

**A province in crisis: the Russian famine
of 1891-92 in Tambov Province**

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I, Bartley Rock, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in my thesis.

Abstract

This thesis examines what the response to the 1891-92 famine by the provincial authorities of Tambov province tells us about the role of the province and, more generally, about how the imperial Russian state functioned in the late nineteenth century. Contrary to the dominant historiography about Russian provinces, they were not chaotic and incapable of responding to a crisis. Under-resourced and with severe structural and strategic limitations, Tambov's officials nevertheless performed to the best of their abilities, driven by a strong sense of moral and provincial responsibility.

The tension between arbitrariness (*proizvol*) and legality (*zakonnost'*) that created a flawed and fragmented structure also provided for the flexibility that offered a partial solution. Tambov province repurposed the ad hoc structures, either created within the province or imposed by St. Petersburg, to meet its own needs as the crisis developed. Tambov province was not merely a passive actor in relation to the imperial 'centre', but instead innovated within certain boundaries while the relationship between provincial and uezd institutions often mirrored that of the centre and the provinces.

Over five chapters this thesis explores the relationships between centre and province and province and uezds, via the two concepts of dialogue and 'provincial identity'. A comparison between institutional decision making and the reality of the crisis on the ground shows that Tambov province was a far from passive place in which uezd and provincial officials used the relief effort to develop and articulate a strong sense of provincial identity.

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Abbreviations

<i>American Historical Review</i>	<i>AHR</i>
<i>Cahiers du monde russe (et soviétique)</i>	<i>CMR</i>
Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Tambovskoi Oblasti	GATO
<i>Journal of Economic History</i>	<i>JEH</i>
<i>Khlebnye zapasy v obshchestvennykh magazinakh i mestnye prodovol'stvennye kapitaly k 1-mu sentiabria 1891 goda v Evropeiskoi Rossii</i>	<i>Khlebnye zapasy</i>
<i>Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History</i>	<i>Kritika</i>
Ministerstvo Vnutrennykh Del	MVD
<i>Polnoe sobranie zakonov Rossiiskoi imperii</i>	<i>PSZ</i>
Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii Arkhiv	RGIA
<i>Slavic Review</i>	<i>SR</i>
<i>Slavonic and East European Review</i>	<i>SEER</i>
Special Committee for Collecting Donations in Favour of the Victims of the Crop Failure under the Tambov Society for the Care of the Poor	July 1891 Committee

*Statisticheskie dannye po vydache ssude na obsemenenie i
 prodovol'stvie naseleniiu, postradavshemu ot neurozhai v 1891-
 1892 gg* *Statisticheskie dannye*

Tambov Provincial Food Conference

TPFC

Tambov Provincial Welfare Committee

TPWC

Tambov provincial zemstvo *uprava*

Provincial *uprava*

Uezd food conference

UFC

Dates, Transliteration and Style

All dates are given in the Old Style (Julian) calendar. Transliteration is based on a modified version of the Library of Congress style guide though anglicised versions of well-known names (such as Tsar Alexander III) are retained. For simplicity, certain terms such as *funt*, *ispravnik*, *pud*, *uezd*, *volost'* and *zemstvo* are treated as English nouns throughout.

A particular convention has been adopted in relation to the minutes published by the provincial and *uezd zemstvos*. There was no consistent naming style with separate meetings in the same year listed as different publications, despite being collected in one volume. Therefore, for ease of use, the style adopted throughout is to shorten the title to specify whether it is the provincial or an *uezd zemstvo*, then list the year and the page reference of the collected volume. For example: *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, p. 23. Full reference details for each meeting and *zemstvo* are given in a special section in the bibliography.

Units of measurements

A number of imperial Russian units of measurement for volume are used, and a conversion to metric is given here for convenience. Where conversions between measurements (i.e. *funts* to *chetverts*) are necessary, the ratio used is given in a relevant footnote. Conversion source: Francois Cardarelli, *Encyclopaedia of scientific units, weights, and measures: their SI equivalences and origins* (New York: Springer, 2003), pp. 121-4.

Chetvert

Imperial Russian measurements distinguished between dry and liquid volume with the *chetvert* having both forms. The dry form is the one used here, and is equivalent to 209.91 litres. The *chetvert* was the predominant measurement used by Tambov's authorities for measuring sown area and seed grain purchases.

Funt

When issued to individuals, food aid was primarily measured in *funts*. There were forty *funts* in a *pud*, with a *funt* being equivalent to 409.51718 grams.

Pud

A *pud* was equal to forty *funt*, and is equivalent to 16.3807 kilograms. *Puds* were the main unit of scale used by the imperial and provincial authorities for food aid; thus food aid was allocated in *funts* but estimations of gross need and purchases were made in *puds*.

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Introduction

In modern Tambov city, by the bank of the river Tsna, there is a statue of a stout, proud man holding a plough, simply entitled ‘the Tambov peasant’. In his healthy, broad shoulders and strong pose, he evokes an idealised image of the region’s agricultural past, one familiar to many late nineteenth century Russian idealists. This, the statue seems to say, is how Tambov’s people have always been: simple, virtuous and strong. ‘Mown down’ by hunger, being killed by the very food sent to save them (so they claimed), the peasants of Tambov province in 1891-2 would have found such an image grotesque.

The famine sweeping Russia in those two years, affecting an area twice the size of modern France, hit the province hard; dire warnings of hunger and impending famine in Tambov province came from uezd and travelling imperial officials.¹ Though previous years had not been kind, the crisis of 1891-2 was on an entirely different scale: a scorching summer and drought in 1891 followed 1890’s severe winter, leading to a 65 per cent decline in the rye crop in Tambov Province in 1891 and a 58 per cent decline in all crops.² From December 1891 to June 1892, the numbers receiving food aid nearly trebled to 1,025,446; this in a province where the population was just 2.455 million people.³ Total mortality in the province was 22,395 above average; at least 8,780 people died of cholera and we can assume that the famine was responsible for most of the rest.⁴

¹ James Y. Simms, ‘The crop failure of 1891: soil exhaustion, technological backwardness, and Russia’s “Agrarian Crisis”’, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (1982), p. 237; Richard Robbins, *Famine in Russia, 1891-1892 the Imperial Government Responds to a Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), p. 1; Tambovskoe uezdnoe zemskoe sobranie, *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo uездnogo zemskogo sobraniia s prilozheniiami; Ocherednogo sessii 1891 g.* (Tambov, 1892), pp. 13-14.

² Robbins, *Famine in Russia, 1891-1892*, p. 2; A.S. Ermolov, *Neurozhai i narodnoe bedstvie* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia V. Kirshbaum, 1892), p.20. The latter was published anonymously by the Ministry of Finance but it was later revealed to have been written by Ermolov, who would later become Minister of Agriculture.

³ Tsentral’nyi statisticheskii komitet Ministerstva Vnutrennykh Del, *Statisticheskie dannye po vydache ssude na obsemeneniei i prodovol’sstvie naseleniiu, postradavshemu ot neurozhai v 1891-1892 gg.* (ed. P. Bechasnov) (St. Petersburg, 1894), pp. 58-9, pp. 78-9 (hereafter *Statisticheskie dannye*).

⁴ Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, p. 189; Tambovskoe gubernskoe zemskie sobranie, *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia: S prilozheniiami ocherednogo v dekabre 1892 g.* (Tambov, 1893), p. 214.

These figures, shocking though they may be, are dry and quantitative and do not tell us much of the human element of the story. They do not reveal the desperate struggle to stay alive, the pleading and sometimes trickery that was necessary to get the small amount of government aid, and the fear and terror as peasants saw their own crops fail and prices of others rise. It does not tell us of the gnawing, never-ending hunger as the peasantry had to make do with goosefoot or grain so admixed with grit that it was only 'fit for the bin'.⁵ No mention is made of the peasant reduced to selling her last horse and burdened with an 'insane' son, another denied aid because he was unpopular with the volost' elite and a village so desperate they sent a messenger to the Tsar himself, looking for aid.

Nor do statistics reveal much about the other side of the story; the officials who were tasked with limiting and resolving the crisis. The land captain, only a month or two in his new post and overwhelmed with petitions for aid he had to check and recheck; the uezd and provincial zemstvo officials, legally responsible for purchasing and distributing relief yet always short of money and forbidden from liaising formally with the peasantry; and the governor, the Tsar's viceroy, no longer welcomed by salt and bread but the spectres of hunger, disease and death. They also do not tell us of the darker side of the official coin; attempts to manipulate the aid rolls, dereliction of duty that could cost lives, narrow thinking and incompetence.

⁵ Usman uezd zemstvo *uprava* to Rokasovskii 17 December 1891, Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Tambovskoi Oblasti (GATO), f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 208-13.

Aims and Goals

Russian history is increasingly becoming a ‘history of regions’, with the margins becoming, as it were, the new ‘centre’ of historiography; thus this thesis seeks to re-orient the story of the famine crisis away from the imperial response, covered thoroughly in Richard Robbins’ fundamental study *Famine in Russia, 1891- 1892*, to that of the affected provinces themselves.¹ The imperial government may have funded the relief effort but it was the uezd and provincial administration who lived on the sharp edge of the crisis. By combining a detailed look at the human side of the crisis with an analysis of the institutional response, this thesis makes an original contribution to historiography by empowering the provincial voice and experience and by examining institutional networks, politics and relationships outside of the dominant, capital focused narrative.

If, as this thesis argues, the province’s officials were empowered and were more developed historical actors than previously thought, could they cope with the crisis? There were terrible mistakes, such as leaving grain to rot for the want of bags or double-allocating aid grain. A number of officials acted capriciously or siphoned off funds or grain. Even Governor Rokasovskii was accused of being less interested in helping the peasantry than in pancakes and champagne, while his deputy went hunting.² Yet there were exemplary officials too: a land captain donated food to the needy and hired doctors at his own expense while Governor Rokasovskii restored morale to a cholera-ravaged Kozlov town and received a laudatory poem for his general efforts in the crisis.³ E.A. Brayley Hodgetts, an English correspondent for Reuters who travelled through several

¹ Susan Smith-Peter, ‘How to write a region: local and regional historiography’, *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, New Series, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Summer, 2004), p. 527.

² A.A. Polovtsev, *Dnevnik gosudarstvennogo sekretariia* (ed. P.A. Zaionchkovskii) (Moscow, 1966), II, p. 468.

³ The land captain’s name was Aleksandr Ivanovich Novikov, and we will come across him more in Chapter 1. *Zhurnaly Kozlovskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 39-43, pp. 139-40, Factual testimony concerning the two half-years and the commands in a starving society 19 June 1893, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4429, ll. 60-5.

famine-hit provinces, said this of Tambov province's response: 'The failure of the crops has [...] been severely felt [...] that the distress has not been more acute is mainly attributable to the prompt and energetic action of the Zemstvo [...]'.⁴

The overall contention of this thesis, then, is that the province's response represents one of the more positive possible outcomes, comparatively and absolutely, given the circumstances of the crisis. Overwhelmed and under-resourced, the institutions did not collapse or fall into chaos but muddled along, adapting and changing where necessary through ad hoc solutions. Indeed, their response tells us much about provincial government in late imperial Russia and its surprising vitality. Aware of their limitations and structural defects, they took steps to correct them and the interaction between the provincial centre and the uyezds often reflected how St. Petersburg interacted with the provinces. Another key aim of this thesis is to show how the crisis helped to develop a sense of 'provincial identity', broadly defined as a moral responsibility to Tambov's population and a sense of initiative in the face of crisis (covered more in 'The role and place of the province in imperial Russia' in this Introduction).

Structure

The thesis is divided into two halves, the first studying the period between June and December 1891 the latter examining January to July 1892. The crisis differed radically in these two times: the first was characterised by an escalating crisis and ad hoc institutions while the second was dominated by a full-blown crisis and deeper institutional integration (at least on paper). The first chapter of each section (Chapters 2 and 4) examines the broader institutional trends while the second (Chapters 3 and 5) looks at the relief effort

⁴ E.A. Brayley Hodgetts, *In the Track of the Russian Famine: The Personal Narrative of a Journey Through the Famine Districts of Russia* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1892), p. 107.

on the ground. This allows us to see a dynamic and evolving picture of the relief effort, official and charitable, over time. Preceding them is Chapter 1, which looks at how provincial Russia was governed in the late nineteenth century. This takes in key themes such as the development of legality, bureaucracy and the structure of provincial government. The second half of Chapter 1 takes these idealised, centrally created themes and structures and, using profiles of provincial officials such as Baron Vladimir Platonovich Rokasovskii, Tambov's governor, and the colourful Aleksandr Novikov, a local land captain, holds them up to the reality of how Tambov province worked. The remainder of this Introduction looks at the sources used, key theories around famine, the role and place of the province in Russia and a brief sketch of Tambov province.

Sources

As this thesis is primarily concerned with the relationships between various institutions and officials, its main sources are official documents, reports, minutes and petitions. At the central and provincial level, imperial Russian government produced voluminous documentation, though official documents are not without limitations. In discussing the strengths and limitations of our rich source base, we shall consider in particular the conceptual and methodological challenge posed by the lack of available material charting the lived peasant experience.

Our sources can be broken down into three main groups: MVD files from the Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA), records of the Tambov governor's chancellery (including police reports) from the State Archive of the Tambov Oblast' (GATO), and reports and minutes of the provincial and *uezd zemstvo* assemblies and *upravy* in Tambov province. The RGIA files chart interactions between the centre and the province

concerning the scale of the crisis, updates and complaints, requests for funding and correspondence between the Special Committee for Famine Relief and the province's charitable institutions. The files from GATO are the richest source base for two main reasons: they reveal the relationships and tensions between the various officials within the province, and the vast majority of them are previously unseen. Nearly as rich is the collection of published provincial and uezd zemstvo minutes and reports; they show the discussions, decisions and executive processes that went on within the bodies with primary responsibility for food security. Alongside these are reports from the MVD's Central Statistical Committee and other sources such as A. I. Novikov's memoir of his time as a land captain, providing a picture of the relief effort at every level of officialdom.

It is not an unbroken chain however, with a number of small yet significant gaps. Of the uezd zemstvo minutes, we lack records for four uezds: Shatsk and Elatomsk in the north, centrally located Morshansk and Lebedian in the south. A link between the absence of records and difficulties in the relief effort is difficult to prove: while Morshansk suffered structural failings and Elatomsk had localised problems, Shatsk had one of the most initially pro-active responses while Lebedian's experience seems to have reflected that of other uezds. It is therefore difficult to detect a pattern beyond, perhaps, poor record keeping. Another important gap in the archival material is that of the land captain records in GATO; only Morshansk and Tambov have uezd congress records for 1891-2 while, for individual precincts, only the third precinct in Kozlov uezd and the first, second and fourth precincts in Morshansk uezd cover the same period. It is perhaps unsurprising that even these records reveal little about the famine in the villages: the land captains' main function was often judicial and as the famine struck almost immediately after they took office, expecting thorough record-keeping is perhaps unrealistic. These gaps hint at what this thesis will suggest throughout: that in the overwhelming chaos of the famine, officials often prioritised *doing* something over formal lines of reporting. Nevertheless, even with

these archival lacunae, we are able to track in some detail the relief effort, and its tensions and relationships, from the volost' to St. Petersburg and back.

Where the detail is lacking however, is in what the *peasantry*, the people most affected by the famine crisis, thought and felt. What we get from the archival sources and the zemstvo minutes are the detailed workings of the minutiae of the relief effort and the concerns of the officials themselves. While, as we will see in Chapter 2 specifically and throughout the thesis more generally, the officials felt a keen sense of moral responsibility to the peasantry, they appeared as a distant character or, in certain cases, as the *problem* such as when they tried to sell aid allocations (explored in Chapter 5) or proved reluctant to use fertiliser. While deeply sympathetic to the peasantry, Aleksandr Novikov, the land captain in Kozlov uezd and a principal character in this thesis, still referred to the peasantry in an 'othering' tone; to most officials they were an amorphous social group, rather than individuals (official views of the peasantry are examined in 'Trying to feed the population: the provincial food conference' in Chapter 2). Where the peasantry do emerge as individuals, it is at a certain distance and through an official lens; their biggest presence is through the aid petitions submitted to the provincial food conference, covered in depth in 'Peasant appeals: type, investigation and decisions' in Chapter 4. Again, however, what we see are official summaries of peasant complaints: the details we get are what the investigating officials considered salient. Direct encounters with the peasantry are rarely mentioned and, from the available archival material, seem to have been limited mostly to assist investigations into the behaviour of *officials*: see here 'Case study: Management of relief in Spassk and Morshansk uezds' in Chapter 3 and 'Public order and security' and 'Local relief problems and provincial intervention' in Chapter 5. The province's institutions did not *ignore* the peasantry but they looked at them in a quantitative, impersonal fashion. Over the 1880s and 1890s, the provincial zemstvo's statistical bureau, under the leadership of Nikolai Romanov, produced a detailed volume

on each uezd and gave detailed geographical and demographic information. A rich resource for the historian in most cases, the information is summative and statistical, compiled from dozens of household surveys and lacking a human element.

This human element is also missing from the secondary material on conditions in the nineteenth century in Tambov province. There is no doubt that a shortage of available and suitable primary sources determined, to a certain extent, the type of historiography that has emerged. As Nina Tsintsadze has noted, the high rate of illiteracy means that there are very few available sources written from the point of view of the peasantry, making understanding their point of view a ‘complex problem’.⁵ There appear to be no memoirs left behind by any of the major figures in the relief effort, other than those produced by A. I. Novikov. In recent years, a scholarly form of *kraevdenie* has emerged, though this, too, has its limitations: on the one hand, broader structural questions are considered in a deeply technical fashion, often obscuring the rich local detail available while on the other, a narrow local focus obscures wider analytical interpretation. The results of this work are nevertheless useful and certain aspects of it have informed this thesis, especially Irina Dvukzhilova’s research on provincial zemstvo officials.

Dvukzhilova and Tsintsadze have both attempted to tackle the issue of personalities and individuals in Tambov’s history, with slightly differing results. Tsintsadze grapples with the problem of sparse peasant evidence by looking at records of peasant/landlord disputes but provides more of a chronicle of these cases, broken down by type, and refers to peasant perceptions as ‘emotional’.⁶ In the same monograph, which examines demographic and economic problems of development, and in a later article, she places the majority of the emphasis on the evidence of ‘contemporaries’ such as zemstvo

⁵ Nina Tsintsadze, *Demograficheskie i ekologicheskie problem razvitiia agrarnogo obshchestva Rossi vo vtoroi polovine xix – nachale xx veka v vospriatii sovremennikov* (Tambov: TGU Press, 2012), p. 247.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 41-54, p. 247.

officials (including Romanov's statistical surveys referred to above) or the governor's annual reports. She creates an authoritative picture of an officialdom deeply engaged in questions of development but does not place it within a broader framework.⁷ Dvukhzhilova profiles the social composition of the provincial and uezd zemstvos; in addition to biographies of key personnel, used in Chapter 1, her work is primarily a statistical breakdown of election and demographic patterns.⁸ The profiles she provides are useful for illustrating the existence of a distinct administrative culture in the province, especially when connected with the activities of the officials as revealed from the archival material. However, it is only by making these connections that we get a sense of the personalities of these local actors that her work does not provide, which is somewhat ironic given her call for a greater focus on personalities.⁹

Much of the rest of the historiography relevant to this thesis focuses on broader structural issues and is led by V. V. Kanishchev, in collaboration with other historians, including Tsintsadze. This historiography draws heavily on the idea that Tambov province was in a state of permanent 'agrarian crisis' after 1861; this thesis takes the more nuanced view that it was not a permanent crisis, but that there was deep vulnerability. Kanishchev and Tsintsadze draw on what they call the 'demo-ecological' mode of history developed by S. A. Nefedov, terming the post-1861 period in Tambov province as one of 'stagflation'; by this they mean an unsustainable ecological balance where a natural disaster or crisis could occur easily due to a chance event or combination of random

⁷ Ibid., 'Demograficheskie i ekologicheskie problem razvitiia agrarnogo obshchestva poreformennogo perioda v vospriatii mestnykh vlastei (po materialam otchetov Tambovskikh gubernatorov za 1860-1890-e gody', *Ineternum*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2010), pp. 40-6.

⁸ Irina Vladimirovna Dvukhzhilova, 'Tambovskoe zemstvo v otechestvennoi istoriografii nachala xxi veka', *Istoricheskie, filosofskie, politicheskie i iuridicheskie nauki, kul'turologiia i iskusstvovedenie, Voprosy teorii i praktiki*, No. 7 (2012), 'Predsedateli Tambovskoi gubernskoe upravly (1886 – 1892 gg.)', *Istoricheskie, filosofskie, politicheskie i iuridicheskie nauki, kul'turologiia i iskusstvovedenie. Voprosy teorii i praktiki*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (2009), *Sotsial'nyi sostav Tambovskogo zemstva (1865 – 1890 gg.)* (Tambov: Iulis, 2003).

⁹ Ibid.

factors.¹⁰ As we will see in the next section on famine theory, and in chapter 2 on ‘warnings signs and distress’, there is considerable merit to this as it highlights the nature of vulnerability. However, it places too much emphasis on purely environmental or demographic causes, neglecting structural, economic or even political ones, or the deeply influential ‘entitlement theory’ argued by Amartya Sen. Kanishchev, whose coverage is not limited to the nineteenth century, adopts a modelling approach to history, using a ‘demo-fractal’ model to examine demographic trends in the province, modelling population change and using spatial modelling to look at long-run ecological processes, amongst others.¹¹ A series of articles by several historians from Tambov, published in English, best typify this over-arching, top-down methodological approach. A cooperative project with Dutch historians, it aims to provide a thorough picture of the social and demographic picture of the province through quantitative, social-science methods. Thus, we have a grid based examination of the demography and ecology of the province, which again attests to the existence of an ‘agrarian crisis’ with little context, and a ‘cohort analysis’ of family and social structures.¹² The latter makes a significant contribution to quantitative and social history, but it does not directly connect to the themes covered here.

¹⁰ Nina Tsintsadze, V. V. Kanishchev, ‘Ekologicheskii aspekt krest’ianskoi reform 1861 g. (po materialam Tambovskoi gubernii)’, *Istoria i Sovremennost’*, No. 2 (2005), pp. 64-79.

¹¹ V. V. Kanishchev, E. V. Baranova, N. A. Zhirov, ‘Lesnye resursyi v istorii agrarnogo obshchestva Rossii (lokal’nyi i mikroistoricheskii urovni)’, *Istoria i Sovremennost’*, No. 2 (2014), V. L. Diatchkov, V. V. Kanishchev, ‘Prognoz rosta naseleniia Rossii na xx v. i sostoiavshaiasia ral’nost’. Vzgljad ‘Snizu’ iz Tambovskoi kres’ianskoi sredi’, *Ineternum*, No. 1 (2011), V. V. Kanishchev, R. B. Konchakov, S. K. Kostovska, ‘Prostranstvennoe modelirovanie ekologicheskikh protsessov v istorii’, *Fractal Simulation*, No. 1 (2011), V. V. Kanishchev, S. O. Kovaleva, I. V. Kovalev, ‘Istoricheskoe pochvovedenie Tambovskoi oblasti: pervye rezultaty issledovaniia’, *Vestnik Tambovskogo Universiteta. Seria: Estestvennye I tekhnicheskie nauki*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (2012).

¹² Vladimir Diatchkov, V. V. Kanitshev, ‘Tambov regional development in the context of integral history, 1800-1917: Contradictions in the modernization of Russian society on a basis of micro-history’, *Historia Agriculturae: Where the twain meet again. New results of the Dutch Russian project on regional development 1780-1917*, No. 34 (2009), Marina Akolzina, Vladimir Diatchkov, Valery Kanitshev, Roman Kontchakov, Iuri Mizis, Ella Morozova, ‘A comparison of cohort analysis and other methods of demographic microanalysis used in studying the Tambov region, 1800-1917’, *Historia Agriculturae: Where the twain meet again. New results of the Dutch Russian project on regional development 1780-1917*, No. 34 (2009).

Since all of this makes it hard to construct a thorough picture of what the peasantry were feeling, this thesis errs on the side of caution and avoids broad conclusions about the peasant psychological experience. Nevertheless, while the ‘voice’ of the peasantry is rarely given directly, through its indirect appearance we will be able to build at least a picture of the distress they experienced and the coping strategies they used and, where possible, place it within the context of broader famine economics and responses. Overall, the sources available are rich if limited and, as the secondary material shows, have not been fully exploited in a way that shows a dynamic picture not just of institutions, but of individuals, coping with crisis.

Definition and theories of famine

Count Illarion Ivanovich Vorontsov-Dashkov, Minister of the Imperial Household, wrote to St. Petersburg to describe the impending famine in Tambov province in July 1891: ‘Here we are getting ready to go hungry. The peasants’ winter crops have failed completely...The situation is one of the utmost seriousness and demands immediate aid’.¹³ Vorontsov-Dashkov’s plaintive statement evokes the classic image of famine; devastated and desperate communities on the brink of failure and, if aid is not forthcoming at a sufficient pace, death. Famine is also a qualitative statement on how we perceive countries; Michael Watts argues that the images of famine in Africa have helped link the continent to images of decay, anarchy, war and over-population.¹⁴ Recent scholarship has begun to reinterpret the periphery, seeing it as more dynamic than previously thought, leading us to question not just the association of famine with ‘backwardness’ but the nature, causes and suggested responses to it.

¹³ Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, p. 1.

¹⁴ Michael Watts, ‘Entitlements or Empowerment? Famine and Starvation in Africa’, *Review of African Political Economy*, The Struggle for Resources in Africa, No. 51 (Jul., 1991), pp. 9-11.

One of the main problems is the definition of ‘famine’ itself. Stephen Devereux considers that dictionary definitions and definitions attached to famine as a problem of food shortage, mass starvation and community fail to deal sufficiently with issues of causality and scale and tend towards the descriptive. Devereux prefers definitions of famine given by famine victims as these seem to distinguish between the various effects of famine and see widespread death as the end of the process rather than the beginning.¹⁵ This notion of famine as a process is emphasised by Michael Watts who argues that its stages can be seen as dearth, famishment and morbidity.¹⁶ Famine, then, goes from being a sudden crisis to a process that has a sudden, catastrophic event as its culmination. It is this sudden, catastrophic event that distinguishes famine from starvation. Amartya Sen defines starvation as ‘the characteristic of some people not *having* enough food to eat. It is not the characteristic of there *being* not enough food to eat’.¹⁷ In Sen’s view, starvation is the condition of people going without adequate food while famine is a virulent manifestation, causing widespread death.¹⁸ Devereux, however, questions the association of excess morbidity with famine, arguing that it ignores famine situations that may not necessarily be reflected in death totals.¹⁹ Nonetheless, it seems clear that we can understand famine as the catastrophic culmination of a process that may or may not result in excess mortality.

However, the precise nature of this process remains heavily contested. The food availability decline (FAD) theory of famine is the ‘classic’ theory of causation according to which famine is caused by a precipitous collapse in food supply.²⁰ FAD has been

¹⁵ Stephen Devereux, *Theories of Famine* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), pp. 9-18.

¹⁶ Watts, ‘Entitlements or empowerment?’, pp. 17-18.

¹⁷ Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 1. Italics in original.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

¹⁹ Devereux, *Theories of Famine*, p. 19.

²⁰ Sen, *Poverty and Famines*, pp. 57-62.

criticised in recent decades as it does not seem to do enough in terms of causality; drought, for example, can cause a collapse in local food supply but that does not necessarily result in famine.²¹ In looking at famine in 1980s Sudan, Christopher G. Locke and Fredoun Z. Ahmadi-Esfahani have argued that the famine may have been exacerbated by a drought, but to claim drought as the sole cause would be erroneous.²² The disconnection between causality and FAD has been highlighted by Devereux: 'Drought *may* be an act of nature, but famine is decidedly an act of man'.²³

This disconnection between FAD and causality led to the emergence in the late 1970s and 1980s of what has become a dominant way of interpreting famine: the entitlement theory. It emerged as part of an attempt to understand, in the words of John Drèze and Amartya Sen, why 'while one part of humanity desperately searches for more food to eat, another part counts the calories and looks for new ways of slimming'.²⁴ The entitlement approach focuses less on the availability of food than on a person's inability to command sufficient food. Through a process that Sen terms 'exchange entitlement mapping', the total combination of a person's resources allow (or 'entitle') access to a variety of 'commodity bundles' which include sufficient food. Famine occurs when these entitlements are insufficient to command commodity bundles with adequate food. A *direct entitlement failure* occurs where food production for own consumption has fallen, and a *trade entitlement failure* is where one obtains less food through trade by exchanging one's own commodity. Endowment declines can occur due to asset related issues such as the alienation of land and sale of livestock at low prices or other factors such as unemployment, inflation and changing social security policy. The entitlement approach

²¹ An example of that would be adverse weather conditions in Western Europe; if drought inevitably resulted in famine then it is likely that famines, if only localised ones, would have occurred recently in countries such as Spain and the United Kingdom.

²² Christopher G. Locke, Fredoun Z. Ahmadi-Esfahani, 'Famine analysis: a study of entitlements in Sudan, 1984-1985', *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (Jan., 1993), p. 363.

²³ Devereux, *Theories of Famine*, p. 42.

²⁴ John Drèze, Amartya Sen, *Hunger and Public Action* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 4.

seeks to understand the process behind famine, especially in countries where food supply decline is either localised or not an issue (some of the worst famines have taken place with no significant decline in food availability per head). Addressing the causal deficiencies of (what is now) FAD₁, Sen argues that even when starvation is *caused* by food shortage in this way, the immediate reason for starvation will be the decline in exchange entitlement.²⁵ Locke and Ahmadi-Esfahani agree that the entitlement approach is a better determinant for famine causality as opposed to food availability: ‘In summary, the food entitlement data can reveal the existence of a famine, no matter what its cause, whereas food supply data reveal a famine only some of the time’.²⁶ Though the entitlement approach can help uncover biases and causality, Justin Yifu Lin and Dennis Tao Yang highlight that it has faced criticism on localised famine; on the local level, crop failures caused by natural calamities lead to supply shortages, speculation, increased demand due to uncertainty and sales of possessions. Essentially, food availability decline lowers purchasing power.²⁷ Locke and Ahmadi-Esfahani acknowledge other limitations such as defining entitlement sets, the impact of illegal activities and the assumption that people will consume all the food they can.²⁸ Lynne Kiesling, eschewing the entitlement approach, focuses on the way distress spreads during a famine and the ways in which a community determines and allocates relief based on factors beyond economic calculations, using the example of the Lancashire cotton famine and issues such as moral hazard, the responses of pre-existing income institutions and the institutional changes that occurred.²⁹ The entitlement approach was ground breaking in its explanation and integration of causality but it has tended towards generalisations in certain areas and

²⁵ Sen, *Poverty and Famines*, pp. 45-51, p. 7, p. 4.

²⁶ Locke, Ahmadi-Esfahani, 'Famine analysis', p. 373.

²⁷ Justin Yifu Lin, Dennis Tao Yang, 'Food availability, entitlements and the Chinese famine of 1959-61', *The Economic Journal*, Vol. 110, No. 460 (Jan., 2000), p. 136.

²⁸ Locke, Ahmadi-Esfahani, 'Famine Analysis', pp. 364-5.

²⁹ Lynne Kiesling, 'Collective action and assisting the poor: the political economy of income assistance during the Lancashire cotton famine', *The Journal of Economic History*, No. 2 (Jun., 1995), pp. 380-3.

seems to neglect the multi-faceted coping strategies which individuals, families, and communities may pursue.

This has led to the emergence of multi-causal approaches to famine which reject the ‘dogmatism’ of accepting either the FAD or entitlement approaches as sole explainers. The criticism of entitlement theory has led to a re-evaluation of the importance of food supply to the issue of causality when looking at historical famine. Devereux maintains that famine is a man-made issue but also cautions against the total exclusion of climate, seeing seasonality as important as it increases the power of the wealthy and overall vulnerability to famine.³⁰ There have been attempts to integrate causality into FAD as opposed to discarding it altogether. Cormac Ó Gráda has shown that food supply was a causal issue in most, if not all, of the key famines in the twentieth century while he and Jean-Michel Chivet argue one of the main reasons for the famines in France of 1693-94 and 1709-10 was a catastrophically poor harvest.³¹

Ó Gráda and Chivet do not solely attribute causality to a decline in the food supply, however. The scale of the infamous ‘terror famine’ in the USSR in 1931-33, and the famines in France were exacerbated by the reaction of the authorities and the stresses of war.³² The connection between a decline in food supply and the actions of government emerges in an examination of the 1947 famine in the USSR: ‘The famine was a FAD₂ (preventable food availability decline) famine, which occurred because a drought caused a bad harvest and hence reduced food availability, but, had the priorities of the government been different, there might have been no famine (or a much smaller one) despite the drought’.³³ FAD₂ continues to assign primary causality for famine to events

³⁰ Devereux, *Theories of Famine*, pp. 35-44.

³¹ Cormac Ó Gráda, ‘Making Famine History’, *Journal of Economic Literature*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (Mar., 2007), pp. 26-32; Cormac Ó Gráda, Jean-Michel Chevet, ‘Famine and market in ancien régime France’, *JEH*, Vol. 62, No. 3 (Sep., 2002), p. 727.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Michael Ellman, ‘The 1947 Soviet Famine and the Entitlement Approach to Famines’, *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, No. 24 (2000), p. 603.

that result in the collapse of the food supply but differs from FAD₁ theory by arguing that other factors may intensify the effect of this decline. Anders Karlsson attributes the primary cause of a famine in late eighteenth-century Korea to crop failures but argues that a combination of Confucian ideology (leading to unsustainable tax exemptions) and socio-political interests that privileged certain provinces exacerbated the famine in affected provinces.³⁴ The interpretation that the scale of a famine can be deepened by the privileging of certain areas or groups by the state has become an increasingly important part of recent scholarship. Lin and Yang, examining the Great Leap Forward famine in China of 1959-61, show that after the revolution, the government's agricultural and industrial policies were heavily biased towards industry; using the percentage of rural population in an affected province, they show that urban bias was a significant factor in the death rate.³⁵ Richard Robbins argues that the export and trade led economic policies of the imperial Ministry of Finance resulted in a delayed response to the 1891-92 famine and an initial refusal to ban the export of rye.³⁶

It is not just central government policies that have been shown to have an impact. Perhaps in reflection of the turn towards the 'region' and spatial history, the role of local government with emphasis on the relationship with central government has been the subject of focus. Carol Shiue looks at the relationship between central and local granaries in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century China, showing that they were characterised by a pattern of action that seems to match the cycle of initiative and response identified by Catherine Evtuhov, a concept we will return to frequently throughout this thesis.³⁷ Local authorities attempted to allocate resources over which they have discretion towards public

³⁴ Anders Karlsson, 'Famine, finance and political power: crop failure and land-tax exemption in late eighteenth-century Chosŏn Korea', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 48, No. 4 (2005), p. 567, p. 573, p. 552.

³⁵ Lin, Yang, 'Food availability', pp. 138-140, p. 149, p. 154.

³⁶ Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, pp. 31-41.

³⁷ Catherine Evtuhov, *Portrait of a Russian Province: Economy, Society and Civilisation in Nineteenth-Century Nizhnii Novgorod* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011), p. 134.

goods that have higher priority in their own jurisdictions such as under stored grain and also deviated from central targets. She suggests that they acted independently, stretching the limits of authority delegated to them. Central authorities, meanwhile, perceived a successful response as conformity with its targets and regulations; their main solution for the various problems of deviation was better monitoring which she argues made the situation worse.³⁸ Delano Dugarm shows that the local authorities in Tambov during the 1918-21 crisis developed a food-supply system that deviated considerably from the plans developed in Moscow. What is different in this case, however, is that the interaction and tension occurred in the province between local institutions and central representatives; by focusing on the conflict between the two, Dugarm shows how local authorities pursued independent policies but that the centre was not above the systematic crushing of local interests that could threaten the stability of the centre.³⁹

The scholarship on the Russian famine of 1891-92 does not address the issues surrounding FAD or make use of the entitlement theory as an alternative. However, it should be acknowledged that much of the scholarship was written only as entitlement theory began to emerge. James Simms, without directly using the term, argues that the 1891-92 famine was a FAD famine caused by drought and poor soil moisture.⁴⁰ However, both nineteenth-century and modern scholarship has also put forward a narrative of the provinces as backward and inherently negative while many radicals and liberals, such as Plekhanov and Solov'ev, used it to argue that the famine demonstrated an agrarian crisis and the general backwardness and incapacity to respond of the Tsarist state.⁴¹ Richard

³⁸ Carol H. Shiue, 'Local granaries and central government disaster relief: moral hazard and intergovernmental famine in eighteenth- and nineteenth-Century China', *JEH*, Vol. 64, No. 1 (Mar., 2004), pp. 103-18.

³⁹ Delano Dugarm, 'Local Politics and the Struggle for Grain in Tambov, 1918-1921' in *Provincial Landscapes, Local Dimensions of Soviet Power, 1917-1953*, ed. Donald J. Raleigh (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001), pp. 59-82.

⁴⁰ Simms, 'The Crop Failure of 1891', pp. 236-50.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

Robbins echoes this, arguing that the structure and capacity of the imperial administrative structure was a crucial factor; the lack of connection between the centre and the province and between the *zemstvo* and the *volost* made the response more difficult to coordinate and that at the local level it was often a function of the variable quality of leadership.⁴² He also brings in the ‘backward’ agricultural practices of the peasantry (such as land exhaustion), a claim rejected by Simms who uses yield figures to show that the land was not becoming exhausted.⁴³ Steven Hoch rejects overpopulation claims and argues that the emancipation may have led to an *improved* standard of living for the peasantry.⁴⁴ However, neither Simms nor Hoch addresses other causal factors such as state action or entitlement collapses. Indeed, it is only Robbins who comes close to foreshadowing the developments in famine causality by treating the role of the state and local government.

The 1891-92 famine in Tambov province and historical comparison

If famine, then, has multiple causes, and there are differing views in the scholarship on the correct way to respond to it, how do we define a ‘successful’ famine response? It is, unfortunately, an open-ended question with no easily available answer, as Richard Robbins has noted.⁴⁵ Medical and technological advances, along with a changing understanding of famine as a process, have raised the bar for what we would consider a ‘successful’ response. We need to be careful of retroactively imposing these standards while also excusing mistakes as ‘context’. This is, undoubtedly, a difficult balance to

⁴² Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, pp. 1-14, pp. 124-148. Kimitaka Matsuzato, however, argues that a *volost* *zemstvo* would not have been possible, even if legal, due to the insufficiency of intellectual manpower, Kimitaka Matsuzato, ‘The concept of “space” in Russian history: regionalisation from the late imperial period to the present’ in *Empire and Society: New Approaches to Russian History*, eds. Teruyuki Hara and Kimitaka Matsuzato (Sapporo: Slavic Research Centre, Hokkaido University, 1997), pp. 187.

⁴³ Robbins, *Famine in Russia* pp. 1-14, Simms, ‘The crop failure of 1891’, pp. 236-50.

⁴⁴ Steven L. Hoch, ‘On good numbers and bad: Malthus, population trends and peasant standards of living in late imperial Russia’, *SR*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (Spring, 1994), pp. 41-75.

⁴⁵ Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, pp. 168-70.

strike but attempting it will allow us to locate the relief effort in a broader history of famine relief internationally and provincial government in imperial Russia. Ideally famines are *prevented* but this is obviously not possible in a historical context. We are thus required to find some way of evaluating the decisions the authorities did take. ‘Success’ then, can be defined as the extent to which a province’s institutions navigated the specific challenges the crisis gave rise to and met the specific needs and goals that arose. In short, could Tambov province cope with the challenge of empty stores, the *rasputitsa*, rising need and successfully get aid to as many people as they could, while keeping mortality rates as low as possible? As Tambov province’s challenge clearly had large structural elements, this will be the main focus of this thesis with the contention that the province’s structures and personnel coped to a greater degree than may have been expected.

While each incident of famine differed, over the course of the nineteenth century, a number of patterns in famine crises emerged. They were cumulatively more severe than in the twentieth century, were increasingly localised, occurred rarely in Europe in peacetime and there was a strong link between the level of industrialisation and the level of distress experienced.⁴⁶ While famines in China and India from 1876-9 resulted in 9.5 – 13 million and 7 million deaths respectively, cruel tolls were also exacted in the heart of European empires: 1 – 1.5 million deaths (as calculated by Joel Mokyr) in Ireland in the 1840s and 375,000 – 400,000 deaths in Russia (as calculated by Robbins) in 1891-92.⁴⁷ Ireland’s population was nearly eight million (up nearly 50 per cent since 1801)

⁴⁶ Cormac Ó Gráda, *Famine: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 23, p. 26, Sergei Adamets, ‘Famine in nineteenth and twentieth-century Russia: mortality by age, cause and gender’ in *Famine Demography: Perspectives From Past and Present*, eds. Tim Dyson, Cormac Ó Gráda (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 160, Joel Mokyr, *Why Ireland Starved: A Quantitative and Analytical History of the Irish Economy, 1800-1850* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985), pp. 278-94.

⁴⁷ Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, pp. 170-2, Ó Gráda, *Famine: A Short History*, p. 23, Joel Mokyr, Cormac Ó Gráda, ‘Famine disease and famine mortality: lessons from the Irish experience, 1845-50’ in *Famine Demography: Perspectives From Past and Present*, eds. Tim Dyson, Cormac Ó Gráda (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 37, Mokyr, *Why Ireland Starved*, p. 266.

while in 1891-2 the population for the twenty-three Russian provinces that received MVD food loans was just over (an estimated) 36,786,000.⁴⁸ On these terms alone, the relief effort in Russia was considerably more successful, already illustrating that we need to revise our idea that the imperial state was incapable of managing a crisis.

However we should be careful about the use of mortality as a measure of success; as Robbins makes clear it is the ‘least unreliable’ measure only.⁴⁹ Part of the reason for this is that what kills people during a famine is complex and multi-faceted and is rarely starvation directly. As Tim Dyson makes clear, it was severe emaciation that meant a hungry person’s ‘hold on life was so slender that any illness could snap their frail support’.⁵⁰ Famine weakens the body to the point that either digestive conditions (such as diarrhoea and dysentery) *or* epidemics like typhus (endemic to the Russian countryside) and cholera can spread with ease. Again illustrating the difference between the two famines, digestive conditions killed roughly half of the Irish famine victims while in Tambov province, over half were killed by the cholera epidemic, the result of what Joel Mokyr and Cormac Ó Gráda refer to as famine’s indirect impact on personal and social behaviour.⁵¹ With the lowest level of famine related deaths amongst neighbouring provinces, it seems Tambov’s authorities would ultimately be more successful at

⁴⁸ Christine Kinealy, *This Great Calamity: The Irish Famine, 1845-52* (Dublin: Gill & MacMillan, 2006), p. 6, *Statisticheskie dannye* p. 62.

⁴⁹ Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, pp. 170-2.

⁵⁰ Tim Dyson, ‘Famine in Berar, 1896-7 and 1899-1900: echoes and chain reactions’ in *Famine Demography: Perspectives from Past and Present*, eds. Tim Dyson, Cormac Ó Gráda (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 109.

⁵¹ Mokyr, Ó Gráda, ‘Famine disease and famine Mortality’, pp. 19-31, Laurence M. Geary, ‘The late disastrous epidemic: medical relief and the Great Famine’ in *Fearful Realities: New Perspectives on the Famine*, eds. Chris Morash, Richard Hayes (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1996), pp. 49-59, James S. Donnelly Jr., *The Great Irish Potato Famine* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2001), pp. 171-6, Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, p. 189.

providing higher quality food aid than either its neighbours or the British government in Ireland.⁵²

When we look at the raw figures for 1891-92, what is striking is Tambov province's remarkable consistency. It issued the fourth highest amount in food loans (5.963 million *puds*), had the third highest population (2.455 million people) and had the third highest monthly average issuing rate in *puds* (553,900 *puds*); this compares with Voronezh which bought the most food, had a smaller population yet had a lower monthly issuing rate.⁵³ This consistent performance marks it out from its neighbouring provinces and is arguably a remarkable achievement, especially given the absence of rail links in the northern half of the province. How the province achieved this consistency is perhaps one of the main puzzles this thesis will seek to tease out; it suggests a degree of capacity and potential that, if not high by modern standards, was certainly higher than traditional perceptions of provincial government has held.

Tambov's consistency relative to its neighbours and the significantly lower mortality rate in 1891-92 overall compared to the Irish famine leads us then to look at the base conditions, or starting point, immediately prior to each crisis. Both areas (Ireland and Tambov province) had rapid annual population growth in the decades pre-crisis which had slowed to 1 per cent or less in the immediate run up.⁵⁴ Russian peasant living standards are still a matter of much debate but it seems that the general trend was for improving living standards (from a low base) with increased pressure pre-crisis due to bad harvests whereas the Irish population were poor by European standards with an

⁵² Charlotte Henze, *Disease, health-care and government in late imperial Russia: life and death on the Volga, 1823-1914* (Oxford: Routledge, 2011), p. 65.

⁵³ *Statisticheskie dannye*, pp. 22-3, p. 62, pp. 42-3.

⁵⁴ Cormac Ó Gráda, *The Great Irish Famine, Studies in Economic and Social History* (London: Macmillan Education, 1989), p. 13, Robert Pepe Donnorummo, 'The peasants of central Russia and Vladimir: reactions to emancipation and the market, 1850-1900', unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1983, p. 244.

income half that of Britain and a national trend for increasing poverty.⁵⁵ Irish and Russian agriculture was inefficient compared to other European states but as Ó Gráda notes, structural factors mean it should have been worse; in 1889 Tambov province was the second most productive of itself and its neighbours despite, as we will see in the profile of the province, widely derided agricultural practices.⁵⁶

The crop failure of 1891 devastated the agricultural economy of the central black earth region, lowering the harvest by an average of 40 per cent.⁵⁷ Tambov province was badly hit, with a harvest decline of 55.3 per cent and a decline in rye yields per person from seventeen to five *puds*.⁵⁸ This is made all the starker when we see that from 1883-92 the province exceeded the MVD's 'minimum average' for the harvest of thirteen *puds* by up to 100 per cent.⁵⁹ Yet its neighbours were hit even harder: Voronezh's harvest fell by 75 per cent, Samara and Saratov's by 73.7 per cent while Voronezh's rye yield per person fell from fifteen to 0.80 *puds*.⁶⁰ Even in years of poor harvests, 20 - 30 per cent of Tambov's population were unable to feed themselves; the famine would take this to over 50 per cent (based on the percentage receiving aid), while in Voronezh it was nearly 90 per cent.⁶¹ This may go some way to explain Tambov's consistency in that it is easier to recover when the effects are less devastating.

⁵⁵ Tracy Dennison, Steven Nafziger, 'Living Standards in Nineteenth-Century Russia' *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (Winter, 2013), pp. 397-441, Stephen G. Wheatcroft, 'The 1891—1892 famine in Russia: towards a more detailed analysis of its scale and demographic significance' in *Economy and society in Russia and the Soviet Union, 1860 - 1930. Essays for Olga Crisp*, eds. Linda Edmondson, Peter Waldron (London: St. Martin's Press, 1992), p. 39, Cormac Ó Gráda, *Ireland Before and After the Famine: Explorations in economic history, 1800-1925* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p. 9, p. 15, pp. 22-3.

⁵⁶ Ó Gráda, *Ireland Before and After the Famine*, p. 56.

⁵⁷ Ermolov, *Neurozhai i narodnoe bedstvie*, p.30.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30, p. 26.

⁵⁹ Tsentral'nyi statisticheskii komitet Ministerstva Vnutrennykh Del, *Srednyi sbor khlebov i kartofelia za desiatilietie 1883-92 gg. v 60 guberniakh Evropeiskoi Rossii po otnosheniiu k narodnomu prodovol'stviiu* (St. Petersburg, 1894), p. 5, p. 11.

⁶⁰ Ermolov, *Neurozhai i narodnoe bedstvie*, p.30, p. 26.

⁶¹ *Srednyi sbor khlebov*, pp. 16-7.

Unfortunately however, Tambov province would not escape so easily. It may have been hit less hard by the actual crop failure but its ability to cope with a disaster of this scale was far below that of its neighbours. We will look at the failures of the 1889 Food Security Statute in Chapter 3 but here it is useful to give a basic indication of how little redundant capacity existed in the very system designed to prevent or ease this very catastrophe. By September 1891 the provincial grain stores in Tambov province were owed 930,306 *chetverts* and 2,836,000 roubles; of its neighbouring provinces only Voronezh could equal the grain deficit while none could match the financial deficit.⁶² In addition to this, the provincial food capital reserve, the financial backstop, was nearly 3.1 million roubles in debt in Tambov province while in Voronezh it was 354,000 roubles.⁶³ Poorly served by a collapsing rail network, this tattered safety net was in no way capable of protecting the population, again underscoring the relative success of the relief effort.

Ultimately, ‘relative success’ is the key concept when evaluating the relief effort mounted by Tambov’s authorities. Measured by mortality, the Russian response to the famine of 1891-2 was much more effective than that of the British government in Ireland and within Russia, Tambov province could claim a decent level of success. Yet the famine threw up different challenges depending on the province as we have seen: Voronezh suffered a catastrophic harvest collapse but had redundant capacity whereas Tambov had little ability to defend itself. Ultimately then, what this thesis will do in terms of ‘success’ or ‘failure’ is look less at the *process* of how Tambov province managed to hold back, to a surprising degree, the devastation the famine threatened to bring.

⁶² Tsentral’nyi statisticheskii komitet Ministerstva Vnutrennykh Del, *Khlebnye zapasy v obshchestvennykh magazinakh i mestnye prodovol’stvennye kapitaly k 1-mu sentiabriu 1891 goda v Evropeiskoi Rossii* (ed. A Dubrovskii) (St. Petersburg, 1892), p. 2.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 33, p. 87.

The role and place of the province in imperial Russia

To understand the role of administration we need to understand how administrative boundaries came to be delineated, practised and understood. As Jeff Sahadeo notes, ‘regional studies [...] underline the tension between diversity and uniformity among the Tsar and his advisers, who sought to streamline administration as well as apply modern concepts of identity to peoples under their control’.⁶⁴ Sahadeo also questions the tendency to avoid the comparative, wondering if historians of Russia fear it will rob imperial Russia of its apparent uniqueness within Europe.⁶⁵ Susan Smith-Peter identifies the problem of ignoring the big picture, which can lead scholars to look only at their own province or region, ignoring theory, other provinces, and other disciplines.⁶⁶ Alexander Morrison counterpoints this however, arguing that the specificities of the Russian empire can only really be analysed and explained by those who specialise in its history, or indeed the history of particular regions within it.⁶⁷

How then should we approach the history of the local or provincial? Susan Smith-Peter advocates a mixture between the Western, theoretical approach and the more geographically narrow Russian local history (*kraevedenie*): ‘to oversimplify somewhat, in the West we are confronted with theory without the local, and in Russia we see the local without theory [...] The local is a window onto Russia [...]’.⁶⁸ Studies of the region and province need to move away from just seeing it in relation to the centre while also seeing the province within the wider institutional and administrative context.⁶⁹ Smith-

⁶⁴ Jeff Sahadeo, ‘Visions of empire: Russia’s place in an imperial world’, *Kritika*, New Series, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Spring, 2010), p. 382.

⁶⁵ Ibid p. 386.

⁶⁶ Susan Smith-Peter, ‘Bringing the provinces into focus: subnational spaces in the recent historiography of Russia’, *Kritika*, New Series, Vol. 12, No. 2 (Fall, 2011), p. 835.

⁶⁷ Alexander Morrison, ‘Metropole, Colony and Imperial Citizenship in the Russian Empire’, *Kritika*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (Spring, 2012), p. 342.

⁶⁸ Smith-Peter, ‘How to write a region’, pp. 541-2.

⁶⁹ Smith-Peter, ‘Bringing the provinces into focus’, pp. 835-48.

Peter appears to be advocating an approach that focuses on the local without forgetting the importance of a theoretical and conceptual framework and the wider context. It is important that our approach to the region does not tend towards the generic but, equally, we should not become bogged down in minute detail to the exclusion of wider themes. Morrison's argument that the complexities of a region can best be explained by a specialist helps shift the emphasis to a more specific and locally-centred history. Alexei Miller sounds out a warning that the regional approach to history is methodologically undefined and calls for a greater awareness of context: 'The success of the 'regional' investigation depends greatly on how well the author is grounded in methodology and able to visualise the processes under investigation as part of a greater whole'.⁷⁰ All of these insights can give us a sense of ways in which provincial institutions may be profitably studied. The machinery of provincial government, especially in a crisis, can be best explained by going beyond generalities; imperial Russia was made up of complex relationships. It is how areas used the standard machinery, not that the machinery was standard, which is the most important aspect.

Most peripheral/centre-periphery scholarship focuses on the 'region' with a particular emphasis on borderlands while our case study differs by focusing on a province within European Russia. While the 'region' and the 'province' are different, they are both sub-national spaces; reviewing the recent historiography on the 'region' allows us to see not only how historians have treated the sub-national space while also justifying the use of administrative boundaries for a case-study but also pull out any useful themes, in particular the notion of 'networks'.

The 'region' as a fixed concept has been challenged; Aleksei Miller is inherently sceptical of the notion of 'region' or 'regionalism', seeing the region as rigid, artificial

⁷⁰ Alexei Miller (trans. Gust Olson), 'Between local and inter-imperial: Russian imperial history in search of scope and paradigm', *Kritika*, New Series, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Winter, 2004), p. 3, p. 16.

and suffering from the same problems as nationalism while ‘regionalism’ is simply nationalism but on a smaller scale.⁷¹ Accepting that the notion of region is central to the many differing conceptions of globalisation, political mobilisation and identity building, Anssi Paasi nevertheless seems to question the ‘uniqueness’ of a region

[...] the question of whether a place/region/territory should be understood as a bounded unit is of course more complicated. [...] the various organisations, institutions and actors involved in the institutionalisation of a region may have different strategies with regard to the meaning and functions of the region and its ‘identity’.⁷²

Thus, it can be argued that ‘regions’ are largely social and artificial constructs, the result of power networks and relationships and are dynamic and ever-changing; they can be contested and shifted by the individual, institutions and groups within the region itself.⁷³ Miller supports this and further contends that regional historians do not explain the nature and mechanisms of their chosen boundaries in detail while Malte Rolf calls for a radical decentralisation of spatial history.⁷⁴

Despite the call to deconstruct and move away from boundaries, their use can be explained by the recent shift in historiography towards the periphery. Now, it is often the centre that is seen as the construct. Kimitaka Matsuzato argues that it is essential to be sensitive to people’s sense of ‘space’. Spatial sensitivity is an argument for historical realism; the way the administrative structure functioned was based on a combination of

⁷¹ Ibid., pp. 7-26.

⁷² Anssi Paasi, ‘Place and region: regional worlds and words’, *Progress in Human Geography*, Volume 26, Number 6 (2002), p. 803, p. 807.

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 802-8.

⁷⁴ Miller (trans. Gust Olson), ‘Between local and inter-imperial’, p. 9, Malte Rolf, ‘Importing the “spatial turn” to Russia: studies on the spatialisation of Russian history’, *Kritika*, New Series, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Spring, 2010), pp. 359-80.

local factors such as culture, wealth and capacity.⁷⁵ A ‘region’ is a set of practices and a cognitive structure; a community ‘can also be based on how social life is organised’ and, thus, large communities can be discursively constructed and imagined; the local ‘ultimately relates to the wider society within which it is embedded’.⁷⁶ I. Gerasimov, S. Glebov, A. Kaplunovski and M. Mogilner seek to reconstruct the ‘periphery’ and make it ‘centre’; the centre then becomes a collection of peripheral narratives.⁷⁷

Seeing the province as a collection of narratives lets us draw out one of the most useful ideas from the historiography of the ‘region’, that of ‘networks’. Malte Rolf argues that one area can contain multiple spaces and places.⁷⁸ Nick Baron further develops the ‘region’ as a complex entanglement of networks and relationships that can spread beyond ‘fixed’ regional boundaries. It is the cultural practices that emerge as part of the human interaction with space and terrain that define, delimit and arrange identity.⁷⁹ The ‘region’ has its origins in an artificial construct designed by governments to regulate and control the internal space. If we understand the region as a function of the common practices and networks within it, these boundaries take on new significance as they limited and shaped these practices and those they affected. Tambov was settled and lived in for nearly two hundred years before the famine crisis while by the time of the famine, new networks and relationships had developed with the creation of the zemstvos and land captains. The resultant process of administering others, interacting with others and existing within the boundaries and conceptions of local government gave the province life and dynamism.

⁷⁵ Matsuzato, ‘The concept of “space” in Russian history’, pp. 181-200.

⁷⁶ Celia Applegate, ‘A Europe of regions: reflections on the historiography of sub-national places in modern times’, *AHR*, Vol., 104, No. 4 (Oct., 1999), pp. 1157-1182, Donald J. Raleigh, ‘Introduction’ in *Provincial Landscapes, Local Dimensions of Soviet Power, 1917-1953*, ed. Donald J. Raleigh (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001), p. 5.

⁷⁷ I. Gerasimov, S. Glebov, A. Kaplunovski and M. Mogilner, ‘The centrality of periphery’, *Ab Imperio*, No. 1 (2012), pp. 19-28.

⁷⁸ Rolf, ‘Importing the “spatial turn” to Russia’, pp. 359-80.

⁷⁹ Nick Baron, ‘New spatial histories of 20th-Century Russia and the Soviet Union: exploring the terrain’, *Kritika*, New Series, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Spring, 2008), p. 433.

While administrative boundaries are a valid way to define a ‘province’, geography itself has played an important role in how Russia has defined itself internally. Mark Bassin pays particular attention to attempts made by Slavophiles, pan-Slavists and others to downplay or deny the European characteristics of Russia, and the difficulties they had in justifying the imperial expansion into purely ‘Asiatic’ lands in the late nineteenth century. He argues that geographic images were used to argue that the inclusion or exclusion of Russia as a part of Europe or Asia, far from being the subjective or value-laden judgment it was, was given objectively in the configuration of the natural world itself.⁸⁰ He uses Sergei Mikhailovich Solov’ev’s use of the ‘frontier thesis’ in the nineteenth century to examine the role of environmental causality in explaining a nation’s development. A committed westerniser, Solov’ev sought a theoretical approach that would demonstrate why Russia was a European nation and, if that was true, why its development had lagged behind that of Europe. Nature, in the Russian context, was an ‘evil stepmother’ (*machekha*); it had allowed other tribes into Russian territory, stretched the Slavs over a vast and inhospitable land and forced them into a state of almost permanent self-colonisation. This, explained Solov’ev, is why, despite being an intrinsically European state, Russia’s developmental path was very different.⁸¹ Others have put forward an interpretation of the Russian province and landscape that does not centre on its relationship to Europe. Christopher Ely argues that, for a very long time, the provincial Russian landscape was not designated as a scenic space and that there was no conception of it as a place of beauty.⁸² Over time however, the generic landscape which could be any province, became a mark of national distinctiveness and pride; Russia’s beauty was in its

⁸⁰ Mark Bassin, ‘Russia between Europe and Asia: the ideological construction of geographical space’, *SR*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (Spring, 1991), p. 2.

⁸¹ Mark Bassin, ‘Turner, Solov’ev and the “frontier hypothesis”: the nationalist significance of open spaces’, *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 65, No. 3 (Sep., 1993), pp. 473-511.

⁸² Christopher Ely, *This Meager Nature: Landscape and National Identity in Imperial Russia* (Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002), p. 5.

absence of beauty.⁸³ In each and every case, the ‘province’ or ‘landscape’ referred to was generic and undefined; this turn to the beauty of the Russian landscape in late nineteenth-century landscape painting reflected a nondescript province with many paintings simply being set in the ‘Russian countryside’.⁸⁴ Whether centred on a relationship with Europe or not, the physical landscape, its appearance and impact, have clearly had a strong impact on the Russian historical concept of the internal space.

We can also see from the historiography that, due to geographical and/or environmental factors, it is also plausible to see provinces as part of Russia’s incessant self-colonisation, forcing the centre to stretch restlessly and use autocratic, repressive methods. The ‘backwardness’ and unending monotony of the province was a recurring trope within Russian culture before and during the nineteenth century. Many writers used the ‘provinces’ as generic unnamed places that consisted of ignorance, narrow-mindedness and abuse; they were interchangeable, monotonous and possessed only of negative qualities where abuses were possible because they were provincial, that is, distant from the centre.⁸⁵ Anne Lounsbery argues that the obsession with provincialism reveals an inferiority complex; Russians themselves felt provincial in comparison to Europe.⁸⁶ From such a viewpoint, ‘provincial’, stood for everything that could be seen as marking Russia out as backward and an imitator. To Lounsbery and Bassin, the province was seen as backward due to its supposedly negative relationship to the seeming modernity of Europe and there was thus a need to forcibly control it in order to modernise and integrate it. This interpretation is given further weight by Alexander Morrison’s argument that in the late nineteenth century a new governmental language emerged in

⁸³ Ibid., p. 225.

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 223-229.

⁸⁵ Anne Lounsbery, “‘To Moscow, I beg you!’: Chekhov’s vision of the Russian provinces”, *Toronto Slavic Quarterly*, No. 9, Summer 2004.

⁸⁶ Anne Lounsbery, “No, this is not the provinces!” Provincialism, authenticity and Russianness in Gogol’s day’, *Russian Review*, Vol. 64, No. 2 (Apr., 2005), pp. 259-280.

Russia : *grazhdanstvennost*’ (variously translated as ‘citizenship’, ‘civic values’ or ‘civic consciousness’). This definition of citizenship did not depend on the exercise of the vote but ultimately aimed at integration, abolishing estate-based taxation, eliminating local variations in governance, and curtailing the privileges granted to local, non-Russian nobles.⁸⁷

The changing historiography on the relationship between the centre and the periphery leads us to examine the emergence of provincial identity and practice. Celia Applegate argues for the emergence of provincial dynamism as a new way to view central-periphery relations.⁸⁸ Catherine Evtuhov, whose work on nineteenth-century Nizhnii Novgorod is one of the most important recent works on the province, builds her study around a ‘fundamental pattern of central initiative and local response in which government legislation met with local interpretation that sometimes far exceeded the centre’s original intentions; more central legislation would then follow in reaction [...]’.⁸⁹ She shows that it was the process of interacting with the physical and material environment that led, over time, to the emergence of a local consciousness, the ‘idea of province’.⁹⁰ As Nizhnii Novgorod, like every other province, was unique, she also views it in interaction with other regions and the centre.⁹¹ She argues that the Russian province came into its ‘own’ from the 1870s on and she puts much of this down to the *uezd zemstvo*; the provincial idea achieved expression through practice.⁹² This stretched through into the Soviet period with some people declaring ‘we already have raions while they still have *uezds*’.⁹³

⁸⁷ Morrison, ‘Metropole, colony and imperial citizenship’, pp. 339-40.

⁸⁸ Applegate, ‘A Europe of regions’, p. 1167.

⁸⁹ Evtuhov, *Portrait of a Russian Province*, p. 134.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9, pp. 20-1.

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 9-20, p. 228.

⁹³ T.V. Klubkova, P.A. Klubkov, ‘Russkii provintsial’nyi gorod i stereotipyi provintsial’nosti’ in *Russkaia Provintsiia: Mif – Tekst – Realnost*, ed. V.N. Sazhin (Moscow: Kollektiv avtorov, 2000), p. 22.

If it was practice that made the province 'come to life', this may lend a new significance to the response to the famine crisis. As Sarah Badcock has shown in her study of revolutionary Russia, in times of crisis where central authority was either too weak or too distant to respond effectively, local authorities responded primarily to the challenges and needs they encountered, as opposed to national imperatives.⁹⁴ She draws from this an opportunity to understand the dynamics of local government: '[...] a crisis offers a good vantage point to oversee the balance of power in the town'.⁹⁵ Two articles show us that, in Russia, famine often led to the locality first approach to which Badcock draws attention. Mark Tauger shows that in the Ukrainian famine of 1928-1929, the regional authorities made clear that they would focus on as many groups as possible despite higher level instructions and that the programme of public works was developed considerably in response to local conditions.⁹⁶ Delano Dugarm, in a study of the grain crisis and Antonov rebellion in Tambov itself from 1918-1921, shows how local conditions, political actors, and peasant communities in Tambov province created a food-supply system that bore little resistance to the plans officials in Moscow had envisaged.⁹⁷ Ultimately, he shows that, in a crisis in the periphery, no matter how the centre envisioned matters proceeding, success could only be achieved by eventually tailoring policies to the needs of the periphery.

The famine then offers an opportunity to test Evtuhov's arguments about initiative and response, and see whether the practice of local politics made the province 'real', in effect with a greater sense of urgency. It will also allow us to reconceptualise the relationship between the province and the centre, as it was the local institutions in Tambov

⁹⁴ Sarah Badcock, *Politics and the People in Revolutionary Russia: A Provincial History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 238-43.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁹⁶ Mark B. Tauger, 'Grain crisis or famine', the Ukrainian state commission for aid to crop-failure victims and the Ukrainian famine of 1928-1929' in *Provincial Landscapes, Local Dimensions of Soviet Power, 1917-1953*, ed. Donald J. Raleigh (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001), pp. 157-158, p. 166.

⁹⁷ Dugarm, 'Local politics', p. 60.

that had to respond first. The centre was thus pushed, explicitly, into the reactive position having traditionally occupied the proactive one.

We should be careful over making the words ‘provincial identity’ do too much work however; through examining institutional networks and relationships, the main focus here is on *initiative* though we will look at the moral dimensions of provincial identity, especially in ‘Provincialism and moral responsibility’ in Chapter 2. ‘Provincial identity’ can be seen as a turn towards self-reliance *not* as a result of feeling ignored by or disloyal to St. Petersburg, but a sense that answers to the province’s problems were best found within the province as holders of the lived experience. A key question for this thesis then is whether the experience of the relief effort helped develop this sense of initiative and identity.

Tambov Province: A brief sketch

If the province was now proactive and the source of innovation, it is necessary to understand what *sort* of province Tambov was at the time of the famine, as this provides greater depth to our case study and allows us to locate the conclusions within a particular context. This takes on greater significance, as this thesis will argue that the response of the Tambov province to the famine was relatively successful, which suggests that a distinct provincial identity had begun to emerge. Tambov province was, in many ways, typical of provinces in the central black earth region in terms of economic and social structure, though the north and south of the province diverged somewhat.

In terms of its actual physical shape, Tambov province resembled an irregular square with a large northward projection; from west to east the base of Tambov province held the uyezds of Lebedian, Usman, Lipetsk, Tambov, Kozlov (the two most populous

uezds) and Borisoglebsk while Morshansk uezd connected the ‘base’ to Shatsk, Spassk, Elatomsk and Temnikov uezds in the north.⁹⁸ Tambov province was located in the central black earth region and bordered the provinces of Nizhnii Novgorod and Vladimir in the north, Penza and Saratov in the east, Voronezh in the south and south-west, and Orel, Tula and Riazan provinces in the west and north-west.⁹⁹ While the provincial statistical committee and the Brokgaus-Efron encyclopaedia differ very slightly on the size of the province, indicating the fragile nature of statistics (as we will see throughout this thesis), it was somewhere in between 58,161 and 58,511 *versts*.¹⁰⁰

A firm part of the central black earth region in European Russia by the nineteenth century, the development of Tambov province was rooted in the expansionist history of the Muscovite state. Recorded urban settlement in the region began in the fourteenth century when the Riazan principality founded the town of Elat’ma, followed by Shatsk in 1553 while the Muscovite state founded Temnikov in 1536 and Tambov town itself in 1637 as a fortress to defend against Tatar aggression.¹⁰¹ Yet Tambov province did not exist until 1779, when it was created out of Azov (later Voronezh), Shatsk (abolished in 1779) and Saratov provinces, and it only achieved final territorial stability in 1803.¹⁰² Illustrating the retrospective myth-making common to identity formation, in 1883 I. I. Dubasov noted with evident pride that the first occupants of Tambov fortress frequently not only fended off large Tatar raiding parties but also gave chase.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Oliver H. Radkey, *The Unknown Civil War in Soviet Russia; A Study of the Green Movement in the Tambov Region 1920-1921* (Stanford, C. A.: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1976), p. 5.

