Preface

In February 1895 in Moscow, friends and admirers of Paul Miliukov gathered for a farewell banquet in his honor. The thirty-six-year-old historian, author of two acclaimed monographs and one of the most popular instructors at Moscow University, had just been barred from teaching and ordered into administrative exile in consequence of his “harmful” political views. Viktor Gol’tsev, editor of the journal Russkaia myśl (Russian thought), proposed a toast to his young colleague expressing the hope that Miliukov would one day become the historian of the fall of the Russian monarchy.¹

Twenty-three years later, in February 1918, Miliukov was in a way realizing this wish as he commenced writing his three-volume history of the Russian revolution. The nature of that work and the circumstances of its composition, however, were not such as anyone could have predicted in 1895. The historian’s own actions—including his desperate effort to save the monarchy in 1917—necessarily figured prominently in the narrative. The head of Russia’s liberal Constitutional Democratic Party, a two-term deputy to the Duma and organizer of its wartime Progressive bloc, Miliukov was a seasoned politician and leader when revolution catapulted him to political center stage. And though he managed to establish a government of progressive public figures, his chronicle of the collapse of tsarism would not be written in the celebratory spirit Gol’tsev’s toast assumed. Miliukov was ousted from office two months after becoming minister of foreign affairs; the remnant of the government he organized was forcibly overthrown in October; his party had been outlawed by the end of the year. His history of
the Russian revolution, begun in hiding in Bolshevik-held Rostov and completed in 1920 in emigration, was an account not of liberal triumph but of national tragedy.\textsuperscript{2}

History and politics—the individual effort to write the history of one's country and also to shape its future—were joined in the person of Paul Miliukov to a remarkable degree. Even had he been a pedestrian historian, or one specialized in a topic far removed from the concerns of his day, scholars who have become political leaders in this century are sufficiently rare to make his career of interest. But Miliukov was a historian of uncommon power and breadth, innovative in his methodology and bold in conception, "the best of the gifted new generation of historians," as one critical reviewer felt compelled to observe.\textsuperscript{3}

His first, pioneering works probed the financial and institutional history of the seventeenth century and the Petrine period. He turned next to the history of ideas and then, as his interests broadened and confidence grew, undertook a three-volume interpretative history of Russian culture from its beginnings to his own day. By the time Miliukov finally chose political activity over a scholarly career, at the age of forty-six, he had written six books and numerous articles and reviews in which he developed views on the historical process and the nature of Russia itself that informed his political thought.

Steeped as he was in Russian history, Miliukov studied that history within a larger context. Encyclopedic in his interests and enjoying a gift for languages, he read widely in foreign belles lettres, philosophy, and scholarly literature, traveled extensively in Europe and to America, and kept up correspondence with friends made in the course of his travels. His knowledge of things Western was thus based on personal observation as well as study, and in his case—as compared with the experience of many Russian radicals who traveled abroad—familiarity did not breed contempt. He admired Western culture and democratic institutions deeply, though not uncritically, and believed it both desirable and possible to establish parliamentary government in a Russia that had outgrown autocracy.

But the who, what, and how of Russia's political transformation were questions to which he only gradually worked out answers: Russia's most famous liberal was not a liberal always. Like many of his fellow citizens, Miliukov became politicized in the early 1890s. He found much that was attractive in Marxism and populism without being won over to either; liberalism, rather inchoate and quiescent at that time, interested him not at all. Returning to Russia in 1899 after two years' exile spent in the Balkans, he frequented socialist circles and became active in the burgeoning opposition movement, for which he won two stays in prison. Liberals of a militant stripe were by then beginning to organize; this activity, and what he saw of
radical liberalism in Bulgaria, suggested to him that liberalism was more
dynamic than he had assumed. Studying liberal theory from a sociological
perspective, and plunging into the history of Russian political thought, Mi-
luiukov worked out his views on a new sort of liberalism. This work, with that
by Petr Struve, provided a theoretical basis for the effort to make liberalism a
mass movement in Russia.

Miliukov respected classical liberalism’s espousal of individual rights and
political liberty, but found these liberal touchstones insufficient to the needs
of twentieth-century society. The modern, interventionist, democratic state
had necessary social and economic tasks to perform that laissez-faire doc-
trines and natural law theory could ill accommodate. Liberalism needed to
recognize that individual rights are not absolute but generated by society,
and that a balance must be struck between those rights and the needs of the
community. At the same time, liberalism had to retain its distinctive respect
for the individual and commitment to rule by law, so that the democratic
state did not become a new sort of despotism. Miliukov believed that Rus-
sians were exceptionally well suited to effect this reorientation in liberal per-
spectives, since Russian liberalism was more “humanitarian” in its ethos and
less “bourgeois” in composition than was the case in Europe.

