed him that he had decided not to approve the bill.47

The tsar's veto came as a double shock for Guchkov. He had overestimated the force of the prime minister's personality in a head-on encounter with the throne and underestimated the degree of Stolypin's vulnerability to political retaliation. The upshot was renewed doubts about Octobrist expectations of a constitutional regime. Particularly unnerving was the fact that Stolypin reacted to the chain of events by solidifying ties with the right. He refused to condemn extremist attacks on Guchkov in the legislature. He welcomed the formation of the Nationalist Party, composed of Russian aristocrats from the western borderlands, who aspired to advance the power of the dominant nationality in an area thickly inhabited by Poles and Jews.48 Finally, as if to underscore the decline of the Octobrists, Stolypin announced that future activities by the Duma concerning the military were confined to the consideration of budget funds. All organizational matters were reserved to the emperor.49

Guchkov's faulty appraisal in 1909 of the relationship between the ministry and the Duma may have been due to a series of distractions from within his own party. It will be recalled that the Octobrists were loosely organized, so much so that one writer contends that they "may not have

47 Pares, Fall of the Russian Monarchy, p. 171.
been a party at all" but more of a "one-man show." Nor was Guchkov inclined by temperament to work to insure party unity. He preferred to negotiate privately with Stolypin or to concentrate behind the scenes on pet projects, such as army reform. Throughout the first and most of the second session the party held together but in the spring of 1909 a split developed which eventually resulted in the expulsion of several delegates from the Fraction. The immediate cause came in the form of a government bill which defined the rights of Old Believers and other non-Orthodox religious groups. Guchkov, as might be expected, took a personal interest in the measure. He wanted to reduce the government’s control over Old Believer communities as well as to demonstrate that greater religious tolerance was entailed by the October Manifesto. To achieve these ends the Octobrists amended the bill to legalize marriages between people of different religious faiths and to eliminate the need to obtain the approval of local authorities before changing from Orthodox belief to another. Religious conservatives were adamantly opposed to the bill’s passage and there were murmurs of dissent from several Octobrists, especially from Ya. Gololobov of Ekaterinoslav province. Incensed by the open display of disaffection within the ranks, Guchkov resigned the leadership of his party. On 18 May the Octobrists, minus Guchkov and Golobov, convened in closed caucus and called upon Guchkov to resume his position. They also, rather tardily, attributed Guchkov’s resignation to the absence of unity within the party. The solution, it was believed, was to decide whom they could best do without. On 23 May, with Guchkov in attendance, and after receiving a telegram from Gololobov who refused to come to the meeting, the Fraction decided to expel him. Several other delegates who were sympathetic to Gololobov’s religious convictions, also announced their resignation.

Throughout the summer and into the fall, Guchkov’s energies were taken up with planning for a party congress which took place in early October in Moscow. His speech to the congress, made on the first day, struck a conciliatory note which masked the deeper concern over Stolypin’s rightward turn with the Duma. On organizational matters the congress voted to make the central committees more responsive to the local chapters. In the future they were to be consulted on whether or not a congress was to be held. Newspaper coverage of the 1909 congress did not reveal any criticism from provincial delegates or any mention of the

51 See Rech, 28 April 1909.
52 Vyazigin, *Gololobovskii intsident: Stranichka iz istorii nashikh oliticheskikh partii*, pp. 75–76.
53 For a report on the meeting see *Rossiya*, 19 May 1909.
54 Ibid., 24 May 1909.
recent internal squabble surrounding the expulsion of Gololobov. For the moment at least, Guchkov appeared to have reestablished his credentials as undisputed leader of the Octobrists.

Having met the challenge to his authority from one source, Guchkov next endeavored to surmount the threat posed by the rightward drift of the government. He did this by going directly to the tsar. In March 1910 he assumed the presidency of the Duma in order to exploit the privilege of the chair for periodic conferences at the palace to persuade Nicholas of the correctness of his ideas on military defense. He also hoped, as he said in a talk behind closed doors to the Octobrists, that his reputation as a public figure would bolster the shaken prestige of the legislature at the court.

It was a gesture born more of desperation than reasoned analysis. Guchkov's presidential address, in which he praised the "integrity" of the Duma and defended its right to criticize the regime freely, was warmly received in the press; according to Rech, a credible source because of its long-standing opposition to the Octobrists, Duma deputies who had gathered outside the assembly hall immediately after the speech were "favorably impressed." On the other hand Guchkov's belief, voiced from the Duma rostrum, that military matters were the nation's chief concern was shared by many contemporaries but held little appeal for the man in the street or his spokesman in the legislature. It held even less appeal, but for precisely the opposite reason, for the tsar and his followers who were determined never to surrender their control of the nation's armed forces. Nor, as has been shown, was Stolypin much help. As long as Nicholas doubted the wisdom of legislative institutions a minister who wished to stay in office was likely to sacrifice constitutionalism to maintain his position.

Much more can be said about the attitude of the tsar as it touched on the Russian constitutional experiment. His admonition in 1907 to Guchkov that the restoration of law and order insured the safety of the throne meant that the success of the Duma hinged on the threat of renewed revolutionary violence. That lesson was lost on the Octobrist leader in 1910 when he cast the situation in personal terms. Nicholas, he felt, regarded his warning of military disaster as a smoke screen for a vendetta against Sukhomlinov. Within twelve months Guchkov had stepped down from the presidency and although the immediate question did not concern the war minister, it nonetheless went to the heart of the issue for Guchkov: the government's cavalier disregard for the Duma.

The crisis which prompted Guchkov to step down from the chair focused on Stolypin. It came over legislation to introduce local self-govern-

55 Ibid., 9 October 1909.
56 Shidlovsky, Vospominaniya 1: 217–18.
57 Rech, 13 March 1910.
58 P.N., no. 5630, 23 August 1936.
ment (zemstvos) into the western borderlands, an area of mixed Russian, Ukrainian, and Polish population. Polish control of the region, rooted for centuries in the predominance of Polish ownership of large and productive landed estates, seemed assured by the traditional zemstvo law (1890) which equated political power—the franchise—with property. That was exactly what Stolypin wished to avoid: the creation of Polish zemstvos. The result was a measure framed by the prime minister which replaced election by estate with election by national curiae, in order to place local administration for the western borderlands in the hands of the numerically superior Russian inhabitants.

Guchkov and other nationalists were highly pleased. In the Duma he greatly assisted Stolypin in overcoming largely Kadet and socialist opposition to the project and in gaining final approval. A Duma amendment to the original bill further enhanced Russian interests by reducing by half the property stipulation for participation in the western zemstvos. This had the effect of allowing greater peasant representation than was customary in zemstvos throughout the empire.

The Western Zemstvo Act, as it was known, came before the State Council in early 1911. At this juncture unexpectedly fierce resistance surfaced from Council conservatives, a combination of anti-Stolypin intrigue, dislike for the Duma, and distaste for lowered franchise. When the full Council rejected the bill, and Nicholas wavered in his endorsement, Stolypin determined to act. He threatened to resign unless the Zemstvo Act was made into law by imperial decree. Reluctantly yielding, the tsar prorogued both legislative chambers for three days by authority of Article 87 of the Fundamental Laws and ordered the introduction of zemstvos into the western provinces.59

In one sense the use of Article 87 by the regime could be termed salutary. At least the recently enacted legislation concerning the zemstvos went into effect. That was a better fate than that suffered by other reform measures which either were overturned or whittled down or ignored completely by the State Council. For instance, the Council rejected a proposal to create lower units in the zemstvo organization at the village level on a classless basis because Council conservatives objected to granting the peasants any rights of self-government whatsoever. It emasculated another proposal to improve the judicial system in rural areas. The education bill, so highly prized by the Octobrists, was rejected in its entirety and remained a dead letter.60 Little wonder then that on one occasion Guchkov asserted that the Council’s appointed members represented much of what was left in

59 Article 87 of the Fundamental Laws gave the tsar the right to publish provisional laws without the Duma’s concurrence if the legislature was not in session. For an account of the western Zemstvo crisis see Korros, “The Landed Nobility, the State Council, and P. A. Stolypin,” in The Politics of Rural Russia 1905–1914, ed. Haimson, pp. 123–138.

60 Despite this setback the minister of education went ahead with the organization of the primary school system. By the end of the monarchy in 1917, most district zemstvos had their own schools.
the country of opposition to the constitutional order of things. Given the make-up of the Upper House, he said, no progress could be expected from it.\(^{61}\)

The sole exception—and a big one at that—to the impasse between Duma and Council was the approval by both chambers of Stolypin’s agrarian reform. First suggested, as noted before, in 1906, the bill was discussed at length by the Duma during the second session (1908–09). Its easy passage was explained by the fact that practically everyone agreed that the gravest single threat hanging over imperial Russia was the peasants’ continued hunger for land. Government ministers, Council conservatives, and Duma moderates “all agreed, in effect, that this was the first essential in order to stave off revolution, whether or not they agreed on the need for further reform.”\(^{62}\) Agreement, as previously recounted, was not to be.

While relations with the Council went from bad to worse, it was nevertheless the dissolution of the Duma in the spring of 1911 that sealed the break between Stolypin and the Octobrists. A party delegation met with Stolypin and expressed its unhappiness in no uncertain terms. Shortly afterwards Guchkov announced his resignation before a full party gathering:

The question is clear: we cannot agree to any concessions; in this instance a struggle with the government is inevitable. If we do not protest what will our party represent? Our role will be reduced to naught.\(^{63}\)

Stolypin was “astonished” by the resignation and told Guchkov that his actions were unwarranted. The prime minister had acted within the scope of the law, as defined by Article 87:

I [Guchkov] answered that, first of all, he had inflicted a blow on our still frail constitution, that second . . . he dictated to the State Council, a legislative body whose members should be allowed an independent opinion, and third—and most of all—he had committed harikari and soon would have to leave his post.\(^{64}\)

Exhausted and confused by the tumble of events, Guchkov left the capital and journeyed to the Far East, again as a Red Cross volunteer to combat contagious disease in Manchuria. He stayed through the summer of 1911. Upon returning to St. Petersburg he dined with Stolypin at the minister’s summer home. A quarter of a century later the occasion remained fresh in his mind:

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\(^{61}\) Guchkov’s speech made such an impact that the leader of the Council conservatives appeared at the next Council meeting to answer Guchkov’s charges. The incident is described by Maxim Kovalevsky, “The Upper House in Russia,” Russian Review 2 (1913): 73–74.

\(^{62}\) Hosking, Russian, p. 72.

\(^{63}\) Tsentralnyi Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii Arkhiv v Leningrade (TsGIal), fond 669, delo 7, 13 March 1911, list 30. This Soviet archive contains the diary of I. S. Klyuzhev, an Octobrist who kept a running, and barely legible, account of internal party relationships during the Third Duma period.

\(^{64}\) P.N., no. 5637, 30 August 1936.
He [Stolypin] was in a very gloomy mood. It left me with the impression that more and more he realized his impotency in the struggle with irresponsible court influ-
ences. . . . He talked in dark tones, alien to his ebullient nature. It was obvious
in all this that the idea of leaving the ministry was growing in him.65

Stolypin's morbidity proved terrifyingly real. Two weeks later he lay
dead, the victim of an assassin's bullet in Kiev, where he had gone to
celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the freeing of the serfs by Tsar Al-
exander II in 1861. The news of the assassination first shocked and then
embittered Guchkov. His dissatisfaction with Stolypin's treatment of the
Duma gave way to a revulsion for the tsar which survived the passage
of time. His forgiveness of Stolypin is difficult to explain. Viewing the
collapse of tsarism through the prism of 1917 he may have been inclined
to blame one individual, Nicholas. Just as likely, however, was the reaction
at the time to a conversation with Count V. N. Kokovtsev, the former
minister of finance who succeeded to the vacant chairmanship of the
council of ministers. Kokovtsev confided that when he became chairman,
the tsar's instruction was "not to overshadow" him, as Stolypin had.
"Kokovtsev's story," Guchkov recounts, "made me very angry . . . and
I experienced an unfriendly feeling towards the sovereign." From this
episode Guchkov came away with the suspicion that Russia's chief prob-
lem was a ruler more obsessed with his self-image than with the well-
being of his realm.66

The year 1911, the fifth and last session of the Third Duma, was marked
by exchange on a number of divisive issues. The plight of the national
minorities, of the Finns especially, within the multinational empire dom-
inated the debates. We will not tell that story here; it is well chronicled
elsewhere.67 Suffice it to say that the Octobrists showed scant respect for
the pride of the non-Russian. Obsessed with images of empire, they en-
gaged in chauvinistic assaults on the Finns and backed a government
measure which stipulated that Finland was an inseparable part of the
realm.68 On the eve of World War I, no portion of the empire was more
anti-Russian than Finland.

