

# THE DECEMBRIST MOVEMENT AND THE SPANISH CONSTITUTION OF 1812

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**Abstract:** This paper studies the impact of the Spanish constitution of 1812 on Russian liberals in general and on the Decembrist movement specifically. It concludes that the constitution mainly exerted influence on the Decembrists by confirming their belief that liberty and constitutions were expressions of "the spirit of the time." It proved to them that liberal reforms were possible in Russia as well.

**Key Words:** Russian liberalism, Decembrist movement, Spanish constitution of 1812, post-Napoleonic revolutions

## I

During the last decade accounts of Russian history have been dominated by a propensity to emphasize autocratic tendencies. Thus, Russia has been portrayed as a country that is, always has been, and always will be autocratic. This might be a convenient explanation for the state of contemporary Russia, but it is not true. Nowadays, when Russian liberals are fighting for their existence, it is especially important to remember that Russia also has a liberal tradition. This tradition was particularly potent during the first and third quarters of the nineteenth century, which was also a period in Russian history when the ties to Western Europe were exceptionally strong. Therefore, we should not, as have often been done, overemphasize the internal influences on this movement.<sup>1</sup> In fact, it cannot be properly understood outside of the contemporary European movement for liberty and constitutionalism of which it was part. This is not to say that the internal context was irrelevant. Internal conditions played a vital role for the choices liberals made, but national demands and nationalistic influences did not make the movement less international. Nationalism was essential to other European liberal movements as well. They were inspired by the same Romantic ideas.<sup>2</sup> Most importantly, Russian liberals felt that they were part of an international movement fighting against absolutism and tyranny. Hence, European revolutionaries gave Russian liberals hope and inspiration because these Russians felt that they were all part of the same struggle, and this struggle was an expression of the spirit of the age.

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<sup>1</sup> See for ex Anatole G Mazour, *The First Russian Revolution, 1825*, Stanford UP, Stanford, CA, 1961, pp. 56-7; S. S. Volk, *Istoricheskie vzgliady dekabristov* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1958), p. 303; H. Lemberg, *Die nationale Gedankenwelt der Dekabristen* (Cologne-Graz, 1963).

<sup>2</sup> Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *Russia and the West in the Teaching of the Slavophiles*, Harvard UP, Cambridge, MA, 1952; Rabow-Edling, *Slavophile Thought and the Politics of Cultural Nationalism*, SUNY Press, Ithaca, NY, 2006.

The origin of Russian liberalism is commonly dated to the end of the 18th century and Alexander Radishchev is typically referred to as the first Russian liberal.<sup>3</sup> However, it was not until the first quarter of the nineteenth century that a liberal movement emerged in Russia. This movement is generally referred to as the Decembrist movement, named after the revolt they instigated in December 1825. The revolt was crushed by the tsar and the members arrested, interrogated and executed or banished into exile in Siberia.<sup>4</sup>

## II

Like in other European countries the Napoleonic wars contributed to the emergence of a liberal reform movement in Russia. In the Russian case, there were several reasons for this. Firstly, the war meant that Russians had the opportunity to see with their own eyes countries that were far more modern and liberal than their own. This also meant that they met with liberals from different European countries and became acquainted with their ideas. Secondly, they felt that by defeating Napoleon Russia had taken an important step towards a better and freer world. To them, the next logical step was reforms at home. When the Russian officers finally returned home after having conquered Napoleon and “liberated Europe from tyranny”, they could not accept the despotism and backwardness at home. Why had they given liberty to Europe, while preserving autocracy at home? Alexander Bestuzhev tried to explain the feelings of the returning soldiers in a letter to Nicholas I written after his arrest: “We delivered our homeland from tyranny but we are tyrannized anew by the master...Why did we free Europe, was it to put chains on ourselves?... Did we buy with our blood primacy among nations, so that we should be oppressed at home?”<sup>5</sup> The introduction to the proposed Russian Constitution, drafted by the Northern Decembrist Society, reflects similar feelings: “All the European nations are attaining constitutions and freedom. The Russian nation, more than any of them, deserves one as well as the other.”<sup>6</sup>

Thirdly, the invasion of the French army had led to an outburst of patriotic feeling in Russia. Many officers felt that it was wrong that peasants who had fought against Napoleon for the liberty of their country were now treated as slaves. An

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<sup>3</sup> David M. Lang, *The First Russian Radical: Alexander Radischev 1749-1802*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1959

<sup>4</sup> M. V. Nechkina, *Dvizhenie dekabristov*, 2 vols. Moscow, 1955; Anatole G Mazour, *The First Russian Revolution, 1825*, op. cit., M. Raeff, *The Decembrist Movement*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1966; B. E. Syroechkovskii, *Iz istorii dvizheniia dekabristov*, Moscow, 1969; N. M. Druzhinin, *Izbrannye trudy. Revoliutsionnoe dvizhenie v Rossii v XIX v.*, Moscow, 1985; S. V. Mironenko, *Dekabristy. Biograficheskii spravocchnik*, Moscow, 1988; S. A. Ekshtut, *V poiske istoricheskoi alternativy. Aleksandr I. Ego spodvizhniki. Dekabristy*, Moscow, 1994; V. M. Bokova (ed), *170 let spustia. Dekabristskie chteniia 1995 goda*, Moscow, 1999; N. Eidelman, *Udivitelnoe pokolenie. Dekabristy: litsa i sudby*, St Petersburg, 2001; *Dekabristy: aktualnye problemy i novye podchody*, ed. by O.I. Kianskaia, M.P. Odesskii, D.M. Feldman, Moskva, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> M. Dovnar-Zapolski, *Idealy dekabristov*, Moscow, 1907, p. 94.

<sup>6</sup> Nikita Muraviev, *Project for a Constitution* in I. Ia. Shchipanov and S. Ia. Straiikh, eds, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia Dekabristov*, Moscow, 1951, vol. I, p. 295.

additional factor was the tsar himself. Alexander I was raised in a liberal spirit, consorted with freethinkers, and often spoke in favour of liberal reforms. Thus, his recognition of the Cortes and the constitution they adopted in the Treaty of Velikiye Luki 8/20 July 1812 was regarded as an expression of his liberal views and gave Russian freethinkers hope for the future. The Decembrist Peter Kakhovskii referred to this action in a letter to General Levashev, stating that the fact that the tsar recognized the Spanish constitution so soon gave Russians hope for a constitution of their own.<sup>7</sup>

Many liberal Russians as well as Western Europeans had high hopes regarding the intentions of Alexander I. This belief was strengthened by Alexander's stand in favour of constitutional monarchy in France and the speech he made in March 1818 during the opening of the Polish Sejm when he declared his intentions to extend the constitutional procedures to all countries under his care. But, rather than implementing liberal reforms, the tsar turned to the right. To many young Russian officers victory and the great role Russia played in Europe after the war also meant the promise of reform at home. Alexander was the liberator of Europe, and so they believed that he would liberate Russia as well. Instead, the conservative Count Aleksei Arakcheev, the organizer of the unpopular military colonies, gained more influence. This made the returning liberal officers deeply disappointed. So did the granting of a constitution to Poland in November 1815 and not to Russia.<sup>8</sup>

