

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR:

Although Professor Mocha is to be sincerely commended for exposing yet another of the curious machinations of F. V. Bulgarin (Frank Mocha, "The Karamzin-Lelewel Controversy," *Slavic Review*, September 1972), the importance of "the attack on Karamzin" remains somewhat obscure. It may be that Lelewel succeeded in "undermining Karamzin's reputation as an historian," at least among Polish patriots, future Decembrists, and "scientific" scholars (none of whom required much convincing), but it is an undeniable fact that *The History of the Russian State* remained immensely popular and greatly influential among the educated Russian public for at least another two decades. And Karamzin made little effort to shield himself from criticism—it is a matter of record that he encouraged M. N. Muraviev to publish a review which took issue with the *History* on a number of key points. Therefore, it would appear that the "undermining" succeeded in an ideological, political sense, and that the resurrection of the "controversy" is intended as another historiographic blow for Poland and liberalism. Once again Karamzin has been made to figure as a spokesman and representative of the regime, an influential and somehow typical policy-level adviser whose comments clearly represent the views of the conservative Imperial Establishment. However, despite the fine nineteenth-century traditions from which it derives, this assumption concerning Karamzin's political importance is misleading. For example, in the case of the *Memoir on Ancient and Modern Russia*, which is generally thought to be "one of the most important documents of social thought in Alexander's era" and a most influential critique, there is no evidence that Alexander even read it; all that is known is that it moldered among the thousands of other papers received and filed away by the emperor. Again, with respect to the "Opinion of a Russian Citizen" of October 18, 1819, we have no evidence that this highly confidential statement "made a great impression on Alexander and on Russian public opinion"; in fact, all we really have is Karamzin's own recollection that hard political considerations terminated the planned "Polish concessions," and his complaint that such a reasoned protest was of no significance to the emperor. An incident concerning anti-Polish bias in Karamzin's *History* only serves to emphasize the historian's lack of "influence" on this as on so many other questions; in the summer of 1822, having personally proofread the eleventh volume, the emperor felt constrained to request that subtle slights against the ancestors of his Polish subjects be toned down. It is perhaps regrettable, but nonetheless true, that the later reign of Alexander I had no spokesman of Karamzin's eloquence.

EDWARD A. COLE
Grand Valley State College

DR. MOCHA REPLIES:

I would like to thank Professor Cole for his sincere commendation of my article. While I enjoyed his distinction between Karamzin's "popularity" with the public and his "influence" with the emperor, I found it odd for him to defend Karamzin by trying to make him appear less important than he really was. He is also some-

what presumptuous to simply declare—in the face of respectable Polish studies and Marc Raeff's remarks in his biography of Michael Speransky (pp. 160, 176)—that there is no evidence that Alexander ever read Karamzin's *Memoir on Ancient and Modern Russia* (1811). Karamzin's "lack of influence" dates from 1822, the year of Lelewel's first article in which he questions Karamzin's qualification as an historian. If, as Mr. Cole says, Alexander "personally proofread" the eleventh volume of Karamzin's *History* in 1822 in order to prevent anti-Polish bias, this particular piece of imperial attention would seem to indicate that Lelewel had succeeded in "undermining Karamzin's reputation as an historian" to a greater extent than Mr. Cole is willing or able to understand. His questioning "the importance of the attack on Karamzin," his probably ironic labeling of my article as "another historiographic blow for Poland and liberalism," and his offhanded reference to the so-called "Polish concessions" confirm that he really does not understand the magnitude of the problems covered by this euphemism, and the efforts of Russian historians and intellectuals, including Karamzin, to explain them away. Rather than criticize Polish historiography, he should get better acquainted with it—it has a reputation of high achievement—otherwise his education as a Russian historian, or even as a Karamzin scholar, will never be complete.

TO THE EDITOR:

I take strong exception to the review of Leopold Tyrmand's *Rosa Luxemburg Contraceptives Cooperative* by H. K. Rosenthal published in the March 1973 *Slavic Review*.

Tyrmand's book is, to be sure, not a scholarly one: as the author says in his "Foreword," it has "literary ambitions." Indeed it represents a very interesting experiment in the combination of the literary and the publicistic; it bases itself on the political anecdote in order to create an "international hyperbole of an existing reality" (the reviewer leaves the impression that these anecdotes derive from a Stalinist period long since forgotten: this is not true, as the stories are illustrative of more or less contemporary, everyday life in Communist Eastern Europe, not the period of the terror and the purges). Political anecdotes are by their nature hyperbolic, but they also embody important truths so long as one does not take them completely literally. Tyrmand's book is much more than a simple collection of anecdotes, however. It contains a wealth of stimulating and intelligent observations on the dynamics of a totalitarian society. Moreover, it accomplishes the difficult feat of being almost equally interesting for the specialist in Communist affairs and for the student who knows little about them. Tyrmand's objective is to give the Western reader who has never been there in the sense of never having had to live there fully subject to the system—as distinct from a tourist or exchange scholar—a notion of how the ordinary person survives in contemporary Communist society. The book is written for those capable of understanding. Knowing and understanding are not necessarily equivalent, as your reviewer has illustrated yet once again.

CHARLES A. MOSER
George Washington University