⁹⁹ *Obzor Tambovskoi gubernii za 1889 god: Prilozhenie k vsepoddanneishemu otchetu Tambovskogo gubernatora* (Tambov: Tipografiia Gubernskogo Pravleniia, 1890), p. 1.

¹⁰⁰ The smaller number was given by the *pravlenie* in 1889 while the larger number came from Brokgaus-Efron, the figures for which came from the head of the provincial zemstvo’s statistical committee: *Obzor Tambovskoi gubernii za 1889 god*, p. 1, N. Romanov, ‘Tambovskaiia Guberniia’ in *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar’* (eds. Brockhaus, Efron), t. 32A (St. Petersburg, 1901), p. 557.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 566, I. I. Dubasov, *Ocherki iz istorii Tambovskogo kraia* (Moscow: Tipografiia Elizaveta Gerbek, 1883), tom 1, p. 7.

¹⁰² Romanov, ‘Tambovskaiia Guberniia’, p. 566.

¹⁰³ Dubasov, *Ocherki*, t. 1, p. 7.

By the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, the demographic makeup of Tambov province reflected its history as a frontier outpost and its transition to a stable province in the heart of European Russia. By 1892 the province's population was just under 2.455 million (50.58 per cent of which was female) with the most populous uyezds being in the south (Tambov, Kozlov, Borisoglebsk and Morshansk) with the northern uyezds (Shatsk, Spassk, Elatomsk and Temnikov) being the least populous. Uezd populations ranged from 118,000 (Spassk) to 351,400 (Tambov uezd) with Kozlov and Borisoglebsk also significant population centres.¹⁰⁴ The demographic breakdown of the province reveals its frontier history and the fact that as the imperial state prioritised expansion, a new Russian majority surrounded ethnic minorities. Concentrated in the northern uyezds, ethnic diversity included a small but significant Tatar population at 4 per cent in Shatsk and Elatomsk uyezds and 7 per cent in Temnikov uezd.¹⁰⁵ This paled beside the Mordvinian minority however which made up 9 per cent, 23 per cent and 53 per cent of the population in uyezds of Shatsk, Temnikov and Spassk, respectively.¹⁰⁶ The province was more homogenous in terms of religion, but even here there were some variation, with 98.6 per cent of the population Orthodox with the remainder of the 'schismatics' (predominantly Molokans and Doukhobors, groups which appear to have emerged in the eighteenth century).¹⁰⁷ The population of the province was overwhelmingly rural: in 1897 91.6 per cent (2,457,766 people) of the province's population of 2,684,030 lived in villages with the largest town being Tambov with a population of only 48,015.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ *Statisticheskie dannye*, pp. 78-9.

¹⁰⁵ Romanov, 'Tambovskaia Guberniia', p. 560.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, Svetlana A. Inikova, 'The Tambov Doukhobors in the 1760s', *Russian Studies in History*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (Winter, 2007), pp. 10-39.

¹⁰⁸ Tsentral'nyi statisticheskii komitet Ministerstva Vnutrennykh Del, *Pervaia vseobshchaia perepisa naseleniia rossiiskoi imperii 1897 g.* (St. Petersburg, 1907), t. 42, p. vi.

Despite its militaristic beginnings, by 1891 agriculture was the ‘main’ or ‘exclusive’ source of livelihood of the province’s population; in 1888 the *obzor* to the annual governor’s report made clear that the population’s welfare was ‘closely connected’ to atmospheric conditions.¹⁰⁹ These conditions were deemed, in general, to be deeply favourable with very fertile soil and a ‘moderate climate’ though the south was less humid, more open and flatter than the north, though prone to greater temperature shifts, leading to occasional descriptions of a ‘sharply different climate’.¹¹⁰ The north had once been entirely forests and while most of this was cleared, forests still dominated the northern uezds while the south was mostly steppe and grass plants.¹¹¹ This climate variation, and the historic settlement pattern, meant that the southern uezds had become the province’s economic and infrastructural hub: the northern uezds lacked any rail connection with Temnikov town 150 *versts* from a railway station.¹¹² As we will see, this would leave the hard-hit northern uezds at a significant disadvantage.

While structural disadvantages such as this would play a role in the ability of the province’s authorities to deliver famine relief to the needy, the overall economic profile of the province shows that, in many ways, it was typical of the central black earth region. Landholding was overwhelmingly agricultural with 89 per cent of the total area of the province given over to landholding with the remaining 11 per cent split between towns, the state, estates and churches and monasteries.¹¹³ Landholding was split between village

¹⁰⁹ *Obzor Tambovskoi gubernii za 1886 god: Prilozhenie k vsepoddanneishemu otchetu Tambovskogo gubernatora* (Tambov: Tipografiia Gubernskogo Pravleniia, 1887), p. 1, *Obzor Tambovskoi gubernii za 1887 god: Prilozhenie k vsepoddanneishemu otchetu Tambovskogo gubernatora* (Tambov: Tipografiia Gubernskogo Pravleniia, 1888), p. 1, *Obzor Tambovskoi gubernii za 1888 god: Prilozhenie k vsepoddanneishemu otchetu Tambovskogo gubernatora* (Tambov: Tipografiia Gubernskogo Pravleniia, 1889), p. 1.

¹¹⁰ *Obzor Tambovskoi gubernii za 1878 god: Prilozhenie k vsepoddanneishemu otchetu Tambovskogo gubernatora* (Tambov: Tipografiia Gubernskogo Pravleniia, 1879), p. 1, *Obzor Tambovskoi gubernii za 1889 god*, pp. 1-2.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, Dubasov, *Ocherki*, p. 10.

¹¹² Tambov provincial *uprava* to Rokasovskii 5 August 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 139-42.

¹¹³ Romanov, ‘Tambovskaia Guberniia’, p. 560.

societies and privately owned land with village societies dominating: in 1877 58.7 per cent of land ownership was collectively owned, the second largest rate in the central black earth region (behind Voronezh at 67.4 per cent) and a good bit higher than the average of 52.1 per cent.¹¹⁴ By 1905 this had *increased* to 59.1 per cent though Tambov province had now slipped to third in the ranking (again behind Voronezh at 71.3 per cent and Riazan at 61.3 per cent) while the average now stood at 56.62 per cent.¹¹⁵ Thus, while collective landholding increased throughout the central black earth region from 1877-1905, the figures show that it was more a case of other provinces, barring Voronezh, converging on Tambov's existing position.

In line with the rest of the central black earth region, peasant allotment size was squeezed over the last decades of the nineteenth century. Average allotment size per revision soul declined significantly across the region from 3.38 *desiatins* in 1880 to 1.87 *desiatins* in 1900; in Tambov province the decline was from 2.7 to 2 *desiatins*.¹¹⁶ Despite this decline, it consistently had the second largest allotment per soul. However, this picture is somewhat deceptive, as there was a difference between former serfs and state peasants: the average for the former in 1877-78 was 2.57 *desiatins* and 4.81 *desiatins* for state peasants while in Tambov province ex-serfs had 2.44 *desiatins* while state peasants had 4.98 *desiatins*.¹¹⁷ Tambov province thus differed slightly from the regional average but was not homogenous itself. In the northern uezd of Temnikov in 1882, the average was 2.4 *desiatins* with ex-serfs having 1.5 *desiatins* and former state peasants 3.4 *desiatins* while in the southern uezd of Kirsanov in 1886 the average was 2.6 *desiatins*

¹¹⁴ Tsentral'nyi statisticheskii komitet Ministerstva Vnutrennykh Del, *Statistika zemlevladieniia 1905 g.: Svod dannykh po 50-ti guberniiam evropeiskoi Rossii* (St. Petersburg, 1907), pp. xl-i.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Donnorummo, 'The peasants of central Russia and Vladimir', p. 146.

¹¹⁷ Christine D. Worobec, *Peasant Russia: Family and Community in the Post-Emancipation Period* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1995), p. 37.

with ex-serfs having 1.6 *desiatins* and former state peasants 3.6 *desiatins*.¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, none of these different figures were particularly sufficient, with several imperial era statisticians estimating a peasant needed a minimum of 5 *desiatins* to be viable.¹¹⁹ The repartitional aspect of communal tenure also meant that peasants had fields on differing sides of the village such as in Grudnevo village, Tambov uezd, where their arable land was five versts from their homes.¹²⁰ However, figures seem to indicate that while allotments shrunk, land pressure was slightly less intense than in neighbouring provinces. Out of every 100 peasants, 4.9 passports were issued in Tambov province from 1881-90, and 5.9 to 1891-1900, below the regional average of 6.1 and 7.9.¹²¹ In line with the other central black earth provinces, just under half of all passports (48.8 per cent) were issued for 1-3 months, indicating they were predominantly used for migration between seasons as opposed to relieving land hunger.¹²² Thus, landholding in Tambov province broadly reflected the average picture of a peasantry forced to make do with less though the changes were less acute than other provinces.

In broad terms, however, the last decades of the nineteenth century saw all of the peasantry of Tambov province coming under as much economic and demographic pressure as the rest of the region. A broad consensus, from *ispravniks* and provincial officials to contemporary historians, highlight a growing resource crisis in the province from insufficient allotment size, land over-use and exhaustion to declining livestock

¹¹⁸ Tambovskoe gubernskoe zemstvo, *Sbornik statisticheskikh svedenii po Tambovskoi gubernii*, t. 4 (Tambov, 1882), p. 2, t. 10 (Tambov, 1886), p. 2.

¹¹⁹ Worobec, *Peasant Russia*, p. 37.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 38, *Obzor Tambovskoi gubernii za 1891 god: Prilozhenie k vsepoddanneishemu otchetu Tambovskogo gubernatora* (Tambov: Tipografiia Gubernskogo Pravleniia, 1892), pp. 3-4.

¹²¹ Jeffrey Burds, 'The social control of peasant labour in Russia: the response of village communities to labour migration in the central industrial region, 1861-1905' in *Peasant Economy, Culture, and Politics of European Russia, 1800-1921*, eds. Esther Kingston-Mann, Timothy Mixer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 59.

¹²² Ibid., p. 75.

numbers and the poor use of fertiliser.¹²³ In 1865, Tambov province was exactly at the average with 60 per cent of its land allocated for arable farming and 12.4 per cent for pasture and meadowland; by 1887 this had changed to 63.9 and 8.3 per cent respectively, while the average was now 66 and 10 per cent.¹²⁴ Robert Donnorummo argues that these changes were highly significant: the more arable land increased, the greater the demand for livestock but the supply of fodder for them decreased, reducing the available animal power and fertiliser (recognising this, in parts of Tambov province, peasants were financially induced to increase their use of fertiliser).¹²⁵ While all central black earth provinces, except Tula, saw a decline in the number of horses per 100 *desiatins* of arable land from 1864-90, Tambov's was the worst at 29.1 per cent, more than double the next closest province.¹²⁶ Thus as the need for horses in the province grew with the increase in arable land, the self-same land structure was making it more difficult to benefit from this shift. The three-field system could be counter-productive, which helps explain Governor Rokasovskii's scorn for it, calling it 'obsolete', blaming poor harvests on it and accusing the peasantry of 'stubbornness' in preserving it.¹²⁷

Governor Rokasovskii talked of the 'unsatisfactory economic situation of the province' and the headline figures appear to bear this out: by 1891, the province's peasantry were apparently 'extremely indebted' with redemption payment arrears of just over 2,134,500 roubles, an increase of 1,027,000 roubles from 1890.¹²⁸ Across the central black earth region, debt as a percentage of the assessed total had risen from 42 per cent

¹²³ Diatchkov, Kanitshev, 'Tambov regional development in the context of integral history, 1800-1917', pp. 199-223, Tsintsadze, *Demograficheskie i ekologicheskie problem razvitiia agrarnogo obshchestva*, pp. 120-7.

¹²⁴ Donnorummo, 'The peasants of central Russia and Vladimir', p. 153.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 154, Esther Kingston-Mann, 'Peasant communes and economic innovation: a preliminary inquiry' in *Peasant Economy, Culture, and Politics of European Russia, 1800-1921*, eds. Esther Kingston-Mann, Timothy Mixer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 45-7.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

¹²⁷ *Obzor Tambovskoi gubernii za 1891 god*, pp. 3-4.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4, pp. 41-2.

to 122 per cent in 1886-91.¹²⁹ This was not the full picture however and within Tambov province, arrears had *decreased* in 1886 and 1887 with one poor harvest reversing the situation drastically while in the central black earth region, the value of rye produced per *desiatin* exceeded its rental value by 246 per cent.¹³⁰ This complicated picture was reflected in the province's industrial output: most of the province's industry consisted of processing and/or refining the harvest's yields so the poor harvests of 1890-91 saw trade fall by 5,000,000 roubles.¹³¹ However, this sector of the economy had grown rapidly in the last few decades, primarily due to the arrival of the railways and connections to other markets, growing from 10,000,000 roubles in 1871 to 24,000,000 roubles in 1889, employing nearly 14,000 workers.¹³² Tambov province was in a delicate position and something of a transition phase; trade was growing as were the numbers of factories but it ultimately all revolved around the harvest. The situation was likely to be even more delicate in the northern uezds; with no convenient rail access, they could not easily take advantage of the opportunity to sell to markets in other provinces.

This reliance on the harvest, and the apparent difficulty in adapting new technologies, placed the province under some demographic strain; there was little change in grain output from 1866-1917 (between 1.05 and 1.15 million tons) despite a doubling in population size.¹³³ The population of Tambov province, like most other provinces in the central black earth region, experienced rapid growth in the nineteenth century though it slowed down in the last two decades. This 'bulge' is seen in the fact that the population of Tambov province increased annually by 52,000 people in 1886, 56,000 in 1887, falling

¹²⁹ Stephen G. Wheatcroft, 'Crises and the condition of the peasantry in late imperial Russia' in *Peasant Economy, Culture, and Politics of European Russia, 1800-1921*, eds. Esther Kingston-Mann, Timothy Mixer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 168.

¹³⁰ *Obzor Tambovskoi gubernii za 1888 god*, p. 9, *Obzor Tambovskoi gubernii za 1890 god*, p. 8, Wheatcroft, 'Crises and the Condition of the Peasantry', p. 168.

¹³¹ *Obzor Tambovskoi gubernii za 1891 god*, pp. 32-3.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ Diatchkov, Kanitshev, 'Tambov regional development in the context of integral history', p. 210-1.

to 29,000 in 1890; from 1863-82 the average annual increase in the province was 27,100 people, shrinking to 12,400 for 1882-97.¹³⁴ This was a considerable decrease yet throughout the period 1863-97, Tambov province recorded the largest annual population growth in the central black earth region, its 12,400 figure for 1882-97 considerably higher than the average of 7,217.¹³⁵ The response of the province's population to this change is interesting. While the family and household structure of the province did change, it reflected the general trends in the rest of the region despite the proportionally much larger population increase. While the average family size shrunk from 8.5 individuals in 1862 to 6.4 in 1897, this reflected the central black earth region with 40-45 per cent of households being between 6-10 individuals.¹³⁶ The vast majority of women married between the ages of 16-19 while men married before the age of 21, this was again in line with the regional average.¹³⁷ Thus, while Tambov province's population increased faster than its neighbours did, its family structure stayed entirely within the same trajectory as these provinces, suggesting a growing number of smaller households.

Overall then, Tambov province was very similar to its fellow central black earth provinces in many ways, certainly in terms of demography and social and economic structure. Within the province, the differences were reflected in the southern uezds being the population, transport and economic hub, while the northern uezds had a more diverse population. As this sketch has shown though, these differences were mostly shades within roughly similar broader trends. Over the last few decades of the nineteenth century, the

¹³⁴ *Obzor Tambovskoi gubernii za 1886 god*, p. 9, *Obzor Tambovskoi gubernii za 1887 god*, p. 7, *Obzor Tambovskoi gubernii za 1888 god*, p. 8, *Obzor Tambovskoi gubernii za 1889 god*, p. 8, *Obzor Tambovskoi gubernii za 1890*, p. 7, Donnorummo, 'The peasants of central Russia and Vladimir', p. 244.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ Valery Kanitshev, Roman Kontchakov, Iuri Mizis and Ella Morozova, 'The development of the family structure in the Tambov region 1800-1917', *Historia Agriculturae: Where the twain meet again. New results of the Dutch Russian project on regional development 1780-1917*, No. 34 (2009), p. 254, Worobec, *Peasant Russia*, p. 104.

¹³⁷ Dyatchkov, Kanitshev, 'Tambov regional development in the context of integral history', p. 205, Worobec, *Peasant Russia*, p. 125.

population of the province rose and land allotments shrunk, while indebtedness was a growing problem by 1891. Yet industry rose and the population increase was tailing off. Tambov province seemed to be relatively stable. It was changing, as were its neighbours, but the changes were less dramatic. Was Tambov province prosperous? The main caveat is that it is hard to call *any* province in the central black earth region 'prosperous' but, within the region, it seemed to be slightly above the mathematical average. What is most important to draw from all of this, and which we will explore more in chapter 2, is how *vulnerable* the figures show the population to be. When the harvest was good, so were living standards, but there was almost no redundant or coping capacity in the economy.

Chapter 1: Provincial government in nineteenth century Russia

Introduction

The overall aim of this thesis is to use a detailed case study of a provincial response to a crisis to examine the resilience, flexibility and robustness of provincial and uezd administration in late imperial Russia. Chapters 2-5 will show how the various elements of the administrative network functioned and will draw out the various relationships, networks and tensions that helped or hindered the crisis response. However, since it is important that such an examination should not become narrow and mechanical, let us start by considering how nineteenth-century government was supposed to work, before moving on to look at the groups and individuals who put this theory into practice. In order to place Tambov province in a wider context, this chapter will discuss first the development of legality in nineteenth-century Russia, then the role and attitudes of the imperial and provincial bureaucracies, before finally profiling some of the key figures in Tambov province at every level of the administration from province to volost’.

The development of legality in nineteenth-century Russia

The key tension in the evolution of government in imperial Russia was between the concepts of arbitrariness (*proizvol*) and legality (*zakonnost’*). This tension originated in the very nature of the monarchy itself. The autocratic model meant that only the monarch could introduce legality into a system that philosophically disdained it. As Richard Wortman notes, ‘From Catherine the Great through the reign of Nicholas I, the Russian

ruler strove to appear as the champion of legality and to incorporate the advancement of the law into the imperial myth. Legality and law now elevated the image of enlightened ruler as transcendent, absolute monarch'.¹ He argues that this form of legality issued from the will of a transcendent ruler, evolved at their discretion and mercy, and presented the emperor as the agent of legality.² There was a desire for regularity and clarity on one hand, and the necessity of not impinging on the autocratic power of the Tsar on the other. The Fundamental Laws of the 1832 *Svod zakonov rossiiskoi imperii* embodied this contradiction, in one article stating that the empire was to be governed on the basis of laws while the first article stated that 'The Emperor of All Russia, is an autocratic and absolute monarch. God Himself commands us to obey his supreme authority not only out of fear, but also out of conscience'.³

The presentation of the emperor as the agent of legality made the contradiction between his autocratic will and the regularisation of the government a permanent and indelible characteristic of the Russian state in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁴ The contradiction between the role of the Tsar as guarantor of the law and transcendent, quasi-divine ruler resulted in successive Tsars in the nineteenth century rejecting or undermining attempts to establish a formalised, unified ministerial direction in order to preserve the autocratic prerogative.⁵ Any devolution of power to a 'cabinet' threatened the privilege of the Tsars who wanted their laws to be followed to the letter

¹ Richard Wortman, 'The representation of dynasty and "fundamental laws" in the evolution of Russian monarchy', *Kritika*, New Series, Vol. 13, No. 2 (Spring, 2012), p. 276.

² *Ibid.*, p. 266, p. 288.

³ Heide M. Whelan, *Alexander III and the State Council: Bureaucracy & Counter-reform in Late Imperial Russia* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1982), pp. 47-50, Peter Zyrianov, 'The development of the Russian state system in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries' in *Empire and Society: New Approaches to Russian History*, eds. Teruyuki Hara and Kimitaka Matsuzato (Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University, 1997), p. 115. For the article itself see *Svod zakonov rossiiskoi imperii* (St. Petersburg, 1892), t. 1, *Svod osnovnykh gosudarstvennykh zakonov*, razdel 1, glava 1, st. 4.

⁴ Wortman, 'The representation of dynasty', p. 276.

⁵ Daniel T. Orlovsky, *The Limits of Reform: The Ministry of Internal Affairs in Imperial Russia, 1802-1881* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 5-8.

and were suspicious of independent activity.⁶ The notion of transcendent ruler as both the embodiment and guarantor of legality helps us understand the way in which the bureaucracy evolved over the course of the nineteenth century and the way in which legality was put to use.

Where did the notions of the transcendent ruler and this ruler as the guarantor of legality come from? Richard Wortman has developed a strong thesis surrounding the emergence of these notions and we will look at it in some detail here. The Russian monarchy was a symbolic system; each Tsar developed a ‘governing myth’, refashioned by each monarch in turn. Each ‘scenario of power’ had a common emphasis on domination and, in the second-half of the nineteenth century, a focus on the ‘bond’ between the Tsar and the people. The coronation and other ceremonies of the autocracy presented a ‘cognitive map of the political order’, making clear that the Tsar was not subject to mundane judgment or the limits of everyday life.⁷ Unbound from traditional convention by virtue of being the Tsar, each ruler chose a conscious role or ‘scenario’. Through this ‘scenario’, the monarchy could be revitalised or repositioned and the place of the particular Tsar in the monarchical pantheon guaranteed. Legality becomes a possible and compatible part of the image of the transcendental ruler then as its introduction is a distinguishing and unique feature of the particular ‘scenario of power’: it is reconcilable to autocracy by the very act of its introduction. The introduction of legality would have acted as a self-defining moment in this scenario; as only the Tsar could modify the autocratic and, often, arbitrary system, the very act of doing so *transcends* the rest of government and, ideally, the ruler’s predecessors. Thus, by

⁶ Richard Wortman, *The Development of a Russian Legal Consciousness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), pp. 8-34.

⁷ Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in the Russian Monarchy, Volume 2: From Alexander II to the Abdication of Nicholas II* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 11, p. 13, p. 4.

reducing the autocratic nature of the state, the autocratic ruler becomes more important as the protector and guarantor of this change. The autocracy integrated the rule of law as a means to effectively govern the empire and it also complemented the traditionalist image of the Tsar as the 'father of the people' and guardian of rights and welfare.⁸

This personalisation of power had risks however. The introduction of the succession laws in the 1832 Fundamental Laws elevated the personage of the emperor to the source of all law and good administration. Behaviour by the Tsar or their family that threatened this image of a noble and transcendent guarantor of good government now undermined both the institutions and legitimacy of the autocracy.⁹ The elevation of the autocratic monarch as both the source and protector of legality in the nineteenth century created a tension at the very heart of the state, which would be present throughout the remainder of the Tsarist regime.

This tension expressed itself in the approach the regime and its officials took to government. From 1711 until 1905, Russian statesmen continued to hold the personal authority of the Tsar and his agents above the law even as they laboured to establish legal institutions that would limit personal authority.¹⁰ Law, therefore, was merely a tool of the autocracy and not a governing ideology; the empire's legality was formalistic and not philosophical and there was a rule *by* law and not a rule *of* law. Heide M. Whelan terms this 'regularised autocracy' and argues that the ruling elite, especially the Tsar, should have seen that this was an impossible contradiction.¹¹ 'Regularised autocracy' is a useful concept through which to view the governing strategy of the late imperial Russian state. Francis Wcislo and Daniel Orlovsky argue that the reign of Alexander III was a

⁸ Whelan, *Alexander III and the State Council*, pp. 4-6.

⁹ Wortman, 'The representation of dynasty', p. 293.

¹⁰ George L. Yaney, *The Systematisation of Russian Government: Social Evolution in the Domestic Administration of Imperial Russia, 1711-1905* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1973), pp. 385-386.

¹¹ Whelan, *Alexander III and the State Council*, pp. 83-9, p. 7.

conservative attempt at renovation of the state and mediation of the social and political transformation of Russia, a contention supported by Jeff Sahadeo: ‘Rather than a reactionary move towards an idealised Slavic past, Alexander III’s Russification plans expressed a dedication to European-style modernisation, albeit with stricter forms of control’.¹² Legality was integrated into the image of the Tsar as transcendental ruler as part of the ‘scenario of power’. This meant that the Tsar could, and did, transcend the boundaries of legality with huge projects of social engineering in order to preserve and promote that self-same legality. The argument here is that the image of the transcendental ruler required grand displays of the autocratic power in order to justify its legitimacy. This led to dramatic projects such as the great reforms and the counter-reforms and underscores the tension between arbitrariness and legality that was at the heart of the late imperial monarchy.

This tension and the concepts of ‘regularised autocracy’ and ‘conservative renovation’ open up reinterpretations of Alexander II’s great reforms and Alexander III’s counter-reforms. Traditional interpretations have seen the great reforms as more liberal while the counter-reforms are seen as more conservative and regressive. The interpretation opened up here is that the great reforms become less liberal than previously thought while the counter-reforms are not as regressive. The great reforms become a more conservative project; they were changes in response to an overwhelming sense of crisis and were designed to be enough to head off social instability and improve administration.

¹² Orlovsky’s argument surrounding ‘conservative renovation’ is that, during the reign of Alexander III, the main goal of the bureaucracy was to introduce changes in order to improve administration without destabilising the political system, Orlovsky, *The Limits of Reform*, pp. 202-205. Wcislo argues that the late tsarist bureaucracy was dominated by two distinct types of governing ethos; a ‘police state’ ethos and one focused on bureaucratic reformism. He claims that both of these acknowledged that the long-term authority of the state order they served dictated the use of state power to mobilise political support for themselves and the government they intended to lead: Francis Wcislo, *Reforming Rural Russia: State, Local Society and National Politics, 1855-1914* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 85, p. 305-8, Sahadeo, ‘Visions of empire’, p. 392.

The introduction of elected local self-government institutions was no luxury for the Tsars but was necessary to compensate for the inadequacies of pre-reform administration.¹³ The Tsarist regime engaged in the various projects of reform as it was seeking an ideology of administration that could provide the right combination of local initiative and political control.¹⁴ This search for reform that undertook necessary change without threatening the regime's stability or lessening its potential for control can be seen in the changing laws surrounding corporal punishment in the nineteenth century and the maintenance by the state of these laws to demarcate social status and maintain authority and control, the 'language of the lash'.¹⁵ The penal system was used to fashion and refashion social categories, bind the elite to the state through the concept of 'negative rights' and this social construction was necessary to maintain and reinforce order.¹⁶ The series of reforms relating to corporal punishment, in 1863 and 1890, were derived less from purely humane considerations than from statist concerns over image, authority and administration.¹⁷ Bureaucrats viewed penal legislation as a tool to refashion society and this reconstructive project appeared more urgent after the abolition of serfdom but never sought to repudiate the penal complex's traditional terms but instead adjust them so that it functioned as a more effective means of ordering Russian society and bolstering autocratic rule.¹⁸ When necessary, the state would engage in 'humane' or 'liberal' reforms, but the ultimate aim was to protect the autocratic order while also retaining its potential for control.

The counter-reforms, then, can be said to form a continuum, along with the great reforms, in the use of reform and state-directed social engineering to secure, revitalise

¹³ Thomas S. Pearson, *Russian Officialdom in Crisis: Autocracy and Local Self-Government, 1861—1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 246.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

¹⁵ Abby Schrader, *Languages of the Lash: Corporal Punishment and Identity in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002), pp. 153-7, p. 6.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-13, p. 22.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 145-7, pp. 168-75.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

and renovate the autocracy. The state sought to permit necessary innovation without inviting internal revolution.¹⁹ As an example of this, Minister of Internal Affairs Dmitri Tolstoi, who spear-headed Alexander III's counter-reforms, involved the gentry in the project and intended them to serve on his terms to restore administrative order and build rural support for autocracy.²⁰ The 1889 Land Captain Statute was an effort to build capacity for state-directed change; the 'rural' crisis meant doing nothing was not an option.²¹ Thus, 'conservative renovation' makes sense in the context of the counter-reforms by helping to reconcile its clearly conservative principles with the huge overhaul of the administrative framework. Francis Wcislo summarises this changing view of the counter-reforms rather neatly: 'To interpret the counter-reforms as a reactionary phenomenon, a return to a political and social *status quo ante*, is to ignore the essential significance of these years in autocratic political history. This period... represented a conservative effort to mediate the political and social transformation of Russia'.²² By the late nineteenth century, legality emanated from the Tsar and the *type* of legality that would be pursued depended on the Tsar's chosen 'scenario of power'. Alexander III's 'scenario of power' was based on a 'national myth' and a spiritual bond with the people; he also sought to return to an idealised seventeenth century version of national unity that simply did not exist.²³ This attempt at the recreation of an imagined nation implied massive transformation; entirely new structures needed to be created.

¹⁹ Orlovsky, *The Limits of Reform*, pp. 202-205.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

²¹ Thomas S. Pearson, 'The origins of Alexander III's land captains: a reinterpretation', *SR*, 40 (1981), p. 386, p.401 and Corinne Gaudin, *Ruling Peasants: Village and State in Late Imperial Russia* (Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007), pp. 19-28.

²² Wcislo, *Reforming Rural Russia*, p. 85.

²³ Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, pp. 6-8, p. 526, 'The representation of dynasty', pp. 294-6.

Imperial and provincial bureaucracy

The growing population and increasing complexity of Russia meant that rule through fiat alone was no longer possible while developing a governing strategy that met the autocracy's key goals of effective government and securing the stability of the autocratic order had a profound effect on the development of the bureaucracy at both imperial and provincial levels.²⁴ Seeing the provinces solely as resource gathering units and simply incapable of correct administration, the state responded to perceived poor provincial governance by relying on bureaucratisation and centralisation.²⁵ A brief example will suffice in demonstrating the degree to which decisions were centralised; the nine-level review process in deciding upon tax levies created such a sheer volume of paper work that decisions had to be taken at the ministerial level.²⁶ This increase in the bureaucracy and centralisation that took place in the nineteenth century can be understood as part of the capital-focused nature of the imperial Russian state. It led to the growth and centralisation of the state coupled with continual and systematic attempts to reorganise and integrate the provinces: 'All capital-city ideologies, whatever their specific content, served to strengthen the impetus to bureaucratic expansion [...]'.²⁷ The impetus for expansion and control emerged strongly in the nineteenth century: 'To Nicholas, the path to total control lay through total knowledge: if all information on every part of the empire could be collected and organised [...] the capacity for perfect control would be one step closer'.²⁸ Thus, in order to organise, administer and integrate the provinces, the bureaucracy grew exponentially.

²⁴ George Yaney has suggested that the main origin for the Russian legal-administrative order and the impetus for Peter the Great's reforms lay in establishing and solidifying a hierarchical tribute-collecting network, Yaney, *Systematisation*, pp. 21-3.

²⁵ Ibid., Wortman, *The Development of a Russian Legal Consciousness*, p. 9.

²⁶ Frederick Starr, *Decentralisation and Self-Government in Russia, 1830-1870* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 38.

²⁷ Yaney, *Systematisation*, p. 393.

²⁸ Evtuhov, *Portrait of a Russian Province*, p. 11.

This need for centralisation to ensure the Tsar's continued control meant that the relationship between the bureaucracy and monarch was one of mutual dependence; the Tsar could not govern Russia alone.²⁹ Thus, the role and composition of officialdom itself is important. Richard Wortman and Don Karl Rowney have argued that the search in the nineteenth century for good government led to the emergence of a class of officials who believed in law and order in and of itself. This then led to the creation of a system in which officials were to be guided by legality:

Throughout the legislative code which defines the authority of the minister it is clear that the ideal state of affairs would be one in which the minister and his subordinates in both the central government and its local counterparts were always guided in their actions by the law, merely executing the decisions specified by the existing legislation.³⁰

During the reign of Nicholas I there was increased professionalisation with the breaking down of distinctions between service nobles and professional secretaries, and members of the lesser nobility beginning to choose the civil rather than the military service as a route to distinction.³¹ The civil service became a distinct professional career requiring specialised training prior to entry.³² This new class of officialdom owed their position to their education and service and brought new preconceptions and attitudes to their positions.³³ Walter Pintner has argued that this professionalisation led to a revolution, not in social recruitment but in socialisation, and that there was a professional and social

²⁹ Dominic Lieven, *Russia's Rulers Under the Old Regime* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1990), p.27

³⁰ Wortman, *The Development of a Russian Legal Consciousness*, pp. 286-287 and Don Karl Rowney, 'Organisational change and social adaption: The pre-revolutionary Ministry of Internal Affairs' in *Russian Officialdom: The Bureaucratisation of Russian Society from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century*, eds. Walter McKenzie Pintner, Don Karl Rowney (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 1980), p. 291.

³¹ Wortman, *The Development of a Russian Legal Consciousness*, p. 69.

³² Walter M. Pintner, 'The Evolution of Civil Officialdom, 1755-1855' in *Russian Officialdom: The Bureaucratisation of Russian Society from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century*, eds. Walter McKenzie Pintner, Don Karl Rowney (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 1980), pp. 201-9.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

cleavage opening up between the officialdom in the centre and in the provinces.³⁴ Secondly, senior officials became far more likely to be divorced from the land and dependent on the state for their economic livelihood and social progress than fifty years previously.³⁵ Owing both their training and progression to the state, it is plausible to argue that they not only owed loyalty to it, but had also been trained to see in it the best form of governance for Russia.

Other historians have taken differing positions. George Yaney sees the development and acceptance of systematisation by officials as a form of pretence or aspiration to operate within a formal legal-administrative system.³⁶ He argues that 'system' reflected how many officials believed that they *should* behave but that few expected their colleagues *would* behave this way and that the image of the absolute Tsar made sense to those who served the Russian state.³⁷ Wcislo argues that for all the pursuit of 'reform', Tsarist officials still perceived themselves as conservators of order (*poriadok*) and that there was an inherent assumption that the autocratic regime was a guarantor of stability.³⁸ We should also not discount the role of selection in reinforcing autocratic presumptions amongst officials; it is unlikely that anyone who openly advocated constitutional rule would have been hired. There is disagreement over the extent of selection based on personal influence and connections in the pre-reform period. Rowney argues that an individual's ability to select based on personal connections was small as the sphere of personal control was limited, while Daniel Orlovsky finds the opposite, that the influence of the minister or a senior official was extremely important.³⁹ Both suggest

³⁴ Ibid., p. 224, Walter M. Pintner, 'Civil officialdom and the nobility in the 1850s', in *Russian Officialdom: The Bureaucratisation of Russian Society from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century*, eds. Walter McKenzie Pintner, Don Karl Rowney (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 1980), pp. 227-49.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Yaney, *Systematisation*, p. 5.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 20, p. 388.

³⁸ Wcislo, *Reforming Rural Russia*, pp. 306-8.

³⁹ Don Karl Rowney, 'Organisational change and social adaption: The pre-revolutionary Ministry of Internal Affairs' in *Russian Officialdom: The Bureaucratisation of Russian Society from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century*, eds. Walter McKenzie Pintner, Don Karl Rowney (Chapel Hill: North Carolina

that the system was essentially self-reinforcing; it selected individuals that met its existing composition.⁴⁰ Orlovsky has shown that by 1881, and even in 1861, the dominant group in the Ministry of Internal Affairs was not 'enlightened bureaucrats' but relatively conservative officials.⁴¹

Nonetheless, irrespective of why historians argue that imperial officials believed in strengthening and expanding the bureaucracy, historians concur that there was a growing move towards the integration of provincial institutions in the nineteenth century. Peter Waldron illustrates the view that the centre administered the provinces from the viewpoint of both total control and vertical integration:

The state's preferred method of governing the provinces of the empire was to impose its power through officials who were directly responsible to St. Petersburg and who could exercise authority with the same latitude as central government [...] local administration was precisely that - the administration on the local level of policies determined in St. Petersburg.⁴²

In the nineteenth century this was embodied most clearly in the governor: the provincial representative of the Tsar's autocratic power.⁴³ Richard Robbins' key concerns are whether the governor was the Tsar's 'viceroy' in the province, and the evolution of the position of the governor and the changing relationship between the governor and the Tsar. He argues that the link to the Tsar was, as the nineteenth century wore on, of decidedly

University Press, 1980), pp. 284-7, Daniel T. Orlovsky, 'High officials in the Ministry of Internal Affairs 1885-1881', in *Russian Officialdom: The Bureaucratisation of Russian Society from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century*, eds. Walter McKenzie Pintner, Don Karl Rowney (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 1980), p. 269.

⁴⁰ This is not to suggest that the level of training or education remained static over time. In his examination of the 'Stolypin cohort' of officials who entered the Ministry of Internal Affairs from 1905-1914, Rowney finds that it is different but not uniquely so: Rowney, 'Organisational change and social adaptation', pp. 291-301.

⁴¹ Orlovsky, *The Limits of Reform*, pp. 104-122

⁴² Peter Waldron, *Governing Tsarist Russia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 115.

⁴³ Richard Robbins, *The Tsar's Viceroys: Russian Provincial Governors in the Last Years of the Empire* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 63-90.

little value other than in a psychological and ideological sense.⁴⁴ The personal meetings between the Tsar and the governors had ceased to take place or had become just brief audiences; it had been reduced to a series of annual reports detailing received and sent correspondence.⁴⁵ As the governor was often simply an errand boy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Robbins poses the question as to whether the governors were viceroys or flunkies.⁴⁶ The overwhelming volume of instruction leads Robbins to reinterpret one of the most traditional claims against governors, that of their arbitrariness. Acknowledging that there were arbitrary and oppressive governors, he argues most governors ‘were open to all kinds of pressures and even humiliations’ and that ‘far from being satraps, they were often supplicants’, concluding that ‘it is easy to forget when encountering an act of gubernatorial *proizvol*, that the *nachal’niki gubernatorii* possess few direct controls over self-government’.⁴⁷ This is a very important insight; arbitrariness, in this context, is not always negative. They were arbitrary because they had to be; the list of tasks and responsibilities was long, time was short and there was relatively little guidance from the centre. Thus, we see the governor as men in the middle, subject to all kinds of pulls and pressures from both and above below.⁴⁸

The highlighting of the lack of institutional capacity by Robbins, therefore, means that we need to look at the power of the governor as an individual. Yaney and Robbins have conflicting views on the importance of the governor’s personal authority. Yaney argues that the governor’s personal authority had declined and that, by the time of the famine, he had become more like the director of an organisation and that ‘the despot had given way to the manager’.⁴⁹ Robbins argues that it was *because* of this increased

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 71.

⁴⁵ Starr, *Decentralisation*, p. 35.

⁴⁶ Robbins, *The Tsar’s Viceroys*, p. 66, p. 72, p. 75.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 243.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 63.

⁴⁹ Yaney, *Systematisation*, pp. 21-23. Wortman, *The Development of a Russian Legal Consciousness*, pp. 320-322.

managerial role that the governor's personal authority and relationships became more important; bureaucratic underdevelopment and an almost total lack of unity and consistent direction from St. Petersburg meant that consensus and personal authority were necessary to fill this vacuum.⁵⁰ Robbins' interpretation that the governor was now just akin to a director is more plausible as it is impossible to manage a large organisation without attempting to establish consensus based on your personal authority and relationships. The 'despotic' personal authority Yaney refers to was indeed gone, but it had been replaced with a new form of personal authority, that of the 'negotiator'.

The structure of provincial government

How was provincial government structured in late imperial Russia at the time of the famine? What were the reporting lines? How, according to legislation, was provincial government *supposed* to work? What tensions, if any, were present in the system? If we keep these issues in mind and focus explicitly on the specifics of provincial government we can more effectively relate what *actually* happened to it, to see how far they corresponded.

The grand centring of power around Muscovy had established a territorial rift between centre and periphery that would have a profound impact on Russian governance; this concept of the territorial relationship, whereby the role of the periphery was to respond to the centre, went hand in hand with the autocratic nature of imperial government and one of the most important developments in late imperial governance, the rise of the bureaucracy.⁵¹ As the imperial state developed it became increasingly clear

⁵⁰ Robbins, *The Tsar's Viceroys*, p. 19, p. 243.

⁵¹ Elena Hellberg-Hirn, *Soil and Soul: The Symbolic World of Russianness* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), p. 48.

that a more regular and systematic form of administration was necessary. The empire was simply too large to be administered by either the Tsar alone or the arbitrary, often despotic officials such as the *voevoda* or the military-governor. Thus, the government embraced bureaucracy and 'systematisation' to regularise and standardise administration while seeking to suborn it fully to the centre.⁵²

This drive for better, regularised administration led to a considerable tension within the growing imperial bureaucracy between the desire for legality and the need to maintain the autocratic prerogative of the Tsar. Indeed, some historians have attributed this as a leading cause for the ultimate collapse of the regime.⁵³ Richard Wortman, in his classic study of the evolution of a Russian 'legal consciousness', attributes this tension to the emergence of a class of officials who believed in law and order in and of itself, outside of the Tsar's decrees.⁵⁴ It may be more convincing to turn to Francis Wcislo's formulation that for all the pursuit of 'reform', tsarist officials still perceived of themselves as conservators of order (*poriadok*) and that there was an inherent assumption that the autocratic regime was a guarantor of stability.⁵⁵ One of the reasons for this is that in the 1880s, one of the most significant periods for the state's bureaucratisation of the provinces, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) was dominated by relatively conservative officials.⁵⁶ Thus, while the tension still existed, Wcislo sees it not so much as a function of a divide between legality and arbitrariness, but rather as the corollary of

⁵² Here I will work from George Yaney's definition of 'systematisation' as the 'historical evolution through which the servitors gradually came to organise themselves to some extent around their common pretence and/or aspiration to operate within a formal legal-administrative system - the process by which the servitors came to depend on one another to act and think as if they believed that their laws and authorities had to be in logical order in order to possess legitimacy'. Using this, bureaucracy and its development is less of a series of coincidental choices but something akin to a deliberate and conscious philosophy or concept of government. See: Yaney, *Systematisation*, p. 5.

⁵³ Waldron, *Governing Tsarist Russia*.

⁵⁴ Wortman, *The Development of a Russian Legal Consciousness*.

⁵⁵ Wcislo, *Reforming Rural Russia*, pp. 306-8.

⁵⁶ Orlovsky, *The limits of reform*, pp. 104-22.

an attempt to use better administrative methods and legality to give effect to the Tsar's autocratic decrees.

This emergence of bureaucracy and the privileging of the centre as the sole repository of good governance led to increased efforts to control the periphery. A significant issue with imperial attempts to control, regulate and administer the provinces however was the fact that central legislation often bore little connection to the reality 'on the ground' and was thus impossible to implement.⁵⁷ The centre interpreted this disparity between its aims and the circumstances in the periphery as a sign of the inability of the centre to impose its will on the provinces.⁵⁸ The response of the imperial government to this was generally twofold. Firstly, it would, somewhat haphazardly and sometimes ineptly contravening local developments, react with more central legislation.⁵⁹ However, the preferred method of governing the provinces of the empire was to impose its power through officials who were directly responsible to St. Petersburg. In 1845 the governor was made responsible for seeing that ministerial decisions were executed.⁶⁰ This played on the governor's position as both the Tsar's viceroy and the province's manager (*nachal'nik*). This inability to enforce its will and the subsequent resorting to powerful figures was due in part to the fact that serving in local government was often seen by the local nobility as an unwelcome burden.⁶¹ Indeed, the state often found it difficult to fill positions in the various corporate bodies it had established.⁶² In a touch of irony, one of the main reasons for this disdain of local service was the centralised nature of the imperial

⁵⁷ Janet M. Hartley, 'Provincial and local government' in *The Cambridge History of Russia, Volume II: Imperial Russia, 1689-1917*, ed. D Lieven (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 449-67.

⁵⁸ Robbins, *The Tsar's Viceroys*, p. 241.

⁵⁹ Evtuhov, *Portrait of a Russian province*, p. 134.

⁶⁰ Waldron, *Governing Tsarist Russia*, p. 115 and Wortman, *The Development of a Russian legal consciousness*, p. 44.

⁶¹ Hartley, 'Provincial and local government', pp. 457-60.

⁶² *Ibid.*

Russian state and the feeling of powerlessness and irrelevance that undoubtedly engendered.

By the outbreak of the 1891 famine, then, the approach of the imperial government to the periphery was one that emphasised the subordination of policy making to the centre in the name of better administration. But how was this implemented in the province, starting with the most senior level and working downwards?

The governor was the most senior official in the provincial administration and a new governor was welcomed with elaborate ceremony.⁶³ The position was strengthened after 1837 with the abolition of the governors-general and the governor became the immediate manager of the province, with responsibility for its social, economic, administrative, legal and moral oversight and accountable to central government.⁶⁴ By the 1890s however there had been considerable change. The provincial board (*gubernskoe pravlenie*), introduced in 1775 and chaired by the governor, grew more significant and was supposed to make many of the decisions on general welfare and matters such as policing.⁶⁵ It had a general assembly comprised of key provincial officials and a chancellery of five departments to handle paper work and decisions were to be made collectively.⁶⁶ This led to a transformation in the governor's role and place in the administrative framework; having long enjoyed vice regal status as a noble and direct appointee of the Tsar, the governor became less of a satrap and more of a manager. While acknowledging this transformation, there has been disagreement amongst historians as to whether this resulted in a decline or rise in the importance of the governor's personal

⁶³ Robbins, *The Tsar's Viceroys*, p. 1.

⁶⁴ Evtuhov, *Portrait of a Russian Province*, pp. 135-136.

⁶⁵ Pearson, *Russian Officialdom*, p. 2.

⁶⁶ The assembly was chaired by the governor and also included the vice-governor, two councillors (*sovietniki*), the provincial medical inspector, the gubernia engineer, the land surveyor and the assessor. The chancellery had five departments (*otdeleniia*); two general executive departments and three for specialised matters such as construction, health and land surveying. See: Robbins, *The Tsar's Viceroys*, pp. 107-10.

authority.⁶⁷ An increase in the importance of personal authority is most likely; if the governor was just akin to a manager or director, it would have been impossible to manage such a large organisation without attempting to establish consensus based on one's personal authority and relationships. The 'despotic' personal authority was gone but had been replaced with a new form, that of the 'negotiator'.

Running both parallel to and below the governor and the *pravlenie* was the zemstvo. Introduced in 1864, it was responsible for looking after the welfare and needs of the province and the uezd such as managing the zemstvo's finances and property, famine relief, the administering of mutual insurance, custody over the development of local trade and education, and presenting, through the provincial administration, information to the centre on local conditions and needs.⁶⁸ There was both a provincial and uezd zemstvo assembly (with a prohibition on organising at the *volost'* level), and the uezd zemstvo was elected by curia with one for landowners, urban dwellers and the peasantry, with the system weighted towards the landowners, a balance which became more pronounced in 1890.⁶⁹ While the zemstvo was granted autonomy in much of its affairs, a level of control and integration existed. The original 1864 Zemstvo Statute allowed the governor to overturn any zemstvo decision that was illegal or against the 'general welfare' while the 1890 Zemstvo Statute explicitly states that the 'Governor has supervision over the correctness and legality of the actions of the zemstvo institutions'.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Yaney argues that it had declined and the governor had become more akin to a manager while Robbins argues that it was this rise in managerialism that made personal authority more important. For more see: Yaney, *Systematisation*, pp. 320-2, Robbins, *The Tsar's Viceroys*, p. 19, p. 243.

⁶⁸ *Polnoe sobranie zakonov rossiiskoi imperii*, 2nd series, t. 39, 1 January 1864, No. 40457, st. 2.

⁶⁹ L. A. Zhukova, 'Administrativnyi kontrol' i zemskoe samoupravlenie, 1864-1881', in *Zemskoe samoupravlenie v Rossii, 1864-1918 v dvukh knigakh*, eds. A. P. Korelin, N. G. Korolev, L. F. Pisar'kova (Moscow, 2005), pp. 176-233 and L. A. Zhukova, 'Zemskoe samoupravlenie i samodержavie v kontse XIX - nachale xx veka', in *Zemskoe samoupravlenie v Rossii, 1864-1918 v dvukh knigakh*, eds. A. P. Korelin, N. G. Korolev, L. F. Pisar'kova (Moscow, 2005), pp. 234-93.

⁷⁰ These provisions of the Zemstvo Statutes, therefore, meant that the centre was able to ensure that the zemstvos were not straying outside of the legal boundaries it had set by more closely binding the Governor to its priorities and system, *PSZ*, 2nd series, t. 39, 1 January 1864, No. 40457, glava 1, st. 7, 9; 3rd series, t. 10, 12 June 1890, No. 6927, glava 1, st. 5.

The 1890 Zemstvo Statute remains controversial. Several historians see it as limiting the power of local government and re-privileging the gentry.⁷¹ However, Wcislo contends that it was part of a conservative effort to renovate government and mediate the political and social transformation of Russia as it clarified many of the zemstvo's duties and expanded some of them.⁷²

The volost', the level immediately below the uезд, was governed by peasant self-administration which, at the time of the famine, was overseen by the land captain. The Land Captain Statute of 1889 declared that the main cause of the 'difficulties' faced by the peasantry 'resides in the lack of a firm government authority close to the people that would combine guardianship over rural residents with care for the conduct of peasant affairs [...]'.⁷³ The imperial government, and in particular, the bureaucracy had come to see peasant administration as chronically and woefully under-managed; as Yaney has argued, 'From the administrator's point of view, the uyezds and below were a chaos [...]'.⁷⁴ The 1889 Statute represented a culmination of these concerns and a concerted (and conservative) attempt to address them. The powers of the land captain in his precinct (*uchastok*) can be grouped into three main categories: social, administrative and judicial.⁷⁵ Perhaps the most significant power the land captain held was that he was

⁷¹ Examples of this interpretation are Thomas Porter and William E. Gleason, 'The zemstvo and the transformation of Russian Society', in *Emerging Democracy in Late Imperial Russia: Case Studies On Local Self-Government (The Zemstvos), State Duma Elections, The Tsarist Government, and the State Council Before and During World War I*, ed. Mary Schaeffer Conroy (Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 1998), Neil Weissman, *Reform in Tsarist Russia: The State Bureaucracy and Local Government, 1900-1914* (New Brunswick N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1981).

⁷² Wcislo, *Reforming rural Russia*, p. 85.

⁷³ *PSZ*, 3rd series, t. 9, 12 July 1889, No. 6196.

⁷⁴ Yaney, *Systematisation*, p. 338. The imperial government had long been concerned that the post-reform system of peasant administration was not functioning correctly and had, in effect, 'collapsed'. In 1880 four senators were appointed to investigate the system of local and peasant administration in ten provinces, Tambov included. For a more detailed treatment see Pearson, *Russian Officialdom in Crisis*, pp. 79-103.

⁷⁵ For a full description of the land captain's powers see: David A. J. Macey, 'The Land Captains: a note on their social composition, 1889-1913', *Russian History*, Vol. 16, No. 2-4 (1989), pp. 327-51; Cathy Frierson, "'I must always answer to the law...': rules and responses in the reformed volost' court", *SEER*, Vol. 75, No. 2 (1997), pp. 308-34; Gareth Popkins, 'Peasant experiences of the late tsarist state: district congresses of land captains, provincial boards and the legal appeals process, 1891-1917', *SEER*, Vol. 78, No. 1 (2000), pp. 90-114.

responsible for the villagers' economic and moral well-being and could recommend the cancellation of any township (*volost'*) resolution if he felt it was illegal or harmful to the interests of the village.⁷⁶ According to Aleksandr Novikov, a land captain in Tambov province, the power of the land captain went beyond what was in the legislation: 'I prefer not to talk about the law but about reality...in reality the power of a land captain in his own precinct is colossal'.⁷⁷ The land captain reported to a District Congress made up of land captains and representatives from the *zemstvo* and the nobility.⁷⁸

Linking the *volost'* and the *uezd* and, as a consequence, the land captain and the *zemstvo* was the system of famine relief. It was a three-tiered system comprised of communal granaries and provincial and central capital funds, and overseen on the local level by the *uezd zemstvo*.⁷⁹ While the *zemstvo* had overall responsibility for the system, it is clear that any crisis would necessitate the involvement of the land captain. In order for any action to be successful, the land captain's involvement with and influence over peasant self-administration was a critical necessity.

By 1891 then, the structure of provincial government was complex, with a series of tiered authorities, each owing their creation to differing conceptions of authority, from the vice regal (the governor), to the collegial (the *pravlenie*), self-government (the *zemstvo*) and personalised supervisory power (the land captain). How was the structure supposed to operate? The governor was the link to the centre, sending information and receiving instructions while ensuring local institutions did not exceed their legal

⁷⁶ Macey, 'The land captains', pp. 327-51.

⁷⁷ Aleksandr Novikov, *Zapiski zemskogo nachal'nika* (Newtonville (Mass.): Oriental Research Partners, 1980), p. 36.

⁷⁸ Yaney, *Systematisation*, p. 326. Aleksandr Novikov mocked this form of oversight, saying that they merely rubber-stamped the decisions of their colleagues.

⁷⁹ Richard Robbins, 'Russia's system of food supply relief on the eve of the famine of 1891-92', *Agricultural History*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (1971), pp. 259-69.

responsibilities.⁸⁰ The *pravlenie* was the nerve centre of the provincial administration, bringing together key non-zemstvo functions and designed to act as a brake on gubernatorial despotism. The zemstvo had, by 1891, become mainly a body to oversee local welfare and services while the land captain administered peasant administration and justice. The framework was designed so that each area was self-contained (under the ultimate supervision of the governor) but, in the event of a crisis, coordinated action, in the manner strictly provided for by law, would be possible. The differing sources of authority, the parallel structures and often competing responsibilities (such as the zemstvo's responsibility for famine relief but the land captain's sole right to administer the volost') were likely sources of tension. Pressure points existed at every level of the provincial administration; the argument over the course of this thesis is that Tambov responded to this challenge through decentralisation in an effort to diffuse and dissipate this pressure.

⁸⁰ E Rabinovich, *Mestnoe samoupravlenie v Rossii : stanovlenie i razvitie* (Moskva: Institut sotsiologii RAN, 1999), p. 11. Rabinovich also argues that the 'state-administration' apparatus in the province (i.e. the governor and the *pravlenie*) was not dependent on the 'representative' institutions (i.e. the zemstvo), whom he sees as merely being institutions for local economic management.

Profiles of officials in Tambov province in 1891-2

Although an understanding of the theory and culture of legality and the bureaucracy is vital, a regional history that neglects regional examples is, as Smith-Peter points out, simply theory.⁸¹ Any regional study needs to take account of the individuals who felt and responded to the pressure created by the responsibilities, tensions and contradictions we have just discussed. In the case of the famine in Tambov province, it is crucial to understand the personality and character of the individuals managing the relief effort. Due to serious structural defects in the Russian governmental apparatus and an ideological preference for power concentrated in individual hands, an individual's character could have a profound impact. Indeed, a key argument of this thesis is that the relief effort was often heavily dependent on the actions and efforts of individuals, which were required to compensate for structural defects. Here we will look at the character and background of individuals who were crucial to the relief effort at both provincial and uezd levels.

a. *Governor Baron Vladimir Platonovich Rokasovskii*

'Dissolute', 'irresponsible', 'mediocre', 'vulgar', 'generous', 'clever' and full of 'energy and good words': these are some of the adjectives applied to Vladimir Platonovich Rokasovskii in his seven years as governor of Tambov province between 1889 and 1896.⁸² His record creates a contradictory picture of a man promoted for excellent and diligent service, awarded bonuses for meeting goals and ultimately dismissed for

⁸¹ Smith-Peter, 'How to write a region', pp. 541-2, 'Bringing the provinces into Focus', pp. 835-48.

⁸² W. E. Mosse, 'Russian provincial governors at the end of the nineteenth century', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Mar., 1984), p. 234, p. 238, A.A. Polovtsev, *Dnevnik gosudarstvennogo sekretariia* (ed. P.A. Zaionchkovskii) (Moscow, 1966), II, p. 468, Factual testimony concerning the two half-years and the commands in a starving society, 19 June 1893, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4429, ll. 60-5, *Zhurnaly Kozlovskogo uездnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 139-40.

exceeding his authority.⁸³ To some officials in St. Petersburg he was seen as simply a favourite of Durnovo, more interested in social functions and quarrelling with the nobility than governing, yet within the province he attracted poems and votes of praise for his actions during the famine and cholera crises.⁸⁴ Having left no memoirs and only a relatively prosaic career file, Rokasovskii is not an easy figure to understand. Nevertheless, from the available material we get a sense of a man who, despite his shortcomings, appears diligent, genuinely concerned at alleviating suffering and determined to do so fairly, in accordance with the rules.

It is relatively easy to see how Vladimir Rokasovskii was shaped into the diligent if doctrinaire governor he seems to have become. Born in St Petersburg province in 1851, the son of a former governor-general of Finland who was ennobled for his service, Rokasovskii joined the Imperial Corps of Pages and entered the military; from 1871-80 he rose rapidly, serving in the Preobrazhenskii guards and the tsar's honorary escort. He was made an aide-de-camp to the tsar in 1880.⁸⁵ He served with distinction in the Russo-Turkish war, receiving a commendation for bravery and was involved in key encounters at Lovech and Shipka Pass.⁸⁶ Raised in a household where service to the sovereign had transformed the family's status and then serving in an elite regiment closely connected to the tsar, he experienced consistent reinforcement of the values of service, duty and

⁸³ MVD note on promotion of Vice-governor Rokasovskii to Lieutenant-Colonel 25 August 1881, Ministry of Finance to the MVD and Rokasovskii 17 November 1894, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 45 (1881), d. 158, l. 49, l. 163, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4009, ll. 83-5, Concerning the incorrect actions of the Governor of Tambov, actual state councillor Baron Rokasovskii (Ministry of Justice, 2nd Department) 29 March 1896, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 45 (1881), d. 158, ll. 189-95, Robbins, *The Tsar's Viceroys*, p. 88.

⁸⁴ A.A. Polovtsev, *Dnevnik*, II, pp. 453-4, I, p. 34, 45, Factual testimony concerning the two half-years and the commands in a starving society, 19 June 1893, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4429, ll. 60-5 (Popov requested that his account be published in the *Tambovskie gubernskie vedomosti* but it seems that his desire went unfulfilled), V. Chernov, *Zapiski Sotsialista-Revoliutsionera* (Berlin, 1922), p. 251.

⁸⁵ The biographical entry for his father, Platon Ivanovich, stated this was at the request of the Finnish nobility in recognition of his success and his 'direct and honest character, kindness and extraordinary tranquility', 'Platon Ivanovich Rokasovskii', *Russkii biograficheskii slovar*, ed. A. A. Polovtsev (Saint Petersburg, 1913), Vol. 16, pp. 426-8., Full service record of the Ekaterinoslav Vice-Governor, Lieutenant Colonel Baron Rokasovskii 11 September 1881, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 45 (1881), d. 158, ll. 8-13.

⁸⁶ Full service record of the Ekaterinoslav Vice-Governor, Lieutenant Colonel Baron Rokasovskii 11 September 1881, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 45 (1881), d. 158, ll. 8-13.

obedience. Like Tsar Nicholas I's own sons, Rokasovskii internalised the idea of the autocracy as a guarantor of stability, becoming a 'conservator of order'.⁸⁷

These values, combined with personal connections and several strokes of good fortune, would help Rokasovskii in his career. Appointed vice-governor of Ekaterinoslav province in 1881, Rokasovskii was transferred to Tambov in 1888 and became acting governor a year later after the retirement of the previous governor, Baron A. A. Frederiks, due to ill health.⁸⁸ He was formally appointed to the position in 1891, when he was also promoted to rank four, becoming an actual state councillor and chamberlain of the imperial household.⁸⁹ From 1881-2 he served under I. N. Durnovo, the Minister for Internal Affairs during the famine crisis. Both Rokasovskii's contemporaries and subsequent historians have disparaged his connection with Durnovo as the principal reason for his promotion to Tambov province and subsequent appointment as governor.⁹⁰ It is difficult to establish the veracity of such claims as there is no direct evidence: D. A. Tolstoi's order appointing Rokasovskii to Tambov province only mentions his 'useful service', though Tolstoi was known for not necessarily having met the people he appointed.⁹¹ By the end of the nineteenth century, the MVD favoured previous experience in uezd or provincial administration in its candidates for governorships. In the early 1880s, however, Rokasovskii's career trajectory of military service followed by two 'apprenticeships' as a vice-governor was entirely normal, though he was marginally

⁸⁷ Orlovsky, *The Limits of Reform*, pp. 104-22, pp. 189-201, Wcislo, *Reforming Rural Russia*, pp. 306-8, Whelan, *Alexander III and the State Council*, pp. 111-2.

⁸⁸ Correspondence concerning the appointment of Baron Rokasovskii as vice-governor in Ekaterinoslav and Tambov provinces, and acting and formal governor in Tambov province 2-21 September 1881, 24 December 1887 – 3 February 1888, 7 August – 24 September 1889, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 45 (1881), d. 158, ll. 1-21, ll. 75-95, ll. 101-16.

⁸⁹ *Ukaz* of the Governing Senate 21 April 1891, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 45 (1881), d. 158, l. 127.

⁹⁰ Mosse, 'Russian provincial governors', pp. 225-39, A.A. Polovtsev, *Dnevnik*, II, pp. 453-4.

⁹¹ Count D. A. Tolstoi to the Imperial Household 4 September 1887, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 45 (1881), d. 158, l. 75.

younger than the average governor.⁹² Following the serious illness and rapid retirement of Governor Frederiks, the MVD might reasonably have prioritised stability and Rokasovskii's eight years as vice-governor was regarded as sufficient experience for his promotion. Even if this owed something to his connections with Durnovo, such patronage would hardly have set him apart from the remainder of the Russian governing elite in the reign of Alexander III.

From 1889-96 Rokasovskii would govern Tambov province in line with those values of order, fairness, duty and fealty to the autocrat. The record of his last four years as governor shows that the tension between *proizvol* and *zakonnost'*, and the search for a 'regularised autocracy', which was beginning to undermine the autocracy, consumed and ended Rokasovskii's career.⁹³ Count Bobrinskii and Polovtsev may have seen him as 'mediocre' but perhaps a fairer assessment is that his governing style, while increasingly out of touch with a rapidly changing Russia, often met the specific requirements of the famine crisis. As Robbins points out, governors became symbols of all that was wrong with the autocracy and even figures such as Stolypin would struggle to balance the competing tensions at the heart of imperial governance.⁹⁴

Yet governors were obliged to manage these competing tensions, in addition to being pulled between the province St. Petersburg 'entrusted to them', in order to fulfil their legal obligations as the Tsar's viceroys. This was an almost impossible juggling act and we should remember that what seems like an arbitrary action could also be an attempt to reconcile the almost limitless workload and instructions with a severely limited time

⁹² Mosse, 'Russian provincial governors', pp. 225-39, Robbins, *The Tsar's Viceroys*, pp. 20-42, 'Choosing the Russian governors: the professionalisation of the gubernatorial corps', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 58, No. 4 (Oct., 1980), pp. 541-60, L. M. Lysenko, *Gubernatory i general-gubernatory Rossiiskoi imperii (xviii – nachalo xx Veka)* (Moscow: MPGU, 2001), pp. 182-239, pp. 262-354.

⁹³ Whelan, *Alexander III and the State Council*, pp. 47-51.

⁹⁴ Robbins, *The Tsar's Viceroys*, pp. 234-49.

frame. Rokasovskii's response to the challenge, especially during the famine crisis, was to combine a strict adherence to the letter of the law with personal inspections designed to make the most of what remained of his authority as the tsar's viceroy.⁹⁵ This led to a variety of seemingly contradictory actions: he exiled some of those peasants accused of spreading rumours during the 1892 cholera epidemic to other uyezds in the province; he had others arrested; yet he also demanded the release of at least one peasant arrested for criticising government commands.⁹⁶ As Susanne Schattenberg emphasises, simple actions or statistics do not tell us everything; understanding *why* people acted the way they did is vital.⁹⁷ Taken together, Rokasovskii's verdicts can easily seem erratic. In each case, however, Rokasovskii judged the action by the threat it posed to public order; the same concern prompted him to establish a food aid appeals process (see Chapter 4). He took the same approach to officials as he did to the peasantry, replacing or admonishing several who deviated from established procedures. Rokasovskii, as a dedicated servant of the imperial system, equated fairness with the application of the law *as written* and this was a key aspect of his response strategy; the population's best interests were protected by the vigorous application of the law.

We can only imagine, therefore, how devastating it must have been to Rokasovskii to find that, after twenty-five years of loyal service, the state deemed him a danger to its project for a more regularised autocracy. In 1894 Rokasovskii ordered that a merchant, Varzin, be given twenty-five lashes of the birch for seeking to organise a revolutionary circle from his *traktir*, inciting resistance to the authorities and refusing to comply with

⁹⁵ For details on Rokasovskii's tours of inspection in Ekaterinoslav province and several uyezds in Tambov province during the famine, see Chapter 3 'Management of relief in Spassk and Morshansk uyezds' and Chapter 5 'Local relief problems and provincial intervention'.

⁹⁶ Various files concerning public order and revolutionary activity in Kirsanov, Kozlov, Tambov and Borisoglebsk uyezds July – December 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4273-5, d. 4277-9, d. 4307.

⁹⁷ Susanne Schattenberg, 'Max Weber in the provinces: measuring imperial Russia by modern Standards', *Kritika*, New Series, Vol. 13, No. 4 (Fall 2012), p. 892.

an MVD order expelling him from Tambov province for two years.⁹⁸ What followed this order illustrates the confused and deeply complex relationship between law, order, political stability and justice in late imperial Russia. As Abby Schrader notes, the laws surrounding corporal punishment were amended, not primarily out of humanitarian concerns, but to refashion the social order, thereby renovating, strengthening and supporting the autocracy.⁹⁹ Rokasovskii clearly thought his actions fitted within these categories: he defended the punishment on the basis of the law and a secret MVD directive from 1885 authorising governors to take all necessary measures in ‘extraordinary circumstances’.¹⁰⁰ Rokasovskii’s letters to the MVD in 1894, detailing concerns over ‘insufficient police supervision’, a long running conflict with the Lipetsk uezd marshal of the nobility, an ‘unexpected liberal air’ and influence in the provincial zemstvo and the economic situation of the peasantry, makes clear that he imagined his administration and, by extent, the tsar’s authority, to be under threat.¹⁰¹ There was an implicit connection between the authority of the governor and that of the throne where resistance to one was resistance to both.

The eventual decision of the Governing Senate in early 1896, nearly two years after Varzin appealed, came as a shock. Finding against him, the Senate did not hold back: not only were his actions illegal, they ‘could only serve to diminish and humiliate the high position in the province’ that he held.¹⁰² Perhaps even more galling was the Senate’s judgment that, as governor, his main duty was not ‘to keep order, or be the chief steward

⁹⁸ Concerning the incorrect actions of the Governor of Tambov, actual state councillor Baron Rokasovskii (Ministry of Justice, 2nd Department) 29 March 1896, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 45 (1881), d. 158, ll. 189-95.

⁹⁹ Schrader, *Languages of the Lash*, pp. 144-61.

¹⁰⁰ Concerning the incorrect actions of the Governor of Tambov, actual state councillor Baron Rokasovskii (Ministry of Justice, 2nd Department) 29 March 1896, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 45 (1881), d. 158, ll. 189-95.

¹⁰¹ Correspondence between Rokasovskii, Durnovo and the MVD department of general affairs 24 December 1894, 6 December 1895, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 45 (1881), d. 158, ll. 167-8, ll. 177-8.

