The Impact of Educational Reforms on Russian Women from 1850-1900: Obtaining a Higher Education with the Help of Socialism

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Introduction

Long on hair, short on brains
Traditional Russian saying[1]

Restrictive governments breed revolutionaries, history has shown this much. Nineteenth century Imperial Russia is marked by a time of reforms and liberations. The tsars Alexander I, Nicholas I, and Alexander II mismanaged the reforms during this time in Russian history, which left the education system and the rights of women floundering through the decades. Each reign struggled to overcome the country's unsettled and unforgiving socioeconomic setting, censored press, turbulent economy, and rigid educational systems. In attempts to ease the distorted systems created by his predecessors, Tsar Alexander II implemented the most striking changes, which included emancipation of serfs. This emancipation ultimately lead to the established a secondary education system, which included previously indentured girls. Although well-intended, the reforms by the Tsar had little impact on liberating women's educational rights. His reforms further stratified women's access to academic institutions, did little to expand their education in comparison to their male counterparts, and pressed the rising socioeconomic tensions which resulted in the birth of socialism in Russia. This thesis elucidates how nihilism, and the Socialist movement became the cornerstones of women's campaign for greater education in Russia.

Between the years of 1850 and 1900 the Socialist and radical movements in Russia appealed as conduits for women to further their educational reach. Such movements helped to obscure the societal role between men and women in order to achieve the common goal of a reformed government system. As those social movements occurred in Russia, women were

[1] V. Dal, *Poslovitsy russkogo naroda. Sbornik* (Moscow, 1957), 350, cited in Christine Johanson, *Women's Struggle for Higher Education in Russia: 1855-1900* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987), 3.

beginning to find their place within a society that restricted them from branching out into new fields. The push towards science and the liberation from religion was exciting for the younger generation, as they believed they would bring change through a new approach.[2] While women could still attend university lectures around 1855, they were unable to obtain an official degree and the courses were very limited. Due to these limitations, women had to find further, more inclusive schooling elsewhere. Schools' outside of Russia was a main reason why the late 1800s produced revolutionaries like Nadezhda Suslova and many more. They received unbridled educations that expanded what they were limited to in Russia. This created platforms for women like Nadezhda Suslova and Vera Zasulich to pioneer in the traditionally male-held roles, such as medicine. Their involvement in assassination plots and public protests empowered the cries for liberties and access to greater education that the women of Russia desired and deserved.

Firstly, this thesis will examine Russian society before 1850; the government, major historical events, and establish traditional female roles prior to the educational reforms. Secondly, the historiography will analyze various research from scholars discussing the internal and external societal factors that influenced the environment women were living in during this tumultuous era in Russian history, 1850 to 1900. This thesis will cover educational reforms and the differences between elite and lower-class women in the sections to follow. Once this information has been laid, the focus will turn towards the advancements regarding women's push into the medical field. This thesis will also establish how socialism was at the center of revolutionary groups and the final driving force of women's education liberation. Overall, this thesis will investigate primary source recollections from the pioneering of Nadezhda Suslova and Vera Zasulich. These revolutionaries are important to understanding the female draw to

[2] Ann Hibner Koblitz, "Science, Women, and the Russian Intelligentsia: The Generation of the 1860s," 210.

socialism as they inspired future generations of Russian women. Primary sources include newspaper articles written from the perspectives of American women and what their understanding of Russian women's education was, as well as letters to home from women who attended medical school outside of Russia. The move towards socialism following the death of Alexander II inspired women to pursue education and join revolutionary groups.

Ivan Turgenev, a notable Russian author at the time, coined the term "nihilistic" to describe this new group of revolutionaries.[3] In his novel *Fathers and Children,* Turgenev introduces a character that is characterized by being a nihilist. In a dialogue between two characters that are discussing the issue of nihilists, they state, "A nihilist is a man who does not bow down before any authority, who does not take any principle on faith, whatever reverence that principle may be enshrined in."[4] Through this conversation the characters outwardly show distaste at the thought of nihilism and the foundation of its beliefs, claiming that it is pitiful and redundant. The character in the book that is characterized as being a nihilist, Bazarov, is obsessed with dissecting frogs. That small notion is metaphorical to the desire that the younger generation had to pull apart society and the government to lay open the truth.[5] Turgenev was an impactful writer at the time, so much of his work was appreciated by the Russian people. The older generation praised his disdain for nihilists, while the younger generation clung onto the term and used it for their benefit. Many nihilists in late nineteenth century Russia were women because of the message it conveyed; this meant freedom of individuals and a war against traditional characteristics of society and culture, as it encompassed the emancipation of women.[6]

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[3] Ann Hibner Koblitz, "Science, Women, and the Russian Intelligentsia: The Generation of the 1860s," The University of Chicago Press, no. 2, (June 1988), 209.
[4] Ivan Turgenev, *Fathers and Children* (Moscow: Grachev & Co, 1862), 36-37.
[5] Turgenev, *Fathers and Children,* 47-59.
[6] Whittaker, Cynthia H, "The Women's Movement during the Reign of Alexander II: A Case Study in Russian Liberalism," *The Journal of Modern History* 48, no. 2 (1976): 35–69.

Nihilism and its applications to the real world were most often seen in literature, which was constantly being consumed by the public.

Socialism was similar to nihilism in the aspect that the government should have little say in the lives of the Russian people. Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto* made its way into Russia and sparked interest in middle to lower class individuals. Women, especially, were drawn to it because it advocated for the social freedom of women and the socialization of domestic tasks.[7] Russian Marxist Alexandra Kollontai theorized that with the dissipation of these social barriers, the family unit would no longer be upheld by the law, but through free unions between men and women.[8] These unions would have to be built on love and equality rather than on law and the state. While socialism benefitted women and allowed them to develop their own voices, Russian socialists sparingly acknowledged the "women question," something that was regarded as more important to the nihilist movement.[9]

The Age of Alexander II and Russian Education

Russia's extensive history is important to consider when examining the immense number of changes that occurred in the late nineteenth-century. During the period of 1850-1900 Russia was both autocratic and revolutionary; both rigid and censored, nihilistic and violent. It was filled with secret societies on both sides.[10] Although such descriptions hold true throughout centuries of tsar ruling, they were especially pronounced during the reign of Tsar Alexander I and Tsar Alexander II. Alexander I ruled from 1801 to 1825. He made minor moves towards ratifying the field of education by enacting reformations that made other tsars that followed him

[7] Ziva Galili, "Women and the Russian Revolution," *Women and Revolution: Global Expressions* 15, no 2/3 (1990): 119.
[8] Galili, "Women and the Russian Revolution," 120-121.
[9] Galili, "Women and the Russian Revolution," 119.
[10] Helen Gay Pratt. *Russia, from Tsarist Empire to Socialism* (Camden, N.J: American Council of Pacific Relations, 1937), 70-75.

