Medicine, Morality and Social Policy in Imperial Russia:

The Early Years of the Alcoholism Commission

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The growth of an urban working class in late nineteenth-century Russia created some new social problems and exacerbated many old ones. Inadequate housing, primitive sanitation, poor nourishment, and unrelieved overcrowding were the unenviable lot of those who worked in the new industrial cities. Contemporary observers, shocked by what they thought to be a simultaneous increase in crime, prostitution, drunkenness, and alcoholism, concluded that there had been a rapid and ominous decline in the behaviour of the common people. Historians of the period, both Soviet and western, have emphasized the government's seeming indifference to the social evils of rapid industrialization, and have left the impression that this indifference was shared by those who enjoyed economic and social privilege under the tsarist regime. Indeed, there has been a tendency to assume that only those who were politically left of centre understood social problems and were prepared to solve them. The present article examines the perceptions of the problem of drunkenness by the upper strata of Russian society, based on the work of the Commission for the Study of the Problem of Alcoholism. The evidence examined here suggests that respectable Russian society was far from indifferent to the problem of drunkenness : its difficulty lay in choosing between the conflicting diagnoses and prescriptions advanced by physicians, advocates of temperance, and social reformers.

Public drunkenness was scarcely a new problem in Russia. Since Muscovite times, travellers had commented upon the drinking habits of the peasants, not to mention those of the Court as well. With the rapid growth of cities in the nineteenth century, drunkenness became a serious social problem and, because of its association with a variety of petty crimes, one dealt with primarily by the police.[1] As the urban population increased, the widespread abuse of alcohol became a permanent feature of working-class life. By the mid-1890's drunkenness was prevalent not only among urban workers (many of whom were recent migrants from the

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[1] On the problem of drink in mid-nineteenth century St. Petersburg, see R. E. ZELNIK, *Labor and Society in Tsarist Russia: The Factory Workers of St. Petersburg, 1855-1870* (Stanford: 1971), pp. 247-251. For a brief but illuminating discussion of the effects of industrialization of drinking habits in England, see B. HARRISON, *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England 1815-1872* (London: 1971), pp. 40-44.

villages, and preserved rural drinking habits), but also in the armed forces, and even among children of school age. The government completely reorganized the sale of vodka during the 1890's. A spirit monopoly, under the control of the Chief Administration of Indirect Taxes, was substituted for the excise system which had prevailed since the 1860's. The monopoly was the work of the energetic and arrogant Minister of Finance, Sergei Iulevich Witte, and it soon became one of his most controversial innovations. Some saw the monopoly as a significant step forward in the battle against drunkenness, but to others it was a shameful hypocrisy perpetrated by a government whose revenues depended so substantially on the sale of alcohol. In 1897, the Ministry of Finance published what it claimed was clear evidence that the monopoly was actually reducing alcoholism and drunkenness, a claim which was not to go unchallenged.

The dimensions of the drink problem increased in the second half of the nineteenth century, and so did the ways in which that problem was perceived and defined. At mid-century, society recognized only drunkenness, a problem which was continually annoying and occasionally dangerous, but nevertheless a fairly simple matter to be dealt with by the police. However, during the next few decades modes of thought changed, often under the impetus of research in the relatively new disciplines of physiology, psychology, psychiatry, hygiene, and social pathology. The recognition that all drinking did not lead to drunkenness, nor all drunkenness to alcoholism, significantly revised the older notion that drinking was a problem for the police. The aspect of police was quickly reduced to only one among a number of approaches to the differing aspects of the problem. The involvement of the medical profession was a natural by-product of the growth of social medicine and public hygiene, subjects which derived their strength from the importance accorded them in the medical services organized by the county councils *(zemstvos)*. In the new hospitals and clinics of the late nineteenth century, physiologists and neuro-psychiatrists organized their work around the assumption that alcoholism was a disease, the causes of which could be discovered through scientific research. From England and Germany the temperance movement spread to Finland and Russia, bringing with it a perspective which stressed the moral responsibility of individuals and the need for coercive legislation. In the 1890's, there was a significant increase in the number of public and private societies and charities in Russia, including many which were concerned either directly or indirectly with the drink problem and its broader implications.

The Russian Society for the Protection of Public Health, founded in 1894, joined together various groups with an interest in public hygiene, including the government, medical scientists, temperance advocates, and philanthropists. Many of its members were already interested in the

problem of drunkenness, and one of them — the psychiatrist Dr. M. N. Nizhegorodtsev — soon proposed that the Society create a special commission to study the alcohol problem. By 1897, this proposal had the support of other influential members, including the Secretary (and future President), Dr. W. O. Gubert. As it happened, the Society had recently been asked by the government to devise rules for the operation of several new clinics for alcoholics. Instead of replying directly to this request, the Society agreed in December, 1897, to establish a Commission "to study alcoholism and the means to combat it, and to devise regulations governing the normal operation of clinics for alcoholics."[2]

Although it was neither a learned society nor a branch of the government, the Alcoholism Commission was to enjoy, as did its parent agency, a quasi-official status. Among its members were civil servants, academics, public health officers, medical specialists of various kinds, prominent temperance advocates, and a sprinkling of clergymen. The list of its ninety-five charter members is a rollcall of some of the most illustrious names in St. Petersburg and Moscow, among them the celebrated jurist A. F. Kori, Count P. A. Geiden and V. D. Kuzmin-Karavaev, all distinguished public figures.[3] Among the physicians who joined the Commission was the eminent Professor A. Ia. Danilevskii, a member of the Imperial Academy of Sciences, and Director of the Imperial Academy of Military Medicine. The President of the Commission was the well-known psychiatrist Nizhegorodtsev, who was also a member of the Board of the St. Petersburg City Council (*gorodskaia duma*). Dr. G. I. Dembo, Editor of the Physician's Gazette (*Vrachebnaia gazeta*) became its Secretary. Among the members were several who had first-hand knowledge of the effects of alcoholism: Professor D. A. Dril' of the Psycho-Neurological Institute, Dr. V. M. Bekhterev of the Asylum for Lunatics and Victims of Nervous Diseases who was also a member of the Medical Council of the Ministry of the Interior, Dr. A. L. Mendel'son of the Institution for the Relief of Alcoholism, and Dr. D. P. Nikol'skii, a factory doctor and an instructor in industrial hygiene at the Technological, Metallurgical, and Polytechnic Institutes. Two other charter members, A. A. Shumakher and V. G. Kotel'nikov were senior officials of the Ministry of Finance, which naturally took a cautious interest in the proceedings of the Commission.

