

Democracy versus the Rule of a Civic Elite: Aleksandr Ivanovič Novikov and the Fate of Self-Government in Russia

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S A M U E L C. R A M E R

DEMOCRACY VERSUS THE RULE
OF A CIVIC ELITE* :

Aleksandr Ivanovič Novikov and the fate
of self-government in Russia

Aleksandr Ivanovič Novikov is best known to historians for the essays on rural life he published under the title *Notes of a land captain* (*Zapiski zemskogo načal'nika*).¹ While serving as a land captain in Tambov province (*gubernija*) between 1889 and 1896, he became convinced that most educated Russians, regardless of their political sympathies, had little understanding either of rural administration or of the dynamics of peasant culture. Viewing such understanding as a prerequisite for solving rural problems, he sought to give the reader of his *Notes* an accurate—if unapologetically impressionistic—portrait of rural life as it actually was.

After resigning as land captain, Novikov went on to hold a variety of administrative and political posts. He was district marshall of the nobility (*predvoditel' dvorjanstva*) for a short time, worked for several years in the Ministry of Agriculture and State Properties (*Ministerstvo zemledelija i gosudarstvennyh imuščestv*), and served as mayor (*gorodskoj golova*) of Baku from 1902 to 1904. He was a prolific writer as well, and his reflections on municipal as well as *zemstvo* self-government brought him a national reputation.² Despite his relative prominence during the period leading up to the Revolution of 1905, however, he has virtually disappeared from the historical memory as a political figure. This is unfortunate for a number of reasons. His career, particularly as mayor of Baku, is worth examining because of the remarkable clarity with which it poses the dilemma of the aristocratic *intelligent* as a reforming politician and the questions it raises about the viability of local self-government in Russia at the turn of the century.

His biography is even more interesting because of the radical change

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which occurred in his political views. As a young man he was a traditional, somewhat Slavophile conservative who accepted all of the basic assumptions on which the tsarist regime was founded, including the privileged position of the gentry. As a result of his experience in the countryside, where he underwent what he described as a "rebirth,"³ he became an impassioned liberal critic of the existing social order and the tsarist regime itself. His explicit rejection of aristocratic values in favor of an egalitarian world-view in which all men—and women—are endowed with equal rights, while certainly not unique, nevertheless provides dramatic testimony to the erosion of prevailing myths and the fragmentation of the elite in Russia on the eve of the Revolution of 1905.

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Novikov was born in 1861, an appropriate year given his own later concern for the cultural emancipation of the peasantry from its legacy of poverty and illiteracy. His father Ivan Petrovič Novikov was a career army officer. Eventually promoted to the rank of lieutenant-general, he also served as a district superintendent of schools (*popečitel' učebnogo okruga*), first in Kiev and later in St. Petersburg. He held the latter post at the time of his death in 1890.⁴ Novikov's mother Ol'ga Alekseevna Novikova (*née* Kireeva), who came from one of Russia's most prominent Slavophile families, became a well-known publicist and unofficial ambassador to England during the latter part of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. She lived most of her adult life in London, where her tireless literary as well as personal advocacy of Russian and pan-Slav causes led Disraeli to dub her "the M.P. for Russia in England."⁵

Novikov received his secondary education at the Katkov lycée in Moscow.⁶ Later he went to Moscow University, where he enrolled in the faculty of physics and mathematics. Upon graduation in the early 1880's he entered state service. Years later he jokingly described his first post as one in which "the most upright mother in St. Petersburg's *haut monde* would dream of placing her son."⁷ From such a position, he calculated, he would have been able to advance to the fourth rank by the age of thirty-five without exhibiting any special gifts. Nevertheless, he reflected, "a brilliant career was evidently not for me, or more exactly, I was not cut out for a brilliant career."⁸ In a move his more career-conscious contemporaries regarded as "crazy,"⁹ he resigned his comfortable berth in the state bureaucracy in 1889 in order to serve as a land captain in the Kozlov district (*uezd*) of Tambov province, where his family's estate was located.

The position of land captain had been created in 1889, replacing the justice of the peace (*mirovoj sud'ja*) in each bailiwick (*učastok*) of the district.¹⁰ Unlike the justice of the peace, who had been elected by the district *zemstvo* assembly on a non-caste basis, the land captain was appointed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs from the ranks of the local landed gentry (on the recommendation of the marshall of the nobility and the governor). Charged with supervising all peasant affairs in his bailiwick, he was endowed with broad administrative as well as judicial powers over the peasantry.

None of the land captain's specific powers adequately captures the extent of his real authority, which was reinforced by his close ties both to higher officials and the local gentry. There were certain formal safeguards against the abuse of this authority, but in practice, according to Novikov, "nothing prevents the land captain from being in the fullest sense an all-powerful and uncontrolled ruler [. . .] In his bailiwick, the land captain is everything."¹¹ One of the major counter-reforms of Alexander III's reign, the office of the land captain served to strengthen the local gentry's paternalistic authority over the peasantry and enhanced the central government's control over rural affairs.¹²

With both a university education and a three-thousand acre estate in the Kozlov district, Novikov was admirably qualified by official standards to serve as a land captain. Believing it necessary for the gentry to exercise a firm if paternalistic control over the peasantry, he was suited to the job by temperament and conviction as well. His experiences as land captain were to alter his world-view considerably, especially his conception of the best means of effecting change in peasant culture. "I moved to the countryside and entered service," he recalled, "in order to knock some practical wisdom into [the peasant] and beat out his hateful drunkenness and laziness; I leave service with a deep conviction that nothing can be accomplished through knocking and beating."¹³

Years later, in 1905, he expressed gratitude for the experiences which had changed him.