consider doing the same. His reforms involved the construction of new universities and the societal re-stratification of intelligentsia, a class comprising of scholars, academics, journalists, and teachers.[11] The tsarist government formulated a document entitled the "Charter of Nobility," which acknowledged the existence of a privileged estate based on serfdom in the autocratic society.[12] This charter inevitably caused discord between the freethinking gentry and the government bureaucracy because it displayed how much power the nobility had over the serfs. Its contents leaked into the education systems via lectures and resulted in the daughters of nobility revolting.[13] These daughters were upset since they were blind to the deceit that was in front of them for most of their lives. Despite the misguided decisions and the failures of his reforms during his tsardom, Alexander I's reign has continued to be revered by historians as the "Era of Liberalism" according to historians.[14]

In the early years of Tsar Nicholas I's reign, between 1825 and the 1830's, the intelligentsia struggled with the issue of censorship. Many students were denied by autocratic rule the opportunities to travel abroad to expand their studies.[15] To ease such frustrations, Tsar Nicholas I set out to reform education, primarily for male students. Censorship and travel bans were lifted under his rule.[16] He also funded the reconstruction of male schools as well as expanding their curriculum. Although the people of Russia were pleased with such modifications, the Crimean War of 1853 soon brought this approval to an end.[17] Russia's defeat

[11] Alexander Chubarov. *The Fragile Empire: A History of Imperial Russia* (New York: Continuum, 1999), 47-54.
[12] Chubarov, *The Fragile Empire*, 77.
[13] Chubarov, *The Fragile Empire*, 56.
[14] Geoffrey A. Hosking. *Russia: People and Empire, 1552-1917* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997), 316.
[15] Chubarov, *The Fragile Empire*, 95.
[16] Chubarov, *The Fragile Empire*, 101.
[17] Chubarov, *The Fragile Empire*, 115.

and the cost of war bankrupted the economy, halting funds for universities and all other large-scale projects that Russian citizens endorsed, including the improvement of public healthcare.

Despite its failure, the war suggested a potential for new roles for women outside of the home.[18] Russia was the first country to deploy female nurses to the front lines during the Crimean War from 1853 to 1855. The war challenged the traditional role of women in society and unlocked the expectancy and potential of women. Such a breath of freedom inspired increasing numbers of women to pursue more male-dominant careers, including medicine. Women began flooding university courses around 1855 in the desire to pursue nursing and higher medical education.[19] However, Nicholas I's educational reforms did not address women; he stood by the belief that women should not pursue education, and that there was no space for duality of women in society. A woman could not be educated and be a sufficient wife at the same time, thus women should remain merely wives. Nicholas I only allowed women to attend the courses and they could not fully enroll in the university. This mood held the country until the end of his reign in 1855.

After Tsar Nicholas I's death, Alexander II took control of a war torn and socially broken Russia from 1855 to 1881. The Crimean War left Russia nearly penniless and without funding to manufacture weapons, thus Russia could not rival their adversaries.[20] In addition to fiscal impoverishment, Alexander II inherited the consequences of the misleading decree of the public militia, which elicited hope to serfs that served in the war, leading them to believe that the government would free them. Unfortunately, Alexander II did not address the freedom of the serfs directly. To rectify the misleading notion, Alexander revoked the decree and set the serfs

[18] Pratt. *Russia, from Tsarist Empire to Socialism*, 73.
[19] Chubarov, *The Fragile Empire*, 178.
[20] Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire, 1552-1917*, 318-319.

free with the promise of their own land.[21] However, the land given to them was poor and segregated into village-societies where only serfs were allowed to live away from Russian society.[22] This prevented schoolteachers, priests, and medical professionals from living in such villages, further increasing the disparities between the serfs and the upper classes.

The emancipation of serfs ultimately led to educational reforms which gave universities administrative power and established a secondary education system to include previously indentured girls. The goal of the reforms was inclusivity; by including these newly emancipated girls, schools experienced higher enrollment rates and have more individuals to indoctrinate. Essentially, schools in the early nineteenth century pushed students to look more at religion and societal norms rather than science and new perspectives.[23] Even though these secondary institutions were open to women around 1865, the question of whether women were deserving of earning degrees and higher social standing was still circulating. The reforms by the Tsar ultimately had little impact on broadening women's educational rights. Educational reforms further stratified women's access to academic institutions, thereby perpetuating their limited roles in society.[24] Noble women were given access to higher education, granting them admittance to governess positions and entrance into academic institutions. Yet, this education was greatly inferior to the expansive education available to men because the coursework women had related more to domesticity and the basics of science or reading.

Segregation of serfs and women in the lower classes from society allowed the rise of disparities, which transitioned into politics. The serfs lacked civil human rights as Russian

[21] Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire, 1552-1917*, 321.
[22] Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire, 1552-1917*, 320.
[23] Pratt. *Russia, from Tsarist Empire to Socialism*, 70-73.
[24] Barbara Clements, Barbara Engel, and Christine Worobec. *Russia's Women: Accommodation, Resistance, Transformation* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 15.

autocracy and society continued to squeeze this group towards revolution.[25] Such issues played a role in the rise of socialism and nihilism because serfs went on to join revolutionary groups to pursue their personal rights. In addition, the autocratic government was strict in its policies regarding women in educational settings, which further agitated the frustrated state. These were the seeds that socialism developed from.

Increased tensions between the extremely stratified social statuses reflected poorly on Alexander II, leading to his assassination in 1881 by the early socialist groups, *Narodnaya Volya*. The revolutionary group was birthed from increasing tensions between low society and high society, including individuals from noble and serf families, male and female.[26] There was undeniably a social and classist divide between the groups, since some students did not feel comfortable attending classes with newly emancipated serfs. The assassination of Alexander II became one of the greatest accomplishments of the socialist movement, as well as its greatest disappointment.[27] It was a disappointment because following his death, the Russian government became more restrictive, and the state was under an emergency lockdown. This meant that authorities could arrest suspects without a warrant or trial, curtail civil rights, and dismiss officials. Ultimately the assassination backfired for the socialist movement because of the new restrictions.

The educational reformations enacted by Alexander II only helped women to an extent during the height of the mid nineteenth century. Reforms consisted of the ability for women to audit secondary university courses and opened universities to women. While the reforms changed the male-centric view of women that Russia had, its impact on universities was limited

[25] Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire, 1552-1917*, 324.
[26] Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire, 1552-1917*, 299-300.
[27] Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire, 1552-1917*, 359.

and women still faced barriers when they tried to fully enroll into secondary schools.[28] This prevention of fully allowing women to fully enroll in secondary universities is one of the main reasons why socialism and nihilism were so appealing to women during this era. Women of all social classes in Russia were able to surround themselves with others who believed that there had to be a change in societal views with other women who faced the same obstacles. Regardless of their backgrounds, the revolutionary groups exposed women to the lives of others who were a higher or lower class than themselves. They did not use the class differences as points for judgment, though, but utilized it to strengthen their voices against the autocratic government and the suffocating image that Russia had placed against women, that they were bound by the law and had to remain subservient with no desire to pursue a higher education.

