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## **Serfdom and State Power in Imperial Russia**

The institution of serfdom has been a central and much debated feature of early modern Russian history: it has sometimes been described as Russia's 'peculiar institution', as central to the Russian experience as black slavery has been to the American.<sup>1</sup> It is striking, however, that the rise and dominance of serfdom within Muscovite/Russian society coincided closely in historical terms with the rise to European eminence and power of the Muscovite state and Russian Empire. The subjection of the peasantry to its landlord masters was finally institutionalized in 1649, at a time when for most of the rest of Europe Muscovy was a little-known and peripheral state, in John Milton's words, 'the most northern Region of Europe reputed civil'.<sup>2</sup> When Peter I proclaimed Russia an empire, in 1721, it had displaced Sweden to become the leading state of Northern Europe; one hundred years later Russia was the premier European land power. Its loss of international status after the Crimean War in 1856 helped to precipitate the abolition of serfdom (1861); but the 'Great Reforms' of the 1860s did not enable it to regain the international position achieved after the Napoleonic Wars. Thus the period of history from the mid-seventeenth to mid-nineteenth centuries, when serfdom became a securely entrenched legal and economic institution, was also the period in which Russia — the Muscovite state and Russian Empire — became relatively more powerful than at any other time in its history before 1945. This article seeks to examine some of the features of serfdom in Russia, to look briefly at its place in the structure and dynamics of Russian society, and to investigate the relationship between the establishment of serfdom in practice and the success of Russian governments both in domestic affairs and on the international stage.

The significance of serfdom has been interpreted in a variety of ways, and an understanding of its principal features is obviously essential to this enquiry. A standard view has seen it as the central cause of Russian 'backwardness'.<sup>3</sup> Conversely, it has been interpreted simply as a symptom of underdevelopment.<sup>4</sup> One recent Russian study, to which we will return later, defines serfdom as a corporate phenomenon encompassing all social relations in the Empire.<sup>5</sup> Another Russian account has gone so far as to conclude that enserfment of the population was a necessary and inevitable condition for Russian survival on the dangerous and inhospitable north European plain.<sup>6</sup>

Russian serfdom (*krepostnoe pravo*) was an outgrowth of state power, originating in delegation of certain powers by the Crown to its supporters and noble servitors: as elsewhere in Eastern Europe, it owed its origin to government decree.<sup>7</sup> As with all other variants of the institution, Russian serfdom was a set of relationships enforced by the judicial and coercive power of the state. Peasants' right of movement, the crucial variable, was abolished by decrees of the 1580s and 1590s which bound them to their place of residence and made them in practice *glebae adscripti* (dependent through being tied to the land); and the final form of full hereditary subjection was put in place by the 1649 Law Code. In its measures regarding the peasantry, the Law Code was concerned exclusively with means to ensure their subordination to their landlords, and with remedies against peasant flight and landlord harbouring of runaways: it did not provide a comprehensive definition of their legal status. However, its stipulations presupposed that both peasant property and labour were at the disposal of the lord, and the legal enactment of peasant dependence and obligation to render dues and services to their lords left the way open to new forms of exploitation without explicit legal sanction. In fact, Russian serfdom as an institution was not properly defined in law before the nineteenth century.<sup>8</sup> A century after the Law Code, nobles' peasants had been deprived by discrete enactments of almost all legal rights, except that killing them was forbidden; and without any specific general enabling legislation being passed, they had become chattels of their owners, bought, sold and bequeathed like any other property. Noble owners were at least required by law in 1734 to look after their peasants in times of famine,<sup>9</sup> but there were few other legal restrictions.

However, the completeness of peasant subjection did not mean

that serfdom was inflexible, or that lack of legal rights might not be tempered by tradition or the master's self-interest. The lack of legislative definition meant in any case that relations and usage differed considerably: in this sense Steven Hoch is right to argue that Russian serfdom 'was not a system, but a widely varying set of practices'.<sup>10</sup> There are well-known cases of wealthy serf entrepreneurs, who amassed fortunes in property and goods held and traded in their masters' names, and often themselves owned serfs on the same basis. Equally well-known are the serf artists and artistes of Imperial Russia, gifted individuals who received training, sometimes abroad, in many cases achieved high professional standards, and made a major contribution to the growing artistic achievements of post-Petrine Russia.<sup>11</sup> These cases are symptomatic, though not typical, of the nature of servile relations; and serfs could be found in a wide range of occupations. It was often in landlords' interest to diversify estate economic activities, or to facilitate off-estate employment for their peasants, and the servile economy could make use of contractual or 'free' labour, as well as compulsory labour: the petty trader, the hired agricultural labourer or industrial worker was often a landlord's serf on *otkhod* (travelling to find work), and bearing a passport from his master. The dues of such a peasant, who might be left very much to his own devices, would be rendered by *obrok* or quit-rent, payments to the lord in cash (or kind), whereas serfs whose obligations consisted of *barshchina* (*corvée* or labour rent, providing labour for the demesne) usually led a life closely regulated by the estate administration and were kept on the estate. There was thus scope for variation, change and innovation within the servile system.

Despite a number of notorious cases, it was not in the landowners' interest to harm their peasants, or ruin them economically: the prosperity, or at least the economic viability, of the peasantry was the guarantor of landlord well-being. Recent research also suggests that Russian peasants under serfdom did not necessarily live much worse than their counterparts elsewhere. This is a difficult area to document exactly, and social status is by no means the only variable. One may at least find contemporary Western commentators comparing the Imperial Russian situation favourably with that of the Irish peasantry under their Anglo-Irish landlords;<sup>12</sup> and one scholar has recently declared with reference to the 1780s that 'the Russian peasant . . .

lived in a state of rude abundance', with an average per capita income which placed Russia at that time, with Britain, second only to France in the European league tables of national income.<sup>13</sup>

Likewise, it should be borne in mind that serfdom in the strict sense did not encompass the whole of the Russian peasantry. Serfs proper — those termed *krepostnye* — belonged to noble landlords. The Orthodox Church owned so-called monastery peasants, but its rights over them were less complete and in any event it lost them in 1764. Peter I created the category of state (*gosudarstvennye*) or treasury (*kazennye*) peasants who were administered by state officials, but whose dues were paid direct to the treasury. In Peter I's day (1719 revision) these consisted of some 19 per cent, but by 1858 about 47 per cent, of the empire's peasantry. It was also the case that differences of law in different regions produced practical differences in peasant status. Peasants in Russian Finland, seized by Peter I in the Great Northern War (1700–21), retained real personal freedom even when the estates on which they lived were granted to Russian nobles. The peasants of Hetman Ukraine remained technically free even after 1783, when the introduction of the poll tax caused them to be bound to their place of residence: though in this case that legislation was merely the last step in fact towards ultimate enserfment.<sup>14</sup> In short, the Imperial Russian institution of serfdom, despite its extreme forms approximating to chattel slavery, and the undoubtedly severe influence that it exercised in general upon the state of the peasantry, was a flexible and variable institution, and was capable of accommodating considerable social and economic variety and change.

The term 'serfdom' has so far been applied to one category of the population, the peasantry, and within that category to one sub-group, the landlords' peasants (*pomeshchich'i* or *krepostnye krest'iane*). What distinguished the latter from all other categories of the lower orders was that they could be bought and sold, that they were comprehensively and utterly at the disposal of their masters. The situation of the individual serf was dramatized in the memoirs of August Ludwig Schlözer, German *adjunkt* of the Imperial Academy of Sciences, in his account of a manservant assigned to him in St Petersburg in the 1760s. This young man, an urbanized, intelligent peasant, appeared one day drunk on duty, and Schlözer upbraided him, exhorting him to make use of

his talents and work hard in order to rise in the world. The valet heard him out impassively and replied simply: 'Ia krepostnoi chelovek' ('I am a serf'). Schlözer was silenced: pride, hard work, self-betterment were instantly irrelevant, since the serf's world was shaped solely by the lord's whim, and especially so that of the house-serf who lived directly under his master's (or her mistress's) eye. 'Accursed serfdom!', wrote Schlözer. 'Since that time I can never think without bitterness about this invention of inhuman monsters.'<sup>15</sup> No other category of Russian peasant was so helpless.

The most numerous group of peasants, apart from the landowners' serfs, were the state or treasury peasants, a body made up of numerous sub-groups. Some historians call these peasants state serfs,<sup>16</sup> equating their status with that of the landlords' rightless peasants. In many respects this is clearly a misnomer. State peasants were subject to no private individual; they could not legally be bought or sold, could enter juridical relationships, and could change their social status (become townsmen) on fulfilment of certain conditions. They had an effective right of complaint and petition against the state officials responsible for their administration; and they were recognized by Catherine II in the 1760s as among those subjects eligible for participation in her Legislative Commission.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, they could not choose their own administrators, who were appointed government officials; they had to meet certain requirements before leaving their community; they paid obligatory dues to the state; and they could be conscripted by the government for whatever purposes it found necessary, not only the army but settlement, labour in factories or special projects. When Peter I assigned areas of forest on the middle Volga to the admiralty, for example, in order to ensure a timber supply for shipbuilding, he created in passing a separate state-peasant sub-category of 'ship peasants' (*korabel'nye krest'iane*) from the local Tatar peasant population, who were obliged thenceforth to provide labour for lumbering and other operations.<sup>18</sup> 'Ascribed' (*pripisnye*) state peasants were assigned to other state industrial enterprises. Moreover, state peasants were not allowed to regard their lands as their own, and were subject to direction in the holding and use of them: the development of repartitional communal tenure among the state peasantry, encouraged by official intervention and legislation, was a significant trend in landholding in the Imperial period.<sup>19</sup>

The state peasants are best described as part of the juridically non-servile but materially obligated part of Imperial Russian society which also included the townsfolk, the army and to some extent the clergy, but not the nobility after 1762 (when they were freed from compulsory state service). But the term 'state serf' does correctly reflect the power which the authorities held to control the labour and the lives of state as well as landlord peasants. This leads to a larger consideration of the meanings of servitude. In a recent contribution already referred to above, Boris Mironov portrays serfdom (*krepostnoe pravo*), or the servile system (*krepostnichestvo*), as a concept to be applied to the whole of Russian society, including its noble élite, and develops the concept of 'corporate' or 'communal serfdom': 'The servile system could exist as a state, corporate or private phenomenon, depending on who was the [juridical] subject of the servile relations (*krepostnicheskikh otnoshenii*): the state, a [social] corporation or an individual person.'<sup>20</sup> Mironov distinguishes three main schools of historical thought on the subject. Pre-revolutionary Russian historiography, he says,

dated the emergence of serfdom to the 16th–17th centuries and connected it with the state's need to tie its population to a particular place of residence and social group in order to facilitate control of tax collection and the fulfilment of obligations [ . . . ] In the final analysis considerations and requirements of state, above all social order and stability, were [seen as] the principal factors in both the enserfment (*zakreposhchenie*) and the liberation of all social estates. In Soviet historiography, it was customary to talk of the enserfment only of the peasantry, and to a limited extent of the enserfment of the lower urban strata (the so-called townsmen [*posadskie*] [ . . . ]).