"As a land captain," he wrote, "I saw the village, I got to know the Russian peasant, and I understood the nature of our task. In doing so I burned everything to which I had previously bowed and came to believe in a better future. Now, comparing myself with what I was fifteen years ago [i.e., at the outset of his service as a land captain], I am horrified by the thought that I could have been such a moral monstrosity (*nравственныj urod*)."¹⁴

Such a response to the peasantry's plight was exceptional, even in a country where the "repentant noble" was a familiar figure. Novikov's religious upbringing seems to have contributed to the sympathy with which he viewed peasant problems. He himself indicated that the district marshall of the nobility Ju. A. Oznobišen had a decisive influence on his thinking.¹⁵

Having rejected the notion that the peasant could be transformed overnight by "whipping him into line,"¹⁶ Novikov came to see the two major needs of the countryside as education and legality (*zakonnost'*). By the latter he meant not only the establishment of a real legal order but also the gradual creation of an environment in which the law would elicit respect. The first step in creating this legal order, he argued, should be the codification of all laws concerning the peasantry. As it was, he lamented, these laws were so scattered and contradictory that "you positively cannot make anything out."¹⁷ The result, in practice, was no law at all. Even an administrator who sought to apply the law without favor often had to fall back on his arbitrary authority in making decisions, thus reinforcing the popular notion of laws as the will of those in power.¹⁸

Transforming this popular vision of the law was a particularly difficult task, he noted, since the very idea of law as an abstract entity to which all were subject was virtually non-existent in rural society. Believing that "the authorities can do whatever they like," he wrote, "peasants strive to avoid not illegality, but the wrath of the authorities; they aim not to obey the law, but to please their superior."¹⁹ In altering this perception the land captain could offer only his own example as an "unswerving servant of the law,"²⁰ but this was more of an attitude than a practical possibility, since the law's very obscurity made arbitrariness inevitable. The establishment of a legal order for the peasantry thus required a more general, national transformation than any local official could provide. "You can't introduce legality by yourself," he acknowledged. "Legality depends more on the whole system."²¹

In the realm of education, on the other hand, the land captain's impact could be both immediate and decisive. During his work in the countryside, Novikov gradually came to view schools as Russia's "salvation."²² As one comes in contact with peasant life, he wrote, "one is convinced every time that the main enemy of the Russian peasant is ignorance. Each time one sees that there is no way to escape this except through good schools."²³ His faith in enlightenment, like that of most liberal reformers in the countryside, was almost boundless, and his expectations of schools encompassed literally all aspects of life:

"Schools," he argued, "should improve family relationships, bring order into public administration, regulate the relationships of employer and worker; only with the introduction of schools can we hope for a reduction of fires in the village, for a lowering of the mortality rate, for an improvement in agriculture; schools are the chief doctor, and they alone can save our people from moral collapse and economic destruction."²⁴

In a book entitled *Notes on the village school* (*Zapiski o sel'skoj škole*), he emphasized that the goal of the village school should be more than mere literacy; it should be, rather, to assist the peasant child in developing his full human potential. "Only this development," he insisted, "will transform him from that downtrodden individual, whom only the lazy don't deceive, exploit, curse, and sometimes even beat, into a full-fledged (*polnopravyyj*) member of society."²⁵ Ultimately, he thought, schooling should enable the student to adopt a critical stance toward the world around him, and he went so far as to define this critical attitude and the breadth of vision it presupposed as basic human rights.²⁶

As a land captain (and subsequently, as district marshall of the nobility), Novikov was *ex officio* either a member or chairman of the district school board, and also a member of the district diocesan council which governed church schools. His efforts to support education, however, went far beyond what his various offices required. He built four schools—three religious and one secular—at his own expense, donating the land from his own estate. For years he paid the salaries of most of the teachers out of his own pocket, as well as the stipends of the over two hundred boarding students. His philanthropy, which also included the construc-

tion of a church, a hospital, and even a railroad station, was so extensive that by the end of his life he had managed to give away the whole of his estate, maintaining himself exclusively on his income as a writer.²⁷

Novikov did not consider himself a liberal at the turn of the century. His belief in extending the rule of law to the peasantry was consistent with his Slavophile background, and he went out of his way to deny that education itself was a particularly "liberal" goal.²⁸ Nevertheless, we can see several aspects of his thought which would push him toward the liberal movement as the country entered a period of revolutionary crisis. An egalitarian ethos, which would later be more pronounced, is already clear in his desire to make the peasant a "full-fledged member of society," and in such minor details as his urging that authorities address peasants by the formal *vy* instead of the familiar *ty*.²⁹ His ardent support of the *zemstvo* and insistence that it should be a truly non-class institution, together with his opposition to censorship and corporal punishment, made affiliation with the liberal movement only a short step.³⁰

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In 1896 Novikov retired as land captain to become marshall of the nobility in the Kozlov district. He lasted only a short time as marshall because of what he described as his "changed views," which evidently clashed with those of the majority of the local gentry, and also because of his increasing "mania" for writing, which brought him into unspecified conflicts with the authorities. (It was during these last years of the century that he wrote *Notes of a land captain*). He thus resigned as marshall and re-entered state service, first as a minor official in the Ministry of Agriculture and State Properties and later as assistant director of state properties in Baku.³¹

Finding his work as assistant director "boring and often unpleasant,"³² he began to seek other opportunities. When the current mayor of Baku resigned, he suggested himself for that position to several members of the local political leadership. (The mayor was essentially a city manager elected by the city *duma*, subject to the governor's approval, and the candidacy of an outsider was not in itself unusual). Novikov found the prospect of serving as mayor attractive because of the real responsibility involved, which he missed where he was, and also because of the opportunity it provided to participate once more in local self-government. In this regard he emphasized that he had "always preferred civic (*obščestvennyj*) service to service in the bureaucracy."³³

He briefly cultivated support for his candidacy, but received neither guarantees nor any immediate indication of the *duma*'s intentions. At this point, thoroughly dissatisfied with his work in the Baku office of state properties, he willingly accepted a transfer to Simferopol'. Several months later he became the director of state properties in Astrakhan. In April, 1902, almost a year after leaving Baku, he received a telegram informing him that several deputies had nominated him for mayor. He replied immediately that he still wanted the job, and the *duma* formally elected him on April 24 by vote of 41 to 3.³⁴

His election seems to have been occasioned by a number of factors. The *duma* itself was about half Moslem and half Christian, most of the latter being Armenians. In choosing a mayor, Novikov recalled, it was nevertheless known that "in the local conditions neither a Moslem nor an Armenian could be confirmed [by the governor in Tiflis]. It had to be a Russian."³⁵ The "local conditions" to which he referred included both the need for a mayor who could mediate between the dominant national groups in the city and, more important, the autocracy's overall policy of Russification. He had no serious rivals among the Russian candidates, and his administrative experience and commitment to local self-government were well known because of his writing. The decisive factor in his favor, he thought, was his frequently expressed hostility to nationalism in any form, an attitude which non-Russian natives would understandably welcome in any Russian mayor.