The liberals’ task, as Miliukov and others saw it, was to unite the entire
opposition in order to defeat autocracy. Once political rights were won,
social reform could be accomplished. With his strong ties among both so-
cialists and liberals, Miliukov was uniquely placed to help effect this unifica-
tion, quickly emerging as one of the most prominent leaders of the libera-
tion movement in 1905. In October of that year he helped found the
Constitutional Democratic (Kadet) Party, just as autocracy was forced to
issue the October Manifesto promising civil liberties and creation of an elec-
ted legislative body. By spring 1906 the Kadets had become Russia’s largest
political party and won a stunning victory in elections to the First Duma.

Hopes of implementing the liberal program soon plummeted. The Octo-
ber Manifesto did not put an end to widespread violence, the first two
Dumas survived only months and accomplished nothing, and by summer
1907 the government had reasserted its authority. The Kadet party was per-
secuted and harassed in the provinces, while a restriction of the franchise
reduced it to a small minority in subsequent Dumas. In these conditions,
many drifted out of the liberal party and politics altogether. Among the
remaining, a tension existed between those who thought the best course
was to make common cause with the left and those who favored a move to
the right. Miliukov devoted considerable energies in these years to mediating
differences and moderating expectations, in the hopes of retaining some
liberal influence in the Duma and the country and averting a formal split in
the party.
The Kadets experienced far more defeats than successes in the decade following the 1905 revolution, but this period was also one of continued intellectual development for Miliukov. The excesses and failures of the revolution taught him both to fear mass upheaval and to distrust the revolutionary socialists he had previously regarded as allies, lessons that would profoundly influence his behavior in 1917. On a more creative level, the social and ethnic tensions revealed by the revolution caused him to think in new ways about the lack of social cohesion in Russia. Most of all, he was challenged by the appearance of a phenomenon often difficult to reconcile with liberal values, an aroused and assertive nationalism. In the Third and Fourth Dumas, concern for the integrity of the empire and its international prestige expressed itself in discrimination against the empire’s non-Russian nationalities and advocacy of an aggressive foreign policy in the Balkans. Miliukov opposed both these orientations, not only as a liberal, but also because of the danger to the state inherent in the excesses of each.

His views on the nationality question were informed by his historical research into the Russian “national idea,” but also by his observations in the Balkans. From his first travels in the region in 1897, Miliukov had been intrigued by the various and competing Slav national movements and the ways religion, language, history, and myth contributed to articulation of national identity. Drawing on these observations, he argued for the socially constructed and variable nature of national identity, but also for the durability of national consciousness once it penetrated to the mass of the population. In fighting Great Russian chauvinism he therefore propounded an approach to the nationality question predicated not on rejection of nationalism, or on assimilationist hopes, but on accommodation of and respect for the national consciousness of all the peoples of the Russian empire.

In these same years Miliukov developed his strong interest in foreign policy. His belief that Russia’s foreign policy should be worthy of a great power was one of the few orientations he shared with the conservative Duma majority, even as his more cautious views on that policy divided him from it. Although he agreed that German and Austrian encroachment on Russia’s interests in the Balkans should be countered, he did not consider Russia strong enough to fight for them. His knowledge of the Balkans made it impossible for him to subscribe to popular neo-Slav assumptions about the common interests uniting Russia and her brother Slavs, nor could he share the general Russian partiality for the Serbs. The Balkan wars of 1912, whose causes and conduct Miliukov investigated as a member of an international commission of inquiry, confirmed his mistrust of Serbian aggrandizement, while the terrible evidence of atrocities committed by all the belligerents intensified his revulsion of war. From 1912, no politician outside the social-
ist camp so passionately opposed Russia’s entering any armed conflict, a position that provoked the most scathing attacks upon his patriotism.

Through all the tumult and tedium of these years, and despite their sobering lessons, Miliukov retained his zest for politics and his faith that they must eventually produce a free and equitable order in Russia. Countering those who maintained that Russians were too backward, ignorant, and unused to freedom to be able to govern themselves, he insisted that experience of genuine parliamentary democracy would itself furnish the necessary political education. Miliukov supplemented his thoroughly liberal confidence in the beneficent influence of liberty and good institutions with a one-man campaign of mass political education. He wrote hundreds of editorials and articles, went on lecture tours, delivered speeches in the Duma to promulgate his vision of what a democratic Russia should be and do.