¹⁰² Concerning the incorrect actions of the Governor of Tambov, actual state councillor Baron Rokasovskii (Ministry of Justice, 2nd Department) 29 March 1896, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 45 (1881), d. 158, ll. 189-95.

of the province's management but, firstly, to be a custodian of the law and fairness'.¹⁰³ In a letter, the tone of which indicates a broken man, Governor Rokasovskii formally resigned as governor of Tambov province shortly after, to be replaced by the vice-governor of Simbirsk, Sergei Dimitrievich Rzhhevskii.¹⁰⁴ In other words, Rokasovskii's career ended over a perceived failure to uphold the very values he lived by.

Conditioned to understand and apply the law in a straightforward and relatively inflexible way, this former military officer was ultimately caught out by these tensions. Rokasovskii was unable to keep pace with the changing way *proizvol* and *zakonnost'* interacted in St. Petersburg. The records show that he could not grasp why he was being disciplined: in his testimony to the Senate he argued that the governor had an 'unconditional obligation to end incitement of the population' against the authorities.¹⁰⁵ Even in dismissal, Rokasovskii remained bound by his conception of his duty and responsibility. As he saw it, he was simply doing his duty: protecting the province 'entrusted to him' by the autocrat.

Rokasovskii's career tells us something emblematic about governors at the end of the nineteenth century. Empowered as viceroys of the tsar, they were the symbolic and literal representatives of the throne in the various provinces. Yet in the end, they were just another set of individuals forced to confront the contradictory tensions gradually eating away at the empire's foundations. Like the vast majority of governors, Rokasovskii was perhaps not a brilliant man, but he was diligent, determined to do his duty fairly and according to the law and was capable of strategic mistakes, flexibility and astute political

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Correspondence between Rokasovskii and the MVD and the Governing Senate 24 April 1896, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 45 (1881), d. 158, ll. 196-9. MVD department of general affairs to the Imperial Household 27 June 1896, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 45 (1881), d. 158, l. 206.

¹⁰⁵ Concerning the incorrect actions of the Governor of Tambov, actual state councillor Baron Rokasovskii (Ministry of Justice, 2nd Department) 29 March 1896, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 45 (1881), d. 158, ll. 189-95.

positioning. There was a final irony however: after his case the Committee of Ministers initiated a project to review the power of governors in criminal cases.¹⁰⁶ Governor Rokasovskii had a much greater impact on the governance of the empire in disgrace than he did while in office.

b. Leading provincial figures

Governing Tambov province was an exercise in negotiation and moving between formal structures and personal networks and relationships. The influence of provincial and uezd officials was considerable and imperial and local officials, of differing political hues, attested to their centrality to the relief effort and general administration.¹⁰⁷ Since few archival records survive to give information on their backgrounds, we will focus here on a brief biography of a few key figures and tease out the specific relationships in later chapters. What we will see is that, in certain key positions, the province had dedicated officials for whom service to the province was a key motivational goal.

One of the most important roles in the province, apart from governor and vice-governor, was that of the provincial marshal of the nobility. As land captain Aleksandr Novikov maintained, the marshal of the nobility had an extremely difficult job: holding an important and ‘honourable’ position, they chaired many of the province’s institutions (including the zemstvo assembly) but had little direct control.¹⁰⁸ Their legal responsibilities were broad: all marshals of the nobility had an obligation to intercede in

¹⁰⁶ Ministry of Justice, the MVD and the Governing Senate 30 April, 6 July 1896, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 45 (1881), d. 158, l. 199, ll. 213-7.

¹⁰⁷ Novikov, *Zapiski zemskogo nachal'nika*, pp. 92-6, pp. 133-9, pp. 149-64, *Pravitel'stvennyi Vestnik*, No. 106 19 May 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 11, ll. 64-ob-66, Count Bobrinskii to Plevé 14 March 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 100, ll. 134-142, Correspondence between Rokasovskii and Tambov provincial marshal of the nobility Prince N. N. Cholokaev 30 October, 2 November 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4009, ll. 30-2.

¹⁰⁸ Novikov, *Zapiski zemskogo nachal'nika*, p. 133.

matters of public and benefit, while the provincial marshal was involved in institutions as varied as the provincial committees on prisons, orphanages, temperance, administration and finance.¹⁰⁹ As we will see in Chapter 2, in 1891-2 Tambov province was experiencing a period of significant instability with wholesale change at almost every level of officialdom. Into this chaotic environment as provincial marshal of the nobility would step Prince N. N. Cholokaev, a land owner from Morshansk uezd who would, against the odds, hold this position until 1917.¹¹⁰ In some ways, it is surprising that he never progressed to a vice or full governorship; if the late imperial era MVD sought provincial experience, Cholokaev more than fitted the bill. He served on a commission to improve the lives of serfs, then served as a peace arbitrator, justice of the peace and, while marshal of the nobility, regularly served on the zemstvo's reporting commission, helping to formulate its budgets.¹¹¹ Cholokaev appeared to have a natural talent for administration and coordination: during the famine crisis he was asked to oversee the relief effort in Morshansk uezd and the provincial zemstvo declared that his chairmanship greatly aided their ability to coordinate and determine relief policy.¹¹²

The ascent of Prince Cholokaev as provincial marshal of the nobility, his longevity and leading role in the provincial zemstvo assembly, in some ways represents a changing of the guard in the province. For his appointment shortly preceded the death of the province's other towering administrative figure, Lev Vladimirovich Vysheslavtsev (1830-92). Vysheslavtsev epitomised, in many ways, those performers of provincial

¹⁰⁹ *Svod zakonov*, t. 9, O raznykh rodakh sostoianii i razlichii prav, im prisvoennykh, razdel 1, glava 5, otdelenie 2, st. 382-3.

¹¹⁰ According to the address-kalendar for 1891, Prince Cholokaev's appointment in took place in 1891 after the original print run when the position was vacant: *Adres-kalendar sluzhashchikh v Tambovskoi gubernii lits na 1891-i god* (Tambov: Tambovskoe gubernskoe pravlenie, 1891), *Gubernii Rossiiskoi imperii: istoriia i rukovoditeli, 1708 – 1917* (ed. N.F. Samokhvalov) (Moscow: Ob'edinennaia redaktsiia MVD Rossii, 2003), p. 294, p. 446.

¹¹¹ Dvukhzhilova, *Sotsial'nyi sostav*, pp. 110-1.

¹¹² Minutes of the TPFC 17 December 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 136-140, *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 356-8.

identity identified by Evtuhov: a member of the province's archival commission, to which he made significant donations, he chaired the provincial *uprava* for a remarkable twenty years (1872-92) and his family was known for its charitable activities, such as funding an orphanage in Tambov town.¹¹³ The provincial zemstvo, which had a strong tendency to commemorate and celebrate even the smallest demonstration of consistent competency, renamed this orphanage in his honour following his death in 1892.¹¹⁴ While many of Russia's most talented individuals came from its provinces, the idea that provinces themselves had an established culture and network of intellectuals that stayed within its borders has only recently begun to be accepted. Prince Cholokaev's dedication to local service, and Vysheslavtsev's prominent role in general, shows that provinces were creating an administrative and intellectual culture that was tailored to their specific needs. Boris Chicherin, himself born in Tambov province, captured the essence of such a culture by describing Vysheslavtsev as 'an honest and decent man, of a modest liberal direction, modest and quiet [...] but fairly quiet with a limited intellect'.¹¹⁵

Chicherin himself could by no means be characterized as having 'limited intellect'. Regarded as one of the leading theoreticians of Russian liberalism, he returned to his native Kirsanov uezd in 1883 after two years as chair of the Moscow city дума.¹¹⁶ According to the leading student of his thought, Chicherin passed through two main ideological phases: 'conservative liberalism', according to which a strong state delivered liberal policies and, after 1866, 'classic liberalism', advocating civil and political rights, along with the necessity of a free market.¹¹⁷ In a way, 'conservative liberalism' was not

¹¹³ Ibid., pp. 112-3, Irina Vladimirovna Dvukhzhilova, 'Predsedateli Tambovskoi gubernskoi zemskoi upravly (1866-1892 gg.)', *Istoricheskie, filosofskie, politicheskie i iuridicheskie nauki, kul'turologiia i iskusstvovedenie, Voprosy teorii i praktiki*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (2009), p. 29.

¹¹⁴ *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 3-5.

¹¹⁵ Dvukhzhilova, 'Predsedateli', p. 29.

¹¹⁶ G. M. Hamburg, *Boris Chicherin and Early Russian Liberalism, 1828-1866* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 2.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 2-3.

entirely incompatible with the ‘conservative renovation’ or ‘regularised autocracy’ concept that became a dominant ideological current in the reign of Tsar Alexander III. Underpinning both of Chicherin’s ideological phases, however, was, as Igor Yevlampiev argues, a recognition of the absolute value and freedom of the person and the need for a strong state to enable the principle of freedom to be realised completely.¹¹⁸ Unsurprisingly, Chicherin’s estate served as a cultural centre for the province; active in the uezd and provincial zemstvos, his influence can be seen in the fact that his health was considered worthy of discussion by the provincial zemstvo assembly.¹¹⁹

This very brief biography of three leading figures within the province shows that the potential for talented and dedicated, if limited, individual action. Admittedly a world away from the draw and spectacle of the two capitals, Tambov province nonetheless developed a self-sustaining provincial administrative culture. In each of the three cases, we can see a strong sense of provincial identity at work; the service ethic was not explicitly tied to the imperial government. Dedication to the province, as we will see in Chapter 2, was alive and well in Tambov.

c. Uezd figures: Governance in Kozlov uezd

The relationship between the province and the uezd can be seen as a reflection of that between the centre in St. Petersburg and the periphery (i.e. the provinces) as a whole. The ‘centre’, however it was geographically defined, simply lacked the resources or structural capacity to fully govern or administer the lower levels. The resulting decentralisation out of necessity best expressed itself in two individuals, the uezd marshal of the nobility and

¹¹⁸ Igor Yevlampiev, ‘Man and mind in the philosophy of Boris N. Chicherin’, *Studies in East European Thought*, Vol. 61, No. 2-3 (Aug., 2009), p. 113.

¹¹⁹ Dvukhzhilova, *Sotsial’nyi sostav*, pp. 118-20.

the land captain. They were given broad responsibilities and powers: the uezd marshal, in addition to uezd versions of provincial committees, oversaw land redistributions, issued certificates of poverty and managed charitable property, while to the peasants, the land captains could do ‘everything’ and resembled the old *barins*.¹²⁰ During the famine crisis, they also oversaw the charitable relief effort and the land captains were responsible for inspecting and verifying aid requests. Thus, a disengaged and detached individual holding either of these posts could have potentially disastrous consequences.

Kozlov uezd was fortunate enough, in uezd marshal of the nobility Iu. A. Oznobishin (1842-98) and land captain A. I. Novikov (1861-1913), to have two individuals who not only took an active part in the relief effort but knew each other and seemingly cooperated where possible. Oznobishin’s career fell into a familiar pattern: service to the state followed by the taking up of a local position, the peace arbitrator, followed by election to the local and provincial zemstvos. Oznobishin’s military career was short but impressive: having served in the 18th rifle battalion, he participated in the conquest of Dagestan and was awarded the Order of St. Stanislav, third class, at the age of twenty.¹²¹ Like Cholokaev and Vysheslavtsev, Oznobishin had a long career, serving as Kozlov uezd’s marshal of the nobility for twenty years (1875-95) and eventually having a school named after him following his death in 1899.¹²² Such longevity might symbolise both stagnation and a dearth of talent or, conversely, a pragmatic recognition that allowing one competent individual to remain in post was a way of coping with the structural fragmentation and under-resourcing endemic to uezd administration. This latter

¹²⁰ *Svod zakonov*, t. 9, O raznykh rodakh sostoianii i razlichii prav, im prisvoennykh, razdel 1, glava 5, otdelenie 2, st. 382, 384, Novikov, *Zapiski zemskogo nachal’nika*, p. 26, p. 96.

¹²¹ Dvukhzhilova, *Sotsial’nyi sostav*, pp. 128-9.

¹²² *Ibid.*

view is strengthened by Oznobishin's key role in the charitable relief effort, ensuring aid was allocated early in the uezd, and his assistance to the provincial *uprava*.¹²³

This, of course, is not to say that one needed to remain in post for a long time in order to be seen as a competent official in the provinces. In fact, some careers burned ever more brightly for their brevity as exemplified by the case of A. I. Novikov, a land captain in the ninth precinct of Kozlov uezd. Born in 1861, the son of a noted Slavophile, he went on to an extraordinary career, serving as land captain from 1891-96, then briefly as uezd marshal of the nobility before leaving Tambov province. Following a surprise nomination and election, he served as mayor of Baku from 1902-04.¹²⁴ Novikov would achieve notoriety around the time of the 1905 revolution, publishing several articles and memoirs of his time as a land captain and mayor, even visiting Witte around the time of Bloody Sunday, before being exiled several times for 'extreme opinions'.¹²⁵ Ramer, in examining his career, sees Novikov as sharing many of the traits of the radical *intelligentsia*: committed to equality and preferring local institutions to tyranny, he was nonetheless uncomfortable with political realities and local intransigence, displaying a degree of moral pretentiousness and the self-same authoritarian behaviour he decried.¹²⁶

Novikov's memoir of his time in Kozlov uezd, the *Zapiski zemskogo nachal'nika* ('Notes of a land captain'), covers not just his own role but also almost every aspect of volost', uezd and provincial life. While lacking many direct historical examples, it is nonetheless an excellent resource for the historian. The crisis, as we will see, had a profound effect on many officials in Tambov province, with policies and priorities shifting as a direct response of

¹²³ *Pravitel'stvennyi Vestnik*, No. 106 19 May 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 11, ll. 64-ob-66, *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, p. 13.

¹²⁴ For a full biography of Novikov see S. C. Ramer, 'Democracy versus the rule of a civic elite: aleksandr ivanovich novikov and the fate of self-government in Russia', *CMR*, Vol. 22, No. 2, (Apr., 1981), pp. 168-71, 'Novikov, Aleksandr Ivanovich' in *Bol'shaia entsiklopediia: v shestidesiati dvukh tomakh*, ed. S. A. Kondratov (Moscow: Terra, 2006), p. 513.

¹²⁵ Ramer, 'Democracy versus the rule of a civic Elite', p. 182.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 180-2.

circumstances. According to Novikov, his experience as a land captain radically altered his entire outlook on life. Originally supporting the 1889 Land Captain Statute as a way of ‘pulling up’ the peasant, he later came to regard this view as ‘morally monstrous’, feeling that the law relied on fear and arbitrariness: ‘I prefer not to talk about legality but reality [...] to concentrate too much large power in one pair of hands is dangerous [...]’.¹²⁷ To Novikov, the solution lay not in the imposition of paternalistic authority, but instead in legality and moral education. Schools were the ‘salvation’ of Russia and moral education involved the use of Christian morality to anchor the peasantry, reinforcing the line between good and evil; as the people became more legally empowered and aware, their stronger moral core would allow them to use the law in the manner of a full, dedicated citizen.¹²⁸ They were connected into a single ideological project: as the level of administrative arbitrariness was decreased, the level of education of peasantry should be raised.¹²⁹ This idea bore a striking resemblance to the principles behind Alexander II’s Great Reforms and shared, in some ways, the same goals as Stolypin’s reforms though with the deliberate absence of ‘disciplinary’ authority.¹³⁰ From an early stage then, Novikov was on a collision course with the very governing principles of the imperial state. Yet his actions show that while he derived different ideological conclusions from the same events, he was flexible, engaged and cooperative, crediting Iu. Oznobishin as a major influence on his development, character and actions.¹³¹ He was extremely active during the famine and subsequent cholera epidemic, funding aid loans in 1892 when the zemstvo reduced the allocation, providing fodder for 1,000 horses and funding six medical staff.¹³²

¹²⁷ Novikov, *Zapiski zemskogo nachal'nika*, p. 2, pp. 8-9, p. 58, p. 96.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5, p. 8, pp. 139-46.

¹²⁹ For a detailed description of Novikov’s views see Novikov, *Zapiski zemskogo nachal'nika*, pp. 3-6, pp. 35-9, pp. 96-103, pp. 139-46.

¹³⁰ Judith Pallot, ‘The Stolypin land reform as ‘administrative utopia’: images of the peasantry in nineteenth-century Russia’ in *Social Identities in Revolutionary Russia*, ed. Madhavan K. Palat (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 116.

¹³¹ Aleksandr Novikov, *Zapiski gorodskogo golovy* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia M. M. Stasiulevich, 1905), p. 9.

¹³² *Pravitel'stvennyi Vestnik*, No. 106 19 May 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 11, ll. 64-ob-66, *Zhurnaly Kozlovskogo uездnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 39-43.

Whether it was a noble or an increasingly radicalised official, the common denominator was a sense of service and commitment to the province. Oznobishin and Novikov may have been superlative examples, other uyezds were not as lucky, but even in this they illustrate the extent to which individual character determined the success of the relief effort and a certain degree of robustness within the province. In later chapters we will see that the inherent capacity of the administrative structure to manage the crisis was low; on paper it was a fragmented and under-resourced system with far too many contradictions to simply function automatically. In a way that the imperial government had not intended, provincial and uezd administration really was individualised as it took commitment and dedication to start and maintain the machinery of the relief effort. In these brief biographies we have shown that these individuals did exist in Tambov province at every level; they were not as brilliant or gifted as other figures perhaps, but that is to unfairly skew the parameters. That the province produced a number of them, at a variety of levels, all of whom preferred a high provincial status than a low imperial one, illustrates a certain degree of vitality, robustness and provincial identity.

From its doctrinaire Governor to the honest if 'limited' chair of the provincial *uprava* and the increasingly radical land captain A. I. Novikov, Tambov province was administered by officials with a wide range of backgrounds and beliefs when the famine crisis began in 1891. Meshing these various personalities and conceptions together was a challenge in and of itself; how would Governor Rokasovskii, a first time governor, work with Lev Vysheslavitsev, who as chair of the provincial *uprava* had outlasted several governors. While St. Petersburg constructed provincial administration on a conceptual level, it was up to individuals such as these to make the system work, no easy task at the best of times. The famine crisis forced them to work together and it is in the next chapter, which looks at the initial institutional response to the emerging crisis, that we will see how successful this meshing of their various interests and priorities truly was.

Chapter 2

Building the relief effort: provincial and uezd institutions, June – December 1891

Introduction

Obligated to enforce the tsar's will and laws and responsible for the general welfare of the population, governors often found it clever politics, in their annual report to the tsar, to suggest that stable, harmonious conditions prevailed in the province 'entrusted' to them.¹ It was in this vein that Governor Rokasovskii sought to turn crisis into success in his report for 1891, noting that despite the severe crop failure, the province's institutions, especially the land captains, had come together and cooperated fully.² Yet in the summer of 1891 there were warnings that more needed to be done to avoid starvation in Tambov province, with doubts over the province's readiness and structures going back to 1890.³ Rokasovskii inadvertently endorsed these critiques of provincial and uezd administration by admitting that the resource shortage was so severe that only loans and 'extraordinary measures' from the centre could deal with the crisis.⁴

These 'extraordinary measures' included requiring or suggesting the establishment of a new and specific institutional architecture and the issuing of 5.7 million roubles in imperial loans.⁵ In explaining how the province constructed this architecture,

¹ Robbins, *The Tsar's Viceroys*, pp. 65-7, *Svod zakonov*, t. 2, Obshchee uchrezhdenie gubernskoe, razdel 2, glava 2, otdelenie 2, st. 270-5.

² Annual Report of Governor Rokasovskii on Tambov Province for 1891 RGIA, f. 1284, op. 223, d. 194, ll. 1-10.

³ Count Pavlov to MVD 15 June 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, l. 5, Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, p. 1, *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo uездnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 13-4, Annual report of the Kozlov uezd *ispravnik* 28 March 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4174, l. 313.

⁴ Annual Report of Governor Rokasovskii on Tambov Province for 1891 RGIA, f. 1284, op. 223, d. 194, l. 5.

⁵ On the loan totals see Correspondence between Rokasovskii, Durnovo, MVD Economic Dept. and the Committee of Ministers, 9 November 1891 – 4 January 1892, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 126-58.

which evolved from ad hoc measures to a formalised response, we will look at notions of provincial identity, moral responsibility, and the attempts to overcome structural and created defects. Ultimately this chapter will argue that Governor Rokasovskii's assertion that the province's institutions had a mutual and reciprocal relationship needs modification. Sharing a common moral and provincial sense of responsibility, they each had the same goal: tackling the crisis, limiting suffering and preventing starvation. However, this chapter will show that their *strategies*, often based on their role in the imperial hierarchy, differed and the efforts to build response architecture are best understood as attempts to work out this tension.

Provincialism and moral responsibility

Over the course of centuries, Russia's geography has been divided and reconstructed into specific localities, giving rise to the modern, relatively stable, provinces of the nineteenth century and, in turn, a sense of community.⁶ This process resulted in often dramatically different views of the 'province'. To many contemporaries in the nineteenth century, and some modern historians, provinces were monotonous, containing miserable provincial towns where abuses were possible *because* they were provincial, a 'truly Gogolian picture of backwardness and neglect'.⁷ By the end of the nineteenth century, however, there was an increasing awareness of the perceived need for Russian society to 'rediscover' Russia: from the 1870s on many artists started depicting the peasantry or the native Russian soil and revelled in provincial 'monotony'; there was nationality and pride in Russia's

⁶ Ely, *This Meager Nature*, pp. 3-26, Raleigh, 'Introduction', pp. 1-13.

⁷ Lounsbury, "'No, this is not the provinces!'", p. 268, "'To Moscow I beg you!'", (<http://www.utoronto.ca/tsq/09/lounsbury09.shtml>), Pintner, 'Civil officialdom', pp. 27-8.

difference, even if it was a generic, non-specific ‘Russia’.⁸ Within the provinces themselves, this exploration of local identity and sense of community expressed itself culturally across the empire in a variety of ways, from stories of village origin to archival commissions, each centred on exploring local identity and symbols.⁹

On a more local level, this search for ‘Russianness’ quickly turned into a search for local and provincial identity, generally starting with historical investigations. A meeting point between the search for provincial identity and state initiatives, archival commissions were established by imperial decree in several provinces, Tambov included, in 1884.¹⁰ As in many other provinces, the Tambov Archival Commission appeared to focus primarily on cataloguing the history of buildings (especially churches and monasteries) and assisting in the preparation of exhibits.¹¹ The connection between this cataloguing and a search for ‘Russianness’ would remain strong. In the first of his volumes on the history of Tambov province, I.I. Dubasov noted that looking at provinces would ‘develop our national consciousness’ and that it was in provinces that the ‘essence’ of Russia resided.¹²

For others, however, provincial identity was expressed through action be it through social unity and resolving problems ignored by the state via charitable activities and organisations or local government.¹³ Hari Vasudevan contends that, in Tver, *zemstvo*

⁸ Hellberg-Hirn, *Soil and Soul*, pp. 126-30, Ely, *This Meager Nature*, pp. 3-26, pp. 192-7, pp. 223-9.

⁹ Chris J. Chulos, ‘Stories of the empire: myth, ethnography, and village origin legends in nineteenth-century Russia’ in *Imperial and National Identities in Pre-Revolutionary, Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*, eds. Chris J. Chulos and Johannes Remy (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2002), pp. 115-34, Evtuhov, *Portrait of a Russian Province*, pp. 206-26.

¹⁰ *PSZ*, 3rd series, t. 4, 13 April 1884, No. 2149.

¹¹ See, for example, Minutes of the meeting of the Tambov scientific archive commission 11 December 1890, 8 February 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4174, ll. 74-150. For more on the activities of the archive commission in Nizhnii Novgorod, see Evtuhov, *Portrait of a Russian Province*, pp. 220-5.

¹² I. I. Dubasov, *Ocherki*, t. 1, p. 3.

¹³ Adele Lindenmeyr, ‘The ethos of charity in imperial Russia’, *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Summer, 1990), p. 683, Hubertus F. Jahn, ‘Charity and national identity in late imperial Russia’ in *Imperial and National Identities in Pre-Revolutionary, Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*, eds. Chris J. Chulos and Johannes Rem (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2002), pp. 135-49, Hari Vasudevan, ‘Identity and

programmes and their identification with ‘province’ were simply a framing device for liberal claims for greater autonomy.¹⁴ There are strong signs, however, that in Tambov province, provincial identity created a sense of moral responsibility to the population that helps to explain their actions when the crops first failed in 1891. This led to innovation and suggestions or requests for action that, though they were firmly rooted within the existing legal framework, exceeded the centre’s intentions and forced St. Petersburg to react.¹⁵ Uezd and provincial authorities (including Governor Rokasovskii) did not shy away from pressing the centre to accept responsibility for meeting its demands yet at the same time local demands prevailed only if they meshed with central requirements.¹⁶

This meshing posed greater problems and conflicts for Governor Rokasovskii than for any other official in the province. In trying to balance them he appeared to be financially conservative and loyal to the centre and province in equal measure. It was sometimes possible to balance the competing loyalties of centre and province but this became more difficult from June 1891. Early that month, Rokasovskii attempted to reassure the MVD that he was not only taking measures to protect the population, as a representative of the tsar and thus of a benevolent autocracy, but also limiting the ‘exaggerated’ zemstvo requests for imperial loans to 2,000,000 roubles by the ‘most accurate prudence’.¹⁷ Beneath this positioning as loyal and prudent servant lay a move designed to secure the province’s best interests. Attempting to ensure that any further

Politics in Provincial Russia: Tver, 1889-1905’ in *Social Identities in Revolutionary Russia*, ed. Madhavan K. Palat (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 34-64.

¹⁴ Vasudevan, ‘Identity and Politics’, pp. 45-51, pp. 54-8.

¹⁵ Evtuhov, *Portrait of a Russian province*, pp. 134-64.

¹⁶ Paula A. Michaels, ‘Mobilising medicine: medical cadres, state power and center-periphery relations in wartime Kazakhstan’ in *Provincial Landscapes, Local Dimensions of Soviet Power, 1917-1953*, ed. Donald J. Raleigh (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001), p. 235. While this article relates to the Soviet experience, he describes a pattern of peripheral resistance and pressure that is similar to that witnessed on a regular basis in the late imperial period.

¹⁷ Correspondence between Rokasovskii and MVD Economic Department Director A.G. Vishniakov 7, 15 June 1891, RGIA, f, 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 1-4.

requests for imperial loans from Tambov province should be realistic, Rokasovskii asked how far the famine had spread and urged loans to be issued quickly.¹⁸ Seemingly innocuous, this request did several things: it sought information as to what the most the province could expect was to save time, made clear that there *would* be future requests, and played on the potential suffering of the people as a way to speed up this allocation.

A far less subtle attempt to press provincial needs upon St Petersburg came in mid-June when Rokasovskii directly opposed the law he was required to enforce. The Shatsk uezd zemstvo assembly, breaching articles sixty-nine and eighty of the 1889 Food Security Statute, voted to issue loans in grain, not cash, and to begin immediately without waiting for resolutions from village societies.¹⁹ Despite telling the MVD and provincial *uprava* that he agreed with the action, which he considered sensible in the context of rye prices rising ‘not by the day but by the hour’, the governor was forced to use his powers under the 1890 Zemstvo Statute formally to protest Shatsk’s actions.²⁰ Rokasovskii presented an alternative: allowing Shatsk to issue loans in grain and prioritise purchasing from other parts of the empire, rebuilding local grain stores.²¹ This was less a rebellious governor and more one who combined his duty, enshrined in the tsar’s law and will, to protect and promote the general welfare of the province ‘entrusted’ to him, with that of ensuring the regime’s stability.

The imperial regime viewed provincial stability, and governance in line with its priorities, as essential. George Yaney argues that the 1864 Zemstvo Statute worked

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Rokasovskii to Durnovo 17 June 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 7-8, Rokasovskii to Tambov provincial zemstvo *uprava* 16 June 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 2192, ll. 16-7, *Svod zakonov*, t. 13, Ustav o obespechenii narodnogo prodovol’stviia, razdel 1, glava 4, otdelenie 1, st. 69, razdel 1, glava 4, otdelenie 3, st. 80.

²⁰ PSZ 3rd series, t. 10, 12 June 1890, No. 6927, glava 3, otdelenie 2, st. 87, Rokasovskii to Durnovo 17 June 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 7-8, Rokasovskii to Tambov provincial zemstvo *uprava* 16 June 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 2192, ll. 16-7.

²¹ Ibid.

against this perception: the latitude granted to the zemstvos gave the centre the impression of provincial chaos.²² However, as Catherine Evtuhov argues in the case of Nizhnii Novgorod, provincial identity expressed itself through practice and institutional innovation. While the centre delineated and structured the periphery, it was the *operation* of this framework that gave meaning to emergent provincial and administrative cultures.²³ While we will see that personal and informal arrangements were essential, these arrangements were less chaotic and more an attempt to overcome and navigate obstacles that threatened a successful relief effort. With the information link on food security weakened by the 1890 Zemstvo Statute, in July 1891 the provincial zemstvo assembly and the *uprava* used the various legislation governing food security, local government, and MVD circulars to construct an explicit responsibility for each official to aid the peasantry and for the zemstvo to provide economic aid.²⁴ The construction of this sense of responsibility was the explicit result of the need to innovate in order to address the province's needs; practice developed the sense of identity, showing that Evtuhov's interpretation also applies to Tambov province.

This sense of solidarity went beyond just the provincial zemstvo and encompassed all levels of the administrative structure. In the Borisoglebsk uezd zemstvo assembly there was a dire warning of a 'full famine' while the Tambov uezd zemstvo *uprava* member Viktor Kosmin warned that 'a public calamity is about to happen - a famine with all its

²² Yaney, *Systematisation*, p. 338, p. 346.

²³ Smith-Peter, 'Bringing the provinces into focus', p. 84 and Evtuhov, *Portrait of a Russian province*, p. 248.

²⁴ This weakening was done via the overturning of article thirty-nine, requiring regular reporting from volosts to the uezd *upravy*, *PSZ*, 3rd series, t. 10, 12 June 1890, No. 6927, V, *Svod zakonov*, t. 13, Ustav o obespechenii narodnogo prodovol'stviia, razdel 1, glava 4, otdelenie 1, st. 69, razdel 1, glava 2, otdelenie 2, st. 39. On the report by the *uprava* see *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 33-37 and the specific articles can be found in *PSZ*, 3rd series, 12 July 1889 No. 6196, razdel 1, glava 6, st. 61; 2nd series, t. 39, 1 January 1864 No. 40457, glava 3, st. 69 and *Svod zakonov*, t. 13, Ustav o obespechenii narodnogo prodovol'stviia, razdel 1, glava 4, otdelenie 1, st. 70, otdelenie 3, st. 80, st. 88-91. The specific MVD circulars are Nos. 6429/30, 10 July 1868.

terrible companions'.²⁵ Both the Borisoglebsk assembly and Kosmin urged imperial loans and active measures by the zemstvos, Kosmin calling for 'extraordinary measures'. Governor Rokasovskii immediately passed on the provincial *uprava*'s request for help to the land captains, often exhorting them (as he lacked the power to compel) to cooperate with the zemstvos in this 'extraordinarily important matter' of inspecting aid requests and issuing loans.²⁶ These are not examples of groups seeking to augment their power, but rather officials genuinely concerned at the crisis unfolding before their eyes, affecting the very people they were responsible for (and, to a limited extent, responsible to). Indeed, this sense of obligation had little political impetus behind it; the legal obligations of the governor and the zemstvos were developed and expanded into a common responsibility while the language used clearly shows that they felt attached to the 'province' and bound to help its population.

Warning signs and distress

When looking at institutional responses to a past crisis, we should be wary of describing them exclusively in terms of modern approaches or examples as this ignores the context and challenges of the time and potentially obscures successes within given resource or conceptual constraints. Nevertheless, by applying recent scholarship on famine, its causes and prediction we can identify a serious flaw in the imperial Russian structure: its fragmented nature prevented both information sharing and the development of a proper warning system and thereby fostered an inability to notice a slow-burning agrarian crisis.

²⁵ Borisoglebskoe uezdnoe zemskoe sobranie, *Zhurnaly s dolakadami I drugimi prilozheniiami Borisoglebskogo uездnogo zemskogo sobraniia: ekstrennogo i ocherednogo 8-go I 9-go ianvaria, 27 iunია, 11, 12, I 13 oktiabria 1891 goda* (Borisoglebsk, 1891), p. 34, *Zhurnaly Tambovsogo uездnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 13-4.

²⁶ Correspondence between the Tambov provincial zemstvo *uprava*, Rokasovskii and all land captains, GATO, 8, 15, 25, 27 July 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 39-41, l. 46, l. 79-81.

While agronomy was a rapidly developing science in imperial Russia, mainly thanks to the work of the soil scientist Vasilii Dokuchaev, a much simpler understanding of the relationship between cause and effect predominated in the imperial administration.²⁷ Governor Rokasovskii, the Kirsanov uezd zemstvo *uprava*, the Ministry of Finance and M.N. Raevskii, director of the agronomy depart of the Ministry of State Domains, all laid direct blame for the crisis on the cold winter of 1890 and, above all, the drought of summer 1891.²⁸ Yet we know now that while famine and drought are linked, the latter does not always precede the former. Modern famine theory has shown that while drought may be a trigger for famine, or may even exacerbate it, it is not the underlying root *cause*. Famine can push a community over the edge but the key issue is an area's *vulnerability* to famine or, in other words, what happens when a crisis hits and lowers food supply, a community's entitlements or clashes with government priorities.²⁹

Understanding vulnerability leads us to the next issue, distress. Famines have been divided into a three-phase process: dearth or economic distress, famishment and starvation, deaths and a morbidity peak (usually caused by epidemics). Some scholars therefore see famine as 'the final stage of a disease which, though not always conspicuous, is ever present'.³⁰ The existence of such distress is a strong indicator that something was going badly and structurally wrong in Tambov province even before a crisis such as the crop failure. With a day's wages for a peasant buying less than half the

²⁷ See, for example, David Moon, 'The environmental history of the Russian steppes: Vasilii Dokuchaev and the harvest failure of 1891', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Sixth Series, Vol. 15, (2005), pp. 149-74; 'The Russian Academy of Sciences Expeditions to the Steppes in the Late Eighteenth Century', *SEER*, Vol. 88, No. 1/2, (January/April 2010), pp. 204-36, Evtuhov, *Portrait of a Russian Province*, pp. 30-4, 165-81, 206-27.

²⁸ Annual report of Governor Rokasovskii on Tambov province for 1891, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 223, d. 194, l. 4 and Kirsanovskoe uezdnoe zemskoe sobranie, *Zhurnaly Kirsanovskogo uездnogo zemskogo sobraniia: ocherednogo sentiabr'skoi sessii 1891 goda s prilozheniiami* (Kirsanov, 1892), pp. 10-1.

²⁹ Devereux, *Theories of Famine*, pp. 35-42, p.183, pp. 190-191, Locke, Ahmadi-Esfahani, 'Famine analysis', pp. 363-76; Michael Ellman, 'The 1947 Soviet famine and the entitlement approach to famines', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, Vol. 24, No. 5 (Sep., 2000), 24, p. 603.

³⁰ Sen, *Poverty and Famines*, p. 55, Watts, 'Entitlements or empowerment?', pp. 17-8, p. 9.

rye it did from 1889-90 in the central black earth region, the distress was already well entrenched before the crops failed in 1891.³¹

Modern scholarship suggests that when rural communities lack the resources to defend themselves, it is necessary to devise famine prevention systems that do not leave them to their own devices, as the 1889 Food Security Statute largely did in the Russian case.³² In order to prevent or mitigate the effects of a famine, it is essential to ensure an information flow and an early warning system that does not rely on terminal indicators of distress such as mass migration.³³ These were precisely the elements that either did not exist or did not function at the start of the crisis in Tambov.

One of the most intractable problems in imperial bureaucracy was the failure to build a full picture through effective co-ordination and this culture of compartmentalisation affected Tambov province deeply. All across the province there were diligent local officials, mainly uezd *ispravniks*, who noted ongoing agricultural distress in 1890 and attempted to sound the alarm.³⁴ The Kozlov uezd *ispravnik* even argued that the zemstvo needed to help the peasantry and, foreshadowing the relief effort, should do so via low cost grain sales.³⁵ The provincial *uprava* noted the severely depleted reserves and suggested various methods of replenishing them, primarily by collecting arrears in grain and not cash.³⁶ Thus, by early June 1891 the peasantry of Tambov province were deeply vulnerable to any negative change in agricultural conditions, a common causal factor in famines, and this position was not helped by the province's traditional role as a grain exporter to the two capitals and grain-deficient north.³⁷

³¹ Wheatcroft, 'The 1891-1892 famine', p. 39.

³² Devereux, *Theories of Famine*, p.183, pp.190-1, Drèze, Sen, *Hunger and Public Action*, p. 75.

³³ Drèze, Sen, *Hunger and Public Action*, pp. 81-4, Devereux, *Theories of Famine*, p. 190.

³⁴ See for example Annual reports of the Kozlov, Lipetsk, Lebedian, Usman and Borisoglebsk uezds for 1890, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4174, l. 312, l. 336, ll. 425-6, ll. 366-7, l. 400.

³⁵ Annual report of the Kozlov uezd *ispravnik* for 1890, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4174, l. 313.

³⁶ Tambov provincial zemstvo *uprava* to the Tambov provincial zemstvo assembly December 1890, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4174, ll. 21-30.

³⁷ Dugarm, 'Local politics', pp. 60-1, Lin, Tao Yang, 'Food availability, entitlements and the Chinese famine of 1959-61', pp. 138-40.

Unfortunately these warnings, which might have been assembled to form a picture of worsening distress across the province, were essentially lone voices.

Both the deeply fragmented structure of provincial government, designed strictly to limit the interaction between institutions for political reasons, and the character of Governor Rokasovskii and the nature of his workload, prevented any co-ordination of these warnings. The information links within the various levels of the province were vertical, from uezd to provincial zemstvo and from *ispravniks* to the governor, and not horizontal. No single element of the provincial structure had all the relevant information but horizontal links could have facilitated communication and helped fill in these gaps. It was a serious failing, and a sign of the obsessive privileging of control and political stability that characterized the imperial state. Compounding this problem was the fact that Governor Rokasovskii, who had ultimate responsibility for this information and the province, often failed to connect information or anticipate problems, reacting only when circumstances demanded it. This strategic limitation was not unique to Rokasovskii, reflecting more on the culture of the imperial bureaucracy, how it trained officials (or did not), and the overwhelming workload governors and their chancelleries had. Nonetheless, his strategic oversight was to be a consistent weakness which would affect the relief effort.³⁸

There was, then, a complete absence of any form of intelligent or even rudimentary warning system in place, despite the dependence of Tambov province on agriculture. This failing was essentially inbuilt however; while the uezd zemstvos were late in becoming aware of a problem, they did move quickly to establish its extent. By the end of spring 1891, several uezd *upravy* expressed fears over a colossal harvest shortfall

³⁸ Robbins, *The Tsar's Viceroys*, p. 75.

and at the end of May the provincial *uprava* asked all uezd *upravy* to determine, by July, the state of spring and winter crops and the numbers and reserves of grain stores.³⁹ The provincial *uprava* also moved to establish reserves held by landowners and traders. The provincial authorities were slow to notice something was going wrong but when they did know, moved as fast as the crippled, fragmented structures allowed.⁴⁰

Initial chaos and ad hoc institutions

In June and July 1891 the provincial and uezd institutions were confronted not only by a worsening crisis, but also by a structure that was being pulled in different directions with evidence of growing instability within Tambov itself. While the province could and did innovate, this innovation occurred within the context of an administrative structure that militated against unified, systematic administration. Mixed messages came from the centre and the very top; patriarchal, modern, decentralising and controlling, the regime of Tsar Alexander III sent confusing signals to its provincial territories.⁴¹ Tambov itself was also experiencing a degree of turmoil. Over the course of 1889-92, the offices of governor, vice-governor, provincial marshal of the nobility and the chair of the provincial *uprava* had all changed hands, the land captains were introduced and 57 per cent of the volost' *starshins* were in place for less than a year by 1892.⁴² Only two of these appointments

³⁹ *Zhurnaly Kirsanovskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, p. 6, *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda.*, pp. 28-9.

⁴⁰ Rokasovskii to Durnovo 7 June 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 1-2.

⁴¹ Whelan, *Alexander III and the State Council*, pp. 17-38, p. 73, Pearson, *Russian Officialdom in Crisis*, pp. 210-44, Vladimir Gel'man, 'The politics of local government in Russia: a framework for analysis' in *The Politics of Local Government in Russia*, eds. Alfred B. Evans Jr and Vladimir Gel'man (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), pp. 1-18, A.V. Remnev, *Samoderzhavnoe pravitel'stvo: Komitet ministrov v sisteme vyshnego upravleniia Rossiiskoi imperii (vtoraia polovina XIX – nachalo XX veka)* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2010), pp. 319-48.

⁴² Telegram from Rokasovskii to Durnovo 7 September 1889, *Ukaz of the Governing Senate 11 September 1889*, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 45 (1881), d. 158, l. 101, l. 110, According to the address-kalendar for 1891, Prince Cholokaev's appointment in took place in 1891 after the original print run when the position was vacant, *Adres-kalendar sluzhashchikh v Tambovskoi gubernii lits na 1891-i god* (Tambov: Tambovskoe

would last long: A.A. Choglokov served as vice-governor until 1902 while N.N. Cholokaev remained the provincial marshal of the nobility until 1917.⁴³ The overall impact, however, was a province with neither institutions nor officials prepared to cope. Patchy and uneven, the initial relief effort relied on ad hoc institutions and policies to manage a problem that rapidly escalated beyond all of the province's institutions' capacity to manage.

These difficulties, which affected provincial and uezd administration generally, were joined by two further difficulties specific to food security. Tension was inherent in legislation on this subject as food security was a zemstvo issue though the grain trade had to be free under the 'vigilant supervision' of the governor.⁴⁴ Compounding this tension was the fact that the network of grain stores in Tambov province, designed by the 1889 Food Security Statute to provide grain reserves, were in crisis with huge arrears and frequent over-reporting by volosts of the actual reserves held.⁴⁵ The zemstvos then, could guarantee neither the information from below nor the approach of the official above: the governor's legal duty and false reporting by volosts pulled the whole system in competing directions.

Despite an overwhelming number of regulations and edicts, autocratic ideology conspired with the use of formal and informal rules and the prevalence of 'departmentalism' to prevent a culture of consistency from developing at either imperial

gubernskoe pravlenie, 1891), For the volost' *starshins* see Correspondence between the Governor's Chancellery and the Chairman of the Saratov Judicial Chamber concerning the volost' *starshins* for Tambov province 15 September–18 December 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4183, ll. 4-36.

⁴³ *Gubernii Rossiiskoi imperii: Istoriia i rukovoditeli, 1708 – 1917* (ed. N.F. Samokhvalov) (Moscow: Ob'edinennaia redaktsiia MVD Rossii, 2003), p. 294, p. 446.

⁴⁴ *Svod zakonov*, t. 13, Ustav o obespechenii narodnogo prodovol'stviia, t. 13, razdel 1, glava 7, otdelenie 1, st. 111, 116, t. 2, Obshchee uchrezhdenie gubernskoe, razdel 2, glava 2, otdelenie 2, st. 322-4.

⁴⁵ *Khlebnye zapasy* p. 14, p. 2, *Zhurnaly Kirsanovskogo uездnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 4-5.

or provincial levels.⁴⁶ Inconsistency had long manifested itself in absenteeism in zemstvos throughout the empire (with Tambov an apparently frequent offender). Now it hampered the relief effort. Only four uezds - Kirsanov, Shatsk, Tambov and Borisoglebsk - held extraordinary meetings to tackle the crisis, with a meeting of the provincial zemstvo scheduled for early July.⁴⁷ The lack of meetings in every uezd did not appear to concern Rokasovskii or the provincial *uprava*, who perhaps felt that nothing could be put in motion until the provincial zemstvo's meeting. Nevertheless, the remaining uezds and the provincial *uprava* could at least have considered plans, even if they could not act on them. As a result, the relief effort was essentially stuck in neutral until July two months after even the defective warning mechanisms identified a problem.

Demonstrating a level of vitality and initiative, the four uezds who did meet before July generated a range of opinions and proposals on the scale of loans. Some requested no food loans at all, preferring to rely on existing grain stores.⁴⁸ Meeting before the MVD imposed its initial cap on how much a province could expect in loans, the uezd zemstvos filled this vacuum by framing it in their own terms and embraced measures the 1889 Food Security Statute did not consider. As we will see in Chapter 3, this statute considered crop failures and famine relief purely in terms of supply and demand, a policy seen by modern scholarship on famine as deeply vulnerable to logistical and administrative failures.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Eugene Huskey, Don K. Rowney, 'Conclusion' in *Russian Bureaucracy and the State Officialdom From Alexander III to Vladimir Putin*, eds. Don K. Rowney, Eugene Huskey (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 320-22.

⁴⁷ On zemstvo absenteeism see Pearson, *Russian Officialdom*, pp. 93-4, p. 143. Correspondence between the Tambov provincial *uprava*, Rokasovskii and Durnovo, 7, 22 June 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, l. 1, l. 15.

⁴⁸ See *Zhurnaly Kirsanovskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 4-5, *Zhurnaly Tambovsogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 5-15 and *Zhurnaly Borisoglebskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 34-6.

⁴⁹ See Drèze, Sen, *Hunger and Public Action*, pp. 85-95 and Debarshi Das, 'A relook at the Bengal famine', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 43, No. 31 (2-8 August, 2008), pp. 59-64. Ó Gráda and Chevet argue that the main failing of relying on markets in historical famines is the assumption that markets were functionally integrated where price would reach equilibrium: Ó Gráda, Chevet, 'Famine and market in ancien régime France', p. 709, pp. 720-7.

Moving beyond this, the Tambov and Borisoglebsk uezd zemstvos proposed measures including banning grain exports, delaying redemption payments, and controls on peasants yielding their allotments to wealthier peasants for ‘next to nothing’ due to ignorance of zemstvo aid.⁵⁰ With little official guidance, several uezd zemstvos moved outside the space for famine relief established by the 1889 Food Security Statute to relieve the pressure their communities felt, again illustrating that the initiative now often lay with the periphery. Indeed, the provincial zemstvo assembly subsequently adopted several of the uezds’ proposals including applying to ban exports, delay redemption repayments and not wait for resolutions from village societies before purchasing aid.⁵¹ It also added its own voice, switching a proposed capital outlay for a psychiatric hospital to the relief effort.⁵²

A closer look at the generation of these ideas suggests that the ‘vitality’ of local thinking should not be overstated. Like the majority of zemstvos, Tambov and its uezds relied on their *upravy* and the statutorily established revision commissions, which had an established responsibility for management, to develop and modify proposals.⁵³ There was little in the way of debate within any of these meetings save objections in the provincial zemstvo assembly, all overruled, to banning exports and issuing loans to peasants who could not work.⁵⁴ So long as they were capable of policy development, there was little issue with this. As we will see in chapter 5 however, when they failed to reach a decision, the result was often paralysis. Tambov’s institutions were simply not ready for such a

⁵⁰ *Zhurnaly Tambovsogo uездnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 5-15 and *Zhurnaly Borisoglebskogo uездnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 34-6.

⁵¹ Rokasovskii to Durnovo 17 June 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 7-8, *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 10-16.

⁵² *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 10-16.

⁵³ Kermit McKenzie, ‘Zemstvo organization and role within the administrative structure’ in *The Zemstvo in Russia: An Experiment in Local Self-Government*, eds. Terence Emmons, Wayne S. Vucinich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 51. The revision commission was established under article seventy-one of the 1864 Zemstvo Statute, *PSZ*, 2nd series, t. 39, 1 January 1864, No. 40457, glava 3, st. 71.

⁵⁴ *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 10-44.

relief effort and it could be argued the assemblies waved through the recommendations simply to ensure that *something* was done.

This urgency, and sense of operating in a vacuum, was not confined to the zemstvos and governor. It applied equally to Tambov's limited and scattered charitable infrastructure, comprising the Tambov Society for the Care of the Poor, five uezd societies and a local branch of the Red Cross. Most of these groups had existed only since 1880, though the welfare society in Morshansk uezd was founded in 1868.⁵⁵ Traditionally seen as a Christian obligation and targeted at specific categories of the 'unfortunate', charity became more 'scientific' in the 1880s thanks to the perceived need to tackle the social threat of poverty.⁵⁶ Many of these institutions owed their existence to the absence of any official response to social problems, be it imperial or provincial: the zemstvos technically had responsibility for public welfare but few devoted significant resources to it while the law gave no indication how the zemstvos were to manage welfare.⁵⁷

As with the uezd zemstvos, the first steps towards a concerted charitable relief effort demonstrated a messy and ad hoc vitality; in the absence of any delineated framework for activity, either legal or cultural, various organisations and individuals essentially created one for themselves. From July to September 1891, two main charitable institutions were established to collect donations and provide relief: the Special Committee for Collecting Donations in Favour of the Victims of the Crop Failure under the Tambov Society for the Care of the Poor (hereinafter the July 1891 Committee) and the Tambov Diocesan Committee for Collecting Donations in Favour of the Victims of

⁵⁵ Rokasovskii to the MVD Economic Department 25 September – 12 November 1891, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 250, l.1, l. 11, l. 17.

⁵⁶ Adele Lindenmeyr, *Poverty is Not a Vice: Charity, Society and the State in Imperial Russia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 7-25, pp. 196-226.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 60-6, Jahn, 'Charity and national', pp. 135-49, *PSZ*, 2nd series, t. 39, 1 January 1864, No. 40458, glava 3, st. 73-87.

the Crop Failure.⁵⁸ Although they provided a focus point for donations, these institutions lacked an on-the-ground infrastructure across the uyezds and into the volosts that would enable them to raise local donations and allocate aid. The frequent identification of the state with society and the simple fact that officialdom was the only real form of universal infrastructure provided the solution. Mirroring the *zemstvos* and land captains in many ways, a network of uezd sectional committees with local committees (*popechitel'stvo*s) in the volosts and uyezds was established. Marshals of the nobility, mayors and land captains frequently chaired them, cementing the link between charity and officialdom.⁵⁹ The Diocesan Committee used the province's deaneries as a structural model and functioned primarily as a transfer organisation, donating most of its money to the sectional committees and other charitable institutions.⁶⁰ Once created, this new charitable space filled rapidly with nearly a hundred *popechitel'stvo*s open by October and more opening all the time; Governor Rokasovskii was keen to stress that the only limit placed on their number was opportunity and the scale of need.⁶¹ A rare example of coordination between the state and civil society, it would continue throughout the crisis with charitable relief gradually evolving to fill the spaces left by the official relief effort.

The bureaucratic cultural values of the late imperial state expressed themselves even in this new charitable infrastructure. In many Russian provinces, charitable societies were open to all ranks and occupations.⁶² In Tambov, however, community links were emphasised: leadership roles were entrusted to local landowners, priests, teachers, doctors

⁵⁸ Rokasovskii to the MVD Economic Department 25 September – 12 November 1891, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 250, l.1, l. 11, l. 17.

⁵⁹ Rokasovskii to the MVD Economic Department 25 September 1891, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 250, l.1, *Zhurnaly Usmanskogo zemskogo sobranie 1891 goda*, p. 40, pp. 33-4.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Rokasovskii to the MVD Economic Department 25 September 1891, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 250, l.1.

⁶² Lindenmeyr, *Poverty is Not a Vice*, pp. 203-12.

and other ‘trustworthy’ persons.⁶³ The rapid and ad hoc pace of capacity building also replicated that hallmark of tsarist administration: sparse and sporadic information. Governor Rokasovskii assumed that collections were proceeding ‘relatively successfully’ even though few accounts had been received by October.⁶⁴

Slow to recognise that there was a serious crisis developing, the zemstvos, Rokasovskii and the province’s recently-established charitable institutions spent the summer of 1891 engaged in debate and rapid capacity building. Despite being prescriptive, legislation offered little guidance of what to do in this serious situation and the various institutions sought to fill this vacuum. Although we can rightly criticise the failure to coordinate from the beginning and the delay and paralysis in certain uyezds, ad hoc institutions nevertheless served a practical purpose. Administrative machinery was notoriously cumbersome and the province prioritised brief discussion, rapid approval and execution over broader strategic thinking. A systematic approach to food and seed loan allocation was needed desperately but by August the province was still relying on the general principles established by the provincial zemstvo assembly in early July.⁶⁵

The drive for institutional unity

Throughout the entire famine crisis, the relief effort would be troubled by a fragmented structure and a lack of unity at every level from the imperial state to the volost’.⁶⁶ The summer of 1891, when the focus was on defining the severity of the problem then rapidly developing a response architecture on an appropriate scale, marked the apogee of this

⁶³ Rokasovskii to the MVD Economic Department 25 September 1891, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 250, l.1, *Zhurnaly Usmanskogo zemskogo sobranie 1891 goda*, p. 40, pp. 33-4.

⁶⁴ Rokasovskii to the MVD Economic Department 25 September – 12 November 1891, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 250, l.1, ll. 10-1, l. 17.

⁶⁵ Rokasovskii to Governor Kladishchev of Riazan province 14/16 August 1891, GATO, f. 4, d. 4192, ll. 147-8.

⁶⁶ Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, p. 174.

disorganisation. With the constantly ‘worsening’ situation of the peasantry, such as the drought devastating two thirds of the seed crop in Temnikov uezd, the ad hoc nature of the initial relief effort rapidly became unsustainable.⁶⁷ The line between a healthy and vigorous expression of opinions and a chaotic and ineffectual response was a thin one.

Where one stood in relation to this line depended, it seemed, on one’s broader perspective on the way in which imperial Russia was governed. Governor Rokasovskii, understandably keen to stress his role as the *nachal’nik gubernii*, sought to give the MVD the impression that he was directly tackling rising grain prices while all of the officials in the province were cooperating and playing their respective parts.⁶⁸ Aleksandr Novikov, a land captain who was clearly radicalised by his experience, argued that the main problem in defining the scale of the problem and dealing with it was the distrust between the various officials.⁶⁹ As we will see in later chapters, disunity would indeed be a recurring theme though Governor Rokasovskii acted reasonably decisively in tackling it. The truth was probably somewhere in middle, in line with the opinion of the captain of the Tambov provincial *zhendarmaskaia uprava* who noted that it was impossible for there to not be complaints about how relief was managed.⁷⁰

The need to have the each of the institutions of the relief effort working from the same plan now became urgent, something that St. Petersburg realised relatively early. While failing to recognise that it was responsible for the structural defects that were now hampering the relief effort, it turned its attention to how best to structure that effort. With

⁶⁷ Rokasovskii to Durnovo 11 September 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 83-5, *Zhurnaly Temnikovskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 66-8.

⁶⁸ Rokasovskii to Durnovo 11 September 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 83-5.

⁶⁹ Novikov, *Zapsiki zemskogo nachal’nika*, p. 168.

⁷⁰ Captain of the Tambov provincial *zhendarmaskaia uprava* to the Department of Police, 20 August 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 83-86.

millions of roubles in loans and the image of the tsar as a defender and protector of the people to uphold, political and financial self-interest met half way.

The true extent of the centre's power was nevertheless limited by the size of the empire: too large for St. Petersburg to rule directly, it was traditionally managed through a complex tangle of laws, decrees and instructions transmitted to the provinces. The early months of the famine crisis would prove no different. Over the course of June and August 1891, Durnovo 'suggested' that governors hold conferences with those 'familiar' with the economic situation of the peasantry from marshals of the nobility, *podatnyi* inspectors and *upravy* chairs.⁷¹ 'Familiar', a word used casually enough by Durnovo, could only be a relative term; the degree of isolation and detachment from the peasantry, coupled with unreliable statistics, was to be something that the provincial *uprava* would complain about.⁷² The message coming from St. Petersburg was now clear however: transcending normal concerns, food security required all measures to be 'strictly united'.⁷³

This drive for unity and coordination touched even charitable relief, an area where Durnovo received stinging criticism from contemporaries and historians alike.⁷⁴ Accepting that the crisis helped shift Durnovo's opinion on the organisation of charitable relief, Lindenmeyr argues that he still delayed supporting reform and taking any action until late 1892, after the crisis had subsided.⁷⁵ Yet in 1891 Durnovo made tentative steps, not to structurally reform charity, but to ensure greater coordination, at least in the matter of relief. While recognising the effort and commitment of the Orthodox Church and private charity, his instructions reveal a belief common to most imperial bureaucrats that

⁷¹ Correspondence between Durnovo, all governors, Rokasovskii and the Tambov provincial zemstvo *uprava* 11 July, 21 August, 1 September 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 54-5, l. 237, l. 261.

⁷² Tambov provincial zemstvo *uprava* to Rokasovskii 25 September 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 275-8.

⁷³ Durnovo to all governors 21 August, 1 September 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 54-5, l. 237, l. 261.
GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, l. 237, l. 261.

⁷⁴ Lindenmeyr, *Poverty is Not a Vice*, pp. 79-82.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

matters ran better under state leadership. Heavy on formalism and governmental supervision, the instructions placed the governor at the head of charitable efforts, responsible for authorising *popechitel'stvo*s, overseeing the composition of uezd welfare committees and ensuring they did not compete with the zemstvos, focusing on those areas or people the zemstvo could not help.⁷⁶ Read plainly, the guidelines were breathtakingly broad in scope but, in Tambov province, reflected changes that had already taken place. By the beginning of October the July 1891 Committee and the local Red Cross had officially merged their operations, though this may have been simply the formal recognition of pre-existing cooperation.⁷⁷ Once again the centre was ratifying moves made by the periphery using strong language as a way to protect its symbolic primacy.

Trying to feed the population: the provincial food conference

The Tambov provincial food conference (TPFC) reflected imperial bureaucratic culture and its four meetings in 1891 enable us to examine the resultant tensions in detail. In this section we will see that the TPFC was a space where contested visions of the peasantry, the role of welfare, isolation from the peasantry and local officials and adaptability existed simultaneously and affected each other. The TPFC moved quickly from setting broad policies and goals to become a forum for sharing information. As the majority of its work was completed at its first meeting on 4 September, that meeting will be the main focus of this section.

Maintaining the centre's symbolic primacy often involved contradictions: seeking modernisation in a conservative manner with greater control, the regime was often

⁷⁶ Durnovo to all governors 1 September 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 308-9.

⁷⁷ Rokasovskii to the MVD economic department 16 October 1891, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 250, l. 11.

reactive and gave the periphery a significant role in shaping imperial rule.⁷⁸ In seeking to impose its vision of greater unity on the relief effort in the summer of 1891, the MVD obliged all affected provinces to create provincial food conferences, an institution pioneered in Nizhnii Novgorod by Governor N.M. Baranov. What had begun as a provincial innovation now became to some extent an organ of central administration, having received the imprimatur of the MVD.⁷⁹ Rokasovskii's praise for the operation of the TPFC needs to be read in this light: imperial governance culture was often self-referencing and self-reinforcing, with rituals or reports adopted for personal or institutional aggrandisement and as a means of showing loyalty.⁸⁰

Nevertheless, the contrasting examples of Tambov and Nizhnii Novgorod provinces show how important personality and local conditions were in the operation of institutions such as the food conferences.⁸¹ Governor Rokasovskii's claim that the provincial food conference was the 'leading organ' is, we will see, a little wide off the mark but there is no doubt that it was an important part of the relief effort's institutional architecture. In many provinces it played a key role in coordinating the work of the zemstvos and the government though it also often reflected the positions of the relevant governor.⁸² There was no single common approach, however, and the contrast between developments in Tambov province and Nizhnii Novgorod is illuminating. Baranov was an active and 'energetic' governor: credited by Robbins for establishing the prototype of the provincial food conference he first sought to use it to control the relief effort then modified it slightly to become the executive body, with him at the head.⁸³ In contrast to

⁷⁸ Sahadeo, 'Visions of empire', p. 408.

⁷⁹ *Obzor Tambovskoi gubernii za 1892 god*, p. 14.

⁸⁰ Robbins, *The Tsar's Viceroys*, p. 66, Katya Vladimirov, *The World of the Provincial Bureaucracy in Late 19th and 20th Century Russian Poland* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2004), p. 98.

⁸¹ Dugarm, 'Local politics', pp. 59-82, Tauger, 'Grain crisis or famine', pp. 146-70.

⁸² Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, pp. 174-5, p. 147.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 50-1, pp. 137-8.

Baranov, Governor Rokasovskii placed less emphasis on the conference's (and his own) direct control of the relief effort, focusing more on rule setting and compliance. It can be argued that this was because he lacked strategic insight or a talent for innovation, but given he would drive the TPF's adaptation in December 1891, this seems unlikely, especially given his military background.⁸⁴ In this commitment to procedure and the innate correctness of imperial policy, Rokasovskii was a personification of the 'conservator of order' described by Francis Wcislo.⁸⁵

As the first four meetings of the TPF show, centrally conceived institutions often developed in different directions in response to local conditions and personalities. What started off as a policy-making body soon became responsible for oversight and later, as we will see in chapter 4, evolved into an appeals board in 1892. This shifting role, and the way in which provincial interests took charge, reflect lasting tensions in the late imperial state: by seeking greater regularisation, integration and more efficient administration, the imperial state dismantled previous command networks and negotiated power more freely while continuing to seek compliance via traditional language and expectations.⁸⁶ In line with this, the first meeting of the TPF, held on 4 September 1891, complied with Durnovo's instructions from August and included the governor, vice-

⁸⁴ On the background and training of the late imperial gubernatorial corps see Mosse, 'Russian provincial governors', pp. 225-39, Robbins, 'Choosing the Russian Governors', pp. 541-60. On Rokasovskii's service career see Full service record of the Ekaterinoslav Vice-Governor, Lieutenant Colonel Baron Rokasovskii 11 September 1881, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 45 (1881), d. 158, ll. 8-13.

⁸⁵ Wcislo, *Reforming Rural Russia*, pp. 306-8.

⁸⁶ For examples of this across areas as diverse as railways, educational societies and agrarian and judicial reform see Don K. Rowney, 'Imperial Russian officialdom during modernisation' in *Russian Bureaucracy and the State Officialdom From Alexander III to Vladimir Putin*, eds. Don K. Rowney, Eugene Huskey (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 26-45; Pallot, 'The Stolypin land reform', pp. 113-33; Schrader, *Languages of the Lash*, p. 189; Lieven, *Russia's Rulers Under the Old Regime*, pp. 151-2; Waldron, *Governing Tsarist Russia*, pp. 15-35, pp. 97-116; Whelan, *Alexander III and the State Council*, p. 41, p. 98, pp. 47-50, pp. 202-3; Orlovsky, *The Limits of Reform*, pp. 10-2, pp. 173-96; Joseph Bradley, 'The St. Petersburg Literacy Committee and Russian education: government tutelage or public trust?', *The Russian Review*, Vol. 71, No. 2 (April 2012), pp. 267-94; Kimitaka Matsuzato, 'The creation of the Priamur governor-generalship in 1884 and the reconfiguration of Asiatic Russia', *The Russian Review*, Vol. 71, No. 3 (July 2012), pp. 365-90; Peter Holquist, '"In accord with state interests and the people's wishes": The Technocratic Ideology of Imperial Russia's Resettlement Administration', *SR*, Vol. 69, No. 1 (Spring, 2010), pp. 151-79.

governor, the *podatnyi* inspector, the provincial marshal of the nobility, and the provincial and uezd *upravy* chairs.⁸⁷ Recognising the limits of imperial power, Durnovo did allow others with ‘close knowledge of food matters’ to attend and Tambov, presumably via Governor Rokasovskii, seized on this opportunity. In addition to the above, the Kirsanov uezd marshal of the nobility, all the members of the provincial *uprava*, the manager of the provincial *kazennaia palata* and V.M. Anosov, all attended this first meeting.⁸⁸ The membership was reduced for all subsequent meetings: after September only provincial officials attended with none from any uezd bodies and V.M. Anosov’s attendance appears to have been a one off.⁸⁹ Anosov was a Borisoglebsk landowner and grain trader who appears to have been very active in the relief effort: he was a member of the provincial zemstvo’s reporting commission and was one of the most significant grain traders on behalf of the provincial zemstvo though there was later a dispute over receipts for the operation.⁹⁰ There are no records that the provinces had to inform the MVD of the membership of these conferences or instructions to narrow the composition so we must assume that this was done independently by the province, again presumably by Governor Rokasovskii.

The narrowing of membership to purely provincial figures can be seen not as a centralisation but a conscious split and demarcation in roles between the province and the uezd in the relief effort. As we saw in the section on provincialism and moral responsibility, the provincial *uprava* and Rokasovskii constructed a sense of solidarity and duty for each level of the province’s administrative structure. The first TPFC meeting then, with its broad membership, represented the province ‘together’, symbolically and

⁸⁷ Minutes of the TPFC 4 September 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 92-7.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Minutes of the TPFC 5 November 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 126-33, Minutes of the TPFC 22 November, 17 December 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 4-12, ll. 136-40.

⁹⁰ *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 2-3, *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 172-4, pp. 194-204.

literally deciding how aid was to be allocated fairly across the province as a whole. Unlike Nizhnii Novgorod where Governor Baranov attempted to use the provincial food conference to assert his authority, in Tambov province the TPFC was intended as a collective action. With the basic principles established, operational control could be devolved while keeping the TPFC as a loose oversight committee. Again, each level of the administrative structure was to play its clearly defined part. We know that Rokasovskii emphasised decentralisation while the provincial *uprava* saw itself as the main executive body, assisting the *uezd upravu* so this interpretation has a strong internal logic.⁹¹

There were, however, deep psychological fault lines running through the TPFC that affected the way in which decisions were made. While the various officials saw themselves as part of a common venture, the boundaries between them remained high; social and corporate identities had never fully coalesced while state policies forced a considerable amount of interest group formation and social flux.⁹² The committee members' approaches were dictated in part by their different conceptualisation of the peasantry (discussed below), and partly by their social and political status. At a meeting focused predominantly on resources, the provincial *uprava* highlighted the shortfall and Governor Rokasovskii described the 'exaggerated' amount of aid requested by the land captains, totalling ten million roubles.⁹³ (That the province would ultimately receive slightly *more* than that in loans would be an irony that was lost on the governor in 1892).⁹⁴

⁹¹ *Obzor Tambovskoi gubernii za 1892 god*, p. 14, Tambovskaiia gubernskaia zemskaiia uprava, *Otchet Tambovskoi gubernskoi zemskoi upravu po prodovol'stvennoi operatsii* (Tambov: Tambovskaiia gubernskaia zemskaiia tipografiia, 1891), Vol. 2, pp. 3-4 (hereafter *Otchet po prodovol'stvennoi operatsii*).

⁹² Alfred J. Rieber, 'The sedimentary society' in *Between Tsar and People: Educated Society and the Quest for Public Identity in Late Imperial Russia*, eds. Edith W. Clowes, Samuel D. Kassow and James L. West (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 343-66, Elise Kimerling Wirtschafter, *Social Identity in Imperial Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1997).

⁹³ Minutes of the TPFC 4 September 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 92-7.

⁹⁴ Annual report of Governor Rokasovskii on Tambov province for 1892, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 223, d. 232, l. 4.

Despite later extolling the land captains for being ‘close to the people’, here Rokasovskii was rejecting that very principle. The land captains had been created to assist the government in the management and control of the peasantry. They were an extension of the paternalistic project and connection between throne and people: independent initiative that put pressure on the treasury was not part of the bargain.

Disagreements on scale aside, the TPFC had to set aid allocation levels; the 1889 Food Security Statute made the specifics the preserve of the *zemstvo upravu* though the TPFC followed the MVD’s recommendations and set aid at thirty *funts* per ‘eater’ per month.⁹⁵ However, while the MVD recommended that loans should be reserved for those of non-working age, it did not give further details. This gave the TPFC the freedom to design its own criteria and in doing so, it revealed a contest between images of the peasantry. In much the same way as picturing the provinces and the search for ‘Russianness’ had become an imperative part of the national project in the nineteenth century, so too had imagining and defining the peasantry. By the 1880s, there was a consensus within the upper levels of officialdom that the peasantry were split into two: a grey, ignorant and blameless peasant and the ‘commune eater’ (*miroed*) or kulak, who exploited their fellow residents, undermining peasant institutions.⁹⁶ The kulak was the village strongman; he was an intelligent and self-interested exploiter who blocked outside access to the village and hampered or prevented reform or positive change if it threatened his position and power.⁹⁷ The antithesis of this was the grey peasant, the impassive or dark slate capable of positive or negative actions depending on the general cultural

⁹⁵ Durnovo to all governors 18 July 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 45-7, Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, p. 50, *Svod zakonov*, t. 13, *Ustav o obespechenii narodnogo prodovol'stviia*, t. 13, razdel 1, glava 4, otdelenie 3, st. 81.