Historiography

Scholars laid the groundwork for understanding women in education by highlighting the opportunities for education and social activism women seized. By examining existing scholarship on the progression of women's education, the political climate in Russia at the time, and how women were able to steadily make their way into the medical field, it is visible that many of these concepts are influenced by socialism as well as a new generation of inspired women. Christine Johanson's approach to women's education looks at Russia as a whole, incorporating numerous aspects that might have impacted the academic field at the time. For example, Johanson looks deeply into why the mid-nineteenth-century Crimean War was a catalyst that women needed to push for higher education from 1850 to 1920. She examines those who come from wealthier families, as they are the ones who aided in this progression, and how

[28] Hosking, *Russia: People and Empire, 1552-1917*, 345.

the political climate made it harder for them to further their education.[29] By analyzing official government documents relaying information regarding the ratio of male to female students, and study how these women impacted those around them, Johanson gives an all-encompassing view of how life was for women who pushed to expand their studies.[30] Those involved in revolutionary movements were impactful, but those women whose parents had the means to enroll them in the education system due to their family's wealth had the most influence.[31] The reasoning behind their efficiency is that the women who were already enrolled could make a more significant impact from the inside rather than fight from the outside. The political climate played a prominent role, as the ruler of Russia had the power to censor or control any information put out into the public, being a hinderance or a catalyst for the progress of some women. The autocratic government's influence on these noble and revolutionary women was a determining factor, along with why their male counterparts viewed them as being "lesser-than."

Phyllis Stock, similarly to Johanson, writes about the progression of women's education in Russia. In her research, she takes a comparative approach and looks at the education system in Russia and Germany around 1865 when Russia started to prevent women from enrolling in universities. In doing so, she points out that between the two, Russia was the first to grant women the right to attend secondary school while Germany was the first for allowing them to participate in primary school.[32] Stock also touches on how the Russian government perceived women in contrast to German women. Typically, under law, Russian women were considered equals to their male counterparts when it came to owning land or property inheritance, so women

[29] Christine Johanson, *Women's Struggle for Higher Education in Russia, 1855-1900* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987), 67.
[30] Johanson, *Women's Struggle for Higher Education in Russia, 1855-1900,* 31.
[31] Johanson, *Women's Struggle for Higher Education in Russia, 1855-1900,* 13.
[32] Phyllis Stock, "East of the Rhine: Germany and Russia," in *Better Than Rubies* (Toronto: Longman Canada Limited, 1978), 144.

did not feel the need to revolt for freedom.[33] Similarly, Stock and Johanson both discuss how the most progress for women's education was made under Alexander II and Catherine the Great. These authors support this claim by referencing the educational reforms that Alexander II enacted and Catherine's institute that was geared towards providing young women with a French education. Using statistical research and collecting first-hand accounts, Stock depicts this gradual change in the education system for the two countries and concludes that, eventually, women will find themselves to be equal to men.

Centralized in the examination of the education system, Ruth Dudgeon argues how women could slip through the cracks when the Russian government prevented them from attending public universities from 1872 to 1917. Instead, professors took pity on them and chose to give them private classes, which progressively developed into universities in the years that followed, closer to the end of the nineteenth century.[34] She concludes that the women and men were not as different as they believed themselves to be, especially when they came from a similar socioeconomic background and had identical interests. Johanson and Stock come to a similar conclusion through their own approaches with different types of research. Johanson and Dudgeon look at the system through first-hand accounts and numerical data, while Stock took a more empirical approach that primarily focused on both revolutionaries and lower-class women.

Dudgeon states that these women who were able to spearhead the way into higher education were the same ones who aided the revolutionary movements. Without them, there is no way of deciphering where women would be in education today. She claims, (to face the hostility of society, officialdom, and, frequently, one's own family, required a measure of independence

[33] Stock, *Better Than Rubies,* 152.
[34] Ruth A. Dudgeon, "The Forgotten Minority: Women Students in Imperial Russia, 1872-1917," *Russian History*, vol. 9, no. 1 (1982): 3.

and spiritual strength from women students not required from men).[35] Dudgeon looks at the political climate at the time and numerical statistics that indicate what years women attended certain institutions. In doing so, she can depict the steady increase of women in these institutions and male-dominated classes over time. Although much of her research focused on education during the Soviet era, Dudgeon's article showcased women's progress throughout history to acquire higher education.

Barbra Engel took an inclusive approach in her study of why women's radical movements evolved in Russia throughout the nineteenth century. Engel examines both their private experience and public activity, more deliberately at what being a female meant to Russian women rather than approaching the subject from a narrative perspective. In doing so, Engel claimed that this perspective made these radical Russian women more human and fallible.[36] She looked at political ideals surrounding women in the intelligentsia, with evidence consisting of accounts or statements given by politicians regarding these women joining progressive groups. Intelligentsia is defined as university-educated individuals and typically aligned themselves with liberal belief systems.[37] The author primarily provided summaries of the lives of various female figures during these movements and closely discusses issues of marriage or relationships with parents. Engel is most interested in understanding why these women wanted to enact the governmental changes they did, as certain positions for the revolution required women to leave their posts as mothers and wives. Still, this moral fervor made them achieve higher roles in the radical intelligentsia.[38] Overall, the author's work held a similar premise to

[35] Dudgeon, "The Forgotten Minority: Women Students in Imperial Russia, 1872-1917," 26.
[36] Barbra Engel, *Mothers and Daughters: Women of Intelligentsia in Nineteenth Century Russia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 109.
[37] Engel, *Mothers and Daughters: Women of Intelligentsia in Nineteenth Century Russia*, 21.
[38] Engel, *Mothers and Daughters: Women of Intelligentsia in Nineteenth Century Russia*, vii.

that of Johanson's and Stock's in that they all research revolutionary women more closely and their motives for wanting to join groups for change. Still, Engel's approach is new in the sense that not very many historians have tried to study radical female figures in-depth and can find out that many women were willing to support individualism fully.

Rosalind Marsh organizes Russian women through literature and societal perceptions. By combining female and male critiques on Russian women's writing during the nineteenth century, Marsh hones in on the fact that women have always had a heavy burden to carry within Russian society. These burdens consisted of men's expectations for desiring meek housewives and fiery revolutionists, which was difficult for women to uphold.[39] In Marsh's work, the term *zhenskii vopros* or "the woman question" is mentioned and seen in Engel's work.[40] This "woman question" was the study of women's roles in feminist movements after the eighteenth century, not only in Russia but also in other nations. This question, Marsh explains, arose in Russia due to the curiosity displayed by men upon seeing women step out of their traditional roles.[41] Marsh compiled various published works by women from different periods of Russian history and examined the perceptions of women throughout Russian history using curated essays by notable scholars and historians.[42] She utilized these works by looking through a lens that examines both the male and female perspectives. While these published books and recollections are all crucial to understanding what pushed women to investigate radicalism, not all of these works are within the time frame this thesis will cover. Still, it does give insight into how scholars interpret the material. Marsh concluded that these written works are beneficial in understanding the reasons why Russian women found socialism to be liberating because they look at the social

