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Published in the USA

European Journal of Contemporary Education
E-ISSN 2305-6746
2022. 11(4): 1345-1352
DOI: 10.13187/ejced.2022.4.1345
<https://ejce.cherkasgu.press>

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The Policy on Women's Education Pursued by the Zemstvo Liberal Party in Chernigov Governorate in the Period between the 1870s and 1880s. Part 2

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Abstract

This is the second part of a study investigating the policy pursued by the Zemstvo Liberal Party in Chernigov Governorate in the area of women's education in the second half of the 19th century. This process was explored through the prism of the Russian Empire's whole new historical realities – a time when a philosophy of counter-reforms and an atmosphere of reaction became the dominant tone of the Romanovs' domestic policy. The work relied on relevant research and documentary sources, some of which were introduced into scholarly discourse here for the first time ever. The conclusion was drawn that, despite the various unfavorable domestic political circumstances present during the time of the reign of Emperor Alexander III, members of the liberal opposition did manage to continue taking care of the development of women's education in Chernigov Governorate and initiate relevant measures.

At that time, the zemstvo liberals had to take account of the radical changes in the government's domestic policy, specifically those associated with the start of the period of counter-reforms under Emperor Alexander III, and adjust their policy in the area of women's education accordingly. On balance, the policy pursued by the Zemstvo Liberal Party in northern Ukraine in the area of women's education between the 1870s and 1880s can be regarded as progressive. It was an achievement founded on devoted efforts on the part of the opposition aristocratic fronde in the region. The democratic principles put into effect in the area of women's education were an integral, organic part of a large-scale humanitarian program implemented by the zemstvo liberal movement in the north of Leftbank Ukraine during that period.

Keywords: education, education policy, education reform, Zemstvo Liberal Party, women's education, zemstvo institutions, women's educational institutions.

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1. Introduction

Following the murder of Emperor Alexander II, committed on March 1, 1881, by terrorist revolutionaries, the Russian Empire entered the so-called “counter-reform period”, which would last throughout the reign of Emperor Alexander III. Most of the transformations that took place dealt with the domestic policy of the Russian government. The principal strategic focus was on ideological restoration and wiping out the achievements of the Era of Great Reforms, i.e. going back to a political regime similar to the one the Russian Empire had in the first half of the 19th century.

A distinctive characteristic of the country’s social and economic life at the time was the Russian monarchy’s fixation on all-out support for and bolstering the position of the Empire’s absolute minority – the great latifundist aristocracy. At the same, the government’s policy towards the largest segment of the population, the peasantry, was characterized by discrimination and abridgement of individual rights and freedoms. Ethno-confessional life in the country underwent some negative changes, too. For instance, the Russian Orthodox Church, in essence, became a state institution, serving as an ideological backstop for the Romanov dynasty to lean on. The national policy of Russian absolutism was dominated by the ideals of Russian nationalism and chauvinism, which was highly facilitative of pogroms and ethnic unrest. Changes took place in the system of local self-government, too. Justice courts in the province were eliminated, and the institution of juries was reduced to mere formality, with the government instead putting in place zemstvo chiefs who would represent the supreme authority in the communities. The zemstvo and urban counter-reforms implemented helped secure complete government control and oversight over the local self-governing authorities, assure the dominance of members of the great nobility within the city dumas and zemstvo assemblies, and subjugate the local executive authorities completely to the gubernia administrations.

The education sector, likewise, underwent radical changes. There, in essence, was a return to a caste system – most members of the non-noble social estates were deprived of access to higher education. The counter-reform period, which began in the spring of 1881, had an effect on the development of women’s education as well. With the domestic policy of the Czarist regime increasingly characterized by reactionary tendencies, the country’s social life was again dominated by conservative political forces. This affected the majority of progressive accomplishments achieved under Emperor Alexander II, including in the area of women’s education.

2. Materials and methods

The principal sources used in the second part of the study are published materials from the proceedings of zemstvo institutions in Chernigov Governorate conducted during the counter-reform period. Some of these sources were introduced into scholarly discourse here for the first time ever.