### III

Many of the Russian officers who returned home after the Napoleonic wars became members of one of the secret societies that emerged at this time. They were modelled on similar societies in Europe as the German *Tugendbund* and the Italian, French and Spanish *Carbonari* with roots in Freemasonry. In the beginning, the political demands of these societies were not clearly formulated and they essentially aimed at a moral regeneration of society. Among the most prominent was the Union of Salvation (1816-17). The founders of the Union included some of the key figures of the Decembrist movement: Alexander Muraviev, Nikita Muraviev, Prince Sergei Trubetskoi, Ivan Yakushkin, Matvei and Sergei Muraviev-Apostol.<sup>9</sup> They were all young officers of the Guard and members of high nobility. Shortly after its founding, Pavel Pestel, who was to play a leading part in the movement, was recruited. Through his broad knowledge of political theory and international affairs, his devotion to the Union and his strong will, he soon won the admiration of

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<sup>7</sup> Letter of Peter Kakhovsky to General Levashev, 24th Feb 1826 in *Iz pisem i pokazanii dekabristov*, ed. by A. K Borozdin, St P, 106, pp. 3-18. Transl in Anatole Mazour, *The First Russian Revolution, 1825*, op. Cit., pp. 274-77.

<sup>8</sup> A. Poggio, *Vosstanie Dekabristov*, XI, p. 38; Anatole Mazour, *The First Russian Revolution, 1825*, op. cit., Marc Raeff, *The Decembrist Movement*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ; Avraham Yarmolinsky, *Road to Revolution*, Macmillan, New York, 1959.

<sup>9</sup> *Vosstanie Dekabristy. Materialy*, ed by M. N. Pokrovsky, Moscow 1925-29, I, 9, 298; II, 198, 203, 204; III, 6, 42, 55; IV, 100, 256, 273-74.

many of the members of the organization.<sup>10</sup> The program of the Union comprised the emancipation of the serfs and the introduction of a constitutional monarchy. There soon arose divisions in the Union between the majority of more conservative members, who desired moderate reforms employed through legal methods and the minority of more radical members, who showed an inclination towards revolutionary action, and if necessary, even regicide. At a conference in Moscow, it was decided to undertake a radical reorganization of the Society. Based on the text of the *Tugendbund* constitution a new constitution was produced known as *The Green Book*. With the completion of this text, the Union of Salvation was discarded and replaced by a new society, The Union of Welfare.<sup>11</sup>

This organization had a somewhat broader philanthropic program. It also had a secret branch with a political agenda, where many of the future Decembrists were members. In order to mislead the government and to rid the Union of untrustworthy members, the Union of Welfare was soon fictitiously dissolved. In its stead arose a Northern and a Southern Society. The organization in the South came into being as a result of the refusal to accept the resolution of the conference in Moscow and its members felt that they continued the program adopted by the Union. The Southern Society was led by a Directory with Pavel Pestel as its chairman with headquarters at Tulchin, a Southern town where the Second Army was stationed. The Society established two important branches, one at Kamenka under the leadership of Prince Sergei Volkonsky, the other at Vasilkov, headed by Sergei Muraviev-Apostol. This branch shortly became the most active one with a larger membership than the main organization. It came to play an important part in the uprising.

In the North, the stronghold of the conservative liberals, no progress was made at first to reorganize the Union, but eventually Nikita Muraviev and Prince Sergei Trubetskoi founded the Northern Council. Nikita Muraviev was captain of the Guard and had been among the troops that entered Paris. He was by conviction a republican and had supported Pestel's republican program in 1820, but he felt that these views were too advanced to be accepted by the majority of the Society's members and thus wrote his constitution in a more conservative manner. Russia, according to Muraviev's constitution, was to become a constitutional monarchy. (However, some of the members of the Northern Society continued to believe in a republican government and opposed his political program). The Decembrists' most important political texts were written by Muraviev and Pestel in the form of constitutions for the future Russia, or rather in Pestel's case, an instruction to the Supreme Provisional Government. While Muraviev wanted to create a Russian Federation modeled on the USA, Pestel believed that Russia should be a unitary nation. Both constitutions were radical documents, Pestel's even more so since it

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<sup>10</sup> Patrick O'Meara, *The Decembrist Pavel Pestel*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2003; O. I. Kiianskaia, *Pavel Pestel: ofitser, razvedchik, zagovorshchik* (Moscow, 2002); N. V. Basargin, *Zapiski*, Kn. izd-vo, Krasnoiarsk 1985, pp. 4-8; I. D. Yakushkin, *Zapiski*, St Petersburg, Obshchestvennaia Polza, 1905.

<sup>11</sup> For the history of the Decembrist movement, see Anatole Mazour, op. cit.

promoted a republican form of government, radical agrarian reform and universal suffrage.

On November 19 1825, Alexander I died in Southern Russia. Since he did not have any children, his older brother Constantine was next in line. But Constantine, who was governor-general in Warsaw at the time, had renounced his right to the throne and placed his younger brother Nicholas next in line. Unfortunately, this arrangement was unknown to most people which meant that when the news of the tsar's death reached St Petersburg, the Guard and the state officials took the oath of allegiance to Constantine. However, Constantine refused to accept the throne and declared his loyalty to Nicholas. For several weeks, the empire remained without a regent until finally Nicholas decided to become emperor. December 14 was set as the date when the Guard and the Senate were to take the oath of allegiance to the new tsar.

Although they were unprepared and there was no time to come to any agreement with the Southern Society, members of the Northern Society decided that the succession confusion gave them an opportunity they could not miss. They chose Prince Sergei Trubetskoi as the leader, who drafted a Manifesto, in the manner of a *pronunciamento*, to be proclaimed by the Senate. The plan was to take the troops loyal to the Society to the Senate Square and force the Senate to approve the constitution. But things did not turn out as planned. First, the number of military units that supported their cause was much smaller than expected. Second, the leaders that had been selected to command the troops failed to turn up at the crucial moment. The remaining leaders were inexperienced and lacked initiative. Third, the Senate had decided to have an early meeting and had already left when the troops arrived. At first the government tried to disperse the troops by peaceful means. When this attempt failed, and the fear that the rebels might gain the support of the troops loyal to the government grew stronger, they opened fire and many, both civilian bystanders and soldiers died.