[39] Marsh, *Women and Russian Culture: Projections and Self-Perceptions*, 10-15.
[40] Barbra Engel, *Women in Russia, 1700-2000* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 67.
[41] Marsh, *Women and Russian Culture: Projections and Self-Perceptions*, 65-72.
[42] Marsh, *Women and Russian Culture: Projections and Self-Perceptions*, 45-89.

environment. Socialism granted them the suffrage that they desperately longed for and saw it as a vehicle for social liberation.[43]

Understanding the workforce and the types of jobs that women were allowed is critical to acknowledge the limitations women encountered. Typically, women who had received some forms of higher education were allowed to teach or go into minor health positions, such as a secretary or doctor's assistant. It was not until Alexander II's educational reforms coupled with the industrialization of Russia in the 1870s that women made their way into fields such as education and medicine.[44] Jane McDermid and Anna Hillyar studied this progression of change in the workforce and the factors that contributed to the shift. By choosing not to use official documents or statistics and instead aim towards a mix of primary and secondary sources, the authors look at the position women held concerning the economic and political developments. McDermid and Hillyar do this to ensure that they depict Russian women in different parts of society rather than focus on one sector, such as factory work or medicine. Their work is beneficial for other scholars because they aid in describing the diverse positions that elite women were in instead of their less fortunate counterparts. For example, McDermid wrote of the women who moved from the countryside to work in the factories and how they had to deal with sexual and physical abuse in the 1860s.[45] Understanding the work environments and how the job market perceived women pursuing work is essential in understanding why women chose the professions they did.

The medical field is an example of a job sector that women were barred from by accrediting boards and medical school administrators, but because of their perseverance, were

[43] Marsh, *Women and Russian Culture: Projections and Self-Perceptions*, 34.
[44] Jane McDermid and Anna Hillyar, *Women and Work in Russia, 1880-1930: A Study in Continuity through Change* (London; New York: Longman, 1998), 21.
[45] McDermid and Hillyar, *Women and Work in Russia, 1880-1930*, 29-31.

able to make their way into this male-dominated field. As previously mentioned, Russia was different from other European countries during the nineteenth century, explicitly when it came to women and their granted rights. In the 1800s, Russia fluctuated between restricting women from studying medicine entirely and allowing them to take special courses.[46] Thomas Neville Bonner discusses the obstacles women faced when trying to pursue a career in the medical field. While his writing is useful, he focuses on other countries more heavily than Russia, but the information he provides will give context to how Europe and America both dealt with women who faced similar issues of discrimination. Bonner uses numerical data from official documents that impart material regarding women's attendance, their success rates, and he also utilizes first-hand accounts from women who were sent to universities to study.[47] His predominant reasoning behind his research was to show a progression of change over time, similarly to McDermid and Hillyar, as well as Engel. His coverage of individual experiences from women who attended universities at the time is crucial because it adds a sense of realism to the history, giving names to the women who worked so hard. For instance, Vavara Kashevarova was the only woman in her class at the Medical-Surgical Academy and was the top of her class amidst the social discrimination she faced from male faculty and students.[48] Bonner, in providing this account amongst many others, solidifies his argument that the transition in allowing women the right to study medicine was not a smooth one, especially in Russia.

Major Educational Changes for Women Across Russia

Education feeds the mind, as well as the soul, this much is true for women in Russia. Secondary education was limited in its allowance for women within universities, women could

[46] Thomas Neville Bonner, *To the Ends of the Earth: Women's Search for Education in Medicine,* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992), 84.
[47] Bonner, *To the Ends of the Earth: Women's Search for Education in Medicine*, 93.
[48] Bonner, *To the Ends of the Earth: Women's Search for Education in Medicine*, 86.

only attend courses rather than fully enroll in universities. This was a barrier for women, namely those who came from middle to upper class families, but for lower class women and newly emancipated serfs, it was scarcely an opportunity. Following the emancipation of the serfs, Alexander II put more funding towards the reconstruction of schools and opened them up for women to audit courses. For the newly emancipated girls who lived in rural areas, attending a university was nearly impossible for them due a majority of the schools being in cities.[49] There was also the issue of the curriculum itself, as primary schools focused on cultivating young women rather than teaching them science and writing as in-depth as they did with male students. These mentioned issues manifested within these women, upper class and newly freed, and drove them to join revolutionary groups so that they could enact change themselves.

In comparison to other Russian emperors, both Alexander II and Catherine the Great were the most progressive when it came to advancing women's education. During the time of the Enlightenment, Catherine the Great's *Smol'nyi* institute was one of the first established institutes where women could pursue education beyond subservience and motherhood.[50] Young girls, aged from seven to fourteen, who attended the institute learned physics, reading, writing, fine arts, and foreign languages, all of which were influences from the French Revolution. While they studied a similar curriculum to their male counterparts, the curriculum also stressed how to be a proper wife and a loyal subject to the crown.[51] Still, there was a limitation put on these young women and it did not help that this institute focused on strictly educating the daughters of nobles, rather than all women. Typically, peasant women were unable to acquire proper schooling, but if they

[49] Serge A. Zenkovsky. "The Emancipation of the Serfs in Retrospect." *The Russian Review* 20, no. 4 (1961): 281-282.
[50] "Russian Female Conspirators," *The New York Times.* May 27, 1877.
[51] "The Poem of 'Russian Women,'" *The New York Times.* November 6, 1881.

did, that education pertained to household responsibilities.[52] There again was the divide between the elite and the impoverished, but the two groups nearly paralleled one another in their curriculum. Following Catherine's death, the institute became even more bureaucratic and selective in the students it accepted, which decreased the enrollment rate over the years until the Bolsheviks used the institution as their headquarters.[53] It was not until Alexander II that significant changes were made to all of Russia's education system.

Early into his ascendance to the throne as tsar, Alexander II concluded that the Russian government needed reform. Alexander emancipated the serfs, stating that liberating them from above was preferable to waiting for revolutions from below.[54] The serfs were individuals who faced abuse and worked countless of hours for their landowners regardless of the weather or any religious holidays, so it was expected that they would eventually revolt.[55] Serfs longed for freedom and the opportunities that were out of their reach, being able to obtain an education was one of them. Because of this opening for education brought on by the tsar, the education system shifted drastically from strictly being for noblewomen to peasant women having a greater chance than ever before. This chance was given to them by the increased funding that the state put towards primary schools, as well as the accessibility that was provided. Depending on where the newly freed serfs lived, education was a novelty, even more so than it was for other young girls.[56] As Russia started to industrialize and expand in the nineteenth century, thus there was no way to access the peasantry in the countryside so obtaining a higher level of education required

[52] Zenkovsky, "The Emancipation of Serfs in Retrospect," 283-284.
[53] Vernadsky, George, and S. G. Pushkarev. *A Source Book for Russian History from Early Times to 1917*. (New Haven Conn: Yale University Press, 1972), 582.
[54] Zenkovsky, "The Emancipation of Serfs in Retrospect," 290.
[55] Zenkovsky, "The Emancipation of Serfs in Retrospect," 285.
[56] Irina Kornolvia and Timur Magsumov, "Emancipation in Educational System: Formation of Women's Higher Education in Russia." *European Journal of Contemporary Education*, 6, no. 2 (2017): 358-359.

them to leave their towns.[57] This issue was seen similarly in the late nineteenth century when socialism was expanding rapidly but struggled to make its way into the impoverished villages and towns.[58] Those who were able to gain access to education outside of the cities and modernized areas received an education that was specifically designed for peasants and proletariats.[59] This meant that their curriculum was centered around homemaking duties and being sufficient wives. The construction of these new schools for both the nobility and lower classes helped spread socialist ideals while also teaching curricula pertaining to mathematics or language.