Soviet scholars, Mironov continues, sought the causes of enserfment in the intensification of extra-economic coercion, the peasant flight which this provoked, or in the interests of the landowning service classes.

Western historiography in principle supports the pre-revolutionary Russian view concerning the enserfment of all estates of the realm, but when discussion turns to serfdom (*krepostnoe pravo*) as such, usually the peasantry is seen as the sole enserfed estate [ . . . ].<sup>21</sup>

This summary of previous scholarship correctly highlights European and American scholars' awareness of the services required by state authorities from all parts of Russian society at different times, and the separate use of the term 'serfdom' to describe the state of the peasantry. The latest Western writings in

the field demonstrate very clearly that the terms ‘serfdom’ and ‘enserfment’ are not generally considered by Western scholars to be applicable to urban and élite social groups.<sup>22</sup> Nor has the usage in fact been common in Russia — historically the term *krepostnoe pravo* (deriving from *krepost*, a legal deed of sale or possession of property, and meaning, strictly, law embodied in legal documentation, the document proving the lord’s right over the peasant)<sup>23</sup> was not applied in Russia to any social group except those who could be, in hard practice, the object of deeds of possession and bills of sale. Mironov himself notes that his term ‘corporate serfdom’ has not been used before;<sup>24</sup> and for the Imperial period it represents an historically or terminologically inaccurate invention. Moreover, the broad usage of terms such as *krepostnichestvo* begs important questions concerning relations between individuals and state power, the limits of acceptable obligation in any society.<sup>25</sup>

The concept of serfdom in Imperial Russia is conventionally applied to the rights of individuals (landowners) over other individuals (peasants) subject to them, and that is an accurate historical usage. But Mironov is correct nevertheless in emphasizing the universality of the duties which the population of Muscovite and Imperial Russia bore in relationship to the Crown: the regime as a whole was based on concepts of hierarchy and obligation. And for this reason his historically inaccurate concept of ‘corporate serfdom’ is a useful heuristic device. At least from 1556, when Ivan IV decreed that ‘all land shall serve’, to 1762 and beyond, Russia was a service state: all sections of society bore service obligations, initially to the tsar, then to the state.<sup>26</sup>

Mironov observes that

if one understands serfdom within the [broad] limits sketched above, then it turns out that in Russia at the start of the eighteenth century the only free person was the Tsar, and all others were in one or another degree enserfed.<sup>27</sup>

To the extent that Tsar Peter I considered himself the first servant of the state, and was prepared to kill his own son (Tsarevich Aleksei Petrovich) to ensure the survival of his work on behalf of the state, even this definition may be too limited. And such a view is not new. One of its best-known formulations was that of the statesman Michael Speranskii, who famously wrote in the early nineteenth century that there were no free men in Russia, save beggars and philosophers.<sup>28</sup> Theoretically this was

true: everyone bore obligations. In principle nobles were also still obliged to serve if called upon, and to prepare themselves for service. In practice, however, a crucial change had taken place under Peter I. Peter's extensive social engineering, undertaken exclusively for his own state purposes, affected all groups in society. His measures on the peasantry created new legal categories and decreed some degree of protection for serfs from excessive landlord exploitation, but also imposed new and heavy state obligations of taxation and conscripted military service. One of his purposes was to impose obligations on the state peasantry equivalent to those already borne by the serfs: all should stand in the same relationship to state interests. The old 'noble' service personnel was tied to state service more systematically than ever before and for an unlimited period, through the Table of Ranks, but at the same time it was unified into a single corporation with a new name and identity, the *shliakhetstvo* or *dvorianstvo* (nobility). And critically for our purposes, Peter divorced noble service obligation from landholding. Both *votchina* (hereditary/family) and *pomest'e* (service) holdings now became private property, and service was to be rewarded by monetary salary.<sup>29</sup> Noble service and land were no longer organically connected. The effects were twofold. First, the full burden of state service began to pass from those who owned land to those who tilled it. Nobles who served received direct compensation; after 1762, although theoretically obliged to serve if called, in practice they served or not as they chose. Prestigious military service in officer rank was normally seen as a noble privilege; nevertheless 'some adjustments in [officer] recruitment were necessitated [after 1762, since . . . ] appeals to altruism failed to persuade many nobles from abandoning service careers for other pursuits'.<sup>30</sup> Peasants had no such choices, and provided the money (taxes) and rank-and-file manpower which supported both the fisc and the armed forces. All the lower classes were subjected to increased taxation, culminating in the poll tax, to compulsory lifelong service in the army, to control of movement through a passport system, and to labour direction for the benefit of Peter I's new industrial projects. Second, serfdom, being an adjunct of landholding, now became a matter as much of private as of state relations: successive governments increasingly circumscribed the public actions of the serf and left him to the control of his master. It was in the late- and post-Petrine period that decrees deprived the serfs of the



right to pay their own taxes, make contracts, freely engage in trades and swear the oath of allegiance.<sup>31</sup> Practically speaking, by Speranskii's time the noble élite had gained considerable freedoms and privileges, and also shared many of the ruler's prerogatives in relation to lesser subjects. They participated in the direction of labour employed by the post-Petrine state throughout the economy, and of which *krepostnoe pravo* was the most extreme expression. Although, as before, only landlords' peasants (and after 1721 and under certain conditions, their industrial counterparts, 'possessional' peasants) could be directly bought and sold, social relations were not fundamentally different on landlords' estates, in bureaucratically-run industries or eighteenth-century private manufactories using ascribed labour, or in the post-Petrine army. Serfdom in its strict sense was thus a specific instance and distillation of a general syndrome, and it is both this general syndrome and its particular instance with which we must be concerned here, as they manifested themselves in the life of the Russian Empire.

Russia's formal status as an empire, and its emergence as a major European power, were both the product of Peter I's Great Northern War against Sweden. In the course of his reign, Peter geared Russia up to face Sweden and similarly formidable competitors by modernizing and reinforcing the Muscovite service system: a process in which compulsion was central. Peter's measures imposed harsh new forms of service on all sectors of society, systematizing and intensifying what had existed previously, including the servile peasant regime. The question of the validity of serfdom was raised in his reign; and he has recently been condemned for not abolishing it.<sup>32</sup> It is scarcely surprising that he did not do so: such a step would have been contrary both to the dominant ideology of the time, to Peter's general line of policy and to his immediate practical advantage. In 1700, both slavery and serfdom were still taken for granted in European élite and ruling circles; in Russia the matter was not a public issue. After Peter's death, the different parts of his service structure evolved in different ways. As already noted, service obligations on the nobility were lightened progressively until, finally, the Charter to the Nobility of 1785 guaranteed nobles' property rights in land (and by implication, serfs) without requiring any service *quid pro quo* at all. On the other hand, the peasantry continued to be principal taxpayers, remained subject to compulsory

recruit levies into the army until 1874 and to labour direction by the state in different forms well into the nineteenth century.

The middle decades of the eighteenth century and the reign of Catherine II are often said to be the apogee of the Russian servile regime: as the peasants lost juridical status, the power and privilege of the nobility grew. At the same time, the position of the servile peasantry in society gradually became an issue of public concern in Russia.<sup>33</sup> There was a European context. The development of agriculture was making the status of primary producers more important than ever before, and the cameralist doctrines of the 'well-ordered police state' emphasized the need to protect and increase population. Across Europe, abolitionist tendencies were stirring, moral opposition to black slavery as well as white serfdom, and the new philanthropy of the Enlightenment was prompting concern for the welfare and improvement of the lower classes. The values proclaimed by the French Revolution at the end of the century finally presented choices in stark terms (while making the Russian governing élite, however, even less inclined to reformism than before). In Russia it was Catherine II herself, the pupil of Montesquieu and the cameralists, who first put the peasant question on the national agenda, where it was to stay with intermissions until 1861. At her accession in 1762, Catherine genuinely disapproved of serfdom and wanted to change matters. It was due to her initiatives that the 'peasant question' emerged as a matter of public debate.<sup>34</sup> But as with Peter, there were good reasons for her failure to take any decisive steps in this sphere. She soon found that changing the status of the peasants, let alone abolishing serfdom, raised major difficulties. Not only was there no consensus in favour of it among the noble serf-owners, which was not surprising, but without such a consensus any change would be enormously difficult to implement administratively, in practice; and moreover, the peasants themselves were highly resistant to change. When Catherine tried to carry out reforms on her own estates, her own peasants resisted, violently. This disorder in miniature was soon matched by the major Cossack and peasant rising of 1773–5 in the Volga frontier-lands, headed by the Don Cossack Emel'ian Pugachëv, which put the security of the whole state in question. After that date Catherine made no more public gestures towards the peasant question. But most importantly for Catherine, there was in fact no pressing need actually to do anything at all in this area.