The first meeting of the Alcoholism Commission was held on 7 January, 1898 (Old Style). Nizhegorodtsev and Dembo were officially

[2] G. I. Dembo, *Esquisse sur l'activité de la Commission pour l'étude de l'alcoolisme (1899-1900)* (St. Petersburg: 1900). p. 3. The proceedings of the Commission are published in full; see *Trudy Kommissii po voprosu ob alkogolizme i merakh bor'by s nim.* Pod. red. M. N. Nizhegorodtseva. *Vypuski* I-XII (St. Petersburg: 1900-1912). *Izdatel' stvo russkogo obshchiny okhraneiia narodnogo zdraviia.* Hereafter cited as *TKA.*

[3] See the list of founding members as of 7 January, 1898, found with *TKA*, Vyp. I.

elected President and Secretary, respectively.[4] The Commission was formally attached to the First Section (Biology) of the Russian Society for the Protection of Public Health, an apparently innocuous decision which was later to become a source of some contention. The enthusiasm of the new members, combined with the problems of organization, produced an initial period of conspicuous activity. No less than fourteen full meetings of the Commission were held in 1898, twelve in 1899, ten in 1900, and nine in 1901. In addition, members attended meetings of various subcommittees according to their own special interests. By 1900, ten subcommittees had been established, only one of which attended directly to the government's original request concerning rules for the operation of clinics for alcoholics. The others encompassed various social, economic and medical aspects of the problem of alcoholism.[5]

During the first few months, the subjects discussed were predictably rather dull, as members sought to inform themselves more precisely about definitions of alcoholism, current medical opinion concerning the physiological effects of alcohol, patterns of consumption and regulation in Russia and abroad, and similar matters. Not until the autumn of 1898 did the Commission venture into those aspects of the problem which were certain to be controversial: the causes of mass alcoholism in Russia; the reasons for its prevalence among certain groups, especially urban workers, school-children, and soldiers; and the significance of the spirit monopoly. These subjects could not be seriously discussed without embarking on a critical analysis of the social and economic policies of the government.

The immediate Russian situation was not, however, the only source of controversy. Nowhere in Europe at this time was there general agreement, either about the precise nature of what was loosely called the alcohol problem, or about the best methods of dealing with that problem. These subjects were discussed at length by learned men everywhere, with the (perhaps not surprising) result that there was more disagreement than ever. Russia was no exception to this general pattern. The Commission

[4] At its inception, the Commission had ninety-five individual members. Four organized groups also joined: the St. Petersburg Society of Psychiatrists, the St. Petersburg University Juridical Society, and the Societies of Neuropathology and Psychiatry at both the University of Moscow and the University of Kazan'. A further twenty-six individuals had joined by February, 1899. See above, n. 3.

[5] The subcommittees were organized as follows: (i) Education (i.e. to stamp out alcoholism in schools), (ii) Juridical Psychiatric Matters (the legal and medical aspects of hospital care for alcoholics), (iii) Military Affairs (i.e. to curb alcoholism in the army and the fleet), (iv) Evaluation of the Effects of the State Spirit Monopoly, (v) Role of the Clergy in the Struggle with Alcoholism, (vi) Statistics (i.e. to gather reliable information on consumption, sale, abuse, etc.), (vii) Medical Matters (i.e. to find improved methods of treating alcoholics), (viii) Temperance Societies and Guardianships of Public Sobriety (i.e. to evaluate their work and to encourage liaison with them), (ix) Measures to be taken to improve the lot of the industrial working class, (x) Research on the physiological effects of alcohol.

was no closer to a precise definition of alcoholism after two years of work than it had been at its first session. In 1900, its Secretary, Dr. Dembo, could only describe alcoholism as "a complex social phenomenon which causes incalculable damage to the health and morality of the people and which leads to the degeneration of entire classes of society."[6] There is a wide variety of opinion, he continued, about the causes of alcoholism, which

> Some see exclusively in economic terms; others in ignorance, in the lack of intellectual development, in a legal situation which is far from satisfactory, in the discontent and moral revolt of both isolated individuals and whole sections of the population; a third group point to the epicurean and utilitarian basis of popular philosophy; still others argue that misery is not the cause, but on the contrary the product of alcoholism.[7]
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> The development of alcoholism is encouraged by a combination of various causes: material or economic conditions, comprising the totality of economic and sanitary conditions in which people live; moral and intellectual factors (conditions of the social milieu, its development, level of education, legal situation, the general philosophic ideas of the people, moral discontent with their position); the influence of the conditions under which alcoholic beverages are made and sold : psychic causes (imitation) and biological causes (heredity and degeneracy); the physiological attributes (the properties of alcohol and its effect on the organism); and finally, peculiarities of race and, perhaps, of climate.[8]

What Dr. Dembo really meant was that all these positions had been expressed in the Commission, but that new members had been reluctant to assess in a rigorous fashion their relative validity. His learned discourse on multiple causation was in fact a committee's compromise masquerading as a set of findings.

Given the composition of the Commission, it was probably inevitable that agreement would not easily be reached. Its members were by no means unanimous in regarding alcoholism as a unique problem to be solved by special methods. Certainly, for many physicians and medical scientists, alcoholism was a discrete, identifiable problem — a disease of the human organism — but one which could be dealt with effectively only when its precise dimensions were known. Hence their natural starting point was to encourage research into the physiological effects of alcohol on the human body, and into the biological aspects of alcoholism. Several other physicians, however — usually those primarily interested in psychiatry — saw alcoholism as merely a symptom of a much larger social problem: the appalling physical and moral environment of the urban working class. Their first priority was not scientific research, but rather the improvement of the living conditions of those industrial workers who

6 DEMBO, *op. cit.*, p. 86.
7 *Loc. cit.*.
8 *Ibid.*, pp. 86-87.

were being driven to alcohol as a means of escaping from otherwise intolerable surroundings. Nor was their point of view the only one in which alcoholism figured as a symptom of a larger, more important problem. There were also those who saw the increasing dependence of the masses on alcohol as grim evidence of the weakening moral fibre and collapsing social discipline of the Russian people. They attributed this decay not to the failings of society but to those of the individuals involved. Hence this group advocated a rigorous and authoritarian morality which would, they believed, restore moral sense and self-discipline to their wayward countrymen. The history of the Alcoholism Commission is therefore not only a story of disagreements between the Commission and the government, but also, and perhaps more importantly, one of conflicts among the "physiologists," the "social improvers," and the "moral suasionists."

That the Commission seriously discussed, and attempted to alleviate the causes of mass alcoholism among workers, was due very largely to the influence of the leading "social improver," Dmitrii Adreevich Dril'. A professor of psychiatry and an adviser to the Ministry of Justice, Dril' was foremost among those who believed that alcoholism was a product of deplorable living and working conditions. He believed that the Commission's job was to expose and publicize the truth about the causes of alcoholism, and to encourage by every available means the elimination of the conditions which fostered alcoholism and drunkenness. Dril' presented a succinct and forceful statement of his views in a paper entitled "Some Causes of Mass Alcoholism and the Means to Combat Them," which was discussed at the Commission's tenth meeting in October 1898.[9] He had little patience with the moralistic advocates of temperance, or with petty reformers who would make alcohol more difficult to purchase and consume. He was convinced that such proposals were pointless: "The masses will simply find another means of poisoning themselves, because under present conditions some form of narcotic is indispensable to them."[10] As an example of what he meant by unfavourable social conditions, he pointed to the plight of the small industrial producers, struggling to survive in an economic climate which grew harsher every day. They and their families, journeymen and apprentices were soon forced to share overcrowded and unsanitary living quarters, to exist on an inadequate diet, and to lead a harsh and monotonous existence. Often they all worked eighteen hours per day. Dril' also attacked the prevailing system of industrial apprenticeship. It was inevitable, he claimed, that such long hours amid deplorable conditions would produce a debilitated human organism and a lifelong reduction in the working capacity of the individuals con-

[9] The full text is in *TKA*, Vyp. II, part 2, pp. 93-110. For the discussion which it produced see Vyp. II, part 1, pp. 100-107.

