

University reform and autonomy: S.M. Solovyov's apologia

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Abstract. The article looks at the problem insufficiently explored within Russian historiography, namely the administrative and managerial activities carried out by the 19th-century Russian historian S.M. Solovyov. This research aims to study the theoretical and practical contribution made by Solovyov to the development and implementation of the basic principles within the system of higher education in Russia. The article shows his achievements, potential, and the difficulties he faced in the course of solution of the organizational and managerial tasks. An important result of the research, which reflects its novelty, is a comprehensive exploration of the institutional source materials. This approach allows the authors to understand and restore the history of the development of Russian universities at the stage of implementation of the 1863 Charter, which was characterized by unconventional situations in the relations between the bodies of power and the university professorial corporation. The work also describes Solovyov's strategy and tactics as an administrator in the context of violations of the University Charter of 1863 by the government circles. The authors make conclusions about Solovyov's moral qualities, who, as a true historian, while holding a senior administrative position, understood his duty to his country as protection of the interests of science and the principles of university autonomy and serving education.

Keywords: Moscow University, Ministry of Education, University Charter of 1863, autonomy.

1 Introduction

The personality of Sergey Mikhaylovich Solovyov is multidimensional in terms of his contribution to the development of historical studies and participation in the process of formation of the Russian education system in the 19th century. During this period, the basic functioning principles were introduced into the structure of university education. What were they going to be like was decided in the quiet atmosphere of ministerial offices, the circles of the professorial and teaching corporation, and government committees and discussed in the press. In the 1850–1870s, Solovyov was in the center of these events.

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2 Methods

Solovyov's work as Dean and Rector of the Moscow University earned him true respect. Protecting the interests of science and principles of university autonomy, he did not allow himself to lower the high professional and moral standards [1]. The historiographic analysis shows that this aspect of Solovyov's activities drew less attention from researchers than his scientific and pedagogical achievements [2-4]. In this connection, more than 20 years of experience and the results of administrative work achieved by this great scholar bring to the fore the problem of studying his social and political views and his role in the development of the system and principles of higher education.

3 Results

Starting from the second quarter of the 19th century, the Russian education system was subject to a serious organizational and conceptual transformation connected with the internal conservative political line of policy implemented by Nicholas I. Its ambassador of which was S.S. Uvarov, Minister of National Education. The new University Charter, a state legal act of the Russian Empire that determined unified principles, structure, and functioning patterns of higher education institutions, was adopted in June 1835. The document restricted the autonomy of universities provided to them in the epoch of Alexander I and eliminated the structural subdivisions based on the principles of collegiality and self-governance. In pursuance of Uvarov's theory based on the triad "Orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality", curricula were reviewed at universities, and the number of humanities was reduced. Students that violated discipline or were accused of freethinking were expelled from universities.

Having started work in the sphere of pedagogical and scientific activity at the Moscow University, Solovyov defended his theses and began writing his many-volumed book "History of Russia from the earliest times". The scholar devoted 30 years to this large-scale research work, and the book later ranked high among the major works of Russian historiography. In 1855–1877, Solovyov's administrative career developed successfully: he became Dean of the Faculty of History and Philology and later – Vice-Rector and Rector of the Moscow University.

Professor Solovyov, who was 35 years old, took office as Dean at the beginning of the academic year 1855/1856. It was the time when the university community and students were expecting reforms and the long-awaited academic freedoms from Alexander II, who had ascended the throne.

Solovyov was a liberal and an advocate of university autonomy. The historian pointed out that only a strong state can ensure freedom and the opportunity for personal self-fulfillment. Solovyov defended his views on the principles of development of the higher education system in the course of the discussion of the new project of the University Charter in 1858–1863.

Development of the Charter, which started at the instruction of Alexander II at the end of the 1850s, intensified in 1862, when A.V. Golovnin was appointed to the post of Minister of Education [5: 148–149]. Reputable Russian and foreign scholars, including Solovyov, were involved in the discussion of the project. He believed that the priorities of the reform included ensuring the independence of universities in such aspects as curricula and teaching methodology. Solovyov paid special attention to teaching students and pointed out that university professors and administration carry out the mission of transmitting knowledge and represent mentors rather than a repressive force [6: 109], while the functions of supervision of students should be carried out by district education inspectors [7: 27].

On 18 June 1863, Alexander II approved the fifth edition of the Charter of Russian imperial universities. It expanded the rights of students in terms of discussions and

participation in learning activities and returned internal self-governance to universities due to expanding the functions of the University Council in the sphere of electivity, scientific, teaching, and financial activity [8, 9]. One of the important features of the 1863 Charter is that the University Council acquired the right to optimize the structure of faculties and handle the issue of disciplines taught at the institution. According to the new University Charter, the rector acquired a wide scope of rights, which reduced the influence of the educational district trustee on the university. Besides, according to the new provisions of the Charter, administrators at all levels of the university structure were faced with significantly higher responsibility for their structural subdivisions [10: 169].