⁹⁶ Gaudin, *Ruling Peasants*, pp. 22-5.

⁹⁷ Cathy A. Frierson, *Peasant Icons: Representations of Rural People in Late Nineteenth-Century Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 139-60.

environment and influences.⁹⁸ At once compatible and mutually exclusive, the belief in their existence by officials undermined their efforts to impose order on social flux and introduced differentiation and division; in 1891 this made the specific and ‘correct’ targeting of aid a practical and moral necessity.⁹⁹

Sincere enough in its concern to distribute aid fairly, the TPFC, in trying to decide who ‘deserved’ aid, nevertheless found itself torn between these two deeply paternalistic images. Both were relatively crude and constructed impositions, revealing the distance between the officials and the majority of the population and the ‘othering’ of the peasantry. As a conservator of order, a fiscal conservative and a defender of imperial power and priorities, Rokasovskii was logically led to be the proponent of differentiation. If, as he regularly complained, the kulak sought ‘an easy profit’ by exploiting the peasantry or manipulating them via alcohol, differentiation was essential: they could hide in plain sight, receiving aid they were not entitled to and potentially draw from the more deserving while also vastly increasing the cost to the imperial treasury.¹⁰⁰ Thus, he proposed dividing the peasantry into categories with food aid available to widows, pregnant women without a ‘worker’ in the family, landless peasants, soldiers and families where ‘eaters’ far outnumbered workers.¹⁰¹ Contrasted against this were the marshals of the nobility and every representative of the provincial and zemstvo *upravy* who considered such division ‘inconceivable’.¹⁰²

In reconciling these two competing images of the peasantry, the TPFC embodied many of the trade-offs, compromises and displays of power that marked imperial

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 138.

⁹⁹ Rieber, ‘The sedimentary society’, pp. 343-66, Wirtschafter, *Social Identity*.

¹⁰⁰ Minutes of the Special Conference with MVD economic department director A. G. Vishniakov 28 July 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 56-66, Minutes of the TPFC 4 September 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 92-7, Annual report of Governor Rokasovskii on Tambov province for 1892, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 223, d. 232, ll. 8-9.

¹⁰¹ Minutes of the TPFC 4 September 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 92-7.

¹⁰² Ibid.

governance. After his initial proposals were rejected, Rokasovskii pivoted slightly and proposed that food loans would go only to the following categories: widows, pregnant women with no worker in the family, landless peasants, retired soldiers, and peasant families where workers were outnumbered by non-workers by a minimum of three to one.¹⁰³ Rokasovskii compromised by allowing for loans outside these groups by uezd officials once the merit of the claim was attested to by local residents and approved by the provincial *uprava*.¹⁰⁴ This compromise, however, did not change the fact that he had largely achieved his aims: there would indeed be differentiation, though with a certain degree of flexibility built in. This pattern of gubernatorial dominance in the provincial food conferences appears to have been common. Robbins does not explain why but a combination of the governor's traditional power and link to St. Petersburg and his role as arbiter 'above the fray' seems the most likely.¹⁰⁵ Now more managerial than vice regal, governors needed to be able to reshape proposals to reach a compromise; a skill Rokasovskii appeared to possess and would use often. This was a vital skill in a crisis; despite Governor Baranov's undoubted ability, his uncompromising nature would lead him into serious conflict with the officials in Lukoianovskii uezd, delaying the relief effort and causing considerable amounts of unnecessary tension.¹⁰⁶ Existing in a vague mid-point between official and informal, the TPFC's internal dynamics could be relatively fluid, something Rokasovskii recognised and navigated reasonably well.

Aside from visions of the peasantry, the TPFC's decisions reflected an internalisation of the centre's conceptions on the role of the state in a social catastrophe, with harsh results. With limited funds available for public welfare, Tambov's zemstvos, like most others, focused on the areas defined by law, institutions such as orphanages,

¹⁰³ Minutes of the TPFC 4 September 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 92-7.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, p. 147.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 155-63.

hospitals and schools.¹⁰⁷ The provincial zemstvo had already reallocated some of the medical budget to the relief effort, further limiting what could be moved around.¹⁰⁸ The explicit role of the state, or its provincial organs, was to provide social infrastructure and not charity. Combined with Governor Rokasovskii's fiscal conservatism, this resulted in a move that seems unnecessarily parsimonious, arbitrary and cruel: as in other provinces, the TPFC denied food loans to children younger than two.¹⁰⁹ There was also a strict divide in the responsibilities of charitable and official relief: welfare was to be the explicit preserve of private charitable institutions, aiding the zemstvos, while official aid outside of the limited food loans was to be mainly through the sale of rye or surrogates (preferably flour) at cost price or less, capped at sixty *funts* per 'eater' per month.¹¹⁰ The 1889 Food Security Statute treated famine relief as a market and supply issue while Rokasovskii saw aid as emergency assistance; not generous but sufficient to prevent starvation.¹¹¹ Thus, those who were not in extreme need were expected to support themselves (and, it seems, their young children), despite the TPFC noting the absence of paid work and rising prices. However, as famine shifts communities from food producers to weakened market dependent consumers, it establishes an often brutal hierarchy of rights for access to food; if ever there was a time for universalism, it was surely then.¹¹² As Amartya Sen highlights, focusing exclusively on supply and market functions does not treat the real problem: the *ability* to purchase food, not the availability of food.¹¹³ Yet we should recognise that this decision was framed by almost impossible resource pressures and an intellectual conception of welfare that is very different to modern ones.

¹⁰⁷ *Svod zakonov*, t. 13, Ustav o obshchestvennom prizrenii, razdel 1, glava 1, otdelenie 1, st. 7.

¹⁰⁸ *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, p. 14.

¹⁰⁹ Minutes of the TPFC 4 September 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 92-97, *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 238-44, Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, p. 50, 62, 166.

¹¹⁰ Minutes of the TPFC 4 September 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 92-7.

¹¹¹ Rokasovskii to Durnovo 4 January 1892, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 156-8.

¹¹² Devereux, *Theories of Famine*, p. 94, Sen, *Poverty and Famines*, p. 51, Watts, 'Entitlements or empowerment?', p. 16.

¹¹³ Sen, *Poverty and Famines*, p. 80.

While we might feel uncomfortable at some of the TPFC's decisions, it did complete its main task, the establishment of principles and policies for the relief effort. The entanglement of moral and practical considerations produced a thin safety net that would, as we will see in chapter 5, come under further pressure, occasionally proving to be insufficient. Operational control, for the rest of 1891, now transferred almost entirely to the provincial and uezd *upravy* with occasional case specific help from Rokasovskii. Essentially somnolent for most of the rest of 1891, the TPFC acted as way for the provincial institutions to be sure that the relief effort was proceeding consistently and successfully.¹¹⁴ This was not a derogation of responsibility but, instead, the first of its many adaptations. The relief effort was plagued by serious communication difficulties and information gaps; full of statistics and overviews, the TPFC became the solution to this gap, insofar as was possible. The TPFC was an ad hoc body imposed from the centre and Tambov's response was to use it in a flexible manner to address specific circumstances as they arose.

Requesting funding

No matter how imperfect the relief architecture that emerged over the course of 1891, or the various tensions and mistakes that shaped it, vast amounts of money would be needed to achieve its aims, whether they were the correct ones or not. With a provincial food reserve of only 480,000 roubles, large arrears and financial difficulties affecting the provincial zemstvo and at least one uezd zemstvo, the province simply did have not

¹¹⁴ Minutes of the TPFC 5 November 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 126-33, Minutes of the TPFC 22 November 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 4-12.

anything approaching the reserves needed.¹¹⁵ Indeed, the first TPFC meeting unanimously agreed that the first tranche of imperial loans was not even remotely sufficient to tackle the crisis.¹¹⁶ The TPFC's sense of desperation is explained by the province's complete dependence on irregular imperial loans to fight a crisis advancing with frightening speed and menace through the province's towns and villages.

The focus of this section will be on this struggle to secure enough resources to fight the worsening crisis. Between July and December 1891 the province was allocated 5.7 million roubles in tranches of 2 million, 500,000, 2.4 million and 1 million roubles; 200,000 of this was redirected for insurance purposes.¹¹⁷ However it is not the amounts that are important here but the *process*. The process of interaction, between the province and the centre and within the province, swung between conflict, tension and cooperation; where one stood in the imperial hierarchy played a leading role in determining the approach one took. Imperial and official identity was a fractured entity with provincial identity cutting across it.

The relationship between a provincial zemstvo and the province's governor embodied the complicated and fractured nature of these identities. Bound together by the law to serve the interests of the province and the empire, they occupied different positions in the imperial hierarchy and their responsibilities were frequently contradictory. Governors could, thanks to the 1890 Zemstvo Statute, intervene in zemstvo affairs and had to protect the free market in the grain trade while the zemstvos protected food security

¹¹⁵ *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 18-22, pp. 38-44, *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 92-6, *Obzor Tambovskoi gubernii za 1891 god*, pp. 44-6.

¹¹⁶ Minutes of the TPFC 4 September 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, f. 4, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 92-7.

¹¹⁷ Correspondence between Rokasovskii, Durnovo, MVD economic dept. and the Committee of Ministers, 21 August 1891 – 4 January 1892, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 126-58, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 213-8.

in general.¹¹⁸ To this was added the complicated and dual nature of the governorship: a creature of the Tsar, he was St. Petersburg's man while he also had to serve and protect the interests of the province.¹¹⁹ Governor Rokasovskii, by virtue of his position, needed to face in two different directions, upwards towards St. Petersburg and downwards to the province. Thus, while the very structure of government forced the zemstvos and the governor together for the welfare of the province, the expectations it placed on both institutions, especially Rokasovskii's duty to the centre, pulled them apart at the same time.

The process of requesting loans from St. Petersburg crystallised tensions, not unusual during the crisis when, in many province, relations between governors and provincial zemstvos were 'correct, if not cordial'.¹²⁰ Along with many governors, Rokasovskii recommended a significant reduction in the provincial zemstvo's loan estimates from 2.9 million to 1.5 million roubles.¹²¹ There is a possibility that Rokasovskii was in some way punishing the provincial zemstvo for its request: in June he had assured the MVD that, after his personal intervention, any request would be limited to 2 million roubles.¹²² The decision by the provincial zemstvo to request significantly more than this potentially undermined his image as an effective manager and viceroy: as we saw at the start of this chapter, it was in a governor's best interests to present the image of a

¹¹⁸ *PSZ*, 2nd series, t. 39, 1 January 1864 No. 40457, glava 1, st. 7, 9; 3rd series, t. 10, 12 June 1890, No. 6927, glava 1, st. 5, glava 3, otdelenie 2, st. 71, 82-7, *Svod zakonov*, t. 13, Ustav o obespechenii narodnogo prodovol'stviia, t. 13, razdel 1, glava 7, otdelenie 1, st. 111, 116, t. 2, Obshchee uchrezhdenie gubernskoe, razdel 2, glava 2, otdelenie 2, st. 322-4.

¹¹⁹ Wirtschafter, *Social Identity*, p. 24, Wortman, *Scenarios of Power, Volume II*, pp. 6-8, *Svod zakonov*, t. 2, Obshchee uchrezhdenie gubernskoe, razdel 2, glava 2, otdelenie 2, st. 270-5, Robbins, *The Tsar's Viceroys*, p. 13, Waldron, *Governing Tsarist Russia*, p. 115.

¹²⁰ Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, p. 138.

¹²¹ Rokasovskii to Durnovo 10 July 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, l. 13, *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia*, pp. 17-44. On the reductions of zemstvo estimates by governors, see Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, pp. 35-9, 43-5.

¹²² Rokasovskii to A. G. Vishniakov, Director of the MVD economic department 7 June 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 1-2, *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 28-44.

harmonious province, with the governor the negotiator-in-chief, above provincial politics. Nevertheless, he continued to help the provincial *uprava* secure grain and involve every level of officialdom as doing so supported his strategy: moderate, fair and *efficient* - not profligate - spending.

Focused on holding costs down as much as possible through moderating grain prices, zemstvo estimates and the use of loans, Rokasovskii's strategy differed sharply from the provincial *uprava*'s.¹²³ The provincial *uprava* adopted a simpler strategy based on moderating prices through a ban on exports, backed by a much larger allocation of loans from the imperial treasury. That two competing strategies could exist despite the common goal of ending the crisis speaks to the longstanding priorities of the imperial state. Tsars had often used disunity, fragmentation and institutional competition to control the machinery of state.¹²⁴ Allowing relatively autonomous institutions far outside the capital to work together without central interference raised the possibility, however remote, of creating a space for further political resistance. As well as seeking to address the 'chaos' in provincial administration, the 'counter-reforms' sought to extend the state into the village, using this integration for greater central control.¹²⁵ This move, and the MVD's known hostility to the zemstvos, might have provided an opportunity for Rokasovskii to control the relief effort, as Governor Baranov had done in Nizhnii Novgorod.¹²⁶

¹²³ Correspondence between Rokasovskii and Durnovo 10, 16, 18 July 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, l. 13, ll. 44-7, Special Conference with A. G. Vishniakov, Director of the MVD economic department 28 July 1891, Rokasovskii to Durnovo 11 September 1891 and Minutes of the TPFC 4 September 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 56-66, ll. 87-90, ll. 92-7.

¹²⁴ Pearson, *Russian Officialdom*, pp. 14-21.

¹²⁵ Gaudin, *Ruling Peasants*, pp. 28-49, Orlovsky, *The Limits of Reform*, pp. 202-205, 250, Pearson, 'The Origins of Alexander III's Land Captains', p. 386, p.401.

¹²⁶ Correspondence between Rokasovskii and Durnovo 10, 16, 18 July 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, l. 13, ll. 44-7, Pearson, *Russian Officialdom*, p. 211, Whelan, *Alexander III and the State Council*, p. 198, Manning, *The Crisis of the Old Order*, p. 44

However, the records show that the provincial *uprava* was often far more effective at implementing its strategy than the governor was. From July to September 1891 he demanded ‘extraordinary care and prudence’ in how need was defined (balking at the land captains’ eventual estimate) and questioned how fast the *upravy* spent the first tranche of loans.¹²⁷ By mid-September, however, he moved to requesting *more* than the provincial *uprava*.¹²⁸ Governor Rokasovskii’s strategy to resist ‘exaggerated’ estimates of need had collapsed quickly; he ultimately become part of the provincial *uprava*’s strategy for securing funding.

The provincial *uprava* achieved this by *inverting* the strategy and tactics employed by Rokasovskii and the MVD, altering and limiting the options open to Rokasovskii. After Rokasovskii succeeded in capping the initial tranche of imperial loans at 1.5 million roubles, only one narrative would emerge: a worsening crisis that, on the evidence of the provincial *uprava*, required ever increasing resources from the centre. Circumstances and the provincial *uprava*’s clever use of statistics, a resource implicitly trusted by the imperial government, pushed the governor into supporting the *uprava*’s strategy. From the reign of Tsar Nicholas I on, statistics were seen as a route to total information and control; information implicitly served the state as it prevented exaggeration, evasion or non-compliance.¹²⁹ This privileging of statistics as a neutral arbiter could allow zemstvos to use them, if they had sufficient volume of information, to take control of the message that was being fed to St. Petersburg. To an extent, the provincial *uprava* used the MVD’s demands for more and better information against

¹²⁷ Special Conference with A. G. Vishniakov, Director of the MVD economic department 28 July 1891, Rokasovskii to Durnovo 11 September 1891 and Minutes of the TPFC 4 September 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 56-66, ll. 87-90, ll. 92-7.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Evtuhov, *Portrait of a Russian Province*, p. 11, Theodore M. Porter, *The Rise of Statistical Thinking, 1820-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 17, 27, Stuart Woolf, ‘Statistics and the modern state’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (Jul., 1989), pp. 601, 603.

itself.¹³⁰ This re-purposing of structures and links intended to further MVD and gubernatorial control would re-emerge over the course of 1891.

The provincial *uprava*'s successful strategic adaptation was achieved by repurposing the MVD's obligation that governors coordinate the relief effort architecture based on regular information from the provincial *uprava*.¹³¹ By switching to smaller, case-specific requests, accompanying them with as much information as possible, it circumvented Rokasovskii's objections effectively; his military background and bureaucratic conditioning made him receptive to quantitative, verifiable information and direct human observation. The first and most significant step was made by Rokasovskii: after travelling to Lipetsk he informed the MVD, only two days after recommending the 1.5 million rouble cap that this would not be enough and further loans would be necessary in December.¹³² Seeking to get in front of the crisis, as he wanted to provide guidance to the provincial *uprava* on how much it could and should request, Rokasovskii inadvertently admitted that he had been wrong initially. Reflecting the tensions governors were subject to, Rokasovskii could now be seen as either flexible or vulnerable.

In many ways, it is easy to see why Rokasovskii seemed to vacillate early on. The simple fact was that at the same time as the MVD expected more from governors, it undercut the governors' ability to meet these increased expectations. Using the innovations and efforts of several provinces to construct a rudimentary template for the relief effort, the MVD emphasised the role of the governor as a coordinator. Durnovo was clear that the *zemstvos* should have a relatively free hand in the management of relief as conditions allowed.¹³³ Thus, Rokasovskii was expected to coordinate the relief effort,

¹³⁰ Durnovo to Rokasovskii 11 August, 23 September 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 78-80, l. 100.

¹³¹ Tambov provincial *zemstvo uprava* to Rokasovskii 8 July 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 39-41.

¹³² Rokasovskii to Durnovo 12 July 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, l. 53.

¹³³ Robbins, *The Tsar's Viceroys*, pp. 148-79, Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, pp. 39-40.

chair the TPF, keep costs down for the MVD and respect the autonomy and authority of the zemstvos. Despite Rokasovskii's evident skills as a negotiator, and his sometimes calming presence (such as during the 1892 cholera epidemic), the truth was that the MVD's conflicting requests were often too hard to balance.¹³⁴

The relationship between a governor and the provincial *uprava* was a complex balancing act; the MVD's encouragement of new structures created new public, provincial spaces in which not just information but the performance of power were now relatively open. Not a strong form of accountability, these new venues shifted Governor Rokasovskii's role further to that of a manager; results could only be achieved by compromise. The pressure this put the governor under was plain to see: Rokasovskii now defended the provincial *uprava*'s pleas for more resources, even in the face of A. G. Vishniakov, the director of the MVD's economic department who toured affected provinces, essentially brow beating them into lowering their requests.¹³⁵ Vishniakov may have been a powerful official from St. Petersburg but Rokasovskii was a governor: managing a province involved a degree of practical politics, compromise and flexibility that a bureaucrat's role often did not. Vishniakov's presence in Tambov province was also temporary, Rokasovskii's (while governor) was not.

In the case of Rokasovskii, the idea of a governor's 'presence' took on a very physical dimension and contributed to his gradual conversion to the zemstvo's arguments. His background in the infantry shaped his approach to governing and managing a crisis: problems were best resolved through direct, hands-on inspection.¹³⁶ Governor Rokasovskii clearly took the idea of 'knowing' the province to heart. As the tsar's

¹³⁴ On Rokasovskii's visit to Kozlov town at the height of the epidemic and his apparent lifting of the town's spirits, see *Zhurnaly Kozlovskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 139-40.

¹³⁵ Special Conference with A. G. Vishniakov, Director of the MVD economic department 28 July 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 56-66. For Vishniakov's tour see Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, pp. 45-7.

¹³⁶ Full service record of the Ekaterinoslav Vice-Governor, Lieutenant Colonel Baron Rokasovskii 11 September 1881, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 45 (1881), d. 158, ll. 8-13.

representative in the province, physical tours acted as a manifestation of imperial power and ritual: a symbol that the sovereign was attuned to the needs of their subjects while it gave local figures an opportunity to demonstrate loyalty to the regime. A tour allowed Rokasovskii to perceive and understand the crisis for himself while also positioning him as a vigorous and caring governor. This was a tactic he understood well and had used previously in Ekaterinoslav province during a crop failure there, and so he toured Tambov province from July to October 1891. Unfortunately for St. Petersburg, he returned increasingly supportive of the provincial *uprava*'s requests for further loans, warning the MVD that 'the critical situation of the peasantry has turned out to be in a much worse light' than he had previously imagined.¹³⁷ Personal tours, then, could strengthen the link between the regime and the people though there was a risk that a governor could go 'native'.

To a certain extent, the crisis forced governors to choose sides and through the provincial *uprava*'s clever use of new political spaces and circumstances, Rokasovskii was gradually manoeuvred into choosing the side of the *uprava* and the province. From his first admission that he underestimated the crisis' severity and his defence of the provincial zemstvo to Vishniakov in July, on several occasions Rokasovskii consistently defended the provincial *uprava*'s claims that the loans from St. Petersburg were 'completely insufficient'.¹³⁸ Rokasovskii now generally accepted the estimates of the provincial *uprava* as accurate; the information battle was over and the *uprava* had won. Governor Rokasovskii backed the provincial *uprava*'s estimate of 6 million roubles in November and, to secure the release of 1 million roubles promised but not yet sent by the

¹³⁷ For his personal tours, see Vice-Governor Rokasovskii to the MVD Department of General Affairs, July 19 1886, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 45 (1881), d. 158, ll. 64-5 and Correspondence between Rokasovskii and Durnovo 11 September, 21 October 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 87-90, ll. 106-7.

¹³⁸ Minutes of the TPFC 4 September, 5 November 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 92-7, ll. 126-33, Correspondence between Rokasovskii and Durnovo 11 September, 21 October 1891, 30 October RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 87-90, ll. 106-7, ll. 120-4

MVD, he essentially threatened the MVD.¹³⁹ He told them he had issued commands spending the entire 2.4 million and needed the 1 million to prevent grain purchasing ceasing.¹⁴⁰ Provincial zemstvos could, after an MVD decision, *request* loans at any time but permission for loans exceeding fifty thousand roubles legally required the permission of the Committee of Ministers.¹⁴¹ Rokasovskii effectively treated a preliminary notification as permission and spent the loan *before* it was transferred. Governor Rokasovskii fulfilled his duty to the centre by using the power bestowed upon him by St. Petersburg in service of the provincial *uprava* and the province ‘entrusted to him’.

This necessity to immerse oneself in the province exposed the governor to the province’s politics. Tambov’s political identity was relatively strong and the provincial *uprava* was its strongest representative. For a start, it had vastly more knowledge of the province: its chair had served in that position since 1872 while another *uprava* member, A. N. Muratov, had been a member of the zemstvo since 1866.¹⁴² This level of experience, local knowledge and an established statistical bureau faced off against Governor Rokasovskii: only in the province since 1888, on his first (and it turned out, last) gubernatorial posting, with a new vice-governor and no time to form any major political alliances.¹⁴³ This sense of isolation was likely quite pronounced in 1891: there were doubts over his conduct in St. Petersburg and long-running allegations of clashes with powerful provincial figures (which several years later spilled over into complaints of ‘liberalism’ in the provincial zemstvo and a feud with the Lipetsk uezd marshal of the

¹³⁹ Minutes of the TPFC 5 November 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 92-7, ll. 126-33, Memo from the MVD economic department 25 November 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 134-6, Correspondence between Rokasovskii, Durnovo and the Committee of Ministers, 29 November, 4-13 December 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 137-42.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ Durnovo and MVD economic department to Rokasovskii, 24 October, 1 November 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, l. 109, l. 124, Minutes of the TPFC 5 November 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 126-33, *Svod zakonov*, t. 13, Ustav o obespechenii narodnogo prodovol’stviia, razdel 1, glava 4, otdelenie 3, st. 88.

¹⁴² Dvukhzhilova, ‘Predsedateli’, pp. 28-30, *Sotsial’nyi sostav*, pp. 112-3.

¹⁴³ *Gubernii ossiiskoi imperii*, p. 290, p. 294, Robbins, *The Tsar’s Viceroy’s*, pp. 124-47.

nobility).¹⁴⁴ A new arrival with few allies in the province, Rokasovskii arguably needed the provincial *uprava* more than it needed him. Allegiances could be few and far between for governors: often disliked or seen as an ‘outsider’ in their province and seen as a tool or resources to be managed by the MVD, it makes sense that Rokasovskii chose to stand with the provincial *uprava*. Also viewing the crisis from a provincial level, the provincial *uprava* presented itself as the firmest ally he could expect. A governor’s status was always in flux with little consistency on how a request or action would be received by the centre: cooperating with the provincial *uprava* offered control and a degree of certainty. His position, and the tsar, demanded harmony and ‘closeness to the people’; operating from an isolated centre governors were subject to strong pressures from above and below. The worsening crisis, the strategy of the provincial *uprava*, the centre’s slow response and Rokasovskii’s relatively short tenure as governor to date, pushed Rokasovskii to gamble that cooperating with the provincial *uprava* was the best way to meet the centre’s objectives.¹⁴⁵

Imperial and provincial identity often mixed in strange ways; if a former governor of Nizhnii Novgorod, Aleksei Odintsov, is right in saying that governors could do little good by intervening, only evil, a hands-off approach was the only way to guarantee good.¹⁴⁶ Zemstvo deputies often saw themselves as outside government but were backed up by Rokasovskii, a creature of that very government, as he fought with St. Petersburg to secure sufficient funds to carry out the duties his imperial identity demanded.¹⁴⁷ As his approach to the cost of the crisis shows, Rokasovskii was a curious mix of hands-off and

¹⁴⁴ Polovtsev, *Dnevnik*, II, pp. 453-4, I, pp. 34, 45, Chernov, *Zapiski sotsialista-revoliutsionera*, pp. 251, Mosse, ‘Russian provincial governors’, p. 238, Correspondence between Rokasovskii, Durnovo and Director of the MVD Department of General Affairs 24 December 1894, 6 December 1895, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 45 (1881), d. 158, ll. 167-8, ll. 177-8.

¹⁴⁵ *Otchet po prodovol'stvennoi operatsii*, Vol. 2, pp. 3-4.

¹⁴⁶ Evtuhov, *Portrait of a Russian Province*, pp. 138-40.

¹⁴⁷ Charles E. Timberlake, ‘The zemstvo and the development of a Russian middle class’ in *Between Tsar and People: Educated Society and the Quest for Public Identity in Late Imperial Russia*, eds. Edith Clowes, Samuel D. Kassow and James L. West (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 164-82.

managerial; it was his hands-on approach of touring the province that helped to move him closer in the direction of allowing the provincial *uprava* to control the tempo of the operation and its cost.

Every deceptively simple letter or telegram from Governor Rokasovskii regarding imperial loans for the relief effort was filtered and negotiated through a complicated web of politics and identity. Just like in the provinces, imperial officials also had a complicated and fractured identity; almost the inverse of Tambov, it was government staff who sought to deny or undermine funding requests while Durnovo was more open to them. As Yaney argues, the bureaucracy had ‘systematised’ by developing a ‘common pretence’ based on seeking and preserving a formal legal-administrative order.¹⁴⁸ Yet the actions of these same officials appears to violate what Rowney sees as the normal and expected order, where the minister was superior and actions followed law, not vice versa.¹⁴⁹ As discussed in Chapter 1, the development of legality with the autocrat as the *source* of this legality, made bureaucrats the defenders of ‘regularised autocracy’ and integrators of the province. In 1891, this meant attacking fellow servants of the tsar to achieve the same strategic goal, the fulfilment of their imperial duties. An anonymous report from the Ministry of Finance in August 1891 is typical: arguing that Tambov’s loan requests were based ‘solely on unverified data’, it claims the loans will be ‘squandered’ simply by virtue of being awarded to the zemstvos and sought to undermine the very nature of the crisis by arguing that the province was no worse affected than other areas.¹⁵⁰ In an unnoticed irony, given that the ministry helped create this situation, it echoed several uezd zemstvos in complaining that the data was problematic as it came from volost’ boards.¹⁵¹ The

¹⁴⁸ Orlovsky, *The Limits of Reform*, pp. 104-22, Yaney, *Systematisation*, pp. 5-31.

¹⁴⁹ Rowney, ‘Organisational change and social adaptation’, p. 291.

¹⁵⁰ Internal Ministry of Finance report on Tambov province August 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 225-31.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

notoriously moribund and fragile MVD economic department joined in the attack: after failing to browbeat the province into reducing its future requests, Director A. G. Vishniakov persuaded Durnovo to call for a new inspection of need to tackle ‘exaggerated’ requests, and again attacked the provenance of the zemstvos’ data.¹⁵²

The two imperial ministers, Durnovo and Vyshnegradskii, arrived at very different positions to the above bureaucrats despite similar attitudes to the province and the same information; hierarchical status appears to have produced distinct methods of conception, interpretation and political engagement. Durnovo, the MVD minister, was like Rokasovskii in many ways: generally competent and sometimes unable to impose his identity, though it seems that Rokasovskii was slightly more strategically able. As they served together in Ekaterinoslav province, this is not a huge surprise, they reinforced their common behaviour. Durnovo’s initial attempts to limit the loans to each province crumbled as the seriousness of the crisis, coupled with a lack of assistance from the Committee of Ministers, overwhelmed the MVD’s attempts to control the relief effort.¹⁵³ Ivan Vyshnegradskii, the Minister for Finance, was a different character; the infamous quote attributed to him, ‘we may not eat but we will export’, has long summed up his role during the famine for many. Seeing Vyshnegradskii’s vigorous fiscal reform policies, aimed at balancing the budget and reaching the gold standard, as abjectly sacrificing the peasantry for industry has been challenged: Russia’s economy and tax receipts recovered quickly from the famine and 162 million roubles were eventually spent on famine relief, in a state with a long history of deficits and a notorious dependency on alcohol revenues.¹⁵⁴ Vyshnegradskii eventually sacrificed the campaign for the gold standard to

¹⁵² Durnovo to Rokasovskii 11 August 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 78-80. For more on Vishniakov and the MVD economic department see Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, pp. 44-9.

¹⁵³ Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, pp. 42-61.

¹⁵⁴ For an overview of the economic and fiscal policies of Vyshnegradskii and others, see: Olga Crisp, *Studies in the Russian Economy Before 1914* (London: Macmillan Press, 1976), pp. 96-110; Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, pp. 14-30, pp. 44-9; Robbins, ‘Russia’s System of Food Supply Relief’, pp. 259-69; Ian

the relief effort by authorising the massive loan programme and banning exports of grain to ease domestic prices. The two ministers sacrificed various strategic approaches and goals for the broader one of imperial duty: for Durnovo it was control and mastery of events while for Vyshnegradskii it was the attempt to reach the gold standard.

While Durnovo and Vyshnegradskii were largely personalities affected by events, there are two examples, one negative and one positive, that show how the reverse could happen. Imperial Russia was a society in which informalism, individualism and quasi-officials network dominated and shaped much of the governing culture.¹⁵⁵ The key dynamic in the below examples is power: in one an official seeks to demonstrate his power to reassert a perceived wounding of his authority, in the other an active and talented minister uses his status to cow Durnovo into releasing additional funds. Vishniakov, perhaps smarting from his failure to limit Tambov's aid claims, fought the provincial zemstvo's desperate requests to replenish its fire insurance fund, emptied by the drought's extreme heat; despite Rokasovskii's support for the claims, he eventually allowed only 100,000 roubles for these claims, provided they were taken from the famine relief funds and made it clear that only Rokasovskii's support had secured the release of the

M. Drummond, 'The Russian gold standard, 1897-1914', *JEH*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (Sep., 1976), pp. 663-88; Stefan Plaggenborg, 'Tax policy and the question of peasant poverty in tsarist Russia, 1881-1905', *CMR*, Vol. 36, No. 1/2, *Cultures économiques et politiques économiques dans l'Empire tsariste et en URSS, 1861-1950* (Jan. - Jun., 1995), pp. 53-69; Haim Barkai, 'The macro-economics of tsarist Russia in the industrialisation era: monetary developments, the balance of payments and the gold standard', *JEH*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Jun., 1973), pp. 339-71; Raymond W. Goldsmith, 'The economic growth of tsarist Russia 1860-1913', *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (Apr., 1961), pp. 441-75; Peter Gatrell, 'Economic culture, economic policy and economic growth in Russia, 1861-1914', *CMR*, Vol. 36, No. 1/2, *Cultures économiques et politiques économiques dans l'Empire tsariste et en URSS, 1861-1950* (Jan. - Jun., 1995), pp. 37-52. On the fiscal and economic impact of the famine see: Simms, 'The economic impact of the Russian famine 1891-92', pp. 63-74, *Ministerstvo Finansov, 1802-1902* (St. Petersburg, 1902), ch. 2, pp. 3-13, p. 314, pp. 640-3. The outstanding work on imperial Russia's relationship with alcohol is Patricia Herlihy, *The Alcoholic Empire: Vodka & Politics in Late Imperial Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

¹⁵⁵ On informalism see Ryavec, *Russian Bureaucracy*, pp. 65-70, pp. 142-3, Graeme Gill, 'The Communist Party and the weakness of bureaucratic norms' in *Russian Bureaucracy and the State Officialdom From Alexander III to Vladimir Putin*, eds. Don K. Rowney, Eugene Huskey (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 118-34.

funding.¹⁵⁶ A relatively vindictive statement, it credited Rokasovskii with securing the province an effective funding cut, sold as being better than the alternative. There would be some relief, however, thanks to court politics and status. Count Illarion Ivanovich Vorontsov-Dashkov was the Minister of the Imperial Householder and a landowner in Tambov province; noticing that 15,000 *desiatins* of land were unsown he exerted pressure on Durnovo to release extra funding.¹⁵⁷ The result, for this small amount of land, was an additional 500,000 roubles, an exhortation to Rokasovskii to care of the problem quickly and the recognition, even in the province, that it was the minister and not the governor who secured the additional funding.¹⁵⁸

In the end, Rokasovskii's assertion that the province's institutions had a harmonious and reciprocal relationship in 1891 was not strictly true. Neither was it entirely false. Broader themes such as loyalty to the tsar, the notion of public service, and occupying a relatively privileged service status bound officials of all kinds together but in 1891 the crisis was another, altogether more prosaic one. Yet this single purpose was, if not shattered, then certainly distorted by the fractured mosaic that was the empire's administrative and cultural structure and hierarchy. Complicating this further was the notion of provincial identity; one's geographical position determined the experienced political and cultural reality. Tambov's response reflects all of these tensions; agreement and cooperation was difficult and not guaranteed. Yet, bound by provincial identity and a sense that something needed to be done, a lot was achieved. By December 1891 over 5 million roubles in loans were secured, new structures established, Rokasovskii had

¹⁵⁶ Annual report of Governor Rokasovskii on Tambov province for 1891, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 223, d. 194, l. 6, Correspondence between Rokasovskii, the Tambov provincial zemstvo *uprava*, Durnovo and the MVD economic department 3, 9, 17, 21, 24 August 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 109-12, ll. 149-50, l. 168, ll. 213-8.

¹⁵⁷ Vorontsov-Dashkov to Rokasovskii and Durnovo 17, 22 July 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, l. 50, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, l. 49.

¹⁵⁸ Durnovo to Rokasovskii 24 July 1891, Tax Inspector A. B. Mikhailov to St. Petersburg 28 July 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, l. 50, ll. 68-76.

defended the province to St. Petersburg and food loans had begun. Hobbled by psychological and legal boundaries, the response architecture was far from perfect but represented the best the province could achieve.

Chapter 3

The initial relief effort in action, June – December 1891

Introduction

On 15 June Vasilii Ivanovich Pavlov, the provincial marshal of the nobility in Minsk province who owned an estate in Usman uezd, wrote that the state of grain in Tambov province was ‘terrible’ (*uzhasno*); the wheat was exhausted, rye would produce only seeds while the millet and oat crops were ruined. Even more ominously, Pavlov warned: ‘There will be a famine if measures are not undertaken’.¹ While it took several months to establish the institutional superstructure of the relief effort, such as the food conference and charity committees, the work of physical relief demanded by Pavlov swung into operation almost as soon as the crisis became apparent, and it is on this relief effort that this chapter will focus. What emerged from the debates in these initial months was a relief effort based around two main operations: the purchase of grain and seed to sow the fields for the next harvest, and the provision of food for the population.

Did the relief effort work? The testimony of the uezd and provincial zemstvos at the end of the year gives a picture of unqualified success illustrated by various self-congratulatory resolutions of thanks.² Governor Rokasovskii also took this attitude and told the first TPFC meeting on 4 September that the ‘united’ efforts of the government and zemstvos had deterred peasants from abandoning sowing the fields and prevented the disaster that would have resulted. In his 1892 annual report to St. Petersburg he went

¹ Count Pavlov to MVD 15 June 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, l. 5.

² *Zhurnaly Spasskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, p. 12, *Zhurnaly Kozlovskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, p. 135, *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, p. 70.

further still, claiming that it was the various government commands regarding the timely seeding of fields and delivery of food to the needy that had decreased the ‘sharp significance’ of the crop failure.³ Yet officials painted a different picture during the relief operation itself: in late July the provincial zemstvo informed Rokasovskii that it was having difficulty locating and delivering sufficient quantities of grain for sowing fields while in late November, Vice-Governor A. A. Choglokov told Rokasovskii that for grain bought in the North Caucasus, which was intended for food aid, ‘shipping goes extremely slowly’.⁴ There were also serious concerns in St. Petersburg at the relief effort as a whole: A.A. Polovtsev noted in October 1891 that all ministers were struck by the knowledge that it would take ‘ceaseless’ measures to deal with the crisis while the influential former Minister of Finance, A.A. Abaza, had become ‘sunken, drawn and aged’ by the crisis.⁵

Even so, we cannot say that the relief effort over the first half of the crisis was a total failure; the difficulties experienced in Tambov bear witness to some of the wider, structural problems that affected the authorities’ response across the entire famine-stricken area. Additionally, as we have seen in the previous chapter, the relief effort was established in a hurry with a reliance on ad hoc institutions and a strong desire to ‘do something’. Consonant with the overall argument of this thesis that while Tambov province’s institutions were structurally ill-prepared for such a crisis, they nevertheless did not collapse, this chapter will suggest that they coped as well as could have been expected in the circumstances by focusing on the relationships and interactions the relief effort necessitated. Since the Food Security Statute 1889 laid out how many of these interactions were to proceed, as well as how food relief was conceived, this legislation will frame much of the rest of the chapter. We will then look at the relief effort and, to

³ Minutes of the TPFC 4 September 1891 and Annual report of Governor Rokasovskii’s on Tambov province for 1892, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 92-7, f. 1284, op. 223, d. 232, l. 13.

⁴ Correspondence between the Tambov provincial *uprava*, Choglokov and Rokasovskii 26 July, 28 November 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192 ll. 84-7 and GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 31-33.

⁵ Polovtsev, *Dnevnik*, II, p. 409.

contextualise the broader issues, a case study of the Vice-Governor's investigation of the management of relief in Spassk uezd, in December 1891.

Food as 'serious need'

In order to understand how food was conceptualised, we must understand how the central government in St. Petersburg had traditionally understood and structured the food relief problem. The central and provincial authorities conceived of 'food' in different ways, and the provincial argument that food was more than just a purchasable commodity was eventually victorious. St. Petersburg and Rokasovskii initially saw the famine as a supply-led or economic crisis that could be tackled with financial aid and loans. However, pressure from regions such as Tambov province quickly changed this. Seeing the famine as a resource crisis where the priority was to take care of the growing hunger required a shift in the way the government thought of crises such as this, as well as a reinterpretation of the law.

The Food Security Statute 1889 framed the overall way in which the government saw the crisis and made certain presumptions about how relief was to operate. The grain and livestock trades were to be free at all times, with the governor tasked with enforcing this.⁶ For famine relief, the provincial *zemstvo uprava* was to maintain local grain stores and a food capital reserve, loans from which were to be managed with the 'closest judgment', only on application from affected village societies and only issued in cash.⁷ To respond to and prevent a crisis, the market was tasked with solving supply and distribution problems, revealing that the central government saw need as an issue of

⁶ *Svod zakonov*, t. 13, Ustav o obespechenii narodnogo prodovol'stviia, razdel 1, glava 7, otdelenie 1, st. 111, 116.

⁷ *Ibid.*, razdel 1, glava 3, otdelenie, st. 48; razdel 1, glava 4, otdelenie 3, st. 80; razdel 1, glava 4, otdelenie 1, st. 69.

purchasing power. A crude precursor of modern developments in famine economics such as the ‘entitlement theory’: however, such a view neglected issues such as price and supply competition and the fact that wealthier provinces, already at an advantage, could theoretically ‘suck up’ the majority of tradable grain reserves.⁸ Above all else, in the event of a widespread crop failure and food shortage, what exactly were the peasantry supposed to spend the cash loans on?

With an economic view of the crisis and little sign of the coming distress, imperial officials (the MVD and Governor Rokasovskii) held that food loans were either unnecessary or could be kept to a bare minimum to replace the failed crops in expectation of the new harvest.⁹ We have already seen, in Chapter 2, Rokasovskii’s and the MVD’s initial reluctance to meet the provincial zemstvo’s requests for loans and the preference for aid via sales of cost price grain. This measure, and the lowering by the Ministry of Finance of rail tariffs for transporting grain to several affected provinces, can be seen as supply-led. The issue was price and supply and the MVD’s measures were aimed to unlock what they saw as a mismatch between the empire’s supply and the demand in the affected regions.¹⁰ The MVD also sought to tackle wage issues by advertising road repair programmes.¹¹ The MVD and the governor had come to realise that a crisis of serious proportions was developing, but they still perceived it as an economic crisis. When food aid was mentioned, it was either in the context of moderating expenses, or as a problem of supply that could be tackled by easing distribution or increasing the purchasing power

⁸ Indeed, competition between various provincial zemstvos and the resulting price escalation would become a serious issue as the crisis worsened. The Food Security Statute, in prohibiting interference with the free-market, would also lead to situations where one famine affected province would actually buy grain from its also famine hit neighbour.

⁹ Correspondence between Rokasovskii, Vishniakov and Pavlov 7, 19 June 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, 1 ll. 1-2, l. 6.

¹⁰ Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, pp. 31-3, p. 37.

¹¹ Durnovo to Rokasovskii 26 July 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, l. 67.

of the peasantry. ‘Food’ was conceived as a generic economic term: there was little sense of it as the dividing line between life and death.

This view of the growing crisis was undermined by pressure from the various provincial and uezd institutions. While by no means the only province to push for ‘food’ to be seen not as an economic issue, but one of desperate need, Tambov is useful to illustrate how pressure from the periphery could force a change in the policies of the centre. As covered in Chapter 2, pressure began as soon as a problem was noticed with Shatsk issuing aid in grain instead of cash, an action Rokasovskii supported in principle but objected to in practice. The governor asked the MVD for a decision on the matter and for permission to moderate prices by allowing the zemstvos buy grain from other provinces.¹² While his concern was to lower the price of grain, he now recognised that the situation required food, not cash, and action had to be taken quickly. In this he was some way behind the provincial zemstvo, who had already taken a ‘food first’ stance, recommending that aid should be in kind and not cash, and had asked for a temporary ban on exports abroad.¹³

Over the next few months this sense of a growing crisis in the basic availability of food continued to build. Rapidly overwhelmed by a shortage of officials, the uezd zemstvos persuaded Rokasovskii to ask all land captains to assist in verifying requests for loans.¹⁴ By August signs of distress were coming in from both the north and south of the province, which had been affected rather differently. From opposite ends of the province, the uezd marshals of the nobility in Kirsanov and Shatsk both warned of impending famine and urged a vigorous response.¹⁵ Police information revealed that one town in

¹² Rokasovskii to Durnovo 17 June 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 7-8.

¹³ *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, p. 17, p. 24, p. 11.

¹⁴ Rokasovskii to all land captains 27 July 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, l. 88.

¹⁵ Correspondence between Rokasovskii and the Kirsanov and Shatsk uezd marshals of the nobility 12, 26 August 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 171-2, ll. 209-11.

Temnikov uezd went several days without food until private charity and the zemstvo intervened and that aid might best be issued in surrogate crops as ‘the need in the province is so great’.¹⁶

From the crisis’ onset, Tambov’s provincial and uezd institutions pressured the governor, and therefore St. Petersburg, to see food policy in terms of urgent human need rather than economic management. This initially took the form of reports and aid requests borne out of analysis of harvest data. From the beginning of August 1891 we can see a distinctive change in tone; the evidence became more personal, direct and urgent. Now ‘masses of hungry population’ and the ‘unfortunate’ were threatened by famine while the need in the province was ‘great’.

What impact did all of this have on the position of the central government? Despite its commitment, for various reasons, to moderate expenses on the crisis and reliance on the market, reports from the provinces made it impossible for the MVD not to realise that what was happening was neither localised nor minor, but a systematic and catastrophic failure in the empire’s agricultural heartland. The MVD’s response, calling for cheaper surrogates to be used in aid instead of rye, may seem penny pinching, but the instruction was based on medical evidence that they provided better nutrition.¹⁷ Following shortly on from this, on 3 August, the MVD overturned sections of the 1889 Food Security Statute, allowing the zemstvos to issue food loans in grain and easing the restriction that they had to wait for requests from village societies before purchasing grain. This seemingly technical change unlocked the potential for a vast, if somewhat chaotic, programme of purchasing by the zemstvos. Illustrating the importance of a provincial case study in building a full picture of the relief effort, Robbins does not address this

¹⁶ Tambov provincial police board to the department of police 20 August 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 83-86.

¹⁷ Durnovo to all governors 11 July 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, l. 92.

change, an omission likely due to the fact that the relevant telegram seems to appear in provincial archives only.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, from August Durnovo began to press for greater unity in the relief effort, leading to the establishment of the food supply conferences while in September Rokasovskii made a request for food aid that went above that asked for by the provincial zemstvo. Finally, in late November the MVD instructed the Governor and the provincial zemstvo to start providing weekly updates on how much food was available, how much it had given out, where it was purchasing it from and if there were any delays in delivering it.¹⁸ Thus, the ways in which the imperial officials (the governor and the MVD) conceptualised food shifted rapidly as the crisis worsened, in response to pressures from below. The Food Security Statute and the initial response conceived of food as an abstract concept, where supply issues could be alleviated through market functions and food aid was to be provided in cash as an economic problem required an economic solution. However, the pressure from provinces such as Tambov forced a reassessment and a recognition that while the market would still be a key part of the solution, ‘food’ was more than just an abstract concept. It was an agrarian society’s most important economic unit but when it failed it became something infinitely more tangible, real and distressing – a matter of life and death.

Seed loans and sowing fields

Sowing was initially seen as the key element in the attempt to avert a crisis; aid would only go so far but it was economics that would allow for long term recovery, an echo of

¹⁸ Durnovo to Rokasovskii 27 November 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 29-30.

modern famine response policy.¹⁹ The operation to sow fields for the winter harvest was vital because ‘giving help to seed fields means a good harvest in 1892 and the recovery of the population’.²⁰ The sowing operation, which involved the purchase of one million *puds* of seed between July and 2 August and depended on the gradual, ad hoc release of funding, supports the argument that the province responded as well as could be expected in the circumstances.²¹ Aware of the need to ensure that fields were sown, the provincial and uezd authorities conducted their purchasing of seed grain in July. Since the vast majority of sowing in most uezds was completed by the third week of August, the whole operation took approximately eight weeks.²² While we can criticise the deficient information-gathering structures or the poor state of preparedness in general, it must be kept in mind that this was simply the reality of the situation and correcting it would have taken a wholesale change in the ways in which the provinces were governed. In this context, the eight week timescale surely ranks as a positive achievement and reflects an urgent yet broadly successful scrambling together of resources and manpower.

Of course, we need to drill down into the finer detail of the operation before we can reach any definite conclusion. Establishing accurate data or precise figures, however, presents as big a challenge for the historian as it did for the provincial officials in Tambov. An illustrative case in point is the operation to buy grain and sow fields for the winter harvest. Despite initial discrepancies between the total cost of the operation given by Rokasovskii and the provincial *uprava*, a cost of 1.35 million roubles at an average of 1

¹⁹ Sen and Devereux have argued that the issue in a famine crisis is not necessarily getting food into a region, it is about expanding a region’s ability to command food through entitlements and/or purchasing power. See: Sen, *Poverty and Famines*, pp. 162-6 and Devereux, *Theories of Famine*, p. 91.

²⁰ *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, p. 17.

²¹ Rokasovskii to Governor Kladishchev, Riazan Province 14 August 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 147-148.

²² Provincial zemstvo *uprava* to Rokasovskii 8 July 1891 and Rokasovskii to Durnovo 28 July 1891 GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 39-41, l. 83, Rokasovskii to MVD 16 August RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, l. 67, Tambov provincial police captain to department of police 20 August, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 83-6, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 195-8, *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, p. 17.

rouble 22.9 kopecks per *pud* was settled on.²³ This illustrates the tendency towards rounding-up and the fact that full information on the management of the operation became available only after the crisis was over and the accounts could be processed in a less hectic fashion. We shall use the 1.35 million rouble figure as the general cost and take the average cost per *pud* on a case-by-case basis where necessary. 1.35 million roubles far exceeded the provincial zemstvo's resources, and the provincial *uprava* was concerned about the burden that repaying this amount would place on the peasantry.²⁴ It therefore recommended lowering the level of cash aid requested in the belief that the impending rain would provide a better harvest. It still recommended that 400,000 roubles (83.33 per cent) of the provincial food capital be spent on sowing fields, allocated proportionally by need.²⁵

What did the 1.35 million roubles achieve? While the statistics give only the basic detail and are not the main focus of this chapter, which is the *process* of relief, they are useful to gauge the success of the relief effort and to provide some overall context. Rokasovskii's 1892 annual report and the provincial *uprava* agreed that just over 1.1 million *puds* of seed, or 18.3 per cent of the annual total for the winter harvest, were purchased and distributed.²⁶ While the 18.3 per cent could be seen as far too small a proportion, in the context of the severity of the crisis and the logistical challenges, this figure represents a relative success. There was, however, wide variation in the allocation of seed grain: it generally ranged from 10–28 per cent of the annual total but the highest

²³ Rokasovskii to Durnovo 4 January 1892, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 156-8, Rokasovskii's annual report gave the figure at 1,348,489r 55k at an average price of 1r 23k per *pud* while the provincial *uprava* calculated it at 1,343,598 roubles and the average cost at 1 rouble 22.9 kopecks. Prices paid ranged from 1.14 roubles (Kirsanov uezd) to 1.38 roubles (Temnikov uezd) per *pud* per uezd RGIA, f. 1284, op. 223, d. 232, p. 15 and, *Otchet po prodovol'stvennoi operatsii*, I, pp. 3-5, pp. 118-9.

²⁴ As the provincial *uprava* pithily noted, 'in other words, for every *chetvert* of rye they will return three' *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 38-44.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 38-44, pp. 17-27.

²⁶ Annual report of Governor Rokasovskii on Tambov province for 1892, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 223, d. 232, p. 14 and *Otchet po prodovol'stvennoi operatsii*, Vol. 2, pp. 4-14.

was Shatsk, considered to be the worst affected uezd, at 63.27 per cent (196,208 *puds*) of its usual sown total while the lowest was Lipetsk uezd at 0.006 per cent (25 *puds*) of its total.²⁷

What explains this variation? Lipetsk uezd did not initially request any aid to sow fields as its *uprava*, until the second half of June, believing that the harvest would be satisfactory and that any loans would be insignificant.²⁸ While Prince Tsertelev²⁹ raised the ‘serious discrepancy’ at the extraordinary provincial zemstvo meeting, it was simply passed to the provincial *uprava* to monitor.³⁰ It seems likely that the issue stemmed from a simple (but potentially disastrous) misunderstanding: the provincial *uprava* misread Lipetsk’s cautious optimism while the Lipetsk uezd *uprava* initially underestimated the provincial *uprava*’s level of sensitivity to this.³¹ There was a breakdown at every single level of the zemstvo’s communication structure, highlighting that the institutional machinery was clearly a brittle reed. A simple misunderstanding could have profound effects: the peasantry were forced to rely on their own resources after the uezd’s land captains told them that the zemstvo had none.³² The communication structure was stronger within the uezd than between uezd and province and news of aid rejections were likely to travel fast. It is worth noting that information got from the uezd *uprava* to a new

²⁷ This was the opinion of the Ministry of Finance and the provincial zemstvo reporting commission who noted that the uezd had lost nearly 68% of peasant fields to frost, Ministry of Finance internal report on Tambov Province, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 225-231 and *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia v dekabre 1891 goda*, p. 17, Annual report of Governor Rokasovskii on Tambov province for 1892RGIA, f. 1284, op. 223, d. 232, p. 15.

²⁸ *Zhurnaly Lipetskogo uezdno zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 19-20.

²⁹ D. N. Tsertelev was a poet, essayist and philosopher and the son of the ethnographer and former inspector of schools for Tambov and Kharkov, Nikolai Andreevich, and the brother of the diplomat and general consul of the temporary Russian government in Eastern Rumelia after the Russo-Turkish War: *Russkii biograficheskii slovar*, Vol. 25, pp. 481-2.

³⁰ *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia v dekabre 1891 goda*, p. 12.

³¹ In May and June, the Lipetsk *uprava* voiced concern about the rye harvest though it felt the potato and millet harvest would be satisfactory. After the heat of the second half of July caused widespread devastation to the crops, the Lipetsk *uprava* appealed for aid and were awarded 26,050 roubles for food aid *Zhurnaly Lipetskogo uezdno zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 19-20 and *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, p. 17.

³² *Zhurnaly Lipetskogo uezdno zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 19-20.

and parallel institution faster and clearer than it did to the provincial zemstvo. Yet in attempting to correct this mistake there is a sign of adaptability and provincial initiative. The provincial *uprava* used an MVD circular to request permission from Rokasovskii to change the monetary and seed allocation to allow Lipetsk to receive aid, in accordance with ‘local conditions’.³³ This permission was granted in July and, in August, two volosts in Lipetsk were granted six thousand roubles as there were large numbers who were unable to sow their fields.³⁴ The case of Lipetsk shows, therefore, that while the system was undoubtedly fragile, the capacity also existed to attempt to repair the damage with the provincial *uprava* taking advantage of a central decision to attempt to minimise the mistake.

This interpretation, where the *upravy* and assemblies attempted to compensate for structural limitations as best they could is the most convincing. Though the misunderstanding between the provincial *uprava* and the Lipetsk uezd *uprava* lends credence to the argument that provincial administration was in chaos, the picture from the remaining uezds is different. Of the eight uezds for which records survive, five (Tambov, Kirsanov, Usman, Borisoglebsk and Kozlov) carried out some form of detailed investigation of the harvest between May and June and the need for aid to sow fields for the next harvest. The uezd *upravy* of Tambov, Kozlov and Borisoglebsk all sent *upravy* or assembly members to gather information on reserves from village societies while the Kirsanov uezd *uprava* ordered volost’ elders to inspect the stores, uncovering huge shortfalls.³⁵ This hands-on approach shows that the various *upravy* were aware of their

³³ Tambov provincial zemstvo *uprava* to Rokasovskii, 30 July and MVD Circular No. 5035 18 July GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, l. 113, Durnovo to Rokasovskii 16-18 July 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 44-5.

³⁴ *Zhurnaly Lipetskogo ueznogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 22-23.

³⁵ *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo ueznogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 8-9, *Zhurnaly Usmanskogo ueznogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 4-5, *Zhurnaly Kozlovskogo ueznogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 67-69 and *Zhurnaly Borisoglebskogo ueznogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 34-36,

information gap, were sceptical of the information they did have and addressed both of these issues by taking advantage of their legal responsibility for food matters and the grain stores.³⁶

Granted control of the sowing operation in July, the provincial *uprava* determined the policies and processes that the *uezds* were to follow, with supervision carried out by it and Rokasovskii.³⁷ The provincial *uprava* quickly sent a letter to the *upravy* on how to conduct the seeding operation. It requested full operational details (including cost estimates), informed the *uezd upravy* that they expected prices to decline (a gross miscalculation, as events transpired) and that any loan from the imperial food capital was to be used for seed loans and would be allocated proportionally based on need (as with food aid).³⁸ The letter instructed the *uezd upravy* to inspect all requests, provide full information, prioritise only extreme cases of need and await binding instructions on allocation.³⁹ The *uezd upravy* were allowed, if it was useful, to hire an agent to purchase grain or to establish distribution points.⁴⁰ The provincial *uprava* was clearly seeking to build a picture of how the *uezd upravy* intended to manage the sowing operation, presumably so they could coordinate it better and avoid situations such as inter-*uezd* competition.

It is clear that this strategy went beyond supervision. The provincial *uprava* deliberately constructed it so that it was ‘concentrated in the closest hands’: the *uezd upravy*, the land captains and the *uezd marshals* of the nobility.⁴¹ The aim was to involve

Zhurnaly Kirsanovskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda, pp. 5-6, *Zhurnaly Borisoglebskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 34-6.

³⁶ Prohibited as they were from organising at the *volost* level, this offers the only plausible explanation as to how the Kirsanov *uprava* was able to instruct the *volosts* to reassess the stores.

³⁷ Rokasovskii to Governor Kladishchev, Riazan Province 14 August 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 147-148 and *Otchet po prodovol'stvennoi operatsii*, Vol. 2, pp. 3-4.

³⁸ Tambov provincial zemstvo *uprava* to Rokasovskii 8 July 1891 GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 39-41.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Otchet po prodovol'stvennoi operatsii*, Vol. 2, pp. 3-4.

each and every element of the institutional structure to attempt to correct for general defects and its own; while the uezd *upravy* were given some leeway in how to procure or store the seed grain, the amount allocated and the process of determining who received aid were all fixed at the centre.⁴²

However, the provincial *uprava* was often forced to report that it lacked precise data on the relief effort as it had not been supplied it by the uezd *upravy*. By mid-August the provincial *uprava* could not say with any certainty how the sowing operation was progressing other than 101,000 *chetverts* were now being distributed amongst Temnikov, Elatomsk, Spassk and Shatsk.⁴³ In late July these four uezds had asked the provincial *uprava* to handle the purchasing of seed; the only information that the provincial *uprava* could guarantee was that which it generated itself.⁴⁴ However, we should be aware that the information of the uezd *upravy* had come primarily from the volost' boards and was often incomplete or inaccurate. Ten uezd *upravy* were able to tell the provincial *uprava* in early August that they had purchased over 500,000 *puds*, even if they could not accurately say what they had done with it.⁴⁵ This suggests that the problems were based in the volost' and were compounded as they went up the structural chain. The provincial *uprava*'s isolation from the volost' illustrates the structural nature of problems with the

⁴² The provincial *uprava* noted that isolation from the peasant *soslovie* made its task difficult, the Tambov uezd *uprava* saw the introduction of the land captains, and their legal responsibility for the peasantry's welfare, as allowing the relief effort to be 'well ordered' while Count Bobrinskii told St. Petersburg that charitable efforts depended on the marshals of nobility for success, *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, p. 13, Tambov provincial *uprava* to Rokasovskii 7 September 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 275-278 and Count Bobrinskii to Plevé 14 March 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 100, ll. 134-42. Yanni Kotsonis noted that: 'In a very real sense, fiscal practice at the turn of the [twentieth] century was a regime of compulsion tempered by the bureaucracy's recognition of its own ignorance': Yanni Kotsonis, 'Face to Face': The state, the individual and the citizen in Russian taxation 1863-1917', *SR*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (Summer, 2004), p. 228.

⁴³ Tambov provincial *uprava* to Rokasovskii 16 August 1891 GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, l. 163. On 16 August Rokasovskii admitted to Durnovo that they only had detailed information from Shatsk uezd Correspondence between Durnovo, Rokasovskii and the provincial *uprava* 13, 16 and August GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 157-158, l. 163 and ll. 195-198.

⁴⁴ Tambov provincial *uprava* to Rokasovskii 26 July 1891 GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 184-187.

⁴⁵ Tambov provincial *uprava* to Rokasovskii 5 August 1891 GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 140-142.

relief effort. Communication was an essential part of the solution and the search for unity, control and consistency. It was regular but unsystematic, a knock-on effect of the haphazard way in which information was reported to it. While the MVD would later require regular updates on food loans, from the outset the provincial *uprava* sought to keep Rokasovskii 'rigorously' informed.⁴⁶ The provincial *uprava* kept its word and there were regular communications and updates between itself and Rokasovskii though most of these were situational with few regular, overall updates.⁴⁷

The provincial *uprava*'s response to the problems on a lower level was to seek to formally involve the land captains in the relief effort; they moved from seeking a sense of common responsibility to asking the governor for help. While they had instructed the *uezd upravy* to ensure that the peasantry sowed fields from their own resources where necessary, the provincial *uprava* had also resolved to ask the land captains to assist in this task. Receptive to the requests Rokasovskii issued two circulars to all land captains in the province in July, asking them to carry out the above and to help the *uezd zemstvos*, owing to a shortage of officials, to inspect the resolutions requesting aid to prevent false or exaggerated requests.⁴⁸

The lines of communication between the provincial *uprava* and Rokasovskii and from him to other institutions were open, regularly used and vital to the relief effort. Where the request involved help in obtaining assistance or correcting errors in relief rolls (and thus potentially reducing expenditure), Rokasovskii was more than willing to cooperate. Both the *uprava* and Rokasovskii appeared to realise that coordination and communication were the only initial alternative in the absence of a cohesive

⁴⁶ Tambov provincial zemstvo *uprava* to Rokasovskii 8 July 1891 GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 39-41.

⁴⁷ Only the letter on 22 August was a specific, overall summary while the rest were situational, minutes of *uprava* meetings or a response to an MVD request.

⁴⁸ Tambov provincial zemstvo *uprava* to Rokasovskii 8, 25 July 1891 GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 39-41, l. 79, Rokasovskii to land captains 27 July 1891 GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, l. 46, ll. 80-1.

administration. Additionally, each used the channel of communication to meet their own goals and priorities: the provincial *uprava* was able to place itself at the centre of the relief operation (securing the land captains as an additional executive arm) while Rokasovskii was able to practice a decentralised approach while overseeing a coordinated response. He also had political goals however. He asked the land captains to stress that the *uezd zemstvos* and the government, working together, were taking measures to secure the food supply'.⁴⁹ The eventual cost of the operation clearly concerned Rokasovskii, a fiscal conservative on public expenditure; he had also mentioned to the land captains the undesirability of burdening the province as a whole with excessive debt as a reason to encourage sowing from the peasantry's own resources where possible.⁵⁰

Thus at the same time as trying to ensure the sowing operation did not slow, he was telling the MVD that the provincial *zemstvo*'s estimate for aid was too high. Rokasovskii was trying to ensure the sowing operation did not slow down while also eliminating 'exaggerated' claims for aid and minimising the province's overall debt burden. Seemingly counter-intuitive, there was a logic behind this: as governor he had to defend the interests of the province by conducting a large relief effort and those of the imperial treasury by minimising the expense to the treasury of the relief effort. There was also some evidence for exaggerated claims being made by the peasantry.⁵¹ The 'togetherness' and unity of the *zemstvos* and the central government was also

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Rokasovskii to land captains 27 July 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, l. 46, ll. 80-1.

⁵¹ In June the Tambov *uezd uprava* voiced concern that their shortage of numbers meant that they may be forced to simply approve the requests from village societies, which may include those not in need, as opposed to checking them thoroughly. In late July a land captain in the fourth precinct of Kozlov *uezd* wrote to Rokasovskii and informed him that several societies, who had approached him for *zemstvo* aid for sowing, withdrew the request once they were made aware that the *zemstvo* would be providing food loans. The land captain concerned saw this as a sign that the peasants could sow from their own resources though it may also have been a strategy to maximise aid or wait until it was needed most, *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, p. 13 and Land captain of the 4th precinct, Kozlov *uezd*, to Rokasovskii 26 July 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, l.103.

emphasised; whether this was an attempt to show a united front (and thus prevent the peasantry playing the various institutions off against each other), or to show that the imperial government was coming to the aid of the peasantry in its hour of need, is unclear.

What is clear however is that Rokasovskii emphasised unity at every turn, telling St. Petersburg that the provincial and uezd institutions co-existed harmoniously and that the land captains assisted the zemstvo in the relief effort.⁵² This unity was a deliberate construction, designed to correct the serious structural flaws that had become apparent. In terms of the sowing operation unity was essentially a byword for control of the process by the provincial *uprava*. They aimed to quickly establish a uniform approach, close the information gap and compensate for the absence of an institutional link to the volost'. These steps were largely effective and the sowing operation took just over a month to complete. Yet problems still emerged and the jerry-rigging of a response architecture should ideally not have been necessary.

Securing the necessary resources emerged very quickly as a significant issue and the solution was again an ad hoc response and an appeal to Rokasovskii. Such was the shortage of resources that the provincial *uprava* had sought to arrange a system of loans, overseen by the land captains, between landowners and affected peasants and had to buy grain from other provinces.⁵³ But using a provincial *uprava* member and three agents, three hundred wagons of seed were contracted for in early July, mostly in Orel and Kharkov provinces and along the Graz-Tsaritsyn line though a lot of the actual grain came from Kiev and Bessarabia.⁵⁴ Problems were evident almost immediately however; a delay

⁵² Annual Report of Governor Rokasovskii on Tambov Province for 1891 RGIA, f. 1284, op. 223, d. 194, ll. 8-9.

⁵³ Tambov provincial *uprava* to Rokasovskii 26 July 1891 and Rokasovskii to land captains 31 July 1891 GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 84-7, ll. 89-90. Illustrating the potential flexibility of the relief effort, it seems that the idea to borrow from local landowners came from Temnikov uezd, where the uezd had asked local landowners to sell it rye to sow fields, *Zhurnaly Temnikovskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, p. 66.

⁵⁴ Tambov provincial *uprava* to Rokasovskii 28 July 1891 GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 84-7.

in receiving additional resources from the centre slowed down purchasing while the northern uezds, the worst affected, had no easy rail access.⁵⁵ Assuming that the grain would even get to the nearest train station was not something the zemstvo could rely on: seed grain began to back up in Penza province and it took a personal intervention by Rokasovskii with the governor of Penza to get things moving eventually.⁵⁶ While not the zemstvo's doing, this again illustrates structural vulnerabilities of the relief effort, and that the provincial zemstvo's efforts to exert control and maintain a strong relationship with Rokasovskii were the most viable coping strategies.

Unfortunately, the provincial idea, which lets us see provinces as initiative holders and more than poorer imitations of the centre, has negative consequences which compounded the above problems. Other provinces displayed Tambov's initiative and dispatched agents far and wide to find grain. In late July the provincial *uprava* repeatedly complained about other zemstvos purchasing grain in Tambov province, forcing competition and driving up prices; one provincial *uprava* member called for the establishment of lower norms to hold prices down.⁵⁷ Rokasovskii opposed this as the zemstvo agents were from affected provinces and were no 'less worried about the food question'; he personally attributed the blame to kulaks, traders and speculators who raised prices 'in view of exploiting an easy profit'.⁵⁸ The Food Security Statute 1889 also mandated that the grain trade was to be free and uninhibited, though Rokasovskii did seek

⁵⁵ For example, Temnikov was over 150 *versts* from stations such as South Pochelma, the grain stores in the north were empty and the provincial *upravas* agents could not find any grain in Ufa, Nizhnem and Chistopal, Tambov provincial *uprava* to Rokasovskii 5 August 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 139-142.

⁵⁶ Correspondence between Rokasovskii, Riazan governor's chancellery and the Spassk uezd zemstvo *uprava*, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, l. 182, l. 191, l. 193, l. 200 and l. 204.

⁵⁷ Tambov provincial *uprava* to Rokasovskii 26 July 1891 GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 84-87 and Special Conference with A. G. Vishniakov 28 July RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 56-66.

