

TERENCE EMMONS

## Additional Notes on the Beseda Circle, 1899–1905

A previously untapped source of evidence about the Beseda circle, a seminal institution in the development of the Russian opposition movement on the eve of the 1905 Revolution, has come to the author's attention since the appearance of his article on Beseda in the *Slavic Review* ("The Beseda Circle, 1899–1905," September 1973, pp. 461–90). This is the unpublished personal notes of Prince D. I. Shakhovskoy, a member of the circle throughout its existence.<sup>1</sup> Although Shakhovskoy's transcriptions of the circle's discussions are much less systematic and detailed than those preserved in the circle's papers in the Maklakov archive which served as the basis for the *Slavic Review* article, his notes are of considerable value because they are devoted precisely to those early years of the circle's existence (1899–1903) which are poorly represented in the Maklakov papers. (The transcripts of only two meetings prior to 1904 are preserved there.)

In general, Shakhovskoy's notes re-enforce the conclusions drawn in the article concerning the circle's character and development. They provide additional documentation on the growing desperation of the zemstvo leadership over the behavior of the government bureaucracy and the parallel growth of constitutionalist convictions among them. At the same time, they give clear testimony to the circle's persistent formal adherence to a nonpartisan stance in the interest of serving as a forum of discussion with the anticonstitutionalist "Slavophile" wing of the zemstvo movement—although the proposition that it be transformed into the central organ of a "constitutionalist party" was raised on several occasions, beginning as early as January 1902 (Petrovo-Solovovo in the meeting of January 8, 1902, p. 50 of the Shakhovskoy notes)—with the result that the circle became somewhat peripheral to the constitutionalist movement by early 1904 with the creation of the Union of Liberation and the Union of Zemstvo Constitutionalists. One can quote in this regard the comment of N. N. Lvov (one of the founders of the Union of Liberation) at the meeting of August 25, 1903, as recorded by Shakhovskoy: "Life itself is drawing

1. Institut russkoi literatury (Pushkinskii Dom), Otdel rukopisei, f. 334 (D. I. Shakhovskoy), no. 651. Zapisnaia tetrad' "Khronologiia poslednego desiatiletiia," 1901–34, pp. 33, 44–61. There apparently were a few additional meetings of the group in St. Petersburg, but they are not included in Shakhovskoy's numbered listing.

[us] toward an organization of the kind V. M. Solovovo has in mind [a political party]. An organization with a *clear* political aim, one capable of realizing the demands arising from it, is necessary at all costs. We cannot do without such an organization, and the question of its formation truly bears no postponement. But doubts arise about the suitability of our Beseda as such an organization, and does not a more diffuse [organization] have the right to exist alongside those united by a definite program? Lvov thinks Beseda should remain as it has been up to now" (p. 55).

In particular, the Shakhovskoy notes provide evidence on several important questions about the circle's activities for which the Maklakov papers failed to provide definitive answers. These include: (1) *The question of the date of the first Beseda meeting*. Shakhovskoy kept a list, with dates, of all meetings of the circle up to and including the meeting of February 15, 1904 (p. 33).<sup>2</sup> According to that list and the notes, the first meeting was held on November 17, 1899. (2) *The question of the identity of the circle's founders and their initial aims*. The notes provide no complete answer to this question, but they do show that the opening statement at the first meeting was made by Pavel Dolgorukov, who is identified as "the [or "an"] initiator."<sup>3</sup> In that opening statement Dolgorukov described the purpose of the circle as "stimulation of public activity and public opinion, so weak and artificially repressed in Russia, so that it should become more authoritative for Petersburg" (p. 48).<sup>4</sup> (3) *The question whether Beseda was responsible for organizing the May 1902 zemstvo congress* (an event of great significance in the development and differentiation

2. Shakhovskoy's numbered list is as follows: (1) Nov. 17, 1899, (2) Jan. 4, 1900, (3) Apr. 16, 1900, (4) Nov. 17, 1900, (5) Feb. 7-8, 1901, (6) Sept. 1-2, 1901, (7) Jan. 8, 1902, (8) Mar. —, 1902, (9) May 27, 1902, (10) Aug. 22, 1902, (11) Jan. 6-8, 1903, (12) Feb. 6, 1903, (13) May 26, 1903, (14) Aug. 24-25, 1903, (15) Nov. 10, 1903, (16) Jan. 11-12, 1904, (17) Feb. 15, 1904.

It is clear that 1902 and 1903 were the years of greatest activity for the circle, with four and five meetings respectively. Altogether the circle had twenty-two meetings over the nearly six years of its existence.

3. According to Shakhovskoy's attendance list (complete for all meetings to the beginning of 1904), there were six participants at the first meeting on November 17, 1899: V. M. Petrovo-Solovovo, Iu. A. Novosiltsev, D. A. Olsufiev, P. S. Sheremetev, and the Dolgorukov brothers Pavel and Peter. It may be noted that identification of Pavel Dolgorukov as the circle's founder in newspaper stories about his election to the Second Duma was objected to by two former members of Beseda in letters to the editor of *Novoe vremia*: by Count Pavel Sheremetev, who merely denied that Dolgorukov was the circle's founder (February 28, 1907); and by Count Vladimir Bobrinsky, who claimed that in fact the founder was Sheremetev (March 1, 1907). (The author is indebted to Michael Brainerd for the references to the letters.)

4. These aims were spelled out in detail in a long letter from Pavel Dolgorukov to Prince P. N. Trubetskoy (January 25, 1903) written in response to Trubetskoy's report to him that Pleve knew of the circle and apparently attributed "some kind of agitational and conspiratorial character" to it (pp. 44-46: a copy of the letter in Shakhovskoy's hand).

of the nonrevolutionary opposition). The notes for 1902 give no indication that the May congress was planned in Beseda. They do prove beyond any reasonable doubt that the April 1902 discussions described by Shipov as preliminary to the congress (see p. 471, n. 35, of the *Slavic Review* article) were not meetings of Beseda. The available evidence suggests that the May congress was not planned in Beseda.