As mayor of Baku, Novikov entered a world quite different from that which he had known as a land captain in Tambov. A booming oil town on the shores of the Caspian Sea, Baku was first of all an urban world, full of factories and slums, teeming bazaars and impassable streets. Located at the crossroads of several cultures, with its population consisting primarily of Moslem Azerbaijhanian Tatars and Christian Armenians, it was also not a predominantly Russian world. Although the framework of its city administration and the nature of its various urban problems made it far more comparable to the industrial cities of central Russia than one might at first expect, Baku politics nevertheless had an important ethnic dimension which those cities lacked. (Novikov described the city as a unique blend of Pennsylvania's industry, Russia's bureaucracy, and Persia's culture).³⁶

Politically, the power of a mayor was far more circumscribed than the extensive arbitrary authority of a land captain. Hired by the *duma*, he required the *duma*'s support in order to effect any significant changes. In order to succeed, a mayor had to cultivate a following and mobilize support for his programs, not only with the *duma* but with the city board (*uprava*) which he headed. This called for political skills, including a willingness to compromise and trade favors, which were not demanded of a land captain. As we shall see, Novikov not only lacked these skills but opposed their use in principle. His tenure as mayor, which began with great expectations on all sides, witnessed an increasingly bitter struggle between himself and the *duma* over how the city should be run.

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Approaching his new position with characteristic enthusiasm, Novikov interpreted his overwhelming election as a mandate for change. The urgency of reform and construction seemed evident wherever he looked, and at the outset he welcomed Baku's very disorder as a challenge:

"God, what a broad field for activity! I often thought. One could secure a good water supply for the city, put down sidewalks, build schools and hospitals and a streetcar network. One could bring in electric lighting, expand the city's gardens, and in general clean the city up a bit."³⁷

Money was indispensable for any of these developments, but the city's finances were also in disarray. No hard data on the city's actual financial position even existed, and reform of the city accounting office's sloppy bookkeeping as well as a thorough audit of the city's accounts loomed as immediate imperatives. In this connection, Novikov also hoped to float a major loan for capital improvements, which the city to his amazement had never done.

The chaos in the city administration rivalled that in the streets, he thought, and some reform of its procedures seemed necessary before any substantive changes could be accomplished in other areas. The "Augean stable" of this administration was the city board, which consisted of four members chosen by the *duma*. Chaired by the mayor, the board was in charge of the city's everyday operation, and was, at least in theory, the body most likely to put forward rational plans for change. Prior to Novikov's arrival, however, the board had rarely even met, much less acted as a body. Each board member had thus reigned as a small tsar over those commissions entrusted to his supervision, spending what was available, decreeing what he liked, and hiring whomever he saw fit to staff available positions. Other board members routinely approved the written notices of their colleagues' actions, and expected the same deference in return. The result was a lack of coordination in the city's overall policies.³⁸

Novikov set out immediately to make the board an effective working body, a move for which he had strong support in the *duma*. He called for regular meetings, daily if possible, and systematic recordkeeping. Insisting on the importance of collegial administration, he sought to use these meetings as a forum before which all impending policies, no matter whose immediate concern, could be thoroughly discussed before presentation to the *duma*. Board members, who were not the mayor's subordinates, predictably resented curtailment of their previously autonomous prerogatives. Only Novikov's initial support in the *duma* itself, which could uphold him against a majority of the board on any substantive issue, brought about their grudging cooperation. When that support waned, as it did within a year, he would find it difficult to secure the passage of any of his programs.

A journalist himself, Novikov believed that government functioned best when its actions were open to public scrutiny. Regarding such openness or publicity (*glasnost'*) as "the main foundation of self-government,"³⁹ he was determined that his own administration should be an "open" one. All board and *duma* meetings were opened to the public, and he instructed city employees to make all official documents available to the press. He recognized that publicity in itself was not a panacea for the problems government faced; by publicly defining those problems, however, he thought it could contribute to their solution. Moreover, the constant threat of exposure was a healthy restraining factor in politics. Looking back over his own term as mayor, he was sure that "a lot of bad things were not done thanks to the fact that there was always a correspondent hanging around, or just somebody who liked to listen."⁴⁰

Novikov clearly sought to enlist public opinion in support of his own programs, using it to counter opposition both on the board and in the

duma. His belief in the importance of a free press, however, transcended this immediate political consideration. Overall, he maintained, "the very possibility of publicity (*glasnost'*) means a lot. It means a lot as well that civic affairs, which concern everybody, should be open to many observers, both the curious and those with a vested interest. For civic affairs are alive in themselves, just as every matter outside the control of society is dead."⁴¹ Such an insistence upon *glasnost'* in public administration, while common fare for the liberal and radical *intelligentsia*, was rare among major public officials in a society where censorship of some sort permeated all levels of government.

Whatever administrative changes or publicity might contribute to the rejuvenation of politics in Baku, Novikov saw clearly that no fundamental improvements in services could be achieved without the help of a competent body of civil servants. Here he found the situation even worse than the disorganization of the city board. The city's employment rolls, he complained, were a "garbage dump" filled with "clerks who have worked for twenty-five years, but who now have nervous disorders and are so old they can't walk," with "bookkeepers who don't know fractions," with "lawyers trained as foresters," and finally with "pensioners (not the city's but from elsewhere), for whom work has been created."⁴²

This situation had arisen, he explained, because of the board members' practice of using city employment as a source of patronage, a place to fix up a relative, an acquaintance, or even an unsuitable employee of one's own business. With the *duma*'s support, he set out to purge the existing staff of "the aged, the sick, and the incompetent,"⁴³ and cooperated with it to arrange some kind of "tolerable life" for those dismissed. Ultimately about 200 positions were freed, some through the normal attrition. The possibility of filling so many positions at once presented a great opportunity to improve the quality of the city's personnel. Without excluding the board from the hiring process, he used his early popularity with the *duma* to secure the appointment of his own nominees rather than others.⁴⁴