⁵⁸ Special Conference with A. G. Vishniakov 28 July 1891 RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 56-66. Rokasovskii would return to this issue of kulak exploitation; particularly in relation to alcoholism amongst the peasantry Annual Report of Governor Rokasovskii on Tambov Province for 1891, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 223, d. 232, ll. 8-9.

resources and official support for a public works programme and railway construction.⁵⁹

It would seem that there was no escaping the inherent duality of his position.

There was also no escaping the fact that not all problems were beyond the province's control. For the first but not the last time, Morshansk uезд was a source of concern. As we saw in Chapter 2, the powerful Minister of the Imperial Household, Count Vorontsov-Dashkov, went over Rokasovskii's head and secured an additional 500,000 roubles for the province. This was not the only incidence of a powerful imperial official intervening in Morshansk's affairs however. Prince Aleksandr Sergeivich Dolgorukov wrote to Durnovo and Rokasovskii in late July and listed five volosts that required loans over and above that issued by the Morshansk uезд *uprava*.⁶⁰ That it took two St. Petersburg based officials to highlight shortcomings in the relief effort highlights once again how vulnerable the lines of communication were.

Additionally, the response of the Morshansk uезд *uprava* does not suggest an authority in full control. In early August it questioned Dolgorukov's account of how they allocated loans and appeared to have waited for the harvest to end before conducting further checks on aid requests.⁶¹ Despite two urgent notices and the MVD's instruction, the *uprava*'s main response was the above reply and an appeal for their allocation to be restored to what they had initially requested in July.⁶² The provincial *uprava* backed the request and Rokasovskii authorised it in mid-August.⁶³ It is hard to see the issue as one of just resources though; Morshansk was a distribution point for other uyezds and by

⁵⁹ Special Conference with A. G. Vishniakov 28 July 1891 RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 56-66.

⁶⁰ Dolgorukov to Durnovo and Rokasovskii 28-31 July 1891 GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 100-102, ll. 107-108.

⁶¹ Morshansk uезд zemstvo *uprava* to Rokasovskii, 2 and 9 August 1891 GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, l. 117, l. 121.

⁶² Correspondence between Tambov provincial zemstvo *uprava* and Rokasovskii 28 July, 9 August and 15 August 1891 GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 104-6, ll. 154-155.

⁶³ Ibid.

August it had not provided up to date information to the provincial *uprava*.⁶⁴ Thus it would appear that the issue in Morshansk was structural in nature and located in either the separation between the volost and the zemstvo or a weak *uprava*.

This is given further credence by the events in the uezd's fifth precinct in late August. Land captain Nilov wrote to Rokasovskii on 22 August that he had compiled lists but they had not been inspected and he had not yet received any seed; Rokasovskii immediately instructed the Morshansk uezd *uprava* to dispatch an official and inspect the lists.⁶⁵ Nilov seems to have blamed non-inspection on the uezd zemstvo agent, Vasili Goliaev, who apparently disobeyed Nilov's instructions and refused to cooperate with him or the volost' board. In addition, he also mentioned a miller, Efim Gordaev, who apparently did not see that wealthy peasants should not receive aid and complained to Rokasovskii over his exclusion. Nilov reported this *in absentia*; on his return he was informed of the irregularities and decided to halt issuing aid and sent the lists to Rokasovskii, seemingly to assuage the peasantry's dissatisfaction.⁶⁶ On 26 August the Morshansk uezd *uprava* responded to Rokasovskii's instructions. Working with Nilov it had been established that the question of errors in the lists stemmed from two households, that the miller was genuinely in need (something Rokasovskii placed question marks beside) and that there were no other complaints in the precinct.⁶⁷ Nilov later reported that a novel solution had been found: the miller had been given seed from the private resources of Nilov's father, a landlord in the area.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Tambov provincial zemstvo *uprava* to Rokasovskii, 5 August 1891 GATO, f.4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 139-142.

⁶⁵ Correspondence between land captain Nilov and Rokasovskii 22 August 1891 GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 189-190.

⁶⁶ Nilov to Rokasovskii 23 August 1891 GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, l. 233.

⁶⁷ Morshansk uezd zemstvo *uprava* to Rokasovskii 23 August GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, l. 239.

⁶⁸ Nilov to Rokasovskii 26 August 1891 GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, l. 240.

The Nilov case is a microcosm of what could very easily go wrong: poor communication, a weak infrastructure and resource shortfalls. Yet the issue was resolved a mere four days after Rokasovskii was made aware of it, illustrating the potential efficiency of the relief effort and the sobering fact that displeasing the Tsar's appointee often had more impact than local need. When the provincial authorities intervened, and intervene they did, each issue was usually corrected. Rather than fall apart, the provincial *uprava*, with Rokasovskii's assistance, sought to impose some semblance of order and coordination. Given the lack of resources and ever changing situation, this was the only possible strategy. Perhaps seared by this experience, they ended the summer convinced that a more uniform approach was needed as they were facing into what would become the most serious element of the relief effort: food.

Food Aid

While the province was slow to detect the signs of the oncoming crisis and severely underestimated the extent of the crop failure, there was a recognition early on that food aid would be necessary. There were declarations from the Tambov provincial zemstvo, the Tambov uezd zemstvo and the Kirsanov uezd zemstvo about 'urgent need' for food, that there 'were already hungry' and that 'famine, with all its terrible accompaniments [...] ' was about to happen.⁶⁹ The official food aid programme did not begin until late in 1891 when it began to escalate sharply. There is evidence however that food distress began in Tambov province extremely early; the Tambov uezd *uprava* started receiving requests for food aid in late May.⁷⁰ The number of similar requests must have escalated

⁶⁹ See *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, p. 17, *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo uездnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 13-4 and *Zhurnaly Kirsanovskogo uездnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, p. 6.

⁷⁰ *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo uездnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 12-3

sharply as Rokasovskii asked all land captains in late July to assist the uezd *upravy* in inspecting resolutions for food loans.⁷¹ Aleksandrovskii volost' submitted three resolutions for food loans between July and August, with the last requesting 6,048 *puds* from the provincial food capital.⁷²

Despite this, there was an initial prioritisation of the sowing operation; the potential collapse of the harvest and the economic catastrophe it would bring meant that food aid was a lower priority. Kirsanov only requested 'initial' assistance while the Tambov uezd zemstvo *uprava* and the Aleksandrovskii volost' board reduced their original requests owing to the prospect of a good harvest and potential earnings for the peasantry.⁷³ The provincial zemstvo also decided to limit its request to cover food needs to October to December, as the annual meeting in December would have better information for the level of need after January. The provincial zemstvo assembly also set aside 80,000 roubles of its 480,000 roubles provincial food capital for food needs.⁷⁴ The *uprava* however, had recommended that 200,000 roubles be allocated for food needs.⁷⁵ The assembly agreed with the reporting commission's more optimistic assessment on the harvest and peasant economy.

We have seen earlier that the zemstvos pushed throughout the summer for food not as an economic issue but as one of urgent, human need. However, the province did not assign immediate temporal urgency to food need. As the provincial *uprava* informed Rokasovskii in mid-August, it and the rest of the province would turn its attention to food aid once the sowing operation was completed.⁷⁶ We may see this as hopelessly naïve:

⁷¹ Rokasovskii to all land captains No. 3297 27 July 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, l. 88.

⁷² Correspondence between Alexandrovskii volost' board, land captain of the fifth precinct and the Tambov uezd zemstvo *uprava* 24 July – 7 August 1891, GATO, f. 145, op. 1, d. 1039, ll 1-7.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 17-25, pp. 10-16.

⁷⁵ Ibid, pp. 38-44.

⁷⁶ Tambov provincial *uprava* to Rokasovskii 13 August 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, l.163.

prioritisation of the sowing operation meant it was a success but the institutions failed to devise a back-up plan if the extreme weather continued. Not absolving the institutions of responsibility, we should also understand the context: short on time and resources and faced with a crisis of uncertain scale that would quickly threaten to overwhelm.

What emerges over the summer is an odd combination of poor analysis and an attempt at long term planning. The institutions severely underestimated the scale of the coming crisis, seeing food as a problem that would emerge once the harvest earnings finished. The provincial *uprava* opted instead to take a series of actions aimed at a form of long-term planning and a minimal amount of redundant capacity building. It recommended that the 200,000 roubles it requested for food should not be issued all at once and instructed the *uezd upravu* in early July that grain leftover from the sowing operation could be used for food aid in kind.⁷⁷ Of the initial 2 million roubles granted by St. Petersburg over the summer, 470,000 roubles (26 percent), were spent on grain to store for food loans in the winter.⁷⁸

Prioritising the sowing operation preparing for food distress in winter ties with a harsh reality that confronted the provincial *uprava*: the province simply did not have the resources to tackle food aid over the summer. Apart from imperial loans, the province had 355,370 roubles from various sources, 183,458 *chetverts* of crops in stores (though there should have been just over 664,000 *chetverts*) and the management of the village stores was strongly criticised.⁷⁹ Rokasovskii described these resources as ‘insignificant’.⁸⁰ In the previous chapter we saw that shortly after trying to limit the

⁷⁷ *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 17-25, pp. 10-16 and Tambov provincial zemstvo *uprava* to Rokasovskii 8 July 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 38-41.

⁷⁸ *Otchet Tambovskoi gubernskoi zemskoi upravu po prodovol'stvennoi operatsii*, Vol. 1, pp. 1-2.

⁷⁹ *Obzor Tambovskoi gubernii za 1891 god*, pp. 17-21.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

zemstvo's requests for aid to 1.5 million roubles overall, he told the MVD that that would not be enough and new applications would be needed in December.⁸¹

The provincial and uezd authorities had greatly underestimated the initial potential for food need, but had taken a number of steps to deal with some of the distress. On 28 July, Vishniakov, of the MVD's economic department, was briefed on these measures. While showing that Tambov was not ignoring the situation, the meeting's minutes also reflect some of the administration's structural weaknesses. Chief among them was again the way in which the province was structured; the uezd zemstvo could 'not fully enter into all administrative actions' while a raft of contradictory information was coming in showing that in some precincts there was an average harvest.⁸² This led Rokasovskii to evince considerable caution: he called for extraordinary care and prudence, and put responsibility on the land captains for careful evaluation of resolutions for food aid.⁸³ Thus, in an effort to limit mistakes, as there were two simultaneous relief operations and capacity and information problems, they slowed the food relief operation down, reflecting the higher priority on the sowing operation. The Kozlov uezd zemstvo appears to have been the only uezd zemstvo that took direct action against food distress early in the summer, selling grain at favourable prices and requesting 26,000 roubles for food aid in the summer.⁸⁴

The conference shows there was no overall institutional strategy for immediate food aid, an impression reinforced by the lack of specific rules for food loans even by mid-August, as the focus was on the shortage of rye.⁸⁵ This shortage of rye, and the price

⁸¹ Rokasovskii to Durnovo 12 July 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, l. 54.

⁸² Minutes of the Special Conference with Director Vishniakov 28 July 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 56-66.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Rokasovskii to Governor Kladishchev, Riazan Province 14 August 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 147-8.

they had to pay for it, appears to have been a main concern at the conference. Kozlov's sale of grain had aimed at meeting and the 'removal of the despotism of the kulaks and their predatory means of profit'.⁸⁶ Despite, or perhaps because of, the presence of a senior MVD official, it seems A.N. Muratov, a member of the provincial *uprava*, was not afraid to challenge; he also asked that the 'significant' commission expenses the zemstvo had to pay come from the zemstvo account not the relief loans.⁸⁷ Muratov felt that non-Tambov traders were responsible and called for lower norms to control this while Rokasovskii placed the blame on local traders, kulaks and speculators who had 'intentions of exploiting an easy profit', stating that the outside agents were concerned representatives of other affected zemstvos.⁸⁸ The disagreement between Rokasovskii and Muratov highlights the tensions in their respective roles and the provincial idea. Muratov was concerned solely with Tambov's interests while Rokasovskii sought to defend the zemstvo and peasantry but against what he saw as a local problem while also needing to act in the empire's interests.

While lacking a coordinated institutional strategy for food need, it seems the province did have some form of response: the administration had *outsourced* the provision of food relief to private charity. The July 1891 Committee and its *popechitel'stvo*s collected money and material and allocated them in towns and most zemstvo precincts.⁸⁹ Specific details for August and September are sparse but grants were made to the Tulezhko bakery to 'release grain free and at lower prices' while in Tambov town up to twenty *puds* of baked grain were made available free or at a discount of forty

⁸⁶ Minutes of the Special Conference with Director Vishniakov 28 July 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 56-66.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

percent to the market price.⁹⁰ Details for the uezd sectional committees are patchy; a fact acknowledged by Vice-Governor Choglokov, but in September 146 *puds* of flour were distributed in Morshansk, Temnikov, Shatsk and Kirsanov uezds.⁹¹ Neither the institutional nor the charitable relief effort, as covered in the last chapter, had adequate links to the affected villages. This often led to reactions based on poor information but they do illustrate the cooperative relationship between charity and zemstvo. In August local welfare committees in Temnikov and Lipetsk distributed a total of 1,700 *puds* based on rumours of food shortages which had left peasants either without food or eating surrogates.⁹² While some of the rumours were apparently unfounded, the uezd zemstvo had begun, as a result, to collect information on ‘actual need’.⁹³ Food aid at this early stage was not a coherent, unified programme, but the *popechitel'stvo*s (opened based on need) and the zemstvos should be seen not as competing structures but as cooperating, parallel ones. The role of the former was to fill in the gaps of the latter and to help those who would not be entitled to zemstvo food loans. It was, in essence, a way to take some of the pressure off the over-stretched provincial institutions. This was explicitly endorsed by Governor Rokasovskii who told the first provincial food conference in September that the welfare committees ‘will of course operate under zemstvo institutions in cases where there is a need to immediately relieve need which has not yet been inspected in the normal procedure’.⁹⁴ This aim would also find occasional expression in reality. In December, the land captain for the first precinct of Lebedian uezd told Rokasovskii that the sectional committee ‘appear as co-workers of the *uprava* in the food matter’ and that this reduces

⁹⁰ Correspondence between Governor Rokasovskii, Vice-Governor Choglokov and the MVD, 25 September, 5 October 1891, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 250, ll. 1-6.

⁹¹ Vice-Governor Choglokov to MVD Economic Department 19 November 1891, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 250, l. 24.

⁹² Captain of the Tambov provincial gendarme to department of police 20 August, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 83-6.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Minutes of the TPFC 4 September 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 92-7.

the amount the *uprava* has to issue in loans or by sales, reducing the debt for them and the peasantry.⁹⁵

This pressure intensified rapidly in September with Governor Rokasovskii sounding the alarm to the MVD over the seriously increased scale of the problem; there were ‘many peasants [...] in extreme need of food loans [...]’ with up to 300,000 needing food aid.⁹⁶ Rokasovskii did not share the provincial food conference’s view on the scale of food need but agreed that the resources of the zemstvos were insufficient and that the task was a deeply complex one.⁹⁷ As we saw in the last chapter, Rokasovskii would start to press the centre to provide millions in loans to aid the relief effort. The crisis was immediate however and the province’s institutions were facing an unenviable situation: with food need sharply increasing the provincial zemstvo only had 500,000 roubles and 300,000 *puds* left.⁹⁸ This was clearly not enough: the Kozlov uezd zemstvo, despite using a particularly restrictive estimation of food need, calculated it would need 200,000 *puds*, which would cost nearly 300,000 roubles at the current price while in Lipetsk several peasants had apparently sold all their possessions to pay for food.⁹⁹ The situation was even worse in the village stores: Tambov’s 2,970 stores only held 115,780 chetverts of all types of grain, again showing how vulnerable the province was to the crisis.¹⁰⁰ Until extra resources arrived from the centre, the province would have to maximise its resources as best it could.

⁹⁵ Land captain 1st precinct Lebedian uezd to Rokasovskii 12 December 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 156-7.

⁹⁶ Rokasovskii to MVD 11 September 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 283-5.

⁹⁷ Minutes of the TPFC 4 September 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 92-7.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Zhurnaly Kozlovskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 73-4, *Zhurnaly Lipetskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 26-7. See also *Zhurnaly Kirsanovskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 8-10, *Zhurnaly Usmanskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 250-2.

¹⁰⁰ *Khlebnye zapasy*, p. 14

Rokasovskii and the provincial *uprava* set about doing exactly that as quickly as possible. The provincial *uprava* divided its 500,000 roubles, spending 150,000 roubles directly to feed the peasantry and allocated the other 350,000 roubles between the twelve uyezds; this was inversely proportional to how much seed for food each uezd had.¹⁰¹ On Rokasovskii's suggestion, the conference agreed to buy all available food resources, whether rye or surrogates, and that aid should primarily be in the form of selling these resources at cost price and to establish stores relative to need, using information from the provincial *uprava*.¹⁰² Taken together, these steps illustrate that the province had finally begun to take food need seriously and was developing a concrete strategy to tackle it. Spending the 500,000 roubles was an immediate relief for the most needy while Rokasovskii's suggestions aimed at helping those not entitled to loans while also helping to ease the financial pressure on the zemstvos. The suggestion to purchase 'all available' food resources underscores the urgency; while the use of surrogates if necessary had long been accepted, now there was no real selectivity: if it could be eaten, it would be bought. The proposal to establish grain stores, and their location, illustrates that an element of strategic planning had finally begun to filter through. Their haphazard location, especially in the northern uyezds, posed a serious problem and by establishing them where need was higher, the province was creating a relatively more efficient and concentrated network that would give it redundant capacity. All of these were comparatively small steps, and not revolutionary, but within the tight legal and fiscal context, were practical temporary solutions, again underscoring the key argument that the response was the best given the circumstances.

From September on, however, intentions would clash with reality. The food aid relief effort from then until December can be split into two sections: the co-ordinated

¹⁰¹ *Zhurnaly Spasskogo uездnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 290-1.

¹⁰² Minutes of the TPFC 4 September 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 92-97.

effort to purchase grain and the internal, *volost*' level difficulties that ran parallel to it. Focusing on the broader, macro level before turning to the micro aspect lets us see how the various institutions tried to grapple with the varied and changing problems that occurred.

While there was unanimous commitment to securing as many food resources as possible, this quickly proved difficult. Unable to source sufficient grain from neighbouring provinces, the province's *zemstvos* turned to locations further away, and requested a funding advance to prevent this slowing down or stopping of the purchase and delivery of the badly needed grain.¹⁰³ The *zemstvo uprav*y remained in firm control, dispatching members to purchase grain and while local traders were used, this was under the 'constant supervision' of the *uezd uprav*y.¹⁰⁴ The determination to remain in control combined with the distances that were now being required stretched the province's resources to the limit. Responding to an MVD request for detailed information in late November, Vice-Governor Choglokov laid bare the depth of the problems confronting the province's institutions. The *uezd uprav*y had bought 500 wagons of grain that had not yet arrived and Choglokov warned that 'shipping goes extremely slowly'.¹⁰⁵ This difficulty in sourcing grain would remain the single biggest obstacle over these few months. M.A. Kononov, a member of the provincial *uprava*, was dispatched to arrange contracts and shipping for grain. His report to the *uprava* in late November makes for sobering reading. The provincial *uprava* were contracted with the Skaramanga trading house but Kononov reported that some of the grain was not being transported because of problems on several rail lines. Kononov asked Skaramanga to consider alternative routes,

¹⁰³ Minutes of the TPFC 22 November 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 4-12.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Vice-Governor Choglokov to Rokasovskii 28 November 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 31-33.

including shipping by boat.¹⁰⁶ Kononov visited the *uprava*'s other agent, the local trader Blokhin, and found that while he was active, there were severe delays on the Vladikavkaz railway; he telegraphed Rokasovskii to ask him to personally apply for priority for Tambov.¹⁰⁷ Rokasovskii, who was in St. Petersburg, acted quickly: several days later a command was issued from the 'highest railway institutions' to ship thirty wagons a day to the province.¹⁰⁸ Kononov concluded that this would only supply one third of the province's needs but unfortunately achieving even that was doubtful due to wagon shortages, despite the best intentions of the railway's management.¹⁰⁹ Yet there was little option but to seek grain from outside the province: purchasing from within reduced the amount available for local markets and was thus counter-productive so Kononov had ordered an end to local purchasing.¹¹⁰ The only bright spot in the report was that its agents were following the provincial *uprava*'s instructions, though Kononov requested more be appointed.¹¹¹

Kononov's report highlighted just how serious the railway crisis had become. In late November Durnovo warned all governors that the Vladikavkaz railway, a crucial supply artery, was over capacity and *zemstvo* purchases were accumulating.¹¹² Kononov and Rokasovskii had articulated similar concerns earlier with both preferring to purchase via south-western railways, mainly through Kharkov, which offered a quicker though more expensive delivery.¹¹³ A sharp rise in prices added to the notion of a perfect storm;

¹⁰⁶ Tambov provincial *zemstvo uprava* to Rokasovskii 28 November 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 40-7.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Rokasovskii to Tambov provincial *zemstvo uprava* 22 November 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, l. 31.

¹⁰⁹ Tambov provincial *zemstvo uprava* to Rokasovskii 28 November 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 40-7.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Durnovo to all Governors 28 November 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, l. 87.

¹¹³ Rokasovskii to Tambov provincial *zemstvo uprava* 23 November 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, l. 36.

until October the uezds had been able to source rye for roughly 1 rouble 13 kopecks per *pud* but by late November and December this had risen to an average of 1 rouble 35 kopecks with the local Saratov market charging nearly 1 rouble 40 kopecks.¹¹⁴ When rye could be found it was expensive and almost impossible to ship. This led to some uezds pushing back against the established rules to maximise the few resources they had. While most other uezds stuck relatively close to the MVD and provincial norm of 30 *funts* per ‘eater’ in food aid, Shatsk issued 20 *funts*, or half a *pud*.¹¹⁵ Yet Shatsk was widely seen as the worst affected uezd though it lacked easy rail access and had a high level of debt to its grain stores.¹¹⁶ This meant Shatsk had to make a number of difficult decisions. The Shatsk uezd *uprava* had allocated loans more equitably by reducing the amount but opening it up to those of working age, paid for by selling rye and barley at possibly slightly above cost price.¹¹⁷ They were issuing loans in advance to save money and were inspecting lists to eliminate those who did not qualify, to reduce costs and eliminate stock uncertainty.¹¹⁸ Shatsk is a perfect example of the difficulties that affected the food relief operation and the way in which the province tried to solve them. Its policy seems less an arbitrary reduction than an attempt to ensure that it was at least able to issue *something* as opposed to quickly burning through its resources.

Dry though they may be, transport and price issues underscore the difficulties that faced Tambov province. Food need was spiking sharply and Russia’s infrastructure, especially its rail network, simply buckled and began to give way under the strain.¹¹⁹ The free market oriented 1889 Food Security Statute exposed the zemstvos to the vagaries of

¹¹⁴ *Otchet po prodovol'stvennoi operatsii*, Vol. 1, pp. 118-9, Ministry of Finance (Railway Department) Grain price update 29 November, 6 December, 13 December, 20 December, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, l. 64, l. 105, l. 153, l. 194.

¹¹⁵ Usman and Shatsk issued roughly the same amount of aid (718 and 781 *puds*) yet Shatsk issued to 1,708 ‘eaters’ compared to Usman’s 718, *Statisticheskie dannye*, p. 77.

¹¹⁶ *Khlebnye zapasy*, p. 14.

¹¹⁷ *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 367-70.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ For more on the railway crisis see Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, pp. 76-94.

supply and demand; the internal grain market was clearly dysfunctional and rail chaos appears to have cut various areas off, creating isolated markets which led to dramatic price spikes. Surmounting these obstacles was only the beginning of problems: some grain had to be transported 100-150 *versts* to northern uezds owing to the absence of rail links and even transport by animal was difficult.¹²⁰ By December the provincial zemstvo assembly was well aware of how serious the issue of transportation had become. The reporting commission estimated that forty-seven wagons of grain a day were required but that they averaged only seventeen per day and in the week before the provincial zemstvo assembly this had fallen to just under eleven.¹²¹ Despite deliveries by rail and boat, shortages began to mount up. By the 16 December each uezd was awaiting delivery of at least 40,000 *puds* while Tambov uezd was waiting for over 200,000 *puds*.¹²² Compounding this was the worsening situation of the village societies' grain stores. Rokasovskii had asked the land captains in early October to provide monthly totals, presumably to provide better data for the relief effort. Like many of the reports from this time, they make grim reading. Spassk and Shatsk uezd reported no deposits at all for October, Tambov and Usman none for November and December while the only positive results came from individual volosts in Morshansk.¹²³ By mid-December, village society stores across the province were almost exhausted and unable to provide food aid, with just under 211,500 *puds* of rye and oats available.¹²⁴ As the crisis had deepened and

¹²⁰ Vice-Governor Choglokov to Rokasovskii 28 November 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 31-33, *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 361-3.

¹²¹ *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 361-3.

¹²² Tambov provincial zemstvo *uprava* weekly grain update 16 December 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4194, l. 127.

¹²³ Correspondence between Rokasovskii, Shatsk, Spassk, Tambov and Usman uezd zemstvo *upravy* and land captain 2nd precinct, Morshansk uezd October – December, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 57-8, ll. 61-2, l. 63, l. 101, l. 125, ll. 165-6.

¹²⁴ Rokasovskii to Durnovo 16 December 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, l. 129 and Correspondence between Rokasovskii and the Tambov provincial zemstvo *uprava* 18 December, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 143-4..

worsened, the first line of famine relief had weakened. Tambov uezd was awaiting almost as much in one week as every village in the province had available.

The province's institutions had not expected food need to arise as soon as it did and it is clear that their planning for the last few months of 1891 was inadequate. The scale of the crisis took Tambov's institutions aback; even allowing for the fact that those aged 18-55 were excluded from receiving food loans, 50 per cent of the population needed food aid by December.¹²⁵ The provincial zemstvo's reporting commission warned that, because of increasing need and supply difficulties, 'the result [...] will be the onset of famine in the literal sense with all its terrible and irretrievable losses'.¹²⁶ The numbers receiving food loans went from just under 3,200 people in October to 363,449 in December, at an average monthly range of 23.6 *funts* in October to 28.8 *funts* in December.¹²⁷ 316,148 *puds* of food loans were issued from October to December, with just over 262,000 of this in December alone.¹²⁸ This fell far below the 50 per cent requirement the provincial *uprava* had identified and to that we must add the 160,000 it was determined needed charitable aid.¹²⁹

Yet just as in the sowing operation, they were able to perform better than the chaos that confronted them would suggest. There were serious shortcomings but given the resource and structural contexts, they operated at their maximum potential. Indeed, there was a sense amongst the province's institutions that they had done all that was possible but that it had not been enough. The reporting commission felt that the provincial *uprava* and Rokasovskii had acted 'resolutely' and 'energetically' in trying to increase rail

¹²⁵ Correspondence between Rokasovskii and the Tambov provincial zemstvo *uprava* 18 December 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 143-4.

¹²⁶ *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 361-3.

¹²⁷ *Statisticheskie dannye*, p.p 37, 57, 77.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 38-9.

¹²⁹ Correspondence between Pleve and Rokasovskii, 18 December 1891, 1 January 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, l. 150, l. 215.

capacity and find alternative routes.¹³⁰ There had been a considerable degree of success in spite of everything. The provincial and uezd zemstvos, battling a supply crisis, price rises and other zemstvos, purchased nearly 1.2 million *puds* of food supplies by mid-December, primarily from Taganrog, the North Caucasus, Ekaterinoslav and the Kursk – Kiev railway.¹³¹ The provincial zemstvo assembly had, in July, estimated, that it would need 1,358,000 *puds* for food needs from October to December.¹³² A gap of 158,000 *puds* is considerable and represents a significant number of potential loans but we should also recognise that, given the transport and pricing issues, to be able to meet most of the target is impressive. It also shows that perhaps the provincial zemstvo was more capable of long-term planning than it seems: in the end, need was much closer to its original estimate than Rokasovskii's. There are also signs that the zemstvos worked to rebuild their own grain stores to try to compensate for the collapse of those in the village. By mid-December, the zemstvos had built up food reserves of 852,000 *puds*, divided between the uezds 'in sufficient quality'.¹³³ The province's institutions had responded to external problems, such as grain supply and prices, and internal ones such as infrastructure, with the same mix of ad hoc measures and an emphasis on control and consistency. The provincial *uprava* and Rokasovskii took early steps to try to redirect grain shipments and Kononov visited each designated agent to reinforce the provincial *uprava*'s instructions. Rokasovskii used his personal influence in St. Petersburg to secure priority for the province's traffic. A rising sense of chaos, especially on the railways, gripped Russia in these months and despite the best efforts of St. Petersburg, the provinces were, to a certain

¹³⁰ *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 361-3.

¹³¹ Correspondence between Rokasovskii and the Tambov provincial zemstvo *uprava* 18 December 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 143-4.

¹³² *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 23-4. The figure was reported in chetverts, a measurement based on the density of each respective grain but has been converted using Stephen G. Wheatcroft's approximated coefficient of 1 chetvert = 7.67 *puds*, Stephen G. Wheatcroft, 'Grain production and utilisation in Russia and the USSR before collectivisation' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Birmingham, 1980), p. 6.

¹³³ Correspondence between Rokasovskii and the Tambov provincial zemstvo *uprava* 18 December 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 143-4.

extent, on their own. Tambov's micromanagement, particularly of its trading agents, was an attempt to put some sense of order on this chaos. The province sought to maximise its resources with a reasonably simple strategy: the provincial *uprava*, in effect the executive agency of the relief effort, strictly regulated the broad strategy with political support from Rokasovskii but they were ambivalent as to where the grain would come from or how to transport it. With chaos the defining feature of these months, the province's institutions approached it much as they had the sowing operation: with an overall, disciplined strategic focus but with flexibility on the details.

It is arguable that part of this focus was because it was the one area where it could be guaranteed. At the last provincial food conference in December, Rokasovskii emphasised that correct allocation loans depended on the communication and unity from those managing it in the *uezds*.¹³⁴ Rokasovskii toured the province and recommended that each *uezd* establish its own food conference as only this offered unity, and that in parts, seemingly uniform cases could differ in details.¹³⁵ In essence, Rokasovskii was arguing that there could be local differentiation but that it had to be handled in a consistent manner as wild variation would threaten the integrity of the relief effort.

This exhortation was borne out of the experience of the past few months. One week after the provincial food conference in September, Rokasovskii issued a circular to all *uezd upravu*, land captains and *uezd ispravniks*. As with previous circulars, this one restated several of Rokasovskii's key political goals; food loans were to be calculated with 'extreme moderation', areas had satisfactory harvests and earnings and food was to be bought at a 'moderate price'.¹³⁶ Despite his increased awareness of the crisis,

¹³⁴ Minutes of the TPFC 17 December 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 136-40.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ Rokasovskii to all *uezd upravu*, *ispravniks* and land captains 11 September 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 298-300.

Rokasovskii still miscalculated badly; he claimed that as the export of rye and rye flour abroad had been banned, ‘there will be no difficulties in getting it’.¹³⁷ To ensure that only those who were entitled to loans received them, Rokasovskii requested that the resources of every peasant household be investigated with ‘all possible accuracy’.¹³⁸ The most striking thing about the circular was that Rokasovskii ordered the officials, when inspecting village societies, not to ‘rely on the inquiries or reports of any one peasant or immediate peasant authorities’.¹³⁹ Rokasovskii did not do this to combat ‘exaggerated’ claims however; the previous verification of claims had apparently been done this way and Rokasovskii was worried this could now turn out to be ‘insufficient’.¹⁴⁰ In other words, while Rokasovskii was concerned with moderation and eligibility, he was also keen to ensure that all those who qualified for food loans received them.¹⁴¹ This hardly speaks to a cold and uncaring bureaucracy, whatever the other manifest failings of the relief effort.

The emphasis on detailed inspections did present problems however. Several *uezd uprav* found themselves overwhelmed with work inspecting resolutions in such a tight time-scale, and appealed to their assemblies to appoint additional representatives to help.¹⁴² Kirsanov and Borisoglebsk *uprav* found that they were not able to determine how many people required aid.¹⁴³ Timing was not the only difficulty with inspection: even if they were able to inspect every household quickly, there was no guarantee that

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² See for example *Zhurnaly Temnikovskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 66-8, *Zhurnaly Lipetskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 42-3, *Zhurnaly Kozlovskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 74-7 and *Zhurnaly Kirsanovskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, p. 10.

¹⁴³ *Zhurnaly Kirsanovskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, p. 10 and *Zhurnaly Borisoglebskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, p. 279.

they would get accurate results. Several uezds reported that the peasantry were attempting to conceal or hide their resources; Borisoglebsk's *uprava* reported that peasants 'in the hope of receiving aid from the zemstvo, without exception enrol in the numbers of the needy and by all means hide their own food resources [...]'.¹⁴⁴ By 5 November this concern was no longer being expressed by just a few uezds and was raised at the provincial food conference. There was concern that nearly every list contained peasants who were hiding their resources and, more importantly, that the peasantry rejected the idea that food aid should only be for those in extreme need.¹⁴⁵ This made it difficult to establish an accurate picture of need; Rokasovskii had already called the figures presented to him by the land captains as 'exaggerated'.¹⁴⁶ These delays further hampered the relief effort and by the last half of November only six uezds had provided detailed requests, forcing the provincial *uprava* to use them to estimate the overall level of need.¹⁴⁷ This reliance on extrapolation could lead to miscalculation, highlighting the inadequacy of resources and robust planning. Other than extrapolation, the only solution available to the institutions was to inspect the lists *again*, which would lead only to further delays and resentment. The best of a bad lot of choices, further inspections were ordered in September and November.¹⁴⁸

This issue throws into stark relief the fragmented nature of provincial government. As the provincial *uprava* put it, it was hard to detect exaggerated claims as it was 'not involved in any peasant *soslovie*'.¹⁴⁹ The only institution with any real contact with the

¹⁴⁴ *Zhurnaly Kozlovskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, p. 77, *Zhurnaly Lipetskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 42-3 and *Zhurnaly Borisoglebskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, p. 279.

¹⁴⁵ Minutes of the TPFC 5 November 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 126-133.

¹⁴⁶ Minutes of the TPFC 4 September 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 92-7.

¹⁴⁷ Minutes of the TPFC 5 November 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 126-33, Minutes of the TPFC 22 November GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 4-12

¹⁴⁸ Minutes of the TPFC 4 September 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 92-7, Minutes of the TPFC 5 November 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 126-33.

¹⁴⁹ Tambov provincial zemstvo *uprava* to Rokasovskii 7 September 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, 4192, ll. 275-8.

peasantry were the land captains and they were only several months in post. It is likely that the peasantry saw the inspections as an imposition and attempt to ‘cheat’ them out of the aid; subsequent inspections were likely to inflame tensions further. Thus the two main institutions supposed to oversee peasant administration and food security were not fully capable of relating to the people they were supposed to help; the impression was probably one of ‘outsiders’ coming in to make life more miserable. Added to this febrile mix were often the actions of officials or important community figures themselves. In Saltykovskii volost’, Spassk uezd, Fr. Ioanna Butakov was investigated by the local *ispravnik* and dismissed as a dean by the Bishop of Tambov and Shatsk for inciting resistance to volost’ and government officials.¹⁵⁰ Fr. Butakov apparently complained about various officials and alleged that the government could afford to feed everyone but ‘did not care’ about the peasantry.¹⁵¹ He was accused of irregularities in allocating aid and there were suggestions of embezzlement over funeral expenses.¹⁵² The combination of the zemstvo’s multiple inspections, the actions of people such as Fr. Butakov, and the growing level of need created the potential for unrest to flare up.

This, however, did not happen as frequently as might have been imagined. In fact, disturbances of any kind only really seemed to occur from the beginning of December. In early December a landowner in Bolshoi Dobrinki, Usman uezd, Luk’ianovich wrote to Rokasovskii and told him that the peasants in the area needed grain and were threatening his estate at night.¹⁵³ The land captain investigated the issue and found that Luk’ianovich had refused to issue them rye on October and so they were ‘obliged to take it by force’, something the *starosts* denied.¹⁵⁴ What appears to have happened is that the grain they

¹⁵⁰ Spassk uezd *ispravnik* to Rokasovskii 24 December 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4197, ll. 1-3.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ Correspondence between Luk’ianovich, Rokasovskii and land captain Kugushev 5 December, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 63-5.

¹⁵⁴ Land captain 1st precinct Usman uezd to Rokasovskii 9 December, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, l. 107.

were issued in November by the zemstvo was of poor quality and full of grit so they stole from traders to stave off hunger.¹⁵⁵ The land captain was clearly sympathetic; he regarded their situation as ‘desperate’ but was constrained by resources and was required to refuse loan requests.¹⁵⁶ Rokasovskii demanded an explanation from the Usman uezd *uprava* and that they take measures to correct it.¹⁵⁷ The *uprava*, while accepting that some grain was ‘only fit for the bin’, found that it was generally of good quality and that Bolshoi Dobrinki had been accidentally issued remainders.¹⁵⁸ In the village of Siniavki in Lipetsk uezd, the local procurator, Anton Marchukov, wrote to Rokasovskii, declaring that the population were ‘dying deaths from hunger’ and asked for food aid immediately.¹⁵⁹ Rokasovskii ordered an investigation but stated that if the allegation was untrue, Marchukov was to be sent to Tambov town (presumably under arrest); the allegation was found to be false, but Marchukov declared there was a disaster and had the peasants elect a representative to go to Lipetsk town to apply for loans.¹⁶⁰

While unrest itself was uncommon, there were frequent complaints over the amount of aid and a recurring motif is that the Tsar had decreed the release of ‘official food’, in which money was provided to feed every peasant. At the last provincial food conference before Christmas, Rokasovskii noted he had been receiving an increasing number of petitions calling for the universal issuing of food loans and that the peasants have ‘fallen into a delusion that the Emperor has deigned that they be generally fed from the Treasury account’.¹⁶¹ Finding that such a belief needed to be stopped as it would have ‘malicious consequences’, the conference agreed to publish an announcement to all

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Rokasovskii to Usman uezd zemstvo *uprava* 13 December, 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4194, ll. 108-9.

¹⁵⁸ Usman uezd zemstvo *uprava* to Rokasovskii 17 December 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 208-13.

¹⁵⁹ Anton Marchukov to Rokasovskii 5 December 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, l. 67.

¹⁶⁰ Correspondence between Rokasovskii and the Lipetsk uezd *ispravnik* 5 and 9 December 1891, GATO, f. op. 1, d. 4193, l. 68, l. 110.

¹⁶¹ Minutes of TPFC 17 December 1891, GATO, f. op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 136-40.

village assemblies, laying out the rules for food loans.¹⁶² The circular, which volost' boards were obliged to read out, was issued on 23 December and published in the *gubernskie vedomosti* and laid out, in stark language, that there was no 'official food', and reinforced the norms and rules for food aid.¹⁶³ These examples show that while Tambov was by no means a rebellious province, it was restive and this concerned the authorities. It can help explain Rokasovskii's consistent emphasising of unity; actions by officials that strayed from agreed practices could cause disturbances that they may not be able to control. This was a genuine concern; Rokasovskii had to upbraid a land captain in Tambov uezd who apparently refused to inspect aid resolutions while he asked the prosecutor to investigate a peasant agent of the Tambov uezd *uprava*. This agent had apparently forced the peasantry to accept wheat and rye chaff instead of grain.¹⁶⁴ Rokasovskii attached special significance to the latter case in light of the 'calamitous situation of the population' and asked the prosecutor to accelerate proceedings to warn, and presumably prevent, similar abuses by zemstvo agents.¹⁶⁵

All of these issues, internal and external, created a difficult context for food aid: poor resources, ignorance of scale, difficulties in establishing accurate information and potential unrest from peasants and officials. Despite the relative success in sourcing grain, by mid-December, there were more personal signs that hunger had become a serious issue: peasants in Temnikov uezd were apparently 'mown down' by hunger, there was 'terrible hunger' in Usman and hunger was 'working' in several villages in Lebedian and

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Rokasovskii to all volost' boards, 23 December 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 201-2.

¹⁶⁴ Rokasovskii to Tambov uezd marshal of the nobility V.M. Petrovo-Solovovo 18 December 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 147-9 and Rokasovskii to Prosecutor, Tambov Okruzhnogo Court 3 January 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 224-5.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

Spassk.¹⁶⁶ Princess Belozerskaia, demonstrating the influence a noble could have, wrote to Rokasovskii about the ‘terrible poverty’ and hunger near her estate and asked that he verify the situation; Rokasovskii quickly instructed the Kozlov uezd *uprava* to look into the situation and take all necessary measures.¹⁶⁷ Even the Governor of Moscow wrote to Rokasovskii, advocating on behalf of several peasants.¹⁶⁸ Though they stuck to their strategy as much as possible, events were beginning to overtake the institutions and we should be very aware from the above that even relative success still meant that there was an increasing level of human tragedy unfolding.

Case study: Management of relief in Spassk and Morshansk uezds

Overall, when confronted with crisis, the province responded by seeking to cooperate internally and innovate where possible to correct structural defects. However what happened when the defect was the institution itself? Serious concerns were raised about the operation of relief in two uezds, Spassk and Morshansk, and this section will examine them to understand what happened when decentralisation failed.

Rokasovskii, noting that his drive for unification had broken down in several uezds, dispatched Vice-Governor Choglokov to Spassk uezd in early December.¹⁶⁹ Based on the subsequent report from the vice-governor, information from the provincial *uprava*, and with the aim of ensuring uniformity in the relief effort, Rokasovskii ordered the Spassk uezd *uprava* to convene a conference with the land captains and to ‘undertake a

¹⁶⁶ Procurator Baydin to Rokasovskii 10 December 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, l. 100, Land captain Okhotnikov to Rokasovskii 9 December, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, l. 99, S.A. Pisarev to Rokasovskii 11 December 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 121-2.

¹⁶⁷ Correspondence between Princess Belozerskaia, Rokasovskii and the Kozlov uezd zemstvo *uprava*, 3-5 December 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 71-2.

¹⁶⁸ Correspondence between Governor of Moscow and Rokasovskii, 4, 10 December 1891, l. 95, l. 111.

¹⁶⁹ Minutes of the TPFC 17 December 1891 GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 136-40.

new allocation of loans immediately'.¹⁷⁰ In Morshansk uezd Rokasovskii had many requests for aid submitted to him in his name which must have raised concerns over how the relief effort was being administered.¹⁷¹ The provincial marshal of the nobility, Prince Cholokaev, who lived in Morshansk uezd, was appointed to manage the relief effort in Morshansk.¹⁷² After formal ratification of this decision on 17 December, Rokasovskii wasted little time in implementing it. Explaining that the food conference had met to 'establish correct measures in the actions of all institutions and to ensure correct observation of the rules for food loans and aid to the needy', on 21 December he asked the uezd's various institutions to provide their full assistance to Prince Cholokaev in the matter.¹⁷³ Prince Cholokaev, seeking to correct any structural defects, quickly instructed the uezd's land captains to continuously check for and correct mistakes in the allocation of aid.¹⁷⁴

What is important here is less the ins-and-outs of Rokasovskii's actions but the underlying approach that drove them. Rokasovskii believed in coordination and decentralisation but resorted to personal intervention when problems occurred. St. Petersburg handled crises involving disunited administration in a similar way and there is a direct example from the famine crisis. Convinced of the inefficiency and chaos in the Ministry of Railways, Tsar Alexander III appointed Colonel Vendrikh to reform railway administration in the area, including deliveries bound for Tambov province.¹⁷⁵ The imperial state, when confronted with a crisis or bureaucratic ineptitude, often resorted to

¹⁷⁰ Rokasovskii to the chair of Spassk uezd zemstvo *uprava*, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, l. 152.

¹⁷¹ *Tambovskie Gubernskie Vedomosti* 4 January 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, l. 202

¹⁷² Minutes of the TPFC 17 December 1891 GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 136-140.

¹⁷³ Rokasovskii to Morshansk uezd and town *upravy*, uezd and town police *upravy* 21 December 1891 GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, l. 167 and Rokasovskii to Morshansk uezd marshal of the nobility Fedor Petrovo-Solovovo GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, l. 168.

¹⁷⁴ Minutes of Tambov provincial food conference 17 December 1891 GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 136-140.

¹⁷⁵ Durnovo to Rokasovskii 22 December 1891 GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, l. 171. For more on Colonel Vendrikh's role during the crisis see: Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, pp. 82-94.

appointing an official with temporary quasi-dictatorial powers to correct the issue. Rokasovskii's use of this tactic shows that there was an interplay between the provincial idea and a distinctly tsarist bureaucratic culture. It is plausible to argue here that the culture and practices of the centre flowed down and embedded themselves in certain levels of the provincial administration. Rokasovskii's initiative also appears to be endorsed, in the case of Spassk, by the 1890 Zemstvo Statute. The Zemstvo Statute took precedence when there was a conflict between it and the 1889 Food Security Statute; in such cases the zemstvo was obliged to take into consideration suggestions from the governor who could inspect the management of the *zemstvo upravu* and recommend remedial action.¹⁷⁶ Thus Rokasovskii's actions in Spassk and Morshansk uyezds show that he took advantage of the centre's restructuring of its relationship with the periphery in 1889-90 to reinforce his policy of unity and decentralisation.

There are few records for Morshansk but an investigation into the village of Bokovoi Maidan, Spassk uезд, escalated on Rokasovskii's instructions into an investigation of relief in the whole uезд. On 13 November land captain Vedeniapin, 'in consequence of the governor's command' went to Bokovoi Maidan with local police and members of the uезд *uprava* to verify the list of those needing food loans.¹⁷⁷ The entire village assembly declared that they needed loans immediately and that Vedeniapin's job, as a land captain, was to give them part of the 2.5 million roubles that had been set aside for food aid.¹⁷⁸ Vedeniapin's explanation of allocation criteria and the emergency nature of aid was rejected as too little by the assembly who demanded aid be issued universally along with the release of 'official money'.¹⁷⁹ Indeed, Vedeniapin commented that the

¹⁷⁶ PSZ, 3rd series 12 June 1890, No. 6927, glava 3, otdelenie 2, st. 71, glava 3, otdelenie 3, st. 103, glava 4 st. 110.

¹⁷⁷ Land captain Vedeniapin, 3rd precinct Spassk uезд, to Rokasovskii, 18 November 1891, GATO f. 4, op. 1, d. 4196, ll. 4-5.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

peasantry believed that the money had already been released to them but was ‘hidden from them by the volost’ leadership’.¹⁸⁰ As we will see in chapter 4 and 5, trust was an extremely vital part of the relief effort. If the peasantry did not have confidence in the officials administering it, then the overall likelihood of success lowered dramatically. This sense of the volost’ leadership hiding aid also reveals much about the tensions and conflicts within peasant communities. While we will look more at this in Chapter 4 when we examine aid petitions, the famine crisis revealed and often exacerbated community tensions, many of which centred on a sense of distrust in peasant officials. Volost’ leadership elections were often manipulated and, as Gaudin and Novikov noted, the increasing integration of these officials by the state often gave them a changed their identity; they were no longer peasants but local officials and must therefore, to the peasantry, be automatically against them.

Vedeniabin dissolved the disorderly assembly but the peasants held an unauthorised session, intimidating the *starosta* into issuing an official stamp so a petitioner could be sent to the Tsar to obtain the ‘official money’.¹⁸¹ Vedeniabin accused Rubovskii, the proprietor of the local distillery to whom many peasants were in debt, of inciting this agitation in order to boost his business and that the loudest calls for immediate aid came from those able to feed themselves.¹⁸² He also accused Rubovskii of ‘pressing’ the peasantry into agreeing to send a petitioner to the Tsar (the petitioner, Maksim Spiran, was sent before Vedeniabin lodged his complaint to Rokasovskii).¹⁸³ Vedeniabin asked the uezd *uprava* whether it could provide loans to the extremely needy in the village, allocated eighty *puds* of flour from the welfare committee under his charge

¹⁸⁰ Vedeniabin to Rokasovskii 1 December 1891, GATO f. 4, op. 1, d. 4196, ll. 7-8.

¹⁸¹ Vedeniabin to Rokasovskii, 18 November 1891, GATO f. 4, op. 1, d. 4196, ll. 4-5.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ Vedeniabin to Rokasovskii 1 December 1891, GATO f. 4, op. 1, d. 4196, ll. 7-8.

and had all those involved in the incident arrested and sent out of the volost' for three days. Crucially, he did not seek to get the thirty roubles spent on petitioning the Tsar back as 'getting the thirty roubles back from taxes or drastic measures turned out to be impossible as this would incite disobedience to the authorities and rebellion'.¹⁸⁴ Replying on 25 November, Vice-Governor Choglokov was evidently extremely unhappy and asked Vedeniapin how he had allowed the unauthorised assembly to happen and why he had decided to break the disorder by issuing food aid and not by calling in the police.¹⁸⁵ Vedeniapin, who pointedly noted that the unauthorised assembly had happened in secret, told Choglokov that he considered aid the best way to calm the situation in the shortest possible time and prevent a riot.¹⁸⁶ The aid apparently had 'the most beneficial action on the peasantry' and Vedeniapin felt that taking strong measures when there was an actual need for aid would cause an outrage which would be difficult to deal with.¹⁸⁷

On 12 December, a troubled Rokasovskii ordered Choglokov to go to Spassk to establish whether Vedeniapin's authority had been 'broken' and if he should be transferred and if there was sufficient unity between the land captains in Spassk over verifying need and allocating food loans.¹⁸⁸ He also instructed Choglokov to inspect the situation in each precinct of the uezd and recommend a further course of action if it emerged that uezd officials needed further instructions.¹⁸⁹ More than likely motivated by potential concerns over order and a desire to ensure fairness in the relief effort, Rokasovskii prefaced this by stressing to Choglokov the importance of allocating loans 'fairly and uniformly'.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁴ Vedeniapin to Rokasovskii, 18 November 1891, GATO f. 4, op. 1, d. 4196, ll. 4-5.

¹⁸⁵ Vice-Governor Choglokov to Vedeniapin 25 November 1891 GATO f. 4, op. 1, d. 4196, l. 6.

¹⁸⁶ Vedeniapin to Rokasovskii 1 December 1891, GATO f. 4, op. 1, d. 4196, ll. 7-8.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Rokasovskii to Choglokov 12 December 1891, GATO f. 4, op. 1, d. 4196, ll. 9-10.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

Choglokov's tour was apparently brief as he reported to Rokasovskii on 20 December, but he had met several village assemblies and the uezd's land captains in that time. The village assemblies told him that aid was insufficient, even capable peasants needed aid (apparently verified by the land captains) and they 'knew' that every 'eater' in Kerensk uezd, Penza province had received one *pud* of flour while Spassk had not issued any food loans.¹⁹¹ Land captain D.N. Rogozhin admitted to Choglokov that the level of aid allocation was inconvenient and did not satisfy existing need, but he was following the provincial food conference's guidelines from 4 September.¹⁹² The implication is clearly that it was the province's own rules that had failed to satisfy need and had caused, or part caused, the disturbances.

This was not a unanimous opinion amongst the uezd's land captains, however, as Choglokov's meeting with them on 14 December illustrated. Choglokov sought to be conciliatory and told them that the relief effort in the uezd had taken different directions because of their 'full conscientiousness and energy'. The issue appeared to be how to manage the relief effort; two of the four (Rogozhin and Zhukov) wanted to broaden the scale of aid and adopt 'gentler methods' towards the population while Vedeniapin and Baturin wanted to stick to the letter of the provincial food conference's guidelines and relate to the peasants more strictly.¹⁹³ Vedeniapin's strict stance raises the issue of a difference in what was seen as 'strict' or 'fair' between the land captains and the provincial administration. It was Vedeniapin who, when confronted with a disturbance, refrained from calling in the police and responded by meeting the urgent need of some of the village's residents. Choglokov noted that differences of approach among the land

¹⁹¹ Choglokov to Rokasovskii 20 December 1891, GATO f. 4, op. 1, d. 4196, ll. 11-8.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

captains generated distrust among the peasantry.¹⁹⁴ Referring to the example of the offer of employment to the peasantry, not made in every precinct, he ‘came to the conclusion that the land captains hide their actions from one another’.¹⁹⁵ He ended the meeting by impressing upon them the need for full unity and energy of action. Agreeing, they pledged to consult each other in future on relief issues not covered by the established rules and procedures.¹⁹⁶ This would appear to be a victory for Vedeniapin and Baturin’s approach of strictness and adherence to established procedure though Choglokov also provided for an element of flexibility and local negotiation in light of specific conditions. Negotiations with the chair of the *uezd uprava* A.N. Zhilinskii secured a commitment to work in solidarity with the land captains, accelerate the verification and allocation of aid, offer work to the peasantry to transport the grain and even to lower its price.¹⁹⁷

Following this meeting, Choglokov addressed a number of village assemblies, including Bokovoi Maidan, in an attempt to shore up the authority of the land captains (and therefore the government). He told them that the land captains ‘only sought good’ and had acted legally, that differences were due to differing conditions in each precinct, and that the peasantry should trust and obey the land captains and turn to them for aid.¹⁹⁸ He also told them that unconditional aid was inconceivable and that everything was being done to alleviate their situation.¹⁹⁹ Choglokov ended his report by noting with confidence that Vedeniapin’s authority was not broken and he should remain in post, and that with very few exceptions the population of Spassk were enduring severe need to the extent that

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ The issue was between Baturin and Rogozhin. Baturin noted that the peasants in his precinct had turned down work transporting grain for the *uezd uprava* as the wage was too low while Rogozhin declared that this opportunity had been hidden from him and maybe the peasants of his district could take the work, Choglokov to Rokasovskii 20 December 1891, GATO f. 4, op. 1, d. 4196, ll. 11-8.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

it was necessary to speed up the allocation of aid on a broader scale.²⁰⁰ Finally he noted that the main cause of the antagonism between the land captains was that the estates of three of the four were located in the precincts of another.²⁰¹ The Vice-Governor's intervention appears to have brought the disturbances in Bokovoi Maidan to an end, but it was not the last time that Spassk uezd would come under fire for its lack of unity or planning, as we will see in Chapter 5.

What appears to have happened in Bokovoi Maidan was a heady and undesirable combination of desperation, a sluggish relief effort and the knowledge that the authorities' views about who deserved aid varied in different precincts. Fuelled by desperation and the belief that they were being cheated out of money supposedly granted by the tsar, the residents of Bokovoi Maidan sought redress through either petitioning the tsar or, more plausibly, by forcing a response from the local authorities. The results were not fully satisfactory and brought unwanted attention but secured extra aid in the short term and an overall review of relief management; academic to the peasantry perhaps but it led to a permanent, sharp increase in food aid.²⁰²

This episode illustrates several points about the way in which relief was managed by the uezds and the way in which the provincial administration interacted with them and oversaw the process. Firstly, there was a huge pressure point in the relief operation in the person of the land captain; the case of Spassk shows that the relief operation was vulnerable to fragmentation based on personal action or antagonism. Since Spassk uezd was divided into only four precincts, a breakdown in this network could have serious

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² The peasants were correct in asserting that no food aid had been issued in the uezd prior to December. The MVDs statistical accounts show that Spassk did not issue food loans until December when it issued 12,905 *puds* but in January this increased to 42,082 *puds*. Whether this is a result of the general upswing in need and purchasing or was part of the acceleration the *uprava* chair agreed to in light of Choglokov's visit is hard to say, *Statisticheskie dannye*, pp. 38-9.

consequences as they were vital to the effectiveness of the relief effort: land captains had responsibility for peasant administration and were often the officials most closely involved in determining who was eligible for aid. If land captains hid certain opportunities for the peasantry from each other and were mutually antagonistic, things could quickly grind to a halt. Following on from that is the issue of differentiation or, depending on how it was used, arbitrariness. Spassk's land captains were divided on the fundamental issue of how to approach the relief effort and while a stricter interpretation won out, the issue is an important one.

The division between the land captains on how to relate to the peasantry in the relief effort shows some of the deeper divisions that affected the position itself; only in post since June of that year, the new land captains were undoubtedly still feeling their way and getting to grips with their responsibilities. Aleksandr Novikov, the land captain in Kozlov uezd, summed up the difficulties of implementing the legislation: 'the result of this legal arbitrariness is that in one province is permitted what is forbidden in the next, what is encouraged in one year is what was hampered in the previous'.²⁰³ The 1889 Land Captain Statute had envisaged a position of authority that was 'close to the people' but had left the land captains with wide discretion on how to do this; indeed this was the one of the main aims of the law. Novikov himself, as we saw in Chapter 1, took Rogozhin and Zhukov's position on how to relate to the peasantry. What this incident highlights is how dependent the relief effort was on a small group of powerful individuals, only just in post and not yet fully integrated into the administrative structures.

This exchange also worked both ways, as Bokovoi Maidan illustrated when the peasants told Vedeniapin that it was his 'job' as their land captain to obtain some of the released aid for them. It can be argued that the peasantry clearly understood both the

²⁰³ Novikov, *Zapiski zemskogo nachal'nika*, pp. 200-3.

broad power of the new official and the fact that they were now responsible for the wellbeing of the peasant community. Indeed, they may have sought to turn this responsibility to their advantage. It is likely that the land captains were not yet fully familiar with either their duties or communities and this may have encouraged individuals or communities to test the new officials. Thus, the peasants in Bokovoi Maidan were seeking to define and control what the ‘responsibility’ of the land captain to the peasantry actually meant, thereby inverting the paternalistic intent of the 1889 Land Captain Statute.

Another issue we can see is that it often took an event likely to cause concern for the provincial administration, such as the unrest in Bokovoi Maidan, before steps were taken to investigate and correct it. Choglokov’s original letter to Vedeniapin focused on the case as a routine matter of civil disturbance and it took Vedeniapin’s reply before Rokasovskii decided to initiate a broader review of Spassk uezd. Why was he troubled enough to launch this review? We know that no reserves of grain were placed in the uezd’s public stores in October and December, while up to September there were 161 *chetverts* in the stores and nearly 53,000 *chetverts* in arrears including overdue loans and that the uezd had not yet started issuing food aid.²⁰⁴ Unfortunately, since the surviving historical record relating to Spassk is relatively sparse, it is hard to get a complete picture. Nevertheless, the evidence presented so far, combined with the fact that nearly 21,000 people received food aid in the uezd when it started in mid-December, suggests that there was a serious shortfall between what was needed and what was available and thus evidence of the relief effort failing to function effectively became quite serious.²⁰⁵

Once again, the desire for unity and cooperation in the management of relief was central, especially for Rokasovskii, who emphasised the need for unity and the

²⁰⁴ Spassk uezd zemstvo *uprava* to Rokasovskii 7, 31 December 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, l.101, l. 244, *Khlebnye zapasy*, p. 14.

²⁰⁵ *Statisticheskie dannye*, pp. 58-9.

implementation of agreed procedures to Choglokov. There seems to be a contradiction here between the emphasis on unity and the decentralisation he highlighted to St. Petersburg as essential in 1892. The most likely explanation is that ‘decentralisation’ meant, in practice, the local implementation of provincially and centrally agreed procedures and is understandable for two reasons. Firstly, the province had to follow MVD rules and guidelines for the relief effort, in addition to the Food Security Statute. Secondly, total differentiation could have resulted in differing levels of entitlement or delivery while a standardised system would at least ensure a minimum, equal standard. If it was unfair, it was unfair *equally*. Nevertheless, Choglokov allowed for the possibility that the land captains might face situations outside the agreed provincial practices. Allowing them this latitude bound them together through enforced cooperation and, in a sign of the ‘provincial idea’, allowed for a greater level of flexibility and rapid response than strictly enforcing the centre’s rules provided.

Chapter 4

Institutional challenges and adaptation, January – July 1892

Introduction

If the first six months of the famine crisis in late 1891 were the story of building the relief effort's superstructure while dealing with a rapidly worsening crisis, 1892 marked a significant change in tone. By January 1892 the specific institutions of the relief effort, the provincial food conferences and welfare committees, were in place while the governor and the zemstvos were more experienced. Count Pavlov's prophetic telegram of 1891 was followed in February 1892 by one noting energetic zemstvo action.¹ The issue now was not to construct a relief effort but to *run* it and to make sure that the structures responded adequately to the crisis. In this chapter we will look at the ways in which these structures were tested and how they evolved and adapted. Funding and the role of and relationships between provincial and uezd institutions would remain key themes. Yet the context would change: there were new institutions, the relief effort would eventually wind down, and the governor's chancellery had to adapt to the reality that some uezds would face difficulties in running a full relief effort. This chapter, then, will look at how the province sought to fund and defend the relief effort as the crisis worsened, how it developed oversight functions for the two main arms of the effort, and what happened when specific breakdowns occurred.

¹ Count V.I. Pavlov to Durnovo 20 February 1892, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 237-8.

Requesting and repaying funding

Throughout 1892, finance remained a constant theme and the MVD and Ministry of Finance became increasingly reticent, gradually withdrawing support as the crisis worsened. After allocating 31,650,000 roubles empire wide in January 1892, and further, smaller allocations in February, by the end of March the Committee of Ministers had only one million roubles left from the sixty million roubles set aside for the relief effort.² This budgetary pressure, and a sense that the worst was ending, led the MVD in mid-April to request the return of any unspent loan reserves.³ Against this, numbers receiving food aid in Tambov province averaged 554,000 per month, peaking at over a million in June before halving in July.⁴ Thus, securing funding from the centre over the second half of the crisis would become a story of fiercer competition for constantly diminishing resources.

In order for any funds to be released, estimates had to go through several levels of bureaucracy from the *uezd zemstvo* to the Committee of Ministers. A narrow sense of fiscal responsibility and inherent distrust of lower officials, often, but not always, led to requests being lowered as they were reviewed. From the start of the crisis, many provincial governors, Rokasovskii included, had generally revised downwards *zemstvo* requests which had totalled 140,000,000 roubles by 1892.⁵ January 1892 continued this trend: the Committee of Ministers assigned 4 million roubles less than the governors requested and just over 16 million roubles less than the *zemstvos* asked for.⁶ In only six

² Correspondence between Durnovo and Minister of Finance Vyshnegradskii 22, 29 January 1892, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, l. 198, l.212, Note from the Committee of Ministers 22 January 1892, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, l. 199, Minister of Finance Vyshnegradskii to Durnovo 29 January 1892, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, l. 212, MVD Economic Department 1 May 1892, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 246-7, Minister of Finance Vyshnegradskii to Rokasovskii 28 March 1892, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, l. 236.

³ Correspondence between Durnovo and Rokasovskii 19 April, 12 May 1892, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, l. 245, l. 249.

⁴ *Statisticheskie dannye*, pp. 56-7.

⁵ Report from Durnovo to the Committee of Ministers 16 January 1892, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 196-7.

⁶ *Ibid.*

provinces, Kazan, Orel, Samara, Saratov, Ufa and Voronezh, did the governors agree with the requests of their zemstvos.⁷ Rokasovskii made the biggest proportional reduction in January 1892, from seven to four million roubles but he was one of the few governors to have his request met in full.⁸ Thus while the reduction may seem unduly severe to us, and events suggest it was, it was also astute politics from a governor who was also a fiscal conservative by nature.

Expected to be two men, the Tsar's viceroy and the *gubernskii nachal'nik*, governors found that the centre and the province sometimes had wildly diverging needs, and being a 'good governor' meant satisfying both. Rokasovskii was perhaps more fiscally conservative than the vast sums of money involved may have naturally prompted: in January 1892 the provincial zemstvo requested 6.9 million roubles to last until July while he felt that 3.5 million roubles for food aid would be enough.⁹ He believed that using existing resources would lower the shortfall and rejected the *uprava*'s fear of a price rise for sowing oats, cutting its request from 1,250,000 to 500,000 roubles.¹⁰ Rokasovskii did not quibble with the zemstvo's figures, the severity of the crisis, or seek to limit aid and its reach. His concern revolved solely around the *cost* of the relief effort and the economic capacity of the people to repay the state for its largesse.

This concern touches on how the empire was structured and managed; power flowed from the centre out while money flowed from the periphery in. Provinces were to contribute to the imperial treasury, not drain it and expenses were to be minimised where

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Report from the MVD economic department 9 January 1892, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 189-90, Minutes of the Tambov provincial zemstvo *uprava* 23 December 1891, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 1, d. 2132, ll. 178-81, Rokasovskii to Durnovo 4 January 1892, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 156-8

¹⁰ He believed the shortfall would only be 2,700,000 *puds* which at one rouble thirty kopecks per *pud* came to 3,500,000 roubles, Rokasovskii to Durnovo 4 January 1892, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 156-8, Rokasovskii to Durnovo 4 January 1892, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 156-8.

possible. Governor Rokasovskii was merely following the dictates of the MVD and carrying out his duty to the tsar. Governors were servants of the Tsar first, sent in to new provinces and often reliant on their or their family's service for their noble status, a category into which Rokasovskii seemingly fell.¹¹ They referred not to 'my' province but the 'province entrusted to me'; they were not part of the province they governed. To be a 'good governor', therefore, was frequently to place the interests of the centre before those of the province and to act as the 'honest broker', managing various provincial conflicts without becoming embroiled in them.

By 1892 what it meant to be a 'good governor' was changing rapidly; the bond between tsar and people was refashioned as Tsar Alexander III sought a closer, national and almost spiritual connection.¹² Now the 'little father' needed to be seen to take greater care of his people. Indeed, such an emphasis helps explain the land captain reforms, which sought to correct 'defects' in peasant administration by strengthening the link between tsar and people. Governors now had responsibilities such as education, developing the provincial economy (for its own and the centre's sake), and overseeing the zemstvos in addition to tax and order; as the imperial state's objectives broadened, so did the governor's role.¹³ Without sufficient funding, governors struggled to serve the province while protecting the treasury, two difficulties with the same source. Rokasovskii, as we saw, ceased resisting the provincial *uprava*'s estimates (often much lower than the *uezds*' ones) but still battled to reduce the cost. Trying to satisfy the competing needs of the province and the treasury was a risky strategy but alternatives were few for the provincial

¹¹ A notable exception to this was in Nizhnii Novgorod where in 1880 the local gentry forced out Governor Pavel Kutaisov who was replaced, albeit only for two months, by the provincial marshal of the nobility, S.S. Zybin, Evtuhov, *Portrait of a Russian Province*, p. 140, p. 232. Nobility was granted upon ascertaining the eighth rank while specific titles could be conferred by the Tsar: Wirtschafter, *Social Identity*, p. 24, *Russkii biograficheskii slovar'*, ed. A. A. Polovtsev (Saint Petersburg, 1913), Vol. 16, pp. 426-8.

¹² Wortman, *Scenarios of Power, Volume II*, pp. 6-8. p. 13.

¹³ The *obzor*, or review, attached to the governor's annual report on the province, illustrates this broadening of responsibilities. For 1892 it ran to 103 pages and included sections on the province's economic activity (agricultural and productive), taxes and duties, public amenities and morals, health, education and peasant affairs.

governor. Thus, his reduction of the request is compatible with the narrative of the ‘good governor’ defending the province’s interests. As we have seen, the Committee of Ministers cut the governors’ requests even further; by pre-empting this reduction Rokasovskii was able to control it. There were few opportunities for the province, especially in desperate times, to assert control but here Rokasovskii managed it in a limited fashion. The province was not served by having its funding cut severely but it was served by making this reduction itself rather than have it imposed from above by a parsimoniously minded centre. Rokasovskii secured the best possible outcome, admittedly from a range of bad options. He was playing politics and here he did so astutely.

However, the attempt to continue this strategy, by proposing how to fund cost-price grain sales, proved to be a grave strategic error. The provincial zemstvo had asked for a special loan of one million roubles to fund these sales while Rokasovskii argued that the grain stores, replenished by purchased grain, would meet this need.¹⁴ This was a dreadful error, which forced stores, already low on grain, to meet competing needs, requiring difficult decisions on prioritisation.¹⁵ While Rokasovskii was capable of flexibility and adaptation, as we will see in this chapter, the bureaucratic culture he was a part of did not often prioritise the medium or long-term consequences of certain decisions. This, combined with the tremendous pressure governors were under to minimise the cost of the relief effort where possible, helps explain Rokasovskii’s error here. Governors were now managers and in Rokasovskii, Tambov province had a frequently adept manager, but the long-term strategic weaknesses of the system remained.