In putting this work together, use was made of both general and special-historical research methods. Universal methods such as classification, periodization, and summarization were employed to establish the chronological scope of the activity of the Zemstvo Liberal Party in Chernigov Governorate in the area of women’s education, classify the ideological priorities of the zemstvo liberal opposition in Chernigov Governorate and its counterpart, the conservative political elite, and summarize the factual material from the sources. This helped draw meaningful conclusions.

The use of special-historical methods helped gain insight into the key events associated with the activity of the Zemstvo Liberal Party in the area of women’s education. Specifically, the use of the historical-typological method helped assess the achievements of liberal zemstvo members in Chernigov Governorate and determine the typological characteristics of the ideological principles both of members of the liberal opposition and of those of the conservative political elite in the region with regard to women’s education by grouping and ordering them. The historical-comparative method was used to juxtapose the accomplishments resulting from devoted efforts of Chernigov Governorate’s zemstvo liberals in the area of women’s education with the realities of the pre-reform period in the Russian Empire.

3. Discussion

The topic of women’s education in the Russian Empire in the second half of the 19th century and early 20th centuries has been researched by numerous scholars, with many different aspects of the subject investigated. In much of this research, the development of women’s education is the central theme ([Kornilova et al., 2016](#); [Kornilova, Magsumov, 2017](#); [Kudinov, 2016](#); [Kudinov, 2018](#);

Panova, Ponomareva, 2022). Certain aspects of the development of women's education have been explored in the context of the study of the history of higher and secondary education in the Russian Empire in the 19th and early 20th centuries (Lebid, Shevchenko, 2021; Lebid, 2022a; Lebid, 2022b).

At the same time, the place of women's education in the policy of zemstvo institutions in the Russian Empire has been investigated relatively little (Selyutina et al., 2022). Yet the history of the zemstvo movement itself, including in the Ukrainian governorates, has been researched fairly extensively (Zhilenkova, 2000; Mojsijenko, 1999; Red'kina, 2002; Jucevych, 2021; Rahno, 2017; Rahno, 2018; Kotelnitsky, 2018; Kotelnitsky, 2019; Kotelnitsky, 2021).

In the first part of the present study, insight was provided into the policy pursued by the Zemstvo Liberal Party in Chernigov Governorate in respect of women's education in the 1870s (Kotelnitsky, Degtyarev, 2022). The second part will examine this policy through the lens of whole different historical realities – the period of counter-reforms under Emperor Alexander III.

4. Results

The counter-reforms implemented under Alexander III also had an effect on the nature of the activity of zemstvo institutions in the Russian Empire, including the self-governing authorities of Chernigov Governorate. The region's zemstvo authorities continued to take active part in organizing women's education and enhancing the material-technical base of women's educational institutions in the governorate.

A session of the Chernigov Gubernia Zemstvo Assembly held in 1881 featured a report by the Gubernia Zemstvo Council regarding the expansion of the infrastructure of Chernigov Women's Gymnasium. At the sitting held on October 8, a liberal deputy named N. Konstantinovich stressed the need to organize education for the peasantry. He noted that Chernigov Women's Gymnasium was maintained mainly through funding from private individuals, although earlier the gymnasium had received financial assistance from the government – the city government of Chernigov, the Chernigov Gubernia Zemstvo, and the Ministry of Public Education.

The member of the zemstvo opposition stressed that the size of the gymnasium's student body increased with each passing year. As at September 1881, the gymnasium had an enrollment of more than 400 students, with 123 of these being natives of Chernigov and 120 – natives of Chernigov Uyezd. All uyezds in Chernigov Governorate were represented in this gymnasium by a student native to them. Therefore, N. Konstantinovich positioned Chernigov Women's Gymnasium as a regionally significant educational institution.

N. Konstantinovich also drew the attention of the councilors to the fact that failure to set up the additional, fourth, class in the gymnasium would have resulted in at least 75 girls being denied admission to school. This would have been detrimental to society, for this student body produced future pedagogues for primary public schools in the region. It was argued that the zemstvo institutions spent less on the training of public teachers than on other areas of public education.