It took nearly two weeks for news of the revolt in the North to reach the Southern Society. By then events in the South had taken a different turn. Several traitors had betrayed the movement and the day before the rising Pestel had been arrested. As the remaining members were debating whether to start a revolt or not, news about the rising in St Petersburg reached them. Muraviev-Apostol, who was the logical substitute for Pestel had gone to Zhitomir and in his absence an order came from St Petersburg to arrest him. The Society sent Bestuzhev-Riumin to warn him. When Muraviev-Apostol, who had already heard about the revolt in the North, received the news about his imminent arrest, he realized that the only option was to revolt. He managed to get the support of the Chernigovsky regiment and with the assistance of members of the United Slavs, captured the town of Vasilkov. From now on Muraviev-Apostol made some strategic mistakes. Instead of choosing to march to Kiev directly in a surprise attack, he spent the night in Vasilkov, waiting for replies to messages that never reached their destination. The plan was to march to Brusilov, from where it was possible either to conduct an attack on Kiev, or on Zhitomir, a stronghold of the United Slavs. Muraviev-Apostol

used the time in Vasilkov to work on his Spanish-influenced *Orthodox Catechism* which was read to the soldiers the next day at noon before setting out towards Brusilov. Apparently the soldiers did not understand the meaning of the Catechism and so were led to believe that they took the oath of allegiance to Constantine.<sup>12</sup>

Reaching and capturing Motovilovka, Muraviev-Apostol made yet another mistake by letting the soldiers rest for a whole day. Early on the morning of January 2 the rebels, now numbering about 1000 infantrymen, left Motovilovka with the intention of attacking Belaia Tserkov, where they hoped to gain the support of the Seventeenth Jegersky regiment, which would make a move on Kiev feasible. However, when camping in a neighbouring town Muraviev-Apostol learned that the regiment had been transferred. He then revised his plan and instead decided to try to reach Zhitomir where the rebels could join the United Slavs and perhaps the Polish Secret Society. This turned out to be a fatal decision. On the afternoon of January 3 the rebels met a detachment of government hussars and artillery in an open field. They were attacked with canister shots, the first killing several men in front, and the second wounding Muraviev-Apostol seriously. Without their commander the soldiers did not know what to do. Most of the rebels were arrested and the leaders were sent to St Petersburg where they joined their unfortunate brothers from the Northern Society.

After crushing the rebellion Nicholas created a special committee for the investigation of all secret societies. Every person connected with the movement in any way was asked a number of questions, including what led them to hold liberal ideas. Answering these questions the Decembrists referred both to internal and external events and thinkers. They claimed to have been influenced by French thinkers, American republicanism and revolutionary events in Spain, Portugal, Piedmont, Naples, and Greece. The country which perhaps had the most profound influence on the Decembrist movement was Spain. This article will look at the Spanish influence, and above all on the impact of the Spanish constitution of 1812.

#### IV

The interest in Spain and in the constitutional movement started already with the War of Independence. Russia began to take an interest in Spanish events with the Spanish War of Independence. The resistance of the Spanish people to Napoleon beginning in 1808 was greeted with approval in Russia. People started to believe that Napoleon's days were numbered, and that the Spaniards and other oppressed people would bring an end to his dominance. Spain was portrayed as the engine for change in Europe. Russian society was impressed by the patriotism and civic spirit shown by the Spaniards and the Spanish cause was felt to be

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<sup>12</sup> See Isabel de Madariaga, "Spain and the Decembrists," *European Studies Review* 3, No. 2, 1973, pp. 141-56 and Richard Stites, "Decembrists with a Spanish Accent," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 12, 1, Winter 2011, pp. 5-23 for a discussion of the Orthodox Catechism

honourable and just. What affected them most was that it was “ordinary” people who had taken to arms.<sup>13</sup>

When war between France and Russia seemed inevitable, many members of the educated elite wanted Russia to imitate Spain and enlist the support of the people. Spain had clearly shown what the courage and energy of a whole people could accomplish against a much stronger enemy. Because patriotism was so powerful, it was almost a guarantee for victory. Thus, when Napoleon finally moved against Russia, June 24 1812, the tsar decided to form a popular militia. The Spanish War of Independence had created a sense of shared ideals and a shared enemy among members of the educated elite in Russia. This sense of community with Spain became even stronger when Napoleon invaded Russia. It joined the two countries in a common experience and forged a bond of sympathy between them.<sup>14</sup> As the interest in Spain grew in Russian society, there was an increase in the amount of information about Spanish events printed in the Russian press. Spanish documents as The Citizen's Catechism, the Decrees of the Cortes, the Proclamation of the Supreme Junta, and of course the Constitution were published in Russian journals.<sup>15</sup>

Spain became a role model and Spanish liberals were held up as patriotic heroes in Russia. Events in Spain since 1808 were described as unexampled in world history. It was argued that these events culminating in the adoption of a liberal constitution, was in accordance with “the spirit of the times” and that “the new Spain, liberated from the yoke of Napoleon, was the homeland of the first *liberales* in Europe”.<sup>16</sup> This argument, repeated during the Spanish revolution, implied that others would follow, that they were all part of the same struggle for liberty. Hence, the “heroic” Spanish rebels and the establishment of a constitutional regime were an inspiration to Russian liberals. Since Russian liberals felt that what happened in Spain was an expression of the spirit of the time, it was taken as evidence that things would change in Russia as well. The fact that the tsar recognized the Cortes and the constitution so soon could only emphasize the feelings of hope for the future. The Spanish example led Russians to believe that liberty and a constitution would follow on victory against Napoleon. In other words, they believed that events in Russia would take the same turn as they had in Spain.<sup>17</sup>

The events surrounding the Spanish constitution also led Russians to form ideas about the power of patriotism and the strong link between patriotism and

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<sup>13</sup> See for ex Leo Tolstoi, *War and Peace*, Vol. 2; M. A. Dodolev, “Rossiia i voina ispanskogo naroda za nezavisimost” *Voprosy Istorii*, 1972, no. 11, pp. 34, 36-38, 43-44.

<sup>14</sup> Isabel de Madariaga, “Spain and the Decembrists,” op. cit.; M. A. Dodolev, “Rossiia i voina ispanskogo naroda za nezavisimost,” op. cit., pp. 38-9.

<sup>15</sup> *Syn Otechestva*, [The Son of the Fatherland] Nos. 13-14, 1812, 1813.

<sup>16</sup> P. A. Korsakov, *Severnyi nabliudatel'* [The Northern Observer], no. 1, 1817, pp. 29-34; *Istoricheskii, statisticheskii i geograficheskii zhurnal*, April 1815, part II, book 1, pp. 11, 57; *Syn Otechestva*, Oct 1812.

<sup>17</sup> See for ex as F Glinka and the Turgenev brothers cited in M. A. Dodolev, “Rossiia i voina ispanskogo naroda za nezavisimost,” op. cit., pp. 39-41.

liberty. It was the patriotism of the people that had led to victory over Napoleon *and* to political freedom. Hence, genuine patriotism presumed a readiness to fight for liberty and a constitution. The battle for national independence could thus easily transform into a struggle for political freedom. In a sense it was two sides of the same struggle. Hence, conservatives feared that the battle against Napoleon would lead to a revolution in Russia as well, while liberals hoped that it would.