¹⁴ Rokasovskii to Durnovo 4 January 1892, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 156-8, Minutes of the Tambov provincial zemstvo *uprava* 23 December 1891, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 1, d. 2132, ll. 178-81.

¹⁵ As covered in Chapter 3, many uyezds were reporting that little or no grain was being entered in public grain stores over November to January.

This rigid culture was embedded throughout the system; in late January Durnovo essentially endorsed Rokasovskii's argument and refused the additional loan.¹⁶ The decision appeared to have serious consequences; in February, writing on another matter, Rokasovskii noted the provincial zemstvo had been forced to substitute cost price sales for loans while the provincial *uprava* noted the 'simultaneous exhaustion' of stores in February.¹⁷

Rokasovskii had a definite and consistent notion of fairness and morality but this was tied both to his belief in the rightness of autocratic rule (and thus its inherent sense of justice), and contemporary notions of the role of charity. A case in point was his objection to the provincial zemstvo's request to increase the food loans from thirty *funts* to one *pud*, a level several uyezds had seen as an absolute 'minimum'.¹⁸ Rejecting it, he argued that it was not 'an especially generous supplement, [but] is in general sufficient in order to secure someone from famine'.¹⁹ Rokasovskii encapsulated much of the government's approach to famine relief; it was *emergency* assistance, designed to prevent starvation, not a hand-out or unconditional support. Rokasovskii's definition of fairness was rooted within the legal framework established by the imperial centre; challenging the concepts at its heart was not within his character or governing strategy. His role as governor was to accept and enforce these over-arching frameworks and this he did with instinctive loyalty and compliance.

The rules did not cover every eventuality, and Rokasovskii was able to manoeuvre within them by deploying language that emphasised desperation and confidence

¹⁶ Durnovo to Rokasovskii 28 January 1892, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 4, d. 2132, l. 200.

¹⁷ Rokasovskii to Durnovo 17 February 1892, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 4, d. 2132 ll. 215-6, *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 23-34.

¹⁸ Rokasovskii to Durnovo 4 January 1892, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 156-8, *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 221-3.

¹⁹ Rokasovskii to Durnovo 4 January 1892, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 156-8.

simultaneously. Striking a tone somewhere between pleading desperation and relative confidence, he requested ‘significant sums without delay’, namely four million roubles with 3.5 million for food aid.²⁰ While food was getting to the peasantry, even the ‘well off’ would be threatened without new grain stores while purchasing would cease without an advance of one million roubles ‘immediately’.²¹ The tone of the MVD’s economic department in reviewing this request, and its subsequent approval, shows that Rokasovskii had chosen his tactics and tone correctly.²² Once again, Rokasovskii performed a balancing act: making the situation bad enough to secure a large advance while also not undermining the MVD’s confidence in him or the zemstvos.

The governor’s fixation on fiscal conservatism as a first principle brought out both an ability to change his mind based on evidence, and contradictions in his character. In February the provincial zemstvo, due to an increase in need and its predicted price rise, reiterated that it needed 1.25 million roubles to purchase seed grain and requested the additional 750,000 roubles.²³ Rokasovskii’s response is revealing; loan reserves would cover the cost of purchasing the needed seed grain but this depended on a number of factors outside the zemstvos’ control so he backed the request in light of the price rises.²⁴ Firstly, he displayed a remarkable ignorance of the fact that it was *he* who had originally suggested 500,000 roubles was sufficient and scoffed at predictions of a price rise. Secondly, he attempted to protect the interests of the imperial treasury by spending now to avoid a larger outlay in the future. Evidence could indeed change his mind, especially when it matched or supported one of his existing principles. That he was unable to see that his earlier strategy was partly responsible for the need to adapt, leaves us with the

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² MVD economic department 9 January 1892 and Committee of Ministers 16 January 1892, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 4, d. 2132 ll. 189-91.

²³ Rokasovskii to Durnovo 17 February 1892, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 4, d. 2132 ll. 215-6 and *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, p. 7, p. 15-9.

²⁴ Rokasovskii to Durnovo 17 February 1892, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 4, d. 2132 ll. 215-6

impression of a governor who could adjust, yet struggled with long-term strategy and sought to please two masters.

The MVD twice rebuffed this request before finally agreeing to allocate an extra 500,000 roubles in early April.²⁵ The province secured one million roubles in additional imperial funding and sourced the remaining 250,000 roubles from existing loan reserves. The three-month battle to get to this point illustrates the ‘provincial idea’; the province leveraged imperial government positions against itself before proving itself remarkably adaptable.

A desire for order and unity amongst provincial officials and a failure to understand the peasantry (leading to occasional suspicion) were two prominent imperial government positions that Tambov province played on. On the first, Rokasovskii warned in February that the loans would not last and needed strengthening, something the *uezd upravyy* and the land captains recognised.²⁶ The provincial food conference had also ‘unanimously’ agreed that one million roubles was necessary (and sufficient) to complete the sowing operation.²⁷ The message was subtle but clear; the province had delivered the unity that so concerned the MVD, across administrative structures and varying sources of authority, although not in the direction it wanted.

In dealing with the centre, the ‘provincial idea’ could also have a darker aspect while also exposing social tensions within the province. The province’s institutions needed to convince the centre that they were not profligate and to do this they blamed the peasantry. In mid-March, Rokasovskii noted that ‘all government sums have been

²⁵ Correspondence between Durnovo, MVD Economic Dept. Director Vishniakov and Rokasovskii 26-27 February 1892, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 225-7, Durnovo to Rokasovskii 23 March 1892, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 1, d. 2132, l. 233, Correspondence between Durnovo, Ministry of Finance, Vice-Director MVD Economic Dept. and Rokasovskii, 23 March, 8 April 1892, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 1, d. 2132, l. 234, l. 244.

²⁶ Correspondence between Durnovo, MVD Economic Dept. Director Vishniakov and Rokasovskii 26-27 February 1892, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 225-7.

²⁷ Rokasovskii to Director Vishniakov 13 March 1892, RGIA, f. 4, op. 1, d. 2132, l. 229.

exhausted' and requested 500,000 roubles be released as soon as possible (a phrase which the MVD underlined).²⁸ The food conference saw a million roubles as sufficient but argued that an 'insuperable' aspiration of the peasantry to sell their seed meant that additional resources were necessary.²⁹ The 'provincial idea' was not fully inclusive and the peasantry were almost a category apart; officials were unarguably deeply moved by their plight but there was still a sense of separation, or 'otherness', about them. The slightly unpleasant truth was that by deflecting blame onto the peasantry, the provincial authorities were speaking the MVD's language. It is a cruel irony that to secure more resources for the people they were trying to help they first had to belittle their (perceived) capacity to act rationally and cope.

By using the centre's language and rules, the province's institutions could articulate their own message. However, it was only by adapting their position and working within the imperial framework that provincial authorities ultimately succeeded in achieving their aims. The goal was still 1.25 million roubles for the sowing operation though the province now accepted that this could only be achieved through additional loans and reallocation of resources. The provincial *uprava* had allocated 500,000 roubles of food loans to the operation and proposed that of the additional 500,000 roubles, half would be spent on food loans. To this, the MVD finally agreed.³⁰ The province however had finally secured what it wanted: 1.25 million roubles for the sowing operation. This achievement came at a significant cost in that it involved using existing food aid resources

²⁸ Tambov provincial zemstvo *uprava* to Rokasovskii 16 March 1892, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 4, d. 2132, l. 232, Rokasovskii to Durnovo 16 March 1892, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 4, d. 2132, l. 231.

²⁹ Rokasovskii to Vishniakov 13 March 1892, RGIA, f. 4, op. 1, d. 2132, l. 229 and Minutes of the TPFC 12-14 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4264, ll. 58-9. As we will see in Chapter 5 there were indeed cases of this though most of them appeared to be unfounded and based on rumour.

³⁰ Tambov provincial *uprava* to Rokasovskii 11 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, l. 38, Tambov provincial zemstvo *uprava* to Rokasovskii 16 March 1892, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 4, d. 2132, l. 232, Rokasovskii to Durnovo 16 March 1892, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 4, d. 2132, l. 231, *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, p. 7, pp. 23-34..

that were only partially rebalanced by splitting the final loan. Provinces could be trapped and flexible at the same time. Tambov had to front load its spending and wait in the hope that the MVD would catch up. Yet Tambov's provincial officials built an argument that eventually succeeded in securing the best deal possible in limited circumstances. As it transpired, this was the last of their requests to be granted as further applications were rejected by the MVD, who directly questioned the zemstvo's statistics.³¹

At the same time as they were attempting to seek additional funding from the MVD for the official relief effort, the province's institutions were faced with another, more intractable problem: how to help the 160,000 people, including 48,000 'landless' peasantry, who were ineligible for food loans.³² While we will see examples of desperate need later in this chapter when we look at peasant petitions, the landless peasantry were in a particularly sorry state and often went from town to town, begging for spare or stale grain.³³ Despite a lot of discussion on the issue, it exposed the limits of the official effort: *no* sums were ever set aside for landless peasants or non-repayable loans due to the absence of resources, despite attempts to establish how many needed aid.³⁴

While the 'tremendous help' of private charity would take on the role of plugging this gap, the way in which funding was sought and allocated further illustrates the fragmented and often clientelist way in which the imperial state managed events.³⁵ The very nature of charitable funding, grants to the Tambov Provincial Welfare Committee

³¹ Correspondence between the Tambov provincial zemstvo *uprava*, Rokasovskii and Durnovo 25, 29 July and 8 August 1892, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 255-6, l. 260.

³² Rokasovskii to the Special Committee on Famine Relief 2 January 1892, RGIA, f. 2014, op. 1, d. 165, l. 22.

³³ Count Bobrinskii to Pleve 14 March 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 100, ll. 134-42.

³⁴ *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 100-5. On establishing these figures, see *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 258-60, pp. 367-70, Shatsk uezd marshal of the nobility Vorontsov-Vel'iaminov to Rokasovskii 21 August 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, l. 180, Correspondence between land captains Kirsanov and Usman uezds and Rokasovskii 1, 14 March, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 10-11, l. 243.

³⁵ *Pravitel'stvennyi Vestnik*, No. 106 19 May 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 11, l. 64-ob.

(TPWC), which were funnelled downwards, and direct grants to uezd sectional committees by the Special Committee for Famine Relief's agent, Count A.A. Bobrinskii, reflect this. Count Bobrinskii linked the Special Committee in St. Petersburg and the charitable relief effort in the province, and very quickly became the central element of the funding structure.³⁶

This transformation of the funding link, from appeals by the organisation to interventions by powerful individuals, happened quite quickly. While small grants had been made to several uezds, the TPWC had started 1892 as the primary link: it requested and received 150,000 roubles and fifty thousand *puds* by early February from the Special Committee.³⁷ It also positioned itself as the primary institution for the overall coordination of relief: in addition to opening *stolovye* they needed to take all measures to secure the peasantry as the collapse of agriculture would have 'serious consequences for the future'.³⁸ While the TPWC would remain the leading coordinating body and would work closely with Count Bobrinskii, it is hard not to see the intervention of powerful private individuals as undermining its position and authority. Circumventing it directly, the wife of the minister for public enlightenment, Princess Elizaveta Volkonskaia, received 10,000 roubles to open *stolovaias* in Borisoglebsk uezd while Vorontsov-Dashkov's ministry would donate 1,500 roubles to a landowner in Kirsanov uezd, and the TPWC would send 1,000 roubles to a member of the powerful Chicherin family.³⁹

³⁶ Of the 457,362 roubles they received, 162,397 roubles was allocated by Count Bobrinskii, Tambov provincial welfare committee to the Special Committee on Famine Relief 17 October 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 254, l. 15.

³⁷ Correspondence between the Special Committee for Famine Relief and Rokasovskii, 22, 27 January 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 100, ll. 12-3, l. 17, Tambov provincial welfare committee to the Special Committee on Famine Relief 27 January 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 100, ll. 18-9, Correspondence between Pleve, Rokasovskii and Count Bobrinskii 31 January, 6 February 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 100, ll. 20-1.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Correspondence between the Special Committee for Famine Relief, Pleve, Princess Volkonskoi and Rokasovskii 12 February 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 100, ll. 30-1, Correspondence between Pleve, Rokasovskii and Elena Chicherina 13 February 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 100, l. 34, l. 41.

Imperial Russia was a state where connections were often more important than formal procedure; donations also risked unbalancing the effort, allocating money based not on need, but connection. Typical of the contradictions that bedevilled imperial administration, it was Count Bobrinskii, the all-powerful individual from St. Petersburg, who intervened to limit this short-cutting and asked that he be notified of all Special Committee grants to private individuals.⁴⁰

This was a move designed not so much to protect the TPWC as to supplant it as the key information link with St. Petersburg. Sent as the Special Committee's representative, Count Bobrinskii quickly became almost a parallel structure to the TPWC by himself. This development followed a long established pattern according to which the imperial state corrected problems via the creation of special agencies or representatives with the power to override local authorities, sometimes across provincial boundaries. As we saw, the role of Colonel Vendrikh, sent in to head a temporary administration to ease the railway crisis during the famine is a case in point. Bobrinskii, while considerably less terse and more cooperative than Vendrikh, acted in a similar fashion. When, after an apparent lack of communication, the TPWC requested an extra 50,000 roubles while Bobrinskii simultaneously requested 81,000 roubles, Bobrinskii was instructed by the Special Committee to sort the situation out.⁴¹ Acting quickly, he convinced Rokasovskii that the latter sum was sufficient and while there were some modifications, Bobrinskii also determined the grant's allocation.⁴²

This assertion of power and mini-autocracy was common in ad hoc situations or bodies such as the Special Committee. The loosely coordinated on-the-ground charitable

⁴⁰ Count Bobrinskii to Pleve 21 February 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 100, ll. 53-4.

⁴¹ The TPWC requested the money to open a large number of *stolovaia*s to tackle typhus outbreaks and secure the population until June, Tambov provincial welfare committee to the Special Committee on Famine Relief 5 March 1892, f. 1204., op. 1, d. 100, l. 65, Correspondence between Count Bobrinskii and Vyacheslav von Pleve 12-13 March 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 100, l. 125, 127.

⁴² Count Bobrinskii to Pleve 14 March 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 100, ll. 134-42, Count Bobrinskii to Special Committee concerning allocations for Tambov province n.d., RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 100, l. 145.

relief effort functioned relatively independently but unlike the official relief effort was not guided by existing provincial institutions and the 1889 Food Security Statute. The dual allocation of money to the TPWC and Count Bobrinskii, and the latter's regular reporting function, shows that there was a fundamental distrust of provincial institutions and autonomy by the centre. Bobrinskii had toured Tambov province and after 'getting to know the need of the population [...] and the actions of local welfare', he determined how much was needed and that all of the allocation should go straight to the uezd sectional committees.⁴³ Count Bobrinskii was diligent and thorough but his actions speak to the common assumption that specially appointed imperial officials were better placed to allocate money granted from the centre than people in the affected area. His choice to allocate it all to uezd sectional committees shows the uneasy balance between central control and local autonomy; full central control was impossible so local action and direction was a necessity, but the centre would evaluate and rank local action. Here too Bobrinskii's experience highlights one of the contradictions and problems of imperial governance. Land captains were introduced in the cause of systematisation, yet Bobrinskii recognised that 'of course, very much depends on the individual' and assigned grants primarily to the active land captains we have already encountered.⁴⁴ A corollary of an institution based on paternal, individualised power, coupled with under-resourcing and vague powers, is that the execution of these powers depends on the individual chosen.⁴⁵

The personalised nature of power in imperial Russia meant that one outsider could make decisions that would affect thousands. The centre placed less trust in provincial

⁴³ Count Bobrinskii to Pleve 12 March 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 100, l. 125.

⁴⁴ *Pravitel'stvennyi Vestnik*, No. 106 19 May 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 11, l. 64-ob. These were Rogozhin and Prince Kugushev in Spassk uezd, Okhotnikhov in Usman uezd and Nilov in Morshansk uezd, Ibid. Bobrinskii had directly tied the success of welfare to where there were energetic land captains, *Pravitel'stvennyi Vestnik* No. 106 19 May 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 11, l. 64-ob.

⁴⁵ For more on the wide variety of ways in which land captains executed their powers and the problems caused by the broad tenor of the 1889 Land Captain Statute, see Gaudin, *Ruling Peasants*, pp. 52-9.

institutions than in Count Bobrinskii, his two officials and, temporarily, the son of A.A. Polovtsev (the writer of a stinging critique of Governor Rokasovskii and Count Bobrinskii's brother-in-law).⁴⁶ This concept of a higher official dispatched by the tsar to root out abuses and poor decisions while dispensing the tsar's mercy, was not just a Gogolian trope but part of the official ideological framework.⁴⁷ Indeed, Governor Rokasovskii employed similar reasoning in establishing an appeals process as we will see. Count Bobrinskii fulfilled this role and, thankfully for the suffering population, did so with an eye to ensuring that local charities were provided for, giving 34,100 roubles to volost' and village efforts.⁴⁸ Seen as virtual plenipotentiaries of the throne (the tsarevich in this case), local individuals often wrote to these special representatives or the Special Committee directly, bypassing provincial bodies. A.S. Norman in Iambirskaia volost', Shatsk uezd wrote directly to the Special Committee from November 1891 to January 1892, eventually securing the necessary resources for his *popechitel'stvo*.⁴⁹ More pertinent here is the example of Prince Gagarin, a land captain in Elatomsk. In April, Prince Gagarin wrote directly to Bobrinskii requesting money to purchase flour from the American vessel *Missouri*; awarded 200 roubles he purchased 600 *puds* (one train wagon).⁵⁰ Despite the fact that Governor Rokasovskii chaired the TPWC, Prince Gagarin

⁴⁶ Bobrinskii's two officials were State Councillor Ramkov-Pozhnov and V.V. Langammer, the latter of whom would shortly after be sent to Borisoglebsk uezd to verify need and distribute aid, Count Bobrinskii to Plevé 12 March 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 100, l. 125, Correspondence between Bobrinskii, Rokasovskii and the Borisoglebsk uezd *ispravnik* 14 March, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 99-100. Polovtsev's son, Aleksandr Aleksandrovich, worked for the MVD and was sent to work with Bobrinskii for the Special Committee while Bobrinskii was engaged to his sister on 20 January 1883 and they were married on 11 February 1883, A.A. Polovtsev, *Dnevnik*, II, pp. 453-4, I, p. 34, 45.

⁴⁷ Gaudin, *Ruling Peasants*, p. 54, Robbins, *Tsar's Viceroys*, pp. 54-6.

⁴⁸ Count Bobrinskii to Special Committee concerning allocations for Tambov province n.d., RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 100, l. 145.

⁴⁹ On A.S. Norman, see Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, pp. 164-8.

⁵⁰ Tambov provincial welfare committee to the Special Committee on Famine Relief June 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 100, l. 225, Count Bobrinskii to Special Committee concerning allocations for Tambov province n.d., RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 100, l. 145, Note from Bobrinskii 24 April 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 100, l. 202, Prince Gagarin to Count Bobrinskii 12 April 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 100, ll. 203-6, Tambov provincial welfare committee to the Special Committee on Famine Relief June 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 100, l. 225. W.C. Edgar, *The Russian Famine of 1891 and 1892: Some Particulars of the Relief Sent to the Destitute Peasants by the Millers of America in the Steam Ship 'Missouri'* (Minneapolis: The Millers and Manufacturers Insurance Company, 1893), Vol. 2, p. 31.

clearly perceived that it was more efficient to sidestep the official structures and go straight to the roving imperial agent.

When convinced of a crisis, St. Petersburg would put laws and money aside but once the government believed that the crisis has passed, Vyshnegradskii's fiscal control was reimposed. The additional 500,000 roubles in loans from the MVD in April was the final grant from the centre. Bobrinskii and the TPWC secured only 4,350 roubles from March to June to fight typhus and rebuild homes destroyed by fire.⁵¹ Between April and October the MVD and the Special Committee requested that all unspent reserves from the official and charitable relief effort be returned.⁵²

All the province's institutions resisted these central directives in a fierce defence of local interests. Though the charitable relief effort was not only less strident in tone than the TPFC, it was also more successful. Rokasovskii, in a difficult position, cautiously supported retaining the reserves of the official relief effort while the provincial *uprava* did not hold back.⁵³ They found it 'difficult to recognise any part of the sum issued from the government [...] which can be immediately circulated to the imperial food capital' and requested an *additional* 300,000 roubles.⁵⁴ The *uprava* criticised approaches that reduced the annual amount set aside for crop failure relief and pointed out that this increased dependency on the harvest and that loans were 'foreseeable' (evidently lacking awareness of their own predictive failures).⁵⁵ The TPWC clearly articulated local identity:

⁵¹ Count Bobrinskii to Pleve 14 March 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 100, ll. 134-42, Tambov provincial welfare committee to the Special Committee on Famine Relief 9 March 1892, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 100, l. 66, Count Bobrinskii to Pleve, 17, 19 March 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 100, ll. 132-3, Rokasovskii to the Special Committee on Famine Relief June 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 100, l. 238, Tambov provincial welfare committee to the Special Committee on Famine Relief 28 June 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 100, l. 271.

⁵² Durnovo to Rokasovskii 19 April 1892, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, l. 245, Minutes of the Tambov provincial welfare committee 27 October 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 101, l. 12.

⁵³ Rokasovskii to Durnovo 12 May 1892, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, l. 249.

⁵⁴ Tambov provincial zemstvo *uprava* to Rokasovskii 7 May 1892, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 250-1.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

reserves should go to the provincial charitable society as local donors had the right to expect their donations would aid local need and the uezd sectional committee network should remain open.⁵⁶ In both replies, there was a clear sense of ownership of funding irrespective of source; once it came into the physical possession of a provincial institution such as the *uprava* or the TPWC it became theirs, and they were determined to direct its allocation insofar as possible. The boundaries of the province may have been artificially created but when it came to desperate need, they were very real. Unsurprisingly, the MVD proved inflexible while the Special Committee was responsive to proposals with a charitable emphasis. Durnovo was explicit and refused to countenance retaining the reserves while the Special Committee felt the TPWC's suggestion would 'serve as an exemplary standard'.⁵⁷

While the imperial government delineated the areas and ways in which the 'provincial idea' could operate, the province was the seat of innovation and the centre had to respond. Bereft of other sources, the centre was often forced to trust the provinces, creating considerable latitude for the provincial institutions, something Tambov province was prepared to exploit. Where the latitude was smaller, Tambov's institutions adopted a maximisation strategy: if you cannot get everything you want, get *as much as possible*. Though they could not break imperial structures, their approach to seeking funding suggests that they could test or nudge them.

⁵⁶ Minutes of the Tambov provincial welfare committee 27 October 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 101, l. 12.

⁵⁷ Durnovo to Rokasovskii 19 May 1892, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, l. 252, Count Pavel Sergeivich Stroganov to Rokasovskii 16 November 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 101, l. 13.

The creation of the Tambov Provincial Welfare Committee

Charitable relief saw the greatest institutional change in this period. The ‘structure’ established in 1891 was vibrant but fragmented and diffuse and by mid-January 1892, with the approval of the Special Committee for Famine Relief, the province would have one new over-arching body, the Tambov Provincial Welfare Committee.⁵⁸ The MVD had sought tighter integration of private charity with light touch regulation since September 1891, but the main instigator of the new structure was Governor N.M. Baranov of Nizhnii Novgorod.⁵⁹ Governor Baranov sought to centralise activities and information while preserving the existing *popechitel'stvo*s and seeking greater local involvement.⁶⁰ He advocated, in essence, a slightly looser version of the provincial food conference, which he had also pioneered. The Special Committee supported the idea but allowed the provinces themselves to decide if local conditions warranted such a structure.⁶¹ Tambov clearly decided that they did, as did the authorities in the provinces of Astrakhan, Kursk, Perm, Riazan and Saratov.⁶²

The methods of the welfare committees in Nizhnii Novgorod and Tambov provinces to coordinate the overall relief effort better were quite different. Governor Baranov sought to ‘centralise’ charitable relief but argued this would not hinder donations or local autonomy.⁶³ It would, he argued, improve information and ensure a more equitable distribution of aid.⁶⁴ The TPWC adopted a lighter touch, preferring to let the

⁵⁸ Count Bobrinskii to V.K. Pleve 21 February 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 100, ll. 53-4, *Pravitel'stvennyi Vestnik*, No. 15 19 January 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 11, l. 25.

⁵⁹ Durnovo to all governors, circular no. 6395/6591 1 September 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 308-9. Despite calling him the province’s ‘most popular governor’, Evtuhov’s only real treatment of Baranov and the famine itself is a recap of his conflict with conservative gentry in Lukoianov uezd, Evtuhov, *Portrait of a Russian Province*, p. 140, pp. 160-1.

⁶⁰ *Pravitel'stvennyi Vestnik*, No. 7 10 January 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 11, l. 20.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Pravitel'stvennyi Vestnik*, No. 15 19 January 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 11, l. 25.

⁶³ *Pravitel'stvennyi Vestnik*, No. 7 10 January 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 11, l. 20

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

uezd institutions purchase grain while it raised donations and transferred resources to the uezds.⁶⁵

Although the evidence is limited, it would seem that the personalities of the two governors and the trajectory of relief management in each province are strong explanatory factors for the difference between Nizhnii Novgorod and Tambov. Baranov was an ‘energetic’ governor (though lacking in ‘moral qualities’ according to Sergei Witte) who had sought to strip the zemstvos of their food supply duties, then backed them against the gentry and used the food conference to establish strict control over the relief effort.⁶⁶ Rokasovskii, as we have seen, preferred a more decentralised approach allowing institutions relative autonomy in execution; indeed, Robbins uses Rokasovskii as a contrast against Baranov’s centralising approach.⁶⁷ There is a strong degree of truth in this; Rokasovskii allowed the provincial *uprava* to control the mechanics of relief and in this chapter, we will look at how he focused more on correcting defects and ensuring consistency.

The structure of the two committees provide further insight into how they perceived their roles. Although there is no record of the TPWC’s meetings before October 1892, we can draw some inferences. The committee in Nizhnii Novgorod sought to integrate and *control* charity to improve coordination, while the TPWC aimed to solicit donations and to use charity to *support* official relief; a subtle but important distinction. The governor chaired both committees, which included the local bishop and chair of the provincial *uprava*. The similarities, however, stop there.⁶⁸ In Nizhnii, Baranov also

⁶⁵ Consolidated reports concerning the income and expenditure of monies which were in the command of welfare institutions of Tambov province' 3 August - 21 October, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 254, ll. 1-21.

⁶⁶ Evtuhov, *Portrait of a Russian Province*, p. 140, Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, pp. 130-8, pp. 155-63.

⁶⁷ Robbins discusses the actions of Baranov, who was ‘energetic’, Governor Poltaratskii of Kazan whom he sees as ‘phlegmatic’ and initially laissez-faire and Rokasovskii whom he regards as the cautious midpoint that was the more common response, *Ibid*, pp. 125-30, p. 138.

⁶⁸ *Pravitel'stvennyi Vestnik*, No. 7 10 January 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 11, l. 20, Minutes of the Tambov Provincial Welfare Committee 27 October 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 101, l. 12.

included the provincial marshal of the nobility, the mayor of Novgorod, the chair of the local Red Cross and representatives of other institutions while Tambov omitted them and included the vice-governor, two staff members (secretary and treasurer), the manager of the Ministry of State Domains for the province and Rokasovskii's wife, Baroness Aleksandra Rokasovskaia, who was the vice-chair.⁶⁹ Only Rokasovskaia, probably a patron of several charities, and the chair of the provincial *uprava* (Lev Vysheslavtsev until his death in February 1892), had any involvement in charitable matters.⁷⁰ The crossover between the TPWC and the food conference is striking as is the absence of any direct charitable representation. While Nizhnii's committee integrated charitable institutions from the start. The TPWC, however, would remove a group from the charitable relief effort by emasculating diocesan control. The TPWC was formed by merging the July 1891 and Diocesan committees; a move that the Holy Synod approved and several members of the Special Committee took a specific interest in.⁷¹ Despite Count Bobrinskii and Rokasovskii referring to it as 'unification', the TPWC itself talked of abolition and it received the Diocesan Committee's 8,900 roubles.⁷² The only concession was including Bishop Ieronim as a member of the TPWC and using the 8,900 roubles for soup kitchens or church schools.⁷³

The TPWC's record was mixed; sacrificing control and coordination for donations and local autonomy meant it had considerable resources but little control on how to use

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Robbins, *The Tsar's Viceroys*, pp. 176-7, Dvukhzhilova, *Sotsial'nyi sostav*, pp. 112-3, 'Predsedateli', p. 29 and *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 3-5.

⁷¹ This was most likely Count Vorontsov-Dashkov who, as we have seen earlier, took a keen interest in the province as he owned an estate there and had secured it an additional 500,000 roubles in 1891. Vorontsov-Dashkov was a member of the Special Committee on Famine Relief, *Pravitel'stvennyi Vestnik* 23 November 1891, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 11, l. 1.

⁷² Count Bobrinskii to V.K. Pleve 21 February 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 100, ll. 53-4, Consolidated reports concerning the income and expenditure of monies which were in the command of welfare institutions of Tambov province' 3 August - 21 October, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 254, ll. 1-21, Tambov Provincial Welfare Committee to the Special Committee on Famine Relief 5 March 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 100, l. 65.

⁷³ Ibid.

them effectively which left it dependent on individuals, another thing it shared with the official relief effort. Outside of the Special Committee it raised 25,000 roubles (mostly from within the province) and just over 138,000 *puds* in grain and fodder, all from other provinces.⁷⁴ This sense of success was emphasised by Count Bobrinskii, who found it impossible to list all the private individuals who contributed via donations, maintaining soup kitchens, or providing earnings and healthcare.⁷⁵ It was fragile however; the TPWC found that it had little impact on how charitable relief functioned, was dependent on marshals of the nobility and land captains, and lacked detail uezd level information.⁷⁶ Managing the relief effort meant making a series of choices, many difficult. In structuring the TPWC loosely, the province was consistent in its practices but charity was less formally connected and risked greater fragmentation.

The provincial food conference as an aid appeal board

The provincial food conference was one of the key institutions of the relief effort though provinces affected by the famine made use of it in different ways. In Nizhnii Novgorod, Governor Baranov, who had originally proposed the establishment of the conference, used it to centralise control of relief within the province.⁷⁷ As we saw in Chapter 2 however, Rokasovskii preferred ‘decentralisation’ with the conference having a role as a ‘guiding organ’.⁷⁸ Threatened by irrelevance largely brought about by the actions of those who comprised it, it proved an adaptable and flexible institution. The changing nature of the crisis and its escalating severity forced a rethink of how best to coordinate efforts,

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ *Pravitel'stvennyi Vestnik*, No. 106 19 May 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 11, l. 64-ob.

⁷⁶ Count Bobrinskii to Plevé 14 March 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 100, ll. 134-42, Consolidated reports concerning the income and expenditure of monies which were in the command of welfare institutions of Tambov province 3 August - 21 October, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 254, ll. 1-21.

⁷⁷ Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, pp. 130-8.

⁷⁸ *Obzor Tambovskoi gubernii za 1892 god*, p. 14.

especially policy formulation. In this section we will look at how the TPFC re-invented itself as an appeals board while some policy formulation was transferred to the uezds. A pragmatic response to the changing circumstances of the crisis, it allowed the province's institutions to meet social and political goals.

The problems encountered in Spassk and Morshansk uezds, covered in Chapter 3, forced Governor Rokasovskii to respond by using the fluidity of the relief effort's ad hoc structure to correct acknowledged defects. His solution was uezd food conferences (UFCs), comprised of land captains, the uezd *uprava* and chaired by the uezd marshal of the nobility.⁷⁹ Along with Governor N. M. Baranov in Nizhnii Novgorod, Rokasovskii was the only other governor to seek an uezd-based solution.⁸⁰ As with charity though, the two provinces would take the new institutions in very different directions. Baranov sought to use them to increase the control of the provincial food conference, while Rokasovskii explicitly stated they should address local variations in common issues.⁸¹ There are no records of communication between the two governors but given Baranov's 'energetic' nature and the fact he was behind the provincial food conference, it is almost certain that he developed the UFCs first. Rokasovskii was not a radical innovator, rather an adaptor of the creations of others; nevertheless, he saw that the UFCs were a way of achieving the contradictory goals of unity and decentralisation. They were a recognition that decentralisation could not function effectively without an adequate structure and a role for the uezds in policy formulation.

The TPFC would continue to deviate from the pattern of a domineering institution controlled by the governor set out by Robbins.⁸² At the same meeting where he announced the establishment of the UFCs, Rokasovskii repurposed the TPFC. A circular in the

⁷⁹ Minutes of the TPFC 17 December 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 136-140.

⁸⁰ Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, pp. 146-8.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, Minutes of the TPFC 17 December 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 136-140.

⁸² Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, pp. 146-8.

Gubernskie Vedomosti and an announcement at all volost' assemblies would clarify eligibility for food aid, the process of obtaining it and establish an appeals process for the peasantry.⁸³ Appeals were to be presented in the governor's name only, not to land captains, and would be given 'due legal process' before being delivered to the TPFC for a final, binding, decision.⁸⁴ Governor Rokasovskii's role in this deviation is central and complicated. It is easy to label him as buffeted by events, lacking the ability to innovate and a weak strategic thinker. Indeed, as we have seen, he made errors. Yet in a moment of acute crisis, very few administrators could afford to be strategists. His adaptation of the TPFC was pragmatic, responding to existing problems with a practical and implementable solution.

Rokasovskii had taken the innovation of another governor and adapted it to Tambov's particular circumstances, using it to correct defects in the machinery he oversaw, again proving that the province could adapt and do the best it could in the circumstances. The TPFC now appeared at the apex of a new, diverse structure designed to limit the impacts of the fragmented nature of provincial government. A clear reporting loop was now established from the top down; for example, UFCs oversaw the *uezd upravly* and land captains and could vary policies to local conditions, but were subject to the TPFC. Every element of the administrative structure now had a role to play, most of which now went beyond simply complying with commands from above. Indeed, Rokasovskii had now built in a certain level of local initiative, analogous to the very function the TPFC played with St. Petersburg.

⁸³ Minutes of the TPFC 17 December 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 136-140, *Tambovskie Gubernskie Vedomosti*, 4 January 1892, Circular No. 6213 to all volost' boards 23 December 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 201-2.

⁸⁴ Rokasovskii to all land captains 23 December 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, l. 187.

The new strategy had several goals: effective oversight of the actions at the volost' level, preservation of public order and ensuring continued loyalty to and faith in the government. By 'reaching into the village' Rokasovskii was using the TPFC to meet key political goals.⁸⁵ Transforming the TPFC into an appeals board closed the last level of the feedback loop and provided a mechanism for effective oversight of volost' officials. The zemstvos could not organise on the volost' level while the land captains did not answer to the governor; this disconnected the TPFC from the very epicentre of the crisis. Little wonder, then, that Rokasovskii saw it as very important that peasants should be able to appeal if they had doubts or complaints about officials.⁸⁶

In addition to oversight, introducing appeals helped ensure public order by essentially providing a safety valve for discontent while legitimising the relief effort and its procedures. Public order was a legitimate concern; as we saw in Chapter 3, there were complaints that poor quality food aid had killed two peasants while one village society had actually sent a messenger to the Tsar to demand the 'Tsar's rations'. On the last claim, Rokasovskii himself had drawn attention to the increasing number of petitions for this food 'on the Treasury's account'.⁸⁷ The governor was explicit on how the appeals process was central to his strategy to maintain order; the development of these 'fallacious instincts' surrounding free aid would have 'very malicious consequences, which it is necessary to stave off'.⁸⁸ A week after this warning, there were two indications of what these 'malicious consequences' would look like. A priest in Spassk uezd, Fr. Butakov, was reported for inciting the peasantry against local officials over aid allocation while the

⁸⁵ Corinne Gaudin uses the concept of reaching into the village to examine the ways in which the late Tsarist state sought to transform peasant communities, values and behaviours in the 1880s and 1890s through laws and officials; repurposing it slightly here we can see Rokasovskii's action as a way of transforming the behaviour of *officials*: Gaudin, *Ruling Peasants*, pp. 14-46.

⁸⁶ Minutes of the TPFC 17 December 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 136-140.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

governor's chancellery asked that a Mr. Leman, supposedly guilty of the same crime, be denied the right to establish a charitable committee.⁸⁹ These incidents aside, concern for public order and a determination to act were a key part of Rokasovskii's character, perhaps partially due to his military career. After the famine, this would lead to reports on insufficient police presence in the province and actions that would cause his eventual dismissal as governor.⁹⁰

In a way, however, Governor Rokasovskii was right to be concerned about public order at this time; evidence from other famines throughout history suggests that public disturbances peak at the *threat* of famine when frustration at authorities over food shortages rises.⁹¹ However, once starvation takes hold, this has in many cases led to greater apathy, presumably due to physical weakness and the sheer focus on survival.⁹² Thus, the province was responding to the small disturbances at the very moment at which public activity would tip away from resistance. The regime of Tsar Alexander III was, with some justification, obsessed with internal security and determinedly autocratic; by allowing the appeals process, Rokasovskii attempted to head off security concerns by allowing a formal, if limited, forum for discontent.

This is important to recognise as Rokasovskii had the authority under the law (backed by a secret MVD circular of 1885) to adopt a more repressive strategy and take all necessary actions to break public disorder.⁹³ That he did not take this opportunity

⁸⁹ Spassk uezd ispravnik to Rokasovskii 24 December 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4197, ll. 1-3, Gubernatorial Chancellery of Tambov province to the Special Committee on Famine Relief 23 December 1891, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 100, ll. 2-3.

⁹⁰ Rokasovskii to Durnovo 23 December 1894, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 45 (1881), d. 158, ll. 167-8, Concerning the incorrect actions of the Governor of Tambov, actual state councillor Baron Rokasovskii (Ministry of Justice, 2nd Department) 29 March 1896, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 45 (1881), d. 158, ll. 189-95.

⁹¹ Ó Gráda, *Famine: A Short History*, p. 55.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Svod zakonov*, t. 2, Obshchee uchrezhdenie gubernskoe, razdel 2, glava 2, otdelenie 3, st. 317, Concerning the incorrect actions of the Governor of Tambov, actual state councillor Baron Rokasovskii (Ministry of Justice, 2nd Department) 29 March 1896, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 45 (1881), d. 158, ll. 189-95.

shows that his main concern was not strict control of public order but shoring up government authority and legitimising the relief effort. Informing land captains of the appeals process, Rokasovskii stressed that it was important to ‘strengthen the faith of the population in the legal and correct allocation of loans’.⁹⁴ As we saw in Chapter 3 and will see later in this chapter, Rokasovskii intervened when the rules and procedures of the relief effort were not followed; fairness and compliance were his key concerns. Attempts by the peasantry to hide their resources, the actions of individuals like Fr. Butakov and the distribution of poor quality grain undermined the effort’s legitimacy.

Seeking to legitimise the relief effort and convince the population the government was doing all it could, Rokasovskii took a number of potentially risky contradictory actions that inadvertently questioned other elements of government policy. The circular to all volost’ boards made clear that there would be no ‘official food’ while the appeals process he outlined circumvented the land captains.⁹⁵ Rokasovskii was attempting to limit peasant expectations while portraying the government as responsive to popular needs. This was no easy task. The land captains were vital in allocating aid and were the centrepiece legislation of Alexander III’s reign, yet here Rokasovskii was undercutting them. It is especially confusing as he would later emphasise how key they were to the relief effort.⁹⁶ This does, however, make sense when we see it as a calculation based on immediate short-term risk; he had clearly decided that the greater risk was to the government’s credibility and arbitrary localised authority was not a new experience for the peasantry and was even expected.⁹⁷ The peasantry believed that the land captains

⁹⁴ Rokasovskii to all land captains 23 December 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, l. 187

⁹⁵ Circular No. 6213 to all volost’ boards 23 December 1891, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, l. 202.

⁹⁶ Annual Report of Governor Rokasovskii on Tambov Province for 1892, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 223, d. 232, ll. 12.

⁹⁷ Aleksandr Novikov, the land captain in Kozlov uезд, remarked that ‘hundreds of years acquiring the belief that his affairs will be solved not according to immutable law but by arbitrary authorities’, Novikov, *Zapsiki zemskogo nachal’nika*, p. 2.

could do ‘everything’, and the 1889 Land Captain Statute itself reinforced their powerful position.⁹⁸ The state frequently attacked and outsourced blame to lower level officials in the event of a crisis to protect its own reputation, and it is logical to assume that Rokasovskii was doing the same thing here. Again, the bureaucratic culture of the centre was replicated in the provinces.

The role of petitions in imperial Russia

By using petitions in his name to create an appeals process against the actions of lower officials, Rokasovskii was playing his part in a long established ritual performance of power. He was performing the role of the powerful satrap, the appointee from outside who would fairly adjudicate and dispense the fatherly mercy of the tsar.⁹⁹ The myth of the tsar-*batiushka*, the ‘little father’ who dispensed freedom or made small gestures of benevolence to the *narod* to overcome the despotism of officials, was a long established cultural motif.¹⁰⁰ The nineteenth century also saw the rise of the ‘scenario of power’, in which each tsar chose their governing myth. Tsar Alexander III’s was based on a close bond with the people via paternalism.¹⁰¹ Allowing the presentation of petitions had long been an established method of interaction between the population and the throne, and the image of the merciful tsar served to personalise and reinforce loyalty, preserving autocracy.¹⁰² Petitions regulated conflict and, by ensuring greater subservience and freedom of action through the unpredictability of a petition’s outcome, maintained the

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 26. The key section is the preamble which states that peasant ‘difficulties’ ‘resides in the lack of a firm government authority close to the people that would combine guardianship over rural residents with care for the conduct of peasant affairs’, *PSZ*, 3rd series, vol. 9, 12 July 1889, No. 6195.

⁹⁹ Robbins, *The Tsar’s Viceroys*, pp. 201-5.

¹⁰⁰ Daniel Field, *Rebels in the Name of the Tsar* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976), pp. 1-26.

¹⁰¹ Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, vol. 2, pp. 6-13.

¹⁰² Wirtschafter, *Social Identity*, pp. 4-6.

autocratic nature of the regime.¹⁰³ By undercutting the land captains, at least symbolically, Rokasovskii was effectively reaffirming rituals of deference and loyalty. The governor may have become a manager but he could still be a powerful symbol.

Petitions were also a useful mechanism for the peasantry as a way of mediating and controlling their existence in a state that privileged other social groups as a matter of course. The state was the source of all justice; there were no 'natural rights' and territories and social groups could not resist incorporation. However, a legal system based on differentiation still created room for even 'lowly' subjects in basic practices of governance.¹⁰⁴ The great emancipation cemented peasant separateness in the very structure of rural administration with the only changes being the way in which they interacted with the general system of administration.¹⁰⁵ However, peasant culture was only partly isolated; it was flexible and adaptable with rituals and customs used to mediate a rapidly changing existence, with even the practice of denying the existence of these customs part of the process.¹⁰⁶ Adaptation stretched to include the reformed legal system; peasants were litigious and used the court system to pursue their interests and goals,

¹⁰³ Madhavan K. Palat, 'Regulating conflict through the petition' in *Social Identities in Revolutionary Russia*, ed. Madhavan K. Palat, (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 100-1.

¹⁰⁴ Jane Burbank, 'An Imperial Rights Regime: Law and Citizenship in the Russian Empire', *Kritika*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (Summer 2006), pp. 397-431.

¹⁰⁵ For an extremely thorough discussion and explanation of the structure of peasant administration and local officials from 1861 until the revolution see: Corinne Gaudin, 'Governing the village: Peasant culture and the problem of social transformation in Russia, 1906-1914', unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 1993, pp. 23-60.

¹⁰⁶ Christine D. Worobec, 'Death ritual among Russian and Ukrainian peasants: linkages between the living and the dead' in *Cultures in Flux: Lower-Class Values, Practices and Resistance in Late Imperial Russia*, eds. Stephen P. Frank and Mark D. Steinberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 11-33; Christine D. Worobec, 'Reflections on customary law and post-reform peasant Russia', *Russian Review*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (Jan., 1985), pp. 21-25; Stephen P. Frank, "'Simple folk, savage customs?" Youth, sociability, and the dynamics of culture in rural Russia, 1856-1914', *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 25, No. 4. (Summer, 1992), pp. 711-36.

sometimes all the way to the Senate.¹⁰⁷ Recent historiography has shown, through examining various court records and petitions, that the peasantry used volost' courts to help reshape society while fighting against its perceived 'government' bias while for women, petitions to the Senate were a way of articulating personal power and freedom.¹⁰⁸

Peasant appeals: type, investigation and decisions

The peasant appeals and petitions to the TPFC in 1892, then, fit into this long established narrative and practice of power. They met the interests of the provincial administration, legitimising their efforts and supervising officials; and the peasantry, who could articulate their own interpretation of the relief effort and seek redress. Petitions represented the point at which state and peasant interests intersected. The appeals process in Tambov province was demand led. The peasantry quickly took advantage of it and forced the provincial authorities to consider their needs. The TPFC met sixteen times between January and August with 94 items out of one hundred and sixty, or 58.75 per cent of the total, dealing with new petitions.¹⁰⁹ In addition to this, the TPFC also reconsidered previously submitted petitions; the TPFC, therefore, spent the vast majority of its time dealing with peasant petitions in some form. Other provincial food conferences met only once or twice a month and there is no indication of an appeal process in other provinces.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Various perspectives on the way in which the peasantry used the machinery of the judicial system can be found in Burbank, 'An Imperial Rights Regime', pp. 397-431; Gareth Popkins, 'Code versus custom? Norms and tactics in peasant volost' court appeals, 1889-1917', *Russian Review*, Vol. 59, No. 3 (Jul., 2000), pp. 408-424; Worobec, 'Reflections', pp. 21-5, Stephen P. Frank, *Cultural Conflict, and Justice in Rural Russia, 1856-1914* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1999); Barbara Alpern Engel, *Breaking The Ties That Bound : The Politics Of Marital Strife In Late Imperial Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).

¹⁰⁸ Jane Burbank, *Russian Peasants go to Court: Legal Culture in the Countryside, 1905-1917* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), pp. 45-72; Palat, 'Regulating Conflict', p. 109; Frank, *Cultural Conflict*, p. 113, Engel, *Breaking The Ties That Bound*, pp. 260-9.

¹⁰⁹ The dates of the meetings were: 4 January, 8 January, 10 February, 4 March, 12-14 March, 25 March, 30 March, 3 April, 14 April, 28 April, 9 May, 30 May, 10 June, 24 June, 1 July, 8 August.

¹¹⁰ Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, p. 147.

A two-way exchange, peasant need drove the TPFC but the volume of petitions highlighted the need to keep an active check on local officials, who retained the final right of decision and conducted thorough assessments.

Famine is the symptom of a wider disease; starvation becomes evident when pre-existing distress reaches crisis point. Far ahead of his time in this respect, the land captain Aleksandr Novikov diagnosed Tambov province with a ‘chronic disease: malnourishment, which escalates in crop failure years into famine’.¹¹¹ Peasant petitions, as the final resort for aid, played a similar role, revealing when distress became too much, and when this distress started. The TPFC records and the MVD’s statistics show that the dramatic spike in petitions for March and April resulted from problems in January and February, showing that the provincial machinery was slow in dealing with distress and identifying its causes.¹¹² Nearly half of the TPFC meetings took place in March and April and it heard 75 of the 94 petitions in this time while March and April were only the third and fourth highest months for food loans (874,000 and 922,000 people respectively).¹¹³ The amount of food aid allocated per eater also rose slightly above the MVD norm and fell slightly in subsequent months though it was decidedly higher than January and February when, as we will see, the TPFC had cut the allocation per eater due to supply fears.¹¹⁴ More aid was being provided in April yet twenty-five petitions came to one meeting in late April alone.¹¹⁵ Hunger had started to work earlier and faster than the province’s institutions were able to cope with or understand; they understood absolute, immediate hunger but not relative or slowly worsening distress.

¹¹¹ Novikov, *Zapiski zemskogo nachal'nika*, p. 165.

¹¹² Minutes of the TPFC 28 April, 4 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 292-314, ll. 1-9.

¹¹³ Minutes of the TPFC 28 April, 4 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 292-314, ll. 1-9, *Statisticheskie dannye*, pp. 56-7.

¹¹⁴ The MVD norm was 0.75 of a *pud* while in March and April it averaged 0.82 and 0.80, up from the 0.70 and 0.74 in January and February, *Statisticheskie dannye*, pp. 76-9.

¹¹⁵ Minutes of the TPFC 28 April 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 292-314.

The desperate human plight of many peasants and whole communities is not captured in the dry and mostly quantitative official documents. The petitions are the clearest records we have from the very people worst affected by the crisis. They were not just examples of allocation procedures gone wrong but desperate pleas for help. Tambov's countryside was in crisis and, via the petitions, peasants were essentially begging the *gubernskii nachal'nik* and closest link to the Tsar for relief. To see how the relative distress affected the peasantry we need to look at specific examples from the petitions. Some of the petitions were desperate cases: a family unattached to a village society forced to reside elsewhere, eighteen needy households initially denied aid and a peasant woman forced to sell her last horse to care for her insane son.¹¹⁶ Entire village societies often had to resort to appeals with between fifteen and 106 peasants sometimes on a single petition.¹¹⁷

Apart from desperate need, the petitions show that peasant life, with its tensions, grievances and practices, continued. Instead of famine eliminating (if only temporarily), these tensions were expressed through the medium of the crisis. Village societies had long used expulsion as a way to control or eliminate threats to stability and viability, and the petitions provided a mechanism for this. In late April, Dukhovka Vyghanov, a peasant in Soldatskoi village, Tambov uezd, had been imprisoned for theft and attempted to obtain a passport on false pretences; after the land captain warned the village society that they were responsible for supervising him, they petitioned to expel him one day after the aid rolls were revised.¹¹⁸ Collective responsibility bound the members of a village society together; debt was collective and Governor Rokasovskii ensured that the peasantry were

¹¹⁶ Minutes of the TPFC 8 January 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 249-52, N. Kazmashnev to Rokasovskii 29 May 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 384-5, Minutes of the TPFC 4 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 1-9.

¹¹⁷ Minutes of the TPFC 30, 4 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 198-224, ll. 1-9.

¹¹⁸ Minutes of the TPFC 28 April 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 292-314.

aware that the aid loans were part of this.¹¹⁹ Burdensome in some ways, collective responsibility acted here as a social regulator; Vyzhanov's petition gave the village society the excuse it had presumably been looking for. Very similar to how the province often interacted with the imperial centre, the local community adapted the language or priorities of the state to meet its own internal goals.¹²⁰ Obedient in appearance, in reality they had transformed the meaning of the act, if not its expression.

Sometimes the allocation process was used as personal score settling or to deceive. In March in the village of Kondrovka, Temnikov uezd, a peasant with the surname of Guliaev petitioned for aid after being denied in the original inspection. When the land captain investigated, he found that the peasants' claim that Guliaev rented out land and worked on the railway was untrue and he was in need of considerable aid.¹²¹ The same village also saw a family who ran their own business appeal for aid.¹²² Land captains would often simply accept the resolutions as presented in order to make the process faster. Knowing this, many peasants or whole village societies used the petitions to settle scores or exclude unpopular peasants, while more powerful individuals (such as volost' elders and scribes) often sought to seize control of the allocation process. The two cases from Kondrovka show that instead of simply being passive and compliant, peasants would, perfectly understandably, seek any advantage. We need to ask then if the province's attempts to shore up confidence in the relief effort did either the opposite or was simply exploited by those who saw it as a second chance to get aid.

¹¹⁹ The law on the peasantry laid down that collective responsibility would be used so that households could fulfil their fiscal and communal responsibilities: *PSZ*, 2nd series, t. 36, 19 February 1861, No. 36657, glava 3, st. 187. In his circular, Rokasovskii asked the land captains to make clear that aid was a repayable loan to the peasantry while inspecting the aid rolls and to make sure that they understood that all were responsible whether loans were issued to everyone or individual households, Rokasovskii to all land captains 27 July 1891, GATO, f. 4 op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 80-1.

¹²⁰ Collective responsibility was used for discipline and also as a way of deflecting tax responsibilities, Gaudin, *Ruling Peasants*, p. 17, pp. 39-40.

¹²¹ Minutes of the TPFC 30 March, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d5. 4265, ll. 198-224.

¹²² *Ibid.*

The crisis presented opportunities for long suffering residents, especially wives, to seek redress. At an unspecified point in April, Ivan Khomutinnikov, a peasant from Sverskoi volost', Temnikov uezd appealed to Rokasovskii for aid. An investigation revealed that he was not needy but the matter did not end there; his wife complained about his profligacy and constant drunkenness, and demanded that their property be removed from his control.¹²³ The investigator, N. Kazmashnev, presumably the land captain, agreed and turned the property over to the command of the village assembly; it is likely Khomutinnikov had accrued debts and the law allowed for the seizure of property in the event of a peasant neglecting their collective responsibilities.¹²⁴ Khomutinnikov's wife was able to use the crisis to leverage broader legal and cultural trends to re-establish her autonomy and at least ease her condition. Imperial law laid down that a wife's first duty was to obey her husband; yet in another sign of the contradictory nature of tsarist governance, the law protected the property rights of women in a way almost unique in Europe for the period.¹²⁵ After 1864, the Governing Senate consistently ruled in the favour of women in disputes with husbands; it was perhaps with the idea that the property would be assigned to the wife that Kazmashnev transferred it to the assembly.¹²⁶ If the stories on Khomutinnikov's behaviour are true, there is a fitting justice to the story; in attempting to take advantage of a redress mechanism, he himself was complained about and fell victim to the law. Imperial legislation and the rules of the relief effort tightly delineated room for manoeuvre but by connecting certain provisions and playing one off against the other, it was possible to carve out a limited sphere of autonomy and use a specific event to improve one's standing.

¹²³ N. Kazmashnev to Rokasovskii 29 May 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 384-5.

¹²⁴ Ibid., PSZ, 2nd series, t. 36, 19 February 1861, No. 36657, glava 3, st. 188.

¹²⁵ *Svod zakonov*, 'O pravakh i obiazannostiakh semeystvennykh', t. 10, razdel 1, glava 4, otdelenie 1, st. 107, Engel, *Breaking the Ties that Bound*, pp. 80-1.

¹²⁶ Engel, *Breaking the Ties that Bound*, pp. 80-1.

Exploitation was all too common a feature in village societies; from the notorious abuses of the volost' scribe to manipulation and intimidation, exploitation was woven into the fabric of peasant life. By the late nineteenth century, this feature had become a key state concern. Indeed, one of the main aims of the 1889 Land Captain Statute was to protect the peasantry from the 'commune eater', who exploited and ruined them. Over the course of the famine, Tambov's provincial and uezd authorities complained about the exploitation of peasants by kulaks and other groups.¹²⁷ That the appeals process threw up a case of this underscores their position as a reflection of normal peasant society and the continuation of its normal tensions. In May in Novo-Cherkutinskoi volost', Usman uezd, Leren Krol' had listed Aleksandr Kuznetsov as the owner of his shop and had taken debts in his name.¹²⁸ Kuznetsov, having this asset on paper was denied aid but was in reality destitute after losing his home in a fire in 1891.¹²⁹ The arrangement may once have been mutually beneficial as Kuznetsov was the shop's manager and Krol' was not legally allowed operate the business; the famine had torn apart this fragile agreement. It took so long to expose the fraud as the land captain, overwhelmed by the volume of work, performed only a perfunctory check of the resolutions. The relief effort's structures are again exposed: they functioned satisfactorily at a surface level, but were incapable of detecting or dealing with more complicated issues.

Unsurprisingly, the petitions reveal that not only did peasants frequently seek to manipulate each other, there were also attempts to manipulate local officials and the relief effort. Despite aiming to reduce evasion and improve peasant trust and compliance, the TPFC was still confronted with cases of peasants seeking to take advantage of the

¹²⁷ See Minutes of the Special Conference with Director Vishniakov 28 July 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 56-66, Annual Report of Governor Rokasovskii on Tambov Province for 1892, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 223, d. 232, ll. 8-9 and *Zhurnaly Borisoglebskogo uездnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, p. 36.

¹²⁸ Minutes of the TPFC 10 June 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 401-19.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

overworked relief effort and improve their chances of receiving aid. The peasantry took advantage of the opportunity the appeals process offered. Most appealed legitimately but others used it as a second chance to get around the strict eligibility requirements. An example of this comes from Tambov uezd in March: following queries by Rokasovskii and the TPFC, the Tambov uezd *uprava* established that a family in Tsorontsivskii volost' had left off the lists four people, two of working age and two one-year-old children.¹³⁰ Neither category were entitled to aid. By excluding them the family clearly aimed to improve their chances of getting aid which could then be distributed between everyone. The peasantry often (rightly) saw the eligibility requirements as far too restrictive; evasion was an attempt to redress what they saw as unfair (and sometimes illegitimate) rules. Subverting and re-positioning official structures to their advantage as a survival strategy was part of a long tradition of peasant resistance and non-compliance.

These brief examples give a flavour of some of the petitions that made their way to the TPFC in 1892. We cannot claim them as wholly representative but they illustrate that even while famine raged, for many life continued as before, only with sharper circumstances. In fact, the crisis perhaps served to encourage the behaviour of thieves, drunken husbands and exploiters; at a time of sharp need and competition, unethical, advantage-focused behaviour usually increases.¹³¹ It is also notable that a large number of applications came from well-off peasants, suggesting that they were better able to make use of official channels.

It was into this maelstrom that the land captains waded, expected to investigate fairly on behalf of the TPFC. They did so in the face of worsening hunger, desperate need

¹³⁰ Minutes of the TPFC 25 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 198-224.

¹³¹ In August 1891, the *Tambovskie Gubernskie Vedomosti* warned members of the public to secure their houses as thefts at night had increased, mostly through open windows, *Tambovskie Gubernskie Vedomosti* Saturday 24 August 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, ll. 201-2. For more on the general rise in anti-social behaviour during famines see: Ó Gráda, *Famine: A Short History*.

and an almost unmanageable workload: in the words of Aleksandr Novikov, a proper inspection of resolutions would take at least a year while if they did not hurry, the loans would always be late.¹³² They were caught in an almost inescapable bind; either they risked handing out aid quickly, potentially giving it to those ineligible, or worked diligently, potentially missing those who needed it. While there were some mistakes and a number of personal judgments, the majority of land captains worked rationally, morally and legally: they sought to establish by proper investigation who had been incorrectly refused aid or who had become needy.

The process of investigating the petitions was remarkably similar to the initial assessment under appeal. Petitions went to Governor Rokasovskii in the first instance and were transferred to the relevant land captain for investigation and appraisal. The land captain's investigation, in the form that reached the TPFC, was a brief statement on the material and family condition of the petitioner, whether they had previously been awarded aid, and a brief conclusion. By using the same process that they were now accepting appeals to, they aimed to legitimise the relief effort and show it was adaptable; mistakes were likely but the system would correct itself. A wide-scale reassessment of need in changing circumstances was not possible, but by allowing for individual applications, they built in a degree of flexibility. It also demonstrated a considerable level of initiative: the rules were centrally set, but the tsar's *local* representatives would address the issues. For the most part, the land captains carried this out. Governor Rokasovskii became directly involved in one case but this was at a time when the appeals system was new and

¹³² Novikov, *Zapiski zemskogo nachal'nika*, p. 172.

fluid and the case crossed uezd boundaries.¹³³ Another case involved the Tambov uezd *uprava* investigating as the local land captain did not respond in time.¹³⁴

This delay was unusual however; despite the heavy workload, there is strong evidence that the land captains understood the seriousness of the situation and were keen to carry out their duties as successfully as possible. We can see this in the fact that land captains would break a petition down by each application, with an individual assessment and evaluation, whether a petition had one, fifteen or even 106 applicants.¹³⁵ In this latter example, the land captain kept the local uezd *uprava* apprised of who needed aid as circumstances changed. This approach was typical; a rare example of a lack of attention was in Badevskoi volost', Temnikov uezd where in March, a new inspection was ordered for several families as the land captain's original conclusion was based on information from 1891.¹³⁶ In general, each level of the province was aware of the need for accurate information; a need that had helped prompt the transformation of the TPFC. The effort that went into investigating each petition shows that they were not indifferent to peasant suffering and were keenly aware of their responsibilities to them and the state. Prince Kugushev, a land captain in Usman uezd, received a ringing endorsement from the uezd *uprava* for following the law while taking 'close to his heart the calamitous situation of the people'.¹³⁷ Very few land captains followed the example of the eighth precinct in Kozlov uezd who rejected a petition to prevent others, which would 'complicate the execution of his duties'.¹³⁸ While the disinterested land captain in Kozlov uezd was an exception, the multiple examples of land captains using their powers in idiosyncratic and

¹³³ Governor Rokasovskii and the Tambov chief of police investigated a case in Tambov uezd for the 8 January TPFC; it appears this involvement was due to the fact that the petitioning family were from Kozlov uezd but were ordinarily resident in Tambov town, Minutes of the TPFC 8 January 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 249-52.

¹³⁴ Minutes of the TPFC 4 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 1-9.

¹³⁵ Minutes of the TPFC 30, 4 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 198-224, ll. 1-9.

¹³⁶ Minutes of the TPFC 4 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 1-9.

¹³⁷ Minutes of the TPFC 10 June 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 401-19.

¹³⁸ Minutes of the TPFC 30 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 198-224.

contradictory ways led many to see them as arbitrary and unchecked. To Aleksandr Novikov, there was a clear difference between the law and ‘reality’ and he identified a complete lack of consistency at all levels.¹³⁹ Historians such as Gaudin and Pearson instead see a flawed institution wherein the first appointees struggled with broad, vague tasks with little support and contradictory messages.¹⁴⁰

The ways in which land captains viewed and judged the petitions they investigated endorse Gaudin and Pearson’s view. Faced with an overwhelming workload, land captains had to find some way of categorising and evaluating cases that fell into the many grey areas, especially for those eligible only for charitable relief. As we have seen already, the imperial state interwove notions of trust, merit and pragmatic security concerns, such as a petitioner who sought to incite the peasantry to ‘unfounded complaints’, into the relief effort. The land captains had to juggle these priorities.¹⁴¹ This sometimes led to decisions based less on formal requirements but personal judgments; a land captain in Temnikov uezd rejected a request, laying the blame on the peasant’s supposed financial mismanagement.¹⁴² This is not to excuse or approve of the judgmental nature of these decisions; ideally, a more robust, well-resourced process would have existed, eliminating the need for this. Famine stricken Tambov province was most certainly not an ideal world, however, and the 1889 Land Captain Statute deliberately envisaged paternal authority. In post for less than a year, struggling to grapple with the crisis, various complex and conflicting laws, and now an ad hoc appeals process, that land captains based decisions on personal judgments was not ideal but was understandable. Ultimately, it was an attempt to cope and ensure that aid went to where it was needed or ‘deserved’, neatly

¹³⁹ Gaudin, *Ruling peasants*, pp. 47-8, Pearson, *Russian Officialdom*, pp. 204-9, Novikov, *Zapiski zemskogo nachal'nika*, p., 36, 45, pp.200-3.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Minutes of the TPFC 8 January, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 249-52,

¹⁴² Minutes of the TPFC 4 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 1-9.

encapsulated by the Usman uezd *uprava* defending Prince Kugushev as ‘it is difficult to avoid mistakes in the inspection of the needy peasants’.¹⁴³ Indeed, several land captains would take it on themselves to aid petitioners who were not eligible for official aid by contacting the local sectional committee, *popechitel'stvo* or the TPWC.¹⁴⁴ A land captain in Lipetsk uezd prevented charitable aid being used to reduce the level of official aid allocated while one in Elatomsk uezd requested permission to redirect livestock aid to feed desperate peasants.¹⁴⁵ One of the issues with ‘*proizvol*’, especially concerning land captains, has been the tendency to see it as a negative qualifier; these examples show instead that it often applied to a range of positive, event-dependent actions to help land captains discharge their duties.

The inevitability of errors, accepted almost without question by all of the province’s institutions and officials, had been a key driver for the establishment of the appeals process. Worried about the number of irregularities or the system’s capacity to cope, Rokasovskii had instituted it to legitimise the relief effort and supervise local officials. The appeals process was the only formal, direct connection and communication between the peasantry and those responsible for their relief. Yet the process was also controlled and mediated; petitions restated the subservient nature of the peasantry and by the time they reached the TPFC they were presented through the lens and judgment of the land captains. The power and responsibility the TPFC had was considerable; it could award or deny aid, praise or rebuke officials and order additional investigations.

In exercising this power, the archival material shows that the TPFC’s main concern was resolving the issue at the heart of each petition and that they, like the land captains, were forced to find ways to cope with and adjudicate on the sheer volume of

¹⁴³ Minutes of the TPFC 10 June 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 401-19.

¹⁴⁴ Minutes of the TPFC 9 May 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 339-44.

¹⁴⁵ Minutes of the TPFC 12-14 March, 30 May 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 41-59, ll. 375-9.

cases presented. At a considerable distance from the actual events described in the petitions, this led to decisions that suggest the TPFC was abdicating responsibility and studiously ignoring its own resolution process. However, the truth is a little more complex than this; while leaving the petition without action or requesting additional information were the most common decisions, they reflected standard bureaucratic practice and were an attempt to resolve the issue at the centre of each petition. Indeed, the TPFC took few decisions on petitions themselves, suggesting that its main role was in providing an outlet for appeal and acting as a driver of better and more responsive local effort.

Perhaps the most common decision was the 'petition left without action', which accounted for half of petitions at one meeting in April.¹⁴⁶ These petitions were frequently resolved between submission and the TPFC meeting. Investigations often established that the petitioners did not meet the eligibility requirements for official aid (through either wealth or age), or that they were allocated aid between the appeal being lodged and the TPFC meeting, therefore the petition was now redundant.¹⁴⁷ The frequent time lag may make the process seem redundant but the very act of allowing petitions triggered an investigation and meant that many issues were resolved at source before the TPFC got involved. Governor Rokasovskii got the supervisory function and more responsive allocation process he wanted.

Imperial bureaucratic practices were transmitted, learned and practised by the TPFC. In the courts system, analogous to petitions in many ways, cases took years to go through the various levels and there were continuous requests for information.¹⁴⁸ Jane Burbank highlights the case of one peasant, Praskovia Aref'eva, who spent nine years

¹⁴⁶ Minutes of the TPFC 14 April 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 248-63.

¹⁴⁷ See for example Minutes of the TPFC 4, 12-14 March, 9 May 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 1-9, 41-59, 339-44.

¹⁴⁸ Burbank, *Russian Peasants go to Court*, pp. 49-81.

going through various appeals; not every case was as prolonged but delays were common even where there were established submission forms to make it easy for the petitioner and officials.¹⁴⁹ Informal and fluid, with information presented in a variety of formats, the appeals process presented considerable challenges for the TPFC, especially when the issue had not been resolved prior to a meeting. Adding to this the approaching *rasputitsa* and rapidly changing circumstances, accurate information was vital. It is no surprise, therefore, that the TPFC frequently instructed the land captain or the uezd *uprava* to collect additional information and present the findings to the next meeting.¹⁵⁰ Aware of the gravity of the crisis and their moral responsibility, they looked to correct widespread information deficiencies, for example when they ordered new inspections in part of Temnikov uezd after they discovered the land captain was using information from 1891.¹⁵¹

The information gap was a persistent and serious problem and helps explain why the authorities so often accepted the verdict of the land captain or ordered further enquiries. As we have seen in almost every chapter, there were serious problems with information travelling upwards from volost' to the provincial level. The TPFC, as with all of the province's institutions, was 'flying blind' in a way; the crisis was unpredictable and severe and as an ad hoc body, it could only ever evolve its approach on a case-by-case basis. This explains what otherwise seems an over-reliance on the opinions of the land captains; they were the closest link to the volost' and were presumed to have 'better' knowledge of the situation of the peasantry. The investigations required by the appeals process itself were to be the safeguard against poor performance. It worked to an extent: land captains and the Morshansk uezd *uprava* were rebuked for not granting aid to those

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 32-42, 49-50.