According to N. Konstantinovich, meeting the needs of all those willing to go to school and satisfying the needs of the zemstvo authorities would definitely require increasing the size of the student body and opening up at least three additional classes. It would not be possible to do this without expanding the school's infrastructure – specifically, building new campuses for it. This would require allocating 5,000 rubles from the budget of the Gubernia Zemstvo. The Chernigov City Duma and Council, too, were expected to take part in the funding of the project (ZCHZ, 1881: 16-17).

However, members of the zemstvo conservative aristocracy argued against an increase in expenditure on the women's gymnasium, citing a lack of funds in the zemstvo budget as a reason. On top of that, the conservatives' argumentation contained notes of anti-Semitism. It was argued that, since at least 40 % of the gymnasium's student body was represented by girls from families within Chernigov's Jewish community, it had to be up to Jewish entrepreneurs to build new campuses for the gymnasium.

The liberal deputies confronted the arguments of members of the conservative wing, but to no avail – the Chernigov Gubernia Zemstvo Assembly refused to approve the allocation of 5,000 rubles for Chernigov Women's Gymnasium toward the building of new campuses (ZCHZ, 1881: 18-21).

The agenda of an ordinary session of the Chernigov Gubernia Zemstvo Assembly held in 1882 included discussion of the situation around the women's department of the feldsher's school at Chernigov Gubernia Almshouse. A special report on the matter had been prepared by members of the Gubernia Zemstvo Council. The sitting held on December 12 included an address by P. Chervinsky,

a member of the Zemstvo Liberal Party in Chernigov Governorate. He informed the deputies of the fact that the department had an enrollment of just seven students. The Council concluded that the department would have to be closed down – because its activity was unproductive and of little use in the context of medical education in the region. At the same time, the Council did not mind first letting the remaining students complete their program of study to the end.

P. Chervinsky noted the low popularity of the educational institution. What is more, the school issued only a certificate of completion of the course of study. The document was not as prestigious as what most other educational institutions provided to their graduates. This made it fairly difficult for graduates of the feldsher's school to get a job post-graduation. However, closing the feldsher's school down immediately could have led to having its students continue their study by enrolling at a similar educational institution in Moscow or Odessa, and there was a risk of no vacant places being available for them there.

There was the option of having members of the school's teaching staff give private lessons to the remaining students so that they could prepare faster for the exams required to get a medical qualification. With that said, a big decision had to be made on the following – stopping the admission of new students to the women's department of the feldsher's school and closing this cost-ineffective and uncompetitive facility down (SOCHZ, 1882. N^o2: 240-245).

The upshot was the Chernigov Gubernia Zemstvo Assembly ordaining the following:

- 1) that the admission of new entrants to the women's department of the feldsher's school at Chernigov Gubernia Almshouse be discontinued as of the 1883 school year;
- 2) that the procedure for closing the feldsher's school down be carried out subsequent to the department's remaining students receiving a certificate of completion of the course of study;
- 3) that the sum of 880 rubles be allocated from the gubernia zemstvo budget toward the needs of the department in the period 1883–1884;
- 4) that the necessary funding be allocated from the budget of the Gubernia Zemstvo toward discontinuing the operation of and carrying out the procedures for closing down the feldsher's school (ZCHZ, 1882. N^o1: 15-16).

Geographically, the region's zemstvo liberals extended their solicitude for the education of women beyond Chernigov Governorate. More specifically, an ordinary session of the Borzna Uyezd Zemstvo Assembly held in 1883 involved discussion of the possible participation of the region's zemstvo institutions in the funding of the Higher Women's Courses in Saint Petersburg.

At the sitting of the Uyezd Zemstvo Assembly held on October 26, 1883, members of the liberal camp of the deputies suggested that there was a possibility to allocate from the budget of the Borzna Uyezd Zemstvo a small amount of money toward the construction of a building for the higher women's courses in the capital. It was suggested to allocate for this purpose at least 100 rubles from the zemstvo budget. The proposal was approved, and the money was provided (ZBZ, 1883. N^o3: 19-20).