[10] *TKA*, Vyp. II, part 2, p. 95.

cerned. Is it any wonder, he asked, that alcoholism flourished where conditions such as these were normal?

Dril' concluded his paper by calling upon the Commission to urge the government to introduce a more extensive and effective body of industrial legislation, and to suppress the prevailing system of apprenticeship. The latter would necessitate, he presumed, the creation of a network of vocational schools, and the provision of cheaper housing and better nourishment for the labouring population.

Dril's opinions were quickly confirmed by the findings of Dr. N. I. Grigoriev, a physician and the editor of the temperance newspaper *Vestnik trezvosti.* In a study of alcoholism among the workers of St. Petersburg, Grigoriev found that their working day varied between 14-17 and 18-20 hours, and that their diet, which consisted largely of water-based liquids and starchy foods, was wholly inadequate.[11] Workers and apprentices usually slept on the floor, either in the workshop itself, or in an adjacent kitchen. Their wages did not exceed eight rubles per month, except for those who did not receive room and board, who might earn as much as twenty-five rubles per month. In these circumstances, workers required little urging from their companions to seek comfort from drinking. Grigoriev found that 132 out of the 470 working-class alcoholics he interviewed had started to drink as apprentices with their comrades.

The Commission soon took steps to alleviate the conditions cited by Dril' and Grigoriev. After a lengthy debate, a brief was sent to the Minister of Finance asking for:

(i) The introduction of special legislation to regulate working conditions in branches of industry not covered by the existing factory laws, e.g. artisans' *ateliers,* light railways, builders' and machinists' establishments;

(ii) The creation of an enforcement agency which would ensure that the new legislation was properly implemented;

(iii) The founding of a series of vocational schools as an alternative to apprenticeship.

Among those matters which the Commission hoped would be governed by legislation were the location, conditions and hours of work, the terms of apprenticeship, and the standards of housing and nourishment for apprentices. Concurrently, another brief was sent to the Ministry of the Interior, arguing for the institution of proper medical and sanitary inspection of all workers' lodgings, not merely of those connected with factories, as was then the case.

[11] N. I. Grigoriev, "O p'ianstve sredi materovykh vg. S.-Peterburge," in *TKA.* Vyp. II, part 2, pp. 111-119.

Neither Ministry took any action as a result of these proposals. The Commission evidently did not pursue matters further at this stage. Whether this inactivity was by design or the result of apathy is not clear from the minutes, but it seems safe to assume that members were generally unwilling to risk an open clash with the government by publicly exposing its indifference to sensible proposals. In any case, the enthusiastic Dril' soon turned the attention of the Commission to a related problem, that of housing for the urban workers. He believed that the Commission should point out to municipal authorities, philanthropic bodies, and temperance societies, that there was an urgent need to create inexpensive but adequate housing for workers. He was particularly optimistic that a favourable response might be obtained from the Empress Alexandra's Guardianship of Workshops and Workhouses. The Guardianship, a charity under the patronage of the imperial family, had recently adopted a more active role in dealing with social problems. A special petition, drafted by Dril', was sent to the Guardianship, apprising its directors of the Commission's opinion that poor housing was an important cause of the increase in alcoholism among workers.

If Dril's fellow members of the Commission thought that he would allow them to assume that the problem would be dealt with elsewhere, they were wrong. Anticipating a favourable response from outside agencies, Dril' next persuaded the Commission to work out a model set of rules for a society devoted to the financing and construction of workers' housing. He saw the Commission's role as that of a catalyst, actively involved in ensuring that social problems were responded to with appropriate speed and expertise. He put his ideas before the Commission at several meetings held in 1901. His scheme involved the creation of a society which would finance the building of workers' housing by selling shares to investors and to prospective tenants, with the help of interest-free loans from public bodies. Investors were to receive a fixed dividend of not more than 4½ per cent per annum, while tenants need buy only one share at a low price, and thereafter pay a low monthly rent. Dril' was keen to see such a society formed immediately, so that the feasibility and utility of the scheme could be demonstrated. He expected to receive immediate support from the Minister of Finance, "whose assiduous concern for the productive forces of the country is well known." [12]

In Dril's opinion, the great merit of his scheme was that it circumvented the objections of those who argued against the provision of housing on a charitable basis. He emphasized that his proposal would encourage the needy to the thrifty and responsible, and hence to help

[12] *TKA*, Vyp. IX, part 1, pp. 626-627. Dril's proposals bear a striking similarity to those which led to the formation in 1857 of the Society for the Improvement of the Lodgings of the Labouring Population. For its brief and undistinguished history, see ZELNIK, *op. cit.*, pp. 241-2.

themselves. At the same time, the scheme was an attractive proposition for investors, because a regular, fixed dividend would be forthcoming. He argued that this was the best means of combating not only the housing problem itself, but also such attendant evils as alcoholism, prostitution, crime, and the decline of family life. Indeed, he frequently stressed the responsibility of the possessing classes to involve themselves actively in solving such social problems : "Who, it is asked, should help to satisfy the present housing needs of those who labour, but who form part of the urban poor? There can be no hesitation in answering this question. Those who can help should do so, and by this I mean the more well-to-do part of the social structure and the powerful state."[13] On the same occasion, he expressed this opinion somewhat more eloquently: "the stronger and, indeed, more enlightened members of society, those who perceive the indisputable interrelationship of cause and effect in the realities of public life, are duty bound to settle these problems for the sake of their own future and that of generations yet unborn."[14]

After considerable debate, and without any semblance of unanimity, members of the Commission finally approved Dril's proposal. Some of them were frankly sceptical that the living habits and moral standards of workers could be improved dramatically merely by placing them in a new environment. Others objected that Russian investors would not cooperate, and that the scheme would quickly flounder for lack of public support. The most controversial aspect of the proposal proved to be Dril's assumption that workers could be trusted to settle down in the accommodation provided without creating problems for the managing society. It was pointed out that he had said nothing about how such an establishment would be supervised. Skarzhinskii, an official from the Ministry of Finance, warned that worker-shareholders would undoubtedly engage in speculation by subletting their accommodation at higher rents to other needy workers.[15] Naturally, Dril' did not share this dismal opinion of working-class ethics, and responded with a spirited defence of the self-help principle.

Events proved Dril's initial optimism about outside support to have been well founded. After his proposals had been approved by the Alcoholism Commission in November 1901, they were discussed at a meeting which included Prince A. P. Ol'denburg, friend and confidant of the Tsar; the Assistant Minister of Finance, V. I. Kovalevskii; and representatives of the Workshop and Workhouse Guardians, the Russian Society for the Protection of Public Health, and the St. Petersburg Guardians of Public Sobriety. This group accepted, with minor modifications,

[13] *TKA*, Vyp. IX, part 1, pp. 625-626.
[14] *Ibid.*, p. 625.
[15] *Ibid.*, p. 616.

Dril's proposed rules, and in November 1902 formed the Society to Combat Housing Needs *(Tovarichestvo bor'by s zhilishchnoi nyzhdoi).* The Tzar permitted the Ministry of the Interior to purchase 100,000 rubles' worth of shares and to grant the Society a long-term loan of 200,000 rubles. The city of St. Petersburg provided a short-term loan of 150,000 rubles. With this basic capital, and with the assistance of many private investors, the Society undertook the construction and letting of five apartment blocks and related facilities in the Gavan' district of Vasilevskii Island. Gavan' Workers' City *(Gavan' skii Rabochii Gorodok),* as the completed project was called, opened its doors in 1906.[16] The Gavan' project was to remain as one of the few pieces of evidence that the alcoholism had some tangible effect on the society in which it functioned.