As the leader of a party, Miliukov was concerned not just with larger questions of theory and program but also with tactics. Fortunately, the extensive records of the Kadet party help us weigh the often contradictory memoir accounts of his strengths and weaknesses as a leader. Outsiders imagined Miliukov to hold nearly dictatorial sway among the Kadets; some of his colleagues later made the same charge, while others contended he was not forceful enough. Over time Miliukov did become more dominant, even domineering, but this was not the case at the start. If he usually carried his way, it was primarily owing to the practicality of his tactical proposals and his efforts to identify a middle position. On those occasions when he did not manage to persuade his colleagues, he fell in with the decision of the majority. But as charting a tenable course became more difficult and rifts in the party widened, from 1912, criticism of his tactical fine-tunings mounted. Miliukov, in turn, became more stubborn and irritable, took defeat less gracefully, and increasingly resorted to ultimatums when he had not managed to persuade.

A complex personality, Miliukov united features that could be both assets and drawbacks in a leader. His native optimism, enormous self-confidence, and great personal courage were clearly advantages in a frequently hostile political environment. His colleagues also esteemed his integrity, indifference to money and rank, and tremendous capacity for work. Non-Russian members justly valued his freedom from racial or religious prejudice. Yet Miliukov could also be caustic, critical of others, unwilling to admit mistakes, and vulnerable to flattery. Priding himself on his pragmatism, he was at times doctrinaire; though adept at reconciling even the most divided gathering, his tactlessness was proverbial. The independent cast of mind that gave his theoretical writings much of their power could also be a political liability, since swimming against the current rarely wins votes. Finally, he had
a natural reserve that frequently made him appear lacking in warmth and emotion. Miliukov's coldness "inhibited any feeling of personal sympathy or love for him," one colleague wrote, adding, "But then, he had no need of either."

Getting to know Miliukov, to know more of his private life and how it influenced behavior and decision making, has been one of the hardest tasks of this biography. Although his personal archive is vast, it contains little of a truly personal nature, the same being the case with the diaries he kept intermittently. Very few of his private letters written before 1918 survived the upheavals of revolution, civil war, and emigration. Such evidence as does exist, however, suggests that the cold and somewhat austere figure of memoir accounts was a later development. As was the case with his contemporary Woodrow Wilson—a scholar who entered politics—the burdens of leadership and personal frustrations exerted a chilling effect on his public persona.

When Miliukov at last began writing his memoirs, at age eighty-one in Montpelier, France, he chose to omit the more intimate details of his life even though "my silence . . . will perhaps lead my future biographer, if there is one, to substitute anecdotes for facts." In a number of places in the memoirs Miliukov similarly addresses the future historian or possible biographer, noting the possibility of error concerning a particular date, regretting his inability to render a quotation exactly, acknowledging that his recollection of an episode might be more "subjective" than he realized. This pronounced historical sensibility was as characteristic of his political career as of his memoirs. As a historian attempting to transform his country, Miliukov was constantly aware of past origins of present problems, but was also anticipating future judgment of the way those problems were addressed: "history will remember" what we say and do or fail to do, he often warned contemporaries.

For many decades Miliukov and his party were in fact "remembered" only partially and incompletely. It was long impossible for any scholar in his homeland to undertake a biography of Miliukov, and the only Western biography, published in 1969, had to be written without benefit of access to Soviet archives. Various aspects of Miliukov's political activity have been thoughtfully treated in works on the events and movements in which he played a part, but there exists no full-scale study of the nature of his liberalism or of the party he led. His scholarship, though frequently alluded to, has been little studied, and his writings on nationalism and the Russian nationalities question are virtually unknown.

History, however, has its "whims," as even the positivist Miliukov conceded, and individuals and movements consigned to its dustbin do not always stay put. When I began this study of Miliukov's life in Russia, more years ago than is comfortable to admit, Iurii Andropov headed the Commu-
nist Party of the Soviet Union and Soviet reformers looking for a "usable past" turned to alternative currents within early Bolshevism, not to the defeated and discredited rivals of Bolshevism itself. The nationality question in Russia scarcely appeared to exist. Bosnia was a place name one spelled out for students when giving a lecture on the origins of the Great War. Since then, the period of perestroika and the demise of one-party states have resurrected most of the issues Miliukov confronted, as well as lending fresh interest to the ways he tried to resolve them. Democrats in Russia again confront the staggering tasks of building a liberal order in a state lacking traditions of respect for law and the individual, of strengthening social cohesion in an ethnically, culturally, and economically divided population, of fostering national pride without resort to misrepresentation of the past or to adventuristic foreign policy, and of mediating collisions between opposing notions of what is "right."

While specific policies proposed by Miliukov rarely have relevance today, the general perspectives informing them remain attractive: that social justice cannot be achieved without first securing political liberties, that both are indispensable to genuine liberalism, and that tolerance and practicality are no less important criteria of politics than are lofty ideals.

The number of individuals and institutions to whom I owe thanks for assistance and support is vast; in the course of the many years that I have been engaged in this study I have met with kindness, encouragement, stimulation, constructive criticism "in measure overflowing." No formal acknowledgment can adequately convey my gratitude.