In hiring new personnel for the city, he sought to create a "third element" in Baku comparable to that of *zemstvo* Russia. The "third element" as he defined it consisted not simply of hired specialists, but of employees whose technical expertise was matched by their moral substance and their principled commitment to civic service. He consistently emphasized the importance of "ethical purity" in filling even minor positions, equating that purity with an altruistic desire to serve the population and a refusal to compromise basic values, no matter what the cost to one's career.⁴⁵ By placing "cultured specialists" with these qualities at the head of every department in the city he hoped to change the operation of the board itself. The "moral influence" of such employees, he thought, "would force the board members to follow their lead."⁴⁶

Few persons with these qualifications could be found in Baku itself. In the first place, those natives with any talent at all preferred to work for the oil industry, where the pay was much higher than the city could offer. Moreover, he wrote, "if there were any socially committed

(*idejnye*) people in Baku, I certainly wasn't aware of their existence."⁴⁷ Hiring in Baku alone, therefore, would only turn up private industry's "rejects,"⁴⁸ little different from those just dismissed. Novikov preferred to import a civic-minded "third element" from the *zemstvo* provinces rather than to fashion one from local material. He thus proceeded, in his words, to "invite the best people in Russia."⁴⁹

It is not easy to measure a job applicant's "civic commitment" or "ethical purity," even if one grants some clear notion of what these qualities entail. Both involve easily feigned attitudes whose sincerity can only be tested over time. In making appointments, therefore, Novikov relied principally on the written recommendations of those whose expertise and civic commitment he already had reason to respect. Some of these were employees he had already recruited, who were happy to recommend their "*idejnye*" friends; others were outsiders whom he knew by reputation. In any case local ties, which had earlier been the foremost prerequisite for hiring, were now replaced by a system of recommendation in which affinity with certain civic ideals was as important a criterion as professional expertise.⁵⁰

Although they were hardly typical, the two appointments which best illustrate the kind of "*idejnye*" specialists Novikov sought were A. V. Pešehonov and Mark Andreevič Natanson. Pešehonov, the well-known *zemstvo* statistician and liberal populist, took charge of the city's faltering census program and subsequently established the city's first statistical bureau.⁵¹ Hiring Natanson as an accountant to put the city's finances in order was a more daring move because of his past career as a revolutionary, which Novikov does not mention. The founder of the Čajkovskij circle, Natanson had spent a decade in Siberian exile as a result of his activities as a charter member of the populist party *Zemlja i volja*. On his return, he established the short-lived *Partija narodnogo prava* to which Pešehonov also belonged, in 1893. For this he was exiled to Siberia for five more years. (During the Revolutions of 1905 and 1917 he would be a major Socialist Revolutionary leader).

Immediately prior to his employment in Baku Natanson worked for the railroad in Tiflis, which recommended him to Novikov as "a man of ideal purity and a brilliant bookkeeper."⁵² According to Novikov, who confessed to some jealousy on this point, Natanson quickly became the "central figure"⁵³ among "third element" employees in Baku. Novikov recognized him as "a man of indisputably great stature, with an enormous moral influence on those around him."⁵⁴ He also proved to be an outstanding accountant, producing the first comprehensive financial report in the city's history.

In his efforts to rationalize city administration Novikov showed little concern for local traditions or the sensitivity of established groups. His failure to do so eventually provoked opposition within the *duma* itself, where his original support had been greatest. Deputies began to regard him as a "despot"⁵⁵ whose intolerance and insistence on having his own way constituted a threat to their authority. Constantly reminding him that he was only a hireling, while they were the city's "bosses" ("*hозяевы*"),⁵⁶ they offered increasing resistance to his initiatives in all areas. Their reasons for doing so varied with the issue under consideration,

but their general hostility to his leadership became more and more pronounced.

Novikov's hiring policies provided the most volatile ongoing source of conflict with the *duma*. Prior to his arrival city positions had been parcelled out evenly between Moslems and Armenians, a division which corresponded roughly to that of the board and the population at large. For reasons we have seen, he thought it necessary to recruit almost exclusively from outside. Although the *duma* raised no immediate objections to this, such a preference for outsiders gradually tended to unify its otherwise fragmented membership against both him and his appointments—who were variously derided as "Novikovites," "Tambovites," "Varangians," or simply "geniuses."⁵⁷

There were numerous reasons for this opposition. Board members, who regarded city employment as a legitimate source of patronage for themselves, continued to resent Novikov's meddling. Some *duma* deputies even accused him of playing the board's game, i.e., of using Baku jobs to take care of his own friends and cronies. The charge of cronyism left its mark on public opinion despite his furious denials, as the label "Tambovites" indicates.

National considerations also played a role here. The higher standards on which he insisted virtually precluded hiring Moslems, and Moslem leaders in the *duma* were not impressed by his arguments that he sought only quality.⁵⁸ (The hiring of some local Armenians under these new standards only heightened their perception of ethnic discrimination). Local leaders, moreover, could hardly overlook the fact that such heavy outside recruiting inevitably attracted a high proportion of Russians, or "Varangians." Finally, a wholesale preference for outsiders, whatever its justification, tended to offend local pride. Such Baku "patriotism," as it was called, was hardly mollified by Novikov's attempts to "prove the superiority of the new, *idejnye* people over the local swamp."⁵⁹

As a compromise the *duma* forced him to hire one Baku native for every outsider he brought in. "Everyone stated clearly," he recalled with regret, "that they wanted Baku natives and not people from outside. Everything else was ignored: the difficulty of obtaining good people in Baku for a low salary, the good of the cause, everything... just give us Baku-ites, that's all."⁶⁰ This tug-of-war over appointments eventually degenerated into the *duma*'s demand that he grant them one of "theirs" for every one of "his," even in cases where "his" were actually from Baku. In this context, he wrote, "theirs" signified candidates who were "good for nothing, but necessary in the interests of re-election."⁶¹

Novikov had no sympathy for this kind of narrowly conceived political motivation, and thought the *duma* ungrateful as well as unwise. "It was painful and offensive," he wrote, "to see how these people, who had been entrusted with city administration, opposed those who came from outside with a concern for their city."⁶² This prolonged struggle over hiring poisoned Novikov's relationship with the *duma* in other areas, robbed him of any joy in his work, and gradually embittered him toward the city in general. "I wasn't a neurasthenic when I arrived in Baku," he recalled, "but after a year and a half I was reduced to a feeling of disgust toward everything around me. I've been in state service in various offices, in

various civic assemblies, but I doubt if you can find anywhere such cynicism, such *moral insanity*, as that which reigns in Baku."⁶³