Majority public opinion in Europe as in Russia was still pro-slavery. And the policies nearest to Catherine's heart, the goals to which the empress attached the greatest significance, could be pursued effectively without major change in the status of the servile peasantry. Catherine's overarching aims were to strengthen Russian society and the state, to maximize national wealth, and to develop Russian power and influence in Europe. All of these aims were fulfilled to a considerable degree in her lifetime. Her institutional and social reforms, while not successful in solving all of Russia's administrative problems, made the system more flexible and responsive to local stimuli. During her reign the economy flourished, even if finances were overstretched by wars abroad and court expenditures at home. Her foreign policy, very successful in its own terms, both brought valuable new lands and commerce in the West and South, and made Russia into one of the most influential European powers. And neither the practical success of her policies internally and internationally, nor her own security and contemporary reputation, required action on serfdom. In other words, in the short term, serfdom was not an insuperable problem of public policy, nor did its abolition have to be a government priority. The rulers whom eighteenth-century Europe revered as exemplary, Henri IV of France and Peter the Great,<sup>35</sup> were seen as warriors, lawgivers, and administrators concerned with the good of their subjects. In all three of these areas Catherine was able to take effective action, and to make a name for herself, without noticeably improving the position of the peasantry. She established herself early as legislatrix: it was her activity here which earned her the sobriquet 'the Great' from the Legislative Assembly and foreign enthusiasts. Her genuine passion for the good of her subjects found expression directly in her public welfare and education policies, more generally in such things as the arrangement of the grain trade.<sup>36</sup> And the successes of her armed forces, systematically built up, and her foreign undertakings, aggressively pursued, confirmed Russia's position as a European Great Power by land, and by sea. All this could be achieved without changing serfdom.

The same was true of Alexander I: he had to confront the same problem in 1801 after the brief reign of his father Paul (1796–1801), who had viewed serfdom positively, as a valuable institution, since he held that individual owners provided greater welfare for peasants than would unprotected freedom and expo-

sure to the rapacity of officials and outsiders. Alexander agonized over the peasant question throughout his reign, commissioned various projects, sanctioned the first legal mechanism for emancipating serfs with land (the Free Agriculturists' Law of 1803), and gave a guiding hand to the landless emancipation of the Baltic Germans' serfs in Livonia in 1816–19. That was all.<sup>37</sup> His motivation was complex; but fundamentally he could also manage perfectly well without changing the peasants' status, and could subordinate the peasant question to more pressing or personal considerations. Servile Russia defeated, in fact crushed Bonaparte, the greatest soldier with the greatest army of his age. After 1815 Russia was the premier land-power of Europe: there was no pressing need to change this winning formula. Alexander's successor Nicholas I disliked serfdom just as much as Alexander on moral grounds and for reasons of state: but he followed a similar line of policy with regard to it. In a much-quoted declaration of 1842 to the Council of State, he had 'no doubt that serfdom in its present situation in our country is an evil, palpable and obvious for all; but to attack it now would be something still more harmful'.<sup>38</sup> For a quarter of a century from his accession in 1825 he was very successful in his immediate aims, until disaster befell, and it was only the discrediting of his entire regime in the Crimean War that brought the issue of serfdom to the top of the Imperial agenda. Serfdom was abolished in 1861.

Thus serfdom in Russia was a flexible and variable institution and, despite growing concerns about it, mainly (but by no means solely) moral, it did not prevent Russian success on the national and international stage. However, to recapitulate: serfdom, and servile relations between Crown and population, grew and flourished in close parallel with the successful development of Russian power abroad and Russian society at home. Did the status of the peasantry and the institution and practice of serfdom in fact support or hinder the relative success of Imperial policies at large? To answer this question, several areas of national life must be examined: the economy, political culture, internal stability and military power.

An approach to the economy should begin with finance. The activities of Peter I and his successors required vast additional sums of money. The expansion of Russian financial resources in the eighteenth century was in the short term very successful, while laying long-term foundations for inflation and instability.

The eighteenth-century taxation system was not intrinsically tied to servile status.<sup>39</sup> The soul or poll tax introduced by Peter I, payment of which was required of all lower classes, nevertheless became the great divider, the badge of *podlost'* ('baseness', low status) and subservience. Townsmen and state peasants, who also paid it, had property rights and were not formally *glebae adscripti*, but neither had full freedom to leave their place of domicile: they were (as already noted) bound to obligation, and the government did not scruple to add to their burdens. One of the clearest examples of this general approach is the introduction of the poll tax into Western borderlands previously exempt from it, under Catherine II, as part of her 1775 reform of local government. For the empress, the primary goals in this case were standardization of law and administration (and élite status), and fiscal advantage.<sup>40</sup> But the effect of the measure was not only to enhance central revenues: it also increased Baltic peasant obligations, causing riots, and in the Ukraine the peasants lost their right of departure, which facilitated their final enservment. The government appears to have been happy with these outcomes (if not the social unrest which they engendered). The maintenance of the poll tax, payment of which was determined by the social estate (*soslovie*) to which an individual belonged, fitted in with the existing hierarchical social structure, which was favoured by both government and élites. The tax censuses (*revizii*), which determined who did and did not pay the tax remained a major indicator of inferior status, and at least initially a significant factor in determining who was categorized as a serf;<sup>41</sup> and the responsibility of the landlord for payment of his peasants' taxes was equally important in consolidating servile relations on the nobles' estates. Thus the largest single Russian tax, the sole direct one, was closely intertwined with the servile system, which facilitated its assessment and its collection.

During the eighteenth century, in 1754, another major source of government revenue, the distilling of spirits, was made a monopoly of noble estate-owners.<sup>42</sup> Just as serf-ownership became a clear social identifier,<sup>43</sup> so the *soslovie* privilege of owning landed estates with servile labour brought other privileges in its wake. And the huge profits which the government (and the tax farmers who controlled distribution) made from the liquor trade relied on the low production costs of estate agriculture serviced by serfs.

Closely allied to questions of tax revenue was the development of the economy and the labour force. The problem of labour supply was central to the economics and the origins of serfdom. As Evsey Domar reminded us,<sup>44</sup> serfdom was valuable to Muscovite servicemen and the Muscovite state because while land was relatively abundant, labour was scarce. Russia's population density was the lowest in Europe: it suffered perennially from 'that perpetual evil of the Russian land, the physical lack of people, the disproportion of the population to the area of the enormous state'.<sup>45</sup> This situation obtained throughout the eighteenth century, despite rapid population growth: government projects required numerous new personnel, and the territorial consolidation and expansion of the period, the economic development of outlying areas, demanded large numbers of settlers for the border regions of European Russia, not to mention the empty spaces of Siberia. Moreover, population was perceived to be scarce even when in fact it was expanding.<sup>46</sup> It was not until the middle decades of the nineteenth century, after exceptional population increases by European standards, that both state policy and noble opinion began seriously to contemplate problems of land-shortage and overpopulation in the central serf-owning regions of the country. Even so, this relative reversal of the land-labour ratio did not persuade the majority of landowners that they should enter upon new economic arrangements — most still clung to the familiar and tried-and-tested servile model — while until 1856, nineteenth-century governments continued to make use of labour direction, and were concerned more with stability and security than with promoting economic and social change.

Population growth contributed to the considerable expansion of Russian agriculture during the eighteenth century, though this was extensive rather than intensive. These developments reflected, on the one hand, lack of investment capital and the reluctance or inability of most farmers (noble or peasant) to take the risk of adopting new or more intensive crops and methods. On the other hand, despite the first signs of relative land shortage in central European Russia, extensive expansion was also facilitated by the availability of the new lands already mentioned, in the south and south-east. These were the product of conquest, and of consolidation and extension of state control into border areas. The government's eagerness to expand its territories and its grasp in this way was dictated by a mixture of motives: they

involved international relations (interactions with border peoples in the Trans-Volga region) and defence (especially against the Turks), social control over border regions, and state-led settlement and economic development. But the increasing availability of new lands matched noble aspirations for more landed estates; and the manner of distribution and settlement of much of the newly-developed areas favoured noble estates with servile population. Land grants in the south were routinely made on condition of their settlement with peasants within a stated period; such estates were granted almost exclusively to nobles, and the new landlords frequently made use of their coercive powers to transfer serfs from internal provinces.<sup>47</sup>

The extensive expansion of agriculture was fuelled by the growing profitability of commercial agriculture, and this was actively promoted by the government. In terms of agronomy and agricultural techniques, eighteenth-century Russia was open to the new ideas of the European 'agricultural revolution', and some attempts were made to introduce new methods, crops and approaches.<sup>48</sup> But both the harsh conditions under which Russian agriculture had to be conducted, and the peasant conservatism which these conditions reinforced, militated against innovation. The principal area of development remained the existing estate and landowner economy, based upon servile labour and dues. On the other hand, the rising expectations and consumption of the post-Petrine noble lifestyle made ever-growing demands upon the noble budget and economy,<sup>49</sup> which encouraged not only agricultural expansion but also diversification into estate industries and entrepreneurial activities: liquor production was simply the most notable example.<sup>50</sup> However, landowners as a whole were primary beneficiaries of the opening-up of internal and international markets. They benefited equally from the price revolution which took place in Russia during the eighteenth century, as prices of Russian commodities rose to world levels.<sup>51</sup> The volume of agricultural production and of trade in agricultural products rose sharply during the second half of the eighteenth century, to the advantage of the treasury and of all producers, but especially the nobility.<sup>52</sup> The primary carrier of this expansion in terms of production was the noble serf-employing estate economy, encouraged by the availability of new land and markets, labour resources and landowners' direct control over their peasants.<sup>53</sup> Not only were landowners able to increase their own production

by seeking new land or engrossing land on their existing estates previously used by peasants; they also competed successfully with towns in the processing and marketing of agricultural produce, exploiting once more the servile labour available to them and the items which it produced. In the contemporary controversy over 'trading peasants' who competed with urban traders, the urban population was hard pressed to make its case against invasion by serfs retailing their masters' or their own produce.<sup>54</sup> And in 1800, one-half of all fairs in Russia were held upon the lands of *pomeshchiki* (estate-owners).<sup>55</sup> In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the servile agrarian economy and its related enterprises were still well adapted to prevailing conditions.

