

# Russia's Peter the Great: 'Bronze Horseman' revisited

by Denise M. Henderson

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### **The Reforms of Peter the Great: Progress Through Coercion in Russia**

by Evgenii Anisimov, trans. by John T. Alexander  
M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, N.Y., 1993  
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I love you, Peter's creation, I love your stern  
Harmonious look. . . .

—A.S. Pushkin, *The Bronze Horseman*

With Russia currently going through a major phase change which could lead to a new aggressive policy toward the West or to chaos and Balkans-style wars throughout the territories of the former Soviet Union, many scholars—Russian and western—are searching for both the underlying causes of Russia's condition as well as policy solutions. Evgenii Anisimov, a senior research scholar at the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Russian History of the Russian Academy of Sciences, is no exception. In the conclusion of his book, he writes: "Right here the most important, fundamental problem of transformations on Russian soil arises: By what means and by what route to realize truth and justice for universal happiness? Should it be by the route of coerced progress, when it is considered normal and permissible to sacrifice one part of the people for the bright future of the rest, when coercion and compulsion in their most-varied forms are chosen as the means to achieve lofty aims?"

Anisimov hopes to find some of the answers for Russia

in his study of the Petrine era of the late-17th to early-18th century. His thesis—which may startle those who have always thought of Peter the Great as the "great westernizer"—is that it is "no accident that some commentators and historians have subtly turned to Peter's epoch in search of the first causes and sources of the *Stalinshchina*," referring to the years of Stalin's reign of terror. Anisimov then documents what he means by that: the shaping of all state institutions according to a militarist world outlook, the commitment to empire by crushing the national aspirations of separate states like Ukraine, the setting up of what became the institution of serfdom, the creation of an internal passport system, the secularization of the Russian Orthodox Church by means of putting it under state control, and the "clockwork regularity" by which the state machinery functioned.

The western reader will be struck by the full portrait of Peter that Anisimov provides. Most westerners have a very poor idea of who Peter was, a caricature really. They know that he was over six feet tall, that he was a hands-on czar who learned shipbuilding in Holland. They might be familiar with Pushkin's somewhat sympathetic portrayal of Peter in his *The Negro of Peter the Great*, or with his more ambivalent portrayal in *The Bronze Horseman*. But this is no substitute for being able to place Peter's role in the formation of Russia as an imperial power during the age of balance-of-power politics in Europe. And what Anisimov has done, by returning to primary source materials, is to provide the reader with the basis for filling out the sketch of Peter.

Anisimov's study raises the question of whether the traditional view of Peter as a westerner can any longer be accepted by scholars, analysts, and even the informed layman. From that standpoint, Anisimov's book is a revelation. The reader is led to conclude that Peter was not so much a western-

izer as a Russian ruler who saw the advantage of utilizing certain features of western culture, to make Russia the great power it was to become.

One of Anisimov's more striking examples of the dichotomy between Peter's desire to modernize Russia, to bring it closer to the standards of western civilization while retaining the imperial, top-down form of government, is the example of how Peter applied the Swedish model of local administration to Russia. "The lowest important link of Swedish administration was the parish. Its activities were based on the active participation in administration of the people, the peasants, and electors from whom entered the administrative and court offices of the parish. Moreover, an important role was played by the pastor, the highest moral authority in the parish. Having acquainted himself with the parish system, Peter and the senators rejected it completely: There could be no thought of any participation in administration by the people and clergy in the system of Russian autocracy. Refusing for Russia the system of lower elected ranks, the Senate directed: 'There not be a *kirkshpil'fokht* [parish warden] and electors from the peasants with the courts or in administration because all kinds of orders and dispatches come by order from the towns, and not from the churches; and besides in the district from the peasantry there are no qualified persons.' " Notes Anisimov pointedly, "And this was said about a people who, acting on the regional and communal tradition of long ago, had once saved the country and the throne from destruction! Anyway, it is hardly surprising that authoritarian power and bureaucratic disdain for the 'stupid' people went hand in hand."

The first third of Anisimov's study is devoted to Peter's military expansionism, how he built a Russian army and navy, and his war against Sweden (1697-1721). For someone familiar with the balance of power intrigues being played out in continental Europe at that time, the role of Venice, Britain, and Amsterdam in providing workmen and advice on shipbuilding and military strategy is quite intriguing; unfortunately, Anisimov chooses not to explore this in any detail.

Anisimov addresses the question of the treason of the Ukrainian *hetman* (leader) Mazepa against Peter as a nationalist question. Noting that "Petrine propaganda did everything to present Mazepa's 'treachery' as political crime," Anisimov insists, "In the saga of Mazepa all the problems and tragedy of the Ukraine were reflected as if in a drop of water." Anisimov then provides the background of Ukraine's circumstances in that period, to demonstrate that what was really at issue was the right of Ukraine to a sovereign existence independent of Russia.

### **Beginnings of a police state**

In order to pay for his 24-year war against the Swedes, Peter needed to reorganize the economy of Russia—both its manpower and the flow of money coming into the State Treasury. To obtain manpower, Peter demanded that each village designate men who would be forced to serve, either

as soldiers or in military construction projects, for life. This system was a conscript system which was soon extended to everyday Russian life. To collect taxes, the czar needed accurate head counts which were to be obtained by setting up a system whereby the peasant could not leave his village without permission and was assigned to an estate (the beginning of serfdom). In Peter's Russia, no one, not even the clergy, could escape taxes—or the secret police.

And informants were to be found in many guises, including, according to Peter's decrees, in the newly secularized Russian Orthodox Church. As the church was reorganized under the control of the state, clergy were required to report any acts against the state, particularly treason; failure to do so, would lead to imprisonment. Even potential acts—or "thought crimes," (i.e., contemplating acts of treason)—admitted to in the confessional, were to be reported. With this one decree alone, suggests Anisimov, the independence of the church was completely undermined. "The church started to serve the regime of autocracy and started submissively to consecrate all the latter's initiatives."