¹⁵⁰ See for example Minutes of the TPFC 12-14 March, 30 March, 14 April, 28 April, 30 May, 10 June 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 41-59, ll. 198-224, ll. 248-63, ll. 292-314, ll. 375-9, ll. 401-19.

¹⁵¹ Minutes of the TPFC 4 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 1-9.

entitled to it while, based on a petition, the TPFC ordered an investigation into the behaviour of volost' officials in Dmitrievich volost', Tambov uezd.¹⁵² The message from the TPFC was clear: every official had their role to play in the relief effort and it needed to ensure that it could trust them to do this in accordance with the rules.

This then, was the real purpose behind the TPFC as an appeals board; it was part of Governor Rokasovskii's strategy to ensure that the relief effort ran fairly in accordance with established procedures. Neither lenient nor severe in how it treated petitions, the TPFC focused pragmatically on ensuring that the issue at the heart of each petition was resolved. This resolution could take the form of awarding official aid, denying it, or transferring the petitioner to charitable organisations. After hearing its first petitions in January, when it reminded uezd officials of the law, active decision-making became rare, and the preference was to encourage land captains to resolve the issue at source.¹⁵³ As an appeals body, the TPFC served many functions: clearing house, supervisory mechanism and a safety valve for peasant discontent. By building on a long imperial tradition of restitution by appeal, the appeals process united moral responsibility and the province's overall relief strategy. It did not, however, highlight every problem and ensure the relief effort ran smoothly as a rule. Doing so was, as this thesis argues, beyond the capacity of the province owing to structural deficiencies it could not cure. What the appeals process did do, and did so reasonably well, was to give a voice to the human desperation and tragedy the crisis caused, and extend a modicum of hope. Without a complete overhaul of the administrative and physical infrastructure of the province, perhaps the most that

¹⁵² Minutes of the TPFC 4, 12-14, 30 March, 30 May 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 1-9, 41-59 ll. 198-224, 375-9.

¹⁵³ Minutes of the TPFC 8 January 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 249-52.

could be done beyond the official effort was to offer hope, a commodity nearly as scarce as food.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ Visiting Tambov province, Konstantin Arsen'ev discussed authorities being forced to comfort people 'with a vague hope for the future, i.e., the opening of a new *stolovaia*', K. K. Arsen'ev, 'Iz nedavnei poezdki Tambovskuiu guberniiu: Vpechatleniia i zametki', *Vestnik Evropy* (February, 1892), p. 847.

Chapter 5

The relief effort on the ground, January – July 1892

Introduction

Modesty appears to have been a commodity that, like grain and food, was in short supply in 1892. The imperial government declared that no government in human history had ever achieved so much for its population and this self-congratulatory mood spread out, encompassing the province's institutions and visitors to Tambov province.¹ Governor Rokasovskii asserted that success was *due* to the administrative structures in place.² The focus of this chapter will be to see if this mood was justified. Certainly, the scale of the effort mounted from January to July 1892 in the province was impressive in raw scale. The authorities purchased just under 1.21 million *puds* of seed crops and issued just under 4.229 million *puds* in official food loans in the same period.³ Putting this into context, the total purchased for this period ranks as the fourth largest total for affected provinces for the *entire* crisis period.⁴

The province's institutions appeared to be under siege, suffering from 'general starvation', a near doubling in the numbers requiring aid (to just over a million people) from January to June 1892, and the death of the long-time chair of the provincial *uprava*.⁵ In this context, avoiding complete collapse was a remarkable achievement. Running to

¹ Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, p. 168. On the self-congratulation on Tambov's relief effort, see Count V.I. Pavlov to Durnovo 20 February 1892, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 237-8, *Zhurnaly Spasskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, p. 12, *Zhurnaly Kozlovskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, p. 113-26 and *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 165-6.

² Annual Report of Governor Rokasovskii on Tambov province for 1892, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 224, d. 232, l. 12.

³ *Obzor Tambovskoi gubernii za 1892 god*, p. 19, *Statisticheskie dannye*, pp. 38-9.

⁴ *Statisticheskie dannye*, pp. 22-3.

⁵ *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 7-9, pp. 23-34, *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 6-9, *Statisticheskie dannye*, pp. 57-8, pp. 5-6.

stand still, the province's institutions were able to give out more aid only by reducing the allocation for two months and admixing it with bran.⁶ Thus, the flattering motions of thanks from the zemstvo assemblies to the various *upravy* reflected relief that the province was able to get through the crisis at all. By looking at each element of the relief effort, we will see the steps they took to get through this crisis.

This chapter will argue, by looking at these various elements, that there was a fundamental misalignment between policy formation and execution. In a system that jealously reserved policy prerogatives to the centre (and specifically to the tsar), Tambov province lacked that policy development aspect in its bureaucratic culture. This, as we shall see, led to a relief effort that could, for the most part, handle the execution of pre-set policies, but would struggle greatly at developing its own when the need arose.

The strategic default of provincial institutions

Perhaps believing that they had sufficiently set the overall direction for the relief effort, the provincial zemstvo, *uprava* and Rokasovskii provided little strategic leadership in 1892. Focused on quantitative and short-term data, only the uyezds issued any strategic predictions, mostly in the form of warnings over grain levels. Other than when he personally supervised aid allocation in Morshansk in February 1892 and recommended opening more stores, Rokasovskii preferred to simply relay TPFC decisions to the uezd *upravy*.⁷ From the governor to the TPFC to the provincial zemstvo assembly and the provincial *uprava*, often left to make key decisions, the focus was on execution, technical

⁶ Count V.I. Pavlov to Durnovo 20 February 1892, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 237-8.

⁷ See for example Correspondence between Rokasovskii and the Lipetsk, Borisoglebsk, Morshansk, Kirsanov and Usman uezd *upravy* 20-29 April, 27 May, 4-15 June 1892 GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 284-91, ll. 380-2, ll. 386-7, ll. 396-8, Correspondence between Durnovo and Rokasovskii 27-29 March 1892, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, l. 235, ll. 239-43.

minutiae and ensuring that the administrative machinery worked. Summarising this approach, the Borisoglebsk uezd *uprava* told its assembly in October 1892 that it was guided by all the instructions and directions from the governor and the previous year's provincial zemstvo assembly; meant to illustrate its diligence, it also shows the degree to which the provincial institutions left the uezds alone in 1892.⁸

Imperial bureaucratic culture fostered this attitude; Tsar Alexander III's zemstvo and food security laws bound the zemstvos into the imperial structure and limited and defined their actions, making the centre the model for administration. Unfortunately, the example it set during the crisis was a poor one. With little tradition of policy formulation, the Committee of Ministers comprehensively failed to give the MVD any strategic guidance despite rejecting Durnovo's proposals.⁹ Policy formulation, even at the Committee of Ministers, was discouraged, as it was ultimately the prerogative of the tsar.¹⁰

Combined, these two factors severely limited the ability of the province's institutions to direct the relief effort at a broad level. Recognising this, Rokasovskii opted for broad decentralisation: a pragmatic policy that offered the best chance of success. Unfortunately, he replicated the centre's tendency to design a system in the abstract. Decentralisation needed local stability and from 1889-92, Tambov was in institutional turmoil. In these three years there were wholesale personnel changes throughout the province and, in the land captains, the introduction of a whole new administrative structure. Additionally, only just over half of the *starshins* were literate, which forced

⁸ *Zhurnaly Borisoglebskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, p. 341.

⁹ For more see: Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, pp. 61-79.

¹⁰ Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, p. 67, p. 75.

tasks such as inspecting aid rolls onto already overstretched volost' scribes.¹¹ Rokasovskii and the provincial *uprava*, trying to counter serious structural defects, devolved strategic planning to institutions that were in a deep state of flux and, as Aleksandr Novikov noted, lacked resilience; a shortcoming that a famine could only exacerbate.¹²

Purchasing and transport

The purchase and transport of seed and food grain illustrates the absence of this strength in local institutions, as well as the limits of provincial initiative and the counter-productive nature of imperial governance. Despite a useful contribution from the experienced manager of the provincial zemstvo's statistical bureau, N. Romanov, the provincial and uezd zemstvos often used the term 'grain' interchangeably for seed and food grain, complicating the task for the historian and illustrating the frequently imprecise and confused approach to relief management.¹³

The imperial government constructed a system for provincial use that bore little relation to reality: a rail network lacking coverage and integration, and a free market that was unable to cope with the demands placed on it. Adapting to this flawed idealisation and resource scramble, provinces began competing with each other, often with serious consequences, such as the conflict between Viatka and Kazan provinces in 1891.¹⁴ The

¹¹ Correspondence between the Governor's Chancellery and the Chairman of the Saratov Judicial Chamber concerning the volost' *starshins* for Tambov province 15 September – 18 December 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4183, ll. 4-36, Gaudin, *Ruling Peasants*, pp. 69-72, Novikov, *Zapiski zemskogo nachal'nika*, p. 89.

¹² Novikov, *Zapiski zemskogo nachal'nika*, p. 158.

¹³ N. Romanov had worked for the statistical bureau of the Moscow provincial zemstvo and edited a thirteen volume statistical work on Tambov province, the *Sbornik statisticheskikh svedenii po Tambovskoi gubernii* (1881-87). Along with the provincial *uprava*'s accountants the provincial zemstvo assembly thanked him for help in purchasing grain, *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 165-6.

¹⁴ Viatka, also crisis hit, banned grain exports from the province in June 1891 and using tactics such as plain clothes policemen, interfered with Kazan's effort to purchase grain from it until November 1891: Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, pp. 55-7.

conflict was unedifying but understandable: resources were scarce and having gone to considerable lengths to prevent political cooperation, the imperial government faced the consequences of its own policies. Provincial identity enlivened and transformed the way provinces interacted with each other, not always positively: Tambov, Kozlov, Borisoglebsk and Lebedian uezds all banned exports outside their uezds (save for the province's zemstvos) in January 1892.¹⁵ Durnovo made it clear that the imperial government would never sanction the move and questioned how such a move could be fair.¹⁶

This structuring, based on self-contained provinces, obliged the centre to foster the coordination and cooperation it normally opposed. Unilateral zemstvo embargoes were not the only problem: an anarchic grain market caused price spikes, shortages and transportation difficulties. Durnovo dispatched I.I. Kabat, an energetic MVD official, to Rostov-on-Don to untangle the mess; he arranged a deal for Tambov's uezd zemstvos with its main trader, Skaramanga, and arranged a common purchase price for all zemstvos in Rostov-on-Don.¹⁷ While we cannot absolve the centre of blame for creating defective structures in the first place, this example does show that it was also capable of adapting and adjusting policies. Yet again though, it was in reaction to provincial actions, even undesirable ones.

The degree of coordination and unity that Vendrikh and Kabat brought does not obscure the considerable confusion and mismanagement in the purchasing operation. This

¹⁵ Excerpts from newspapers and correspondence between Durnovo and Rokasovskii 25 – 28 January 1892, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 201-5.

¹⁶ Durnovo to Rokasovskii 28 January 1892, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 203-4.

¹⁷ On the common price, or syndicate, that Kabat arranged, see: Correspondence between Durnovo, Rokasovskii and I.I. Kabat 23 December 1891 – 2 January 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 176-7, l. 191, l. 193, l. 207, ll. 220-1, Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, pp. 144-5. Ambitious and talented, Kabat proposed several initiatives during the crisis and appears to have become director of the MVD's economic department, Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, pp. 81-83, Director I. Kabat, MVD Economic Department to Rokasovskii 23 April 1893, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, l. 295.

forces us to redefine ‘effectiveness’ and measure it using the problematic assumption that the institutions had correctly gauged the level of need.¹⁸ Then we need to see if the province’s institutions met their own targets. Rokasovskii himself noted the difficulty in his 1892 annual report, commenting that because it was impossible to define accurately the level of need, the zemstvos purchased 689,893 *puds* more food grain than was ‘actually required’.¹⁹ Undoubtedly, many peasants disagreed with his judgment about surplus grain, again raising the issue of administrative versus peasant expectations and judgments (see Khorvat’s investigation of Tambov uezd, below). These caveats aside, using the zemstvos’ estimates as a yardstick for success is sensible; it evaluates their effectiveness on their own terms and not ones of our (equally) arbitrary choosing.

Unfortunately, the way in which the MVD and the zemstvos recorded how much they purchased and distributed is a significant challenge for the historian. Late imperial Russian bureaucracy was almost obsessive in how it collated information, but little was ever done with it, as we saw in Chapter 2 with the multiple warnings of existing peasant distress. This weakness in analytical thinking affected the MVD’s statistical reports on the famine; the information collected is vast and impressively detailed but no attempt was made to analyse it. Imperial policy-making and information-gathering were seemingly two very different and disconnected branches. The reports produced in Tambov province, like the provincial *uprava*’s fortnightly grain accounts, offer real-time information but no clear sense of overall progress. Any form of total or analysis was apparently retrospective, exposing a major planning weakness and the potential for serious error.

The human cost of failure was high while operational capacity was low: by its own metric, the province failed to secure enough grain for sowing fields and food aid.

¹⁸ Schattenburg argues that ‘effectiveness’ is a modern concept and that we need to ask ‘effective for whom and from what perspective?’: Susanne Schattenburg, ‘Max Weber in the provinces: measuring imperial Russia by modern standards’, *Kritika*, New Series, Vol. 13, No. 4 (Fall 2012), p. 892.

¹⁹ *Obzor Tambovskoi gubernii za 1892 god*, p. 17.

Identifying how much food grain was purchased in the second half of the crisis is difficult, owing to aggregation of the figures. The figure arrived at here, approximately 4,894,061 *puds*, is based on the total purchasing for all crop types given by the MVD, 8,369,189 *puds*, and subtracting the totals for sowing in 1891-2 and the amount purchased for food up to January 1892.²⁰ The provincial zemstvo repeatedly emphasised it needed 250,000 *chetverts* (approximately 1,407,500 *puds*) for sowing yet eventually it secured 1,209,942 *puds*.²¹ That was not the only failure, as the provincial zemstvo had set its target for food aid at just over 5,790,000 *puds*. Its total shortfall was therefore almost 1,100,000 *puds* (896,000 for food aid and 198,000 for seed grain).²²

The significant shortfall highlights how the gap between aims and reality was a recurring feature of bureaucratic culture, both within and beyond St Petersburg. The province's institutions established their figures as minimums, but their deliberations lacked planning for how to secure these figures. In part, this was due to the very nature of the system in which they operated: the 1889 Food Security Statute, 1864 and 1890 Zemstvo Statutes governed their actions and forced them on to the open market for grain while also removing their ability to work with other zemstvos to arrange efficient distribution or limit price rises.²³ Yet article 102 of the 1889 Food Security Statute

²⁰ *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 354-5, *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, p. 7, pp. 15-9, Rokasovskii to Durnovo 17 February 1892, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 215-6, Minutes of the Tambov provincial *uprava* 23 December 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 178-81, Correspondence between Rokasovskii and the Tambov provincial zemstvo *uprava* 18 December 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 143-4, *Statisticheskie dannye*, p. 19, *Obzor Tambovskoi gubernii za 1892 god*, p. 16, p. 20, pp. 88-9, *Obzor Tambovskoi gubernii za 1891 god*, p. 19 and *Otchet po prodovol'stvennoi operatsii*, Vol. 2, pp. 4-14.

²¹ The provincial zemstvo resolved in December 1891 to purchase seed grain almost entirely in oats and the conversion is based on Carol Leonard's rate of 5.63 *puds* of oat seed per *chetvert*: Carol Leonard, *Agrarian Reform in Russia: The Road from Serfdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 286. For the provincial zemstvo's repeated emphasis of the 250,000 *chetverts* as a minimum, see *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 354-5, *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, p. 7, pp. 15-9, Rokasovskii to Durnovo 17 February 1892, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 215-6.

²² Minutes of the Tambov provincial *uprava* 23 December 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 178-81.

²³ Both statutes contained clauses that limited zemstvo activities to the institutions within their specific provincial or uezd boundaries, *PSZ*, 2nd series, t. 39, No. 40457, glava 1, st. 3; 3rd series, t. 10, No. 6927, glava 1, st. 3.

required all uezd *upravy* to conduct the majority of purchasing of all ‘vital’ crops from September to May, forcing the *upravy* on to the market and further increasing the sense of panic.²⁴

Forced to rely on Rokasovskii to expedite funding and delivery, the uezd *upravy* were isolated: in March, Rokasovskii found himself pleading with Colonel Vendrikh on behalf of the Kirsanov and Usman uezd zemstvos (the chair of the Kirsanov uezd *uprava*, P.P. Chikhachev, was particularly insistent) to release delayed grain deliveries.²⁵ While Rokasovskii’s pleas eventually secured the release of the grain, governors in famine-hit areas encountered imperial Russia’s hard bureaucratic reality. They were just one of many of the tsar’s viceroys and there appears to have been a growing instability in gubernatorial tenure.²⁶ In Vendrikh they met the latest viceroy, installed by political manoeuvring in St. Petersburg and granted broad, if temporary, authority.²⁷ Try as they might, there was only so much they could do; Rokasovskii visited Durnovo in person in 1891 but such meetings were often brief, with governors strictly limited in what they could broach.²⁸ Governors were still powerful but their influence waxed and waned with changing circumstances, an uncomfortable fact that made dealing with institutions such as railway boards an often-frustrating task.

²⁴ *Svod zakonov*, Ustav o obespechenii narodnogo prodovol’stviia, t. 13, razdel 1, glava 6, st. 102.

²⁵ Kirsanov uezd zemstvo *uprava* chair P. P. Chikhachev to Rokasovskii 10 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, l. 27, Correspondence between Rokasovskii and P.P. Chikhachev 10, 15, 17 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, l. 28, l. 97, l. 107, Correspondence between Rokasovskii, Colonel Vendrikh, Engineer Tukhin and the Tambov provincial zemstvo *uprava* 15, 17, 18, 22, 28 March, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, l. 108, ll. 125-6, l. 168.

²⁶ W. E. Mosse has identified that between the 1880s and late 1890s, the average length of tenure for governors and vice-governors shrank with newer officials serving roughly five years in each position: Mosse, ‘Russian provincial governors’, p. 236.

²⁷ Vendrikh was empowered to do whatever it took to ease the railroad crisis and his appointment was the result of subtle lobbying by Vyshnegradskii and Witte at the expense of the railways minister A. I. Giubbenet and not so subtle lobbying by Prince V. P. Meshcherskii, editor of *Grazhdanin*. See Robbins: *Famine in Russia*, pp. 76-83.

²⁸ These meetings were often limited to no more than twenty minutes and were controlled by the minister’s aides. For more see: Robbins, *The Tsar’s Viceroys*, pp. 78-9.

Yet such dealings were vitally important as Tambov province was desperately short of grain. Only 39 per cent of the grain it eventually bought came from within the province, the rest coming primarily from the Don region and the Griaze-Tsaritsyn and Lozovo-Sevastopol' railway lines.²⁹ This dependence on outside grain was not unusual: including Tambov, thirteen of twenty-three affected provinces imported the majority of their grain, with dependency greatest in Voronezh.³⁰ The pattern of purchasing via external railways, started in November 1891, had accelerated; the provincial *uprava* could only buy enough seed grain internally for four uezds while Borisoglebsk bought 94 per cent of theirs outside the province.³¹ We have seen earlier how this external purchasing caused tensions between provinces, yet it was also vital. The 1889 Food Security Statute mandated a free grain trade and affected provinces took advantage of it.³²

Unfortunately, the provision worked bought ways: Tambov province *exported* 554,000 *puds* of grain (while Samara exported over a million *puds*).³³ The fact that this happened while uezd *upravy* were pleading for external grain highlights serious institutional shortcomings. Robbins places the blame primarily on the lack of a zemstvo link to the volost' but the issue goes beyond that.³⁴ The centre designed a system in the abstract despite the all too real shortcomings on the ground. This was not just a Russian problem of course: the evolution of laissez-faire economics meant that other European states designed an unfettered free market system that created tension between rulers, cities

²⁹ *Statisticheskie dannye*, pp. 94-7, *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 7-9, Ministry of Finance (Railway Department) Grain price update 27 March, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, l. 236.

³⁰ *Statisticheskie dannye*, pp. 94-7.

³¹ Tambov provincial zemstvo *uprava* to Rokasovskii 28 November 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 40-7, *Zhurnaly Borisoglebskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, p. 11, *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 10-1.

³² *Svod zakonov*, t. 13, Ustav o obespechenii narodnogo prodovol'stviia, part 7, section 1, article 111.

³³ *Statisticheskie dannye*, pp. 94-5, Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, pp. 145-6.

³⁴ Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, pp. 145-6.

and provinces and threatened to pull stability apart.³⁵ When needed most, grain was flowing out yet there appears to have been no discussion of this problem at the TPFC, by Rokasovskii, or the provincial *uprava*. The TPFC outsourced day-to-day operations to the *uezd upravy* while Rokasovskii, as a governor, a ‘conservator of order’ and a man at the sharp end of the crisis, was not going to challenge the very nature of the relevant imperial law, even if its market focus was dysfunctional. As we will see later, the only proposal was to ban the export of certain types of livestock fodder.³⁶ This is not to say that export bans were the solution; the main issue is that the empire was not an integrated market, forcing provinces to look close to home, which meant buying from affected provinces and driving up prices.

The major shortcoming in the purchasing operation was the sheer diffusion of authority with no parallel oversight structure. There were no fewer than thirteen separate *zemstvo upravy* buying grain for the province with the provincial *uprava* and the *uezd upravy* often buying grain for the same place.³⁷ There was a multiplicity of agents, traders and commissioners: not only did the provincial *uprava* use five different grain traders, *uezd upravy* often arranged their own contracts or dispatched *uprava* members to do so.³⁸ Furthermore, the TPWC outsourced the purchasing of food for charity soup kitchens to the *uezd* sectional committees as it was ‘more convenient’.³⁹ Convenient for the TPWC perhaps, but it is impossible to look at how the operation as a whole was organised and see anything other than a recipe for confusion and chaos. Yet, at the same time, it was also impossible for one body to take on sole responsibility that was far beyond the

³⁵ Gráda, Chevet, ‘Famine and market in ancien régime France’, p. 709, pp. 717-8.

³⁶ Minutes of the TPFC 8 January 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 249-52, Correspondence between Rokasovskii and Durnovo 21, 28 September 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 101-2.

³⁷ See *Zhurnaly Temnikovskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 61-3, *Zhurnaly Kozlovskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 120-1.

³⁸ *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 172-84, *Zhurnaly Lipetskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 25-36, *Zhurnaly Kozlovskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 120-1.

³⁹ TPWC to the Special Committee for Famine Relief 12 September 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 254, l. 4.

province's capacity as well; yet again, officials were obliged to take the 'least bad' decision.

A flawless purchasing operation on this scale was, despite the zemstvos' best efforts, beyond its capability: responding to a claim of widespread missing receipts and information, the provincial *uprava* essentially argued that traders simply loaded and shipped bags as fast as humanly possible.⁴⁰ The *upravy*'s powerlessness came through again: one trader was unable to fulfil a contract with the Kozlov uezd *uprava* as prices rapidly rose beyond his ability to pay meaning that Kozlov was left 150 wagons of rye short.⁴¹ Nevertheless, the Kozlov uezd *uprava* waived the money he owed them, as he had been the cheapest supplier for all northern uezds, suggesting there was a strong sense of gratitude born of desperation and a keen awareness of how chaotic and unmanageable the situation was.⁴² It also illustrates the unsurprising strength of traditional personal networks: it was better to keep and develop an imperfect relationship than try to build a new one if a similar crisis occurred again.

This chaos was avoidable however, thanks, ironically, to imperial legislation. Nicholaevan desires for total control through total information, the search for order in chaos via statistics and the rise of zemstvo statistics and cadastral maps as tools for administration and identity formation meant that by 1892 there were rich and frequently updated sources available.⁴³ The centre's desire for total information, which often strangled the provinces in red tape, was, for once, a plausible solution.⁴⁴ Articles 102 and

⁴⁰ *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 167-98.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 91-3.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Evtuhov, *Portrait of a Russian Province*, p. 11, Porter, *The Rise of Statistical Thinking*, p. 17, p. 27, Woolf, 'Statistics and the modern state', p. 601, p. 603. For a full examination of the leading role zemstvo statistical studies and cadastral mapping played in forming provincial identity in Nizhnii Novgorod see: Evtuhov, *Portrait of a Russian Province*, pp. 165-81.

⁴⁴ For example, in 1892 the published *obzor* to Rokasovskii's annual report was 103 pages of information and statistical *vedomosti*. For an analysis of information requests, such as weekly reports and more esoteric ones, placed on governors, see Robbins, *The Tsar's Viceroys*, pp. 71-85.

103 of the 1889 Food Security Statute stipulated that every month the *uezd upravys* were to compile grain prices, including purchasing and storage costs, and send them to the provincial *uprava* who would then compile them together.⁴⁵ Despite collecting this data, the *uezd upravys* of Tambov, Kirsanov and Kozlov *uezds* appeared to do nothing with it; it offered an opportunity to gauge prices and criteria dealing with grain traders and budget accordingly yet they went in blind, creating a problem for themselves.

Deeply powerless, the *zemstvos* were forced into a maelstrom, competing with other provinces in a fragmented market on an overstretched rail network. Not even Rokasovskii could ease the strain, despite his efforts. They failed to reach their purchasing targets and there were serious shortcomings in strategic planning; disparate and separate arrangements helped secure grain but made any level of considered planning impossible. Nevertheless, powerless and dependent as they were, they achieved despite the deep-rooted problems. Perhaps the final word on the purchasing operation should go to the provincial *zemstvo's* reporting commission: 'the [provincial] *uprava* handled this in a fitting manner but the results are not yet known'.⁴⁶

Sowing fields

It is not enough simply to feed the hungry in times of famine: it is necessary to secure the next harvest in order to avoid the risk of repeating the crisis. Whereas in 1891 there was an initial sense that a full crisis could be averted by a large sowing operation, by early 1892 that was no longer an option. Then, a successful sowing operation was all that stood between the peasantry and long-term starvation. The chair of the Borisoglebsk Agricultural Society, Dmitri Konstantinovich Zolin, emphasised this to the Borisoglebsk

⁴⁵ *Svod zakonov*, t. 13, Ustav o obespechenii narodnogo prodoval'stviia, glava 6, st. 102-3.

⁴⁶ *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 100-7.

uezd zemstvo assembly in early 1892; calling it the zemstvo's 'main task' he warned that without it, hunger would again threaten the population, not as a result of drought, but of 'our inaction'.⁴⁷

The zemstvos' approach to the operation reflects the transmission and development of St. Petersburg's culture of increased systematisation and bureaucratisation. They approached the problem mechanically: since half the peasantry were in need and one third of Spring sowing was in oats, they simply divided that in two, and set a goal of securing one sixth of the average total.⁴⁸ Dedicated but narrow in focus when it came to execution, this was the systematic ideal: the identification of a problem and the direction of resources to deal with it in a calculated manner. Bound by legislation that levied very specific obligations for food and economic management and operating in an era where statistics and mechanical execution increasingly replaced 'political confusion' with an 'orderly reign of facts', this approach would have seemed natural and correct.⁴⁹ As we will see below, the zemstvo assemblies frequently deferred to the *upravy* and reporting commissions. Their sense of moral responsibility demanded that they resolved the crisis in quantitative terms; society's laws, and thus answers to its problems, were found by in depth statistical gathering.⁵⁰ Indeed, the sowing operation reflects this approach: the vast majority of the information available is quantitative, especially from the provincial *uprava*, which provided fortnightly reserve updates.⁵¹

⁴⁷ *Zhurnaly Borisoglebskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, p. 5.

⁴⁸ *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 354-5, Minutes of the Tambov provincial *uprava* 23 December 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 178-81.

⁴⁹ For example, the 1889 Food Security Statute specified the amount of grain that each village store should have per person, in what types and ration, *Svod zakonov*, t. 13, Ustav o obespechenii narodnogo prodovol'stviia, razdel 1, glava, st. 11.

⁵⁰ David Darrow, 'From commune to household: statistics and the social construction of Chaianov's theory of peasant economy', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (Oct., 2001), p. 795.

⁵¹ There were eight such updates: Tambov provincial zemstvo *uprava* grain update 1-9, 7-15, 15-30 March, 1-14, 14-27 April, 27 April – 11 May, 11-24 May, 24 May-7 June, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, l. 23, l. 110, l. 225-6, l. 264, ll. 317-8, ll. 345-7, l. 371, l. 399. For quantitative reporting at uezd level, see *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 9-11, pp. 21-3, p. 148, *Zhurnaly Lipetskogo*

Whether it was due to an over-developed sense of confidence in the *uezd upravu* or being overwhelmed, Rokasovskii and the provincial *uprava* began to exhibit the same contradictions that affected imperial policy in the relief effort. Namely, they abdicated a certain level of responsibility and created a system that, on paper, would function well but struggled to meet difficult and changing realities. As the sowing operation was essentially a repeat of 1891's operation, primary responsibility shifted to the *uezd upravu*; the provincial *uprava* conducted limited grain purchases while Rokasovskii issued no circulars or exhortations.⁵² At first glance, this appears to have worked: the *uezd upravu* purchased more compared to 1891, including 1.1 million *puds* in March alone, allocating nearly all of it by the end of April.⁵³

Unfortunately, in imperial Russia, the figures frequently did not reveal the true picture of a situation and this held for Tambov province too. A mechanical, quantitative approach required reliable information flows and these were sorely lacking. Lacking any information from Temnikov *uezd*, the provincial *uprava* no longer got detailed reports from every *uezd* from late April, making it impossible for the provincial *uprava* to know what was going on.⁵⁴

uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda, pp. 33-5, *Zhurnaly Temnikovskogo uездnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 62-3, *Zhurnaly Kozlovskogo uездnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 118-9, *Zhurnaly Kirsanovskogo uездnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 202-6, *Zhurnaly Borisoglebskogo uездnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 10-2.

⁵² The provincial *uprava* purchased grain locally for several *uezds* while it purchased all of Temnikov's millet needs, at the request of Temnikov's *uezd upravu*, *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, p. 63. The weekly grain price and reserve updates were ordered by the MVD in late November 1891 but in March 1892, they instructed that they be issued for fortnightly periods only, finally calling them to an end in June, Durnovo to Rokasovskii 27 November 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 29-30, Durnovo to Rokasovskii 19 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 121-4, Durnovo to Rokasovskii 10 June 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, l. 420.

⁵³ Tambov provincial *zemstvo upravu* grain update 7-15, 14-30, 31 March, 1-14, 14-27 April GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, l. 110, ll. 225-6, 317-8, Tambov provincial *zemstvo upravu* to Rokasovskii 11 March, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, l. 38.

⁵⁴ Tambov provincial *zemstvo upravu* grain update 14-27 April 11-24, 27 May, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 317-8, ll. 345-7, l. 371.

What was happening was the gradual collapse of Rokasovskii's and the provincial *uprava*'s overall strategy. By decentralising the majority of the relief effort, after centrally determining key policies to correct for structural defects, the authorities hoped that uyezds could respond quicker and more effectively. This strategy bore a striking resemblance to the rise of systemisation at the imperial level; too large to manage effectively, it outsourced certain actions while seeking to preserve central administrative control and standardisation.⁵⁵ As with the practice of systemisation at the imperial level, two major problems arose: a failure in transmitting standardised practice and the inability of reality to match the idealised policy.

Privileging the centre as the policy maker, no matter where this 'centre' was, helped create a culture of dependency that frequently left the periphery unable to operate without clear instructions. Imperial Russia was a state where, often, the issuing of instructions masqueraded as activity.⁵⁶ The sowing operation in many ways reflected this culture of dependency and yet, at the same time, manifested a degree of initiative borne of the necessity from operating in a structurally deficient system. The provincial zemstvo assembly's decision in December 1891 (restated in February 1892) that seed loans should be allocated in the same way as in 1891, with some allowance for local variation, failed to reach Kozlov, Tambov and Borisoglebsk uyezds, even by March 1892.⁵⁷ After complaining to their respective assemblies over the 'lack' of instructions, the three *upravy* then proceeded to innovate by developing their own allocation procedures. Each one differed slightly but all made use of local officials, whether it was the uezd food

⁵⁵ Yaney, *Systematisation*, p. 5.

⁵⁶ Robbins, *The Tsar's Viceroys*, p. 75, p. 234.

⁵⁷ *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, p. 70, *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, p. 7, pp. 16-17.

conference or a special commission of the *uprava* and land captains.⁵⁸ Kozlov used pre-established food aid rules while Borisoglebsk and Tambov uyezds used the aid rolls for food aid but devised a new system, allocating seed loans proportionally based on various criteria such as farm size.⁵⁹ This innovation and initiative shows that, on a small scale, the periphery would take matters in house when either the centre failed or the instructions failed to travel down the imperfect chain of communication.

Unfortunately, no level of the administrative structure translated initiative into consistently effective action on the ground. Volost' stores never exceeded 50 per cent capacity while we only have full information on the sowing operation in three uyezds: Lipetsk, Borisoglebsk and Kozlov.⁶⁰ The first two had to devise their own allocation policies while in all three, the actual sowing varied widely in timeframe. Lipetsk started the earliest, in February, and finished last in May while Borisoglebsk and Kozlov started in March and April respectively.⁶¹ For some peasants, such a delay would have been a luxury: in Elatomsk there was an entire precinct without seed loans, 130 in Usman uezd and several petitions to the TPFC in April for seed loans.⁶² There was an element of self-correction however: Rokasovskii intervened in Usman and Elatomsk, forcing a new inspection in the former, replacing the land captain in the latter (see below) and provoking the uezd *uprava* to dispose of grain stocks to provide seed grain.⁶³ Reinforcing the

⁵⁸ *Zhurnaly Kozlovskogo uездного земского sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 118-9, Tambov uezd zemstvo *uprava* to Rokasovskii 31 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 228-9, *Zhurnaly Borisoglebskogo uездного земского sobraniia 1892 goda*, p. 18, p. 14.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Tambov provincial zemstvo *uprava* grain update 1-14, 14-27 April, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, l. 264, ll. 317-8.

⁶¹ *Zhurnaly Borisoglebskogo uездного земского sobraniia 1892 goda*, p. 11, *Zhurnaly Kozlovskogo uездного земского sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 118-9, *Zhurnaly Lipetskogo uездного земского sobraniia 1892 goda*, p. 34.

⁶² Rokasovskii to the Usman provincial uezd zemstvo *uprava* n.d., GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, l. 246, Rokasovskii to the land captain of the fifth precinct Usman uezd 12 April 1892, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, l. 247, Usman uezd zemstvo *uprava* to Rokasovskii 26 April 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, l. 315, Minutes of the TPFC 28 April 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 292-314.

⁶³ Correspondence between land captain Malevinskii, fifth precinct Elatomsk uezd, Rokasovskii and the Elatomsk uezd zemstvo *uprava* 21 April 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, l. 184, Correspondence between Land captain of the fifth precinct Elatomsk uezd Malevinskii, Rokasovskii and the Tambov provincial

localised centre-periphery argument, the initial initiative came from the uyezds, with Rokasovskii forced into reacting to it. We should not be surprised at this: we have seen already that the TPWC felt it had little influence while the entire imperial system often issued commands that, practical in principle, produced unintended consequences.⁶⁴

Despite the unquestionable concern of the provincial and uezd *upravy* and Rokasovskii's determination for fairness (evidenced by his intervention above), unintended consequences combined to trap the peasantry in an economic pincer. Once this happened, the response from officials highlights the sheer psychological gap between officialdom and the peasantry and the authorities' sometimes unintentionally 'othering' attitudes. The imperial government's policies on famine relief, especially as relating to sowing, contained that element of indirect political failure to act or act correctly that inadvertently worsens the problem (such as the British Government's focus on total food availability instead of ability to purchase food).⁶⁵ Nothing encapsulated this so neatly as the 1889 Food Security Statute: not only did it mandate a free market response, seed loans issued could not exceed the area normally sown while no more than half the grain stores could be loaned out.⁶⁶ Thus, the peasantry could only access volost' grain stores at a quarter of their capacity or zemstvo aid (when it arrived) or compete on a market where they were rapidly being priced out. By 1892, the average wage per day for sowing in the central black earth region would purchase just over eight kilogrammes of rye, down from over twelve in 1890.⁶⁷ Furthermore, while Tambov traditionally supplied northern provinces, the railways now brought cheaper grain the other way around.⁶⁸ Drought itself

zemstvo *uprava* 7-13 May 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 331-2, l. 352, Elatomsk uezd zemstvo *uprava* to Rokasovskii 21 April 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, l. 283.

⁶⁴ Ryavec, *Russian Bureaucracy*, p. 71.

⁶⁵ Devereux, *Theories of Famine*, p. 129, Sen, *Poverty and Famines*, pp. 78-83.

⁶⁶ *Svod zakonov*, Ustav o obespechenii narodnogo prodovol'stviia, t. 13, razdel 1, glava 4, otdelenie 1, st. 69, 75 glava 7, otdelenie 1, st. 111, 116.

⁶⁷ Wheatcroft, 'The 1891—1892 famine in Russia', p. 49.

⁶⁸ Hodgetts, *In the track of the Russian famine*, pp. 111-3.

does not cause famine, policy failures such as market mechanisms that create perverse incentives or the privileging of other areas at the expense of another are key factors. Famines are a complex event, dependent on many factors; tsarist policy took a simplistic approach that caught Tambov province's peasantry in an economic trap.⁶⁹

Their attempts to escape from this trap were logical and economically rational but such was the psychological gap between them and officials that the latter reacted with incomprehension and sought to punish them for it. Reports came in from across the province of peasants evading attempts to compile aid rolls for seed loans and others of peasants attempting to *sell* their allocation.⁷⁰ One example of this was Belomestno-Devoynevskii volost', Tambov uезд, in late March 1892 when allegations of the practice reached Rokasovskii: it transpired that five peasants, initially believed to have been coerced by the *starshin* to pay off the 'collective debts' of aid loans, had kept the aid but sold private reserves.⁷¹ This was an economically rational action yet it so worried the authorities over the 'correct' use of the loans that they formally investigated. The peasantry, perceived as innately duplicitous and simultaneously 'addicted to aid' and refusing to work were, in fact, deeply strategic.⁷² In the above case, what they sold were *private* reserves; undoubtedly aware that selling aid would not be well received yet desperate to escape an economic trap, they used what flexibility was open to them. Profiteering may have been the strict legal definition, but as prices rapidly surpassed the

⁶⁹ Sen, *Poverty and Famines*, pp. 52-80, Joachim von Braun, Tesfaye Teklu and Patrick Webb, 'Famine as the outcome of political production and market failures', *IDS Bulletin* 24(4) (1993), pp. 75-6, Lin, Yang, 'Food availability, entitlements and the Chinese famine of 1959-61', pp. 138-40.

⁷⁰ Rokasovskii to the Tambov provincial uезд zemstvo *uprava* 13 March, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, l. 63, Rokasovskii to Director Vishniakov 13 March 1892, RGIA, f. 4, op. 1, d. 2132, l. 229, Minutes of the TPFC 12-14 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4264, ll. 58-9

⁷¹ Correspondence between the Tambov uезд chief of police, Rokasovskii and the Tambov uезд zemstvo *uprava*, 27, 28, 31 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 161-2, ll. 228-9, Report of the Tambov uезд chief of police 28 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, l. 230, Rokasovskii to the land captain, eighth precinct Tambov uезд, 28 March 1892, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, l. 162, Land captain, eighth precinct Tambov uезд, to Rokasovskii 12 May 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 354-6.

⁷² Minutes of the Lipetsk uезд food conference 19 April 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 284-6.

peasantry's ability to pay, these asset sales were a desperate form of 'coping strategy', a tactic common in contemporary famines.⁷³ That the officials could not even begin to understand or rationalise this behaviour illustrates the degree to which identity gaps could hamper the relief effort.

In evaluating the results of the province's second attempt at sowing fields, we hear again a common refrain of this thesis: the province succeeded despite structural obstacles and problems it brought on itself. The zemstvos and Rokasovskii did not offer sufficient strategic direction, did not use every avenue open to them, relied on a store network that did not meet everyone's needs, and had a frequently counterproductive view of the peasantry. Against this, however, should be set a degree of innovation, self-correction and the constant dedication of officials such as the land captains who went out and re-inspected aid rolls. We should also add to this the change in provincial *uprava* leadership and the fact that multiple aid operations were now being managed simultaneously. The technocratic and quantitative nature of the sowing operation reveals the strategic limitations of the province's personnel, but also shows that they were diligent, determined and capable of innovation to a certain extent.

Fodder and livestock

Horses, and the struggle to purchase, distribute and feed them, illustrate many of the structural and strategic problems afflicting the relief effort such as resource strain and

⁷³ Debarshi Das, 'A relook at the Bengal famine', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 43, No. 31 (Aug. 2-8, 2008), pp. 59-64, Alison S. Pyle and Omer Abdel Gabbar, 'Household vulnerability to famine: survival and recovery strategies among Berti and Zaghawa migrants in northern Dafur, Sudan, 1982-1989', *GeoJournal*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (June, 1993), pp. 141-6.

limited strategic thinking. This section will show how Tambov province's institutions, able only to innovate within familiar bounds, were at a loss when its executive bodies (mainly the provincial *uprava*) were unable to recommend a course of action, resulting in tension and temporary paralysis in the relief effort.

More than a working animal, horses were economically vital and a powerful cultural unifier. For those with horses, there were more employment opportunities, higher wages and, unlike one fifth of Borisoglebsk's households, less arduous physical effort, as Geroid Tanquary Robinson reminded us.⁷⁴ Horse theft was common and the severe community justice meted out to those caught, and the sense that the whole community suffered, underscores their social importance.⁷⁵ Horses could be the difference between penury and sufficiency; they were a collective and competitive advantage. The famine crisis wreaked devastation on this vital resource; 109,273 horses were 'lost' in 1891 in Tambov province and the sale price of horses collapsed.⁷⁶ This economic distress prompted several petitions to the TPFC and local charities. Matvei Getkin, a formerly prosperous miller in Boiarovka village, Morshansk uezd, had to sell half of his horses and relied on the continued 'indulgence and patience' of his creditors.⁷⁷ Noting how the crisis

⁷⁴ *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 25-6. In 1891 those with horses tended to attract a significant premium; the average wage was twenty to sixty-five kopecks (presumably per day) but in Kirsanov uezd those with horses could attract up to one rouble fifty kopecks, with the average being consistently higher for those with horses in every uezd. Material for the annual report of the Tambov Governor Part 1, 26 January – 16 April 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4174, l. 6. Geroid Tanquary Robinson, *Rural Russia under the Old Regime: a History of the Landlord-Peasant World and a Prologue to the Peasant Revolution Of 1917* (New York: Macmillan, 1949), A. A. Isaev, *Neurozhai i Golod': v pol'zu postradavshchikh ot neurozhaia; lektsiia v imperatorskom Aleksandrovnom Litsee* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia R. Golike, 1892), pp. 17-21.

⁷⁵ See Christine D. Worobec, 'Horse thieves and peasant justice in post-emancipation imperial Russia', *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (Winter, 1987), pp. 281-93.

⁷⁶ Annual Report of Governor Rokasovskii on Tambov Province for 1891, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 223, d. 194, ll. 3-4., Vice Governor Choglokov to Durnovo, September 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, l. 302. Vice Governor Choglokov to Durnovo, September 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, l. 302, *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 417-20, Annual Report of Governor Rokasovskii on Tambov Province for 1891, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 223, d. 194, ll. 3-4, *Obzor Tambovskoi gubernii za 1892 god*, pp. 20-1. For more on forced horse sales, see Minutes of the TPFC 4 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 1-9.

⁷⁷ Arsen'ev, 'Iz nedavnei poezdki Tambovskuiu guberniiu', *Vestnik Evropy* (February, 1892), p. 836.

was devastating rich and poor peasants alike, the liberal journalist Konstantin Konstantinovich Arsen'ev wryly noted that 'the process of equalisation moves forward in major strides'.⁷⁸

The crisis in supplying and feeding the necessary numbers of horses, the provincial and imperial authorities' initial ignorance of a growing crisis in livestock numbers, and the fact that once again, individual effort and an ad hoc body found a resolution shows how limited the empire's capabilities were. In the summer of 1891, the Kozlov uezd *uprava* obliged peasants to use their horses to assist in collecting seed grain from the zemstvo stores, yet there is no evidence to suggest that anyone in the province, including Rokasovskii, saw the quantity or maintenance of horses as an issue.⁷⁹ The only recognition from the MVD of a problem was a request in September 1891 for information on stock numbers, fodder requirements and sale prices.⁸⁰ St. Petersburg and Rokasovskii failed to provide the province with the strategic management it needed for this particular element of the relief effort.⁸¹ Imperial law and official culture created a narrow, prescriptive system that could not plan outside the narrow scope of sowing and food aid.

Thus, when forced to act, the administrative structures simply shifted responsibility to ad hoc bodies. Tsars had long used these ad hoc bodies to diffuse responsibility and circumvent the 'bureaucratic' obstacles in the system of their own creation; permanent reform was unpalatable as it entailed further limits on the jealously-guarded autocratic privilege. Deeply embedded in the culture of the system, this meant

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ *Zhurnaly Kozlovskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, p. 70.

⁸⁰ Durnovo to Rokasovskii, 11 September 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4192, l. 301. On the dependence of uezd zemstvos on peasant horses for distribution, see: *Zhurnaly Temnikovskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, p. 66 and *uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, p. 66, *Zhurnaly Kozlovskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 113-26.

⁸¹ While it initially demanded more information and a more coordinated response from the MVD, the Committee of Ministers itself lacked any strategy, leaving Durnovo and his ministry essentially to muddle through. See Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, pp. 61-79.

that only either talented individuals or those unconnected from the centre could innovate. One of Vorontsov-Dashkov's employees purchased 10,000 horses and the count proposed extending this scheme to all the affected provinces.⁸² At the same time, V. M. Petrovo-Solovovo, the Tambov uezd marshal of the nobility, proposed a purchasing programme on a colossal scale, costing one million roubles.⁸³ The stricken, supposedly backwards provinces left the centre, reduced to scaling up and resourcing these ideas, far behind intellectually.

Despite the urgency of the problem, the endless deliberation that was a fundamental feature of imperial bureaucracy delayed this proposal. The ad hoc Special Committee for Famine Relief, chaired by the tsarevich, took from December 1891 until March 1892 to design a purchasing programme through which the peasantry could pay twenty-five roubles per horse over four years, and were forbidden to sell on the animals.⁸⁴ The fact that in May neither a land captain nor the TPFC clearly understood this latter provision illustrates the difficulty in getting information from the centre to the provinces and how fragmented and disconnected the structures were.⁸⁵ The horses themselves travelled faster than the information governing their arrival.

Unlike the centre with its frequently abstract conceptions of how things were supposed to work, Tambov province sought to adapt to the reality it faced. The province's institutions had a much keener sense than the centre, borne of direct, practical and frustrating experience, of the limits of administrative capacity. Despite the communication vulnerabilities, uezds retained a decent record at implementation within

⁸² *Pravitel'stvennyi Vestnik*, No. 283 31 December 1891, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 11, l. 15.

⁸³ Count Bobrinskii to V.K. Pleve 21 February 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 100, ll. 53-4, Minutes of the TPFC 8 January 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 249-52.

⁸⁴ *Pravitel'stvennyi Vestnik*, No. 283 31 December 1891, No. 65 22 March 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 11, l. 15, l. 47, Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, p. 109.

⁸⁵ Minutes of the TPFC 9 May 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 339-44.

their own borders. Accordingly, responsibility was transferred and Tambov's two thousand horses (the second lowest allocation) were handed over to the uezd food conferences, which in turn required land captains to assess need.⁸⁶ Policy formation was not a strong point but the administrative machinery frequently took on an almost automatic quality, even if the process was still slow; there is no evidence suggesting that there were problems with allocating the horses.⁸⁷

Responsibility shifting was another long established feature of imperial governance; after purchasing and sending the horses to the provinces, the Special Committee made no provisions for their feeding and maintenance. Exposing the sheer fragility of provincial governance, the provincial zemstvo also failed to make a decision. The degree of control the provincial zemstvo exerted over the relief effort masked a disturbing truth: it was reliant on its two executive bodies, the *uprava* and the reporting commission, as the assembly was frequently weak and timid, preferring to be led by reports and recommendations. It was not so much a decision-making body as a clearing-house. In February 1892 the provincial *uprava* lacked a chair and the reporting commission presented two options on how to feed horses, costing 500,000 and 1.25 million roubles respectively and no clear preference on either.⁸⁸ Despite an 'animated' discussion, the assembly refused to act, seeing the proposals as impossible to implement.⁸⁹ Nervous of the cost involved, the assembly lost its nerve at a crucial moment; the 1889 Food Security Statute, for all its defects, provided a response template

⁸⁶ Minutes of the TPF 25 March, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 144-5, The Special Committee purchased 30,000 horses in total, the largest allocation of 6000 being to Samara province. See *Pravitel'stvennyi Vestnik*, No. 48 1 March 1892; RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 11, l. 40.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 7-19.

⁸⁹ Ibid. In addition to the provisions laying out responsibility for food security, the local economy and general welfare as zemstvo responsibilities, Article 2 of the 1864 and 1890 Zemstvo Statutes obliged them to prevent the death of livestock, *PSZ*, 2nd series, vol. 39, No. 40457, glava 1, st. 2, 3rd series, vol. 10, No. 6927, glava 1, st. 2.

that the *upravy* could execute. The TPFC also avoided making decisions; in April it opted to simply pass complaints about the suitability of horses for fieldwork to the Special Committee.⁹⁰

We can therefore see in provincial Tambov all the hallmarks familiar from the centre in St Petersburg: a bureaucracy capable merely of reviewing decisions rather than of making them, fiscal reticence, weak collective institutions and a reliance on small executive bodies to draft and implement decisions. Meeting only once a year, the zemstvo assembly was essentially the weaker relation to the *uprava*, a hierarchy deliberately imposed by a hostile imperial government, determined to limit provincial autonomy.⁹¹ In the long term, this was not a sustainable model: though the more artful zemstvos were capable of eluding legal restrictions and surmounting funding shortages, they were forced to rely on a governance model that was insufficiently responsive for a crisis.⁹²

The fact that only prodding by the MVD would end the deadlock shows the paralysis and indecision that the centre introduced into provincial government. This paralysis was not incompatible with the ‘provincial idea’ and innovation however; in January 1892 the provincial *uprava* adapted an earlier suggestion from Borisoglebsk to ban the export of certain fodder ingredients.⁹³ Unfortunately, again highlighting the weakness of collective institutions, the provincial food conference declined to make a decision. Only a telegram in March from Durnovo finally persuaded them to act, seemingly forgetting practical restraints and assigning 30,000 *puds* to feed horses.⁹⁴ The

⁹⁰ Minutes of the TPFC 14 April, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 248-63.

⁹¹ Whelan, *Alexander III*, p. 198 and Manning, *Crisis of the Old Order*, p. 44.

⁹² Under articles 65-68 of the 1890 Zemstvo Statute, uezd and provincial assemblies were to meet annually though permission could be sought from the Governor for extraordinary meetings in ‘especially important circumstances, such as public misfortune [...]’- considering the communication delays we have seen, this was hardly the template for a responsive assembly attuned to local conditions, *PSZ*, 3rd series, vol. 10, No. 6927, glava 3, otdel 2, st. 65-8.

⁹³ Minutes of the TPFC 8 January 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 249-52, Correspondence between Rokasovskii and Durnovo 21, 28 September 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 101-2.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, Minutes of the TPFC 12-14 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 41-59.

administrative mechanism froze far too easily but once restarted, could move quickly: aid was set at two *puds* per horse, uezd food conferences determined allocation numbers and a week later land captains requested details on need from volost' starshins.⁹⁵

The horse-purchasing programme may have been new territory for the province's institutions but once a decision was finally made, familiar patterns of intra-uezd tension reasserted themselves. Kirsanov felt the allocation was too much, while Borisoglebsk saw it as too little.⁹⁶ The provincial food conference held to its decision, telling Borisoglebsk it accepted its argument but it would be 'unjust' to privilege one uezd, considering the position of others.⁹⁷ There was no question of paralysis here; the stakes were too high. The provincial food conference was not a command and control institution: it was essentially a redistributive or balancing mechanism. The debacle over how to support the purchased horses shows how weak the governance function was, a function of administrative culture and personnel. By no means perfect, policy execution was far less problematic than determining the policies themselves, the latter a result of an indecisive governing culture found in the imperial centre and the provinces.

Ethics and reality: reduction of food aid allocation

This governing culture also made negative, and troubling, assumptions about the peasantry's apparent desire to rely solely on aid. As the MVD saw the crisis as an economic issue, Durnovo sought to convince the peasantry that government support

⁹⁵ Land captain, third precinct Kirsanov uezd, to volost' starshin 20 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, l. 172.

⁹⁶ Minutes of the Kirsanov uezd food conference 14 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 268-9, Minutes of the TPFC 30 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 198-224.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

would be withdrawn as soon as unemployment declined.⁹⁸ Several uezds, though using different reasoning, also sought to reduce aid. Borisoglebsk excluded women of working age from receiving aid to incentivise participation in the workforce, while Lipetsk proposed halving aid to fifteen *funts* as the peasantry were ‘addicted’ to aid and further loans would have ‘undesirable consequences’.⁹⁹ The belief that aid was emergency relief designed to prevent starvation, not welfare, and that where possible the population should support itself chimed with the contemporary, and indeed modern, narratives surrounding charity. ‘Dependency’, defined as a population relying on government support and not the labour market was seen as an unquestionable moral evil and poor policy. Nevertheless even the TPFC had limits: Borisoglebsk’s proposal was seen as indiscriminate while Lipetsk’s was not legal, though aid could be lowered in line with local conditions.¹⁰⁰ Aid would be reduced when it was felt the crisis was abating but the suggested reductions would have created inequality within the province, hurt the genuinely needy and, crucially, undermined the purpose of the relief effort.

Although rarely used, the language of morality was a constant undercurrent in these various debates; the desperate search for the ‘right’ decision underpinned everything. As we have seen though, what the ‘right’ decision was depended very much on one’s particular vantage point or place in the administrative chain. While the harsh realities and the will of the MVD eventually took care of many of these issues, the debate over aid allocation shows that the province had developed a keen sense of morality and duty. While signs of alienation from the peasantry persisted, this moral discussion, and

⁹⁸ Durnovo via MVD economic department to all governors No. 2954 21 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, l. 163.

⁹⁹ Minutes of the Borisoglebsk uezd food conference 23 April 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 288-9, Minutes of the Lipetsk uezd food conference 19 April 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 284-6.

¹⁰⁰ Rokasovskii to the Lipetsk uezd zemstvo *uprava* 29 April 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 287-8, Rokasovskii to the Borisoglebsk uezd zemstvo *uprava*, 29 April 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 290-1.

the way it was framed, are clearly key parts of the emergence of a strong, provincial identity.

The very same provincial idea that promoted a sense of moral responsibility to the peasantry came to work against Tambov's population in the early months of 1892. Concerned with overburdening the peasantry with debts for the future, as well as heeding the MVD's call for economy, the province's institutions applied the allocation rules strictly at first, and then simply cut the allocation. In chapter 2 we saw how this desire to obey the MVD's call for strict economy combined with fiscal reticence and a wish not to overburden the imperial treasury saw children from between the ages of two and five denied the right to food loans.¹⁰¹ This decision, in addition to being an overzealous reading of the MVD's instructions on aid allocation, was also an attempt to maximise resources while keeping debts down.

One of the most negative decisions, in the eyes of the peasantry, was borne of such a confused attempt to do the right thing. In January 1892 the TPF, following the provincial *uprava*'s lead, confronted the reality that every decision had high opportunity costs. Following a recommendation from the provincial *uprava*, it reduced the aid allocation per 'eater' from the thirty *funts* set by the MVD to twenty-five *funts*.¹⁰² The provincial *uprava* explicitly overrode its parent body: after pressure from several *uezds*, the provincial *zemstvo* assembly voted in December to *increase* the loans by ten *funts* to one *pud*, and the Shatsk *uezd uprava* immediately re-drew its estimates.¹⁰³ The provincial *uprava* recommended that the higher level only be issued in March and April, as doing so before then would dangerously deplete stores and 'turn the population to bitter

¹⁰¹ Minutes of the TPF 4 September 1891, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 92-97, *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 238-44.

¹⁰² Minutes of the TPF 4 January 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 235-9, Tambov provincial *zemstvo uprava* to Rokasovskii 2 January 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 233-4..

¹⁰³ *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, pp. 221-3, Tambov provincial *zemstvo uprava* to Rokasovskii 2 January 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 233-4.

misfortune'.¹⁰⁴ In essence, they attempted to make the peasantry hungry now, to avoid starving them *later*. It was a terrible position to be in: logically strong on paper, the moral and practical implications were dreadful but perhaps only slightly less so than fully depleted stores. Such were the dilemmas Tambov's institutions had to face.

The provincial *uprava* was essentially the main executive body for the relief effort and a clear policy gap had now opened between it, its parent body and the uezd institutions. Each institution's definition of the relief effort's 'best interests' depended very much on their role within it and the uezd institutions pushed back against the provincial *uprava* in the way it had contested the MVD's decisions. The provincial *uprava* informed the assembly in February that the reduction had created savings but need continued to increase because of the 'simultaneous exhaustion of peasant stores'.¹⁰⁵ The uezd *upravy* responded strongly however: Usman, Morshansk and Shatsk *upravy* all warned they could not guarantee food security and were reporting shortfalls already.¹⁰⁶ The Shatsk *uprava* took a hard line, demanding that the allocation increase to fifty *funts*.¹⁰⁷ The message was clear: the TPFC decision ran counter to uezd needs and ignored the pressures they were under and had to change.

In their divided responses to this pressure from below, Rokasovskii and the other members of the TPFC revealed a tension between two visions of 'province'. In this debate, Governor Rokasovskii emerged as the defender of uniformity and the peasantry while the rest of the TPFC used divergent uezd interests as a justification for its own fiscal conservatism. In March Rokasovskii called for loans to be increased uniformly by the

¹⁰⁴ Minutes of the TPFC 4 January 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 235-9.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Chair of Morshansk uezd zemstvo *uprava* N.I. Kotel'nikov, 11 March 1892, Rokasovskii to Colonel Vendrikh in Rostov-on-Don 14 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, l. 40, l. 97, Shatsk uezd zemstvo *uprava* to Rokasovskii 14 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 116-7, Shatsk uezd zemstvo *uprava* to Rokasovskii 21 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, l. 142.

¹⁰⁷ Shatsk uezd zemstvo *uprava* to Rokasovskii 14 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 116-7.

five *funts* taken off in January and February but the conference instead permitted the increase only where local conditions allowed.¹⁰⁸ Rokasovskii saw the province as an integrated whole in which fairness should apply to all while the TPFC saw the province as a patchwork of *uezds* where the crisis differed in scale. These rival visions created a further point of tension within the relief effort. Governor Rokasovskii, positioning himself as the outsider who was the true defender of the peasantry's interests, made it clear to the *uezd upravu* that it was the conference, not him, which had opted to make the increase conditional.¹⁰⁹

These contested articulations soon became academic however, as the MVD again demonstrated that no matter how flexible a province might be, the centre ultimately determined the broad framework. Shortly after the institutions essentially put their differences aside and agreed to Morshansk's proposal to allocate two months of loans over two weeks in April due to the *rasputitsa*, the MVD ordered that aid be reduced and rolls be revised due to increased employment opportunities.¹¹⁰ While the MVD drew the idea from another, unnamed province, it was a command and Tambov had no room for manoeuvre; the TPFC noted the instruction while Rokasovskii noted it would 'ease the food difficulties'.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Minutes of the TPFC 12-14 March, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 41-59, Rokasovskii to all *uezd zemstvo upravu* 13 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 60-1.

¹⁰⁹ Rokasovskii to all *uezd zemstvo upravu* 13 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 60-1.

¹¹⁰ Chair of Morshansk *uezd zemstvo uprava* N.I. Kotel'nikov, 11 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, l. 40, Minutes of the TPFC 25 March, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 144-5, Durnovo via MVD Economic Department to all governors No. 2954 21 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, l. 163.

¹¹¹ Minutes of the TPFC 30 March, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 198-224, Rokasovskii to the Tambov provincial *zemstvo uprava*, *uezd upravu*, marshals of the nobility and land captains, 1 April 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, l. 164.

Food aid: Local networks, variation and individual action

Unable to stop the rising tide of human misery, all the province's institutions could do was blunt its worst effects and the evidence suggests they were able to do this with a degree of success. Every uezd met or exceeded the MVD's guidelines of thirty *funts* per 'eater' for these months with allocations *above* this the only significant variations (barring the reduction in January and February).¹¹² This conforms to the wider pattern as all of Tambov's neighbouring provinces, with the exception of Riazan, meeting or exceeding these guidelines.¹¹³ Though the majority of charitable donations came from outside the province, Tambov society managed to raise nearly 100,000 roubles and 8,130 *puds* of grain were donated from January to August 1892, no mean feat.¹¹⁴ When the relief effort worked, usually via an active land captain or marshal of the nobility, the result could be a well-run, harmonious relief effort.¹¹⁵ However, since authority was either too fragmented or placed too many responsibilities on one individual, this harmony was by no means guaranteed. In this section we will look at two uezds, Borisoglebsk and Spassk, to see extremes of how things were managed before looking at the individual actions, good and bad, that highlight vulnerability and achievement throughout the province.

The famine exacted a cruel toll: a rough maximum of 13,615 people in Tambov province died as result of the famine in 1892, despite Count Bobrinskii dismissing hunger related deaths as 'not based on reliable facts'.¹¹⁶ The inescapable truth was that Tambov's

¹¹² *Statisticheskie dannye*, pp. 76-9. The variations were in Borisoglebsk, Spassk and Elatomsk uezds and for March and April, Borisoglebsk actually issued 105 per cent of the MVD guidelines, or forty-two *funts*, *Statisticheskie dannye*, pp. 76-9 and *Obzor Tambovskoi gubernii za 1892 god*, p. 17.

¹¹³ *Statisticheskie dannye*, pp. 64-79.

¹¹⁴ Consolidated reports concerning the income and expenditure of monies which were in the command of welfare institutions of Tambov province' 3 August - 21 October, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 254, ll. 1-21.

¹¹⁵ Count Bobrinskii to Plevé 14 March 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 100, ll. 132-4, Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, pp. 153-4.

¹¹⁶ This figure is arrived at by subtracting the number of cholera related deaths from the amount of 'excess mortality' in 1892 compared to the years before and after crisis, Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, p. 189, *Pravitel'stvennyi Vestnik*, No. 106 19 May 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 11, l. 64-ob.

population was getting hungrier: numbers receiving aid rose every single month from January to June, peaking at just over a million people, with the burden falling almost equally on men and women, despite the exclusion of working males from aid rolls.¹¹⁷ Konstantin Arsen'ev wrote of children with swollen stomachs and how peasants in Morshansk uezd, owing to the delay in zemstvo aid, had to eat *shchi* made of 'rotten, grey cabbage leaves, heavily seasoned with salt', which simply made them thirstier so they drank too much water.¹¹⁸ Even Count Bobrinskii talked of peasants, too poor to afford the cost price grain on sale from the zemstvo, travelling from town to town to beg for grain.¹¹⁹ While the TPFC, TPWC and the food allocation rules were established in late 1891 or early in 1892, there was a clear time lag between decision and implementation; charitable relief was slow to get off the ground in Borisoglebsk, Tambov and Lebedian uezds, not really beginning until January or February 1892 with Temnikov uezd leading the way, having started in October 1891.¹²⁰ There was often a lot of overlap between the charitable and official relief effort but Temnikov uezd, who issued charitable relief the earliest, was among the last to start issuing official aid.¹²¹ Additionally, there was a crisis amongst peasants not attached to village societies, uezds running out of food while others had to reassess their stores, creating a picture of a province fighting against the tide of rising starvation.¹²²

¹¹⁷ *Statisticheskie dannye*, pp. 57-8, pp. 77-8.

¹¹⁸ Arsen'ev, 'Iz nedavnei poezdki Tambovskuiu guberniiu', *Vestnik Evropy* (February, 1892), p. 837.

¹¹⁹ Count Bobrinskii to Pleve 14 March 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 100, ll. 134-42.

¹²⁰ *Pravitel'stvennyi Vestnik*, No. 106 19 May 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 11, ll. 64-ob-66.

¹²¹ *Statisticheskie dannye*, pp. 78-9.

¹²² Rokasovskii instructed the land captains in January to determine how many people in their precincts were unattached to a village society and how many of those needed food aid; unsurprisingly, it was the vast majority. For examples of the correspondence see Correspondence between Rokasovskii and land captains of various uezds 25 February 4-7, 10 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, l. 20, ll. 29-32, l. 72-93. On fears of insufficient reserves see Chair of Morshansk uezd zemstvo *uprava* N.I. Kotel'nikov, 11 March 1892, Rokasovskii to Colonel Vendrikh in Rostov-on-Don 14 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, l. 40, l. 97, Correspondence between the Shatsk uezd zemstvo *uprava* and Rokasovskii 14, 21 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 116-7, l. 142.

For the peasantry of Tambov province, it appears that the likelihood of receiving aid and its quality and quantity depended on where one lived. In some uyezds families were given pure, high quality aid (usually rye) while in others surrogates were used, either high quality ones such as potatoes or barley, or bitter ones with health complications such as goose foot.¹²³ Indeed, a series of letters in the British Medical Journal in 1892 drew attention to the fact that peasants in many provinces would rather starve than eat ‘famine bread’ made with goosefoot (*Chenopodium*).¹²⁴ That there was such dramatic variation in aid quality within the same province suggests that the robustness of an uezd’s relief effort structures were very important. Borisoglebsk and Spassk uyezds illustrate, in opposite ways, the extent to which the fragmented, disjointed structures of local government relied on individuals.

At the very southeastern corner of the province, Borisoglebsk uezd was less severely affected than others by the famine. Even at its worst, only 31 per cent of the population received food aid; yet peasants here consistently received above the thirty *funts* norm in 1892 every month from March to June.¹²⁵ Here the peasantry were fed clean rye and not surrogates.¹²⁶ The uezd *uprava*, which had two lieutenants and a peasant amongst its members, was effective, dividing the uezd into precincts, issuing aid to stores promptly and confirming receipt by the needy five days later.¹²⁷ It collected precise information on grain purchases and their distribution on top of this. The uezd had problems however and prior to January 1892 charitable relief was ‘too weak’.¹²⁸ Into this

¹²³ Eleven types of surrogates were used, mostly potatoes and wheat, *Obzor Tambovskoi gubernii za 1892 god*, p. 17. For examples and percentages of the surrogates used see Count Bobrinskii to Plevé 14 March 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 100, ll. 134-42 and *Zhurnaly Kozlovskogo uездnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 113-26.

¹²⁴ Stevens, ‘The truth about Russian “famine bread”’, p. 146.

¹²⁵ *Statisticheskie dannye*, pp. 76-7, *Pravitel’stvennyi Vestnik*, No. 106 19 May 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 11, l. 64-ob, l. 66.

¹²⁶ *Pravitel’stvennyi Vestnik*, No. 106 19 May 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 11, l. 64-ob, l. 66.