Under different, and earlier, circumstances assertions of great Russian
nationalism might have restored the Octobrists to the good graces of the
regime. But 1911 was not 1907 and in 1911 Guchkov's conviction that
the government was riddled with corruption made rapprochement all but
impossible. His suspicions focused on the self-anointed holy man, Gregory
Rasputin, whose counsel had become an integral component of the

65 Ibid.
66 Ibid., no. 5640, 2 September 1936. Many years later, recalling the circumstances of his
appointment, Kokovtsev wrote that Stolypin had "never been forgiven [by the tsar] for his
277.
67 See especially Pinchuk, The Octobrists in the Third Duma.
68 GDSO, III, 5: 690–701.
tsarina's increasingly spiritual life. Rasputin, by his hold over her, had a voice in appointments to high office. All who wished an audience with the imperial pair had to go through him, a circumstance which provoked enlightened persons of all classes.

Following a detailed investigation, Guchkov charged Rasputin with being an active member of the khlysty, an orgiastic sect illegal in Russia. Though Nicholas recognized the danger of scandal and ordered his own investigation, he did not in the end remove Rasputin. Instead he fired his minister of interior for "lack of control over the press" and declared the matter of Rasputin to be a private one, closed to further discussion.69

Next on Guchkov's list for rough treatment before the Duma was his old enemy, General Sukhomlinov. Armed with information supplied by friends in the army, he denounced the war minister for two related acts of impropriety: the organization of a secret branch of the gendarmerie to spy on army officers for evidence of subversion and the appointment of a gendarme officer, Colonel Myasoyedov, suspected of having connections with Austrian intelligence. The embarrassed war minister obtained Myasoyedov's release, but refused to attend a session of the defense commission of the Duma at which Polivanov was scheduled to present the annual bill on military supply. Excitement ran high when Myasoyedov challenged his Octobrist accuser to a duel, one of Guchkov's favorite pastimes.70 According to Pares, "Guchkov coolly awaited his opponent's shot and discharged his revolver into the air and walked off, without shaking hands, to show that he did not regard his opponent as worthy to take part in a combat of honor."71

Kokovtsev, who detested Sukhomlinov, informed the tsar, vacationing in the Crimea, of the Myasoyedov incident. Nicholas indicated displeasure but not a willingness to remove his war minister. Kokovtsev, however, did not desist and even volunteered to resign, which the tsar refused to acknowledge. No sooner had the prime minister left than Sukhomlinov appeared and charged that Polivanov had conspired with Guchkov and the Octobrists to engineer the mixup. That seemed to satisfy Nicholas, who told Sukhomlinov to get himself a more trustworthy assistant.72

The Myasoyedov episode heightened the frustration of the Duma moderates. The reward for their campaign to reduce corruption, or worse, in high places was the removal of Polivanov, a major ally in those same

69 P.N., no. 5644, 6 September 1936.
70 Ibid., no 5633, 26 August 1936. Guchkov was an inveterate dueler although dueling itself had long been outlawed in the empire. "He was a crack shot," his daughter writes, "and limited himself to blowing off their hats or extinguishing their cigarettes." From Traill, "Papa," p. 5.
71 Pares, Fall, pp. 120–21. During World War I, Myasoyedov, still in Sukhomlinov's employ, was arrested as a spy and executed. Apparently the spy charge was false but the public furor over the incident soon forced the tsar to dismiss Sukhomlinov in June 1915. See Stone The Eastern Front, pp. 197–98.
72 Polivanov, Iz dnevnikov, p. 112.
circles. At least as disturbing, both for Guchkov and his party, was another development: a strike by Russian workers on a British goldfield concession near the Lena River in Siberia which climaxed in tragedy. The dispute over food supplies and poor management began in March 1912. The strike was well-organized but peaceful until soldiers who had been summoned to the scene fired without provocation on a crowd of several thousand workers. The Lena massacre, as it came to be known, resulted in the death of nearly two hundred men, all miners. When news of the catastrophe reached European Russia and the capital, the impact was overwhelming. Demonstrations erupted and workers, so lethargic since the halcyon days of 1905, touched off a series of strikes in dozens of cities which rumbled over a two-year period, leading in July 1914 to the giant general strike in St. Petersburg. In the Duma, the Kadet, N. V. Nekrasov, long a proponent of better labor conditions, demanded government action on pay and other abuses. Years earlier, at the start of the Third Duma or in 1905, the Octobrists might have sat silent, as an expression of contempt for their Kadet colleagues. Now they were quick to agree with Nekrasov. Several Octobrists called for punishment of the guilty authorities. Guchkov also spoke, claiming that the shooting was a clear abuse of government power and, equally troublesome for him, a blemish on Russia’s honor before the international community.73

The efforts of the Octobrists to rescue the monarchy from itself, symbolized for the greater part by verbal assaults on the sycophants of the tsar and condemnation of indiscriminate official violence, backfired badly. The more they thundered the less Nicholas listened. The tsar was not at all unhappy to see the Third Duma finish its business in June 1912. The strained atmosphere enveloping the court and the Duma now took its toll even on formal occasions, as when the outgoing Duma deputies were received at a government reception in 1912:

The tsar entered the room. . . . He greeted me [Kotovtsev] and the President of the Duma and walked along in front of the members. . . . To Guchkov he limited himself to a remark: ‘I believe you are from the guberniya of Moscow?’ then walked back into the center of the room.74

In the elections to the Fourth Duma the government took steps not only to preclude the reelection of political gadflies but also to insure the selection of more docile deputies. Right-wing officeholders received substantial sums from the state coffers and the Orthodox Church, itself a bastion of conservatism, came out in support of pro-government candidates. The results were only partially satisfactory. The Octobrists returned their plurality to the Duma although their numbers were reduced. Altogether 98 Octobrists were chosen of whom only 39 had sat in the Third Duma. To

74 Kokovtsev, Out of My Past, p. 318.
their right in the Fourth Duma sat some 185 delegates while on the left there were 150 representatives, including the Kadets. Because of their crucial center position the Octobrists would continue to play a major role in the Duma. On the other hand several prominent and outspoken Octobrists had been defeated, Guchkov among them. Especially ironic was the fact that his seat in the House was taken by a member of the Kadet Party.\(^7\)

The reasons behind Guchkov’s defeat are noteworthy because they call into question the Soviet contention that the Octobrists were the political muscle of the haute bourgeoisie. Guchkov had campaigned hard for re-election, speaking on no fewer than ten occasions to the voters in his Moscow district.\(^6\) His defeat probably was due to the disillusionment of many businessmen, who made up a good portion of the district electorate, with the record of the Octobrists in the Third Duma. In 1912, shortly before the election, Russia’s most influential organization of businessmen, the Association of Industry and Trade, published a detailed critique of the legislature. It suggested that in almost every aspect of its work the Duma had favored the interests of agriculture over industry. It noted that the Duma had taken action to provide small farmers with credit while neglecting the problems of the small businessman, similarly hard-pressed financially. It concluded that little had been done to place business on an equal footing with rural cooperatives and government agencies.\(^7\) While the precise impact of the report on the voters can only be guessed at, the fact remains that in both St. Petersburg and Moscow the Octobrists went down to defeat in those areas where merchants and industrialists were heavily represented. They lost their seats, moreover, to an electoral bloc of Kadets and progressists. The Progressists, a new party recruited in the waning days of the Third Duma from the old Party of Peaceful Renovation, were preeminently a party of big industrialists. Among its members were several individuals who along with Shipov had left the Octobrists back in 1906. Guchkov himself was defeated by the Kadet, M. V. Chelnokov.\(^7\)

The sole consolation for the Octobrist leader was more time to spend with his family. His daughter, born in Manchuria, was a healthy six-year old and in 1909 a son, “a dreamy absent-minded boy named Lyova,” added to his joy.\(^7\) Before long, however, the distractions of public life overshadowed the desire for privacy; in this instance, as in 1904–1905, the possibility of another war, this time in the Balkans. In the spring of 1912 the Balkan League, a military alliance involving Greece, Montenegro, Serbia, and Bulgaria, materialized. The alliance was directed at Turkey

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\(^7\) Otchet tsentralnogo komiteta soyusa 17-go oktyabrya o ego deyatelnosti s 1-go okt. 1912g. do okt. 1913g. p. 67.
\(^6\) Ibid.
\(^7\) Lavrychev, Po tu storonu barrikad, pp. 51–52, 91–92.
\(^7\) Letter from Vera Traill to the author dated 28 March 1976.
and by October of that year the four Balkan countries and their traditional enemy were at war. The war was a decisive one. Turkey, mauled on the battlefield, surrendered most of her remaining European territorial possessions in the Treaty of London. In the aftermath of Turkey’s defeat, however, Serbia and Bulgaria renewed a long-standing rivalry over Macedonia and fell into war in 1913. The second Balkan encounter in less than nine months led to Bulgaria’s defeat. The final result was worrisome to St. Petersburg in several respects. Serbia and Bulgaria, the principal objects of Russian diplomacy, now were enemies. Austria, fearful of Belgrade’s expansionist appetite, had at the Treaty of London (May 1913) blocked Serbia’s access to the Adriatic Sea by establishing a new state, Albania. Serbia’s objections were answered by an ultimatum from Vienna to accept Albania’s existence and for the second time in five years, Belgrade capitulated before an obvious show of superior force. Meanwhile Bulgaria, smarting from defeat and resentful of Russia’s continued friendship with Serbia, began to gravitate in the direction of Vienna and the Central Powers. By the end of 1913 Austria’s influence in the Balkans loomed larger than ever.80

In 1912 Guchkov twice traveled to the Balkans, the first time in July to consult with tsarist diplomats in Sofia and Belgrade; the second in October to volunteer for Red Cross work in the conflict with Constantinople.81 He had long hoped for closer ties with Bulgaria and Serbia in order to solidify Russian influence in an area adjacent to the Straits. For a century the Straits provided the only Mediterranean outlet for military and commercial vessels and various treaties had guaranteed Russia’s predominance at the Porte. But tsarist statesmen put little faith in treaties; they preferred direct control of the Straits. Control of the Straits, moreover, was a dream shared by many Russians, including many liberals. Peter Struve, for one, always had objected to Turkey’s presence at the Straits. Even Milyukov displayed imperialist tendencies; he once wrote that “our first duty was to preserve the unity of our country and to defend its position as a world power.”82 He accepted Russia’s “historic mission” concerning Constantinople; that acceptance would bring Guchkov and Milyukov together in 1917 as ministers in the Provisional Government. Then there were the views of many businessmen who, as might be expected, eyed the Straits as the doorway to expanded trade and profit. Less expected perhaps, but no less significant from a historical perspective, was the demand of business on the eve of World War I for a broader role both for itself and the general public in the making of foreign policy. Military setbacks were bad enough, Ul'tro Rossii (Dawn of Russia) mused; what was inexcusable was the refusal of the regime to repair the situation by sharing

80 Wolff, The Balkans in Our Time, pp. 92–95.
81 Otchet tsentralnogo komiteta soyuza oktyabrya, pp. 76–79.
82 Milyukov, Vospominaniya, 2: 190.
power with "responsible social elements whose backing was vital to the restoration of national confidence."  

That was Guchkov's assessment as well. For him the Balkan wars cast into bold relief the likely outcome of the tsar's contempt for the whole of politically sensitive Russia. Unprepared for conflict, as in 1905, military adventure could spark internal violence on a scale fatal to tsarism. The only available recourse, he felt, was the formation of a political coalition of oppositionist elements sufficiently powerful to extract concessions from the dynasty. To do this Guchkov would have to convince the Octobrists in the Duma that cooperation with the regime was meaningless—worse than meaningless, stupid—until the government changed its ways.

At first the prospects for a realignment of political forces seemed enticing. In addition to Guchkov there were other moderates in 1913 who spoke belligerently. There were the Progressists, who called for "the creation of a constitutional monarchy responsible to the national assembly."  

