A SOURCE BOOK FOR RUSSIAN HISTORY
FROM EARLY TIMES TO 1917

VOLUME 2
Peter the Great to Nicholas I

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**XIV:35. S. S. Uvarov's Pronouncements on Autocracy, Orthodoxy, and Official Nationality, Ca. 1833-1843**

Count Uvarov, when minister of education under Nicholas I, expounded what became the core of the official philosophy of that regime. The expression "official nationality" has become standard only since the late-nineteenth century as the designation for what Uvarov and his contemporaries called simply *narodnost* ("nationality").


[From Uvarov's instruction to the staff of the Ministry of Public Education, March 21, 1833:]

Our general duty consists of this: that the education of the people be conducted in conformity with the supreme intention of our august monarch in the united spirit of Orthodoxy, autocracy, and [official] nationality.

[From Uvarov's General Report for 1837, submitted to His Imperial Majesty by the Ministry of Public Education, April 1838:]

**General Conclusion**

In concluding this brief review, I make bold to add that the feeling of gratification with which I hope this picture of successes will be received by the well-intentioned can find its origin not only in the harmonious development of mental powers, nor only in the unexpected increase in the statistics, nor even in the awakening of a common aspiration in men's minds for a goal set forth by the government. Other aspects and a higher purpose were envisaged at the same time by the ministry, renovated to its very foundations and uplifted by the unceasing concern of Your Imperial Majesty.

To enliven all intellectual powers, but yet to keep their tendencies within the limits of a secure order; to inspire youth with the knowledge that at all levels of public life mental improvement without moral improvement is but a dream, and a pernicious one; to eradicate the antagonism between so-called European education and our needs and requirements; to cure our newest generation of blind and unthinking predilection toward the superficial and the foreign, instilling in its youthful minds a cordial respect for things of their own country and a full conviction that only the adaptation of general, universal education to our national way of life and to our national spirit can bring forth genuine benefits for each and all; then, to encompass with a sure glance the vast sphere of action opened before our beloved fatherland, to appraise precisely all the contradictory elements of our civil education, all the historical facts that converge in the vast structure of our empire; to direct these developing elements and awakened energies inssofar as possible toward a common denominator; and, finally, to seek this denominator in the tripartite concept of Orthodoxy, autocracy and [official] nationality—such, in brief outline, is the direction given to the Ministry of Public Education by Your Majesty from the time when Your Most Gracious Majesty deigned
to entrust me with the difficult, but at the same time important and flattering, task of serving as the instrument of your high purpose in this transformation.

Soon after assuming this post, I set forth before Your Imperial Majesty with most loyal frankness and in the following manner the dangers that at the time seemed, to my mind, to beset this road: "Fortunately, Russia has preserved her warm faith in certain religious, moral, and political ideas which belong exclusively to her. . . . But these principles [Orthodoxy, autocracy, nationality], dispelled by premature and superficial education, by fanciful and unsuccessful experiments—principles that for the past thirty years have continuously faced a prolonged and stubborn struggle—how can they be reconciled with the contemporary frame of mind? Shall we have time to include them in the system of general education, which would combine the advantages of our time with the traditions of the past and the hopes of the future? How can we establish popular education appropriate to our way of life and not alien to the European spirit? Whose hand, both experienced and strong, can contain the aspirations of intellects within the bounds of order and tranquility and repulse anything that may violate the general order?" . . .

Everything in public institutions seethes with new life; everything flows toward the goal of superior and most proper education. Having lost none of the advantages of European education inherited from our forebears, we shun its errors; we are becoming less receptive to its blandishments; language, the true promoter of national spirit, is already gradually bringing together the center of the empire and territories where heretofore its sound has evoked either hatred or indifference. But, on the other hand, it would be futile to subject everything indiscriminately to a single fixed form throughout the vast expanse of Russia, with all its diverse sections, without regard for the local needs and the special situation in each separate section. Today, according to the will of Your Majesty, the eastern regions of the empire enjoy a system of education that is gradually acquainting itself with Asiatic life, pays particular attention to the languages and literatures of Asia, and attracts to our schools inhabitants of the remote Asiatic steppes. With the further development of this plan, which is to encompass the territory of the Caucasus and the Trans-Caucasian regions, the University of Kazan' should one day constitute an important link connecting two peoples and, so to speak, two parts of the world, at least in an intellectual sense. At the other end of the empire, in what is known as the Baltic [Ostzieiskie] gubernias, the ministry, prompted by your instructions, has made every endeavor to inculcate knowledge of the Russian language and Russian education, without, however, impeding the development of knowledge in subjects related to the special position of these gubernias. But nowhere has the success been as striking as in the gubernias restored from Poland.