The Spanish constitution of 1812 was one of the key documents for the Russian liberal movement. It was published in St Petersburg on November 8 1812 in a French translation and soon afterwards in a Russian translation.<sup>18</sup> Prominent Russian liberals, including Nikita Muraviev, the leader of the Decembrist Northern Society, had copies of the Spanish constitution in their private libraries, (as well as works on Spanish History and the Cortes).<sup>19</sup> The publication of the Spanish constitution gave Russian liberals reason to address the situation in their country and compare it to Spain. This gave rise to a discussion of the significance of liberal reforms and the meaning of political liberty in the Russian press.<sup>20</sup>

When Ferdinand VII, who was restored to his throne in 1814, refused to swear by the constitution and restored absolutism in Spain, many Russians were disappointed. The fact that Alexander I revoked the constitution that he had recognized only two years earlier shocked them.<sup>21</sup> Many educated Russians criticised the actions of Ferdinand VII despite the more conservative policy of the tsar. Both Nikolai and Sergei Turgenev condemned the despotism of the Spanish king but were convinced that freedom would win in the end, because Spain had had the opportunity to experience the benefits of constitutional rule under the Cortes. As soon as the people were able to desire freedom, they argued, despotism would lose. Even some conservatives condemned the reaction and supported constitutional reforms because they feared revolt among the people.<sup>22</sup> Conservatives also believed in the spirit of the time although, in their case, it was something to be feared. The Spanish constitution showed what drastic consequences national resistance could lead to. Thus, it could be argued that the Spanish constitution affected the educated elite in Russia by creating fear of change among conservatives and hope for change among liberals.

The effect of the constitution of 1812 on Russia was even more drastic as a result of the Spanish Revolution in 1820. To Russian liberals the revolution was seen as a continuation of the War of Independence and evidence of the

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<sup>18</sup> *Constitution politique de la monarchie espagnole publiée à Cadix le 19 Mars 1812. Traduit de l'Espagnol par m-r l'abbé Vialar, ancien chanoin d'Albi*, St P., 1812; "Gosudarstvennyi ustav ispanskoi monarkhii," *Syn Otechestva*, 1813, nos. 13-14.

<sup>19</sup> N. Druzhinin, *Dekabrist Nikita Muraviev*, Moscow, 1933, p. 297 ff.

<sup>20</sup> M A. Dodolev, "Russia and the Spanish Revolution of 1820-1823," *Russian Studies in History*, Vol. 8, No. 3, Winter 1969-1970, p. 253

<sup>21</sup> After 1814 republication of the Spanish constitution was prohibited. M. A. Dodolev, "Rossiia i voina ispanskogo naroda za nezavisimost," op. cit., pp. 42-44.

<sup>22</sup> *Severnyi nabliudatel'*, 1817, no. 5; *Syn Otechestva*, 1814, nos. 25, 58, 60; *Dnevnik i pis'ma Nikolaia Ivanovicha Turgeneva za 1811-1816 gg.*, Izd. Otd. russkago jazyka... Ross.akad.nauk, Petrograd, 1921, pp. 327-82; *Syn Otechestva*, 1814, No. 27, p. 88; M A. Dodolev, "Russia and the Spanish Revolution of 1820-1823," op. cit., p. 253.

rightfulness of the constitution. It proved that the days of absolutism were numbered. N. I. Turgenev wrote that for the second time Spain was revealing the meaning of popular spirit, of love for the fatherland. What made the revolution especially noble in the eyes of the liberals was the fact that its aim was to restore the constitution and constitutional government.<sup>23</sup> Many Russians held the constitution of 1812 in high regard although it was also criticized for not seriously limiting the powers of the king and properly dividing executive and legislative powers.<sup>24</sup>

The mutiny in Cadiz among the Spanish troops, as well as the rebels' calls for the return to the constitution of 1812 was reported in the Russian press and discussed at length by members of the educated elite. When Ferdinand VII convened the Cortes and took an oath of fealty to the Constitution, it was welcomed by most educated Russians and the press in general took a positive attitude toward the revolution. The subsequent period of constitutional government was followed with interest by Russian liberals. The debates in the Cortes were available in French on the pages of *Le Constitutionnel*, a French opposition newspaper, which was widely read by future Decembrists.<sup>25</sup>

The revolution was highly idealized and its heroic aspects emphasized. One of the aspects of the revolution that attracted the attention of Russian society, even the conservatives, was the peacefulness of the revolt and the implementation of the constitution. This, many of them believed, had implications for reform in Russia. As they had done during the war of independence, Russians compared events in Spain with the Russian situation and were convinced that what happened in Spain had consequences for Russia. Peter Chaadaev, for instance, wrote that he hoped that the events in Spain would have "an immediate influence" on the situation in Russia.<sup>26</sup>

Alexander I, however, was not in the least excited about events in Spain. The promulgation of the constitution produced a bad impression upon him. The tsarist government took a very negative view of the Spanish Revolution and of the constitution adopted. This standpoint alienated a large part of the educated elite in Russia from the tsar. It is interesting to note that the Russian charge d'affaires in

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<sup>23</sup> N. I. Turgenev, cited in Isabel de Madariaga, "Spain and the Decembrists," op. cit., p. 144; *Izbrannye sotsial'no politicheskie i filosofskie proizvedeniia dekabristov*, Gos. Izd-vo polit. litry., Moscow, 1951, pp. 208-9.

<sup>24</sup> See for ex N. M. Novosil'tsev cited in M. A. Dodolev, "Russia and the Spanish Revolution of 1820-1823," op. cit., p. 257. At the tsar's request Novosil'tsev drafted a constitution for Russia in 1820 which was never implemented. The document emphasized civil liberties and proposed a federal structure with elected assemblies on local and national level.

<sup>25</sup> See testimonial of Matvei Ivanovich Murav'ev-Apostol cited in Mazour, 57; Isabel de Madariaga, "Spain and the Decembrists," op. cit., p. 144; L. Iu. Slezkine, *Rossia i voina za nezavisimost' v Ispanskoi Amerike*, Moscow, 1964, p. 244.

<sup>26</sup> See for ex. *Sochineniia i pis'ma* P. Ia Chaadaeva, ed. by M. Gershenzon, Vol. II, Moscow, 1914, p. 53; *Dnevnik i pis'ma* N. I. Turgeneva za 1816-1824 gg., Petrograd, 1921, p. 226-27; M. A. Dodolev, "Russia and the Spanish Revolution of 1820-1823," op. cit., pp. 256-58; Isabel de Madariaga, "Spain and the Decembrists," op. cit., p. 144.