Socialism was prevalent in these schools through the influence of the outside world. For example, Vera Figner, a Russian revolutionary political activist, was first introduced to socialism at her primary school. Figner and other female students were frustrated with the roadmap that was constructed for their lives by society. They were expected to marry someone of equal social status, have children, and become a good housewife. Figner writes in her autobiography:

> But if little attention was paid to the physical development of the little girls in the Institute, what then shall I say of the moral education there, of the preparation for life? There was no such education. We never heard of any duties to ourselves, to our families, to society and our native land–no one ever spoke to us about them.[60]

Throughout her autobiography, Figner complains that these schools did very little to strengthen her educational capabilities and mainly focused on forming her into a proper Russian lady. She writes that after her school day ended, she would often read in private because reading was not

[57] Kaiser, Daniel H., and Gary Marker. *Reinterpreting Russian History: Readings, 860-1860's*, 384.
[58] Rachel Fuchs. *Gender and Poverty in Nineteenth-Century Europe.* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 13.
[59] Nakosteen, Mehdi, and Mehdi Khan Nakosteen. *The History and Philosophy of Education*. (New York: Ronald Press Co., 1965), 410-413.
[60] Figner, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 23.

encouraged at the Institute.[61] The girls were not allowed to take up any sort of book with the exception of a notebook.

Born in Kazan on June 24, 1852, Vera Figner came from a family of prosperous noblemen. Her mother was the daughter of a wealthy judge in the district, which granted her mother, Ekaterina Khristoforovna, the opportunity to receive an in-home education. Figner's father was educated in the Forestry Corps and became a justice of the peace following the emancipation of serfs. Vera was the eldest of six children and was a leader for her younger siblings, as all her younger sisters followed in her footsteps by giving their lives to revolutionary movements. Her sister Lydia was involved in a revolutionary organization that involved factory workers but was exiled to Eastern Siberia once the government found out.[62] Her other sister, Evgenia, was a defendant in the Kvyatkovsky Trial and was involved in the bombing of the Winter Palace in 1880. The youngest sister, Olga, was also involved in the revolutionary movement before following her husband into administrative exile in Siberia.[63] Figner and her sibling's background is another example of how women from all different social classes were able to involve themselves in revolutionary movements.

Elite Women & Lower-Class Women

The gap between the elite and the lower-classes widened in Russia from the late eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century. Girls born into nobility or elite families had governesses hired by their parents to teach them in their own homes.[64] Their teachings primarily consisted of French culture and art, as well as cultivating certain skills that would make them

[61] Figner, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 15-16.
[62] Figner, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 48.
[63] Figner, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 20.
[64] Vera N. Figner. *Svobodnaya Pesn': sbornik revolyutsionnykh pesen i stikhotvoreniy* (New York: Max N Maisel, 1911), 2.

desirable women in society. Those skills included playing an instrument, painting, or singing.[65] Those who were not as fortunate still received some form of education, but it was typically less formal. There were similarities between these women, though, a prominent one was that their teachings rarely exceeded obedience and motherhood.[66] The curriculum in Russia consisted of developing young women into traditional wives and mothers before there was any consideration of allowing them their own free thought.[67] In Russia, married women were expected to be devoted to their husbands and listen to them on a consistent basis.

For example, Vera Zasulich grew up in the Russian province of Smolensk, an impoverished area that seemed to be nearly abandoned. Her grandfather, Mikhail Alexandrov, was a wealthy nobleman who owned a prosperous estate of his own, thus Zasulich's mother did not grow up in poverty. Rather, she was educated in French fine arts, typical for children of the elite at the time, along with her sister.[68] It wasn't until the death of her grandfather that Zasulich's mother fell into poverty. Following his passing, his estate was divided amongst his sons and nothing but a small plot of land with serfs were given to his two daughters, which was not abnormal in Russian society. Suddenly, her mother plummeted to the bottom tier of the social ladder and forced into menial farm work until she met her husband, Vera's father, Ivan Zasulich.[69] He aided her mother in managing the land they owned, and they eventually had children of their own, three daughters and one son. Vera's father had been a kind man, but war had ruined his psyche; he became abusive towards his daughters, sought alcohol for relief, and caused the estate to lose countless amounts of money. Her father eventually died from a cold in

[65] McDermid and Hillyar, *Women and Work in Russia, 1880-1930*, 35-40.
[66] "Women Students in Russia." *The New York Times.* April 18, 1874.
[67] "Women Students in Russia," *The New York Times.* April 18, 1874.
[68] Siljak, *Angel of Vengeance*, 16-18.
[69] Siljak, *Angel of Vengeance*, 24-27.

1852 when Vera was just three years old. Zasulich is one example of what could happen to women either of class or of poverty.

Meanwhile, the male figures in the family were more free and, for example, could obtain a passport at age seventeen while the government and societal norms told women that they could not travel alone. This later became important when women wanted to leave Russia to obtain medical degrees. The oppression women faced from these laws translated into their schooling, and there was a notable difference between boy and girl boarding schools.[70] Girls who were able to go to school felt restrained and unable to grow academically, due to the male supremacy that shrouded the education system. Vera Figner was a young woman who was enrolled in the education system, primarily from 1860 to 1880, wrote about the unjust education that girls received.[71] It was not until she attended the Rodionovsky Institute of Kazan that her glamorous childish ideas faced reality. She was one of the only girls at her school, except for another young girl who left soon after joining, and was constantly picked on by her male classmates. Figner had this to say about the school:

> What did my time at the Institute give me? A cultivated manner and a sense and need of comradeship developed in me by living with many other who were in a position identical with my own— the ordinary life of a student, cloistered in a boarding school.[72]

During her time at the institution, Figner developed a desire for comradeship that carried on to her adulthood. Rather than being cultivated, girls such as Figner who attended these schools wrote in memoirs that reading was discouraged and many felt more cultivated rather than educated.[73]

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[70] Johanson, *Women's Struggle for Higher Education in Russia, 1855-1900,* 4.
[71] Vera N. Figner, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist,* trans. Camilla Chapin Daniels and R.G. Davidson, ed. Alexander Kaun (New York, 1968), 32.
[72] Figner, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 23.
[73] Figner, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 24.