If the estate-owning nobility found their power over the labour force valuable in the establishment of estate industries, which were a growing feature of the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, industrial development at the national level in the eighteenth century shows a similar pattern. Ascription of labour was a central feature of eighteenth-century Russian industrial growth, used both in the mining complexes of Karelia, the Urals, Siberia and in merchant and 'possessional' enterprises in many other branches of industry. Powers of conscription and ascription allowed the government to find workers and to direct labour to otherwise unpopulated sites. State peasants thus compelled to work for the state were dragooned in the same way as landlords' peasants by their masters. These government policies permitted payment of low wage rates and kept costs down; and if this sometimes took place at the expense of production efficiency and technical advance, that was a problem which had a serious effect only in the mid-nineteenth century. Decline in available labour supply when the 'possessional' peasant system was curtailed in the 1760s has been cited as a significant (though not the only) reason for the decline of the precious metal industries at the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>56</sup> The availability of ascribed labour was crucial to the development of the Urals mining complex from the end of the seventeenth century onwards, while lack of free labour became one of its problems in the nineteenth century. The admiralty, the largest industrial complex of eighteenth-century Russia, met its considerable but fluctuating labour requirements by a mixture of conscription and voluntary inducements, in which coercive measures greatly predominated.<sup>57</sup>



In short, in all three areas of the economy examined here, finances, agriculture and industry, the existence of servile relations and coercive direction of labour did not hinder, but rather materially facilitated, both the policy of the Crown and the interest of the élites in developing Russia's economic potential during the eighteenth century. Also, in the first half of the nineteenth century, despite much discussion in some government and specialist circles, the relatively conservative officials in charge of economic policy found little reason seriously to change existing arrangements.

One reason why the establishment was slow to make changes in servile relations was that these were wholly consistent with Russian political culture for much of the Imperial period. The autocratic political system lacked major structures and institutions for the articulation of social interests or adversarial social relations, the protection of social rights, and the resolution of social conflict. Until the 1864 judicial reform the judicial system and the courts, for example, were notoriously inefficient, slow, corrupt and arbitrary, and peasant society was in any case largely governed by customary law. The attempts of successive eighteenth-century regimes to construct socially independent organs, social institutions dependent less on central government than on their own members, and to encourage autonomous social action, had limited success.<sup>58</sup> It is therefore not surprising that the place of law in determining social action and resolving social conflict was restricted in practice, and that law was largely replaced by a culture of patronage. Patronage and personal connections or influence were fundamental to the workings of both the political and the social systems in Imperial Russia, and underpinned the power of the monarchy and the social pre-eminence of the aristocracy and nobility. The autocratic system has recently been described as the 'statization' of personal power.<sup>59</sup>

The political expression of the patronage system was the culture of petitions, which in the Muscovite and Imperial periods became a standard mode of communication between the population, the nobility/aristocracy and the Crown. Indeed, the petition had long been part of the popular Russian 'moral economy'; the refusal of Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich to accept a mass petition, and thereby acknowledge his responsibility in matters of popular grievance, led to the riots of 1648 which compelled composition of the Law Code of 1649.<sup>60</sup> In the eighteenth century, peasants

became skilled in using state laws as instruments to maximize the efficiency of their petitions.<sup>61</sup> But patronage, in Russia as elsewhere in eighteenth-century Europe, was a powerful but unreliable mechanism. Although it implied a certain mutuality, in which the patron was expected to respond to his client's needs and confer favours when required, it was always an uncertain and unbalanced relationship, in which power was personal and arbitrary, the client was largely dependent on the patron, and little redress was available in case of dissatisfaction. The values underlying the petition culture, even when it had been given structural definition by Imperial decree, were personal, patriarchal, hierarchical and authoritarian.

Serfdom was an integral part of this system of informal power. Advocates of serfdom idealized it as part of a set of paternalistic relationships based upon the love, morality and respect which should characterize both family life and subjects' devotion to the tsar. Count D.P. Buturlin remarked in 1803, for example, that 'there is something paternal and gentle in the reciprocal relationship between the master and his born servant, whereas the same relationship strikes me as purely mercenary when between the hired servant and his master'.<sup>62</sup> Despite such views, it is perhaps going too far to suggest that serfdom was itself a form of patronage.<sup>63</sup> Patronage rests upon consent and at least theoretical mutuality. While serfdom could, and sometimes did, operate on this basis, its ultimate foundation was coercion and silent obedience. Nevertheless the servile system encapsulated, underpinned and exemplified the non-legal, personal nature and projection of power in Russian society. The serf was absolutely at the disposal of his owner in the same way that the Petrine nobility was at the mercy of Peter's government, and this remained the case long after the nobility's position had been secured with a large measure of legal protection granted by later monarchs. The practical lawlessness of serf-master relations was mirrored not only in the relations (theoretical but not always actual) of noble and tsar, but also in social relations generally. Such despotic and unregulated relations characterized the peasant family which formed the fundamental unit of Russian society.<sup>64</sup> Extreme awareness of rank and hierarchy, grounded both in the Table of Ranks, in the militaristic model of society favoured by so many Romanov rulers, and in the weakness of legal safeguards against abuse, produced a subservience and servility towards superiors and an

inhumane lack of consideration for inferiors which became a standard theme of Russian literature in the nineteenth century. (It also gave rise to, or at least great encouragement to, the noble duelling culture of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which provided a rare escape-route for nobles who sought to preserve their sense of dignity and self-worth against the tyranny of hierarchical social relations.)<sup>65</sup> A.I. Koshelev was correct in the 1850s in denouncing serfdom as a system which corrupted not only the peasants but also the masters.<sup>66</sup>

However, the lack of legal restriction on power exercised from above was an essential component of the autocratic system; and the nature of Russian serfdom both justified this lack, and reinforced the social structure and social relations which helped to preserve it. Observers, from G.F. Müller in the 1750s to S.S. Uvarov in the 1840s, correctly saw that serfdom and servile relations were intrinsic to the existing system.<sup>67</sup> It was precisely this that finally undermined the autocratic regime of Nicholas I: not any diminution or failing in the institutional strength of the monarchy and its social support, but the fatal impact on national life of unaccountable power both at government level and in army, society and administration lower down — ‘administrative [and, one might add, social — RB] arbitrariness’ and the ‘universal official lie’. It was these features of the Russian polity, according to P.I. Valuev in his famous memoir *Duma russkogo* (*Thoughts of a Russian*, 1855), which were ultimately responsible for Russia’s failure in the Crimean War. And when in 1856 the regime, so successful hitherto, finally proved to be incapable of fulfilling its own state goals, a failure which called its legitimacy into question, the abolition of serfdom was a logical consequence.<sup>68</sup>

In Imperial Russia the state’s legitimacy was founded upon military power in external relations, and the support or acquiescence of the population internally. Throughout this period, and even in face of the Crimean debacle, the legitimacy of the autocratic system was never seriously challenged from within; and in the 1860s the monarchy led reforms of almost all areas of public life except the political, while keeping its own power and prerogatives largely intact. The same had been true in the eighteenth century, despite the turbulence around the Russian throne: the battles of court factions and frequent palace coups called into question neither the institution of the unlimited

monarchy (except once, in 1730) nor the privileged social position of the service nobility. Peter I, who enforced his personal will both with his cudgel and through the workings of a police state system and the inquisitions of the *Preobrazhenskii Prikaz* (his secret police office),<sup>69</sup> at once tied his servitor class more tightly to service and made service a correlative of privilege. Peter I's often-alleged meritocratic tendencies did not prevent him from enshrining noble advantage in his Table of Ranks, and enabling the established aristocratic clans to dominate it.<sup>70</sup> Catherine II was typical of most monarchs of the *ancien régime* in thinking of the aristocracy as her fellows — 'je suis aristocrate, c'est mon métier'. Moreover, the nobility was simply too useful, too essential a tool, to be neglected by the Crown. Imperial enactments had the effect of consolidating both noble social dominance and noble property rights. As O.A. Omel'chenko has remarked, despite noble insecurities a solid tradition of civil rights (or at least liberties) evolved in eighteenth-century Russia which was borne by the nobility:<sup>71</sup> under Catherine they enjoyed a good measure of liberty and property. This also consolidated their rights of serf-ownership; and when the western borderlands were brought into line with the Russian centre after 1775, this was made acceptable to their respective élites by the offer of equal access for all nobles to freehold of property in land, and to servile labour.<sup>72</sup> Russian noble credit institutions demanded serfs rather than land as security, and wealth was counted in souls. Government enactments had the effect of entrenching the position of the nobility as the pre-eminent social class and as the sole private owners of populated land between 1764–1801, and the government enjoyed noble support on this basis.<sup>73</sup>

Noble ownership of the servile peasantry also served as a control measure in the countryside. Although eighteenth-century monarchs probably never came to see landowners quite as Nicholas I did, simply as 100,000 rural police chiefs, throughout the Imperial period public law effectively stopped at the gates to the estate. The estate owner bore primary responsibility for good order on his lands, and estate discipline was the first recourse for social control. (Many estate owners were absentee landlords, but in such cases their authority was delegated to a steward, or even to the elder of the peasant community.) Landlords' control over serfs thus served in some measure as a substitute for local government. The 'great reforms' of the 1860s retained corporal

punishment as a penalty for peasants. Traditional views, both liberal and Soviet, have seen a sea of suppressed peasant discontent in the Imperial countryside, with a rising tide of unrest in the early nineteenth century. Peasant resistance was undoubtedly a common occurrence, occasionally taking violent forms of arson or murder. Against this, Stephen Hoch in his study of a large nineteenth-century *barshchina* estate has argued that we should be impressed, not that there were so many instances of landlord-peasant conflict, but that there were so few. The conclusions of his analysis of village relations in Petrovskoe have been amplified by subsequent research. He suggests persuasively that these relations operated at grassroots level to maintain the servile system: the village élite and estate management both had privileged positions to defend, they both benefited from the system, and they therefore colluded in defence of their own respective power positions and to maintain the status quo which guaranteed these.<sup>74</sup>

Peter I's recruiting system gave both landowners and also state-peasant and urban communities the power to select individuals for dispatch as recruits to the army, and the same groups were given in 1760 the right to exile serfs or community members who incurred their displeasure. Landowners frequently delegated part or all of these powers to the village commune. These mechanisms, which formed part and parcel of the servile system, created an authoritarian system of social exclusion, which contributed to social stability by exerting pressure on community members to conform, and by removing physically those who would not or could not do so.<sup>75</sup> To the extent that the servile system militated against peasant mobility, independence and knowledge, it also served the purpose of buttressing a relatively stable social order. Outside the estate, the passport system introduced by Peter allowed serf owners to determine the movements of their peasants; it enabled the authorities to track peasants, and in general to check the legitimacy of any population movement. Religious and ideological beliefs also served to mobilize peasant allegiances in favour of the established regime. Both Orthodox teaching and belief, and peasant conceptions of right social order, hallowed the figure of the tsar; and as nineteenth-century Populist revolutionaries were to find,<sup>76</sup> it was very difficult to rouse peasants against the status quo in the name of anything but the tsar's will. Even Pugachëv presented himself as a replacement

tsar, and promised freedom only through subjection and service to himself. Moreover, peasant 'naïve monarchism' and trust in the ideal benevolence of the tsar was mirrored by what Daniel Field called the authorities' 'myth of the peasant': the frequent readiness of government to pardon peasant rebellion on the grounds that the peasants in their simplicity had been misled, either by misguided loyalty to an imposter or by malicious outsiders.<sup>77</sup> In general, social mechanisms worked powerfully to underpin popular support for the established order. Dissent was usually localized, rarely if ever directed against the system as a whole rather than specific abuses, and normally easily controlled by the forces of the state, by the regular army as the last resort.