Madrid, Count Mark Bulgari had advised Ferdinand to grant the constitution, a move the tsar was not particularly pleased with. It shows that not even government officials were prepared for Alexander's reaction and acted according to the spirit of the times. In fact some members of the government defended the constitutional government because they feared a full revolution in Europe. This shows that not only liberals believed that time was ripe for liberty and a constitution. They held up the Spanish case as an example of what would happen if liberal reforms were not granted.<sup>27</sup>

The view of the Spanish constitution after 1820 divided Russian society. Conservatives compared the Spanish revolution with the French and criticized the constitution for creating anarchy and permitting everything. In their view all constitutions were harmful and dangerous. Liberals, on the other hand, held that a constitution was an essential prerequisite for a progressive country. They called opponents to their views "Spanish *serviles*."<sup>28</sup> However, what created the deepest divide and the greatest disappointment was the tsar's acceptance of the French military intervention in Spain, authorized by the Holy Alliance. The role Russia and Alexander I played in the French invasion and the restoration of absolutism in Spain shocked and disappointed many Russians, especially since the tsar had recognized the constitution in 1812.<sup>29</sup> Alexander had opponents both among his former friends and in his own government. One of those who were critical to the politics of the Holy Alliance toward Spain was the statesman N. S. Mordvinov. He argued that the uprising in Spain and in other European countries had common roots. Already in 1816, he wrote that absolutism in Russia was the reason for the country's weakness. These arguments are interesting considering that Mordvinov had in his possession the appeal of Colonel Antonio Quiroga, one of the leaders of the Spanish Revolution, to the king where he writes that the peoples are demanding the establishment of representative institutions.<sup>30</sup>

The Decembrists felt that Russia's role in the suppression of liberal movements in Europe was tantamount to treason and regarded Alexander's submission to Metternich's policies as unpatriotic.<sup>31</sup> The suppression of revolution in Naples and Piedmont and now in Spain, as well as the failure to support the Greek insurrection finally revealed Alexander's reactionary leanings. One case in point is the tsar's visit to the military camp in Tulchin. At a dinner with his officers Alexander received news of the arrest of Rafael del Riego. Having read the message, he turned to his men and announced "Messieurs, je vous félicite: Riego est fait prisonnier." However, only one of the officers congratulated him to this "victory," and thereby lost the respect of his fellows. All the other officers remained silent.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> M A. Dodolev, "Russia and the Spanish Revolution of 1820-1823," op. cit., pp. 258, 260.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 259, 262-63.

<sup>29</sup> See for ex the testimonies of Poggio, *Vosstanie*, XI, p. 73; Kakhovsky's letter to Nicholas I in A. K. Borozdin, *Iz pisem i pokazanii dekabristov*, p. 12.

<sup>30</sup> M A. Dodolev, "Russia and the Spanish Revolution of 1820-1823," op. cit., p. 254.

<sup>31</sup> N. V. Basargin, *Zapiski*, op. cit., p. 10; Anatole Mazour, op. cit. p. 57

<sup>32</sup> Richard Stites, "Decembrists with a Spanish Accent," op. cit., p. 16.

## V

That events in Spain affected the liberal movement in Russia is beyond doubt. The question is to what extent and how. Isabel de Madariaga has argued that Russian liberals' knowledge of Spain and Spanish history was slight, but, as we have seen, Russian journals published reports of events in Spain from the Napoleonic invasion to the execution of Riego, and there is evidence that at least some of the liberals followed events in Spain very closely.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, the libraries of N. I. Turgenev and N. Muraviev show that they were familiar with the Spanish constitution of 1812 as well as literature on Spanish history. A few of the future Decembrists had firsthand knowledge of Spain and Spanish connections. D. Zavalishin, for example, had been with the navy in Spanish California and learnt Spanish. He had contact with the secretary of the Spanish embassy in St Petersburg, Calderón de la Barca, who was an ardent constitutionalist and was accused of receiving political literature from him. Furthermore, A. Bestuzhev and A. Belyayev served on a Russian frigate which called at British Gibraltar in the summer of 1824 when liberals had seized a neighbouring town and proclaimed the constitution of 1812. When the revolutionaries had to abandon the town, the Decembrists witnessed their arrival in the harbour of Gibraltar and even met with some of them.<sup>34</sup>

The late Richard Stites argued in his recent article that the overall impact of the Spanish constitution on the Decembrists consisted in: 1) its very existence; 2) its association with the resistance to Napoleon; 3) its rallying role in 1820; 4) its juridical anchoring of a new order; and 5) its ultimate destruction.<sup>35</sup> I agree with these points, but they need to be further developed and exemplified.

To begin with, the most important impact the constitution of 1812 had on Russian liberals was the feeling of hope it generated; i.e. the idea that change was possible. The idea of a constitutional regime in Russia became much more real due to the success of the constitutional movement in Spain. N. I. Turgenev expressed these feelings in his diary, writing that "[p]erhaps Spain is demonstrating the possibility of something that up to now we thought impossible."<sup>36</sup> Events in Spain proved that constitutionalism and the ideals of the French Revolution could

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<sup>33</sup> N. M. Druzhinin, *Dekabrist Nikita Murav'ev*, Izdatel'stvo Politkatoržan, Moscow, 1933, 297 ff.; P.

E. Shchegolev, *Dekabristy*, Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo Moscow, 1926, p. 256; *Dnevnik i pis'ma Nikolaia Ivanovicha Turgeneva za 1816-1824 gg.*, op. cit.

<sup>34</sup> Isabel de Madariaga, "Spain and the Decembrists," op. cit., pp. 145-47; Richard Stites, "Decembrists with a Spanish Accent," op. cit., p. 17.

<sup>35</sup> Richard Stites, "Decembrists with a Spanish Accent," op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>36</sup> N. I. Turgenev cited in Richard Stites, "Decembrists with a Spanish Accent," op. cit., p. 12; See also M. P. Alekseev, "Etiudy iz istorii ispano-russkikh otnoshenii," in *Kul'tura Ispanii: Sbornik*, Moscow: ANSSSR, 1940, pp. 403-4; Isabel de Madariaga, "Spain and the Decembrists," op. cit., p. 146.

spread. It showed Russians that change was possible in their country as well. When asked what influenced their free thinking and liberal ideas by the Investigating Committee many of the Decembrists referred to events in Europe which showed that change was possible. According to the Decembrist Vladimir I. Shteingel, "events in Spain, Piedmont and Greece inflamed minds about freedom in Russia."<sup>37</sup> Pestel testified in a similar way, stating that "all these events familiarized the minds of men with the idea of revolutions, with their possibilities."<sup>38</sup> Likewise, Prince Sergei Petrovich Trubetskoi, one of the directors of the Northern Society, wrote that he acquired liberal ideas as the result of the transformation of the French Empire into a constitutional monarchy; the promise of other European sovereigns to give their peoples a constitution and the latter's introduction into several countries.<sup>39</sup>

Secondly, the reason why the adoption of the constitution of 1812 gave Russians hope was because they saw it as a sign of what they called "the spirit of the time." The establishment of a constitutional regime in Spain confirmed their belief that since the American Revolution, the days of absolutism were numbered. Liberty and freedom would spread across the world, and neither monarchs nor armies could do anything to stop it. Revolutions and constitutions belonged to the future, while absolutism was obsolete. Thus, it was only a matter of time before this trend would reach Russia. In Kiukhelbeker's words:

The ages are marching toward a glorious goal;  
I see them! They are moving!  
The codes of authority have grown old;  
People heretofore asleep have awakened,  
Are looking around and rising up.  
O joy! The hour has come, the happy hour of Freedom!<sup>40</sup>

Prince Evgenii Petrovich Obolenskii, member of the Union of Welfare and of the Northern Society, wrote in his testimonial regarding his liberal way of thinking that it was "strengthened by the spirit of the age and by observation of the events which during the last years had punctuated with all kinds of revolutions the history of almost all countries of the world."<sup>41</sup> As Pestel expressed it, "every century has its peculiar characteristic: ours is marked by revolutionary ideas. From one end of Europe to the other the same thing is observed... The same spectacle is displayed also in the whole of America."<sup>42</sup> The Decembrist writers were confident that the hour of change had struck, a happy hour for Liberty, but not so for the tyrannical

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<sup>37</sup> V. I. Shteingel, cited in T. C. Prousis, *Russian Society and the Greek Revolution*, Northern Illinois U. P., Dekalb, 1994, p. 47.

<sup>38</sup> *Vosstanie dekabristov. Materialy po istorii vosstaniia dekabristov*, Moscow, 1925-2008, 21 vols, Vol. IV, pp. 94, 105; translated in Anatole Mazour, op. cit., p. 273

<sup>39</sup> Anatole Mazour, op. cit., p. 45.

<sup>40</sup> V. K. Kiukhelbeker, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia v dvukh tomakh* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1967), vol. I, p. 144; transl. Brown, *Russian Literature*, vol. 2, p. 16.

<sup>41</sup> E. P. Obolenskii, cited in Anatole Mazour, op. cit., p. 48.

<sup>42</sup> *Vosstanie dekabristov*. op. cit., vol. IV, pp. 94, 105; translated in Anatole Mazour, op. cit., p. 273

ruler. “Tyrants of the world! Tremble!” Pushkin warned, “And you fallen slaves, be men and hearken, rise up!”<sup>43</sup> “Near is the hour, near is the struggle, the struggle between liberty and despotism!”<sup>44</sup> Before 1823, many believed that Alexander I had realized that absolutism was outdated and placed himself on the side of liberty. As a contemporary stated, “[a]ll were singing a constitutional song in which the leader of the choir was Emperor Alexander Pavlovich.”<sup>45</sup>

Both the idea that change was possible and the notion of the spirit of the time was related to a sense of belonging to a global liberal movement that many Decembrists expressed. They regarded the Spanish revolution as part of a European wave of revolutions, and they saw the Decembrist movement as part of this European struggle for enlightenment and freedom. In the words of Kakhovsky, “[t]he people have conceived a sacred truth – that they do not exist for governments, but that governments must be organized for them. This is the cause of struggle in all countries.”<sup>46</sup> A common view shared by Russian liberals was that since all the other European countries were receiving constitutions, Russia ought to have one as well.

A fourth source of influence was the Spanish constitution's link to patriotism and heroic acts. As we have seen above, Stites held that its association both with the resistance to Napoleon and with the revolution of 1820 affected the Decembrists. What I would like to argue here is that the reason this affected them lies in the importance given to patriotism at the time and the way patriotism was linked to liberty. The fight against absolutism and tyrants was considered patriotic. Decembrist literature is full of references to heroic patriots who defended the liberty of their people against tyranny. Under the yoke of despotism, only one desire remained – to save the Fatherland from tyranny:

Yet 'neath the fateful yoke that bows us  
One burning wish will not abate:  
With mutinous soul we still await  
Our Fatherland to call and rouse us,  
In transports of impatient anguish  
For sacred Liberty we thrill.<sup>47</sup>

It was a virtue to sacrifice one's life to the cause of liberty. As Glinka wrote: “Ah, who would not prefer a glorious death to the fate of slaves?”<sup>48</sup> In Kondratii

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<sup>43</sup> A. S. Pushkin cited in Brown, *Russian literature*, p. 148.

<sup>44</sup> K. F. Ryleev, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1934), p. 214; transl. Patrick O'Meara, *K. F. Ryleev: A Political Biography of the Decembrist Poet*, (Princeton, 1984), pp. 188-89.

<sup>45</sup> Anatole Mazour, op. cit., p. 56.

<sup>46</sup> Letter of Peter Kakhovsky to General Levashev, 24th Feb 1826 in *Iz pisem i pokazanii dekabristov*, ed. by A. K Borozdin, St P, 106, pp. 3-18; transl Anatole Mazour, op. cit., pp. 274-77.

<sup>47</sup> A. S. Pushkin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, (Moscow, 1949), vol. I, p. 267. Translated in Pushkin, *The Complete Works of Alexander Pushkin* (Norfolk, 2001), vol. 1, p. 272.

<sup>48</sup> From F. N. Glinka's *Velzen* translated by S. Karlinsky, *Russian Drama from Its Beginning to the Age of Pushkin* (Berkeley, 1985), p. 219.

Ryleev's *Volynskii*, the main character realises "how glorious it is to die for the people."

Alive with love for his country  
He endures everything for it ...  
May he be a model of honour,  
An iron breastplate for the suffering  
And forever the sworn enemy  
Of shameful injustice.<sup>49</sup>

Rafael del Riego was a perfect hero in this sense. Kakhovsky described him as a "saint-martyr hero" and friend of the people.<sup>50</sup> He was a role model to many Decembrists and thus many were upset by his execution. And yet, it was his execution that turned him into a martyr.

The Decembrists were directly influenced by the way the Spanish constitution was restored, i.e. that a few soldiers could carry out a revolt without the participation of the people, that is, without creating social anarchy. The desire to avoid social anarchy was something that united both the Northern and Southern Society. Thus, the example of Spain, where a small military group had executed the revolt, seemed highly attractive to them. "Our revolution" wrote Bestuzhev-Riumin to Peter Borisov of the Society of the United Slavs, "will be similar to the Spanish revolution of 1820; it will not cost a single drop of blood, for it will be executed by the army alone, without the assistance of the people."<sup>51</sup> Pestel too was impressed by the Spanish revolt and desired a rapid military rising which, he felt, would aid in maintaining order and preventing bloodshed.<sup>52</sup>

Finally, the overthrow of the constitution and the execution of Riego had a great impact on Russian liberals, not only in the way that Riego was made a martyr. Above all, events in Spain proved to them that monarchs were not to be trusted which meant that the Decembrists started to seriously contemplate regicide. They did not want to repeat the errors of the revolution in Spain. The most important lesson they learned from the overthrow of the constitutional regime was that kings could not be trusted. Sergei Muraviev argued that a king would never agree to the demands of the people, i. e. a constitution. Hence, the fault the Spaniards had made was not that they preserved his life, but that they entrusted him with the establishment of the constitution.<sup>53</sup> Pestel held that events in Spain,

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<sup>49</sup> K. F. Ryleev, *Dumy*, L. G. Frizman ed. (Moscow, 1975), p. 87; transl Patrick O'Meara, op. cit., p. 175.