Novikov's personality itself was a major factor in his conflict with other Baku leaders. His chief liability as a politician was his almost total lack of tact. Arrogant and vain by his own account, he barely concealed his contempt for those with whom he disagreed. His quick temper and inability to restrain himself in debate caused him to insult deputies more than once by impugning their motives and calling them "scoundrels" in public.⁶⁴ He was exceptionally sensitive to criticism, and regarded the very existence of opposing views as a personal affront, "One of my great shortcomings," he confessed, "is an extreme touchiness, and in every opinion that differs from my own I see a desire to insult me, or even to offend me altogether."⁶⁵ This tendency to personalize all conflict made compromise of any sort difficult and reinforced the *duma*'s perception of him as a dictator.

In his memoirs he sought to justify his tactlessness by attacking what he considered to be the unusually all-pervasive hypocrisy of Baku politics. Such a rampant mendacity, he wrote, "gave the very notion of tact a different meaning [in Baku] than elsewhere."⁶⁶ In Baku, he charged, tact implied a surrender of all ethical principles. In order to appear tactful, a mayor would have to acquiesce in the private transactions *duma* deputies made at the city's expense, for example, or appoint their various protégés to city positions without concern for their qualifications. One would have to flatter one's opponents and shake hands with those whom one despised. Equally important, one would have to smile while doing so, and join in the overstated and meretricious familiarity (*amikošonstvo*) which characterized all political dealings in Baku.⁶⁷

Novikov confessed himself "incapable of this kind of tact."⁶⁸ His disdain for subterfuge—or even subtlety—did not allow for pretense even in superficial matters. "How can you shake hands with a man you despise as a thief?" he asked. "Or even with a personal enemy who smeared you with God knows what in the morning issue of 'Caspian'? In general, whether or not to shake someone's hand turned out to be a major question for me in Baku."⁶⁹ His aristocratic pride was as important here as his genuinely strict notion of honesty. To behave tactfully in Baku's circumstances, he reported, "it was necessary to sacrifice too much of one's own personal dignity."⁷⁰ Unwilling to make that sacrifice, which he saw as an inadmissible "opportunism,"⁷¹ he became more and more estranged from the *duma*.

Novikov's attitude toward politics itself was a more fundamental source of conflict with the *duma* than his personality. On the one hand, he was impatient with the very notion of politics insofar as it required him to cultivate others in return for their support. He complained, for example, about the need to concern himself "not with the *duma*'s affairs, but with the *duma*'s politics,"⁷² as if the latter were an expendable and slightly illegitimate aspect of government. He also refused from the outset to develop any "party" of his own within the *duma*, insisting that all issues be settled on their merits alone.⁷³ His earlier success as a political maverick in the *zemstvo* encouraged him in this contempt for party politics. "As a deputy," he recalled, "I was always an *enfant*

terrible and avoided all party affiliation (*partijnost'*) [. . .] I had already done a lot in this way, and I believed in my star now as well."⁷⁴

This comparison with *zemstvo* service, one should note, showed little appreciation for the vastly more complex nature of urban politics, especially in Baku, and even less for the more explicitly "political" role of a mayor. Much of Novikov's frustration as mayor seems to have derived from his expectation that the *duma*'s cultural and political norms would approximate those of the predominantly aristocratic *zemstvo* in which he had earlier served. Such an expectation was hardly realistic, and his experiences as mayor illustrate the disparity between these two institutions of self-government.⁷⁵

Novikov's distaste for politicking was rooted in a conception of politics similar to that held by the most idealistic and socially committed members of the "third element," in whose numbers he counted himself. As an aristocrat who had renounced his own privileges, he was hostile to the increasing role of wealth *per se*, and rejected all politics based on "cynical" compromises between competing interests.⁷⁶ He urged instead an altruistic devotion to the general welfare as the basic principle of politics, and attitude which would have made him at home among the aristocratic liberals of the Tver' or Moscow *zemstva*.⁷⁷

In Baku, on the other hand, such an altruistic civic consciousness alienated him from the only political reality available. His belief that private or selfish interests should have no role in the formulation of public policy was scarcely comprehensible, much less acceptable, to the wealthy businessmen and property owners who made up the majority of the *duma*. In their view politics existed to accommodate private interests, whether those of business or otherwise, and they saw no conflict between such accommodation and the public welfare. Furthermore, Novikov's hatred of parochialism clashed with their perception of local self-government's very *raison d'être*. What was the purpose of such government, after all, if not to permit the triumph of parochial tastes or the appointment of local people to city jobs?

Given these ideological differences, which Novikov's open contempt for his political adversaries made explicit, it was only a matter of time until he was forced from office. During the last months of his administration what he described as the *duma*'s "general hatred for me and all new city servants"⁷⁸ made the passage of any substantive reforms impossible, and city government itself came to a virtual standstill. Demoralized and physically exhausted, he resigned in early 1904. Within several months most of those he had appointed to city service had either left or been fired.⁷⁹

By all conventional standards Novikov was a failure as a mayor. Although he had managed to build some schools and hospitals, he had not achieved any of the main goals he had set for himself on coming to Baku. City finances, for example, remained in the same chaotic state in which he had found them, since the *duma* refused even to consider Natanson's thorough audit before developing its budgetary goals. The *duma* was even less willing to contemplate any reform of the city land commission, in whose operation many deputies has a definite vested interest. Despite his efforts to gain control over this commission, which

might have expanded the city's tax base, he reported that it remained an "impregnable fortress" throughout his mayorship. A variety of disputes with the *duma* frustrated his efforts to find a dependable supply of fresh water for the city, and the loan which the city needed for capital improvements was never floated. In short, he conceded, "very little" of a practical nature had been accomplished under his leadership.⁸⁰

Although he blamed this primarily on the *duma*'s lack of vision and indifference to the city's most crying social needs, he recognized that his refusal to work with the *duma*'s deputies on their terms, accepting their notions of "tact" for the sake of expediency, had also been a contributing factor. A mayor more open to compromise, he mused, "might have achieved brilliant results in a whole series of areas in which I did nothing!"⁸¹ This insight, however, did not move him to regret his political inflexibility, which he saw as a matter of ethics.