Elementary schools were open to everyone and were always open in Russia. In Stock's analysis, she found that Germany was the first to open primary schools for girls, while Russia followed second.[74] Enrollment rates between both boys and girls was similar, but the coursework between the two genders differed. As previously mentioned, the girls did not spend their time learning good academics or math equations, but how to be a proper homemaker or a subservient wife.[75] In Figner's memoir, she wrote about what kind of education was given to young women in Russia. She stated that their classes remained surface level during their time in primary schools.[76] Meanwhile, the boys expanded their knowledge with in-depth math, literacy, and historical concepts.[77] Nicholas I was a ruler who believed in the furthering of boys' education before girls', seen in the upgrades he made to boys' schools such as enhancing the curriculum and rebuilding the schools.[78] Prioritization of boys' education hindered girls from growing into themselves or doing the things they wanted to do, as they were restricted to the home a majority of the time.[79] To consider the differences between these groups of women is essential because, despite their opposing economic status, many of them found socialism or radical revolutionary groups to be better than the society they were living in.

Returning to the example of Zasulich's education in both the higher class and in poverty, her mother could not afford to care for her children after the death of Zasulich's father. Zasulich and her siblings were sent to live with their estranged cousins miles away from home. Her family was of noble status, meaning that Vera had to conform to the expectations of being a young woman in a wealthy family. Those expectations meant that she had to learn proper manners,

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[74] Stock, *Better Than Rubies,* 167.
[75] Figner, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 37.
[76] Figner, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 56.
[77] Johanson, *Women's Struggle for Higher Education in Russia, 1855-1900,* 35-42.
[78] Daniel H. Kaiser and Gary Marker, *Reinterpreting Russian History: Readings, 860-1860's* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 379.
[79] Figner, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 23.

learn from a governess, and adopt ideologies that were foreign concepts to her.[80] Zasulich wrote a short story titled, "Masha," where she recalls what it felt like to be a charity for her family members.[81] The story was about an orphaned child living with a new wealthier family, which was a direct reflection of Zasulich's experiences growing up. Her appearance was always mangled or unsightly, she never truly grasped the concept of proper etiquette, and even encouraged her cousins to oppose the schooling their parents forced them into.[82] In the story, Masha prefers to subscribe to a library and read during the summers rather than join the other girls in their endeavors. The books she read were propaganda for positivism, nihilism, and socialism, all of which was similar to what Zasulich consumed. For young Russian girls during the early 1850s to 1860s, this was peculiar behavior, but Masha directly reflects Zasulich's character. Masha writes of the nihilists as if they were "in her eternal world" and that they were "her secret, which she revealed to no one."[83]

Living on the estate meant that Vera had also come into close contact with the serfs that worked there, learning of the oppression they faced and how they yearned for freedom. Around the time Vera was in her late teens to early twenties, word spread of the revolts enacted by serfs who were abused by their landowners. Growing up around this immense amount of poverty and seeing the people of Russia struggle under the autocracy was enough fuel for her to move towards an action that shifted the perception of women in Russia for years to come. Zasulich's aunt sent her and her sisters, Alexandra and Ekaterina, to a pension in Moscow to polish themselves before taking a state exam that was required of girls who wanted to become

[80] Vera Zasulich, *Otkrytoe pis'mo,* trans. Deich, Kravchinskii, and Stefanovich (Obschina: 1878), 75.
[81] Vera Zasulich. "*Masha. S pometami Plekhanovoi P. M. i L. G. Deichs*." Rossiiskaia natsionalnaia biblioteka, Otdel ruskopisei. January 11, 1895.
[82] Siljak, *Angel of Vengeance*, 30.
[83] Zasulich, *Masha,* 25.

governesses.[84] She describes her experience there as being narrow, but this ultimately opened an avenue for her to explore more about intelligentsia and socialism. Through this exposure and her lack of enthusiasm for becoming a governess, Zasulich realized that she wanted to take her life into her own hands. She writes to her sister, "That year, the seventeenth of my life, was filled with the most feverish internal activity; I finally took my fate into my own hands."[85] Her sister, Ekaterina, was already a member of a group of students that radicalized by the reforms of Alexander II. Thus, Vera and her sister Alexandra decided to join their efforts in enacting a change in society.

Socialism: Catalyst or Hinderance?

With Tsar Alexander II's reign, many Russian citizens considered the thirty years as being a "new age," especially for underprivileged groups such as women and serfs.[86] With the emancipation of the serfs and new educational reforms set in place for women, the younger generation felt optimistic. Ivan Turgenev created the term nihilistic when describing upcoming groups of revolutionaries.[87] Turgenev depicted these teens and young adults as being rebellious without cause and that they just wanted to get a reaction from the older generations.[88] This new term was meant to insult them, but they chose to embrace it instead, stating that there was nothing to salvage from the Russian government so it must undergo major changes.[89]

The value system of the nihilists focused on the betterment of Russian society. Improving the education for women and serfs, advancing medicine, as well as overall changing the way

[84] Vera Zasulich and Alexandra Upenskii, *Vospominaniia*, xiv A. N. Shabanova. *Ocherk zhenskogo dvizheniia v Rossii.* (St. Petersburg, 1912), 7.
[85] Zasulich and Upenskii, *Vospominaiia*
[86] Fuchs. *Gender and Poverty in Nineteenth-Century Europe,* 100.
[87] Ann Hibner Koblitz, "Science, Women, and the Russian Intelligentsia: The Generation of the 1860s," The University of Chicago Press, no. 2, (June 1988), 209.
[88] Turgenev, *Fathers and Children,* 47-59.
[89] Ann Hibner Koblitz, "Science, Women, and the Russian Intelligentsia: The Generation of the 1860s," 212-214.

tsarist Russia perceived science. Because of this, women such as Nadezhda Suslova were able to help Russia, even though Russia did not help them. Even before acquiring her degree in medicine, she felt inspired by the nihilist movement and the revolutionaries that participated, so she approached it her own way. After her schooling, Suslova went back to Russia to take the entry exam to become a practicing obstetrician and pediatrician, then opened medical facilities in remote villages for those who could not seek proper remedial help. Not only was this nihilist movement targeting science, but the expansion of the education system as well. In universities, women were inspired by Suslova and pushed for their right to schooling as well.[90] Women, at the time, were supported by liberal faculty members and other revolutionary groups such as the Land and Freedom organization, also known as *Zemlya i Volya*. From this revolutionary group came new ways of thinking from this young generation, as well as other new revolutionary groups. *Narodnaya Volya*, also known as the "People's Will" or "People's Freedom" was a group that organized terrorist activities to enforce political reformations and push for the disestablishment of the tsarist autocracy. Vera Zasulich, often called an "angel of vengeance," assassinated a Russian government official in the name of change.[91]

The Land and Freedom party sought to spread radical political propaganda to inspire the younger generation. Suslova was a member of this group, living under police surveillance for most of her life due to her close contact with socialist ideas.[92] This was a fate dealt to other women who involved themselves with the radical groups. In succession of this populist party, *Narodnaya Volya* was considerably more violent in its approach, as many of the women

[90] Ann Hibner Koblitz, "Science, Women, and the Russian Intelligentsia: The Generation of the 1860s," 214.
[91] Ana, Siljak. "Angel of Vengeance: The Girl Who Shot the Governor of St. Petersburg and Sparked the Age of Assassination." (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2009,) 45.
[92] Whittaker, Cynthia H, "The Women's Movement during the Reign of Alexander II: A Case Study in Russian Liberalism," *The Journal of Modern History* 48, no. 2 (1976): 35–69.