Throughout the spring and summer months other groups met to assess the political climate. Even the relatively restrained Association of Industry and Trade issued a scathing indictment of the government's failure to move Russia forward as a Great Power.

Meanwhile Guchkov signaled the onset of the new strategy in a speech in Kiev before an assembly of municipal representatives. The Kievan municipal congress, which ran for ten days in September 1913, was attended by over two hundred delegates from 154 district and provincial towns. The significance of the congress is difficult to overstate. It was the largest gathering of municipal notables in Russian history and in the end the most explosive. Officially the agenda had as its theme the municipal economy. However discussion soon swung round to politics and the touchy issue of franchise reform. While generally opposed to universal suffrage, the delegates did favor extension of voting rights beyond the narrow limits of the Municipal Statute of 1892. The shift in focus brought a swift response from the local gendarmes, who interrupted debate and warned the speakers "to confine themselves to the agenda."  

Undaunted, the delegates moved toward a defiant climax two days later by resolving to meet in six months in Moscow to proclaim that "economic development is impossible without fundamental statutory reform."  

Guchkov, who attended the congress as a representative of the Moscow city council, was scheduled to deliver the keynote address. His talk, delivered under police watch on the final day of the congress, was supposed to summarize the work of the assembly. After a perfunctory introduction,
however, Guchkov denounced the "paralysis of our entire state organism, the stagnation in legislative work . . . and the bureaucratic attitude of the administration to the very idea of local government . . . that creates our present condition." He warned that "further delay in the execution of necessary reforms, and further deviation from the principles proclaimed in the October Manifesto threatens the country with numerous convulsions and ruinous consequences." With these words the police closed the congress but not before Guchkov received the applause of the delegates.88

The Kievan congress, and Guchkov's speech along with it, aroused considerable public notice. Gorodskoe Delo (Municipal Affairs), a Kadet-inspired reformist journal first published in 1909, described the congress as a "memorable event in the history of Russian society."89 The full text of Guchkov's address appeared in many newspapers, interspersed with favorable editorials. The articulate Duma Kadet, V. A. Maklakov, heralded the speech as a sure sign that the regime has been abandoned by the very people it previously had counted on for support.90

Over the following weeks Guchkov maintained a hurried pace. During a thirty-day period, for instance, he spoke on no fewer than four occasions to gatherings of Octobrist party officials, including the Moscow central committee on 12 October.91 The decisive moment in Guchkov's campaign for a realignment of political forces came in early November, at an Octobrist party congress in St. Petersburg. Again he delivered the keynote address the better part of which consisted of a careful review of the resurgence of reaction, culminating in the immobility of the Duma and Stolypin's destruction.92 The obstructionism of the State Council, the disarray of the central administration, the stagnation of local government—these were but a few of the symptoms of decay within imperial Russia. None was more obvious, however, or more portentous, than the inability of tsarism to sustain the nation's honor in military or political combat:

The historic traditions of Russia . . . demanded that she, as a great Slavic power, should play a decisive part in the world-wide crisis. . . . But that state of prostration which numbed our political organism at home also hampered our movements and paralyzed our will abroad. . . . We will not close our eyes to the fact that bloodless but disgraceful defeats which Russia experienced during the Balkan crisis had a huge impact on public opinion, especially in those circles . . . for whom Russia's role as a great power is the central point and symbol of their political faith.93

In contrast to 1905, the chief threat to stability lay "not in the parties of revolution, not in the ideas of socialism, not [even] in anarchist agitation

88 Ibid., p. 1279.
89 Ibid., no. 17 (1 September 1913): 1111.
90 Russkoe slovo, 22 September 1913.
91 The best source for this period of Guchkov's life is the still unpublished dissertation by John Hutchinson, "The Octobrists in Russian Politics."
92 Guchkov, Rechi po voprosam, pp. 95–112.
93 Ibid., p. 105.
against the state,” but in the state itself and the dark forces surrounding
the throne. As for the future, Guchkov concluded, there was only one
course:

The Duma must take up the defense of the cause of Russian freedom and the
integrity of the political system. . . . It is upon us, the Octobrists, that this duty
lies most heavily. . . . We must declare that our patience is exhausted and likewise
our faith. . . . It is we who should make the final attempt to bring the government
to reason, to open its eyes, to awaken in it the alarm that we so strongly feel.94

The Octobrist response to Guchkov’s call to action was divided. Some
agreed wholeheartedly and prepared to follow Guchkov into an alliance
with the liberals. Typical of their outlook was that of the Duma deputy,
S. I. Shidlovsky, who said that complete acceptance of the proposed
changes should be the minimal prerequisite for membership in the
Union.95 Others, a majority, were for various reasons more hesitant. Their
cautions was one part complacency (after all the Octobrists remained the
largest party in the Duma); one part reflex (residual dislike for the Kadets);
and one part adherence by the gentry component of the party to the
notion that its interests were best served by the monarchy. A critical point
came with the declaration of the Moscow central committee that reforms
could be achieved without resort to an intraparty bloc—an explicit denial
of Guchkov’s fundamental point.96 At the last instant Guchkov tried to
restore party unity but to no avail. By December all pretense of agreement
was gone and twenty-two members, siding with Guchkov, had broken
off to form the so-called “Left-Octobrists.” The bulk of the Duma Fraction,
numbering now about sixty-five, called themselves, the “Zemstvo-Oc-
tobrists.” Final attempts in early 1914 by the Left-Octobrists to persuade
their former colleagues to agree to a union of progressive forces in the
legislature proved fruitless. The breakdown in communication came at a
critical moment since the Progressists, on the advice of Alexander Ko-
novalov, a spirited liberal industrialist from Moscow, had just concluded
that the success of an oppositionist bloc depended on the inclusion of the
entire Octobrist Fraction. When that was not forthcoming Konovalov sar-
castically added that the Zemstvo-Octobrists preferred to “return to day-
to-day drifting.”97

The seven-year period preceding World War I punctured Guchkov’s
faith in the permanence of imperial Russia. That optimism had hinged on
two assumptions: first, the good faith of the government in its commitment
to the October Manifesto; second, the ability of the Duma to help the
government implement reforms. It is quite clear that Guchkov underes-

94 Ibid., pp. 109–10.
95 Shidlovsky’s remarks were reported in Novoe vremya, 10 November 1913.
96 Linderman, Otchet tsentralnogo komiteta soyuz a 17-go oktyabrya o ego deyatelnosti s 1-go
1913 g do 1-go sept. 1914 g. pp. 165–80.
97 Fraktsiya progressistov v 4-oi gosudarstvennoi dume, pp. 8–9.
estimated both the tenacity of the Emperor and the willingness of his own party to pursue more militant tactics once the coalition with the regime broke down. Much of the difficulty stemmed from an infatuation with Stolyrin, symbolized by a bronze bust of the man on the mantle of Guchkov’s apartment in St. Petersburg. At times it seemed that, almost in a dreamlike reenactment of his student days in Berlin in the 1880s, he pictured Stolyrin as a Russian Bismarck, performing miracles for his country. But tsarist Russia was not the German Reich and Stolyrin, even if he, like Bismarck, had obtained the requisite backing from the throne, died prematurely.

The other illusion revolved around Guchkov’s conception of the role of the Octobrists in Russian politics. He failed to see that the Octobrists were without a broad popular base and that their nationalism, unaccompanied by social reforms, did not bridge the gap between privileged society and Russia’s restless majority. He seriously discounted the possibility that short-sighted class motivation could drive elements in the party into the arms of an unrepentent regime. In 1905 the Kadets had predicted that the Octobrists soon would need the government more than the government would need the Octobrists; events in 1913 seemed to bear out that prediction.

On the other hand the logic of economic determinism can be overdrawn. On the eve of World War I a growing number of businessmen no longer were sure that the monarchy could ensure their survival, let alone their progress. Their uneasiness was grounded in the spreading militancy of the workers which gave rise, in 1913 in Moscow, and in 1914 in St. Petersburg, to widespread strikes and demonstrations. One result, in March 1914, was a renewed effort by Konovalov to effect an alliance of “progressive forces.” This time Konovalov hoped to join the opposition in the Duma to groups outside the Duma, including Marxists of the radical left. Once fashioned, their program would entail highly organized strikes and newspaper campaigns against the regime for the realization of the goals of the October Manifesto. While the alliance never materialized, the episode illustrates the extent to which liberal business circles were preparing to go in their search for an alternative political order. It also suggests that simplistic allusions to class confuse as much as clarify. In this case “fear of revolution” drove some businessmen in the direction of the workers rather than the repressive forces of the state.

Finally it cannot be said that Guchkov did not learn from experience or admit his mistakes. Whereas many Octobrists continued to believe in the Duma as the principal instrument of political change, Guchkov showed by his conduct in 1913 that at least that dream had been forsaken. Indeed

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on the eve of the war it appeared that he had forsaken politics altogether. He made one more speech, in April 1914, to the Moscow Octobrists. In it he waxed philosophical about the national character:

Unfortunately, for historical reasons, the Russian nature has received a special stamp, which can be summed up in one word: 'servility'. Either we are slaves, cringing before authority, or by a fearful revolutionary upsurge we break chains, not sparing either good or bad; this is not what we see among our western neighbors who follow the path of gradual improvement of their institutions and who gain prosperity in their country without destroying the great good which has been achieved by historical development.100

This was Guchkov's farewell to Octobrism and to the notion of peaceful change through political parties and legislative institutions. It was not, however, to be a farewell to politics by other means.

100 Linderman, Otchet, p. 16.
IV. Politics by Unusual Means: 1914–1917

Never during the whole of my political activity had I been more aware that I was performing so necessary a step for the monarchy as that moment when I participated in the conspiracy against Nicholas II.¹

One evening during World War I, Guchkov received an invitation to attend a political strategy session at the home of a friend in St. Petersburg. It was September 1916 and the patriotic fervor which enveloped the nation at the outbreak of the war had given way to weariness and anger at the government’s errant behavior. That particular evening, however, talk did not center on the usual scandals—Rasputin and Alexandra or the frequent changes of ministers—but rather on the mood of the factory workers in the capital. Many at the meeting felt that the sentiment welling up in the factories of Petrograd was unmistakably revolutionary. “It was obvious,” Guchkov remembered, “that events were leading to a big moment. . . . [and] by the same token that the government which we all regarded with contempt, was devoid of will, reason, and self-confidence, and would not be in condition to repel the revolution and repress it.”²

Paul Milyukov, also in attendance at the meeting, agreed that demoralization among the people of the capital was spreading and that no end appeared in sight. Nevertheless he opposed the slightest suggestion of concerted action against the regime out of fear that, if successful, the displacement of authority would undermine the war effort. For Milyukov, as well as for many other Kadets, the war had engendered a surge of national loyalty and the belief that “Russia’s own international position had to be protected.”³ It also had strengthened their hopes in 1914 for the Duma, both as a counterweight to the possibility of mass agitation which could undo the military campaign and as a springboard for launching liberals—Kadets—into the wartime ministry. Now, two years later, Milyukov echoed that initial optimism. Only the Duma could unite the country in common spirit around a positive program and the “masses” were waiting for some signal from its leaders. In referring to the Duma, Milyukov meant the ‘Progressive Bloc’, the majority coalition which had formed in 1915 to demonstrate to the public that the legislature could play a constructive wartime role. The Bloc comprised two-thirds of the

¹ P.N., no. 5651, 12 September 1936.
² Ibid., no. 5647, 8 September 1936.
Duma membership and pressed the government to enact a broad program of reform, including religious and political toleration and freedom for labor organizations. Its most important demand was for a "ministry of confidence," designed to amplify the Duma's control of the tsar's cabinet by means of liberal ministerial appointments. None of these suggested changes was accepted by the tsar who indicated his displeasure by dismissing the Duma for six months, starting in September 1915.4

Milyukov's contention that the Duma was the center of national authority brought a swift and sarcastic retort from Guchkov. He believed, and said so, that the Duma was powerless, frightened by disorder and incapable of producing more than general statements of principle. He told Milyukov that the Kadets had lost touch with the "real forces" of the country; that political reality lay outside the Duma, in the streets of the capital. Nor was there any doubt about the fate of the liberals once insurrection gave way to anarchy:

I simply was convinced that if revolution originated in the lower levels of society, then the results would be not only the downfall of the government, but also of Russia.5

The meeting ended on an inconclusive note. Not long after, ill for a time in his apartment, Guchkov was visited by N. V. Nekrasov, a Kadet of impeccably liberal credentials.6 Nekrasov agreed with Guchkov's gloomy assessment of the wartime temper and together they decided that the best alternative to "violent upheaval" was a "bloodless palace coup, forcing the sovereign to renounce the throne in favor of his son."7 Little did they suspect that their worst fears—an explosion of rage in the streets of the capital—soon would materialize and produce not only the tsar's removal but that of tsarism itself, with Guchkov a prime witness to the final drama.