Public order was seriously threatened only by major unrest. The most important popular movements of the Imperial period were traditionally treated by Soviet scholars as 'peasant wars', expressive of broad class struggle;<sup>78</sup> more recent emphasis has focused on their specific social composition and geographical setting. Kondratii Bulavin (1708) and Emel'ian Pugachëv (1773–5), like Stenka Razin before them (1670–1), were Cossack leaders operating in frontier territory, whom peasants joined in greater or lesser numbers; they might articulate widespread as well as local grievances, but they never seriously threatened the heartland of serfdom and Imperial control. The government's response to such episodes was invariably military, and invariably successful. The Pugachëv revolt of 1773–4 was probably the greatest popular rising of early modern Europe. But after initial setbacks, and some panic among noble circles, the authorities were able to suppress it comprehensively. Pugachëv was defeated on his own terms, both militarily and ideologically, and physically destroyed. The unrest was contained and the Imperial order re-imposed, although Catherine hastened the implementation of a major reform of provincial administration to improve control of outlying regions. The government also emasculated Cossack autonomy, and integrated the Cossack 'hosts' into the regular army structure, which deprived potential future peasant insurgents of access to crucial military experience and leadership and completed the Cossacks' conversion from potential dissidents to an arm of the ruling power. The government was well aware that serfdom had dual significance for public order, as a method of control and a source of discontent, and after 1775, as already noted, whatever private projects may have been considered, there

was no public discussion of serfdom and the peasant question. Therefore, in terms of the Imperial state's ability to control and mobilize its population and resources, these social movements were not of great importance. Their significance lay more in the realm of social psychology: ruling élites were always fearful of what rampant peasants might do, and in times of social tension this could become a factor in élite behaviour<sup>79</sup> and state policy. Nicholas I justified his famous statement of 1842 by reference to the fury and unreliability of the masses. The same was true of the French Revolution: the spectre of peasant sans-culottism could be terrifying to Russian nobles, but there is no evidence at all that Russian peasants in the mass were affected by events in France.<sup>80</sup>

Overall, therefore, the existing serf-based social order contained adequate mechanisms for its own defence, including the collusion of the mass of the population. But its final guarantor, of course, remained the military forces of the state. In using armed force to put down civil unrest and peasant disturbances, naturally the government had to rely upon the army. This was composed overwhelmingly of peasants;<sup>81</sup> yet it was used very successfully to crush peasant discontent. The Imperial Russian standing army successfully divided peasant soldiers with military experience from the civilian population. It has been argued that it was this fact above all others which brought Tsar Alexander II to embrace the abolition of serfdom in 1856. Reform which was essential for military purposes — the introduction of a reserve system involving the training and subsequent return home of large numbers of peasant conscripts — posed impossible social dangers without prior emancipation, and its necessity therefore precipitated the end of the servile regime.<sup>82</sup> The old order certainly operated to insulate the Russian soldier from the grievances of his fellow-peasants in the villages. The military system depended on the lack of rights of the lower classes who were subject to the recruit levy, and mirrored the servile system. The serf recruit, freed *de jure* from the control of his master, was in some respects a privileged member of society;<sup>83</sup> but he exchanged subservience in the village to *bol'shak* (head of household), *starosta* (elder) and *pomeshchik* (landowner) for subservience in the regiment to company discipline, *artel'* (cooperative), *starosta* and commanding officer. Service for life (twenty-five years after 1793) meant that the young soldier lost contact with family and village life and

peasant concerns: induction into the army was a civil death.<sup>84</sup> The soldier was distanced from his village, losing family (and usually his wife if he had one), and communal rights; and in the rare event of returning as an old man he usually found himself greeted as an unwelcome stranger. The village community perforce came to accept the recruiting system, which meant that those who remained in the village had no direct experience of military life, and that the recruiting system was built into estate management and village politics. As already noted, the owner/steward and the village élite could both use it to their advantage, to rid the village of weak or undesirable members, or to pay old scores, and so on.<sup>85</sup> On the other hand, induction into the army also meant a social rebirth. The regimental company and the *artel'* system in the army recreated the communal framework around which village (and peasant family) life was organized; they provided the new recruit with social support and a social structure uniquely his own. Common bonds to his fellow rank-and-files in the company gave the soldier an outlook and identity of his own as well — something, however, which has been little researched. Ironically, in view of the discussions concerning peasant property which agitated Russian élite society in the 1760s, a contemporary noted that the *artel'* system — which accumulated means of subsistence for its members — allowed Russian soldiers to become in some limited sense property-owners,<sup>86</sup> with all that this could entail in motivating loyalty to their unit (even if officers were often able, illegally, to take control of that property in the same way as *pomeshchiki* dealt with the property of their peasants). This social and economic situation, and the solidarity which soldiers could develop in this way to comrades-in-arms who were also fellow company members, gave a powerful incentive to support the army and obey its commands.<sup>87</sup> Not surprisingly, such troops could be used with assurance in putting down peasant unrest; and the failure of the post-reform army in the later nineteenth century to inculcate similar loyalties among its conscript soldiers was a crucial factor in the disintegration of army discipline in the revolutionary period.<sup>88</sup>

The same features may also help to explain the success of the Russian army on the international battlefield. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the Russian Empire enjoyed an extraordinary period of military success. Although Russian international status fluctuated in the short term and suffered some



serious setbacks, these all proved merely temporary (for example, 1700, 1711, 1805, 1812), and the empire's long-term rise led in 1815 to the pinnacle of Great Power status. This was lost in 1856, and never regained in the same measure. Russia's Crimean débâcle was due in part to defective diplomacy and bad generalship, in part to other practical defects of the 'Nicholas system', particularly the failure or inability to modernize in the sphere of technology, military practice and the economy. Despite extensive reforms of military administration carried out in the 1830s, accelerating changes in the financial, economic and technical prerequisites of warfare among the industrializing Great Powers proved to have outstripped Russia's capacities. But in the pre-industrial era, as the research of Walter Pintner and William Fuller suggests,<sup>89</sup> technical advance and sophistication were much less important than they became in the mid-nineteenth century. One of the most crucial determinants of success in eighteenth-century military campaigns was the simple ability to put an army in the field and maintain it there, supplying and replacing it as necessary. This affected various aspects of military organization and fighting technique: manpower, supply, medical provision and attrition rates. For present purposes the most important features are the recruitment, retention and morale of the rank and file soldiery.

In these respects the Imperial Russian system constructed by Peter I and essentially continued by his successors until 1874 had significant advantages. The Petrine military system of a standing army, maintained by involuntary 'estate'-based conscription and quartered on the land, allowed full access to manpower reserves at relatively low cost.<sup>90</sup> It was not part of the servile system as such: on the contrary, as already remarked, serfs sent as soldiers were removed from the ownership of their lord, they became technically free, and truly so if they survived to old age and veteran or invalid status. Nevertheless, their position within the army remained one of total subordination.

The social dynamics of the soldier's company, the *artel'* system and the personal, social and economic situation of the rank-and-file soldiery which has already been discussed were not only vital factors in the army's effectiveness against internal insurgency, but probably contributed materially to the fighting qualities for which the Russian infantryman became famous: preparedness to suffer and endure, stoicism in the face of attack and danger, and

readiness to go over to the offensive even under conditions of extreme adversity.

In contrast with the armies of [late eighteenth-century] Europe . . . the Russians had fashioned something approaching a truly national army. The peasants who manned its ranks were illiterate, but they rendered their sovereign a primitive devotion that commanders could readily exploit to build loyalty and confidence without excessive use of the whip and cudgel.<sup>91</sup>

This must also have been a significant factor in preventing desertion, something which had plagued Peter but which became rarer in the army in the later eighteenth century while still rife elsewhere in Europe.

This military system relied fundamentally on the coercive powers which enabled the Muscovite state to direct all its subjects' labour and which Peter adopted and adapted in military as in other spheres. The total subordination of the peasantry on which the new Petrine army rested was essentially a reflection of the Muscovite service regime. Despite suggestions, at the time and since, that Peter could and should have abolished the servile relationship between landlord and peasant, the need and ability to direct labour resources, for military, fiscal, industrial or social-economic purposes (maintenance of the *élite*), clearly outweighed considerations of humanity or the marginal gains offered by peasant emancipation in other spheres. The Petrine army and its post-Petrine history demonstrated the success of this military model, which was maintained by his successors into the nineteenth century.

To conclude: serfdom and servile relations arose in Muscovite Russia because under the conditions of an undeveloped and underpopulated society and economy, the government found them a convenient tool for the practical realization of its goals, primarily military. Serfdom was one principal manifestation of the power of the ruling *élite* to control society at large. The recent argument of L.V. Milov<sup>92</sup> that the needs of national survival made serfdom an inescapable necessity in Russia is excessively deterministic, and begs the question as to the reasons for continuous Muscovite expansion. Nevertheless, it is clear that successive regimes found the system useful, and that it offered effective means to direct society and control resources. At the same time, the reasons for the domestic and international success of the Imperial Russian governments in the eighteenth and first

half of the nineteenth centuries were various. Social relations were not their sole determinant, nor was government action. Serfdom was only one factor influencing the dynamics of the period: others include the country's size, location, resources and demographics, or the favourable intellectual and commercial conjunctures of the eighteenth century. Nor did Russian successes derive only from circumstances inside the empire: in the international arena, throughout the period considered, the weaknesses of Russia's adversaries and competitors were just as important as Russian strength. (If the decline of Sweden, Poland and the Ottoman Empire facilitated Russia's rise in Europe, the unification and power of Germany was a significant factor in her incomplete recovery after 1856.)<sup>93</sup> The present discussion suggests, however, that the existence of servile relations in Imperial and especially eighteenth-century Russia did not hinder, and in some respects positively assisted, developments which served to strengthen the country's economic and military capability, support the existing political structure, and realize the ruling regime's policy goals. The immediate economic and social utility of the servile system to the Imperial ruling élite remained considerable well into the nineteenth century, and outweighed in their eyes serfdom's acknowledged dangers and disadvantages; these could be fairly easily contained or were not of sufficient gravity to make change essential. The striking economic, cultural and military achievements of successive Russian regimes provided justification for the status quo. From the point of view of the pre-industrial period, the abolition of serfdom, or even serious improvement in the condition of the servile peasantry, was not a prerequisite for Russian achievement of acceptable internal order and Great Power status. Nor was it essential, either, to the good reputation of successive tsars, at least among most contemporaries;<sup>94</sup> it was principally later public and scholarly opinion which was affronted by the Imperial rulers' failure to act. It is therefore not surprising that for much of the Imperial period, servile relations and the institution of serfdom were considered by government and élites as serviceable tools of social and economic organization and control, and that they commanded widespread support right up until the abolition of serfdom in 1861.