He did pride himself on three achievements. First, he had identified himself with the "third element," defending them against attacks from both the *duma* and the board. In doing so, to judge by the public declarations of various members of the "third element" itself, he had increased their sense of their own worth. "Let some laugh about this," he wrote, "but I think that awakening a sense of human dignity in people who lack it is a far more precious endeavor than building a hospital or a school."⁸² Second, by governing without recourse to censorship and encouraging the maximum press coverage of political activities, he believed he had proved in practice that "no limits of any kind must or should be placed on publicity (*glasnost'*). And this is worth something."⁸³ Finally, his open administration had increased public interest in city affairs, among women and young people especially, which was a development he clearly hoped would lead to a broader public involvement in city politics.⁸⁴

His belief that these kinds of changes justified the sacrifice of more conventional reforms virtually removes him from consideration as an ordinary politician. He was an aristocratic *intelligent* uncomfortable with the reality of politics, particularly in an urban environment in which few shared his cultural and political assumptions. An outsider insensitive to local feelings, he sought to shape Baku according to his own ideas, with or without the *duma*. In attempting to do so he was a reformer without a party who relied exclusively on the power of those ideas and the example of the politicized "third element" he had recruited to win support for his programs. What is most striking in retrospect is not that he failed, but rather that the Baku *duma* ever elected him in the first place.

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Novikov's failure as mayor embodies the dilemma self-government posed for that portion of the Russian *intelligentsia* whose political aspirations were fundamentally different from those of local groups in power, whether the gentry in the *zemstva* or the wealthy bourgeoisie in city governments. On the one hand, local government seemed preferable to dictatorship from the center because of its potential to respond to local needs and the real authority, however limited, which it vested in the local population. Optimistic liberals, including Novikov, also valued

self-government as a school of politics, a useful stepping-stone toward the creation of a national parliament which, whether legislative or advisory in character, would nevertheless represent the will of society.⁸⁵

On the other hand, the everyday functioning of the *zemstva* and municipal governments established by the Great Reforms evoked far less undiluted optimism or enthusiasm, even from those most committed to self-government in principle. The powers of these local governments were narrowly circumscribed, for one thing, and the central government frequently interfered in their activities.⁸⁶ An equal if nor greater source of ambivalence for many—and certainly for Novikov—was the character of the local assemblies themselves. Those within the “third element” who were dedicated to serving the people, for example, were angered by what they saw as the parochialism and unbridled self-interest of the elites which dominated these bodies. The increasingly professionalized members of this “third element,” whether physicians, statisticians, or teachers, sought the freedom to define their own remedies for local problems and the budget with which to apply them.

Novikov’s attitude toward the very principle of self-government was considerably more ambivalent than he could bring himself to admit. His explicit disdain for “common business affairs, family, and old ties”⁸⁷ as acceptable factors in local politics, for example, runs counter to the idea of local initiative. His opposition to the Baku *duma* itself was more explicit. Shocked by the tumult and elaborate cursing which were common features at its meetings, he thought it “sad, unbelievably sad, that the fate of self-government in Russia depends on sessions of this sort.”⁸⁸

In general, he did not think the Baku *duma* had the cultural and moral qualifications to govern rationally, whatever its legal authority. Nor did he think it an exception in this regard. Despite Baku’s geographical and national distinctiveness, he wrote, its *duma* was “very, very similar to all other *dumy* in Russia.”⁸⁹ The economic interests of the properties classes which dominated these municipal assemblies (and implicitly the *zemstva* as well), he argued, far outweighed all differences in their members’ nationality, social position, or even education. By extension, therefore, his depreciation of the Baku *duma* brought the authority of *dumy* and *zemstvo* assemblies throughout the empire into question.

If existing assemblies were so inadequate, how should local self-government be constituted? Novikov offered no real answer to this question, which his denigration of local assemblies automatically suggests. The only conclusion he drew in his memoirs as mayor was that “neither landlords nor capitalists will save local administration in Russia, but rather an element of the conscious Russian *intelligentsia*.”⁹⁰ This formulation admirably reflects the *intelligentsia*’s desire to administer the country according to its own designs, various as they were; certainly it accords as well with the “third element’s” wish to be free from the tutelage and constant harassment of local political authorities. But it ignores the political dimension of government altogether and leaves a series of obvious questions unanswered. Who belonged to this “conscious Russian *intelligentsia*”? More important, who decided who belonged? How could one reconcile such an administration by experts, however politically

enlightened, with an equally insistent demand for democracy and an expansion of popular participation in government? Finally, who but a central dictator could sustain the decisions of such an untrammeled "third element" against the recalcitrant opposition of powerful local groups?

Novikov did not pretend to have an alternative to existing institutions. His argument was simply that the "third element" would provide the people "who will guide our self-governments, both *zemstvo* and urban, onto the proper path."⁹¹ His refusal to accept politics as the institutionalized reconciliation of competing interests was shared by most of the liberal and radical *intelligentsia*, and thus had important implications for Russia as a whole. Such contempt for interests—as opposed to ideas—made a reliance on experts inevitable, whether those of the "third element" or those of a monolithic political party. In doing so it precluded the development of a truly democratic politics, in which interests are necessarily a factor, and fostered a climate of acceptance for the rule of an ideological elite.

Novikov's refusal openly to support the Baku *duma*'s right to rule—whatever its mistakes—gives some indication of his limited commitment to the "formal democracy" of local self-government as it was. The *duma* was doubtless as parochial and corrupt as he charged, but it embodied the principle of self-government all the same. It was admittedly a less than fully democratic representative body, but there is no reason to assume that a more equal suffrage would have made it any less parochial or corrupt, which was Novikov's main concern. (Significantly, he never complained about the electoral laws themselves). The altruistic standards by which he rejected the *duma*'s competence reveal an unwillingness to accept the practical consequences of any local administration whose principles and decisions differed from his own, and hence an imperfect understanding of the nature of local government itself. In this respect as well his attitude is reminiscent of the radical *intelligentsia*. However one may sympathize with his ideals, or even with his frustration at the defeat of admirable political goals, his moral pretentiousness, intolerance, and generally authoritarian manner make it questionable whether he was any better prepared for the reality of self-government than the Baku deputies whose qualifications he so disparaged.