Thus by the third year of the Great War, Alexander Guchkov had moved from being a friend of order in 1905 to a partisan of constitutionalism and enemy of the "dark forces" of the court less than a decade later. And the reader should be able to detect one mark of his life's journey in the aversion of revolution which he recounts in the autobiography. Guchkov was conservative, but a special kind of conservative: far from reaffirming traditional political conceptions (orthodoxy, autocracy), he insisted on a limited

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4 Yakhontov, "Tyazholie dni," Arkhiv russkoi revolyutsii 23 (1926): 109–10. Yakhontov was the secretary of the council of ministers.

5 P.N., no. 5647, 8 September 1936.

6 Guchkov suffered from rheumatic fever and a bad heart. In this instance the heart condition may have been aggravated by the emotional impact of a family tragedy. In 1916, Lyova, his six-year old son, died from meningitis, having fallen from a horse he was riding near the family estate. According to Traill, Guchkov blamed the untimely death of the boy on his wife's carelessness, an accusation which his daughter accepts. Letter from Traill to the author dated 28 March 1976.

7 P.N., no. 5647, 8 September 1936.
transformation of institutions in accordance with changing historical circumstances. He believed in constitutional government and sought to improve the existing social system by means of orderly reform. He glorified native values and opposed social revolution; but on the eve of the war, he urged so unrelenting a struggle against the government that he felt compelled to break with his colleagues in the Octobrist Party. That was because for Guchkov the true source of instability and of potential violence was the dynasty itself and not, as he once thought, professional agitators or misguided liberals.

The war was further proof of the decay of the tsarist system. In 1914 Guchkov had joined the Red Cross under the aegis of the Moscow zemstvo. That position enabled him to move freely as a medical service volunteer and to survey the impact of the fighting on soldier and civilian alike. He witnessed the slaughter of Russian troops at Tannenburg in East Prussia. “Soon after the battle,” as Pares describes it, “Guchkov saw a large unit under fire without a supply of rifles. He learned of an order to the artillary not to fire more than five shots a day irrespective of what was being done on the other side.” By December 1914 Guchkov had come to the conclusion that the “war was hopeless” and not simply because of disasters such as Tannenburg. “Instead of a free, patriotic atmosphere,” he testified before the Provisional Government in 1917, “we had an evil atmosphere, one filled with hatred, distrust, and deep suspicion.” With characteristic energy, Guchkov returned to Petrograd to confer with officials in the ministry:

I saw a kind of stone wall before me which could not be overcome. . . . I talked to a minister who was completely informed of the bad situation regarding the supply of the army. But to my insistent request that he report this picture to the tsar . . . he told me: “Alexander Ivanovich, what you are saying is perfectly true but we can do nothing.”

The disconcerting image of an isolated wartime ruler intensified the following spring when a massive assault in Galicia brought the German army to the gates of Warsaw, within a few hundred miles of the Russian border. During the engagement Guchkov conversed with a high-ranking officer who filled him with stories about the air of unreality surrounding the throne:

The officer . . . had recently been in conference with the tsar . . . and reported that he had no opportunity at the conference to tell Nicholas of conditions at the front. “I never could talk face to face with him as there were always other people around him.”

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9 Padenie tsarskogo rezhima, 6: 225. This source includes the testimony of officials and prominent public leaders on the causes of the downfall of the tsarist regime. The testimony was delivered in 1917 before a special investigatory commission of the Provisional Government.

10 Ibid., p. 256.

11 Ibid., p. 258.
Guchkov was not alone in his anger now. The military setbacks of the spring of 1915 provoked widespread indignation over the results of the war. In Moscow the mood of discontent spilled over into an explosion of nationalist frenzy. Mobs looted stores and homes belonging to persons with foreign names. For a while the authorities made little effort to stop the indiscriminate destruction. Over 400 businesses and 200 private homes were destroyed, many of them owned by Russian subjects with foreign names.12

More constructive was the response of the business community. Industrialists especially were shocked by the news of defeat which they attributed to bureaucratic failure to supply the needs of the troops. As early as December 1914, P. P. Ryabushinsky, chairman of the Moscow stock exchange, had petitioned army headquarters (Stavka) for permission to enroll a larger number of factories in production for the war effort.13 Stavka declined the offer but Ryabushinsky persisted and in May 1915 brought his case before the annual gathering of the Association of Industry and Trade. In a dramatic speech to the assembly he lashed out at the minister of war and demanded the mobilization of industry. In addition to his disgust with the ministry, Ryabushinsky was eager to extend the system of government defense contracts beyond the confines of Petrograd; he did not, in the words of one account, "want to see defense become a Petrograd monopoly."14 Together with representatives from Moscow and other industrial centers, he succeeded in pushing through a resolution in favor of "the unification of all the industrial and commercial forces of our country to assure the timely provisioning of the army with all necessities."15 Eight weeks later, again under the auspices of the Association of Industry and Trade, newly-formed groups of industrialists convened in the capital to chart basic strategy. By an overwhelming vote Guchkov was elected chairman of the central war-industries committee with Alexander Konovalov as his deputy.16

How serious, it may be asked at this point, was the munitions shortage in wartime Russia? The general view has been that the Russian army suffered throughout this period because of decisive material deficits.17 That view recently has been challenged. According to Norman Stone, a British historian, Russia's economic backwardness vis-a-vis Germany was greatly exaggerated. By the fall of 1916 the Russian army "had achieved considerable superiority not only in men but in material."18 His conclusion is

12 Oldenburg, Tsarstvoovanie 2: 168.
14 Stone, The Eastern Front, p. 199.
15 Utro Rossii, 29 May 1915. Ryabushinsky went on to become the chairman of the Moscow war-industries committee.
16 Trudy sezda predstavitelei voenno-promyshlennykh komitetov, p. 205.
17 See, for example, Golovine, The Russian Army in the World War.
18 Stone, The Eastern Front, p. 211.
well documented. By January 1917, for example, there was a shell reserve equal to 3,000 rounds per gun; by the end of 1917 the reserve stood at 18 million shells. On the other hand Stone admits to the "fact of shell shortage" at the time of the Galician disaster; indeed as late as March 1916 the army had fewer rifles than men and "was not yet ready for offensive action." Given these conditions it is not unreasonable to suggest that public opinion, the vital cement force for every modern government, was badly shaken by revelations of supply shortages in 1915. It persisted in the belief, despite facts to the contrary in the following year, that the regime had failed to organize the nation for war. Guchkov, for one, certainly felt so. In August 1916, in a letter to the Stavka, he upbraided the war ministry for failing to obtain a shipment of 500,000 rifles from the British. "The English proposal," Guchkov argued, "finally would have rescued us for the duration of the war from the gun and cartridge crisis."

Perhaps, as Stone suggests, the generals did conceal their mistakes with the excuse of insufficient supplies. There is nevertheless nothing in the record to indicate that Guchkov or other public figures did likewise.

It is interesting to speculate—and speculate we must because the memoirs and other primary sources pass over this episode—on the reasons behind Guchkov's decision to head the war-industries committees. Apart from his family background little in his experience suggests that he knew or cared much about day-to-day industrial operations. One possibility, alluded to above, was old-fashioned politics. The period immediately preceding the July congress of war-industries committees witnessed a behind-the-scenes struggle between rival groups of industrialists in Petrograd and Moscow to influence the composition of the central committee. As it turned out a compromise was reached. The committee would have its headquarters in the capital but its leaders, Guchkov and Konovalov, would turn a sympathetic ear to the demands of their Moscow colleagues for an equitable share of defense manufacture.

Another factor which probably contributed to Guchkov's selection was his awareness of conditions at the front, including extensive contacts with top-level military and civilian officials. The best example of the latter was in the person of General Polivanov who by this time had replaced Sukhomlinov as minister of war. His appointment in June 1915 was widely interpreted as a concession by Nicholas II to public criticism of the handling of the war. Polivanov's return to prominence must have given Guchkov great personal satisfaction; certainly it eased his efforts to gain official

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19 Ibid., p. 227.
20 Semennikov, Monarkhiya pered khrusheniem, p. 281. This book, not cited by Stone, is a valuable collection of documents on the war years. It includes correspondence of the tsar, his ministers, and other public figures.
22 Dyakin, Russkaya burzhuaziya i tsarizm v gody pervoi mirovoi voiny 1914–1917gg, pp. 93–94.
sanction for the war-industries committees. On 4 August, at Polivanov’s request, Guchkov came before the council of ministers and explained the purpose of the committees to the council’s satisfaction.23

Whatever Guchkov’s motive in assuming the leadership of the war-industries committees, the consequences can be measured with some accuracy. One by-product was the bitterness of the empress. She told her husband that Guchkov would manipulate the government through Polivanov. Nicholas in turn told Polivanov not to let the chairman of the war-industries committees influence his actions unduly.24 The significance of the exchange transcended personalities. Alexandra soon would be able to block both Polivanov and Guchkov when, in August 1915, over the objections of virtually his entire cabinet, Nicholas relinquished the reins of government to take command of the army in the field.

Leadership of the committees also afforded an excellent opportunity for contact with a variety of groups during the war. Unlike the Duma, whose jurisdiction was strictly defined, the spokesmen for the war-industries committees could meet in private and their proceedings were free of public standing orders. And in order to discharge their obligations to the army the war-industries committees had to ascertain the supply needs of the troops, a fact which put Guchkov in constant touch with army headquarters at Mogilev. His exposure to political crosscurrents was further helped along by the ties between the committees and the labor groups attached to them. In 1915 workers employed in defense factories were asked by Konovalov and Guchkov to send delegates to the provincial bodies as well as to the central body in Petrograd. This was a significant departure in labor relations in Russia. The creation of so-called “labor groups” within the committees was carried out in 1915 and 1916 in Moscow, Petrograd, Kiev, and other industrial centers.25

Undoubtedly patriotism was the immediate motive behind the invitation to the workers to join the committees. Properly understood, however, the movement for stronger ties with labor must be placed in a broader historical context. Konovalov, the principal exponent of better business-labor relations, had long advocated organizing the workers under bourgeois tutelage. He saw a left-center alliance as a means of recovering prestige for the liberals among the workers and so providing the country with an alternative to anarchy and violence. Konovalov’s scheme dovetailed with Guchkov’s campaign before the war to move the Octobrists in a leftward direction along the political spectrum; it is not surprising therefore that

25 Tsentralnyi Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Oktyabrskoi Revolyutsii (TsGAOR), fond 102, ed. khr. 343 and 347. This archive consists of tsarist police reports on the activities and organization of the war-industries committees (and other public organizations) in 1915 and 1916.
the two men found themselves in ready agreement in 1915 on the need to ensure the support of the worker.26

The general story of the war-industries committees does not concern us here. Suffice it to say that when it came to organized labor, subsequent developments reinforced Guchkov’s belief that Russia was riding the crest of a revolutionary wave. First of all, the committees helped to revive the sagging fortunes of the Bolshevik underground in Petrograd. The rally around the throne at the start of the war had left Lenin’s followers at a low ebb. Many local activists were arrested and sent off to Siberia. Strikes in the factories fell off dramatically, and strikes of a political character were almost nonexistent. From his place in exile in Switzerland, Lenin called for the “defeat of the tsar’s armies;” but in 1914 that call fell on deaf ears.27 However the veteran Marxist was not easily discouraged. By 1915 worsening economic conditions in Petrograd (inflation, food shortages) rekindled his hopes for revived strike movement. When news of the war-industries committees reached him, he responded with typical shrewdness. Writing in the emigré newspaper Sotsial-Democrat, Lenin called for a “fight with the false worker representatives under the aegis of A. Guchkov.”28 He then ordered his forces in Russia to boycott the committees, but to exploit the election campaign to disseminate anti-war propaganda among the rank and file of the workers.