¹²⁷ *Adres-kalendar 1891 goda*, p. 105, *Zhurnaly Borisoglebskogo uездnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 345-6

¹²⁸ *Pravitel’stvennyi Vestnik*, No. 106 19 May 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 11, l. 66.

breach stepped Princess Elizaveta Volkonskaia, the wife of the minister for public enlightenment. She toured the uezd meeting local and private officials and her actions caused bakeries and sixty-three *stolovye* to open in rapid succession.¹²⁹ The involvement of the princess, with her powerful status as a wife of an imperial minister, likely changed the entire social dynamic around charity, making it ‘fashionable’ and, in a way, a competition; as Konstantin Arsen’ev noted, charity became an almost theatrical performance.¹³⁰

If Borisoglebsk represented the advantages of informal networks, Spassk uezd represented what happened when such networks collapsed in the absence of effective individuals. Lacking a marshal of the nobility, relief in this uezd fragmented to the extent that Vice-governor Choglokov was, as in late 1891, again sent out to restore order (as we will see below). The grain issued was rough, admixed and tasted bitter while at the high-point of the crisis, 63 per cent of the population received aid hovering at thirty *funts* from March to May, and rising to thirty-two *funts* in June.¹³¹ Despite widespread poverty and cumulative annual crop failures in Spassk uezd, the official relief effort there was chaotic and disorganised while charitable relief was in complete disarray with only six *stolovaias*.¹³² The fact that the chair of the uezd *uprava* was also acting marshal of the

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Lindenmeyr, ‘The ethos of charity’, p. 689, Arsen’ev, ‘Iz nedavnei poezdki Tambovskuiu guberniiu’, *Vestnik Evropy* (February, 1892), p. 848. On informalism see Ryavec, *Russian Bureaucracy*, pp. 65-70, pp. 142-3; Gill, ‘The Communist Party and the weakness of bureaucratic norms’, pp. 118-34. On provincial culture and the status of the two capitals see for example Evtuhov, *Portrait of a Russian Province*, pp. 206-27; Lounsbery, ‘“No, this is not the provinces!”’, pp. 259-80; Leonid Gorizontov, ‘The “great circle” of interior Russia: representations of the imperial centre in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries’ in *Russian Empire Space, People, Power, 1700–1930*, eds. Jane Burbank, Anatolyi Remnev (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), pp. 67-93.

¹³¹ Khorvat to Rokasovskii 11 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 187-188, *Statisticheskie dannye*, p. 79.

¹³² *Pravitel’stvennyi Vestnik*, No. 106 19 May 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 11, l. 64-ob and Rokasovskii to Vice-Governor Choglokov 16 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, l. 115.

nobility may help to explain some of the chaos; apparently E.G. Shcheglov, a trader on the *uprava*, was unable to offer it significant commercial expertise.¹³³

The above two examples represent end points on the spectrum. Between them fell the remainder of Tambov province. The remaining uyezds reinforce the lesson that the administrative machinery needed a skilled operator to make it work whether that skill was in administration or influence. The zemstvos depended not just on the land captains but also on various other local figures, such as priests, teachers, hospital staff and zemstvo land surveyors, and additional hires to help them inspect aid rolls and issue aid.¹³⁴

Despite the many laws and rules, provincial institutions, official and civil, were often weak and utterly dependent on individuals to maintain the relief effort. This sometimes encouraged links between official and charitable institutions, as in Kozlov and Lipetsk uyezds.¹³⁵ Nothing symbolised this more than the dual role played by the marshals of the nobility and the land captains. Bobrinskii speaks of several uyezds, such as Kozlov and Temnikov, where charity was active because of the ‘energetic’ and dedicated actions of the uezd marshal of the nobility; in Temnikov the marshal of the nobility appears to have compensated for zemstvo aid frequently adulterated with surrogates.¹³⁶ Holding an ‘honourable’ position, they were expected to chair the uezd’s collective institutions, such as they were; the imperial state frequently equated ‘status’ with ‘power’ and/or ‘ability’.¹³⁷ Several land captains distinguished themselves, including Aleksandr Novikov, who personally replaced zemstvo loans when they had not been issued in February, inspected lists, and established bakeries and *stolovaias* amongst other

¹³³ *Adres-kalendar 1891 goda*, p. 63.

¹³⁴ See for example *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo uездnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 43-4, *Zhurnaly Temnikovskogo uездnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 61-3, *Zhurnaly Kozlovskogo uездnogo zemskogo 1892 goda*, pp. 113-26.

¹³⁵ *Zhurnaly Kozlovskogo uездnogo zemskogo 1892 goda*, pp. 113-26, *Zhurnaly Lipetskogo uездnogo zemskogo 1892 goda*, pp. 153-6.

¹³⁶ *Pravitel'stvennyi Vestnik*, No. 106 19 May 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 11, ll. 64-ob-66.

¹³⁷ Novikov, *Zapiski zemskogo nachal'nika*, p. 133.

activities.¹³⁸ The institutional infrastructure was often fragile and without the dedication of many officials, the twin arms of the relief effort would have collapsed. Land captains and marshals of the nobility lent an air of authority to charity and could help direct aid to where it was needed. This combination is significant; there were goals and regional identities that transcended political concerns and the crisis show that when a serious threat emerged, provincial authorities could pragmatically embrace private charity to complement the weaknesses in its own structures.¹³⁹

This identification of social goals and provincial identity as connected and interdependent went beyond the organised and into individual action. Over the course of the nineteenth century, charity developed notions of obligation, community and overcoming fragmentation and promoting social harmony, though the imperial government thought of charity in explicitly Christian terms.¹⁴⁰ The significant donations made by the Grand Duchess Elizaveta Fedorovna to Morshansk uezd from Moscow are evidence of this socially inspired charitable ethic.¹⁴¹ Within the province however, the social ethic of charity linked with provincial identity, strengthening the sense of moral responsibility; as we saw in Chapter 4, donations were now seen as ‘belonging’ to the province.

The efforts of private charity in Tambov province in 1892 were full of those individual human relationships and actions that give deeper meaning to philosophical concepts such as ‘duty’, ‘morality’ and even the ‘provincial idea’. While the later

¹³⁸ *Pravitel'stvennyi Vestnik*, No. 106 19 May 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 11, l. 64-ob-66, *Zhurnaly Kozlovskogo uездnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 39-43.

¹³⁹ A. S. Tumanova, *Obshchestvennye organizatsii i russkaia publika v nachale XX veka* (Moscow: Novyi Chronograf, 2008), p. 50.

¹⁴⁰ Lindenmeyr, ‘The ethos of charity’, p. 689. The rescript from Tsar Alexander III to Nicholas establishing the Special Committee defined the charitable relief effort as a ‘sacred matter of Christian charity’, Rescript from Tsar Alexander III to Nicholas, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 1-2.

¹⁴¹ The Grand Duchess’ donation appears to have been sent to undisclosed *popechitel'stvo*s via the ‘Moscow committee’, *Pravitel'stvennyi Vestnik*, No. 106 19 May 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 11, l. 65-ob.

municipal guardianships of the poor would start from an explicitly different source, there are many similarities with the structure and goals of the *popechitel'stvos*, such as a committee, volunteers and community based, individually tailored activities.¹⁴² Examples are N. F. Plakhova in Tambov uezd and Countess Levasheva in Usman uezd; acting separately they opened *stolovaias*, stables for over 416 horses and employed 100 women. Plakhova even visited village assemblies to help allocate aid.¹⁴³ Borisoglebsk uezd had nine *popechitel'stvos* and fifteen private individuals managing *stolovaias* and stables.¹⁴⁴ Since late 1891, Governor Rokasovskii had sought to encourage as many *popechitel'stvos* as possible and these examples show that there was a positive response from many private individuals. There was, to a certain extent, a sense of common purpose.

In contrast to this image of charity and selfless devotion was that of an unnamed priest who sought not to donate his grain to the hungry, but instead sell it to the zemstvo, hardly the embodiment of Christian values and state loyalty the clergy were meant to be.¹⁴⁵ A Voronezh native, he disdained to help the population of Tambov province, deeming them '[...] a self-indulgent, vain, and foolish people [...]'.¹⁴⁶ He was not the only case: while we have seen in Chapter 3 that Fr. Butakov in Spassk uezd sought to incite peasant unrest in December 1891, in January 1892 several peasants accused him of essentially overcharging for funerals, pocketing the difference.¹⁴⁷ The mirror image of the TPWC's determination to keep 'local' donations for local uses, it shows that notions

¹⁴² Adele Lindenmeyr, 'A Russian experiment in voluntarism: the municipal guardianships of the poor, 1894-1914', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Neue Folge, Vol. 30, No. 3 (1982), pp. 429-35.

¹⁴³ These are but two examples of the individual acts of charity that Count Bobrinskii detailed in his report to the Special Committee, *Pravitel'stvennyi Vestnik*, No. 106 19 May 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 11, l. 65-7.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Brayley Hodgetts, *In the Track of the Russian Famine*, p. 117. For more on the interaction between the state, clergy and the peasantry, see Chris Chulos, *Converging Worlds: Religion and Community in Peasant Russia, 1861-1917* (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003), pp. 57-62, Chris Chulos, 'Peasant religion in post-emancipation Russia: Voronezh province, 1880-1917 (Volumes I and II), unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1994, pp. 273-77. Wirtschafter, *Social identity*, pp. 49-60.

¹⁴⁶ Brayley Hodgetts, *In the Track of the Russian Famine*, p. 118.

¹⁴⁷ Bishop Ieronim to Rokasovskii 13 January 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4197, l. 6.

of charity and who deserved aid became inextricably linked to identity and the sense of origin that an individual felt.

Haunted by the sights they saw, forced to control the allocation of aid, both official and charitable, the private individuals and officials who sought to prevent starvation and death in the province in 1892 faced a thankless task. They made mistakes, failed to coordinate properly and operated in a structure that restricted their activities to small geographic areas, leaving them isolated. Yet every month they issued a greater amount of food aid at a consistent level. It was not enough, but perhaps no amount would be. As structured, there was simply no way that provincial and uezd institutions, and the ad hoc charitable committees, could effectively meet the level of desperate, devastating need they found. As Konstantin Arsen'ev noted of those who sought to help in Tambov province: '[...] even if their numbers increased by a hundred, or a thousand times, it is still not enough to meet the level of need'.¹⁴⁸ What they could do was their best; securing everyone was impossible but by providing aid and *stolovye*, they could at least prevent villages 'fearing the ghost of starvation'.¹⁴⁹

Public order and security

Despite being a paramount concern of Alexander III's regime, any potential public order and security risks the famine raised did not seem to concern Tambov's provincial authorities in 1892. The main concern was threats to the integrity of the relief effort, to which the regime responded by adapting the TPFC as an appeals board. There is no sign that the authorities were worried about any threat to law and order; in fact, discussing

¹⁴⁸ Arsen'ev, 'Iz nedavnei poezdki Tambovskuiu guberniiu', *Vestnik Evropy* (February, 1892), p. 849.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 850.

prisons in the *obzor* to his annual report for 1892, Governor Rokasovskii simply mentions that the province's jails remained unfortunately cramped but that the quality of food had *improved*.¹⁵⁰ The only sign of concern was that several uezd zemstvos hired security for their grain warehouses though one uezd *uprava* was explicitly clear that an insurance company required this.¹⁵¹

Not only were they not concerned, key provincial officials reported not dissatisfaction, but a sense of gratitude, throughout the province. Count Bobrinskii told the Special Committee that no matter how bad the crisis was in the province, he did not encounter any sign of dissatisfaction.¹⁵² Instead, all he heard were the 'prayers of thanksgiving' to the tsar and tsarevich from the peasants, issued with 'tears in their eyes'.¹⁵³ Vice-governor Choglokov brought up the same theme on his investigation of Spassk uezd (which we will look at in the next section); the peasants expressed gratitude for the 'paternalism' of the government and Tsar in securing them from hunger.¹⁵⁴ The message fed back to St. Petersburg was the same: the population were (rightly, to the officials) deeply grateful for the extraordinary mercy and benevolence from the Tsar, the true protector of the people. Count Bobrinskii and Choglokov were playing their part in the validation and continuation of Alexander III's 'scenario of power' that portrayed the Tsar as close to the people and in tune with their needs.

This feedback loop, engendered by officials telling St. Petersburg what it wanted to hear while also validating their own management abilities, does appear to have some

¹⁵⁰ That prison food had improved in quality during a famine, due to charitable donations and the efforts of prison officials, again reinforces the sense of a moral sense of responsibility to those under the government's care, *Obzor Tambovskoi gubernii za 1892 god*, p. 46.

¹⁵¹ Temnikov and Lipetsk specifically mention hiring security with Lipetsk mentioning the insurance requirement, *Zhurnaly Temnikovskogo uездnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 62-3, *Zhurnaly Lipetskogo uездnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, p. 28.

¹⁵² Count Bobrinskii to Pleve 14 March 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 100, ll. 134-42, *Pravitel'stvennyi Vestnik* No. 106 19 May 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 11, l. 64-ob.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ Vice-governor Choglokov to Rokasovskii 11 April 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 422-3.

factual basis. However, it seems likely this lack of concern was a misdiagnosis of the causes of the population's relative passivity. The comparative literature on famine suggests that as the severity of a crisis intensifies, resistance to authority tends to decrease because of physical weakening and a desire not to bite the hand that was feeding them, as opposed to gratitude. Modern scholarship has shown that communities affected by famine tend to develop coping strategies that do not involve disorder such as food substitution, rationing, reducing the numbers of claimants, migration or borrowing money.¹⁵⁵ The livestock and seed loans covered earlier in this chapter are further examples though these tactics often have high long-run costs.¹⁵⁶ As James C. Scott has argued, the intersection of economic and environmental burdens can make violent resistance inevitable.¹⁵⁷ Yet the archives seem to indicate only one real act of violent resistance, a land seizure in Spassk uezd, which focused on a border dispute with a landowner.¹⁵⁸ This case had little, if anything, to do with the famine, with the archival record referring to a dispute over an 1890 agreement allowing peasants to rent the land in question.

To the peasantry the crisis appeared economic or natural, not the result of state policies. In consequence, many, as Robbins suggests, adopted a philosophical 'The Lord gives, the Lord takes' approach.¹⁵⁹ Scott refers to this passive acceptance of an event's occurrence as the 'subsistence ethic', with technical and social arrangements made to cope with periodic food crises.¹⁶⁰ Coping was becoming more important; anecdotal and

¹⁵⁵ Daniel Maxwell, 'Measuring food insecurity: the frequency and severity of "coping strategies"', *Food Policy*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Jul., 1996), p. 295, Daniel Maxwell, Clement Ahiadeke, Carol Levin, Margaret Armar-Klimesu, Sawudatu Zakariah, Grace Mary Lamptey, 'Alternative food-security indicators: revisiting the frequency and severity of 'coping strategies'', *Food Policy*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Aug., 1999), p. 414.

¹⁵⁶ James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1976), pp. 205-6.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 139-42.

¹⁵⁸ Correspondence with the Spassk Uezd ispravnik on the letter of Prince A. Kil'deshev concerning the seizure of his land by the peasants of Dimitrievskii Usad village, Spassk uezd 21 February – 16 April 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4198, ll. 1-9.

¹⁵⁹ Scott, *Moral Economy*, pp. 200-1, Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, p. 13.

¹⁶⁰ Scott, *Moral Economy*, pp. 1-3.

historical evidence shows that areas such as Siberia used railway expansion to ship grain quickly and cheaply around the empire, making provinces like Tambov increasingly uncompetitive.¹⁶¹ Whether it was relationships with institutions like the land captain, the reformed zemstvo elective curia, or rapid economic change, relative powerlessness within the established order was a constant in peasant life.

The increased sense of ownership that the provincial authorities took of the relief effort, through the use of investigations and the adaptation of the TPFC as an appeals board, affected the peasantry's actions and lowered the security risk. The highest rate of peasant dissatisfaction, as we saw in Chapter 3, was before aid was handed out in any systematic way. Widespread resistance is a moral action and often aims not at overturning the existing order but at forcing the authorities to discharge their moral obligations, often invoked by reference to paternal norms.¹⁶² The enthusiastic uptake of petitions to the TPFC and the direct invocation of paternalism in Spassk uezd show that the peasantry sought to hold the authorities to what they saw as their end of the social contract. Governor Rokasovskii, inspired by his sense of duty and fairness, was perhaps the only official to grasp this fact.

The provincial and imperial authorities were not the only ones to misinterpret the crisis and the potential for unrest however. Imperial Russia's administrative officials and revolutionary movements had at least one thing in common: an inability to understand properly the psychology and priorities of the peasant. In mid-April 1892, several volosts in Kirsanov uezd received an anonymous 'first letter to the hungry', bearing Moscow and

¹⁶¹ Hodgetts, *In the track of the Russian famine*, pp. 111-3, Nikolai M. Dronin and Edward G. Bellinger, *Climate Dependence and Food Problems in Russia 1900-1990: The Interaction of Climate and Agricultural Policy and Their Effect on Food Problems* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2005), p. 60.

¹⁶² Scott, *Moral Economy*, pp. 191-2.

Kirsanov postmarks and ‘seditious’ contents.¹⁶³ The aspiring conspirators (unfortunately the files provide no information about connections to a wider movement such as the populists) addressed the letters to peasants with common names such as Petr Ivanov, presumably in the hope that there would be someone there with that name.¹⁶⁴ When those individuals were not there, the volost’ board opened the letters and immediately informed the authorities, again showing the reluctance for broader resistance.¹⁶⁵ The appearance of the letters caused mild concern; Rokasovskii instructed officials to use all of their networks to watch out for more letters, gathering them up immediately while one land captain tried to get all mail handed over not to individuals but to volost’ boards for screening.¹⁶⁶ The affair ended in May with the arrest and conviction of three men, all Kirsanov uezd residents, and it seems no further disorders were recorded.¹⁶⁷ The cooperation of the volost’ authorities shows that the peasantry were not convinced of any moral argument to resist the state because of the famine. In fact, as we saw in Chapter 3, it led to a clamour for the ‘tsar’s rations’; pressure was placed on authorities to fulfil obligations, not to stand down. Once this began to happen on a large scale in 1892, it seems that the risk of disorder shrank correspondingly.

Only perceived threats to the peasantry’s existence from the authorities provoked the peasantry to active resistance. Such an example was the cholera outbreak, which would reach Tambov province in June and July of 1892. While the cholera riots of Saratov province are more famous, Tambov was not free of disorder: there was a mini-riot in Abakumov, Tambov uezd, which nearly resulted in the murder of the long-serving

¹⁶³ Correspondence between the land captain of the 1st precinct Kirsanov, the Kirsanov uezd *ispravnik* and Rokasovskii 11 April, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4270, ll. 1-7.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Kozlov uezd *ispravnik* to Rokasovskii 18 April 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4270, l. 10.

¹⁶⁶ Circular from Rokasovskii to all land captains and uezd *ispravniks* 14 April 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4270, l. 8, Manager of the Tambov telegraph *okrug* to Rokasovskii 30 April 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4270, ll. 25-6.

¹⁶⁷ Tambov provincial gendarme board to Rokasovskii 26 May 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4270, l. 32.

zemstvo doctor, A. V. Tsevtsev.¹⁶⁸ By the far most serious incident in the province during the outbreak, it appears to have necessitated the temporary movement of troops to Abakumov to quell the disorder.¹⁶⁹ The vast majority of the disorders however, were non-violent and instead focused on accusations that cholera was deliberately spread by officials and doctors to kill the peasantry; it reflects that distrust of the morality of science and modernity that was a strong part of peasant culture.¹⁷⁰ That rumours and the fear of cholera as an existential threat, and not innate resistance, drove violence is shown by Abakumov: after an apparently thorough information campaign by the zemstvo doctors in Abakumov, resistance died down and there was even a thorough disinfection campaign.¹⁷¹

Local relief problems and provincial intervention

Though decision making was diffused through a number of levels during the second half of the famine crisis, local officials did not have total freedom and were obliged to follow government decisions (with the *uezd upravly* required to obey the provincial zemstvo assembly).¹⁷² This gave Rokasovskii the legislative and moral authority to intervene and seek to correct problems as quickly as possible.

¹⁶⁸ For more on the unrest in Abakumov see *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 57-8 and V.V. Kanishchev, Iu. V. Meshcheriakov, E. V. Iakolev, *Tambovskii bunt 1830g. v kontekste kholernykh kirizisov v Rossii XIX veka* (Tambov: Tambovskii Gosudarstvennyi universitet imenii f. R. Derzhavin, 2009), pp. 299-303.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ A small sample of the files concerning these disorders in Tambov's archives can be found in GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4273-5, d. 4277-9, d. 4307-8. Leonid Heretz, *Russia on the Eve of Modernity: Popular Religion and Traditional Culture Under The Last Tsars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 130-9, Henze, *Disease, health-care and government in late imperial Russia*, pp. 79-97.

¹⁷¹ *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 57-8.

¹⁷² *Obzor Tambovskoi gubernii za 1892 god*, p. 14.

Despite his other shortcomings, mostly in long-term planning, Rokasovskii's personal interventions and investigations into the relief effort reveal him as an active, hands-on manager who understood well the symbolic power of the governor. Instruments and symbols of the tsar's power, governors projected into the daily lives of a province's population and personal visits or intervention of the governor were regularly used to resolve disputes or gather information.¹⁷³ During the famine, the MVD used imperial officials to conduct overall reviews and, sometimes, provoke inactive governors such as Governor Poltaratskii in Kazan province into action.¹⁷⁴

Such 'encouragement' was not necessary with Governor Rokasovskii. With a sense of hierarchy and belief in his viceregal status, he toured Tambov province twice, in 1891 and 1892, to see how relief operated in the province 'entrusted' to him.¹⁷⁵ He was essentially repeating his earlier practice from 1886 when, as vice-governor in Ekaterinoslav province, he had toured two uyezds suffering from crop failure; he recommended imperial loans and grain transfers from other provinces while heavily criticising the response of the Novomoskovsk uezd *uprava* as 'too passive'.¹⁷⁶ Yet in Tambov province, despite the errors and defects, the provincial and uezd *upravy* were at the forefront of the relief operation. Often disagreeing with their estimates (especially on cost), Rokasovskii appeared to have faith in their management abilities and the example of Ekaterinoslav illustrates that he was willing to intervene directly if necessary. Over the course of 1892, this necessity arose several times and in each case it was Rokasovskii,

¹⁷³ For more on the role of governors in resolving disputes, see: Robbins, *The Tsar's Viceroys*, pp. 200-13.

¹⁷⁴ In Chapter 2 we saw a conference between Tambov's provincial officials and Director Vishniakov of the MVD's Economic Department. In early 1892, after becoming increasingly concerned at reports from Kazan province, the MVD dispatched N. A. Troinitskii, director of the Central Statistical Committee, to investigate. His unfavourable report seems to have provoked Poltaratskii into undertaking a personal tour of the province, after which the relief effort apparently approved: Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, pp. 126-9.

¹⁷⁵ His first tour was of the entire province from September – October 1891 while his second tour in March 1892 took in four uyezds, of which only Spassk and Morshansk are named, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 87-90, ll. 106-7, ll. 239-41. We have examined some of the results of his tour in Chapter 3 in Spassk and Morshansk uyezds.

¹⁷⁶ Vice-governor Rokasovskii to the MVD department of general affairs, July 19 1886, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 45 (1881), d. 158, ll. 64-5.

via an official, who acted as the correction mechanism; he turned his concern for consistency and compliance, and his status as the Tsar's symbol, into an effective troubleshooting role.

a. Collapse of Trust? Khorvat's investigation of Tambov uezd

Trust was essential: the peasantry self-declared need for aid and local officials then verified these claims and allocated aid accordingly. This meant trusting officials who were not directly accountable to, or distant from, the provincial authorities. 'Trustworthy' people provided crucial information on the scale of need and it was only 'trustworthy' people who were authorised to open charitable committees.¹⁷⁷ Therefore, the relief effort could collapse into chaos or be exploited for personal gain if the officials were not 'trustworthy'. As we saw in Chapter 2, the definition of 'trustworthy' in Tambov province referred to those with close official or economic connections to village societies such as land captains, landowners, priests, teachers, doctors and other 'trustworthy' persons.¹⁷⁸ Holding one of these positions was no guarantee of conduct however: Rokasovskii had to upbraid a Tambov uezd land captain in December 1891 who had apparently refused to help inspect aid resolutions and asked he be reminded that this task was a 'necessity', legally and morally.¹⁷⁹

On 21 February Governor Rokasovskii asked College Secretary Nikolai Khorvat to secretly enquire into the actions of two members of the Tambov uezd zemstvo

¹⁷⁷ The Kozlov uezd zemstvo and the provincial food conference based their arguments for the severity of the crisis on this information, *Zhurnaly Kozlovskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1891 goda*, p. 69, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 92 – 97. On charitable committees see Rokasovskii to Special Committee for Famine Relief 23 December 1891, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, ll. 2-3 and Correspondence between S.A. Pisarev and Rokasovskii 11-14 December 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 121-124.

¹⁷⁸ Rokasovskii to the MVD Economic Department 25 September 1891, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 250, l.1, *Zhurnaly Usmanskogo zemskogo sobranie 1891 goda*, p. 40, pp. 33-4.

¹⁷⁹ Rokasovskii to Morshansk uezd marshal of the nobility F.M. Petrovovo-Solovovo 18 December 1891, GATO, f. 0p. 1, d. 4193, ll. 147-9.

uprava.¹⁸⁰ The allegations concerned potential fraud over prices paid for grain and an allegation against *uprava* member Romantsev for distributing poor quality aid.¹⁸¹ Rokasovskii asked Khorvat to establish to what extent these rumours were true.¹⁸² In September 1891 the MVD had raised similar concerns with all governors so it was likely that the provincial authorities, especially Rokasovskii, were sensitive to any potential evidence of corruption.¹⁸³

Khorvat was unable to determine whether the allegations of embezzlement were true but he discovered other serious issues, concentrated on where uezd *uprava* member Romantsev had managed the distribution of grain.¹⁸⁴ In one volost', there were complaints that the grain handed out in December was poor quality and even that it killed two peasants.¹⁸⁵ This could not be proven, after a sample was tested, though the grain was admixed with grit.¹⁸⁶ The uezd zemstvo *uprava* had to promise higher quality grain from January 1892.¹⁸⁷ Compounding this, it seems that the oats the volost' bought for sowing had already been sold to an agent of the zemstvo *uprava*, leaving the peasantry with no way to obtain the necessary grain for the next harvest.¹⁸⁸

The evidence for corruption is slim but we can infer at least a significant lack of coordination and resource pressure. Also at the start of February the uezd zemstvo rejected a request from the *uprava* to inspect its stores and asserted that the aid issuing

¹⁸⁰ Rokasovskii to Khorvat, 21 February 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, l. 187.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ MVD to all governors, 27 September 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4194, l. 95.

¹⁸⁴ Khorvat to Rokasovskii 11 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 187-188.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. and Vasili Aleksandr to Khorvat [n.d.], GATO, f. op. 1, d. 4265, l. 193.

¹⁸⁷ Khorvat to Rokasovskii 11 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 187-188.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. The agent who purchased the grain, I. Gulenko, was thanked by the Tambov uezd zemstvo assembly in an emergency meeting in February 1892 for purchasing high-quality grain from Kishinev (modern day Chisinau), *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo uездnogo zemskogo sobraniia, ekstrennogo sessii 1 Fevralia 1892 goda* (Tambov, 1893), pp. 9-11.

operation was going well with high quality grain being issued.¹⁸⁹ The peasants rejected the appointment of the volost' starshin, choosing someone else from their own number, and refused to buy grain for the zemstvo and took 'reckless unrealistic behaviour'.¹⁹⁰ Volost' starshins were often seen as an arm of the government and the peasants were reacting to poor quality, infrequent aid. Replacing the starshin was, to them, a pragmatic 'coping strategy' aimed at improving administration and asserting control over their community against officials they saw as against them or thoroughly disorganised. Yet on paper there was coordination and clear delineation: in early February the *uprava* and land captains divided the relief effort with the *uprava* providing information and the land captains managing efforts on the ground.¹⁹¹ There was a definite detachment between the reality of the situation and the uezd zemstvo's understanding of it: the zemstvo lacked either the means or the will to supervise the actions of its own agents, and it took the governor to investigate the issue.

b. Aid Abuse in Kirsanov uezd

If the weakness in Tambov uezd was zemstvo agents, Kirsanov uezd reflected what could happen if the zemstvo lost trust in the communities it was supposed to help. In March Rokasovskii asked Khorvat to go to Kirsanov and 'personally verify' that food aid was being handed out correctly in several localities.¹⁹² Apparently the Kirsanov uezd zemstvo *uprava* had stopped buying seed grain as several peasants were avoiding compiling

¹⁸⁹ *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo uездnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 9-11.

¹⁹⁰ Khorvat to Rokasovskii 11 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 187-188.

¹⁹¹ Tambov uezd zemstvo *uprava* to Rokasovskii 31 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 228-229.

¹⁹² Rokasovskii to Khorvat 13 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, l. 62.

resolutions.¹⁹³ Evasion was a serious issue for the authorities and undermined the potential of the relief effort to reach those who needed it.

Khorvat's investigation found up to thirty-seven cases of the abuse of aid allocation, concentrated in the lists of those deemed eligible for aid.¹⁹⁴ Many well-off peasants (the word 'kulak' was not used by Khorvat), including one who owned a warehouse, were receiving aid while others, who were 'burdened by families and endured need' or who 'positively had nothing', were excluded or had been put on the lists but never received aid.¹⁹⁵ Indeed, in two volosts he found that the village starosta and other peasant officials, who should have been excluded, were receiving aid.¹⁹⁶ According to local officials and landowners, the *uprava* relied on two lists to allocate loans and was also having difficulties purchasing enough grain for the hungry.¹⁹⁷ All of this led, in Khorvat's words, to potential trouble for the authorities: 'Such incorrect allocation of loans stirs up discontent from the side of the five people incorrectly left out'.¹⁹⁸ It is possible to see from this why the Kirsanov uezd zemstvo had stopped issuing aid: they were struggling to secure enough grain and could not be sure it would go where it was needed.

The final say on whether the uezd zemstvo had acted correctly belonged to the provincial food conference which, on 30 March 1892, instructed the Kirsanov uezd food conference to discuss the findings.¹⁹⁹ Despite delays, Kirsanov received Khorvat's

¹⁹³ Rokasovskii to Tambov provincial zemstvo *uprava*, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, l. 63.

¹⁹⁴ Kirsanov uezd marshal of the nobility A. Apushkin to Rokasovskii 16 May 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 359-61.

¹⁹⁵ Khorvat to Rokasovskii 20 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 174-6.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, ll. 171-2.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ Rokasovskii to Kirsanov uezd marshal of the nobility A. Apushkin 1 April 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, l. 130.

findings in April and discussed them on 11 May.²⁰⁰ The *uprava* provided a list of each of the cases of incorrect allocation found by Khorvat, along with the numbered list each case was on, the representative who authorised the loans and, occasionally, the basis for its authorisation. A general explanation for the situation was offered by the uezd food conference: investigating and compiling the lists of the needy involved the land captain and the zemstvo assembly and *uprava* and that in such a ‘difficult and complex matter’ it was ‘inconceivable’ that there would not be mistakes.²⁰¹ For example, one peasant had been awarded aid but this was revoked in February upon further investigation and one starosta who received aid did so on agreement from the *uprava* that it was given to peasants in genuine need.²⁰² The lists were apparently constantly verified and updated to ensure accuracy and that the majority of cases found by Khorvat were now corrected.²⁰³ The provincial food conference, on 10 June, accepted the declaration of the Kirsanov uezd *uprava* and the food conference as ‘completely valid’ and the resulting decisions completely correct.²⁰⁴

Khorvat’s investigation of Kirsanov, and the zemstvo’s moves to correct the problem, illustrates that inspections such as this were employed as a corrective technique. It also reveals how the fragmented nature of provincial government meant it was sometimes difficult to effectively coordinate and manage a task as complex as crisis response. It seems likely that several wealthy and powerful peasants took advantage of the situation; complaints about volosts leaders ‘hiding’ aid were not unknown and Rokasovskii complained to St. Petersburg about intra-peasant exploitation in general. Despite the

²⁰⁰ A. Apushkin complained on 10 April that the package he received had been empty and Vice-Governor Choglokov resent it shortly afterwards. Correspondence between A. Apushkin and Vice-Governor Choglokov 10 April 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 275-6.

²⁰¹ A. Apushkin to Rokasovskii 17 May 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 358-61.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁴ Rokasovskii to A. Apushkin 13 June 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, l. 363.

various problems and confusion, Kirsanov's relief effort had not resulted in disunity and disagreement between officials.

c. Vice-Governor Choglokov in Spassk uezd

Unity was an important and recurring theme and would play a big role in another investigation, in Spassk. Through its perceived lack of unity and leadership, it became an area of serious concern for the provincial and imperial authorities. Rokasovskii, touring the province as a form of personal oversight, told his vice-governor, Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Choglokov in mid-March that he found the organisation of the relief in Spassk unsatisfactory and that there was 'insufficient unity in actions between the uezd actors'.²⁰⁵ Rokasovskii told St. Petersburg in his annual report for 1892 that the province's institutions were united but clearly this did not always hold true.²⁰⁶ As we have seen earlier in this chapter, Spassk lacked a marshal of the nobility and the absence of this coordinating figure led to at least a partial disintegration, disagreement and a spike in poor quality aid, illustrating how fragile and individual dependent the relief effort was.

This disintegration and Spassk's falling away from established procedures was front and centre in Rokasovskii's mind when he toured the uezd. He had instructed Spassk's institutions on how to manage the relief effort but, unable to continue the tour, asked Choglokov to visit instead.²⁰⁷ Under the 1890 Zemstvo Statute, the governor had the right to impose corrective actions on the *zemstvo uprav*y for 'incorrect' management. Rokasovskii felt that a 'personal explanation' from Choglokov to the uezd's institutions would 'ensure the lasting establishment of the matter' in line with the commands of the

²⁰⁵ Rokasovskii to Vice-Governor Choglokov 16 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, l. 115.

²⁰⁶ Governor Rokasovskii's annual report for 1892, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 223, d. 232, l. 12.

²⁰⁷ Rokasovskii to Vice-Governor Choglokov 16 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, l. 115.

provincial food conference and welfare committees.²⁰⁸ To ‘strengthen’ the activities of the land captains, officials were assigned to each one, mostly drawn from other areas.²⁰⁹ With no marshal of the nobility to provide the necessary supervision and coordination, it is clear that Rokasovskii had decided that the gubernatorial authorities had to step in. The appointment of outside officials to assist the land captains indicates a lack of trust and confidence in them; the uezd was essentially no longer being trusted to organise its own relief effort on a local level.²¹⁰ Vice-Governor Choglokov, as a representative of the governor and thus St. Petersburg, was being sent to remind the uezd’s officials of their obligations.

Choglokov had visited Spassk for a similar reason before. In December 1891 an investigation of potential irregularities in one precinct resulted in instructions to undertake a new allocation of loans in the uezd. Choglokov left having impressed the need for unity on the land captains, who were the source of the disunity, and having secured a commitment to increased cooperation from the uezd *zemstvo uprava*.²¹¹ These exhortations had clearly not taken hold and the absence of a marshal of the nobility did not help matters.

Choglokov visited Spassk from 25 March to 2 April, and held a long conference with the chair of the uezd *zemstvo uprava* and the land captains. He does not give many details of the meeting, but noted that he pressed upon them that a more ‘uniform’ method of welfare was possible.²¹² The rest of the conference focused on how to allocate the

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ This imposition of outside control was not an isolated incident. A more drastic form took place in December 1891 when Rokasovskii placed the relief effort in Morshansk uezd under the control of the provincial marshal of the nobility, Prince Cholokaev, See Minutes of the TPFC 17 December 1891, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4193, ll. 136-140.

²¹¹ The full report of the investigation can be found in Delo volnenniakh krest’ian s. Bokovoi Maidan Spasskogo uezda v tsviazi s utverzhdeniem spiskov na vydachu prodovol’stvennoi ssudy golodaiushchim, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4196, ll. 1-19.

²¹² Vice-Governor Choglokov to Rokasovskii, 11 April 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 422-3.

horses being sent to the uezd from St. Petersburg and how to prevent the peasantry from simply selling them on.²¹³ The allocation of horses was important as it aimed to greatly increase the productive capacity of farms, helping to rebuild the peasant economy. Choglokov's focus on it suggests that the provincial authorities were deeply concerned about Spassk's ability to successfully manage such an undertaking.

As in December 1891, Choglokov again went to village assemblies but this time, instead of seeking to shore up the authority of the land captains (and therefore the government), he used it to supervise them. The zemstvo and the land captains were now acting mutually in accordance with Rokasovskii's actions and commands, and 'in recent time the matter of welfare to the needy was established in the best light and the population are secured'.²¹⁴ The zemstvo and the land captains were now cooperating in verifying need and allocating aid (including horses), which was now being distributed quickly and correctly.²¹⁵ Choglokov met more than 200 people and told Rokasovskii that all he encountered was gratitude from the peasantry to the government and local administration for their care and attention towards them.²¹⁶ Indeed, several village societies presented Choglokov with resolutions of gratitude declaring that they had no requests for the governor and were fully secured for aid.²¹⁷ Indeed, Choglokov noted that three claims he received were unfounded and another had already been taken care of.²¹⁸

Spassk's relief effort was now apparently operating well and had been established on the basis of '[all] possible fairness, humaneness and complete understanding of the

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ The archive contains numerous examples of these resolutions, which often follow a standard format. One resolution in Kargashin village, Anaevskoi volost', selected two peasants to deliver their official thanks and was undersigned on behalf of 148 people, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4266, ll. 2-38.

²¹⁸ Vice-Governor Choglokov to Rokasovskii, 11 April 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 422-3.

instructions given'.²¹⁹ This explicitly connected a fair and compassionate relief effort with the instructions of the provincial and imperial authorities. Compliance with these instructions, especially those issued from the provincial level, would decrease the level of distress in Spassk uezd and make the relief effort fairer. In short, the message was that the government had the people's best interests at heart and the uezd had a moral duty to its inhabitants to follow these instructions.

d. Confusion in Sasovskoi volost'

As we saw in the section on horses, while implementation was relatively easier than policy making, it still posed significant problems. As the provincial food conference acknowledged in June, it was 'impossible to avoid mistakes in the difficult inspection of the needy peasants', despite the 'most thorough inspection' by land captains.²²⁰ One such example is Sasovskoi volost' in Elatomsk uezd where the issue was less official capriciousness but a struggle to cope with the chaos the crisis engendered.

What prompted an investigation into Sasovskoi volost' is unknown, but on 29 February, Rokasovskii dispatched a member of his staff, College Secretary Malevinskii to inspect the allocation of loans.²²¹ Malevinskii found that most peasants were secure and relief allocated correctly but there were some problems.²²² It seems the 'authorities' (presumably the land captain), having 'the right to direct the issuing of loans', overruled the volost' elders and included well-off peasants on the aid lists.²²³ Malevinskii presented

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Minutes of the TPFC 10 June, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 401-19.

²²¹ College Counsellor Malevinskii to Rokasovskii n.d., GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, l. 33.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

the lists in question to the Elatomsk uezd *uprava* for their review and sent them to Rokasovskii for his own inspection.²²⁴

Rokasovskii reacted quickly: on 6 March he informed the Elatomsk uezd *uprava* and revealed that he had personally removed two peasants from the list and added two more due to their ‘extreme poverty’.²²⁵ There were difficulties in delivering to the villages of the volost’ and he instructed the *uprava* to correct them.²²⁶ Rokasovskii’s highlighting of the situation and instructing the *uprava* to correct it was a reasonably standard response. What was unusual however was Rokasovskii’s personal adjustment of the aid lists; while he commented on the veracity of others, he usually instructed uezd officials to correct any issues.

Not limited to mere instructions, Rokasovskii could, and did, arbitrarily intervene to ensure compliance with the law, underscoring the tension between *zakonnost’* and *proizvol* in a ‘regulated autocracy’. Rokasovskii went further than his earlier instruction by appointing Malevinskii as land captain and manager of food affairs for the precinct.²²⁷ Though this was a radical move, the emphasis on the government’s commitment to allocate aid fairly left Rokasovskii with little choice. Unfortunately Rokasovskii was unclear on *how* the problem was to be resolved. Malevinskii noted that ‘without instructions I cannot appeal to the peasants’.²²⁸ The *nachal’nik gubernii* could intervene but without being clear as to the desired outcome, it could be read as simply more confusing arbitrariness.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Rokasovskii to the Elatomsk uezd *zemstvo uprava* 6 March 1892 and n.d., GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, l. 18, ll. 34-5.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Rokasovskii to the Elatomsk uezd marshal of the nobility M.V. Neklebov 6 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, l. 106a.

²²⁸ Land captain Malevinskii, 5th precinct Elatomsk uezd, to Rokasovskii 16 March 1892, GATO, f. op. 1, d. 4265, l. 106.

This arbitrariness, even if justified and in the public interest, could be contested. The former land captain wrote to the TPFC and accused a land owner and the TPWC of either keeping aid rolls too low or not responding to his requests.²²⁹ The provincial food conference did not judge the land captain's actions, instead simply deciding to ask the Elatomsk uezd *uprava* to explain how these incorrect allocations had taken place.²³⁰ Sasovskoi would continue to feature for less serious reasons but a clear line of communication was now open between Malevinskii, Rokasovskii and the uezd *uprava*.²³¹

Sasovskoi exposes the limits of the food conference's oversight role: it had no power to compel or command land captains (who answered to the MVD): all it could do was ask the *zemstvo upravy* to explain the situation. There was no institution that had responsibility for food security and disciplining land captains. Only the governor and his chancellery had at least some powers of oversight over every element so when local solutions or discussion failed, it would move in and 'fill the gaps'. Aware of this, the province adapted an ad hoc strategy: manage events at a local level where possible with the governor as a last resort mechanism. A messy, complicated and under-resourced approach, it demonstrated a level of dynamism, adaptability and pragmatism that was ultimately successful.

²²⁹ Minutes of the TPFC 30 March 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 198-224.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

²³¹ See Correspondence between Malevinskii, Rokasovskii and the Elatomsk uezd *zemstvo uprava*, 10, 21 April, 7, 10, 13 May 1892, GATO, f. 4, op. 1, d. 4265, ll. 245 a-c, l. 184, ll. 331-2, ll. 352-3.

Conclusion

It is not an exaggeration to say that the crisis shook Tambov province to its very foundations. Since the province was almost entirely reliant on agriculture, the famine made over half the province's population dependent on some form of aid, official or charitable. Accompanying this long-term structural damage was the horrifying human cost, not just in mortality, but also in the fear, chaos and hunger caused by the crisis. With isolated villages, half the province lacking a connection to the (chaotic) imperial rail network, getting aid to those in need was an almost-Herculean task even before the fragmented administrative structures, resource shortfall and the shortcomings of the officials and their mistakes are taken into account. There were indeed plenty of mistakes, such as not detecting the ongoing distress early enough, anticipating sharp price rises, originally excluding children from those eligible for aid loans, and the not-infrequent paralysis of the institutions charged with making these decisions.

It is important, however, to be aware of the context we are considering. As Robbins notes: 'Famine does no one honour. Not even the biggest and most effective relief campaign can remove the stigma produced by hunger and misery'.¹ The pride that one can take in famine response is limited; the job of governments is ideally to prevent it, especially as their actions can inadvertently or deliberately *cause* famine. The famine hit Tambov province when its capacity to respond was particularly low, with empty stores and financial reserves, and a high degree of institutional turnover. Yet by adapting these self-same deficient structures, the province coped with these challenges to a certain degree: month after month, the level of aid allocated increased and aid guidelines were

¹ Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, p. 176.

mostly met or exceeded and while breakdowns in the relief effort occurred, they were isolated and responded to by the provincial centre. While mortality in Tambov province rose by 22,395, an increase of 29 per cent over 1890-1, this compares to the average of 28 per cent in affected provinces, and is the second lowest rate of its neighbours, which ranged from 19 per cent in Riazan to 55 per cent in Saratov.² It underscores the stark nature of a famine crisis, and given the structural difficulties that faced Russian provinces, their response was an achievement. When cholera related deaths are removed from the total, Tambov province's total of 13,317 famine related deaths is lower than any of its neighbours except for Tula (again Saratov was the highest).³ Overall then, that this was accomplished with poor rail infrastructure, empty financial reserves and grain stores means we can declare the relief effort in Tambov province a comparative success and a moderate one in absolute terms.

Interwoven with the above are themes of legal responsibility, tensions between *zakonnost'* and *proizvol*, the centre-periphery relationship and its pressures, the notion of ad hoc versus formal structures and the importance of individuals and overall structural capacity. Crisis response and the concept of 'province' itself are deeply complex issues and the purpose of this conclusion is to draw these themes, teased out in the preceding chapters, into a cohesive whole. The aim here is to show that the relief effort proves that provincial administration in the late imperial period was more robust than traditionally assumed and that the relief effort helped foster a sense of provincial identity, taking it from a cultural sphere to a burgeoning sense of solidarity between administrators and those they oversaw.

While this thesis charts the crisis via the medium of the official relief effort which opened in June 1891 and wound down in July 1892, that was not the end of the story. The

² Ibid., p. 189.

³ Ibid., Henze, *Disease, health-care and government in late imperial Russia*, p. 65.

economic damage caused to the province's economy and to its food supply system would last for several years while the provincial zemstvo developed a plan that would see the peasantry repay the imperial loans over ten years. The shockwaves of the crisis extended out far, and in order to assess the effectiveness of the relief effort, we need to look at the short and medium-term consequences of the famine. This will show that many of the same themes, attitudes and approaches were prevalent, indicating that these were not simply unique to the relief effort, but indicative of a deeper provincial bureaucratic culture owing much to the behavioural practices of the imperial centre.

Looking at the devastation that the crisis had wreaked in only twelve months, it is easy to imagine that, as the uezd and provincial officials contemplated their jurisdictions, their mood was one of deep despair. With over six million individual loans issued over the course of the crisis, the 1891 harvest reaching only 40 per cent of that of 1889 and just under 22,400 dead, the crisis exacted a devastating toll.⁴ It is not hyperbolic to argue that 1892 saw crises of almost biblical proportions: no sooner had the famine relief effort begun to wind down when a plague of locusts attacked what few crops there were and then a cholera epidemic swept in from neighbouring Saratov.⁵ The TPWC, in seeking aid from the Special Committee to help provide for children orphaned by cholera and to fight the disease, wearily remarked that the spread of cholera in the empire 'forced us to assume

⁴ *Statisticheskie dannye*, pp. 58-9, Tsentral'nyi statisticheskii komitet Ministerstva Vnutrennykh Del, *Glavnaia rezul'taty urozhaiia 1891 goda* (St. Petersburg, 1891), p. 14, Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, p. 189, *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, p. 214.

⁵ The provincial and uezd zemstvos devoted, as is to be expected, considerable resources and energy to both problems though a detailed examination of it is beyond the scope of this thesis. Examples of the collated reports are *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 18-29, pp. 212-27, *Zhurnaly Kirsanovskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 2-3, p. 47, pp. 58-61, pp. 94-116, *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 51-75, *Zhurnaly Lipetskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 166-76, *Zhurnaly Temnikovskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 55-60, *Zhurnaly Kozlovskogo uezdnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 39-43, pp. 135-9.

that Tambov city and Tambov province are not escaping this new disaster, especially hard and heavy this year [...]’.⁶ Fatalism, it seems, was the most infectious condition of all.

This despair was probably made all the worse by the fact that this was the result achieved with over 10 million roubles from the imperial treasury; the potential outcome had that money not been granted is hard to contemplate. While the relief effort was obviously the result of a whole government approach, it is possible to see how Tsar Alexander III’s personal convictions had a positive impact on the relief effort. His well-known disdain for system and regulation perhaps made it easier for the imperial government, in the words of a member of the Tambov provincial zemstvo assembly, ‘to make a number of deviations from the requirements of strict formal legality’.⁷ As all legality emanated ultimately from the tsar, it was his to uphold or deviate from as circumstances required. Small wonder then that an address of thanks from the provincial zemstvo assembly thanked him for saving the peasantry from ruin and even thanked divine providence for having him as tsar during the crisis (Alexander’s annotation, ‘very pleased!’ was communicated back to the province).⁸

All of this, however, contrasted with the efforts of Governor Rokasovskii to create a positive or self-congratulatory image out of the chaos and suffering. Seemingly drawing upon that powerful image of the peasant as a strong character who bore suffering in silence, he remarked in his 1892 annual report that the province ‘survived the disaster comparatively easily and without special consequences’, and that the peasantry would recover by themselves, a theme picked up in the following year’s *obzor* of the province.⁹

⁶ Correspondence between the TPWC and the Special Committee for Famine Relief 28 June – 29 July 1892, RGIA, f. 1204, op. 1, d. 100, ll., 269-79.

⁷ *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 246-8.

⁸ Correspondence between the Tambov provincial zemstvo *uprava*, Rokasovskii and Durnovo 10 December 1892 – 18 January 1893, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 269-70, l. 289.

⁹ Annual report of Governor Rokasovskii on Tambov province for 1892, RGIA, f. 1284, op. 223, d. 232, l. 8, *Obzor Tambovskoi gubernii za 1893 god: Prilozhenie k vsepoddanneishemu otchetu Tambovskogo gubernatora* (Tambov: Tipografiia Gubernskogo Pravleniia, 1894), p. 21.

This notion of the famine as merely a temporary disturbance, though undoubtedly a severe one, has some merit to it, notably in the fact that the imperial treasury and other macroeconomic measures such as the financial system and consumer demand, recovered quickly throughout the empire.¹⁰

Yet Rokasovskii's later confidence looks more like a tactic, aimed at ensuring St. Petersburg that things were returning to normal under his watch. In August 1892, Rokasovskii again played the loyal, fiscally conscious governor, 'coerced' out of a sense of duty to ask for more for the province. He assured the MVD he was fully aware how important it was to restore a 'normal situation' in the province and he accepted that there needed to be a 'struggle with the population's custom to depend on aid from the government, zemstvo and welfare'.¹¹ Nevertheless, there was a need for 'energetic measures' to secure the food needs for the population and he found it a 'duty' to support the provincial zemstvo's request for an additional 356,000 roubles.¹² The MVD quickly rejected this but offered 100,000 roubles as a compromise; once again, while we might baulk at the language used about the peasantry, Rokasovskii had secured a deal for the province.¹³ The scale of the request, meanwhile, illustrates that the province was not returning to a 'normal situation'.

In fact, evidence suggests that despite Rokasovskii's later denials and reassurances, Tambov province would feel the effects of the crisis for several years. An additional request for 497,000 roubles was made (and rejected) in 1893 while in 1894 the provincial zemstvo was worried about a 'significant decline' in the province's agricultural

¹⁰ Simms, 'The Economic Impact of the Russian Famine 1891-92', pp. 63-74, *Ministerstvo Finansov, 1802-1902*, ch. 2, pp. 3-13, pp. 640-3

¹¹ Rokasovskii to MVD economic department 17 August 1892, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 261-2.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Correspondence between the Tambov provincial zemstvo *uprava*, Rokasovskii, Durnovo and the MVD economic department, 17 August – 4 September 1892, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 261-5.

development and, ‘despite all efforts of the administration’, it was impossible, as a direct result of the 1891-2 crisis, to assess food security as sufficiently secured.¹⁴ Forced to use the highest grain price over the previous ten years when seeking to convert grain store reserves into cash, in 1897 the provincial zemstvo asked for permission to exclude 1891 and 1892, due to their distortive effect.¹⁵ Indeed, the governor’s *obzor* for 1897 noted that that year’s crop failure was especially hard for the peasantry as they have ‘not yet fully recovered from the disastrous consequences of the crop failure of 1891’.¹⁶ Thus, Rokasovskii was telling St. Petersburg what it wanted to hear and avoiding the blunt truth that the road to stability was not short.

Even in a state or province equipped with gifted administrators, an efficient administrative structure and deeply advantageous weather conditions, a virtually instantaneous recovery from such a devastating crisis would have been extraordinarily difficult. This then leads us to the issue of what *was* possible. As we have suggested throughout this thesis, the issue of the uezd and provincial institutions’ *capacity* is crucial here. Any measure of success must be relative since to impose an absolute metric would be anachronistic. With the province economically devastated and every level of the food security system, from the volost’ level grain stores to the provincial food financial capital, virtually exhausted, the options open to the province were limited in the extreme, especially as the MVD issued instructions on the repayment of the imperial loans in July.¹⁷ Before looking at the broader lessons we can take from the famine crisis and

¹⁴ Correspondence between the Tambov provincial zemstvo *uprava*, Rokasovskii, Durnovo and the MVD economic department, 23 December 1892 – 9 January 1893, RGIA, f. 1287, op. 4, d. 2132, ll. 271-80, *Obzor Tambovskoi gubernii za 1894 god: Prilozhenie k vsepoddanneishemu otchetu Tambovskogo gubernatora* (Tambov: Tipografiia Gubernskogo Pravleniia, 1895), p. 1, p. 15.

¹⁵ *Sbornik postanovlenii Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia za 1895 – 1906* (Tambov: Tambovskaiia gubernskaia zemskaia uprava, 1906), ed. V. I. Manotskov, t. 3, p. 406, *Svod Zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii*, t. 13, Ustav o obespechenii narodnogo prodovol’stviia, razdel 1, glava 1, st. 21-2.

¹⁶ *Obzor Tambovskoi gubernii za 1897 god: Prilozhenie k vsepoddanneishemu otchetu Tambovskogo gubernatora* (Tambov: Tipografiia Gubernskogo Pravleniia, 1898), p. 1.

¹⁷ MVD Circular No. 7156 26 July 1892 in *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo uezdnoho zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 222-5.

Tambov province's response to it, we should briefly consider the issue of *repaying* the loans.

As if coming full circle, the institutional architecture created for the relief effort to issue grain *to* the peasantry was now quickly re-purposed to take grain *from* them. A brief examination of this inversion of the relief effort's original purpose reveals the vitality of the structures. Illustrating that they were a fundamental part of imperial governing culture, the themes of decentralisation, provincial adaptation and centrally imposed individualised authority are again apparent. To lower the burden on the peasantry, the MVD agreed that loans should be repaid on a *pud-for-pud* basis instead of the cash value while the TPFC again embraced decentralisation, mandating that each uezd establish a network of food stores under the control of the uezd food conferences.¹⁸ The strain between the centre and the periphery remained: the MVD appointed Lieutenant-General Tseimern to oversee the collection and distribution of repaid grain while the provincial and uezd zemstvos pushed for debts to be tied to individuals rather than village societies and sought to set the repayment period at ten years.¹⁹ Operationally, the repayment operation was the inverse of the relief effort but the values and approaches that maintained it were the same. Once again, the province responded to an instruction from the centre by constructing an approach, based on a constructed sense of provincial identity, that involved policy making at the provincial centre and localised execution.

The fact that the approach of the relief effort and the repayment operation were almost identical is no accident and was not just the result of their close temporal proximity. One of the contributions this thesis has made is to show that these approaches were a result of the interactions between the more established official identity and an

¹⁸ MVD Circular No. 7156 26 July 1892 and Minutes of the TPFC 8 August 1892 in *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo uездnogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 222-30.

¹⁹ *Zhurnaly Tambovskogo gubernskogo zemskogo sobraniia 1892 goda*, pp. 327-34.

emerging provincial identity (an identity the crisis helped to develop). It was the development of legality in the nineteenth century and its often-fraught relationship with the autocratic notion of reserved legality and individualised authority that would create the space for these interactions to take place and develop. As the governing myth of the autocracy became ever closer tied with the notion that the tsar, and his government, were *responsible* for efficient, rational and reliable administration, this created new expectations within the provinces. If 'good government' was now a key legitimising element of the autocracy, then provinces could expect that many of the abuses of the past would be reversed or, at least, mitigated.

A fundamental tension developed between the imperial centre and the periphery on how the empire was to be governed. Complicating this even further were conflicts within each of these two visions: an imperial one focused on centralisation and a provincial one that emphasised local initiative within the autocratic context. To the imperial centre, the notion of a rational administration meant centralisation and integration; if abuses took place within the province then they were to be suborned to the centre and fully integrated into its administrative structure, as we saw in Chapter 1. Provinces were, in some ways, inherently untrustworthy; away from the supposedly watchful eye of the centre, 'uncultured' local elites would seek to exploit whatever and whenever they could. The disdain with which Polovtsev and Count Bobrinskii, both officials with careers wholly based in the imperial centre, held Rokasovskii and Durnovo is an example of this. Their service was entirely provincial and there appears to have been a psychological barrier between them and central officials. One need mention only the flippant, browbeating attitude shown by A. G. Vishniakov when he held a conference with the various provincial and uezd officials in Tambov in July 1891. Thus, control and integration were key tools to ensure that the government achieved its aims (in a sign of

‘regulatory capture’, even Durnovo attempted this integration). However, the methods used to achieve this reveal the complexities within this integrationist approach.

Despite the development of a desire for a rational administration, the autocracy could not fully uncouple itself from its key ideological conception that rule by a single individual was the best model for Russia. This led to governors who were simultaneously viceroys of the tsar, provincial managers and, increasingly, provincial cogs within the wider MVD machine. As we saw in Chapters 1, 2 and 4, Governor Rokasovskii was frequently torn between his duties to the imperial centre (especially the treasury) and his responsibilities to provincial welfare. Frequently during the relief effort he sought to satisfy both by, for example, asking how much Tambov could expect in loans to ensure moderate expenses while also trying to provide the province with an overall strategic framework and certainty. That many of these tensions derived from the same statute is not a coincidence; as the centre tried to balance two competing ideologies, these became bound up in legislation and affected the governance of the provinces. The land captains, only introduced in Tambov province in the month before the crops failed, are another strong example of this conflict. The ‘counter reforms’ were not inherently reactionary; they are better understood as a conservative method of ensuring ‘good government’. By granting broad discretionary power, within an increasingly regularised framework, the regime of Tsar Alexander III attempted to mesh the continued desire for a regularised administration with the belief that only broad individualised authority, a miniature tsar in other words, could deliver this. It was not fatally flawed or the narrow illiberal measure of historiography but it was a belief riven with contradictions, a by now frequent refrain of this thesis.

As the centre struggled to define, and then impose, its version of ‘good government’, the same debate was happening within the provinces, with profoundly

different effects. The centre believed that, ideally, the system should work from the top down, with St. Petersburg determining the law and operational framework while the provinces simply executed central commands with some allowances made for local circumstances. As the nineteenth century moved on, the provinces began to articulate a new vision, one that gradually pushed and tested the one emanating from St. Petersburg without, it is important to stress, straying into political resistance. This vision was based on practice and innovation; the provinces would take the centrally designed framework and altered them to meet local needs. Where the framework or law fell short, they would often 'fill the gap' or rely on the fact that the law did not *specifically prohibit* a measure to take it. The resistance by Tambov province to several provisions of the 1889 Food Security Statute and its strategic inversion of the central emphasis of statistics and administrative linkages show how this was becoming common practice. While the province pushed back against only one specific article of the food security law on paper, the move was based around the law's conception of famine relief as an economic matter.

Throughout the crisis, this theme of provincial innovation is a frequent one: through Governor Baranov, Nizhnii Novgorod created new institutions while Tambov province adapted these and existing structures and laws to meet its own particular circumstances. The crisis helped further develop a dialogue between the centre and the periphery that left autocratic legitimacy unchallenged but instead questioned specific decisions. The zemstvos and Governor Rokasovskii remained steadfastly loyal to the tsar throughout but interpreted their tsar-given responsibility, to protect the province, differently. As 'good governance' became a more important part of the way in which the imperial regime thought of itself, this rhetoric was internalised by the provinces and fed into their actions. Combined with a provincial identity based on lived experience, the famine sharpened this debate: who would know better how to deal with the crisis than those living through it? We should, of course, acknowledge that St. Petersburg learned

this lesson relatively early and sought to give the provincial zemstvos broad latitude in handling the relief effort, partially to avoid politicisation which could have threatened effectiveness.²⁰ Overall, what was at issue in these debates was not a struggle for political control, but how best to implement the same vision.

While the relief effort saw the integration and meshing of these two interpretations of ‘good governance’, on balance the approach adopted by Tambov province emerged as the stronger voice. As political debate and indecision hampered the ability and desire of the MVD to take full control, the way was clear for the provinces to step into the resultant vacuum. MVD imposed structures, such as the provincial food conferences, or ones supported by the centre, such as the provincial welfare committee, were provincial innovations. They were ad hoc, extraordinary institutions that the centre took from one province and imposed upon others. However, they comprised *provincial* figures, even if several of these were provincial agents of imperial departments. This presented an opportunity, taken up with considerable vigour by Tambov province, to integrate this structure into the relief effort and to adapt it considerably as the crisis progressed.

This ability, and desire, to adapt leads us to look at the nature of provincial innovation and the specific responses it engendered. Sometimes a direct reaction to imperial decisions or legislation, sometimes an attempt to fill those gaps exposed by circumstances, the provincial ‘voice’ was, however, shaped by the culture and attitudes of the centre. In managing the relief effort, Tambov’s provincial institutions often used the same language and approaches that the imperial centre used with the provinces. This makes the case for a specific imperial bureaucratic culture that was transmitted from the centre to the periphery. This is reflected in the way that the various institutions in Tambov province related to each other during the crisis. Provincial institutions such as the TPFC

²⁰ Robbins, *Famine in Russia*, p. 175.

and the provincial zemstvo may have acted as key determiners of policy. Yet, because they lacked both resources and infrastructure, the execution of policy had to be given over to the uyezds out of necessity. Via Governor Rokasovskii's recommendation that each province establish an uezd food conference, the TPFC imposed institutions on the province. The same dialogue we saw between St Petersburg and Tambov, in which there was a contest over who was best placed to understand and shape the relief effort, was replicated between the provincial centre and the uyezds. There was also a reliance on the almost interminable culture of review and report, where the process of gathering information often took the place of decision-making. The values of St. Petersburg and the province were therefore not so different; within each there was a conscious construction of a 'centre' and a 'periphery' with one determining policy and the other tasked with execution. There was a consistent emphasis throughout on the need for each level to adhere to provincially decided policies yet there was also push back from the uyezds or several decisions. Compliance and integration also emerge as parallel values; the disunity discovered in Spassk uezd and certain volosts sparked full-scale investigations. The adaptation of the TPFC into a board of appeal provided a dynamic, peasant-focused response to the same issue, explicitly designed to meet peasant concerns while maintaining relatively close supervision over the officials on the ground who might otherwise have remained poorly managed.

The lack of formal administrative control reveals two final, important themes: fragmented structures and the role of individuals. There is little doubt that the structure of provincial administration was not fit for purpose. It was disjointed, fragmented and often sacrificed efficiency and common sense in the name of political stability; making uezd zemstvos responsible for the grain stores in volosts in which they were forbidden to organise is a case in point. The 1889 Food Security Statute, and the legal duties of the governor, prioritised the operation of a free market and threatened to distort the supply of

grain; if relief was to be purely market led, grain would simply leave the affected provinces as the peasantry could no longer afford it. That, as we saw in Chapter 5, is exactly what happened. The lines of communication were unclear and often weak; who did a land captain report to on food security, the *uezd zemstvo*, the Governor, the MVD or all three? The *zemstvos*, who bore the main responsibility for food security, suffered from a number of serious failings. Chief among them was the general decision making process; meeting only once a year they were utterly dependent on their two standing bodies, the reporting commission and the *uprava*. When these failed, the result was often paralysis. The simple fact is that the structures were neither sufficiently connected nor robust enough to manage the relief effort automatically.

This structural vacuum put considerable pressure on the officials as individuals, pressure that not all of them lived up to. From the land captain who refused to inspect resolutions to the almost constant disorder and chaos in Spassk *uezd*, there are plenty of examples of abdication of responsibility. However, there are examples such as Aleksandr Novikov who went far beyond the minimum expected of a land captain to help those in need. While, overall, this thesis has shown that the majority of officials approached their job with a sense of responsibility and diligence, what is ultimately more important is this interplay between a weak, fragmented structure and individualism. What an individual *chose* to do often had a profound effect; if Governor Rokasovskii had not used the TPFC as an appeals board, would public order have been of greater concern? Here was a man with a profound impact; he made short-term decisions with negative longer-term consequences but his hands-on management style and insistence on fairness and compliance while recognising the need for decentralisation arguably allowed the relief effort some of the flexibility and strength it needed.

Privileging individualised authority via the marshals of the nobility and the land captains, there was a degree of arbitrariness built in to the response, as Chapters 3 and 5 showed. Authority was *individualised* almost as a result of the increasing reach by the state into the village; with too many responsibilities and not enough time or structural support to execute them, Tambov's officials had to make difficult choices, often on their own. Recognising this, they attempted to reduce the potential for negative arbitrariness either by using these self-same structures or leveraging the traditional status and power of their position.

This then, was the tangled and complicated network that made up Tambov province. It shared many characteristics with other provinces at least in administrative terms. Isolated and compartmentalised, the various institutions also overlapped each other in many ways, a situation that was not tenable even outside a crisis. Into this were placed individuals and the interaction between them had a significant impact. Provinces, however, were not just identikit administrative structures where the defining feature was simply different individuals. As we saw in the profiles of provincial figures on Chapter 1, members of the provincial and uezd assemblies were often key players in the social and cultural life of the province (such as Boris Chicherin) and also funded key elements of the social infrastructure (such as Lev Vysheslavtsev's family and Aleksandr Novikov), showing that cultural and administrative identities overlapped and intertwined. The primary sources used here are predominantly administrative in nature but, as Evtuhov argues, provincial identity was more than just cities outside the two capitals having theatres and newspapers.²¹

At the beginning of this thesis, we defined 'provincial identity' as a moral responsibility to Tambov's population and a sense of initiative in the face of crisis and it

²¹ Evtuhov, *Portrait of a Russian Province*, p. 246.

is clear that the relief effort fostered the development and construction of this sense of provincial identity. While the crisis did not fully break down the social divisions between officials and peasantry, it did subtly change the way in which these divisions manifested themselves. From the provincial zemstvo seeking to bind all elements of the administrative structure together in a common legal responsibility, to declarations from the Borisoglebsk Agricultural Society on inaction threatening the population, to the use by uezd zemstvos of the term ‘exports’ when banning grain sales outside the province and the TPWC’s determination to hold on to ‘local’ donations for ‘local needs’, the crisis helped crystallise and develop the issue of provincial identity by forcing provincial and uezd officials to engage with the question of who they served and why. Social barriers had by no means broken down completely, but the response to the famine signalled that the peasantry had to be helped on terms that, as far as possible, met their needs: not just from genuine humanitarian concern but because they were *Tambov’s* population. It also forced these officials to address *how* they served the population. As we have seen in this conclusion and throughout this thesis, the answer to this was through a limited, if growing, degree of innovation. When St. Petersburg had established no policies for a specific situation or had failed to respond, Tambov’s officials used a combination of pressure on St. Petersburg and filling in the gaps to address it. A full, long term view of the development of provincial identity in Tambov province as a result of the crisis is beyond the scope of this thesis, but there are some signs that this subtle culture shift was long lasting. The impact of the 1897 crop failure was minimised as the province, likely scarred by the empty stores of 1891-92, had land captains personally ensure that the peasantry fulfilled their obligations to deposit (good quality) grain into the stores.²² When famine came calling again, in 1918-21, Tambov province’s initial response was to deviate

²² *Obzor Tambovskoi gubernii za 1897 god*, p. 15.

considerably from the centre's policies as they did not fit local needs.²³ Whatever the nature of the regime that ruled in the capital, Tambov province, post-1891, defaulted to an approach that prioritised locally sourced solutions; 'provincial identity' had taken root in food security policy at least.

To conclude, the relief effort in Tambov province was often ad hoc, chaotic and vulnerable. Conflict, competition and confusion between various individuals often held back the relief effort while it is arguable that there was too much variation between the uezds. Robbins takes this view of provincial relief in general, arguing that a 'famine dictator' could have prevented these tensions.²⁴ This ignores the fact, however, that this was never a possibility and retroactively imposes an idealised type on the provinces. This thesis has shown that Tambov province was a dynamic and evolving place whose administration was far from static. Despite its many failings, the uezd and provincial officials had no choice but to use the tools to hand. Subject to their own faults and failings, these officials managed the best they could. From an artificial boundary drawn on a map, Tambov province had evolved into having its own unique, lived variation of Russian culture; the relief effort was not just an administrative response, it was a human, *local* one.

²³ Dugarm, 'Local politics'.

²⁴ Ibid.

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