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Title	Sakhalin as Cause Célèbre : The Re-signification of Tsarist Russia's Penal Colony
Author(s)	Gentes, Andrew
Citation	Acta Slavica Iaponica, 32, 55-72
Issue Date	2012
Doc URL	https://hdl.handle.net/2115/51100
Type	departmental bulletin paper
File Information	ASI32_003.pdf



Sakhalin as *Cause Célèbre* The Re-signification of Tsarist Russia's Penal Colony

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INTRODUCTION

During the mid-1860s Russia's penal labor institution known as *katorga* entered what Alexander II's government recognized was a "state of collapse."¹ Established by Peter the Great, *katorga* had for most of its existence been centered among the mines and smelteries of the Nerchinsk Mining District east of Lake Baikal. However, these mines' exhaustion, poor management and maintenance, and a surfeit of convicts (particularly from the mass deportations following the 1863 Polish Uprising) had transformed *katorga* into a losing proposition in both fiscal and penological terms. By the late 1860s Petersburg decided new arrangements were needed for its 14,000 penal laborers (*katorzhane*). The island of Sakhalin seemed a solution. Eastern Siberia's Governor-general Nikolai N. Murav'ev dispatched reconnaissance expeditions there during the 1850s; and following annexation of the Amur region, Sakhalin attracted official interest as a natural fortress guarding the mouth of the Amur River. But not until 1875, when the Treaty of St Petersburg eliminated Japan's competing claims, did Russia formally annex the island.²

Writers began speculating early on about Sakhalin's role in the *imperium*. In 1874, state councilor Iakov N. Butkovskii wrote in *Naval Articles* (*Morskoi sbornik*):

Sakhalin is the same as Kotlin [in the Finnish Straits, on which Kronshtadt was built], only on a Siberian scale. To fortify it with cannons is expensive, and inconvenient; it will be more soundly secured for us if it is populated by a

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- 1 As reported in Biblioteka Irkutskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta (BIGU), fond staropechatnykh i redkikh knig, no. RUK. 345, Sakhalin *delo*, V.[I.] Vlasov, "Kopiiia s soobrazhenii predstavlenykh Kollezhskim Sovetnikom Vlasovym General-Gubernatory Vostochnoi Sibiri, ob ustroistv katorzhnykh rabot na o. Sakhaline" [No date, c. 1873], pp. 1–2. Vlasov was a councilor in both the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Main Administration of Eastern Siberia who toured *katorga* sites in Eastern Siberia and on Sakhalin in 1871.
 - 2 Andrew Gentes, "Katorga: Penal Labor and Tsarist Siberia," in Eva-Maria Stolberg, ed., *The Siberian Saga: A History of Russia's Wild East* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2005), pp. 73–85; idem, "Siberian Exile and the 1863 Polish Insurrectionists According to Russian Sources," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 51:2 (2003), pp. 197–217. For an account of one of the early expeditions see N. V. Busse, *Ostrov Sakhalin: Ekspeditsiia 1853–54 gg.* (Sankt-peterburg: V. tipografii F. S. Sushinskago, 1872).

Russian element, no matter if this initial element will be exiled penal laborers: in our view, Sydney and Melbourne became prosperous cities.³

The following year an editorial in *The Voice (Golos)*, "Our Tasks on Sakhalin," designated three "points of view" concerning Sakhalin: 1) the military, which held that Sakhalin was the strategic "key" to the mouth of the Amur; 2) the economic, which regarded the island as a "rich mine of coal"; and 3) the political, which considered the island an ideal location for penal laborers.⁴

Butkovskii and *The Voice's* editors were certainly aware that the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) had, in 1869, initiated plans to transform Sakhalin into a penal colony. Small groups of male and female convicts there delivered were during the early 1870s on a so called experimental basis. By 1876, Sakhalin's convict population was 1,200 and growing. Enamored of the dream of an autarkic colony that would secure the region against supposed encroachment by Japan, China, the United States, and Great Britain, Petersburg ignored local commanders' reports about the island's poor soil and weather conditions. *The Voice* expressed hope that Sakhalin would one day be populated by free settlers. But thirty years later the island had more than thirty thousand exiles,⁵ and only a small portion of these consisted of a *soslovie* of nominally free "peasants." The penal colony was abolished in the aftermath of the 1905 Japanese invasion.