Later on, a session of the Chernigov Gubernia Zemstvo Assembly held in December 1883 involved discussion of funding the women's medical courses in Saint Petersburg. Note that some funding had already been provided for the school earlier (2,000 rubles in 1882). Now the Gubernia Zemstvo Council petitioned for the allocation of 2,000 rubles toward the upkeep of this educational institution annually.

Several members of the liberal party spoke out on the matter. N. Konstantinovich argued against the annual contribution of 2,000 rubles, citing as a reason the fact that the officials in charge of the women's medical courses had failed to account for the money received in 1882 (SOCHZ, 1883. N^o6: 176-177).

A liberal deputy named A. Lindfors focused on the headway achieved in the development of women's education. It was noted that numerous women's gymnasiums and boarding schools were established in the Russian Empire during the Era of Great Reforms, with Saint Petersburg and Kiev becoming home to higher women's courses. The deputy also stressed that the majority of people in the country supported the idea of women having higher education, including in the medical field. Yet, at the same time, A. Lindfors noted that, starting in the spring of 1881, the situation had worsened substantially. Most women's educational institutions in the country no longer enjoyed the good graces and patronage of private benefactors. Therefore, there was a lack of funding to dedicate to ensuring the proper operation of women's educational institutions, with many losing their campuses. The deputy argued against refusing help to women's education, both in and

outside of Chernigov Governorate, and insisted on having in the budget of the Gubernia Zemstvo the sum needed to support the needs of the women's medical courses in Saint Petersburg (SOCHZ, 1883. №6: 183-187).

A member of the liberal wing named V. Varzar seconded the proposal put forth by A. Lindfors. The argument was that, given the fact that the Gubernia Zemstvo had already taken part in funding the women's courses in the capital in 1882, it would not be right to refuse to provide this kind of support again in the future. Besides, the sum of 2,000 rubles was not a very large one for the Chernigov Gubernia Zemstvo. In fact, refusing to provide this kind of help could have led to the zemstvo institutions falling out of favor with the public.

After heated debates, the Chernigov Gubernia Zemstvo Assembly rejected, by a majority vote of 35 to 20, the allocation of 2,000 rubles from the zemstvo budget toward the needs of the women's medical courses in Saint Petersburg (SOCHZ, 1883. №6: 189-190,194).

The same sitting also involved discussion of the issue of getting a building for the women's higher courses in Saint Petersburg. The Chernigov Gubernia Zemstvo Council informed the Assembly of the need to allocate for that purpose 400 rubles for a period of 3 years. The liberals P. Chervinsky, N. Konstantinovich, and A. Lindfors suggested raising the funding through charity donations, without encumbering the budget of the local government. The deputies corps of the Gubernia Zemstvo Assembly approved this proposal by majority vote (ZCHZ, 1883. №6: 35).

At the next sitting of the Gubernia Zemstvo Assembly, held on December 13, 1883, the liberals made use of their deputy right to initiate a repeat vote on the decision regarding the provision of financial aid for the medical women's courses in Saint Petersburg. By that time, the educational institution had already lost its buildings, finding itself in an emergency situation. However, the deputies corps of the Chernigov Gubernia Zemstvo Assembly reaffirmed, by majority vote, its opposition to allocating 2,000 rubles toward the needs of the medical courses. With that said, the Chernigov Gubernia Zemstvo Council was directed to collect all the information about the situation of the women's medical courses in the capital. With detailed information about the school's financial needs in hand, the Gubernia Zemstvo Assembly could revisit the issue some time later (SOCHZ, 1883. №7: 217-221).