<sup>50</sup> "Extract from a Letter of Kakhovskii to General Levashev," dated February 24, 1826 in *Iz pisem i pokazanii dekabristov*, St P., 1906, pp. 3-18; transl. in Anatole Mazour, op. cit., p. 276.

<sup>51</sup> Mikhail Bestuzhev-Riumin cited in Isabel de Madariaga, op. cit., pp. 145-46; *Vosstanie dekabristov*, op. cit., vol. V, 31; I. I. Gorbachevskii, *Zapiski i pisma*, Moscow, 1925, p. 73.

<sup>52</sup> Anatole Mazour, op. cit., pp. 115-16.

<sup>53</sup> *Vosstanie dekabristov*, op.cit., vol. I, p. 341; vol. III, p. 367; vol. IV, pp. 91, 342, 350; M A. Dodolev, "Russia and the Spanish Revolution of 1820-1823," op. cit., p. 264; Isabel de Madariaga, "Spain and the Decembrists," op. cit., p. 148.

and later in Naples and Portugal, had shown that monarchical constitutions were unstable and that he was right in doubting the sincerity of any monarch who accepted a constitution. In order to avoid Riego's mistake, Pestel became convinced that the Imperial family had to be liquidated, thus preventing any claimant to the throne which could revoke the advances of the revolution.<sup>54</sup> After 1823 many Decembrists were won over to the idea that the emperor and possibly other members of his family would have to be assassinated to prevent a counter-revolution.<sup>55</sup> Kakhovsky stated that it was the breach of the constitution in France and its destruction in Spain that compelled him to agree to the assassination of the imperial family.<sup>56</sup> Not only among the more radical Southerners, but also among the Northerners, similar conclusions were drawn. Referring to the Spanish example, they asserted that for a constitution to be stable, it could not be forced from the king. Hence, if the emperor refused to grant a constitution, there would be a problem, which was why revolutions must start at the top.<sup>57</sup>

## VI

To what extent then did the Decembrist constitutions, written by Pestel and Muraviev reflect the Spanish constitution of 1812? This question is extremely difficult to answer, because although there are similarities between these constitutions, the formulations in both the Spanish and the Russian documents could have been borrowed from yet another constitution. Nevertheless, there are some similarities which are obvious. For instance the writers of both the Decembrist constitutions and the Spanish one were concerned with the concept of popular sovereignty. The second article of the Spanish constitution declares that "[th]e Spanish nation is free and independent and neither is nor can be the property of any family or person." In a very similar manner, the first article of Muraviev's constitution, *A Project for a Constitution*, states that "[f]ree and independent, the Russian people is not and cannot be the property of any one person or family". The same formulation is found in the introduction to Pestel's *Russian Law*. All three adhered to the notion that the people should write their own laws in accordance with which they should live, but the Spanish constitution was not as clear as the Decembrists on this point. Thus, in article two Muraviev, wrote that "[t]he people is the source of sovereign power; to it belongs exclusively the right to make fundamental statutes for itself," which means that the People's Assembly is "sovereign and invested with all legislative power." This statement is to be compared to article three of the Spanish constitution which states that "[s]overeignty belongs to the nation, consequently it exclusively possess the right of establishing fundamental laws." However, the meaning of this statement becomes blurred because of article fifteen which declares that the Cortes has the power of making laws, albeit "with the King."<sup>58</sup>

<sup>54</sup> *Vosstanie dekabristov*, op. cit., vol. IV, p. 91; Anatole Mazour, op. cit., p. 115.

<sup>55</sup> *Vosstanie dekabristov*, op. cit., vol. XI, p. 73; vol. V, pp. 34, 48; vol. IV, pp. 342, 350.

<sup>56</sup> Peter Kakhovskii, cited in Isabel de Madariaga, "Spain and the Decembrists," op. cit., p. 149.

<sup>57</sup> *Vosstanie dekabristov*, op. cit., vol. I, p. 433; vol. III, pp. 318, 339.

<sup>58</sup> N. M. Muraviev, *Project for a Constitution* in I. Ia. Shchipanov and S. Ia. Straikh, eds, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia Dekabristov*, Moscow, 1951, vol. I. English version in *A Documentary History of*

They all agreed that the object of government should be the welfare and happiness of the people, but the power of the executive was greater in the Spanish constitution.<sup>59</sup> For instance the Spanish king had greater veto power. Muraviev wrote that if the Russian tsar disapproved of a bill, which he could only do once, but two thirds of the first chamber and a majority of the second voted in favour, it became a law.<sup>60</sup> In contrast, the Spanish king had the power to delay law-making for several years. Another difference was that in Russia the parliament had the power to declare war, while this was the prerogative of the king in Spain.<sup>61</sup> Otherwise the various obligations of the legislative and executive branches were largely the same: The legislature was to approve treaties and alliances, fix expenses of public service, borrow money, establish customhouse and rates of duties, promote industry, establish public education, and protect the liberty of the press.<sup>62</sup> The executive in both *A Project for a Constitution* and the constitution of 1812 appointed high officials and nominated judges and received annual revenue from the parliament. The king in both cases was prevented from leaving the kingdom without consent of the parliament, and from making alliances or treaties, or make over national property without the consent of the parliament. Pestel was opposed to the institution of monarchy altogether and instead the *Duma* [council] of the state, elected by the National Assembly would have executive power. However, the exact function of the executive branch remains obscure.<sup>63</sup>

As we have seen above, the object of the government in both the Spanish and Decembrist constitutions was the welfare and happiness of the people, which is probably why they agreed on the significance of public education as well as the government's duty to establish it.<sup>64</sup> In the Russian case the welfare of the people also implied free trade and a policy of *laissez faire* which is not found in the Spanish constitution. Both Muraviev and Pestel wrote that everyone should have the right to engage in whatever trade that seemed most lucrative.<sup>65</sup>

Another point which was important to the Russian and Spanish constitutions was public openness. This, they felt, was a prerequisite for democracy. Hence, it was vital that sessions in parliament were open to the public and only closed in

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*Russian Thought: From the Enlightenment to Marxism*, ed. by W. J. Leatherbarrow and D. C. Offord, Ardis, Ann Arbor, 1987 and in M. Raeff, *The Decembrist Movement*, op. cit.; P. Pestel, *Russian Law* in A. S. Nemzera and O. A. Proskurina, eds., *Dekabristy. Izbrannye sochineniia v dvukh tomakh*, Izd. Pravda, Moscow, 1987, pp. 45-82; English version in *ibid*; *The Political Constitution of the Spanish Monarchy*, *Cobbett's Political Register*, Vol. 16, July-December, 1814, Chapter II, Article 15

<sup>59</sup> *The Political Constitution of the Spanish Monarchy*, Ch. II, Art. 13; Pestel, Introduction.

<sup>60</sup> Muraviev, Ch. X, 101.