I have described elsewhere the penal colony's establishment and social composition.⁶ This article examines how critics of tsarist penalty turned Sakhalin into a *cause célèbre*, and argues that their increasingly confrontational publications challenged not just Russia's penal administration but tsarism itself. Like others who throughout history have made prison conditions a rallying point for political opposition,⁷ Russia's critics imprinted new meaning upon

3 Quoted in Aleksandr Kostanov, *Osvoenie Sakhalina russkimi liud'mi* (Iuzhno-Sakhalinsk: Dal'nevostochnoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo Sakhalinskoe otdelenie, 1991), p. 94. Russia was not alone in viewing Australia as a model penal colony. Cf. Colin Forster, *France and Botany Bay: The Lure of a Penal Colony* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996).

4 "Nashi zadachi na Sakhaline," *Golos* (11 November 1875), pp. 1-2.

5 Out of a non-indigenous population of about 35,000. See Marina Ivanovna Ishchenko, "Formirovanie postoiannogo russkogo naseleniia Sakhalina (konets XIX - nachalo XX v.)," *Sovetskaia etnografiia* 3 (1991), pp. 102-111 [here, table 1, p. 103]. N. B.: Ishchenko confirms that there is a mistake in this table, such that figures listed for the year 1907 actually pertain to 1905.

6 Andrew A. Gentes, "The Institution of Russia's Sakhalin Policy, from 1868 to 1875," *Journal of Asian History* 36:1 (2002), pp. 1-31; idem, "No Kind of Liberal: Alexander II and the Sakhalin Penal Colony," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 54:3 (2006), pp. 321-344; idem, "Sakhalin's Women: The Convergence of Sexuality and Penology in Late Imperial Russia," *Ab Imperio* 2 (2003), pp. 115-138.

7 Cf. Frederick D. Harper, "The Influence of Malcolm X on Black Militancy," *Journal of Black Studies* 1:4 (1971), pp. 387-402; Robert E. Cray, Jr., "Commemorating the Prison Ship Dead: Revolutionary Memory and the Politics of Sepulture in the Early Republic, 1776-1808," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 56:3 (1999), pp. 565-590 [esp. p. 570]; Erik Luna, "Cuban

a geographical location that the state had intended would symbolize omnipotent police authority. Largely because of censorship and concern for their own safety, these critics never went so far as to specify the tsar or top officials by name. However, the combined effect of their writings successfully re-signified Sakhalin as a symbol of political discontent and thus dislodged it from the official paradigm. Critics used Sakhalin's new significance to leverage a challenge against Russia's very system of government.⁸

THE CASE FOR A PENAL COLONY

Before turning to literature critical of the penal colony, let us examine that which supported it. Generally speaking, this literature emphasized Sakhalin's national economic value while ignoring or diminishing its human costs. The aforementioned Butkovskii article and *Voice* editorial fall into this category and suggest its tendency to portray prisoners primarily as a capital-use labor resource. It is significant that Butkovskii's article appeared in the official publication of the navy, which had utilized *katorga* labor ever since both these institutions were created in the late seventeenth century. *The Voice* has been called a "liberal newspaper"⁹; nonetheless, its Sakhalin editorial recommended gathering together a "Russian tribe" (*russkoe plemia*) of free settlers from the Baltic and White Sea coasts for transfer to Sakhalin, where the indigenous Giliaks, Oroks, and Ainu were, like Siberia's other natives, to be "regulated" and relegated to a "minority position."

Butkovskii echoed this imperio-racialist discourse in another article that he published in 1882 in *History's Messenger* (*Istoricheskii vestnik*) and that offers an optimistic survey of developments on the island up to that point. Butkovskii was by now the major shareholder in a joint-venture named "Sakhalin," which employed penal laborers to work the coal mines around Dué Post, then the headquarters of the island's military administration. Butkovskii managed at one and the same time to celebrate his personal successes and to portray them as being in the national interest, and expressed particular concern that the United States' presence in the North Pacific threatened Russia's ability to carry on its own white man's burden. "A completely Russianized island is all the more needed," he wrote, "because it cuts into a completely alien world, the world of deep Asia: China, Japan, and Korea – countries awakened, or which Europe-

Criminal Justice and the Ideal of Good Governance (Whither Goes Cuba: Prospects for Economic and Social Development)," *Transnational Law & Contemporary Problems* 14:2 (2004), pp. 529–655; Gregory Shank, "Looking Back: Radical Criminology and Social Movements," *Social Justice* 26:2 (1999), pp. 114–134.