The substantial support which the Society to Combat Housing Needs received from the Ministry of the Interior merits some comment. Its longtime rival, the Ministry of Finance, headed by Witte, had already earned the appreciation of the Alcoholism Commission. In January 1900, it had granted the Commission 15,000 rubles to support research into the physiological effects of alcohol on the human body. This grant was the more welcome because it was evidently secured with very little difficulty.[17] Perhaps there is some significance in the fact that this unaccustomed generosity originated with the very Ministry which had ignored the Commission's lengthy brief on the needs of industrial workers and apprentices. Throughout 1899, the Ministry of Finance had also been heavily criticized in the Commission for its handling of the spirit monopoly. Perhaps this grant was a deliberate attempt by Witte to confine the work of the Commission to medical and scientific research, lest the zeal of Dril' and some of his colleagues should have embarrassed the Ministry of Finance. If such was his purpose, it was thwarted by the Ministry of the Interior, whose support for Dril' and his Society encouraged those who regarded the alcohol problem as a matter for social reform, not scientific investigation. Here then is one more example of these two ministries working at cross purposes, a phenomenon which has been commented upon by many historians of the period. In this case, the action of the Ministry of the Interior in supporting the Society to Combat Housing was in accord with its policy of supporting a broad programme of paternalistic social reforms aimed at improving the living standards of workers by providing better housing, nutrition, and recreation. As Dimitry Pospielovsky has recently demonstrated, the notorious Zubatov experiment in "police socialism," far from being merely a crude attempt to contain the revolutionary potential of the workers, was an integral part

[16] For a full description of the Gavan' project, see N. I. DMITRIEV, "Dmitrii Andreevich Dril', uchreditel' "Tovarichestvo bor'by s zhilishchroi nyzhdoi," in *TKA*, Vyp. XI-XII, part 3, pp. 37-47.

[17] *TKA*, Vyp. VII-VIII, part 1, pp. 552-554. See also DEMBO, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

of the social policy of the Ministry of the Interior.[18] The Alcoholism Commission thus found itself caught up in the continuing conflict between these two Ministries over the social consequences of rapid industrial development.

The debates over Dril's housing proposals had raised, albeit in a muted fashion, the most serious question which the Commission was to face: whether the moral standards of Russian society could be improved, and if so, how, and by whom. There was again a predictable lack of unanimity among the members, especially when they discussed prostitution, for although everyone agreed that this problem could not be separated from alcoholism, no one had a convincing explanation of the precise relationship between these two social evils. In Russia, no less than in contemporary Western Europe or England, the rights and wrongs of legalized prostitution were hotly debated, although the Russian version of this conflict lacked that element of feminist zeal which was so much a part of the struggle elsewhere.

Even while the Commission was still debating the measures proposed by Dril' in 1901, another of its members demanded that it strongly endorse the abolition of legalized prostitution. In this case the advocate was D. N. Borodin, a lawyer, who was better known as editor of the journal *Temperance and Thrift (Trezvost' i berezhlivost')*. Arguing that prostitution was both morally wrong and hygienically indefensible, Borodin demanded the closing of all brothels as part of a frontal assault on all forms of this social evil. In his opinion, prostitution flourished in Russia because of adverse social conditions, inadequate law, and the predisposition of the people for indolence and license. He therefore expected to stamp it out by employing a combination of social action, rigorous discipline, and law reform. Where poverty or unemployment was driving women to prostitution, he would fight back by providing free medical care and public assistance payments, as well as by increasing the number of occupations open to women. In order to combat the exposure of young women to a lax moral environment, he called for increased attention to the moral development of the people. He even proposed that there should be some form of supervision, both medical and moral, over young girls and women working as apprentices, in factories, and in domestic service. Furthermore, he called for greatly strengthened laws against procuring, the keeping of bawdy houses, and trafficking in women.

Borodin has assumed, but fell short of demonstrating, that his campaign against prostitution was relevant to the struggle against alcoholism. Dril' found these proposals illogical, and pointed out that closure of the brothels would simply increase prostitution in other forms, while doing

[18] D. Pospielovsky, *Russian Police Trade Unionism: Experiment or Provocation?* (London: 1971), *passim.*

nothing whatever to curb alcoholism.[19] At this point there intervened in the debate the formidable Dr. M. I. Pokrovskaia of the Women's Section of the Russian Society for the Protection of Public Health. She also demanded an end to legalized prostitution, arguing that the prevalence of alcoholism among prostitutes was due entirely to the heavy-handed behaviour of the medical police. Since they treated all girls found alone in cities as if they were prostitutes, the poor unfortunates (she claimed) had to turn to alcohol to endure the realization that others thought them fallen women.[20] Not surprisingly, these allegations evoked a rejoinder from A. E. Fedorov, a member of the Medical Police Committee of the Ministry of the Interior. He pointed out that brothels fulfilled a useful social function by satisfying the needs of psychopaths and wealthy impotents, and that, in any case, neither alcoholism nor syphilis were as prevalent inside brothels as among prostitutes working on their own.[21]

Prostitution was clearly an extremely divisive issue within the Commission. With the poles of opinion so far apart, there was little chance of agreement. For the pragmatic Fedorov and those who shared his views, prostitution was an unpleasant fact of life, best controlled by a system of inspection. His position was eminently defensible from the point of view of safeguarding public health. To a "moral suasionist" such as Borodin, however, the evils of prostitution in any form made irrelevant any discussion of whether girls in inspected brothels were more hygienic than streetwalkers. Dril' found himself agreeing both with the pragmatists' argument that suppression of brothels was a self-defeating exercise, and with the moralists' insistence that popular depravity must be reduced. Although a subcommittee was created to draft proposals regarding alcoholism and prostitution, it was unable to arrive at a compromise between these positions.[22]

These debates, inconclusive though they were, are a forceful reminder that virtually all these people accepted the concept of moral depravity, and what is more, believed in their own ability to diagnose and cure this terrible ill. In other words, depravity was an indentifiable abnormality of the human organism, like disease or insanity. Just as they did not question their ability to prescribe treatment for the sick or the insane, so they did not question it in the case of a patient suffering from moral depravity. And since the patient in this case was their own homeland, it was all the more important to them to stop this new illness before it reached epidemic proportions and destroyed everyone. Men troubled by the

[19] *TKA*, Vyp. IX, part 1, p. 620.

[20] *TKA*, Vyp. VII-VIII, part 3, pp. 59-61.

[21] *TKA*, Vyp. IX, part 1, p. 634.

[22] The issue was not raised again until the end of 1909, at the First All-Russian Congress on the Struggle with Drunkenness.

deteriorating moral fibre of their country were naturally also concerned by the state of the armed forces of the Empire. The probable fate of a country which might find itself defended by drunken and promiscuous degenerates was a more than sufficient basis for this concern, but there were other reasons as well. In the absence of a system of compulsory primary education, the period of military service provided a rare opportunity for instructing the masses in the dangers of alcohol. Moreover, the enforced isolation of military life also provided a potential laboratory in which to demonstrate the efficacy of those alternatives to alcohol favoured by the temperance movement: tea-drinking and recreational diversions. Carried away by their desire to make the best use of these opportunities, the members of the Commission seem to have persuaded themselves that they could suddenly outlaw the ancient soldierly pastime of drinking. In April 1899, they petitioned the Ministry of War to enforce abstinence throughout the Russian army.