The reform of education implemented by Alexander II resonated with the student community to a great degree. University administration often had to handle conflict situations connected with student strikes and their rejection of conservative professors together with police and the educational district trustee. Understanding that due to their black-or-white thinking students could not evaluate the professional qualification of a teacher, Solovyov tried to look into the essence of a problem. As Dean, he attended lectures not only in compliance with the provisions of the 1863 Charter but also to form his own opinion, take the possible measures to improve the learning process, and promote the level of teaching. Solovyov was described as a manager who strictly followed the law and was careful in decision-making.

Within the framework of the implementation of the new Charter, Dean planned to expand the existing chairs, university staff, and the number of students. In this respect, Solovyov filed requests to the Ministry of Education [11: 4]. Since the system of education was financed according to the residual principle, the expectations related to the expansion of the network and structure of educational institutions did not come true.

Election of professors for new terms posed a great challenge. Discussions frequently led to a wide public response, for example, violation of the election rules in January 1866, when V.N. Leshkov, professor of the Faculty of Law, did not win enough votes to be elected on a competitive basis. Minister of National Education A.V. Golovnin interfered in the matter and confirmed this professor in his office for the following five years by his order, thus violating the charter procedure of electing a candidate for a new term. As a sign of their dissent, Solovyov and his supporters submitted their resignations. This story, which was later called “an uprising of the Moscow University professors” by contemporaries, was interpreted in public opinion as an oppositional protest [12: 254]. Later, when the emotions of the professors faded away, their resignation letters were revoked at the request of Alexander II.

As conflicts developed and repeated in the professor and student community, the government circles drifted towards reducing university autonomy and self-governance. The situation was aggravated by an attempt on the life of Alexander II made by Dmitry Karakozov — a former reckless student expelled from the Kazan and Moscow Universities for participation in student unrest and failure to pay for his studies. A.V. Golovnin, a liberal minister, was dismissed from his post and replaced with Count D.A. Tolstoy, who got down to the implementation of conservative and protective activities in the sphere of education aimed at prevention of revolutionary sentiments in society [13: 148].

By 1870, Solovyov had already received the title of a distinguished professor of the Moscow University, earned fame abroad, and become Privy Councillor in the Table of Ranks. His work as Dean for 15 years allowed him to acquire large managerial experience and develop his administrative style. In February 1871, Solovyov’s election to the post of rector of the Moscow University by the University Council for four years was confirmed by an Imperial Edict. Several significant scientific, pedagogical, and organizational projects were carried out already in the first years of his rectorship. Best scientists from other universities were invited for teaching and research work, faculties were reformed to improve the level of specialist training, and new chairs and specialized laboratories were established. In 1875, the

first Russian Convention of Lawyers was held under the auspices of the Moscow University [14]. Solovyov's authority also played an important role in the launch of the Higher Women's Courses in Moscow. Despite a high workload as Rector, Solovyov found time for public activity as well. In his journal articles, he popularized the role of science and its connection with daily life.

4 Discussion

Protecting the interests of the university community, Solovyov often engaged in conflicts with the Ministry of National Education. It was vividly manifested in 1857–1877, the period when the government Committee carried out active work on reviewing the University Charter. The management of the Ministry promoted the approach that implied restriction of university autonomy and called for an increase in control over the life of universities exercised by the trustee and Minister. As a famous scholar and Rector of a leading Russian university, Solovyov was included in the above-mentioned government Committee, where he spoke openly against the restriction of the rights and freedoms of universities. V.S. Solovyov, the historian's son, remembered that when his father was the head of Moscow University, he still adhered to the principles of the old 1863 Charter neither due to his conservatism nor because he considered it flawless. Solovyov's experience suggested that the new top-down reform would not change the state of affairs conceptually. The majority of members of the University Council and heads of other Russian universities supported Solovyov in this confrontation [12: 10].

The Ministry of Education steadfastly pursued its policy and supported its advocates. In one of the meetings of the Moscow University Council, Physics Professor N.A. Lyubimov criticized the existing university rules and autonomy. In his opinion, "bureaucratic liberalism" has become established at universities, i.e. faith in certain forms of electing professors determined by the Charter, secret voting, and non-intervention of the Ministry of Education [15]. In response to Lyubimov's speech, 35 professors of Moscow University, including its Rector Solovyov, signed a letter against the suggested reform and sent it to the Ministry of National Education. The situation was getting tense, students refused to attend lectures, and the Ministry demanded an explanation for what was happening to Rector. After Alexander II was informed of the conflict, Rector received a reprimand from the Emperor. The Ministry of National education supported Lyubimov. Solovyov could not sacrifice the principles of the Charter and infringe the rights of the university corporation. On May 16, 1877, he submitted his resignation, and soon Alexander II signed an Imperial Edict dismissing the Rector of the Moscow University [16: 270].

5 Conclusion

Exploration of the topic of administrative activities carried out by Solovyov during his tenure as Dean of the Faculty of History and Philology and later as Rector of the Moscow University, his role in the development and implementation of the principles described in the University Charter of 1863 allows us to take a wider look at the scholar's contribution to the development of the system of higher education in Russia. We can see the historical image of this person, who was guided by high moral standards in difficult professional and life circumstances. Justly holding the post of university rector for two terms, Solovyov executed his duty to his country, which he understood as protecting the interests of science and principles of university autonomy and serving education.

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