Even in the climate of the counter-reforms, the zemstvo liberals of Chernigov Governorate continued to look for ways to preserve the accomplishments achieved in the area of women's education. Specifically, an ordinary session of the Chernigov Gubernia Zemstvo Assembly held in December 1884 involved consideration of the request by the Board of Trustees of Chernigov Women's Gymnasium to allocate from the zemstvo budget a grant in the amount of 1,000 rubles toward the needs of this educational institution. Members of the conservative party opposed doing so, citing the proverbial lack of funding in the zemstvo budget as a reason. The liberal deputies attempted to argue that Chernigov Governorate's only women's educational institution of this level deserved all support from the local zemstvo institutions, for the entire system of women's education would be at risk of regression in the event of the gymnasium's downfall. They insisted on the provision of funds from the budget of the Gubernia Zemstvo to help keep the women's gymnasium running. While the liberals managed to stand their ground, it was not without considerable effort. Finally, the Chernigov Gubernia Zemstvo Assembly directed the Gubernia Zemstvo Council to allocate from the budget of the Gubernia Zemstvo the sum of 1,000 rubles toward the needs of Chernigov Women's Gymnasium (ZCHZ, 1884. №4: 27-28).

With the process of implementing the counter-reforms of Alexander III gaining momentum, the liberals of Chernigovshchina found it increasingly difficult to continue their progressive policy of supporting women's education. An ordinary session of the Chernigov Gubernia Zemstvo Assembly held in 1887 involved consideration of yet another request from Chernigov Women's Gymnasium for financial aid. As expected, deputies from the conservative party opposed the provision of such a grant. On top of that, they publicly reproached the Gubernia Council for spending large amounts of money on the school when other secondary educational institutions in the region were left without any help. With that said, it was argued that the uyezd zemstvos of Chernigov Governorate were not funding the needs of the gymnasium. Members of the liberal party attempted to rebut the assertions of the reactionaries by reminding them that in 1887 the Chernigov Uyezd Zemstvo allocated some funding from its own budget to support the needs of the women's gymnasium. However, in the end, the deputies corps of the Chernigov Gubernia Zemstvo

voted to turn down the request from Chernigov Women's Gymnasium for financial aid (ZCHZ, 1887. №9: 228-229, 232).

5. Conclusion

While the pre-reform Russian Empire did have private women's educational institutions, it is the Era of Great Reforms (1856–1874) that facilitated the emergence of an entire network of state and municipal women's educational institutions, most importantly gymnasiums and boarding schools. The retrieved historical sources, most of which are being introduced into scholarly discourse here for the first time ever, attest that a key role in these processes was played by the zemstvo institutions. An especially active part in this was taken by deputies of the zemstvo authorities who represented the liberal political wing. There were two major stages in the activity of the Zemstvo Liberal Party in Chernigov Governorate in the area of the development of women's education – (1) the 1870s and (2) the period of the reign of Emperor Alexander III. The first stage involved active efforts on the part of liberal zemstvo members in Chernigov Governorate in the area of building a network of women's educational institutions in the region. Specifically, a major achievement of the liberal party was the creation and development of Borzna Zemstvo Women's Progymnasium. The consolidated efforts of the zemstvo liberals helped secure steady funding for the school. Members of the liberal wing advocated for using an election-based system to form the school's teaching team and granting the status of zemstvo public officers with corresponding rights to its entire teaching staff.

The liberal deputies systematically initiated procedures for the provision of financial aid from the budgets of the zemstvo self-governing authorities to support the needs of women's educational institutions not only in Chernigov Governorate but in Kiev and Saint Petersburg as well.

In the second stage, the zemstvo liberals of Chernigov Governorate had to take account of the radical changes in the government's domestic policy and adjust their policy in the area of women's education accordingly. It is to be noted that members of the opposition publicly criticized many of the political decisions made by the government of the Russian Empire. Despite the domination of conservative ideology and reactionary practices in the country, liberal zemstvo members did find ways to preserve the accomplishments achieved during the Era of Great Reforms. A case in point is the provision of funding to support the needs of Chernigov Women's Gymnasium.

On balance, the policy pursued by the Zemstvo Liberal Party in northern Ukraine in the area of women's education between the 1870s and 1880s can be regarded as progressive. The democratic principles put into effect in the area of women's education were an integral, organic part of a large-scale humanitarian program implemented by the zemstvo liberal movement in the north of Leftbank Ukraine during that period.

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