If their optimism was misplaced, it was not wholly groundless. During the preceding thirty years there had been periodic attempts to reduce the consumption of alcohol in the army. Free rations of liquor, distributed to all ranks at least nine times a year, were an old tradition in the Russian army. It was also customary for officers, at their own pleasure and expense, to treat their men to liquor to celebrate some achievement or help them through times of severe distress. In 1873, a War Ministry investigating committee had been urged by most of the army medical inspectors to reduce or abolish the liquor ration. The ration was indeed suppressed in 1886, but only during peacetime.[23] In 1899, the Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich, Commander of the St. Petersburg Military District, forbade the sale of liquor in all regimental canteens under his command. However, the proposals made by the Alcoholism Commission went a great deal further than had been contemplated by any military authority.

The Commission asked the Minister of War to abandon the liquor ration entirely, in wartime as well as in peacetime. Moreover, they proposed that officers should be prohibited from sponsoring distributions of liquor, that the sale of liquor in army canteens be forbidden, and that liquor be banned from army barracks and camps. They asked that soldiers receive, in place of the liquor ration, a daily supply of tea, and that tearooms, lecture halls, and other recreational facilities be made available in or near army barracks. They also proposed that all officers should conduct an extensive educational programme to teach the men about the evils of

[23] The island of Sakhalin was exempt from this regulation, presumably because of the extraordinary burden which its climate imposed on the troops.

alcohol, and asked that the curricula of military schools be revised accordingly.[24]

The Ministry of War gave scant consideration to these proposals. A formal reply was sent to the Commission in April 1900, by the Assistant Chief of the General Staff. He pointed out that the liquor ration was already limited by army regulations, and observed that its unconditional suppression "would be inconsistent with army life."[25] His sole concession was to agree that in future, training manuals would include a new section on the harmful effects of drinking spirits in place of an existing section which appeared to condone moderate drinking. The Commission made a considerably milder approach to the Navy at the same time, but it met with similar indifference from the Naval Ministry.[26] Members of the Commission made no attempt at the time to press matters further, and turned instead to seek other ways by which to promote temperance among the people. In later years, however, they were to claim that Russia would have fared considerably better in the war against Japan if their proposals had been taken seriously by the authorities in 1899.[27] The grand, if improbable, notion of an abstemious army was never wholly abandonned by members of the Alcoholism Commission. They raised the subject once more in 1909-10, but again without success. Nevertheless, there was one secret convert to the idea who was far more able than they to see it realized: the Tsar himself. Although the Commission was itself defunct when wartime prohibition was launched in 1914, its members would have wholeheartedly approved of such a policy.

By far the most complex and controversial subject examined by the Commission in the years before 1905 was the State Spirit Monopoly, administered by the Chief Administration of Indirect Taxes of the Ministry of Finance. The examination necessarily ranged very widely, since the monopoly was much more than simply a revenue-collecting scheme for the marketing of rectified spirits. Count Witte, the originator of the monopoly, had argued that its establishment would achieve four goals which could not be met by the prevailing exercise system: (i) the population would become accustomed to a more regular pattern of consumption in place of the traditional drinking sprees; (ii) the quality of the spirits sold would be improved and maintained; (iii) the alcohol trade would be

[24] *TKA*, Vyp. IX, part 1, pp. 272-273; see also DEMBO, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-38. These proposals made in April, 1899, were reinforced in May, when the Seventh Congress of the Pirigov Society of Russian Doctors took a similar position.

[25] The full text of this reply is in *TKA*, Vyp. X, Part 3, pp. 161-162.

[26] It cannot be said that the Commission lacked influential personal contacts in the armed forces. The Director of the Imperial Academy of Military Medicine and the Chief Medical Inspector of the Fleet were both members of the Alcoholism Commission.

[27] See the minutes of the Commission's sixty-eighth meeting held on 28 November, 1907. *TKA*, Vyp. X, part 1, pp. 715-716.

more effectively policed, eliminating the possibility of fraud; (iv) persons of high moral standing would be attracted to the trade.[28]

Obviously one means by which the Commission could evaluate the monopoly (and naturally the one preferred by the Ministry of Finance) was to judge how far it had fulfilled Witte's announced goals. It was also possible, of course, to treat the monopoly as primarily a revenue-collecting agency, and to measure its success or failure by the efficiency with which it brought revenue into the treasury. From a broader perspective, the Russian monopoly could be compared with several other state-run schemes for the marketing of alcohol, such as that established in Switzerland in 1887, or the various schemes based on the Gothenburg system which were operating in Sweden, Norway, and Finland. Moreover, since a part of the revenue from the monopoly was devoted to supporting the local Guardianships of Public Sobriety (instituted concurrently with the monopoly after 1896), the Commission could examine the effectiveness of these agencies in promoting temperance compared with, for example, the efforts of private temperance societies.

The initial round of discussions on the monopoly was a lively one in which members paraded their prejudices in an unusually open fashion. The monopoly and all its works were denounced by those closely connected with the temperance cause, led of course by Borodin. Predictably, the monopoly was stoutly defended by bureaucrats from the Ministry of Finance, among them Ia. R. Mintslov and A. A. Shumakher.[29] After several months of argument, it became clear that some of the more outspoken members of the Commission were bent on a collision with the Ministry of Finance. At that point the President, Nizhegorodtsev, stepped in to prevent such an occurrence.

No matter from which perspective the monopoly was analysed, the temperance advocates and the bureaucrats found themselves contradicting each other.[30] Mintslov asserted that the monopoly had fulfilled

[28] See DEMBO, *op. cit.*, p. 50; also S. Iu. WITTE, *Vospominaniia, Tsarstvovanie Nikolaia II* (Moscow & Petrograd: 1923), Tom. I, pp. 66-69.

[29] Actual Privy Councillor Arkadii Alexandrovich Shumakher, not to be confused with Alexander Alexandrovich, who was Director of the St. Petersburg Office of the State Bank.

[30] The debates on the monopoly may be followed in detail in *TKA*, Vyp. I, part 1, pp. 23-28, 74-77, 84-86; Vyp. II, part 1, p. 112; Vyp. III, part 1, pp. 114-159, 165-211. The most important papers are also reprinted: see D. N. BORODIN, "Vinnaia monopolia (ekonomicheskoe i nravstvennoe znachenie reformy)," Vyp. III, part 2, pp. 133-179; I.K. DYMSHA, "Kazennaia vinnaia monopolia i eia znachenie dlia bor'by s' p'ianstvom," Vyp. IV, part 2, pp. 337-360; I. P. MINTSLOV, "Dushevoe potreblenie spirta v nekotorykh inostrannykh gosudarstvakh i v Rossii," Vyp. I, part 2, pp. 1-24; I. P. MINTSLOV, "Monopolia torgovli spirtnymi naptikami v nekotorykh inostrannykh gosudarstvakh i v Rossii," Vyp. I, part 2, pp. 51-76; A. A. SHUMAKHER, "K voprosu o vozmozhnosti sokrashcheniia mest' prodazhi pitei i vremeni torgovli v poslednikh v raione kazennoi prodazhi pitei," Vyp. III, part 2, pp. 179-206.