8 On the symbolic uses of geography see Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels, *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments* (Cambridge, Eng. and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

9 A. M. Prokhorov et al., eds., *Sovetskii entsiklopedicheskii slovar'*, 3rd ed. (Moskva: Sovetskaia entsiklopediia, 1985), p. 318.

ans are trying to awaken, from eons of slumber." Like *The Voice*, he supported Sakhalin's eventual settlement by free migrants, and singled out Old Believers and the intelligentsia as the best candidates for this task; yet Butkovskii warned that "foreigners, and probably Jews, should be forbidden to settle in such places until a more highly developed level of population can eliminate the threat of exploitation."¹⁰

But for all this, the government and private contractors' exploitation of penal labor was a non-issue for Butkovskii. This reflected government policy. Despite efforts by legalists and penal reformers to establish a penology based on rehabilitation, most officials believed that upon conviction criminals forfeited, along with their civil rights, any human rights that might have been presupposed. As the journalist Vlas Doroshevich found during his 1897 tour of Sakhalin, this view allowed penal laborers to be subjected to what was essentially a revived serfdom.

Admittedly, however, most of the early paeans to what was projected as Russia's largest-ever penal colony only briefly mention exiles. For instance, Ivan S. Poliakov, a zoologist with the Imperial Russian Geographic Society whom Alexander II dispatched to the island in 1881, guardedly supported establishing an agricultural colony, but largely by ignoring whether or not such a colony could be established by convicts.¹¹ Writing for *Virgin Soil (Nov')*, Poliakov devoted only one paragraph to the exiles themselves, despite detailing at length the resources to be exploited by their labor. He nevertheless felt compelled to add that "[t]he position of the exiled penal laborers truly merits profound sympathy on the part of the outside observer," and complained that "local functionaries... put personal interests above those of society and the state so that their personal fantasies supersede the law."¹²

THE KENNAN CONNECTION

Educated society's attention was first drawn to the plight of Siberia's exiles by Dostoevskii and others during the 1860s.¹³ But it was American journalist and adventurer George Kennan who was most significant in provoking – even among Russians – debate about the exile system. In 1885–86 he, along

10 Ia. N. Butkovskii, "Ostrov Sakhalin," *Istoricheskii vestnik* (October 1882), pp. 175–186.

11 I. S. Poliakov, *Puteshestvie na ostrov Sakhalin v 1881–1882 gg.* (Sanktpeterburg: Tipografiia A. S. Suvorina, 1883).

12 Iv. Poliakov, "Na Sakhaline," *Nov'* 7:1 (1 November 1885), pp. 1–18 [here, p. 17].

13 In addition to Dostoevskii's *Notes from a Dead House* see [Anonymous] "Arestanty v Sibiri," *Sovremennik* 11:99 (November 1863), pp. 133–175; S. Maksimov, "Gosudartsvennye prestupniki. Piataia chast'," *Otechestvennyia zapiski* 9 (September 1869), pp. 229–272; idem, *Sibir' i katorga*, 3 vols. (Sanktpeterburg: Tipografiia A. Transhelia, 1871); N. M. Iadrintsev, *Russkaia obshchina v tiur'me i ssylke* (Sanktpeterburg: Tipografiia A. Morigerovskago, 1872); idem, *Sibir' kak koloniia: k iubileiu trekhstotletii. Sovremennoe polozhenie Sibiri. Eia nuzhdy i potrebnosti. Eia proshloe i budushchee* (Sanktpeterburg: Tipografiia M. M. Stasiulevicha, 1882).

with illustrator George Frost, toured the Siberian exile system on behalf of *The Century* magazine, for which he wrote a series of articles published between May 1888 and October 1891 that luridly described prison conditions and, most particularly, what he saw as the indefensible treatment of exiled “nihilists,” or revolutionaries, whom he habitually described as “bright, intelligent, well-informed men & women, with warm affections, quick sympathies, generous impulses, & high standards of honor & duty.”¹⁴ By 1891, after most of these articles had been collected and published as *Siberia and the Exile System*,¹⁵ Kennan was well into a lecturing career that would powerfully influence American and British public opinion against the Russian government. Under his guiding light, the “Society of American Friends of Russian Freedom” was formed and counted among its members such luminaries as Samuel Clemens, Julia Ward Howe, and William Lloyd Garrison.¹⁶

Kennan’s articles and book were translated into Russian almost instantly. In 1889, a forty-page pamphlet titled *Political Prisoners in Russian Prisons* (*Zhizn’ politicheskikh arestantov v russkikh tiur’makh*) was published in Geneva by the activist publisher Mikhail K. Elpidin, who over the next several years produced at least ten Kennan-authored pamphlets.¹⁷ Émigré Socialist-Revolutionaries in Paris published a much lengthier pamphlet the following year; and the first complete Russian-language text of Kennan’s book came out in Berlin in 1891, the same year as the original.¹⁸ Kennan’s sympathy and personal friendships

14 George Kennan, “Russian Political Exiles,” Box 4, George Kennan Papers, Rare Books and Manuscripts Division, New York Public Library, pp. 20–21b. Document is the unpublished notes Kennan used during his lecture tours on Siberian exiles (see below). Pagination refers to the second draft.