## Notes

Parts and versions of the arguments presented in this article have been rehearsed before several scholarly audiences and read by several colleagues: I acknowledge most gratefully their comments and criticisms, also those of the anonymous *EHQ* referee. Needless to say, responsibility for the opinions expressed here, and for any deficiencies, is mine. A short early version focused upon the late eighteenth century appeared as 'Das Recht der Leibeigenschaft in Russland in der Regierungszeit Katharinas II', in C. Scharf, ed., *Katharina II, Russland und Europa. Beiträge zur internationalen Forschung*. (Mainz 2001), 403–19.

1. The comparison has often been made; a full discussion lies beyond the scope of this article. See further, P. Kolchin, *Unfree Labour: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom* (Cambridge, MA/London 1987); M.L. Bush, ed., *Serfdom and Slavery: Studies in Legal Bondage* (Manchester 1996).

2. J. Milton, *A Brief History of Moscovia, and of Other Less-Known Countries Lying Eastward of Russia as Far as Cathay. Gather'd from the Writings of Several Eye-Witnesses* (London 1682, reprint edn London 1929), 32.

3. J. Blum, *Lord and Peasant in Russia from the Ninth through the Nineteenth Century* (New York 1964), 612–13; A. Gerschenkron, *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective: A Book of Essays* (Cambridge, MA/Oxford 1962).

4. O. Crisp, *Studies in the Russian Economy Before 1914* (London/Basingstoke 1976), 95.

5. B.N. Mironov, *Sotsial'naia istoriia Rossii perioda Imperii (XVIII-nachalo XXvv.) Genезis lichnosti, demokraticeskoi sem'i, grazhdanskogo obshchestva i pravovogo gosudarstva* (2 vols, St Petersburg 1999), I, 360–80. English version: B.N. Mironov with B. Ekloff, *A Social History of Imperial Russia, 1700–1917*, (Boulder, CO 1999).

6. L.V. Milov, *Velikorusskii pakhar' i osobennosti rossiiskogo istoricheskogo protsessa* (Moscow 1998), 'Conclusion'.

7. M.L. Bush, 'Serfdom in Medieval and Modern Europe: a comparison', in, Bush, op. cit., 199–224, 222. The most recent discussion of Russian serfdom, by C.S.L. Dunning, notes that 'The development of serfdom is one of the most controversial topics in Russian history, but there is no doubt that it was due to state action in response to the crisis of the late sixteenth century.' Dunning emphasizes financial pressures as motivating factors. C.S.L. Dunning, *Russia's First Civil War. The Time of Troubles and the Founding of the Romanov Dynasty* (University Park, PA 2001), 67–9.

8. See Blum, op. cit., 262–5, and in general, A. Man'kov, *Razvitie krepostnogo prava v Rossii vo vtoroi polovine XVII veka* (Leningrad 1962).

9. D. Moon, 'Reassessing Russian Serfdom', *European History Quarterly*, Vol. 26 (1996), 504 and n. 88. The decree had to be repeated on several occasions.

10. S. Hoch, 'The Serf Economy and Social Order in Russia', in Bush, op. cit., 311–22, 320.

11. See M.D. Kurmacheva, *Krepostnaia intelligentsiia v Rossii, vtoraiia polovina XVIII-nachalo XIX vv.* (Moscow 1983); K. Gestwa, 'Das "russische Manchester" und die Grafenfamilie Šeremet'ev. Baumwollgewerbe und Gutsherrschaft auf dem Landgut Ivanovo, 1741–1861', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Vol. 47 (1999), 20–39.

12. See The Marchioness of Londonderry and H.M. Hyde, eds, *The Russian Journals of Martha and Catherine Wilmot [ . . . ] 1803–1808* (London 1934), 146. Further on serf standards of living, see S.L. Hoch, *Serfdom and Social Control in Russia. Petrovskoe, A Village in Tambov* (Chicago, IL/London 1986); R. Bideleux, 'Agricultural Advance under the Russian Village Commune System', in R. Bartlett, ed., *Land Commune and Peasant Community in Russia. Communal Forms in Imperial and Early Soviet Society* (London 1990), 196–218.

13. I. Blanchard, 'Eighteenth-Century Russian Economic Growth: State Enterprise or Peasant Endeavour?', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Vol. 45 (1997), 547–8; first published in I. Blanchard, ed., *Studies in Economic and Social History: Discussion Papers*, No. 95–1 (University of Edinburgh, Dept. of Economic and Social History 1995).

14. J. Paaskoski, 'Noble Landlords and Serfdom in Old Finland', in L.A.J. Hughes and M. di Salvo, eds, *A Window on Russia. Papers from the 5th International Conference on Eighteenth-Century Russia, Gargnano 1994* (Rome 1996), 83–91; I. de Madariaga, *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great* (London 1981), 313–14.

15. A.L. von Schlözer, *A. L. Schlözers öffentliches und Privat Leben, von ihm selbst beschrieben. Erstes Fragment* (Göttingen 1802), 125–8. However, much still remains unclear about daily practice in this area, and the practical realities of servile relations overall.

16. For example, A. Kahan, *The Plow, the Hammer and the Knout. An Economic History of Eighteenth-Century Russia* (Chicago, IL/London 1985), 23.

17. *Sbornik Imperatorskogo Russkogo Istoricheskogo Obshchestva* Vol. X (St Petersburg 1872), 285–8; Madariaga, op. cit., 139.

18. V.I. Semevskii, *Krest'iane v tsarstvovanie Ekateriny II* (2 vols, St Petersburg 1900–1), I, 579–92.

19. Ibid., I, 593–676; N.M. Druzhinin, *Gosudarstvennye krest'iane i reforma P.D. Kiseleva* (2 vols, Moscow/Leningrad 1946–53), I, ch. 1; S.G. Pushkarev, *Krest'ianskaia pozemel'no-peredel'naia obshchina v Rossii* (new edn, ed. M. Raeff, (Newtonville, MA 1976), *passim*.

20. Mironov, I, 361 (emphasis in the original), 368–77. See also the extensive collective review in *Slavic Review*, Vol. 60 (2001), 550–99, and Mironov's article, 'When and Why was the Russian Peasantry Emancipated?', in Bush, op. cit., 323–47.

21. Mironov, *Sotsial'naia istoriia*, I, 360.

22. See, e.g. Bush, op. cit.; J.M. Hartley, *A Social History of the Russian Empire, 1650–1825* (London/New York 1999), 19ff. Dunning, op. cit., 69, writes that lower status service men bound to the *posed* found themselves 'in effect enserfed' (my italics).

23. 'Initially this word [*krepostnoi*] indicated a peasant or slave for whom the owner possessed a 'deed' [*krepost*], that is, some written document. In this sense 'servile' [*krepostnye*] peasants and people were contrasted with 'old-established' ones [*starinnye*]. But 'old-established' people also became 'servile' when an entry in a government document became the proof of their old establishment. Alongside this entry, the [old] free agreement [between lord and peasant] retained its significance only for those persons who enrolled themselves in the peasantry from a free status. The private document [*krepost*] was replaced or supplemented by a government one, and at the same time the concept *krepostnoi* acquired new mean-

ing. It designated a peasant tied to a servitor *for reasons of state interest*, just as the serviceman was bound to his military-service obligations in view of those same interests.' I.I. Andreevskii, ed., *Entsiklopedicheskiĭ Slovar' Brokgauz-Efron*, Vol. XVIIA (St Petersburg 1895), 681, s.v. 'Krest'iane'. Emphasis in the original. Cp. *Slovar' russkogo iazyka XVIII veka*, fasc. 10, ed. I.S. Sorokin (St Petersburg 1998), s.v. 'krepostnoi', 2 and 3.

24. Mironov, *op. cit.*, I, 368, n. 29.

25. Is the modern tax-payer unfree? Were Germans seized by a recruiting patrol for Frederick II's armies, 'enserfed'? Such essential questions of status, definition and terminology have confused previous discussions of the origins of Russian serfdom as well as modern social analysis. However, they are unfortunately beyond the scope of the present article.

26. A distinction made, allegedly, by Peter I himself in addressing his troops before the battle of Poltava. Cp. L.A.J. Hughes, *Russia in the Age of Peter the Great* (New Haven, CT/London 1998), 40.

27. Miranov, *Op. cit.*, I, 370. Jerome Blum in his comparative analysis of 'The Rise of Serfdom in Eastern Europe', *American Historical Review*, Vol. LXII (1957) identified as fundamental causes of serfdom throughout the region not royal power, but the political leverage of lesser nobilities, and the absence of countervailing urban communities: he consequently concluded that 'the history of agrarian institutions in Russia would have taken much the same course without the creation of the absolutist state'. But even if it is true, as Blum asserts, that 'the new [Russian] absolutism only channelled and intensified already existing tendencies', he finds the point of divergence from Russia's neighbours far back in time, when 'the Muscovite rulers unified the country', and also points out that in Russia the lesser nobility's triumph over the peasantry was paid for, exceptionally, with obligations of their own to the 'service state', Blum, *Lord and Peasant*, 605–7. The present discussion is concerned essentially with the Imperial period.