Witte's aims because it had reduced the number of outlets at which spirits were sold, and because the quality of all spirits sold within the law had been improved. Borodin replied that these claims were offset by the fact that the monopoly had moved drunkenness out of the taverns and into the streets. Furthermore, he argued, persons of high moral character had not in fact been attracted to the trade; on the contrary, profiteers still sold government spirits in the remaining private shops, while the administration of the monopoly itself was notoriously corrupt. Borodin dwelt at length on the plight of rural communes, which he said had suffered a serious blow to their financial stability because of the inception of the monopoly, for they had been deprived of the revenue previously obtained from selling tavern licenses. Mintslov replied that such allegations were nonsense. Since the peasants were now able to retain money previously spent in taverns, he observed, the communes must have become wealthier, not poorer, as a result of the operation of the monopoly.

These opposing forces inevitably employed to their own advantage comparisons between the Russian monopoly and the Gothenburg system.[31] Borodin and the temperance advocates made much of the fact that private sale for profit still flourished alongside the Russian monopoly, whereas it had been completely eliminated in Norway and Sweden. He argued that the Gothenburg system was especially praiseworthy because the revenue which it produced was used to defray actual needs at the local level, not swallowed up in the coffers of a gargantuan state treasury.[32] He also found it superior because consumption off licensed premises was forbidden. Since alcohol could only be obtained by those consuming a hot meal on the premises, it naturally followed (so he argued) that the incidence of drunkenness had been significantly reduced. The temperance advocates favoured the adoption in Russia of the Gothenburg system, not of course as a permanent solution to the alcohol problem, but as a first step on the road to the eventual elimination of the production and consumption of spirits.

[31] The essence of the Gothenburg system lay in its virtual elimination of private profit from the sale of alcohol. A tiny profit of about 6% went to pay the expenses of the trade overseers, but the balance went into the public treasury. Under the Norwegian law of 1894, 65% of the profits from the sale of alcohol were donated to the treasuries of workers' benevolent societies, 15% to urban and rural communes, to be spend only on temperance activity, and 20% to the treasuries of the towns whence the revenue was obtained. For further information, see E. R. L. GOULD, *The Gothenburg System of Liquor Traffic* (Washington: 1893); E. A. PRATT, *Licensing and Temperance in Sweden, Norway and Denmark* (London: 1907).

[32] It should be pointed out that the expenses which were met by the revenues from the sale of alcohol might otherwise have had to be covered by increased taxes on property and income for the middle class. No Russian disciple of the Gothenburg system ever cited this fact as a reason for its adoption, but the importance of this aspect cannot have been far from the minds of the debaters.

Mintslov, in a statement which may be taken as reflecting ministerial policy, replied that although the Gothenburg system was "well-ordered in the theory," it would be "inapplicable here, because the people lack the necessary sophistication."[33] Clearly he meant that the Russian government, which itself had been involved in curtailing local self-government, was unwilling to accept the extensive autonomy and public participation on which the Gothenburg system rested. Moreover, the Ministry which he served was not prepared to disperse into other hands the substantial revenues which the spirit monopoly brought into the state treasury.

A similar division of opinion between temperance advocates and bureaucrats was apparent when the Commission discussed the work of the Guardianships of Public Sobriety.[34] Once again it was Borodin who led the attack. He claimed that the Guardianships were useless organizations, which at best occupied themselves with busy-work, and blamed their inactivity on the fact that they were dominated by bureaucrats, particularly those from the Ministry of Finance.[35] His comments were echoed by Professor I. K. Dymsha, who argued that this close relationship with the bureaucracy had made it impossible for the Guardianships to fulfil one of their chief tasks, the policing of the drink trade at the local level. According to Dymsha, instead of ensuring that the quality of the alcohol available in government and private shops met the appropriate standards, the Guardians were turning a blind eye to the most flagrant abuses.

The case for the Guardianships, such as it was, was put by Shumakher. He tried to impress his audience by reciting statistics concerning the number of restaurants, tearooms, libraries, Sunday schools, choirs, and theatres which had been established by the Guardianships throughout the nineteen provinces in which they then operated. These activities were, he claimed, proof that these bodies were indeed protecting the people from the viles of alcohol by presenting them with attractive alternatives to the consumption of spirits. Shumakher, however, made some concessions to the critics of ministerial policy. He admitted that the non-bureaucratic element among the Guardians should be increased, and that each local agency should have permanent executive officers who could act as inspectors of the liquor trade. He even conceded that the efforts of some Guardians to hold lectures and conferences had sometimes been frustrated by the restrictions on public meetings which had been imposed by the

[33] DEMBO, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

[34] For minutes of the discussions see *TKA*, Vyp. IV, part 1, pp. 230-237, 241-245, 255-258. The most important paper on this subject has been reprinted; see A. A. SHUMAKHER. "Popechitel' stva o narodnoi trezvosti," *TKA*. Vyp. IV, part 2, pp. 283-336.

[35] For the composition and duties of the Guardianships, see the article, "Popechitel'stva o narodnoi trezvosti," in F. A. BROKHAUS and I. A. EFRON, *'Entsiklopedicheskii Slovar'* (St. Petersburg: 1898), Vol. XXIV, pp. 547-8.

Ministry of Public Instruction, and that efforts were being made to secure a special exemption. However, he had no answer to the critics' most serious charge — that it was patently absurd to expect a serious commitment to the cause of temperance from agencies which were creatures of the government spirit monopoly, financed out of the profits derived from its operations.

This critical discussion of the monopoly and its related agencies by the Commission was politically dangerous. The Commission appeared to be condemning the government for deriving its revenue from immoral earnings. These discussions could easily have been interpreted by the enemies of *zemstvo* liberalism as an attempt to bolster the partisans of local autonomy in their battle against centralized bureaucracy. Had the Commission continued to offer a platform to Borodin and other vocal critics of the Ministry of Finance, there is little doubt that their next step would have been to demand an immediate limitation on, and progressive reduction of, the production and sale of alcoholic beverages. Such a move, however reasonable it might have been on strictly medical grounds, was certain to be regarded as an act of provocation.

No reference was made within the Commission to the fact that its deliberations were carrying it into dangerous territory. Such considerations cannot, however, have been far from the mind of the President, Nizhegorodtsev, when he proposed in November 1898, that a special subcommittee be set up to investigate all aspects of the operation of the spirit monopoly. He himself assumed the chairmanship of the subcommittee, which numbered among its eighteen members two of the most outspoken critics of the monopoly — Borodin and Grigoriev — as well as three of its most ardent defenders — Mintslov, Osipov, and Shumakher.[36] After a year of discussion, the subcommittee produced a deliberately ambivalent report. It found that public *drunkenness* had increased, but that this fact alone proved neither that *alcoholism* had increased nor that it had decreased. (Such precision in terminology contrasts sharply with the looseness of the discussions about "the alcohol problem" in the army or the schools.) It was noted that the consumption of alcohol had shifted from the tavern to the home, but that this fact could not necessarily be attributed to the introduction of the monopoly, since there were many "immeasurable factors," e.g. the family milieu, which might foster or inhibit consumption at home. The subcommittee were agreed that, while the monopoly had influenced the mode of consumption, there was no evidence that the quantity consumed had increased because of the monopoly. After resolutely condemning bootlegging and the sale of government vodka in private shops, the report ended with a grand flourish of equivocation: "The sale of alcohol by the government, while pursuing primarily finan-

[36] DEMBO, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

cial ends, offers more scope for the reduction of alcoholism than did the excise system which prevailed in former times."[37] Or, as Dr. Dembo tactfully commented in 1900: "A definitive solution to the problem has been postponed until the receipt of new material on the results of the alcohol monopoly."[38]

Borodin and his fellow crusaders had to be satisfied with a gentlemanly campaign conducted by the Commission in support of the restoration of local option rights to village communes. The communes had lost the right to prohibit the opening of a spirit shop on the land of any member when the state monopoly was instituted. According to the new rules, only the consent of the householder involved, and not that of the commune as a whole, was required for the opening of a shop. As a result, villagers who had previously lived in "dry" areas soon found themselves with spirit shops under their very noses. In response to an enquiry from the Alcoholism Commission, the Ministry of Finance had stated that, where villages had been "dry" before the establishment of the monopoly, the wishes of the members of the commune would be respected.[39] In practice, however, this qualification was ignored.