15 George Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System*, 2 vols. (New York: The Century Co., 1891). Note that the title of an early article by Kennan (“Siberia. The Exiles’ Abode,” *Journal of the American Geographical Society of New York* 14 (1882), pp. 13–68) is misleading; it contains little of substance on the exiles and the article itself is not typical of his writings on this topic.

16 *Free Russia* [American edition] 3:9 (April 1893): back cover. On Kennan’s influence on foreign opinion see Frederick F. Travis, *George Kennan and the American-Russian Relationship, 1865–1924* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1990), p. 156 *et passim*; Thomas M. Barrett, “‘Thrills of Horror’: Siberia and the American Melodramatic Imagination,” in Stolberg, ed., *The Siberian Saga*, pp. 131–144; Taylor Stults, “George Kennan: Russian Specialist of the 1890s,” *Russian Review* 29:3 (1970), pp. 275–285.

17 George Kennan, *Zhizn’ politicheskikh arestantov v russkikh tiur’makh* (Genève: M. Elpidine, 1889); idem, *Poslednee zaiaвление russkikh liberalov*, 2nd ed. (Genève: M. Elpidine, 1890); idem, *Les prisoners [sic] d’état=Russkie gosudarstvennye prestupniki* (Genève: Elpidine, 1891); idem, *Golos za russkii narod: otvet na “Golos za Rossiia”* (Genève: Izd. M. K. Elpidina, 1896). On Elpidin see Alfred Erich Senn, “M. K. Elpidin: Revolutionary Publisher,” *Russian Review* 41:1 (1982), pp. 11–23.

18 George Kennan, *O Rossii: Sibir’ i ssylka: perevod s angliiskago* (Parizh: Izdanie parizhskago sotsial’nago revliutsionnago [sic] literaturnago fonda, 1890); idem, *Sibir’* (Berlin: Z. Kronbakh, 1891). Several houses published the book in Russia in 1906 following removal of censorship restrictions.

with many of them led revolutionaries to regard him as a fellow traveler, so to speak. For example, when the political exile Feliks Volkhovskii managed to escape to Canada, Kennan was one of the first persons he contacted for help. Kennan maintained both an open and clandestine correspondence with political exiles up until the old regime's final years.¹⁹

Kennan had several reasons for writing *Siberia and the Exile System*, not the least of which was mercenary. Another was to compare Russia unfavorably to the United States and thus to highlight "American freedom."²⁰ Moreover, Kennan was a publicity hound and not averse to hyping his relationship to revolutionaries: during a lecture tour he told Yale's student newspaper that he had helped plan Volkhovskii's escape,²¹ a claim his personal correspondence reveals was simply not true. Nonetheless, Kennan sincerely believed in the revolutionaries' cause and publicly expressed an understanding (though not an approval) of their resort to terrorism.²² Moreover, despite the elitist aspirations which caused him to largely ignore, and sometimes even to disparage, those commoners who accounted for the vast bulk of the exile population, Kennan advocated the humane treatment of all prisoners. For example, responding in a letter-to-the-editor to *The Nation's* negative review of his book, he wrote:

...I must express my profound regret that... *The Nation*, which, in times past, has championed the rights of the cruelly treated and the oppressed, should seem to excuse and palliate a state of affairs in Siberia that is worse, in many respects, than I have represented it, that is deplored by all humane officers of the prison and exile department, and that is regarded by every liberal-minded and patriotic Russian as a dark blot upon the history of his country.²³

But apart from his celebrity and renown in America, England, and even France, Kennan frightened St. Petersburg more than did any Russian writer. "The harm caused to the Russian government's interests by Kennan is enormous," the MVD concluded its 1893 report on "untrustworthy foreigners sent abroad without right of return." (Kennan had been forbidden to return to Russia after his book came out.) As of 1893 the revolutionary movement was on the wane, but Petersburg was if anything more wary than ever of foreign *provocateurs*:

19 Volkhovskii letter mentioned in letter of 4 December 1889, "Kennan's Letters to Frost, 1885-1898," Box 6, George Kennan Papers, op. cit. Also, Kennan and his wife maintained a correspondence with exiled revolutionary Ekaterina Breshkovskaia as late as 1910. See Box 3, George Kennan Papers, op. cit. On Kennan's long term influence on revolutionaries see Zhukovskii-Zhuk, "Pamiati Dzhordzha Kennana," *Katora i ssylka* 12 (1924), pp. 314-320; M. D. Karpachev and T. V. Logunova, "Amerikanskii publitsist Dzhordzh Kennan o revoliutsionnom dvizhenii v Rossii," *Istoriia SSSR* 5 (1988), pp. 189-199.