### **Great Russian bias**

As revealing as Anisimov's book is, *caveat lector*: The author has a distinct bias, that of a Great Russian.

Most significantly, Anisimov either does not understand or has chosen to blot out the role of the great 17th-century scientific thinker Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz in relation to Russia. Anisimov has reduced him to one sentence: "It is no accident that in Leibniz's correspondence with Peter the problem of state reforms is touched upon and that Leibniz presents an image of the state in the form of clockwork, all the gears of which would work in ideal conjunction. There can be no doubt that this image was close to Peter's view of the world, as a true son of his century." For the rest of his book, Anisimov calls up this clockwork image as the sum of Leibniz's contribution to Petrine Russia, thus demonstrating a complete ignorance of Leibniz's proposals.

Leibniz had proposed that Peter the Great found a Russian Academy of Sciences, which he did, and to finance scientific research as well as expeditions into Siberia, where, Leibniz was convinced, the future of Russia would lie, as well as the path to China. The Russian Academy and the Leibnizian tradition in Russia have been crucial to whatever scientific and technological progress has been achieved both in Imperial Russia and in the former Soviet Union. That tradition was carried forth into the Russian space program and into its advances in military technology. The failure of Russia to use its scientific capabilities in the civilian sector, however, would have disappointed Leibniz and has led to economic disaster in the recent period.

Anisimov also blindly defends the Russian Orthodox Church without examining its doctrines or theology in any way. The ROC, reports Anisimov, under Peter became completely secularized. "The church, with its thousand-year tra-

ditions of preaching morals and defending the downtrodden and those subordinated by the state . . . became a submissive tool of the authorities and thereby largely forfeited the people's respect as a preserver of spiritual principles." The theology of the Russian Orthodox Church (so respected by Anisimov) was, and still is, however, antithetical to the idea of *man in the image of God*, man as creator. Peter, however, refused to consider reopening negotiations for a union with the Catholic Church based on the principles of the Council of Florence, which would have meant an acceptance by the ROC of the *Filioque*, that is, that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and from the Son*, signifying that each and every individual is potentially capable of creative reason. Peter met this idea, we are told, with "complete passivity and deprecation." The Russian Orthodox Church under state control was more suited to the czar's need to be able to control the Russian population.

Anisimov also defends the communal system. As Count Sergei Witte pointed out in the late 19th century, the communal system itself was a cause of the backwardness of the Russian peasantry. Because the land belonged to the commune, and not to individual families, no one farmer could ever separate himself from the commune in order to make improvements on the land. This system, which predominated in western Russia, was often contrasted to the success of the Ukrainian kulaks, who were productive farmers because they each owned and worked their land.

Even more startling is Anisimov's rejection of Peter's creation, St. Petersburg. Known as "the city built on bones," St. Petersburg certainly does exemplify the principle of "progress through coercion." Tens of thousands of men died in the building of that city. Anisimov tells us that Peter's vision of St. Petersburg was as a new Amsterdam, but grander. But Anisimov believes that St. Petersburg should never have been built, that it is the home of the Devil. " 'Regularity' and the military element set into the idea of Peter's city, it might seem, ought to have conferred the weight of the barracks, the despondency of the dusty parade ground, and the tedium of endless monotonous lines. But this did not happen. Built on a marsh by a wave of the czarist hand, it bore the stamp of illusion, the lightness of a phantom, a mirage, the Northern Lights that had visited the city earlier."

St. Petersburg has always been identified with those Russians who are called "westernizers," who wish to see Russia turn its face westward in order to assimilate Western ideals and principles.

Thus, the answer to Anisimov's question—the often-asked "Whither Russia?"—lies precisely in what Anisimov has chosen to omit. Just as Leibniz had laid out a true westernizing project through the Russian Academy of Sciences, today, Lyndon LaRouche has proposed a broad-based scientific and economic program, the Productive Triangle, to extend from Paris to Vladivostok and to eventually encompass Chi-

na, as the means of lifting the East out of its current state of economic ruin, and herald an economic and scientific revival throughout Eurasia. Such a program means sacrificing only one thing, and that is the state-enforced backwardness which has harmed the peoples of the former Soviet Union for so long.

## Inside the mind that built the nuclear navy

by Stuart Lewis

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### **The Rickover Effect, How One Man Made a Difference**

by Theodore Rockwell

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Theodore Rockwell's book tells the story of how it was one man's idea to build a nuclear submarine, and how he brought it forth. It was clear that "the problem boiled down to convincing the top levels of the Navy and the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) that building a nuclear submarine was an important national priority. It was clear that no one else who mattered held that view at that time." The only one who held that view in the late 1940s was Adm. Hyman G. Rickover, who was responsible for starting the job and getting it finished, with the official launching of the *Nautilus* in 1954. Equally important, along the way, as a result of the success of the nuclear submarine program, Rickover was asked to develop the first commercial nuclear plant at Shippingport, Pennsylvania, thereby launching the creation of what became a highly trained staff within the military, research laboratories, training schools, and the commercial nuclear industry.

The author, who was a member of Rickover's engineering team, gives an inside view of Rickover's drive and how he moved others to accomplish his nuclear goal, and Rockwell makes clear that the admiral did not see the building of the submarine as a monument to himself. On the contrary, according to Rockwell, Rickover had a strong sense of history and was intent on developing a well-trained cadre who could take over after he was gone. In his foreword, former Secretary of the Navy Adm. James Watkins writes that Rickover's passion was the "never-ending process of education and training prospective leaders for the Navy." As part of this process, Rickover helped set up a master's degree program in nuclear engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Tech-