In the ensuing elections the Petrograd Bolshevik revolutionaries failed by the narrowest of margins to stop the delegate selection to the central war-industries committee. What they did do was to tap the rising tide of worker resentment against the war and to compel the ten worker-delegates, all Mensheviks, to disavow support for the war.29 In fact it quickly became clear that even the Mensheviks, once elected, viewed the committees less as a vehicle for wartime collaboration with the bourgeoisie, as Guchkov and Konovalov had hoped, than as a mechanism to promote the class interest of the worker. For example, the Mensheviks demanded legalization of unions, arbitration boards to settle strikes, and a national minimum wage law. “They were not so much interested in defense work with us,” Guchkov noted in 1917, “as in uniting all possible organizations in pursuit of their own interests.”30 On more than one occasion Guchkov

26 Ibid., ed. khr. 347, 29 December 1915, listy 184–186. A recent study of the war-industries committees credits both Konovalov and Guchkov with being the “architects” of the invitation to join labor to the wartime mobilization. According to L. H. Siegelbaum, while Konovalov was the driving force behind the campaign, Guchkov, in “his readiness to enter a tactical alliance with the workers outdid many with more democratic sympathies.” See Siegelbaum, “The Workers Group and the War-Industries Committees: Who Used Whom,” Russian Review 39, 2 (1980): 155.
28 Sotsial-Demokrat, 13 October 1915.
29 TsGAOR, fond 102, ed. khr. 347. 5 December 1915, 11. 133–141.
30 Padenie 6: 283.
encountered bitter opposition from the Menshevik worker-delegates when he asked them to distribute pro-war pamphlets in the factories. In response to one request the leader of the Mensheviks, Kuzmin Gvozdyov, published an open letter disclaiming all responsibility for "imperialist wars."  

Worker disenchantment with the war, and with everything associated with the war, was all too evident in another exchange involving Guchkov and Gvozdyov. In 1916 the wave of labor unrest began to swell. Strikes broke out at the giant Putilov munitions plant in Petrograd and at factories in nearby areas. The leaders of the war-industries committees interceded on the strikers' behalf for better pay but also urged a return to fulltime production. Guchkov, in an open letter to the Menshevik spokesman, appealed to the workers' group to give wholehearted support to the war: "I turn to you because I firmly believe in the active patriotism of the worker... because until now we have always been able to find a common language."  

Gvozdyov's reply, published several days later, was a vivid reminder that the day of reckoning between labor and industry could no longer be put off by calls for unity:

I am convinced that social peace, if it existed, would turn into a patriotic jungle for the cold and merciless exploitation of the masses... The policy of social peace would lead only to the enslavement of the workers... class struggle is the normal and unalterable manifestation of contemporary life.

The hatred of the worker for privileged Russia was countered by the hatred of the crown for the war-industries committees. After all, the autocracy hardly could have allowed itself to feel beholden to groups of volunteers during a war; to have done so would have been to confess its isolation from the nation at large and to encourage those who argued for radical reformation of the ship of state. By 1916 public initiative from sources other than the war-industries committees threatened to do just that—to undermine the government's authority in the prosecution of the war. In particular the all-Russian union of towns and union of zemstvos, organizations of volunteers which had formed in 1914 during the civic campaign to mobilize human and material resources for the tsar's army, had by 1916 acquired an enormous role in managing the nation's economy and in provisioning the army with food, clothing, and medical supplies. So desperate was the regime in the face of the flood of refugees and the spread of contagious disease, problems which threatened to engulf millions of people by mid-1915, that it allowed the unions to discharge responsibilities which properly belonged to the state itself. By 1916 the

31 TsGAOR, fond 102, opis 17, delo 338, list 67. Gvozdyov's letter is contained in a police report on the activities of the war-industries committees.
32 Ibid., 11. 67–68.
33 Ibid.
unions controlled thousands of employees and monthly budgets which ran into the tens of millions of rubles.\textsuperscript{34}

Bureaucratic resistance to the initiative of the unions manifested itself throughout 1916. Several ministers accused the union leadership of subversion and in December the tsarist police forced a congress of union notables to disband due to fears that the meeting was a pretext for plots to overthrow the regime.\textsuperscript{35} In the end the unions escaped serious punishment because their destruction would have entailed an inexcusable increase in suffering both for the army and the many civilians who depended on their continued assistance.

In the case of the war-industries committees, however, the prospects for cooperation with the regime were considerably dimmed by the volatile mixture of politics and personalities. That the empress needed no prompting in her dislike of Guchkov already has been noted; the inclusion of radically-inclined workers on the committees was sure evidence in her mind that Guchkov was plotting against the monarchy. The absence of the tsar, away at the front, coupled with Rasputin’s stranglehold on the court, drove Alexandra to extremes. Polivanov was quick to fall, dismissed from office because of his eagerness to cooperate with the committees in obtaining supplies for the army. Other ministers were relieved of their posts and systematic curtailment of the committees began: police surveillance, cancellation of procurement orders by government contractors, and, in January 1917, the imprisonment of the workers’ group of the central committee.\textsuperscript{36} In an interview, Alexander Protopopov, the minister of interior who ordered the arrest, charged that “Konovalov and Guchkov were turning the committees into organizations for the preparation of a workers’ movement in the empire.”\textsuperscript{37}

The accusation of political skullduggery by means of the war-industries committees was wide of the mark that Protopopov had in mind. Guchkov never had been a believer in popular appeals; it will be recalled that his horror of mass movements had kindled his distaste for the Kadets in the midst of the 1905 Revolution. But in another sense Protopopov was close to the truth. The spectacle of a corrupt regime had persuaded Guchkov that only drastic measures could avert military defeat: “I was convinced that a coup, once completed, would be received sympathetically by all, from top to bottom... I was convinced that the army, as one man, with few exceptions, would stand on the side of revolution.”\textsuperscript{38}


\textsuperscript{35} TsGAOR, fond 102, ed. khr. 343\textsuperscript{c}, vol. 5, 11. 31–35.

\textsuperscript{36} Tsentralnyi Gosudarstvennyi Voenna-Istoriicheskii Arkhiv (TsGVIA), fond 13251, opis 4, delo 2, 28 January 1917, 11. 62–66. This archive contains the reports and materials of the war-industries committees, including several communiques from Guchkov.

\textsuperscript{37} Rech, 30 January 1917.

\textsuperscript{38} Padenie 6: 277–78.
As early as the fall of 1915, in private talks with other public figures, Guchkov had intimated that members of the high court, including the empress, favored a separate peace with Germany. He raised the spectre of a so-called “Black Block,” a Germanophile circle whose “diabolical aim” was to “kidnap the sovereign, set up a leaderless government,” and “pull out of the fighting.” The suggestion struck a responsive chord. During the war many Russians, including Milyukov, firmly believed in the existence of a secret pro-German cabal which was deliberately betraying them from the top. On balance there was little basis for the fear; according to one Soviet historian, the French and British ambassadors felt that “neither Nicholas nor Alexandra held any position on this matter other than the official one of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.”

In considering this issue, however, what is important is not what actually happened but what Guchkov and others thought was happening. It was far easier to blame the “dark forces” for Russia’s poor showing on the battlefield; easier to believe that defeat was the result of conspiracy, even treason at the top, than, say, of crippling food shortages in the cities brought on by the refusal of peasants to market their grain in the face of nonexistent manufactured commodities which they wished to buy. The illusion that tsarism was solely to blame for undermining the war effort was widespread during this period; also the idea, equally illusory, that the patriotism of the middle class was felt with sufficient fervor by peasants and workers. Because of his association with the war-industries committees, Guchkov no longer harbored the notion that the proletariat shared his enthusiasm for the war. But beyond that his judgment was clouded by the long-standing animosity to the royal family. He continued to think that an energetic government, “a ministry of public trust,” as he put it, could propel the Russian army to victory.

It is not easy to reconstruct the practical arrangements Guchkov undertook for his coup. In his memoirs only three people are mentioned: the Moscow “liberal” Nekrasov; the chairman of the Kievan war-industries committee, M. I. Tereshchenko; and a member of the court, Prince Vyazemsky. Under cross-examination in 1917 by the Provisional Government, Guchkov refused to name other co-conspirators. As for the plot itself, we have his own words:

... the plan consisted of seizing the imperial train along the way between the Stavka and Tsarskoe Selo, then simultaneously through the medium of military units in Petrograd, arresting the existing government and proclaiming the fact of a coup.

All this was seen as a prelude to the abdication of Nicholas II and the swift formation of a new government, thus insuring the continuation of

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39 Grave, Burzhuaziya, p. 7.
40 Dyakin, Russkaya burzhuaziya, p. 286.
41 Stone, The Eastern Front, pp. 296–97.
42 Padenie 6: 278.
the war. The scheme rested on the coordination of the military along the railroad from the front to the capital as well as in Petrograd itself where the army garrison would safeguard the abdication against any possible miscarriage. Apparently Guchkov felt that the officers of the guard regiments attached to the railroads were more reliable than the Stavka because the generals might wish to steer clear of political foul play while the fighting raged on. The lion’s share of the spadework for the planned coup fell to Vyazemsky who, unlike the others, was free of police surveillance. Vyazemsky spent the rest of the year alerting select groups of soldiers in Petrograd and nearby areas to the details of the conspiracy, tentatively earmarked for March 1917. Guchkov, by contrast, was visibly less active: bedridden from a bad heart, in October 1916 he journeyed to Kislovodsk, a rest spa in the Caucasus, for two months of medical treatment.

What happened afterwards is better known to students of Russian history. The Romanov dynasty was fated to expire not so much from deliberate intent as from its own crassness, having betrayed the public trust, including elements of the royal family. Vasily Shulgin, a right-wing deputy from the Fourth Duma whose impressions of the death throes of tsarism are among the best, said it well:

The trouble was that in all that enormous city [Petrograd], it was not possible to find a few hundred people sympathetic toward the Government. Even . . . the Government didn’t feel good about itself. In fact there was not a single minister who believed in himself and in what he was doing.

Nothing, perhaps symbolized the disrepair of the regime and its impending fate more vividly than the murder in late 1916 of Rasputin. The murderers, monarchists all, rejoiced in their deed and in the salons of the aristocracy “news of the killing was . . . seen as a patriotic action that had removed a great evil from Russia.” For the remaining ten weeks of tsarism talk of eliminating Alexandra by violent means and of dethroning Nicholas raced through the corridors and byways of Petrograd. The decisive moment, however, came not from distraught patriots—such as Guchkov—or from professional agitators—such as the Bolsheviks—but from ordinary citizens of the capital who, waiting in long lines and freezing temperatures outside bakeshops on 22/23 February 1917, were told there was nothing to buy. Not unexpectedly they became disorderly and when the police moved in, the demand for “bread” escalated into the cry “Down with the autocracy.” Strikes and demonstrations ensued and the Petrograd military garrison, composed of training cadres, dissolved into the unruly crowds. The central organs of the tsarist bureaucracy soon ceased to func-
tion altogether; by 1 March most of the ministers had been jailed by the self-constituted provisional committee of the Duma, which the leaders of the major parties formed on 27 February after the emperor dissolved the House.

The events in late February overtook the Guchkov conspiracy. During this period he had joined the provisional committee to participate in the debates over the new government. He agreed to serve as minister of war, although nothing was settled because the committee’s first concern was to assure the generals at central army headquarters at Mogilev that it could guide the revolution in the direction of a constitutional monarchy and avert, so the politicians believed, further bloodshed. Within the committee Guchkov argued that the only way to keep Russia in the war was to form a ministry of confidence with Aleksis, the young tsarevich, acting as emperor under a regency.47 During the talks the committee learned that Nicholas had left Mogilev and reached Pskov, headquarters of the northern front, under the command of General N. V. Ruzsky. This prompted Guchkov and Shulgin to volunteer to go to Pskov to present the formal abdication demands. ‘Volunteer’ could be the wrong word here for the sources disclose an insistent, almost hysterical, tone on Guchkov’s part. At one point he threatened to go to Pskov as a private citizen—‘as a Russian’—if not officially authorized to do so.48 Festering hatred of Nicholas, coupled with determination to rescue the monarchy from oblivion, may explain the uncharacteristic agitation. As likely, however, was a personal tragedy, less than twenty-four hours old. On 28 February Guchkov, along with fellow-conspirator Vyazemsky, toured the city in an attempt to calm soldiers in the regimental barracks. Along the way Guchkov’s car was fired upon by a sniper. Guchkov escaped uninjured but Vyazemsky was hit and died instantly.49 The incident, one can conjecture, revealed with chilling clarity the consequence of continued social turmoil. Whatever the case, Guchkov’s request to meet with the tsar was sanctioned and on 2 March he and Shulgin boarded a coach for an all-day train ride to Pskov. They would reach their destination at nine that evening, too late to have the slightest effect on the tsar’s deliberations. The abdication was complete and in a manner unforeseen by the two emissaries. To comprehend what had happened we must briefly recapitulate what had occurred during the previous days—and hours—concerning the tsar.