Accordingly, the Commission drew up a petition to the Ministry of Finance, requesting that all communes (not merely those "dry" before 1896) be permitted to refuse permission for the opening of a spirit shop for at least five years, with individual cases subject to review by the Guardians of Public Sobriety. As if to anticipate Ministerial objections, the Commission further requested that the discovery of bootlegging should not invalidate a local prohibition, since the commune could not be held responsible for the illegal acts of individuals.[40]

Almost two years elapsed before the Commission learned of the response of the Ministry.[41] The reply was negative, on the grounds that it would be too complex and impractical for the Ministry to investigate thoroughly the rights and wrongs of opening a spirit shop in every commune where the idea found some opposition. There could be no question of allowing individual communes to investigate the situation and decide matters for themselves. The idea that the Guardianships could serve as appeal bodies in difficult cases was dismissed with the revealing admission that these agencies "... are not yet sufficiently functioning organs."[42]

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 59.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 88.

[39] The full text of the circular letter, dated 26 June, 1898, may be found in *TKA*, Vyp. VI, part 1, Appendix, pp. 410-412.

[40] The final text of the petition as amended appears in *TKA*, Vyp. VI, part 1, Appendix XXVI, pp. 426-428.

[41] For some reason the decision, which was made in November, 1901, was not reported to the Commission until February, 1902. See TKA, Vyp. IX, part 1, pp. 644-652.

[42] *TKA*, Vyp. IX, part 1, p. 651.

The Ministry's reply failed to state the main reason why local opinion had been rejected so emphatically. The prevailing direction of government policy at that time was to re-establish centralized administrative control over local affairs after the relative decentralization of the 1860's and early 1870's. To this end, administrative officials known as land captains (*zemskie nachal'niki*) had been appointed to oversee local affairs. The idea of local option flew in the face of such a policy; if communes were sensible enough to regulate liquor sales, there was no logical reason why their competence should not be extended to other subjects.

The spirit of bureaucratic paternalism which animated the government was nowhere more apparent than in the field of education, as members of the Commission quickly discovered. They had already agreed that one of their primary tasks was to encourage other institutions — temperance societies, Guardians, learned societies, county councils, and municipal governments — to support temperance education. They especially wanted to assist those most likely to influence the young: teachers, priests, physicians, and the mothers of small children and adolescents. Such encouragement was impractical, however, so long as the government's attitude toward public lectures and meetings remained one of suspicion and deliberate frustration.

The regulations governing public lectures were a legacy from the nervous early years of the reign of Alexander III, unchanged despite the abating of the terrorist threat which had provoked them.[43] In addition to innumerable restrictions concerning the mechanisms for securing official approval, there was a further regulation, rigorously adhered to, that lectures could only be from books approved by the Scientific Committee of the Ministry of Public Instruction. Indeed, when the Pirigov Society of Russian Doctors petitioned the Minister in 1896 for permission to use the new magic lantern at their public lectures, they were told that "His Excellency has not deigned to find sufficient reasons for exempting popular lectures on medicine and hygiene from the common law."[44] As noted above, even the Ministry of Finance could not expect an exemption from these regulations for lectures organized by the Guardians of Public Sobriety. It is understandable, therefore, that so many Russian temperance societies, rather than risk losing their official sanction, soon

[43] Until 1894 public lectures could take place only in provincial capital cities, and then only with the permission of the governor, the bishops, and the provincial representative of the Ministry of Public Instruction. In 1894 lectures were also permitted in towns and villages, but only with the consent of three government departments: the Holy Synod, and the Ministries of the Interior and of Public Instruction. The government's idea of simplifying these procedures was to propose that, in the case of lectures outside provincial capitals, the consent of the local director of primary schools could be substituted for that of the provincial representative of the Ministry of Public Instruction.

[44] DEMBO, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

became closed groups preaching to the converted. In such a climate it was impossible for the Alcoholism Commission to do more than pay lip-service to the idea of temperance education for the masses.

Some members of the Commission would have welcomed the expansion of the primary and secondary school curricula, in order to include the teaching of what they called the "anti-alcoholic sciences," and also the establishment of special temperance societies for teachers and pupils.[45] If the opinions of the Commission had carried more weight with the government, there can be little doubt that schoolteachers and priests would have been expected to teach "anti-alcoholic science," which can only be described as a bizarre mixture of elementary hygiene, spiritual guidance, and temperance propaganda. The fact that such proposals were seriously considered by members of the Commission should serve as a reminder that Count Dmitrii Tolstoi and Pobedonostsev were not alone in desiring to implant a dogmatic social morality in the minds of Russian schoolchildren. No doubt the advocates of this strange new subject considered it a supplement to physics, chemistry, and biology. In reality, it would have been far closer in spirit (though perhaps not in content) to the existing officially approved courses on the national heritage (*rodinoverie*). It was naïve for members of the Alcoholism Commission to think that there might be room in the educational system of an autocratic state for a subject which would teach Russians desirable social behaviour, yet claim to derive its authority from scientific truth.[46] There was only one acceptable way to teach social behaviour in the Russian Empire of Nicholas II and Pobedonostsev, and it was based on the Bible and the Fundamental Laws.

The coolness of the government towards the many proposals made by members of the Commission played a major part in dampening their enthusiasm for holding a national congress on the alcohol problem. The idea that the Commission should convene such a congress was originally put forward in 1900 by the President, Nizhegorodtsev. His plan was that the congress should form part of a larger programme, including meetings, publications, and exhibitions, by means of which the Commission could inform the people about the evils of alcohol.[47] At his suggestion, the holding of a national congress was discussed by the Commission early in 1902. He himself took the view that it should be planned for 1905, thus

[45] *Ibid.*, pp. 73-4.

[46] The Commission's subcommittee on educational matters expressed concern over the relative lack of influence which physicians and hygienists had on educational administration and reform of the curriculum, fields which were almost exclusively controlled by pedagogues and bureaucrats. See *ibid.*, p. 72.