28. Quoted, for example, in M. Raeff, *Michael Speransky, Statesman of Russia, 1772–1839* (2nd edn, Den Haag 1957), 121.

29. Muscovite servicemen had also received some cash remuneration; and ownership of land and serfs continued to be a reward aspired to by Petrine and post-Petrine servitors. But the automatic and causal link had been broken.

30. F.W. Kagan and R. Higham, eds, *The Military History of Tsarist Russia* (New York/Basingstoke 2002), 82. In the eighteenth century after 1762, some period of state service seems to have remained the norm, and was often desirable for financial or social reasons (it was also expected by Paul I, 1796–1801); but retirement, if desired, was not difficult to encompass at any age. The 'superfluous man' portrayed in classical Russian literature — the educated, economically secure estate-owner who feels no obligation to, need for, nor satisfaction in state service, but also has no other object in life — if real, was a nineteenth-century phenomenon.

31. R. Bartlett, "Liberty and Property, Land and Freedom". Landholding and Agriculture in Imperial, Soviet and post-Soviet Russia', in G. Hosking and R. Service, eds, *Reinterpreting Russia* (London 1999), 75–88; *Brokgauz-Efron*, Vol. XVIIA, 682–3.

32. F.C. Weber, *The Present State of Russia*, Vol. 1 (London 1723), reprint edn, 49; see the argument in E.V. Anisimov, *Vremia petrovskikh reform* (Leningrad 1989; translated as *The Reforms of Peter the Great. Progress through Coercion in Russia* (Armonk/London 1993)).

33. See R. Bartlett, 'Defences of Serfdom in Eighteenth-Century Russia', in Hughes and di Salvo, op. cit., 67–74.

34. See R. Bartlett, 'Catherine II, the Debate on Serfdom, and the View from the Western Periphery: J.G. Eisen and G.H. Merkel', in R. Bartlett and J.M. Hartley, eds, *Russia in the Age of Enlightenment. Essays for Isabel de Madariaga* (Basingstoke/London 1990), 142–66.

35. M. Reinhard, *La légende de Henri IV* (Saint-Brieuc 1935); C.H. Whittaker, 'The Reforming Tsar. The Redefinition of Autocratic Duty in Eighteenth-Century Russia', *Slavic Review*, Vol. 51 (1992), 77–98; G. Goggi, 'The Philosophes and the Debate over Russian Civilization', in Hughes and di Salvo, op. cit., 299–305.

36. When the grain trade was liberalized in the 1760s, consideration was given to such problems as control of internal prices and availability of emergency grain supplies. For a judicious review of Catherine's approach to this area of public life, see R.E. Jones, 'Morals and Markets: The Conflict of Traditional Values and Liberal Ideas in the Economic Thought and Policies of Catherine II', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 45 (1997), 526–40.

37. On Alexander, see S.V. Mironenko, *Samoderzhavie i reformy. Politicheskaia bor'ba v Rossii v nachale XIX v.* (Moscow 1989); J.M. Hartley, *Alexander I* (London 1994).

38. Cited, for example, by H. Seton-Watson, *The Russian Empire 1801–1917* (Oxford 1967), 227.

39. Although in some respects the dues paid by serfs to state and owners influenced the levels of dues set for state peasants. Madariaga, op. cit., 479.

40. V.A. Mlakotin, *Prikreplenie krest'ianstva levoberezhnoi Ukrainy v XVII–XVIII vv.*, in *Godišnik na Sofijskija Universitet. Istoriko-fil. fak.*, fasc. 28 no. 1 (Sofia 1932); Zenon E. Kohut, *Russian Centralism and Ukrainian Autonomy. Imperial Absorption of the Hetmanate 1760s–1830s* (Cambridge, MA 1988).

41. It was not unknown for landowners to enserf members of their own family with whom they had fallen out, by entering their names as serfs in the revision lists.

42. On the history of the vodka industry, see D. Christian, *Living Water: Vodka and Russian Society on the Eve of Emancipation* (Oxford 1990).

43. E. Kimerling Wirtschafter, *Social Identity in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb 1997), 24.

44. E.P. Domar, 'The Causes of Slavery and Serfdom: A Hypothesis', *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 30 (1970), 18–32; further on the development of serfdom in Russia, see R. Hellie, *Enserfment and Military Change in Muscovy* (Chicago, IL/London 1971).

45. S.M. Solov'ev, *Istoriia Rossii s drevneishikh vremën* (ed. L. Cherepnin, 29 vols in XV, Moscow 1959–66), Vol. IX, 455.

46. R.P. Bartlett, *Human Capital. The Settlement of Foreigners in Russia 1762–1804* (Cambridge 1979), 23–34, 108, 235. Population statistics may be found in Kahan, op. cit., and in V.M. Kabuzan, *Izmeneniia v razmeshchenii naseleeniia Rossii v XVIII-pervoi polovine XIX vv.* (Moscow 1971).

47. B.E. Nolde, *La formation de l'Empire russe* (2 vols, Paris 1952–53); N.D. Polon'ska-Vasilenko, *The Settlement of the Southern Ukraine (1750–1775)* (New York 1955, *Annals of the Ukrainian Academy of Arts & Sciences in the U.S.*, Vols. IV–V, Summer–Fall 1955, No. 4/14–1/15); E.I. Druzhinina, *Severnoe Prichernomor'e 1775–1800 gg.* (Moscow 1959).

48. On the successes and failures of this development, see M. Confino,

*Domaines et Seigneurs en Russie vers la fin du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris 1963); M. Confino, *Systèmes agraires et progrès agricoles: l'assolement triennal en Russie au XVIIIe-XIXe siècles. Etudes d'économie et de sociologie rurales* (Paris 1970).

49. A. Kahan, 'The Costs of Westernization in Russia: the Gentry and the Economy in the Eighteenth Century', *Slavic Review*, Vol. 25 (1965), 40–66.

50. See, for example, W. Daniel, 'Conflict between Economic Vision and Economic Reality: the Case of M.M. Shcherbatov', *Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 67 (1989), 42–67, and more generally N.W. Cornwell, 'The Role of the Nobility in Agricultural Change in Russia During the Reign of Catherine II' (PhD thesis, University of Illinois, 1972). On the somewhat exceptional case of textile development in the Sheremet'ev estate of Ivanovo, see Gestwa, op. cit. Gestwa notes with emphasis the economic potential of the Russian servile regime, 'that the servile order could not only accommodate itself to the development of monetary and market relations, but even give them decisive impulses' (op. cit., 20). On the larger history of Ivanovo and early industrial activity, see Gestwa's outstanding monograph, *Protoindustrialisierung in Rußland. Wirtschaft, Herrschaft und Kultur in Ivanovo und Pavlovo, 1741–1932* (Göttingen 1999).

51. B.N. Mironov, 'Vliianie revoliutsii tsen v Rossii XVIII veka na ee ekonomicheskoe i sotsial'no-politicheskoe razvitie', *Istoriia SSSR* (1991) no. 1, 86–101. The recent work of Mironov and of Ian Blanchard raises new questions and perspectives on the eighteenth-century Russian economy: see further B.N. Mironov, *Russkii gorod v 1740–1860e gody* (Leningrad 1990); I. Blanchard, *Russia's 'Age of Silver'. Precious-Metal Production and Economic Growth in the Eighteenth Century* (London/New York 1989), critically reviewed by Mironov in *Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 69 (1991), 361–3, and Blanchard, 'Eighteenth-Century Russian Economic Growth'.

52. Mironov, 'Vliianie revoliutsii tsen', 92–8. If we may believe Mironov's figures, agricultural expansion was one major cause of relative decline in Russia's urban population in the later eighteenth century, even reflecting in some cases a process of 're-ruralization': B.N. Mironov, *Russkii gorod*, 227. In general on urban development in this period see M. Hildermeier, *Bürgertum und Stadt in Rußland 1760–1870. Rechtliche Lage und Soziale Struktur* (Köln-Wien 1986).

53. P.B. Struve, *Krepostnoe khoziaistvo: issledovanie po ekonomicheskoi istorii Rossii v XVIII i XIX vv.* (Moscow 1913); Kahan, *The Plow, the Hammer and the Knout*.

54. See inter alia D. Morrison, *'Trading Peasants' and Urbanisation in Eighteenth-Century Russia: The Central Industrial Region* (New York 1987).

55. Mironov, 'Vliianie revoliutsii tsen', 90–4; Kahan, op. cit., 134–6ff. This positive evaluation of the economy in the 'golden age' of the Russian nobility masks the fact of extensive poverty at the lower end of the nobles' social scale. I am concerned here with the landed-estate economy as a whole.

56. Kahan, op. cit., 85; Blanchard, *Russia's 'Age of Silver'*, Part II, highlights the adverse effect of government attempts in 1779 to improve the conditions of ascribed peasants in the metallurgical industry.

57. Kahan, op. cit., 87. The labour ascription system permitted harsh usage of the workforce by managements, and labour unrest was a constant by-product. However, even the most serious episodes were easily contained, by military force if necessary, and did not prevent (though they may in the long term have hindered) industrial growth.



58. D. Geyer, “‘Gesellschaft’ als staatliche Veranstaltung. Bemerkungen zur Sozialgeschichte der russischen Staatsverwaltung im 18. Jahrhundert”, *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, NF Bd. XIV (1966), 21–50; L. Behrlich, ‘Social Discipline in Early Modern Russia’, in H. Schilling, ed., *Institutionen, Instrumente und Akteure sozialer Kontrolle und Disziplinierung im frühneuzeitlichen Europa* (Frankfurt am Main 1999), 325–57, esp. 330.

59. G. Hosking, ‘Patronage and the Russian State’, *Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 78 (2000), 320. Hosking has developed his argument at greater length in his magisterial *Russia and the Russians* (London 2001). See also the excellent material and challenging analysis in J.P. LeDonne, *Ruling Russia. Politics and Administration in the Age of Absolutism, 1762–1796* (Princeton, NJ 1984), further developed in his *Absolutism and Ruling Class. The Formation of the Russian Political Order 1700–1825* (Oxford 1991).

60. V.A. Kivelson, “‘The Devil Stole His Mind’: the Tsar and the 1648 Moscow Uprising”, *American Historical Review*, Vol. 98 (1993), 733–56. On the concept of moral economy, see E.P. Thompson, ‘The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century’, *Past and Present*, Vol. 50 (1971), 76–136; J.C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in South-East Asia* (New Haven, CT/London 1976).