<sup>61</sup> Muraviev, Ch IX, 92; *The Political Constitution of the Spanish Monarchy*, Ch IV, Art 171.

<sup>62</sup> *The Political Constitution of the Spanish Monarchy*, Ch. III, Art. 131; Muraviev, Ch. IX; Pestel, Ch. V.

<sup>63</sup> *The Political Constitution of the Spanish Monarchy*, Art. 172, Muraviev, Ch. 10; Anatole Mazour, op. cit., p. 108.

<sup>64</sup> *The Political Constitution of the Spanish Monarchy*, Ch IX; Pestel, Ch V.

<sup>65</sup> Muraviev, Ch III; Pestel, Ch III, Ch V.

special circumstances.<sup>66</sup> Minutes of the proceedings should be kept and published periodically.<sup>67</sup> Hence, they held similar views on the importance of openness, although the Decembrists emphasized it even more, for example by exhorting each chamber to keep minutes and publish them periodically.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, Muraviev pointed out that from time to time the public services should publish for the information of the whole nation a detailed public account of all public receipts and expenditures, while in the Spanish case, the Cortes examined and approved the returns of the receipts of public monies.<sup>69</sup>

A third aspect on which the constitutions agreed is the importance of civil liberties. They used very similar formulations regarding imprisonment, declaring that people could not be imprisoned without information of the deed committed. Within twenty-four hours prisoners must be acquainted with the cause of confinement and name of accuser. No person could be imprisoned who offered bail and confiscation of property should never be imposed.<sup>70</sup> However, even here there are divergences. Both Decembrists and Spanish liberals emphasized the right to write, print and publish political ideas. But, while the Spanish constitution declared that the nation was obliged to protect the “liberty, property and legitimate rights” of every individual, it did not spell out what was meant by “legitimate rights.” On the other hand, Pestel’s plans to establish a secret police leaves something to be desired.<sup>71</sup>

An interesting point of comparison between the Russian and Spanish constitutions is their concept of citizenship. They were all founded on a civic concept of the nation in the sense that citizenship was based on allegiance to the state. The Spanish constitution talks of patriotism in its classical sense of love of country which in this case means to be faithful to the constitution and respect the authorities. It portrays honesty and fairness as civic duties. A patriot must obey the laws and defend the fatherland when required by law. Very similar formulations are found in Muraviev’s constitution. What is interesting to note here is that in the Spanish constitution there is a distinction between being Spanish and being a Spanish citizen, not found in the Decembrist versions. The requirements for becoming a Spanish citizen are more difficult to fulfil and excluded those of African descent and mulattos, while in the Russia case only the foreign-born were excluded.

Despite the basis in civic nationalism, in both the Russian and the Spanish case elements of cultural or ethnic nationalism were at play. In the Spanish case, parts of its population were excluded from citizenship since only those who

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<sup>66</sup> *The Political Constitution of the Spanish Monarchy*, Ch. III, Art. 126; Muraviev, Ch IX, 81.

<sup>67</sup> *The Political Constitution of the Spanish Monarchy*, Article 302, Muraviev, Ch IX, 82. The Spanish constitution states that the proceedings should be public, but does not comment on minutes.

<sup>68</sup> Muraviev, Ch. IX, 82.

<sup>69</sup> Muraviev, Ch. IX, 97, 98; *The Political Constitution of the Spanish Monarchy*, Ch. III, art. 131.

<sup>70</sup> *The Political Constitution of the Spanish Monarchy*, articles 287, 295, 300, 304; Muraviev, Ch. III, paragraphs 19, 20, 23-4.

<sup>71</sup> *The Political Constitution of the Spanish Monarchy*, article 4, 371; Muraviev, Ch III: Pestel, Ch V.

descended from Spanish parents on both sides had the right to become citizens. Moreover, only one faith was allowed. Thus, although the Spanish nation was based on allegiance to the constitution and the government, rather than on a common culture or race, cultural elements certainly played a part in its concept of the nation.<sup>72</sup> A large part of Pestel's *Russian Law* is concerned with issues of race and nation to an extent that the Spanish is not. He argued that in order to survive Russia must be single and indivisible.<sup>73</sup> This meant that the different ethnic groups that lived in the Russian empire had to be assimilated, that is, they had to become Russian. In contrast Muraviev envisaged Russia as a federation.

Pestel did not only discuss nationality at length. He was also very much concerned with class and class privileges to a much greater extent than was the Spanish constitution. In fact both Muraviev and Pestel declared that the privileges of the aristocracy had to be removed and that no distinction was recognized between commoner and nobleman. Equality before the law was a central concept in both Decembrist constitutions.<sup>74</sup> Muraviev specifically stated that the Imperial Family enjoyed no special rights or privileges.<sup>75</sup>

One final point of interest is religion. There was a great divergence between the Spanish constitution and Muraviev's constitution regarding the place of religion in the nation. While the Spanish document clearly states that Spain is a religious country and that the Catholic faith is the only true faith, Muraviev emphasized freedom of religion. In his *Project for a Constitution* it is explicitly stated that freedom of conscience and opinions are not subject to the power of the People's Assembly.<sup>76</sup> Pestel, on the other hand, recognized the mobilizing power of religion, which was particularly important considering his desire to turn the Russian empire into one single indivisible nation. Accordingly, he based his constitution on a religious foundation, stating that the Christian Orthodox Graeco-Russian religion must be recognized as the ruling faith of the "Great Russian state". However, in contrast to the Spanish constitution which declares that the Catholic Apostolic Roman faith is the only true faith and that the State shall prevent the exercise of any other. Pestel wrote that all other Christian denominations and non-Christian faith is allowed, provided it is not contrary to "the Russian spiritual and political laws, the rules of morality and do not violate the natural obligations of man."<sup>77</sup>

## VI

The Spanish constitution of 1812 made a great impact on Russian liberals in general and the Decembrist movement in particular. However, this impact consisted not so much in the formulations of the Decembrist constitutions as in the circumstance under which it was adopted, abolished, reinstated, and abolished

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<sup>72</sup>*The Political Constitution of the Spanish Monarchy*, Chapters I and II.

<sup>73</sup> Pestel, Ch I.

<sup>74</sup> Muraviev, Ch III; Pestel, Ch III.

<sup>75</sup> Muraviev, Ch. X, 103.

<sup>76</sup> Muraviev, Ch. IX, 98.

<sup>77</sup>*The Political Constitution of the Spanish Monarchy*, Ch. II, Art. 12; Pestel, Ch. V, 19.

again. What affected the Russian liberals in general was the hope and inspiration it arose. It confirmed their faith that change was not only possible but actually coming their way. It also led them to believe that they did not need the support of the people, i.e. a wide-scale revolution, to be able to make changes. A small military rising was sufficient. Such a revolt was more feasible and also less risky. Finally, the destruction of the constitution of 1812 radicalised the Decembrists, and many became convinced that agreements could never be made with monarchs.

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