On 28 February, upon learning that his cabinet in Petrograd was crippled by anarchy and unable to act, Nicholas left Mogilev to be united with his family at Tsarskoe Selo. He never reached the royal household; in the early hours of 1 March, railroad workers stopped the imperial coach and forced it to go to Pskov. Once in Pskov, Nicholas talked with his generals who first implored him to form a parliamentary government—

47 Chermensky, IV gosudarstvennaya duma, p. 282.
a "responsible ministry"—but then, as news filtered down that the revolution had spread to Moscow, to abdicate altogether. At mid-afternoon, on 2 March, Nicholas yielded the throne to his son Aleksis. Guchkov and Shulgin were six hours away, still believing that Nicholas intended to retain the title at all costs. In the meantime, in Pskov, and unbeknownst to Ruzsky and his staff, a further—and final—twist in the bizarre chain of events was in the making. Hypersensitive to the physical well-being of Aleksis, Nicholas entertained immediate misgivings about the abdication. Very shortly he conferred with his personal physician, who warned that the future held no guarantee for the sickly child. Based on that advice, and telling no one outside his personal entourage, Nicholas changed his mind: the Grand Duke Michael, his brother, would assume the throne while Aleksis stayed behind, in his father's safekeeping.50

When Guchkov and Shulgin finally reached Pskov, they went straight to the brightly-lit imperial car where they were greeted by Nicholas and General Ruzsky. Guchkov began to explain why the abdication was necessary:

The situation is in the highest degree threatening. It is not the result of some kind of conspiracy or previously planned revolution, but a movement out of the earth itself. Among the people there is a deep conviction . . . that this situation arose due to the mistakes of the authorities, more precisely, of the high authority. . . . There is only one way—to transfer the burden of administration into other hands. Russia can be saved, the principle of monarchy can be saved, the dynasty can be saved if you [Nicholas] declare that you will transfer power to your young son.51

According to Shulgin, who stood silently by, the former Octobrist leader was visibly drained:

[Guchkov] spoke with carefully planned words, but overcame his feelings only with great difficulty. He spoke roughly—not smoothly—but he told the truth: nothing was exaggerated, nothing was concealed.52

Throughout the peroration Nicholas sat expressionless, looking "straight-ahead, calmly." Suddenly, to everyone's surprise, he spoke:

Prior to your arrival . . . I was prepared to renounce the throne in favor of my son but now, having once again considered the situation, I have reached the conclusion that because of his sickness I must simultaneously abdicate for him as well as for myself, because I cannot part with him.53

Turning aside the objections of his astonished onlookers, including those of General Ruzsky who, more than anyone, had convinced Nicholas of

50 For a meticulous account of this entire episode see Hasegawa, The February Revolution: Petrograd 1917, pp. 487–510.
51 Melgunov, Martovskie dni, pp. 190–191. Melgunov bases his account on the stenogram of the meeting at Pskov on 2 March.
52 Shulgin, Dni, pp. 267–68.
53 Melgunov, Martovskie dni, p. 192.
the need for the initial act, the tsar abdicated to the Grand Duke Michael. After arranging the final papers, Guchkov and Shulgin paid their respects and departed for Petrograd with the signed abdication. It was 3:00 A.M., 3 March. Neither man, Shulgin later confessed, was at all sure that Michael would be able or willing to still the furor in the capital, growing by the hour.\textsuperscript{54}

Their speculation proved to be premature. Arriving at the Warsaw Station in Petrograd, Guchkov encountered a stormy reception when he told a crowd of railroad workers of the details from Pskov. From there he and Shulgin were whisked by car to the grand duke’s temporary apartment on Millionaya Street, where a meeting of the provisional committee was in progress. Many in the room, most notably Kerensky, the minister of justice in the soon-to-be-formed Provisional Government, vigorously opposed Michael’s acceptance of the crown. A lengthy debate ensued, the high point coming with an impassioned plea by Milyukov for retention of the monarchy as the “axis of Russia.” Milyukov evidently felt that the authority of the government—its support from the army and privileged public opinion—depended very much on the continued existence of the dynasty. Guchkov agreed in large measure with Milyukov, saying that the key consideration was to confer legitimacy upon the successor regime. He added that any arrangement would be temporary, pending convocation of a freely-chosen constituent assembly to draft a new constitution, a point tacitly understood by all in attendance. Much to Milyukov’s annoyance, however, Guchkov concluded that a regency might be more palatable for the nation as a whole than Michael’s full assumption of the throne. This piece of advice, a remarkable admission for a life-long subscriber to the virtues of monarchy, reflected the deepening realization that the traditional regime simply could not endure the trauma of revolution.\textsuperscript{55}

The grand duke listened in silence, left the room to deliberate for a short while, then returned to say that he could not accept the offer of the throne. The dynasty was gone, with Milyukov and Guchkov, so long arrayed on opposite sides of the political battleline, among its last and best-known defenders. The grand duke’s renunciation deprived the new government of any claim it might otherwise have had to being the legitimate successor to the old one. Given the mood of people in the streets, so hostile to the merest mention of the restoration of the monarchy, the grand duke’s decision hardly can be counted as a political setback. Guchkov, nonetheless, felt otherwise: twice exposed over a four-day span to physically threatening circumstances, and embittered by the political out-
come, he told M. V. Rodzyanko, chairman of the provisional committee, that he could not in good conscience stay on as minister of war. Rodzyanko begged Guchkov to remain in office until a successor could be found. Reluctantly yielding, Guchkov officially joined the Provisional Government.56

Since 1917 Guchkov has been singled out for special mention in connection with the downfall of the Romanov dynasty. Disgruntled defenders of the tsar as well as several respectable scholars have advanced the hypothesis that the plotting of a coup, accompanied by rumors against the royal couple and dark suggestions of treason, destroyed the regime's credibility. It is argued that Guchkov, along with liberal politicians in general, were by now so obsessed with their own ambitions that everything, including the national interest was subordinated to the quest for power. A British historian, George Katkov, also asserts that Guchkov's maneuvering with the army high command undercut the military's effectiveness at a crucial moment of the war.

On the whole these claims seem exaggerated. Katkov's story centers around Guchkov's relationship with General Alekseev, chief-of-staff at the Stavka, and on their alleged plans to dethrone Nicholas. He documents correspondence in 1916 between Guchkov and the Stavka but fails to prove the connection between these contacts and events in 1917. As such his case breaks down, becoming instead an elaborate proof that Guchkov and Alekseev corresponded, which is true, but a far cry from demonstrating the existence of a bona fide conspiracy involving generals and the high command.

If Guchkov did at times show an almost irrational hostility to every act of the government, that was the result of years of frustration. From 1914 to 1917 Guchkov's life swerved significantly from the patterns of the prewar period. Convinced of the fruitlessness of legislative endeavors, Guchkov momentarily spurned politics of any kind in favor of wartime work. Once again, as in the years following the near-revolution of 1905, the regime crushed the enthusiasm of its more dedicated friends by turning aside offers of help. As conditions worsened Guchkov came to feel that the best, and perhaps the only chance for success on the battlefield, lay in a swift, knife-like, change of government. Yet, as we have seen, rather than falling victim to conspiracy Nicholas dug his own grave, although as the end neared Guchkov and other distraught individuals were prepared to assist with the funeral arrangements.

Guchkov's refusal to endorse basic alternatives to tsarism—republicanism or a full-blown parliamentary experiment—derived from the belief

that the Duma politicians, both institutionally and temperamentally, could not govern Russia alone. The Duma was by now thoroughly emasculated and the tsar’s ministers disdainful of its leaders, endlessly closeted in the club-like atmosphere of the legislative chambers. Guchkov, by contrast, moved beyond the charmed circle, through various levels of society. What he saw—in the war-industries committees, in the factories and barracks of Petrograd, and along the front—compelled him to admit that the liberals needed tsarism as much, if not more, as it needed them. Once the monarchy was gone, for this man at least, the game was almost over.
The end of Romanov rule opened a four-year period of internal strife, disorder, and search for a new basis of social and political stability. That the Provisional Government, and men in the government like Guchkov, failed miserably in coping with the problems of war, food for the cities, and the need for civil peace in both town and countryside, cannot be denied. The government failed in all else because it lacked clarity of purpose. Of the many blunders which brought it down, the first and most fatal was the refusal to acknowledge the bitter necessity for ending the war. In this respect Guchkov mirrored the year 1917.

Guchkov remained in office for less than two months, leaving the government along with Milyukov in late April. Judging from his memoirs, the eight-week stay in the ministry was a nightmare. To a certain extent Guchkov was his own worst enemy. Once the abdication project fell through, scepticism was his constant companion:

From the first days of its existence I felt that the Provisional Government was shaky... At that time there was no kind of firm foundation from below. There was no sanction of a national election, no legislative institution reflecting the national will; in a word, there was nothing concrete on which the government could have rested its power.¹

One suspects that the anxiety so evident in the memoirs was magnified retrospectively by the victory of the Bolsheviks in October 1917. But just as surely there was ample cause at the time for concern. The split in 1917 between the government and society resembled conditions in 1905 all too vividly and the government Guchkov belonged to lacked an essential attribute, executive power. That quality fell to another group, the Petrograd Soviet, which had formed alongside the Provisional Government and derived its authority from the garrison and workers of the capital who had sealed the fate of the February Revolution. Its leaders, for the most part moderate socialists, initially repudiated any notion of taking power because in the first few weeks following the collapse of tsarism the credit of the new regime was “still high” and the “role of the Soviet only hazily understood.”² Yet under pressure from its constituents, the Soviet was compelled to encroach upon the functions of government in crucial matters of domestic and foreign policy.

As war minister, charged with the conduct of the military, Guchkov was concerned less with the actions of the general population than with

¹ P.N., no. 5668, 30 September 1936.
² Wildman, The End of the Russian Imperial Army, p. 255.
the discipline of soldier-reserves en route from Petrograd to the front. Constantly he preached the need for stern measures against unruly elements in the Petrograd garrison, where upwards of 200,000 troops, many of them raw peasant recruits, were quartered in the spring of 1917.3 The garrison was one problem, the Petrograd Soviet, however, quite another. For it was Guchkov, in his capacity as overseer of the military, who more and more came under the watchful eye of the Soviet. The jockeying for influence began with the issuance on 2 March by the Soviet of Order Number 1, which permitted relaxation of discipline for off-duty soldiers and proclaimed their right to participate in elections to the Soviet and to soldier committees. Order number 1 instructed enlisted men to obey their officers and the new government only if their commands did not conflict with those of the Soviet.4 Deeply concerned about the unraveling authority of officers at the front, Guchkov made plain his opposition to the new decree. His disdain for Order Number 1 was grounded in contempt for the Soviet, but it also reflected a sincere belief that the order was unnecessary. Thus he told a group of delegates from the Soviet that the army sided with the revolution and would under no circumstances permit a return to the status quo ante.5 Things seemed headed for an impasse until, "as so frequently happened in those days, both sides became suddenly conciliatory, as each realized it could not entirely do without its rivals."6 In this case Guchkov authorized the decree, whereupon the Soviet issued Order Number 2, which restricted the application of the previous decree to soldiers and units behind the front.

Failing to reverse the changes introduced by the Petrograd Soviet, Guchkov tried to bring matters under closer supervision. He established a special commission under the chairmanship of Polivanov to mediate relations between the war ministry and the Soviet. He then pushed ahead with one of the principal missions of his life: the creation of an officer class worthy of the name. He brought in the young cossack, General Lavr Kornilov, for the sole purpose of taming the garrison by finding good officers. In a newspaper interview he echoed sentiments expressed years before on the floor of the Third Duma. "The old regime," he said, "not only did not seek but even avoided people of outstanding talent . . . but favoritism must have no place in the regenerated armed forces of a Russia that is now free."7

Noteworthy too is the fact that for a short while Guchkov ranged himself on the side of the forces of change. He sought to bring the old army, with its traditions of deference to authority and rigid discipline, into conformity with the new realities of expanded citizenship and equal rights.