involved planned assassinations and murders of government officials. Before these movements and new ideals, schools focused on the education of boys over girls, choosing to prioritize them constantly. This prioritization was occurring for centuries before Alexander II decided to shift the balance.[93] Russia was an agitated government and remained as such for many years following the death of Tsar Alexander II. With the prevalence of groups such as the *Narodnaya Volya* in the 1870s and spearheads like Suslova, other female anarchists made their presences known to the public. Prominent female anarchists include Vera Zasulich, Praskovya Ivanovskaya, Olga Liubatovich, Vera Figner, and Elizaveta Kovalskaia. Some, if not all, of these women took part in some form of revolutionary action. Ultimately, favoritism for boys hindered girls from growing into themselves or doing the things they wanted to do, such as write and study subjects more in-depth than what they were allowed, as they were restricted to the home much of the time. Understanding the differences between these groups of radical women and men is essential because, despite the opposing economic status between these women, each one found socialism or radical revolutionary groups to be better than the society they were living in.[94]

There was also the issue of the newly emancipated serfs, which caused an uproar in the restrictive government. Many rich male students went on to protest that there should be major changes in collegiate staffing as well as questions of who should really be admitted into universities.[95] Since protestors were predominantly male, it gave women even more of a disadvantage when it came to their schooling and hindered them from speaking out for their own rights to attending universities. Despite the large number of women who remained silent, those

[93] Daniel H. Kaiser and Gary Marker, *Reinterpreting Russian History: Readings, 860-1860's* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 379.
[94] Kaiser, Daniel H., and Gary Marker. *Reinterpreting Russian History: Readings, 860-1860's*, 384.
[95] Anne E. Gorsuch. *Youth in Revolutionary Russia: Enthusiasts, Bohemians, Delinquents* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 117.

who did speak out were punished accordingly in the eyes of the tsarist government, which meant sending them to Siberia for joining anarchist groups or joining protests.[96] While some of these women were able to escape the labor camps in the desolate arctic, others were stuck there for up to fifteen years, as in the case of Sophia Perovskaya. Perovskaya helped orchestrate the assassination of Alexander II, which led to her exile.[97] At that point, universities or higher-education institutions were barred from accepting women, even for lectures, and most of them closed enrollment for both men and women. This closure was one of the main reasons why Russian women had to study abroad, but the move still proved to be beneficial as they were able to continue their studies.[98] At home, Russian women, including Vera Figner and Vera Zasulich, stayed and protested in their own ways; they began dressing androgynously, smoking cigarettes publicly, cut their hair shorter, and altered their appearances and actions to oppose the stereotypes that were perpetuated on them by society. This infuriated their male counterparts, who continued to speak out against this movement that these women enacted, but there was little that the fearful government could do.[99]

Vera Zasulich, or "angel of vengeance," shot governor Trepov during a petitioner gathering. During this, people formally petitioned to have documents signed or passports stamped by the governor, which Zasulich regarded as being "medieval."[100] At the time, Zasulich was part of a group of six individuals who subscribed to Mikhail Bakunin's anarchist beliefs before joining the *Narodnaya I Volya* group. The anarchist group targeted Trepov because he was infamous for his repression of Polish rebellions and had a prisoner flogged for not taking his

[96] Vernadsky, George, and S. G. Pushkarev. *A Source Book for Russian History from Early Times to 1917*. (New Haven Conn: Yale University Press, 1972), 583.
[97] Whittaker, "The Women's Movement during the Reign of Alexander II," 45.
[98] Ann Hibner Koblitz, "Science, Women, and the Russian Intelligentsia: The Generation of the 1860s," 217-218.
[99] Zenkovsky, "The Emancipation of Serfs in Retrospect," 280.
[100] Jay Bergman, *Vera Zasulich: a Biography* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1983), 35

hat off when meeting the governor.[101] This sparked the group into action and Zasullich wanted to be the one to do the damage. She approached the governor at the petition, lied about wanting a certificate of conduct, and when his back was turned to her, she shot him twice.[102] Zasulich was interrogated and put in prison before being sent to exilement in Siberia where her revolutionary fervor only grew more. In a letter addressed to her sister Zasulich wrote:

> I could not understand this feeling then, but I have understood it since. Had I been convicted, I should have been prevented by main force from doing anything, and I should have been tranquil, and the thought of having done all I was able for the cause would have been a consolation to me.[103]

In her letters, Zasulich's pull to nihilism and anarchist ideals never waver regardless of what punishment was given to her by the government. Her radicalized decisions made her a martyr in the eyes of the Russian people, as university students began revolting and peasants started their own revolutions.

Socialism was a catalyst for women in Russia during this thirty-year period, from 1850 to 1900, because it granted them an outlet for which they could voice their opinions through. In addition, it also connected women with other likeminded individuals who felt that their society needed to undergo major changes. It was not just women alone in these revolutionary socialist groups, but men too. Groups such as *Narodnaya Volya* and *Zemlya i Volya* contained both women and men that chose to go into action to push the government into action.[104] Although these were predominantly violent acts of terrorism, these people were able to gain the government's attention towards the internal struggles of the nation.[105] Socialism was, essentially, the catalyst that propelled women's educational rights.

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[101] Bergman, *Vera Zasulich: A Biography*, 56-60.
[102] Zasulich and Upenskii, *Vospominaiia,* 2.
[103] Zasulich and Upenskii, *Vospominaiia,* 1-2.
[104] Whittaker, "The Women's Movement during the Reign of Alexander II," 57-60.
[105] Pratt. *Russia, from Tsarist Empire to Socialism*, 45.

Women in Medicine and Other Male-Dominated Sectors

With the knowledge that women progressively made their way into universities that were strictly full of men, it is easier to understand why fields such as medicine and pedagogy might have been appealing to them. Women were allowed to take specialized medical courses prior to this shows that the system did not completely fail them, but enrollment was highly selective and geared towards primarily accepting men. Before medical schools fully opened their doors for women in Russia, there was an influx of Russian women moving out of the country in search of schools that would accept them.[106] European countries, such as France, Germany, and Austria, were the main places women who sought a higher education went to. Soon enough, Russian women outnumbered the German, Austrian, and French women in their own universities until the first Women's Medical Institute opened in St. Petersburg in 1897.[107]

When women were restricted from attending a university or course, there was almost always faculty that supported them. In the instances that there was an exodus of women joining philosophical discussions in universities, numerous male students petitioned to have them removed because they didn't feel comfortable studying alongside women.[108] Men were raised to believe that women were limited in the fields that they could pursue and how high of an education that they could receive. The male discourse was predominantly a product of their upbringing and the constraints society placed on women. This general disdain for women attending classes led to universities faculty and professors teaching these female students outside of the university, resulting in the development of new institutes and radical groups.[109] This same support from faculty translated into the medical schools, especially following the opening of the

[106] Bonner, *To the Ends of the Earth: Women's Search for Education in Medicine*, 99.
[107] Bonner, *To the Ends of the Earth: Women's Search for Education in Medicine*, 90.
[108] Nakosteen and Khan Nakosteen. *The History and Philosophy of Education*, 400.
[109] Nakosteen and Khan Nakosteen. *The History and Philosophy of Education*, 416.

school located in St. Petersburg, St. Petersburg Medico-Surgical Academy. Teachers, physicians, and instructors campaigned to keep women's courses open, petitioned with the universities themselves that they should accept women's admissions, and helped them get jobs afterward.[110] The help that women received from inside of the university greatly benefitted them in the long term.