The International Research and Exchange Board generously funded three research trips to Russia between 1984 and 1995; without this support, and that of the Fulbright-Hayes Fellowship Program, this book could not have been written. The Department of History of Harvard University made it possible to do much-needed research in New York; the support of the Harvard Russian Research Center, thanks chiefly to the efforts of my adviser, Richard Pipes, helped finance the final stages of writing my dissertation. Adam Ulam and the fellows and staff of the Russian Research Center provided an intellectual home that was as rewarding personally as it was academically. The generous support of the Russian Research Center and the John M. Olin Foundation also made possible a wonderfully productive year of work in 1992, one all the more memorable thanks to residency at Lowell House and the opportunity to enjoy the stimulating community of the Lowell senior common room headed by William and MaryLee Bossert. The Research Council of the University of Oklahoma and the Oklahoma Foundation for the Humanities generously provided funding for travel to collections and summer support for writing.
I am grateful to the library staffs of Harvard University, Columbia University, and the state libraries of Moscow and St. Petersburg, the library of the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, and also to the archivists and staff of the Houghton Archive at Harvard University, the Bakhmeteff Archive of Columbia University, the Russian State Historical Archive of St. Petersburg, and the State Archive of the Russian Federation in Moscow. I particularly wish to thank the archivists and staff of the Hoover Institution, Stanford, and the Archive of the Academy of Sciences in Moscow not only for their invaluable professional assistance but also for making the conduct of research in these two institutions so pleasurable. I am also grateful for the help of the inter-library loan staff of Bizzell Memorial Library at the University of Oklahoma, who efficiently procured for me dozens of necessary items over the course of several years.

Among the individuals I wish to thank are the teachers who guided and challenged me, not only in the study of history. Marilyn Brannon, Connie Cronley, and John Huffman taught me to write. David Epstein and Marvin Lomax nourished my love of history; James Wilkinson taught me to think critically; and Ben Henneke inspired me in ways too numerous to mention. Scholars and fellow students shared their expertise and their work, offered suggestions, and pointed me in the direction of sources. I thank James Flynn, Edward Kasinec, Raymond Pearson, Terence Emmons, Robert Nye, Arch Getty, James Cracraft, Thomas Bohn, Gary Cohen, and Olga Andriewsky for their assistance and good will. Paul Nascimento, Dirk Voss, and Ina Germanovich provided assistance with research and translation. Margaret Smith expertly produced many of the illustrations. Most especially, I thank Tom Gleason, Shmuel Galai, and V. V. Shelokhaev for their mentorship as well as for many, many happy hours of conversation on the subject of Russian history, liberalism, and Paul Miliukov; their knowledge, critical acumen, and guidance enriched this study—and its author—in a variety of ways.

One of my greatest debts is to the teachers, colleagues, and friends who gave so generously of their time and expertise in reading this manuscript or portions of it, through its many tortuous drafts. To them belongs much of the credit for whatever is creditable in this study; I am responsible for the shortcomings. Richard Pipes, Cathy Frierson, Tom Gleason, Steve Marks, Edward Keenan, Shmuel Galai, Robert Shalhope, David Levy, Tom Schwartz, Tom Stockdale, and Adrian Jones critiqued my work gently but rigorously, improving my style, correcting inaccuracies, tightening my logic, and suggesting lines of argument I had not even considered. They also provided encouragement and help when it was sorely needed, as did, in different ways, Julie Jones, Laurie Burnham, Christine Porto, Jacki Rand, Dan Snell,
Katie Barwick, Martha Skeeters, Linda Reese, Paul and Chris Regan, Oleg Zimarin, Sergei and Valia Zapolskii, and Dmitrii Rundkvist.

I have been extraordinarily lucky in my editors at Cornell University Press. I thank Andrew Lewis for his fine copy-editing; Carol Betsch for her expertise, patience, and warmth in shepherding the manuscript through the production process; and most especially John Ackerman, for his humor and encouragement, his rigorous editing, and for caring so much about Paul Miliukov.

Finally, I wish to mention my family. Bob Bruce first made me think of graduate work. Members of my extended family, most especially Bud and Georgette Stockdale and Anne Wurr, constantly heartened and touched me with their interest and expressions of support. My son, Nicholas, has been a source of joy and also of sanity, since he helped keep the importance of producing a monograph in some sort of reasonable perspective. I thank Jane Bruce, Harry Kirschke, Amy Kirschke, Tom Schwartz, and Tom Stockdale with all my heart for their love, encouragement, and help. Finally, I lovingly dedicate this book to the memory of my grandparents, Harry and Helene Stamos and Edward and Nadine Kirschke.

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