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3 Rabinowitch, Prelude to Revolution, p. 48.  
5 P.N., no. 5658, 20 September 1936.  
6 Wildman, Russian Imperial Army, p. 233.  
7 Vestnik vremennogo pravitelstva, 17 April 1917.
He published several decrees: one authorized the term ‘Mister’ for all officer grades; another permitted soldiers to form clubs and political associations. He rebuked General Aleksev, commander-in-chief of the armed forces, for opposition to the new regulations, warning Aleksev to forsake the “old illusions.” As for the soldier committees, the earlier object of suspicion by the minister of war, there too fears proved groundless. Far from adding to the confusion, the committees, as Guchkov confessed, helped to contain “anarchy in the army.”

By April, however, the tide of dissolution was again apparent. Increasingly Guchkov grew despondent over the breakdown of discipline at the front. He received periodic telegrams from Aleksev on the composition of the troops. One report came during a visit by Pares to Guchkov’s office:

He showed me the telegram in which Aleksev warned for the third time that if fraternization with the enemy could not be stopped, he [Aleksev] would have to resign.

Vladimir Nabokov, Kadet, executive secretary of the provisional Government, and father of the renowned Russian-American novelist, was in the room on that occasion:

[Aleksev] described the mood of the army. . . . I well remember the feelings of horror and despair that gripped me. . . . Despite all reservations it was clear even then that the revolution had struck our military a most terrible blow, that demoralization was proceeding at a colossal pace, and that the commanders were powerless.

In early April, Guchkov fired off a telegram to the commander of the northern front, warning that “any refusal by the troops to carry out an order . . . will ruin the army. Russia will become Germany’s slave.” Simultaneously he conferred with Kornilov about the condition of the Petrograd garrison, a move prompted by Lenin’s return from exile and by Bolshevik organizational efforts to capitalize on the garrison’s ripening anti-war sentiment. In contrast to other socialists, including many from within his own party, Lenin in 1917 was prepared to move beyond liberalism and the Provisional Government directly to socialism and revolution. The garrison’s discontent, and Lenin’s anger, deepened when they learned that the regime, under Milyukov’s guidance, had assured its European allies that Russia would stay in the war and fight to obtain “sanctions and guarantees” from the Central Powers. The Petrograd Soviet interpreted Milyukov’s note to be a veil for an annexationist peace, which

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8 Cited in Wildman, Russian Imperial Army, p. 458.
9 P.N., no. 5658, 20 September 1936.
12 Den, 21 April 1917.
13 A detailed analysis of the Bolsheviks in April 1917 and especially of their ties to the Petrograd Garrison can be found in Rabinowitch, Prelude, chap. 2.
it opposed. Demonstrations of workers and soldiers erupted in Moscow and Petrograd; in one, Guchkov remembers, "Lenin delivered a fiery speech from the balcony of the Ksheshinskaya home [Bolshevik Party headquarters] and through the streets walked crowds of armed soldiers and workers crying 'Down with the bourgeois government! Down with Milyukov and Guchkov'".14

In the meantime Kornilov had informed Guchkov that only 3,500 garrison troops were considered "reliable," hardly an encouraging figure, but sufficient, or so they surmised, to defend the regime against attack or attempted overthrow. With barely-concealed impatience, Guchkov went before the other ministers with a call for deployment of the loyal garrison troops against demonstrators protesting continuation of the war. Except for Milyukov, who as Foreign Minister assumed that Russia would fight on to victory, the other leaders saw no immediate cause for alarm. "The scene stunned me," Guchkov recalls. "I foresaw the task before us, the need for counter-revolution and military action—but it would not be realized with this government."15

Demoralized by his colleagues' refusal to sanction the use of force, Guchkov soon was beset by controversy surrounding the Declaration of Soldiers Rights. Fashioned by the Petrograd Soviet, and representing the ultimate attempt at democratization of the army, the Declaration relieved off-duty soldiers of obedience to their superiors. The senior command resisted its implementation and Guchkov submitted the Declaration to Polivanov in the belief that "[Polivanov's] Commission, composed exclusively of soldiers, would find it less acceptable than I did." To his shock the Commission unanimously approved the Declaration whereupon, incensed at the behavior of his old acquaintance from the Duma, Guchkov relieved Polivanov of the chairmanship. He told a delegation of workers from the Soviet of his decision not to approve the Declaration. The workers told Guchkov that the Declaration would be authorized in any case, with or without his signature.16

Guchkov's resignation from the Provisional Government was now only a matter of time. The final straw came when the ministers decided to disavow Milyukov whose message to the Allies, it will be recalled, had sparked a massive public outcry in mid-April. Guchkov, who stood alone in support of Milyukov, decided to leave the government. Last minute appeals by Kerensky and Tereshchenko, ministers of justice and finance respectively, did not dissuade Guchkov and on 29 April, the decision became official.17 Seventy-two hours later Milyukov left the office of the foreign ministry.

14 P.N., no. 5661, 23 September 1936.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid., no. 5665, 27 September 1936.
17 Ibid., no. 5668, 30 September 1936.
Guchkov and Milyukov were not the only individuals who found it difficult to adjust to the freest year in Russian history. Shulgin’s recollections highlight the confusion, and the humor, of those first eventful weeks. He tells how Kerensky, accompanied by two soldiers bearing a bundle of papers, burst into a room where a ministerial meeting was under way. Dismissing the soldiers Kerensky triumphantly announced that the papers were the secret wartime treaties with the Allies. The startled ministers decided to store the precious documents in a place of safekeeping which Kerensky did—under a table!18

Even the passage of time did not heighten the sense of reality for some participants to the drama. Long after 1917 had passed into memory, charges still could be heard that its leaders had acted poorly by allowing themselves to be unduly influenced by the Soviets. It is ironic that Guchkov should have been charged with impropriety in this regard, for his resignation was due in part to his weariness of always having to address the spokesmen of the Left. Kerensky, Guchkov’s successor as war minister, accused his colleague of ceding “more and more to the demands of the . . . Soviet.”19 That charge is difficult to accept since Kerensky, once in office, treated the socialists of the Soviet with greater care than his predecessor.

Especially symbolic of the refusal to acknowledge the impact of the revolution on the war was the view of General Denikin, chief-of-staff to Alekseev in 1917 and, in 1919, the most nearly “successful” of the White Generals. Denikin, who never forgave Guchkov’s approval, however half-hearted, of Orders Number 1 and 2, charged his former superior with “being partial” to the Soviets:

[The officers] ascribed their difficult situation to the numerous reforms of the War Minister, to whom a hostile feeling developed, growing still more violent with those dismissed generals who could not forgive Guchkov for his participation in the preparation of a court coup and his trip to Pskov.20

After Milyukov and Guchkov resigned, the Provisional Government was reshuffled to include moderate socialists. The new cabinet’s dominant figure was Kerensky. Kerensky advocated “peace without annexations and indemnities” but did not specify how to achieve it. In truth the new war minister’s policies differed little from his predecessor’s. Caught between Allied insistence on total military commitment and rising Soviet and popular pressure for a democratic peace, the ministry issued nebulous statements to cover its own indecisiveness.

Given the crosscurrents of war and revolution, it is small wonder that Guchkov was among the first in 1917 “to become convinced that the task

18 Shulgin, Dni, p. 134.
19 Kerensky, Russia’s and History’s Turning Point, p. 264.
20 P.N., no. 5712, 13 November 1936. I am indebted to Mrs. Denikin, wife of the former Russian general, who brought this article to my attention.
was hopeless and futile." Freed of official responsibilities, Guchkov rejoined the war-industries committees in order to travel to the front and organize the "healthy elements of the country and army for a struggle with anarchy." He later claimed that he had in mind preparation for "a march on Moscow and Petrograd . . . the plan which Kornilov subsequently tried unsuccessfully to implement." One wonders whether Guchkov's thinking during this period was precise. However in April he did help to found an organization known as the Society for the Economic Rehabilitation of Russia. Consisting of businessmen and industrialists, the Society set out to find moderate candidates for elections to the Constituent Assembly and to combat by whatever means the influence of the Soviet.

Twenty years later the industrialist A. I. Putilov, another organizer of the Society, remembered that "during the entire summer, A. I. Guchkov published proclamations and distributed leaflets and brochures."

By late June the dominant question was whether the Provisional Government could long survive a dictatorship of either the right or left. On July 3 and 4, violence and disorder broke out in Petrograd. A half million people, many armed, roamed through the streets and demonstrators besieged the Taurida Palace, home of the Soviet Executive Committee, to demand that its leaders form a new government. Their anger stemmed from the rout of the Russian army by German forces in Galicia. Troops fled in panic, desertions increased, and some soldiers simply refused to fight. The mass uprising in the capital, which collapsed when the Soviet refused to take power and when the Bolsheviks decided that popular backing for their cause still was inadequate, drove many people to demand tough measures to restore law and order. Alexander Kerensky, by mid-summer the leader of the government, determined to act. The cabinet again was reshuffled, the Bolsheviks were arrested or forced into hiding, and representatives of all major political factions were summoned to Moscow "for the purpose of uniting the state power and all the organized forces of the country." The Moscow State Conference, held August 12 to 14, resolved nothing but served to demonstrate the polarity between conservatives and moderate socialists. It also brought to the fore the last significant episode of Guchkov's political career.

The Russian commander-in-chief at the time of the Moscow Conference was Guchkov's former subordinate, General Kornilov. Kornilov's hard line on the issue of handling civil disorders—in April he recommended firing on demonstrating soldiers and workers—had earned the applause of conservatives, Guchkov among them, who by now were convinced that only an authoritarian government, and possibly a military dictatorship, could

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21 Medlin and Parsons, eds., V. D. Nabokov, p. 88.
22 P.N., no. 5668, 30 September 1936.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid., no. 5780, 20 January 1937.
25 Rabinowitch, Prelude, chaps. 5–6.
26 Yakovlev, Tsyacha devyatot semnadtsaty god v dokumentakh i materialykh, p. 330.
save the country from Germany and from civil war. At the close of the conference, at which he had spoken, Kornilov met with Putilov of the Society for Economic Rehabilitation and requested money to finance a movement against the Soviet. At the next meeting of the Society, with Guchkov present, it was decided to send a large sum of money to Kornilov. With such support, Kornilov pushed plans to move presumably loyal army units toward Petrograd, ostensibly to strengthen the Provisional Government, but secretly prepared to go further if the opportunity arose. Learning of the conspiracy, Kerensky dismissed Kornilov and called on the citizens and soldiers of the capital to defend the revolution. Bolshevik prisoners were released from jail and as Kornilov's soldiers approached Petrograd, they were met by railroad and telegraph workers, sent by the Soviet, and most of the men lost heart. Against the Soviet, Kornilov's troops melted away as had the armies at the front and the only serious rightist attempt in 1917 to seize the reins of power vanished unceremoniously.