The University of Zurich, located in Switzerland, was one that accepted women from foreign countries, ones that barred them from pursuing an education in medicine. The university was open to women from varying countries for continuing their education in various subjects, but the school predominantly focused on healthcare and medicine. Nihilistic doctrines were prevalent throughout the population of Russian women who were forced out of their own schools, considering some even influenced Swiss natives to go to their homeland to provide aid. These doctrines include the desire to help the underprivileged, move society away from being centralized in the church, and shed light on scientific advancements. There were many memorable women who encouraged younger generations to follow in their footsteps, with some, if not all, pursuing degrees in medicine or being active participants in revolutionary groups. Vera Figner is an example of a woman who had to make this decision. Following her enrollment at the university, Figner realized that she was surrounded by Russian women who formed their own groups rooted in ideas of revolution.[111] When Figner was faced with the choice, continue her education or join them in their efforts, she decided to go back to Russia and educate the peasants and serfs on the oppressive government. In her autobiography, she writes that her intent was to

[110] Bonner, *To the Ends of the Earth: Women's Search for Education in Medicine*, 83.
[111] Figner, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 167-170.

make them see that the government and society needed to change.[112] This decision changed her path in life and make her into the revolutionary woman that history regards her as today.

Nadezhda Suslova has often been referred to as the pioneering woman as both a revolutionary and as Russia's first female doctor. Suslova was the daughter of a serf, born in Nizhny Novgorod in 1843. Her father, although a serf, was a wealthy man who was a steward at an estate and then was later freed and became the owner of a textile factory.[113] Her father helped her attend a private school in Moscow, several hours away from her hometown, and moved on to St. Petersburg Medico-Surgical Academy, an advancement that occurred due to her father's wealth. In 1862, Suslova published her first scientific paper through the university before the government restricted women's ability to fully attend medical schools in 1864.[114] Because of this barring, Suslova left Russia in pursuit of continuing her education at the University of Zurich.

While living in Russia, Suslova also participated in the emancipation of women's movement in 1860, another reason why she was forced to continue her studies outside of Russia at the University of Zurich.[115] Suslova was admitted to Zurich in 1865, with no faculty vocally opposing her admission because she was a timid woman in nature who believed in bringing her knowledge in medicine back to Russia. Nihilistic doctrines were prevalent throughout the population of Russian women who were forced out of their own schools, some even influenced Swiss natives to go to their homeland to provide aid.[116] The women who utilized nihilism were able to pursue their educations and vocalize the discretions that they had with the Russian government. Suslova finished out her studies, defending her thesis on the physiology of the

[112] Figner, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 134.
[113] Olga Valkova, "The Conquest of Science: Women and Science in Russia, 1860-1940," *Osiris* (2008): 136-140.
[114] Valkova, "The Conquest of Science," 148.
[115] Bonner, *To the Ends of the Earth: Women's Search for Education in Medicine*, 83.
[116] Ann Hibner Koblitz, "Science, Women, and the Russian Intelligentsia: The Generation of the 1860s," 211-212.

lymphatic system knowing little about the German language, and went on to open her own medical practice where she helped those in need in her hometown of Nizhny Novgorod.[117]

From leadership seen in Suslova, many of the younger girls began enrolling in lectures and this influx of women in education made the tsarist government of Russia reconsider the limitations that they had placed on women specifically. Unfortunately, the government did not take their ailments into consideration and continued to restrict women from being considered equal to men when it came to obtaining an education.[118] In 1874, the Russian government called women back from the University of Zurich in 1874 or else they risk penalties.[119] The reason for this was that the Russian government believed that women were falling prey to treacherous ideas and wanted to study medicine to perform acts like abortions when they were in sexual relationships with men who weren't their husbands.[120] Many of these women chose to stay in the countries they were currently residing in while others, out of fear, moved back to Russia and joined underground revolutionary groups such as the *Narodnaya Volya* group.

Suslova was Russia's first female doctor and was a revolutionary that held political motives throughout her time obtaining her medical license. She had close relations with other revolutionaries and intellectuals at the time, such as author Fyodor Dostoyevsky, physiologist Ivan Sechnov, and literary critic Nikolay Chernyshevsky, all of which were role models for her.[121] The influence from these voices as well as her desire to promote equal rights for women and provide healthcare for the poor, showcase the strong impact that nihilism had on Suslova. In doing so, she was able to become a model for other young Russian women at the time. Outside

[117] Bonner, *To the Ends of the Earth: Women's Search for Education in Medicine*, 54.
[118] Valkova, "The Conquest of Science," 155-158.
[119] Figner, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 120-125.
[120] Ann Hibner Koblitz, "Science, Women, and the Russian Intelligentsia: The Generation of the 1860s," 211-212.
[121] Valkova, "The Conquest of Science," 165.

of medicine there were many women of different professions and class statuses that influenced younger generations of women to pursue the education and the rights they desired.

Conclusion

Nihilism was a vehicle for women to voice their opinions and meet likeminded individuals that had the same goal: to improve women's scholarship and oppose the autocratic government. The revolutionary movements that arose due to the death of Tsar Alexander II and the rise of socialism had a large impact on the future of women's education. Because of these radical ideas, women were able to go out of the country to pursue their educations and saw one another as equal, regardless of their economic status. The public believed that universities were breeding grounds for revolutionaries, but without them, there was no saying where higher education would lie for women in Russia.

Revolutionary groups that grew from the introduction of socialist ideals were also beneficial in bringing groups of people together, both male and female, through the dissipation of societal roles. Individuals from varying backgrounds came together to fight for a similar cause; for the reconstruction of their government and its policies surrounding education to cater to everyone. Although some of their efforts were unsuccessful, a handful of women were able to become role models for future generations and inspire women to use any means necessary to make themselves heard. Nadezhda Suslova was an important figure because she was the first woman to obtain a medical degree and utilize in Russia, showcasing how beneficial nihilism was for Russia and its women. Vera Zasulich was a leading voice in the revolution as well as an inspiration through her bold act of assassination, she was a woman that the government feared and that was a rare occurrence in Russian history. Lastly, Vera Figner was vital to the peasant

uprisings and the assassination of the Tsar. As Suslova herself said, “I am first but not the last. After me will come thousands.”[122]

[122] V.A. Bazanov, “Nadezhda Suslova—pervaii russakii zhenschina-vrach,” *Fel’dsher i askusherka* (Moscow, 1963), 53.

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