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As a result of his proximity to the "third element" he had recruited in Baku, Novikov's dedication to egalitarian values became noticeably more explicit. In Baku, he wrote, "I was able to kill off in myself the man of *high life*, the landlord, the nobleman, and the land captain. I was able to become simply a human being, and there is nothing higher than that on this earth."⁹² He contrasted this with his experience in the countryside: "As a land captain," he recalled, "I felt myself to be close to the peasants, but this was the closeness of a father to his children. . . No, not a father. . . a step-father, a noble, and perhaps also a tormentor. Only with a sense of absolute equality can a human being be fully satisfied."⁹³ In retrospect he recognized that his tendency to discriminate on

the basis of civic ideals could violate this notion of equality as much as traditional distinctions based on social origin or wealth. Criticizing his own behavior in this regard, he conceded that "one must seek and be able to find the human being in everyone."⁹⁴

It was with this pronounced commitment to equality that Novikov entered the revolutionary period of 1905. After resigning as mayor of Baku he moved to St. Petersburg, where he worked full-time as a writer.⁹⁵ He also became actively involved in liberal politics, and was exiled from the capital in early January, 1905, for his speeches at various banquets.⁹⁶ Still in the city on the night of January 8, the eve of Bloody Sunday, he joined a delegation of prominent writers and scholars who visited both Witte and Sviatopolk-Mirskij at their homes, imploring them to intervene with the tsar in order to prevent the impending violence. The petitioners included the liberal politicians and editors K. K. Arsen'ev and I. V. Gessen, the populist statisticians and publicists N. F. Annenskij and A. V. Pešehonov, the historians N. I. Kareev, V. A. Mjakotin, and V. I. Semevskij, and finally the writer Maksim Gor'kij.⁹⁷ They were turned away in both cases. Witte's response that "as chairman of the Committee of Ministers this affair does not concern me" struck the group as a particularly obtuse kind of bureaucratic formalism.⁹⁸

Two days later, on January 11, this last-minute delegation was arrested, and its members were subsequently exiled from the city.⁹⁹ According to the Brockhaus-Efron encyclopedia, Novikov was arrested and exiled "several times" in 1905 because of his "extreme opinions."¹⁰⁰ The entry provides no details, and his activities in the period after 1905 remain obscure. Following his death on January 24, 1913, his mother wrote a commemorative essay recounting all he had done to help the peasants on his own estate. Entitled "What a Russian landlord can do," it was published in October, 1917.¹⁰¹

New Orleans, 1980

1. A. I. Novikov, *Zapiski zemskogo načal'nika* (SPb., 1899) (hereafter ZZN).

2. The urban counterpart to *Zapiski zemskogo načal'nika* was his *Zapiski o gorodskom samoupravlenii* (SPb., 1904). A more personal account of his service as a mayor is *Zapiski gorodskogo golovy* (SPb., 1905) (hereafter ZGG). His occasional articles on current topics were published in two collections: *Sbornik statej, 1899-1900 gg.* (SPb., 1901) and *Vtoroj sbornik statej, 1901-1902 gg.* (SPb., 1902). He also wrote short stories, plays, and a novel.

3. ZGG: 9.

4. The English journalist W. T. Stead states that Ivan Novikov was curator of St. Petersburg University. Both the Brockhaus-Efron encyclopedia and Soviet sources are precise in their description of his office as that of school superintendent. See W. T. Stead, *The M.P. for Russia: reminiscences and correspondence of Madame Olga Novikoff*, 2 vols (London, 1909), I: 13; "Novikova, Ol'ga Alekseevna," *Encyklopédiečeskij slovar' Brokgauza-Efrona*, 86 vols (SPb., 1890-1907) XXI: 252; and *Ličnye arhivnye fondy v gosudarstvennyh hraničestvah SSSR: Ukatatel'*, 2 vols (Moscow, 1962-63) I: 326.

5. W. T. Stead, I, v. Her best-known published works were *Is Russia wrong?* (London, 1878), *Friends or foes?* (London, 1879), and *Russia and England, a protest*

and an appeal (London, 1880). For her memoirs see Madame Olga Novikoff, *Russian memories* (London, 1917).

6. *Imperatorskij licej v pamjat' Careviča Nikolaja*, known as the Katkov lycée for its founder, M. N. Katkov.

7. ZGG: 8.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. For a detailed examination of this reform see P. A. Zajončkovskij, "Zakon o zemskih načal'nikah 12 iulja 1889 goda," *Naučnye doklady vysšej školy: istoričeskie nauki* 2 (1961): 42-72.

11. ZZN: 38-39.

12. For a broader discussion of land captains see Aleksandr Abramovič Liberman, "Institut zemskih načal'nikov, 1889-1905 gg.," *Avtoreferat dissertationi* (Moscow, 1976); the same author's "Sostav instituta zemskih načal'nikov," *Voprosy istorii* 8 (Aug. 1976): 201-204; and J. I. Mandel, "Paternalistic authority in the Russian countryside, 1856-1906" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1978). For suggestions of the more positive role the land captain could play in matters such as famine relief see Richard G. Robbins, Jr., *Famine in Russia, 1891-1892: the Imperial government responds to a crisis* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1975): 28-30, 153-154.

13. ZZN: 9.

14. ZGG: 8.

15. Ibid.

16. ZZN: 2

17. Ibid.: 58.

18. A. I. Novikov, "Čto nuzhno derevne," in *Sbornik statej, 1899-1900 gg., op. cit.*: 1-8.

19. ZZN: 26-27.

20. Ibid.: 99.

21. A. I. Novikov, *Zapiski o sel'skoj škole* (SPb., 1902): 2. Novikov's perceptions tend to support the more general observations Marc Raeff has made in his stimulating article "Codification et droit en Russie impériale: quelques remarques comparatives," *CMRS*, XX, 1 (Janv.-Mars 1979): 5-13.