[From Uvarov's report on ten years of the Ministry of Education, 1843:]

In the midst of the rapid collapse in Europe of religious and civil institutions, at the time of a general spread of destructive ideas, at the sight of grievous phenomena surrounding us on all sides, it was necessary to establish our fatherland on firm foundations upon which is based the well-being, strength, and life of a people. It was necessary to find the principles which form the distinctive character of Russia, and which belong only to Russia; it was necessary to gather into one whole the sacred remnants of Russian nationality and to fasten to them the anchor of our salvation. Fortunately, Russia has retained a warm faith in the sacred principles without which she cannot prosper, gain in strength, live. Sincerely and deeply attached to the church of his fathers, the Russian has of old considered it the guarantee of social and family happiness. Without a love for the faith of its ancestors a people, as well as an individual, must perish. A Russian, devoted to his fatherland, will agree as little to the loss of a single dogma of our Orthodoxy as to the theft of a single pearl from the tsar's crown. Autocracy constitutes the main condition of the political existence of Russia. The Russian giant stands on it as on the cornerstone of his greatness. An innumerable majority of the subjects of Your Majesty feel this truth: they feel it in full measure, although they are placed in different runs of civil life and although they vary in education and in their relations to the government. The saving
conviction that Russia lives and is protected by the spirit of a strong, humane, and enlightened autocracy must permeate popular education and must develop with it. Together with these two national principles there is a third, no less important, no less powerful: nationality.

XIV:36. THE "FIRST PHILOSOPHICAL LETTER" OF PETER CHAADAEV, 1836

This "Letter" by Petr Iakovlevich Chaadaev (1793-1856) was originally written in French in 1829. Its publication in Russian in 1836 by the journal Teleskop led not only to the banning of the journal but also to the tsar's decision that Chaadaev was "officially" insane. Through this cause célèbre Chaadaev gained great prestige and popularity among the Russian intelligentsia. The following excerpts help to explain the divergent reactions to his views.


Every people has its period of violent agitation, passionate uneasiness, of activity without any deliberate motive. During that period men become wanderers about the world, both in body and in spirit. It is the age of great excitement, vast enterprise, strong national passions. People then toss in excitement, without any apparent reason, but not without benefit for future generations. All societies have passed through these periods which have provided them with their most vivid memories, their marvels, their poetry, and all their greatest and most fertile concepts. Such periods are the essential bases of any society; otherwise, societies would have nothing in their soil. This fascinating phase in the history of nations is the period of adolescence, a moment when their faculties are at the highest stage of development, a moment whose memory is a joy and a lesson for their maturity. We [Russians] have nothing like this. Savage barbarism, first, immense superstition next, then cruel and debasing foreign domination whose spirit our national government later inherited. Such is the sad history of our youth. We have had nothing similar to that age of exuberant activity, of the impassioned play of the moral forces of nations. The epoch of our social life corresponding to this period has been dull and somber, without vigor or energy, enlivened only by crime and mitigated only by servitude. No charming souvenirs, no pleasing images in the memory; no mighty lessons in our national tradition. Cast your eye over all the centuries we have traversed, over all the territory we occupy, and you will discover no arresting memory, no venerable memorial which speaks with force about the past, and vividly and picturesquely recreates it for you. We live only in the most confined present, without a past or a future, in the midst of a dead calm.

If we wish to occupy a position similar to that of other civilized peoples, we must, somehow, retrace the entire education of mankind for ourselves. The history of nations and the results of the passage of centuries will serve as aids. . . .

Peoples live only by the strong impressions which the preceding ages have left in their spirit and by their contact with other peoples. In this way each individual feels himself in harmony with all of humanity. . . . Having come into the world as illegitimate children, without a heritage, without any links with the