[47] In fact, no popular manual was produced until 1909. The same year saw the first exhibition and the first national congress organized by the Commission. No regional or international congress was ever held. On Nizhegorodtsev's plans, see *ibid.*, p. 89.

permitting ample time to prepare the groundwork at the scheduled meetings of psychiatrists, neuropathologists, and of the Pirigov Society. Moreover, he noted, by 1905 the congress could examine the operation of the state spirit monopoly for an entire decade, a fact which would lend a certain credibility to whatever conclusions it reached.[48] His arguments failed to persuade those of his colleagues who felt a strong commitment to social action. First Grigoriev, then Borodin, and finally Dril' spoke strongly in favour of holding a congress as soon as possible—in the autumn of 1902, or the spring of 1903 at the latest. It is evident not only from what they said, but also from the tone of urgency in which they spoke, that they had in mind a congress which would inspire a great crusade for social reform. Nizhegorodtsev, on the other hand, appeared to be thinking of a series of meetings which, however large and varied in the composition, would resemble the detached atmosphere of a learned society. With characteristic frankness, Dril' went to the heart of the matter:

> The task of this congress [he said] is not to promote science but to arouse a vital, active interest not only in St. Petersburg but everywhere; to stimulate communication throughout Russia among separate groups who have studied, at the local level, the basic causes of alcoholism and the means to combat them.[49]

A special subcommittee was created to settle the organization, programme, and timing of the Congress, but it failed to get on with its work because of the repeated absences of so many of its members, presumably a deliberate tactic on the part of those who, like Nizhegorodtsev, wanted the Congress delayed.[50]

As it happened, the march of events in Russia after 1903 forced all members of the Commission to direct their attention elsewhere. A squabble over when to hold a congress paled beside the domestic repercussions of the Russo-Japanese war and the political upheavals of 1905-06. As Nizhegorodtsev recalled, with commendable restraint, in 1907. "the temper of the times [was] not auspicious for the holding of a congress."[51] The minutes of the Commission make it abundantly clear that members were occupied elsewhere. The frequency of meetings declined steadily. After an average of ten annually between 1898 and 1903, only four were held in 1904, and in 1905, and none at all in 1906. No topics of any social significance were discussed in the Commission between 1903 and November 1907. When the Commission did come to life again in 1907, it was to find that the existence of the State Duma gave an entirely new cast to its deliberations. After so many years of affirming

48 *TKA*, Vyp. IX, part 1, p. 638.
49 *Ibid.*, p. 652.
50 *Ibid.*, pp. 653, 656.
51 *TKA*, Vyp. X, part 1, p. 705.

that only an awakened public opinion could deal effectively with the drink problem, members of the Commission were to be considerably disillusioned by that awakened opinion, at least in the form in which they met it among the deputies of the Third Duma.

* * *

The Alcoholism Commission obviously had little impact on government policy during the first seven years of its existence. Did this lack of influence stem from internal weaknesses, or from the strength of the obstacles which confronted it? One of its charter members, N. F. Vvedenskii, reflecting in 1907 on its early years, was in no doubt whatever that its weakness was the result of internal division.

> In our Commission [he said] two currents have been evident. One of these stood for a swift and decisive struggle, while the other protested against this [course], and proposed that the problem should be decided scientifically, by founding a learned committee to study the action of alcohol on the human organism. Was this necessary? Of course not, because the evil was already obvious without it. But tens of thousands were allotted for it, and some of our members were themselves involved in this research. It is, after all, a great temptation for a scientist. For all practical purposes, of course, it was unnecessary; it simply diverted our energy from the other approach to the struggle with drunkenness. I continually protested against setting up that learned committee, and refused to participate in it. The entire situation led me to the conclusion that in our struggle with alcoholism, the chief enemy is the Ministry of Finance and its spirit monopoly.[52]

Although perhaps superficially attractive, Vvedenskii's interpretation is in fact misleading. He suggests that members of the Commission fell naturally into two groups: the dedicated social reformers on the one hand, and the selfish scientists on the other. Yet such a characterization is scarcely fair to those scientists who were prepared to make a rigorous distinction between alcoholism, a disease, and drunkenness, a social phenomenon. They were, after all, members of a commission to study the problem of *alcoholism*. Since the Commission was attached to the Biology Section of its parent society, surely its members had every reason to expect that its work would concentrate on the medical and physiological problems of alcoholism? In any case, even among the social reformers — those who, in Vvedenskii's phrase, "stood for a swift and decisive struggle" — there were several shades of opinion. The group unofficially led by Dril' stressed the need to fight the alcohol problem, not by attempting to prohibit its manifestations, but by improving the economic and social environment of the lower classes. Yet Borodin and the advocates of temperance conceived of waging their struggle with degeneracy by precisely those means which Dril' rejected: prohibitive laws, rigorous policing, and heavy-handed moral suasion. Many members

[52] *TKA*, Vyp. XI-XII, part 1, pp. 101-102. The minutes contain no record of protests by Vvedenskii or indeed any other member at the time when the subsidy for research was being accepted by the Commission.

of the Commission were sufficiently eclectic (or sufficiently vague) not to commit themselves completely to either approach, or even to regard them as mutually exclusive. They saw no reason why the Commission should not simultaneously endorse several different approaches to such a vast and complex problem. There is an implication in Vvedenskii's remarks that those who approached alcoholism as a problem for scientific investigation were virtually collaborating with the Ministry of Finance in order to prevent the Commission from waging a determined struggle for social reform. Yet it is clear that neither Dril' nor Borodin (nor, for that matter, anyone else) ever succeeded in attracting the support of all members of the Commission for a thoroughgoing campaign against the social causes of drunkenness. The gentlemen who gave such hesitant and qualified support to the workers' housing society scarcely sounded as if they were soon likely to be rushing to the barricades.

Even if members of the Commission had agreed on a concerted plan of attack, there were enormous limitations on their ability to take decisive action. The Commission was, after all, only a quasi-official advisory body. It had no power to require any other individual or institution to do anything. Other than the prestige of its members, it had no means at its disposal by which it could force a hearing for its opinions. In any event, if exasperation had driven its members to seek allies among other groups disillusioned with the government, they would have found it impossible to make workable alliances. Although some of them condemned the social evils attendant on the growth of Russian capitalism, they did so not because they wanted to overthrow the *status quo*, but because they were searching for means by which to soften the harsher consequences of rapid economic development. Hence there could be no alliance with the Socialist opposition to the tsarist regime; they would have scorned Dril's efforts to awaken the social conscience of Russian capitalism. Similarly, the liberal opposition would have recoiled from the authoritarian moralism of Borodin. There was an irreconcilable gulf between those who wanted to smash the centralized authority of the autocratic state and those who wanted to use that authority to enforce patterns of behaviour which would save the Russian people from the drink problem.

One can see in the debates of the Alcoholism Commission a genuine concern for the fate of moral values in a rapidly changing society, a concern at once too profound and too pessimistic to be contained with the movements of coherent political dissent. It is a concern which is very close to the spiritual anxiety felt by men such as Count Peter Geiden, Dmitrii Shipov, and Mikhail Stakhovich when they spoke in 1906 of the imperative need for the "peaceful renovation" of Russia, before that noble goal became a mockery thanks to the work of Guchkov and Rodzianko. It is also the sophisticated manifestation of that profound fear

of social instability which led more vulgar minds to the chauvinism and xenophobia of the Union of the Russian People. It is perfectly natural that Rasputin, whose reputation comprehended everything that Borodin's crusaders thought was wrong with Russia, should have been so repugnant to right-wing politicians. Like the temperance crusaders, Purishkevich also wanted immediate action and demonstrable results.