22. ZZN: 8.

23. Ibid.: 3.

24. Ibid.: 3-4.

25. A. I. Novikov, *Zapiski o sel'skoj škole, op. cit.*: 12.

26. Ibid.: 13, 197-198.

27. Olga Novikoff, "What a Russian landlord can do," *Asiatic Review* (Oct. 1917): 3-5.

28. ZZN: 146.

29. Ibid.: 101.

30. A. I. Novikov, "Melkaja zemskaia edinica," in *Vtoroj sbornik statej, 1901-1902 gg., op. cit.*: 28-33; "K voprosu ob otmene telesnyh nakazanij," in *ibid.*: 7-12; "Cenzura redakcii," in *Sbornik statej, 1899-1900 gg., op. cit.*: 244-247.

31. ZGG: 9. I have not been able to establish the exact dates when he held these offices.

32. Ibid.: 9-10.

33. Ibid.: 10.

34. Ibid.: 10-12.

35. Ibid.: 12.

36. Ibid.: 6.

37. Ibid.: 10.

38. Ibid.: 26-28.

39. Ibid.: 3.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.: 87-88.

42. Ibid.: 67.

43. Ibid.: 69.

44. Ibid.: 69-70.

45. Ibid.: 68-69.

46. Ibid.: 68.

47. *Ibid.*: 71.
48. *Ibid.*
49. *Ibid.*
50. *Ibid.*: 72-73.
51. *Ibid.*: 101.
52. *Ibid.*: 88.
53. *Ibid.*: 90.
54. *Ibid.* Novikov's description of Natanson corresponds to that of Vera Figner, who thought him "a man of tireless energy, possessing an unusual capacity to attract people, to organize them and unite them in common work." V. Figner, "Mark Andreevič Natanson," *Katorga i ssylka* 7 (1929): 142, quoted in V. V. Širokova, *Partija "Narodnogo prava,"* (Saratov, 1972): 34.
55. *Ibid.*: 143.
56. *Ibid.*: 52.
57. *Ibid.*: 179. Novikov's search for such "geniuses" prompted a variety of anecdotes: "There are dogs running loose in the city—Novikov ought to recruit a genius-dogcatcher," or "Novikov is collecting gods. Olympus is taking shape" (*ibid.*, p. 89).
58. *Ibid.*: 166.
59. *Ibid.*: 144.
60. *Ibid.*: 153.
61. *Ibid.*: 176.
62. *Ibid.*: 153.
63. *Ibid.*: 177-178. The term "moral insanity" occurs in English in the original.
64. *Ibid.*: 153.
65. *Ibid.*: 33.
66. *Ibid.*: 238.
67. *Ibid.*: 238-239.
68. *Ibid.*: 239.
69. *Ibid.*
70. *Ibid.*: 237.
71. *Ibid.*
72. *Ibid.*: 201-202.
73. *Ibid.*: 12-13.
74. *Ibid.*: 13.
75. Novikov doubtless recognized this disparity in theory, but he was nevertheless shocked by its magnitude in practice. Initially he preferred to emphasize the similarity of *zemstva* and *dumy* as manifestations of the same principle of self-government, ignoring their social and cultural differences. (His stay in Baku clearly dispelled this optimistic notion). It is interesting to compare his views on this point with those of the *zemstvo* liberal (and mayor) B. N. Čičerin, who was also from Tambov province. Čičerin made a qualitative distinction between the *zemstvo*, which he described as "the flower of the aristocracy, placed in the most favorable position for the proper discussion of civic questions," and urban assemblies, "where extremely uneducated elements not infrequently push themselves to the front." Boris Nikolaevič Čičerin, *Vospominanija Borisa Nikolaeviča Čičerina: zemstvo i Moskovskaja Duma* (Moscow, 1934): 20.
76. ZGG: 178.
77. For a recent discussion of *zemstvo* liberalism see N. M. Pirumova, *Zemskoe liberal'noe dvizhenie: social'nye korni i evoljucija do načala XX veka* (Moscow, 1977), especially pp. 93-111.
78. ZGG: 73.
79. *Ibid.*: 228-233.
80. *Ibid.*: 37, 234.
81. *Ibid.*: 234.
82. *Ibid.*: 240-241.
83. *Ibid.*: 241.
84. *Ibid.*
85. For the best discussion of the origins of self-government in Russia and the attending dilemmas see S. Frederick Starr, *Decentralization and self-government in Russia, 1830-1870* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972). For a review of liberal aims see N. M. Pirumova, *op. cit.*, and the literature she cites.

86. The interference of governors in particular was a common refrain in the memoirs of *zemstvo* activists. For an example see V. M. Hižnjakov, *Vospominanija zemskogo dejatel'ja* (Petrograd, 1916). Interestingly, Novikov made few complaints about such interference, and none as mayor of Baku.

87. *ZGG*: 73.

88. *Ibid.*: 222.

89. *Ibid.*: 4.

90. *Ibid.*: 241.

91. *Ibid.*: 1. *Zapiski gorodskogo golovy* was dedicated to the "third element" in Baku.

92. *Ibid.*: 232. The term "high life" is written in English in the original.

93. *Ibid.*

94. *Ibid.*

95. His books from this period included not only *Zapiski o gorodskom samoupravlenii* and *Zapiski gorodskogo golovy*, both of which dealt with problems of urban administration, but also two collections of stories and plays: *Sbornik rasskazov* (SPb., 1904), and *P'esy* (SPb., 1904). An earlier novel based on his experiences as land captain was entitled *Po zakonu. Roman iz derevenskoj žizni* (SPb., 1901).

96. Solomon M. Schwarz, *The Russian Revolution of 1905: the workers' movement and the formation of Bolshevism and Menshevism*, tr. Gertrude Vakar (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1967): 66.

97. A. M. Pankratova, ed., *Revoljucija 1905-1907 gg. v Rossii: dokumenty i materialy*. Volume entitled *Janvar'-mart 1905 goda* (Moscow, 1955): 147.

98. S. Ju. Witte, *Vospominanija*, 3 vols (Moscow, 1960) II: 342.

99. A. M. Pankratova, ed., *op. cit.*: 147.

100. *Enciklopedičeskij slovar' Brokgauza-Efrona*, vol. 3 (supplement): 295.

101. Olga Novikoff, "What a Russian landlord can do," *loc. cit.*