61. D. Raskin, ‘Ispol’zovanie zakonodatel’nykh aktov v krest’ianskikh chelobitnykh serediny XVIII v.’, *Istoriia SSSR* (1979) No. 4, 179–92.

62. Cited by P. Kolchin, ‘In Defense of Servitude: American Pro-Slavery and Russian Pro-Serfdom Arguments, 1760–1860’, *American Historical Review*, Vol. 85 (1980), 811–12.

63. Hosking, ‘Patronage and the Russian State’, 315.

64. See Hoch, ‘The Serf Economy and Social Order’, 316, and his description of peasant life in *Serfdom and Social Change*.

65. See I. Reifman, ‘The Emergence of the Duel in Russia: Corporal Punishment and the Honor Code’, *Russian Review*, 54 (1995), and note 69 below.

66. Seton-Watson, op. cit., 334.

67. G.F. Müller: *Johann Georg Eisen (1717–79): Ausgewählte Schriften. Deutsche Volksaufklärung und Leibeigenschaft im Russischen Reich*, ed. R. Bartlett and E. Donnert (Marburg 1998), 112; S.S. Uvarov and N. Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia, 1825–1855* (Berkeley/Los Angeles, CA 1967), 140.

68. P. Valuev, *Duma russkogo*, quoted in M.O. Gershenzon, ed., *Epokha Nikolaia I* (Moscow 1910), 184. Recently F.W. Kagan has attacked the notion that the Crimean defeat discredited Nicholas’ regime, F.W. Kagan, *The Military Reforms of Nicholas I. The Origins of the Modern Russian Army* (Basingstoke/London 1999), 243. Kagan’s revisionist view of the relative success of Russia in fighting the Crimean War under extremely adverse conditions may be plausible, but his conclusion does not take into account his own observations that the government successfully concealed Russia’s systemic military vulnerability under an image of continuing strength.

69. See, most recently, E.V. Anisimov, *Dyba i knut: politicheskii sysk i russkoe obshchestvo v XVIII veke* (Moscow 1999).

70. B. Meehan-Waters, *Autocracy and Aristocracy. The Russian Service Elite of 1730* (New Brunswick, NJ 1982).

71. O.A. Omel’chenko, ‘*Zakonnaia monarkhiia*’ *Ekateriny II* (Moscow 1993),

358–9. The 1785 Charter guaranteed a wide range of rights in law and (as already observed) subsequent monarchs found it difficult or inexpedient seriously to diminish these legal rights. There was a difference between the position of nobles in the later eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries and that in the first half of the eighteenth century, when the outcome of noble and court faction-fighting frequently meant exile, expropriation of property, and sometimes death. Against this, much emphasis has been placed in the literature on noble insecurity and alienation throughout the eighteenth century. Day-to-day practice in the localities and in personal relations between nobles were a somewhat different matter from government policy and legislation, and here nobles may well have felt insecure or ill at ease, although this view of contemporary noble culture and psychology requires further substantiation: insecurity should not be confused with changing values and self-image. See, most recently, the remarks on this point of Gary Marker, 'The Ambiguities of the Eighteenth Century', *Kritika, Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, Vol. 2 (2001), 245–7.

72. Cp. LeDonne, *Ruling Russia*, 339.

73. Mikhail M. Shcherbatov, in his essay opposing serf emancipation, imagined the nobility threatening Catherine with rebellion if their serfs were freed: something she said that she herself feared in the Baltic provinces, were she to push the matter there too far. Bartlett, 'Defences of Serfdom in Eighteenth-Century Russia', 73.

74. Hoch, *Serfdom and Social Control in Russia*. Hoch's analysis of serfdom as a symbiotic relationship has been developed further by the excellent studies of Edgar Melton in his contribution on Russia to T. Fox, ed., *The Peasantries of Europe from the Fourteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries* (London/New York 1998), 227–68 and of David Moon, 'Reassessing Russian Serfdom' and *The Russian Peasantry 1600–1930. The World the Peasants Made* (London 1999). See also Moon's recent work, *The Abolition of Serfdom in Russia 1762–1907* (London 2001).

75. See D. Moon, 'The Problem of Social Stability in Russia, 1598–1998', in Hosking and Service, op. cit., 66.

76. A situation which drove them in the late 1870s to engineer the abortive Chigirin conspiracy: see D. Field, *Rebels in the Name of the Tsar* (Boston, MA/London 1976), ch. 3.

77. Ibid., 208–14; Moon, 'The Problem of Social Stability', 67.

78. I.I. Smirnov, ed., *Krest'ianskie voiny v Rossii XVII–XVIII vv.* (Leningrad 1966); V.I. Buganov, ed., *Krest'ianskie voiny v Rossii XVII–XVIII vv.* (Moscow 1976).

79. The Decembrist revolutionaries of 1825 deliberately sought to use military models in order to limit unpredictable popular action, and this was a contributory cause of their failure.

80. Seton-Watson, op. cit.; R. Bartlett, 'The Russian Peasantry on the Eve of the French Revolution', *History of European Ideas*, Vol. 12 (1990), 410–14.

81. See, in general, D. Beyrau, *Militär und Gesellschaft im vorrevolutionären Rußland* (Köln/Wien 1984); E. Kimerling Wirtschafter, *From Serf to Russian Soldier* (Princeton, NJ 1990); F.W. Kagan, op. cit.; Kagan and Higham, op. cit.; and additionally on the *artel*', J. Bushnell, 'The Russian Soldiers' *Artel*', 1700–1900. A History and an Interpretation', in R. Bartlett, ed., *Land Commune and Peasant Community in Russia. Communal Forms in the Imperial and Early Soviet Periods* (Basingstoke 1990), 376–94.

82. A. Rieber, ed., *The Politics of Autocracy: Letters of Alexander II to Prince A.I. Barjatinskij 1857–1864* (Paris 1966), Introduction; Kagan, *The Military Reforms*, 250–1. In 1832 Nicholas I, concerned at the length of time required before new recruits became battle-ready, had personally proposed the introduction of a form of reserve system, as a mechanism to speed up recruits' integration into the army: recruits would be registered and prepared, but then released back into society to await a further summons to their regiment. However, this was rejected by his military advisers, on grounds of impracticability and potential economic and social damage, including a 'threat to domestic tranquillity', (Russian State Military-Historical Archive, Moscow, fond VUA, d. 18027. I am indebted to Alex Bitis who kindly made this material available to me.) However, the furlough system introduced in 1834 for long-serving soldiers seems to have been acceptable. On this, and for the context of the 1830s, see Kagan, *op. cit.*, esp. 212–35. Kagan's work demonstrates admirably the increasing problems faced by Nicholas and his government in the military sphere, and the inadequacies of responses conceived within the framework of the existing servile system, though Kagan's use of the term 'serf[dom]' is questionable, and he does not consider such things as Russian railway policy.

83. Wirtschafter, *op. cit.*, 120.

84. W.C. Fuller, *Strategy and Military Power in Russia 1600–1914* (New York 1992), 172; Wirtschafter, *op. cit.*, 34–5. In peacetime, troops spent much time quartered in peasant villages; but this does not seem to have led them to identify themselves with their hosts.

85. On conscription, and village attitudes to recruitment and recruits, see V.A. Aleksandrov, *Sel'skaia obshchina v Rossii (XVIII-nach. XIX v.)* (Moscow 1976), 273–94; Wirtschafter, *op. cit.*, ch. 1.

86. Count A. Lanzheron [Langeron], 'Russkaia armia v gody smerti Ekateriny II', *Russkaia Starina*, Vol. 83 (April 1895), 148–9, also quoted in Fuller, *op. cit.*, 173.

87. On the organization and socialization of Russian soldiers see, further, Wirtschafter, *op. cit.*, *passim*, and John Curtiss, *The Russian Army under Nicholas I, 1825–1855* (Durham, NC 1965).

88. Moon, *op. cit.*, 67. See also J. Bushnell, *Mutiny Amid Repression: Russian Soldiers in the Revolution* (Bloomington, IN 1985).

89. W.M. Pintner, 'Russia as a Great Power, 1709–1856: Reflections on the Problem of Relative Backwardness with Special Reference to the Russian Army and Russian Society', *Kennan Institute of Advanced Studies, Occasional Papers*, No. 33 (Washington, DC 1978); W.M. Pintner, 'The Burden of Defense in Imperial Russia, 1725–1914', *Russian Review*, Vol. 43 (1984), 231–60; Fuller, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

90. Absolute costs were of course not low; and the 'estate' basis of recruitment finally became restrictive as larger and larger numbers were required after 1815. These problems led in the nineteenth century to the creation of Alexander I's notorious military colonies and were also a major factor in the military reforms of the 1830s. The military colonies were designed to divert costs still further from the treasury onto the land and the soldiers themselves: they combined the economic autonomy of the peasant village with the reserve requirements of the military establishment. Russia already had a number of settled military forces — the Cossack hosts, the Serbian and other military border settlements created in the

1750s, and the militarized settlements promoted by Potemkin in New Russia. The Alexandrine military colonies operated entirely within the assumptions of serfdom: they relied on the model of the peasant village which financed itself while also providing services to lord and Crown, and they deployed to the full the directive powers of the servile regime. The military colonies were undermined by the martinet management which Arakcheev and his successors imposed upon them, but they were maintained until 1857, when they contained altogether some 620,000 troops.

91. Kagan and Higham, *op. cit.*, 71; *cp.* Fuller, *op. cit.*, 174.

92. Milov, *Velikorusskii pakhar*, Conclusion.

93. A full consideration of the questions raised here would require further comparative analyses, both of the dynamics of serfdom in other European states, and of the roots of state and military power among Russia's principal competitors — of particular interest in this respect might be France and the Ottoman Empire, as well as the other two great absolute monarchies of Eastern Europe, Prussia and Austria. This work must be left to another occasion.

94. See, for the eighteenth century, D. Griffiths, 'To Live For Ever: Catherine II, Voltaire and the Pursuit of Immortality', in R. Bartlett, A. G. Cross and K. Rasmussen, eds, *Russia and the World of the Eighteenth Century* (Columbus, OH 1988), 446–68. Scepticism appeared earlier among foreign observers, who however also included many admirers.

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