The Kornilov Revolt—to take at this point a long look both backward and forward—marked for Guchkov the end of an era. The current of public activity, which had taken definite shape during the Third Duma and continued to flow for several years thereafter, had been running since the turn of the century. After the Bolshevik takeover in October 1917, Guchkov assumed a more solitary but no less purposeful existence. For example, he assisted in the organization of the White Armies in 1918 and donated considerable sums to the anti-Communist cause. He moved quickly, as in his younger days, from one end of Russia to the other; first to Manchuria, then back down into the Caucasus. In between he managed to get his wife and daughter out of the country via the Black Sea and Constantinople. Actually, as his daughter tells it, she and her mother went very "reluctantly," boarding a small English cargo vessel, "rusty and very old," in which "about two hundred refugees were crammed like sardines." Not long before their final flight from Russia they had been captured at Kislovodsk, a resort spa in the northern Caucasus. They succeeded in getting away because the White Armies soon moved back to recover the area, but not before a comic-opera interrogation by three Bolshevik soldiers:

Watching Mama perched on the table, two of the commissars apparently kept whispering, exchanging bewildered glances and tapping their foreheads. . . . Only the third man, Kogan, insisted that A. I. G., one of the cleverest men in Russia . . . couldn't possibly have married an idiot, however pretty . . . she was a cunning enemy agent and must be shot forthwith. But Kogan was outvoted. Mama jumped off the table saying "Thanks. I hope you have some sort of transport for

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27 P. N., no. 5668, 30 September 1936.
me” and her two saviors hurriedly assured her, “Yes, yes, there is that van that brought you,” and she was driven home.30

By 1919, Guchkov was working with Denikin, leader of the White Armies in southern Russia, who finally persuaded him to go abroad for negotiations with the French Government. From that point until his death from cancer in 1936, Guchkov lived in Berlin and Paris. He did not curtail his activities; far from it:

[even] in the dreary years of exile A. G. did not give up. From his headquarters in modest flats . . . he organized the blowing up of Soviet factories and the killing off of commissars. . . . These desperate terrorist convulsions cost Mr. G. the remains of his fortune which he managed to bring out of Russia: three million francs.31

The only known return on the rather large investment came with the assassination in 1922 of a Soviet commissar, Vorovsky, in Geneva. According to his daughter, the assassin was paid by Guchkov.32

The picture sketched by Guchkov’s daughter suggests an active period of exile. Beyond these tantalizing glimpses, however, the concrete details of Guchkov’s stay in Germany and France are few and far between. In 1920, in Berlin, Guchkov lent his financial support to Slovo (The Word), soon to become one of the most profitable Russian-book publishers in Germany. Two years later, still in Berlin, he was the target of an assassin, a disgruntled monarchist, Sergey Taboritsky. Taboritsky failed in his attempt on Guchkov’s life but months afterwards was involved in the murder of the Kadet, V. D. Nabokov, Guchkov’s associate in the Provisional Government.33

There are also passing references to the “Guchkov Circle,” a “very active group of White Russians,” living in the 1920s in Berlin, with ties to both German Military Intelligence and the Federation of Tsarist Army Veterans, the latter with headquarters in Paris. The Circle hatched plots against the Soviet government but Moscow kept a tight watch. The OGPU, forerunner of today’s KGB, had its agents inside the Circle.34 There is no mention where Guchkov was in all this and one is left with the impression that his principal task was to supply funds for the abortive conspiracies.

But surely, it is tempting to ask whether Guchkov’s last years contained more substance than the sparse details mentioned above. Milyukov, for instance, took his talents to Paris and there for two decades edited The Latest News until his death in 1940. He and Guchkov met occasionally but on the whole Guchkov remained aloof from emigre politics. During

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30 Ibid., p. 10.
32 Letter dated 7 September 1975 from Traill to the author.
33 Information for these episodes comes from Williams, Culture in Exile, pp. 185, 209–10.
his stay in Paris in the last decade of his life, there is not the slightest reference to affiliation with any known Russian group.\textsuperscript{35}

In the midst of exile there occurred a small irony. The combination of European fascism and worldwide depression took its toll on millions of families and the Guchkov household was no exception. In 1932 his daughter, by now a grown woman, became a Communist:

As a result Papa and I were barely on speaking terms the last years of his life. About a year before his death I went for the first time to Moscow and went to tea with Papa upon my return. I began “I’ve just returned from Moscow and my impression is . . . .” He interrupted and said: “I know your impressions in advance and I don’t want to hear them.”\textsuperscript{36}

Ultimately, family ties proved too strong for ideological differences. In time the daughter “forgot politics” and visited her father “daily,” often staying the night when Guchkov entered a nursing home shortly before his death.

The same cannot be said of Guchkov’s marriage. For many years, as far back as World War I, the relationship had been a stormy one. No doubt one of the reasons for the marital rift was Guchkov’s amorous adventures which rivaled his travel exploits in scale. One particular family incident still captures his daughter’s imagination:

[She] saw her father lose his temper only once. . . . The moment was ill chosen: dinner for thirty people was laid on, the bell began to ring, guests were arriving . . . while in the dining-room at the other end of a long corridor, Mama, still in a dressing gown was loudly reproaching Papa for his infidelities. [The daughter] could observe the visitors with one eye and her weeping and gesticulating Mama with the other. And then all of a sudden, to her amazed delight, Papa took hold of the enormous tablecloth and quietly and unhurriedly walked out, pulling it all behind him—plates, glasses, silver, the lot.\textsuperscript{37}

With tongue in cheek she concludes: . . . mother’s \textit{scènes de jalousie} . . . were not without foundation: Papa was reputed to have begotten 200 children. . . . We never returned to the same sea-side resort two summers running, because the second summer all the babies in prams looked embarrassingly like me.\textsuperscript{38} The details of the breakup are obscure, but by the time they settled in Paris, and probably earlier, Guchkov and his wife no longer were living together. During this period Guchkov kept a mistress who outlived him, as did his wife, by a full generation.

Illness finally drove the seventy-three year old Guchkov to a nursing home in the fall of 1935. With confinement came nostalgia; he mused

\textsuperscript{35} Milyukov’s obituary on Guchkov notes simply that “Guchkov did not affiliate with any of the parties.” See \textit{P.N.}, no. 5441, 15 February 1936.

\textsuperscript{36} Letter dated 28 March 1976 from Traill to the author.

\textsuperscript{37} Traill, “Papa,” p. 5.

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., p. 6.
about his serf origins and about his roots in the poor peasant class. In a more serious vein he remembered the Duma and its ill-fated efforts to introduce a degree of rationality into the tsarist political system. The intervening years had induced a strain of pessimism bordering on fatalism. By the time of his death, Guchkov believed that the reformist alternative to revolution was an illusion. The "moral basis of the highest ruling circles" had been compromised and many "mistakes" were made. But, he told a friend, "even if these mistakes had not been made, it makes no difference, for nothing would have succeeded." 39

Death came quickly. Guchkov was an atheist ("I never found any good reason to believe in God") but as the end neared he relented just long enough to take Holy Communion. "Well, it can't do any harm," he told his daughter, "and after all we don't know, do we? So just in case." 40 He died on the morning of 14 February 1936:

The last words she heard from her father were Goethe's "Here you come again, you wavering figures." He whispered, "How does it go on?" She tried to remember but couldn't, and to this day she hasn't forgiven herself for having let him down that night, which was his last. 41

The funeral service was held three days later at the Nevsky Cathedral in Paris. The list of those in attendance reads like a chapter, perhaps several chapters, from a textbook on modern Russian history: Milyukov, Kerensky, Denikin, and Maklakov, to name only a few. 42 Following the service the body was cremated and the ashes taken to the cemetery of Pere Lachege.

39 Elkin, "Pamyati A. I. Guchkova," P.N., no. 5441, 18 February 1936. Elkin was the executor of the Guchkov family estate.
41 Ibid.
42 Vozrozhdenie, 28 February 1936.
Conclusion

Guchkov was one of the more controversial personalities of his time. He elicited strong reactions from all who knew him. The royal couple believed him to be a traitor to the autocracy. During World War I, Alexandra’s hatred of Guchkov reached hysterical proportions. She spent much of her time imagining ways to “get rid of” him, first by hanging, then by dueling—a poor choice it would seem! Almost always she referred to Guchkov as “Our Friend’s [Rasputin’s] enemy.”

In line with this the tsar’s backers believed that Guchkov was an opportunist willing to adopt any idea that furthered his own career. Above all they never forgave Guchkov for plotting, however clumsily, the overthrow of the monarchy. Prince A. D. Obolensky, Governor of Grodno Province during the Stolypin era, put it this way: “And so it went: our proletariat did not prepare the revolution, [it was] prepared by the General Alekseev, the rich kupets Guchkov . . . and many others, who supplied the revolution with money.”

More apt was Milyukov’s post-mortem assessment. “Guchkov,” he wrote, “was one of the few real politicians against the backdrop of the old regime”; a man “whose energies were thwarted by the narrow contours of Russia’s political culture.” In part this was a consequence of the obstructionism of the State Council, but mostly of the fact that it was the tsar and not the Duma whose power was crucial for the country. Milyukov further offered the intriguing but speculative suggestion that with his call for patriotism and the promotion of the empire’s dominant nationality, Guchkov might have found a large constituency if Russia’s “electoral field” had been broader.

Vladimir Nabokov, whose recollections were set down in 1918 while events and impressions were fresh in mind, also paints an interesting portrait. Nabokov, an outspoken liberal who had served in the short-lived First Duma and later went to jail for three months for signing the Vyborg Manifesto, sat with Guchkov in the Provisional Government. Long before most of the other members of the wartime cabinet, Nabokov realized that, no matter what the outcome, “any kind of war was incompatible with the problems which the revolution raised inside the country.” Guchkov too saw through this relationship:

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1 Letters of the Tsaritsa to the Tsar 1914–1916, pp. 91, 130, 135, 172.
2 Obolensky, Moi vospominaniya i rasmyshleniya, p. 97.
3 P.N., no. 5441, 15 February 1936.
He [Guchkov] spoke repeatedly on this theme in the second half of April [1917]. He constantly demanded that the Provisional Government surrender its authority, writing its own epitaph with a diagnosis of the situation and a prognosis for the future.⁴

Nabokov’s reflections serve as a reminder that Guchkov’s political personality—the reflexive stress on military preparedness and on the need for strengthening the state authority—was grounded in the peculiarities of the age itself. He came to maturity at a time of competitive nationalism on a grand, almost global scale. He was a frequent first-hand observer of the violent rhythm of that competition, whether in the Far East, in the great power rivalry in China and Russia’s clash with Japan, or closer to home, in the Balkans. On no fewer than three occasions—in 1905, in 1912, and during World War I—Guchkov’s appetite for politics fed itself on a steady diet of international tension.

In my opinion no label quite elucidates Guchkov’s ideology. His underlying point of view—a mixture of nationalism, political liberalism, and social conservatism—had greater affinity with modern counter-revolutionary movements than with attitudes inherited from Russia’s past. His intention was to substitute political mobilization for social mobilization, thus replacing revolutionary change from below (which threatened the social structure) with closely supervised change orchestrated from the top (which would serve the goals of the state). He defended the continuation of the monarchy, although personally estranged from the monarch himself. Monarchy was useful, he believed, both as a symbol of order and as an agent of thoroughgoing reform and greater national cohesion.

The unwillingness of the tsars to respond intelligently to overtures of assistance from elements of society is perhaps nowhere better illustrated than in the person of Guchkov. By 1905 it was clear that Nicholas’s Russia required the conscientious cooperation of society if it was to weather without convulsion the gigantic transformation the country was undergoing. Simply put, the minimal prerequisite for the survival of the dynasty was the active allegiance of men of energy and means, of men like Guchkov. In that sense Guchkov’s career in the Duma was a test of whether Russia could remain intact in the aftermath of the Revolution of 1905 and whether the parliament could begin to take hold in the public mind. Instead the philosophy of the tsar excluded a priori any changes that limited the royal authority and turned the atmosphere of the Third Duma from one of hope to despair.

One can fault Guchkov for many things: an excessively combative temperament; a tendency, as in the rivalry with Sukhomlinov, to personalize political issues; above all a blindness to the weak institutional underpinnings of the Stolypin Ministry. Finally, like so many others in 1917, he

⁴ Medlin and Parsons, eds., V. D. Nabokov, pp. 87–88.
fell into the trap posed by the war. Concern for reform gave way to a stress on authority alone, driven by the passion for victory.

In other respects, however, Guchkov discerned certain currents of reality which forever eluded the intelligentsia of his generation. He always felt that change from above, as imperial history had shown, opened wider vistas than change from below. Consequently he never truly felt that the virtue and wisdom of the people would in the end win out, once the monarchy gave way. He felt, as he intimated in 1914, that more probably the successor regime would rule with a heavy-handed authority reminiscent of previous rulers. And while he was troubled by Russia's economic woes and by conditions in the village, he found more troublesome Russia's military backwardness which, in case of war, could plunge the nation into uncontrollable chaos.5

This was the gist of Guchkov's faith, a faith, furthermore, partially vindicated by events. From 1914 to 1917 war weariness and the prospect of unmitigated suffering undermined state controls and opened the way for revolution. It was Lenin, himself believing in the people, but with a propensity for state-sponsored change, who restored in a new form the overthrown autocracy.

5 Theda Skocpol's important study of modern social revolutions concludes that "developments within the international state system...especially defeats in war...have directly contributed to virtually all outbreaks of revolutionary crisis." See States and Social Revolution, p. 23.
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