20 Both charges made in a withering review of *Siberia and the Exile System* in *The Nation* (14 January 1892).

21 "George Kennan Interviewed," *The Stentor* (16 February 1891).

22 George Kennan, "Russian Political Exiles," pp. 45-52b, et passim, op. cit.

23 *The Nation* (14 January 1892).

Agitation by this foreigner, who has lost his mind, turns the ideas and views on the "matter of Russian freedom" completely around; he constantly speaks about English-style humanitarianism and has given powerful impetus to the revolutionary movement abroad. This situation, in connection with a completely free press in Great Britain and English public opinion's hostility towards Russia, is becoming, in essence, a major factor in governing the country [Russia], and is receiving special attention...²⁴

During his travels Kennan never visited Sakhalin. All the same, the sum total of his descriptions amounted to an indictment of the exile system, and though American prisons and chain-gangs were as equally dehumanizing for their charges, Kennan succeeded in tarring Russia as a barbaric Other. This construction served the purposes of both American patriots and Russian reformers and revolutionaries.

Among these reformers must be included Anton Chekhov, whose connection to Kennan was tenuous but nonetheless unmistakable. Chekhov mentions Kennan in a letter written 9 March 1890, before he left for Sakhalin, and in another after he had returned and begun writing his book about the penal colony and his experiences there.²⁵ Chekhov denied that he tried to imitate Kennan. But I agree with scholars Frederick Travis and Donald Rayfield that Kennan was a source of inspiration for him.²⁶ Even in the unlikely possibility that he never read Kennan, Chekhov at least belonged to a literati familiar with his work. Indeed, Lev Tolstoi, who received a surprise visit from Kennan at Iasnaia Poliana in 1886, is known to have read Kennan no later than November 1888.²⁷ Chekhov did not personally meet Tolstoi until 1895; but he was in correspondence with him before this, and so if these great writers ever discussed Chekhov's Sakhalin visit, then it is likely that Kennan's name would have been mentioned.

If one series of associations links Kennan to Chekhov, another links him to less savory writers. To counteract Kennan's detrimental publicity, the Russian government sponsored visits by two foreign writers, Englishman Harry De Windt and American Benjamin Howard, each of whom later penned laudatory accounts of the Sakhalin colony. De Windt's *The New Siberia* is the more plausi-

24 A. Miller, Departament Politsii, "O neblagonadezhnykh inostrantsakh, vyslannykh bez-vozvratno za granitsu. O grazhdanine Severo-Amerikanskikh Soedinennykh Shtatov Dzhordzhe Kennane," 26 June 1893. Reproduced in D. A. Kolesnichenko, "Dzhordzh Kennan i tsarskaia okhranka," *Prometheus* 7 (1969), pp. 226-229.

25 A. P. Chekhov, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 12 vols. (Moskva: Gos. Izd-vo khudozh. lit-ry, 1960-64), vol. 11, pp. 200, 520.

26 Travis, *George Kennan*, pp. 232-233; Donald Rayfield, *Chekhov: The Evolution of His Art* (London: Paul Elek, 1975), p. 93; idem, *Anton Chekhov: A Life* (London: Flamingo, 1998), p. 242.

27 Kennan describes this visit at length in "A Visit to Count Tolstoi," in "Kennan Miscellany - Writings by Kennan," Box 6, George Kennan Papers, op. cit. See also L. N. Tolstoi, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 90 vols. (1929-58; rpt. Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1972), vol. 50, p. 5; Travis, *George Kennan*, 140.

ble of the two, albeit written with remarkable detachment, as if he had viewed what he describes in a picture-book rather than personally witnessed it. Like the penal colony's Russian defenders, he exaggerates its positive attributes and consistently patronizes the exiles, such as the group he witnessed in Rykovsk Prison "chatting by the open gateway as contentedly as any group of English yokels."²⁸ Summarizing his wanly optimistic view in a subsequent article for the popular *Fortnightly Review*, De Windt concluded: "Sakhalin possesses so many resources that their development can only be a question of time," and he predicted that exile would soon be abolished anyway.²⁹

Howard's *Prisoners of Russia* is much more lurid and rife with inaccuracies. "The dishes were brought on by another repulsive-looking domestic, resembling the one who had brought me my early tea," he writes of his stay at the governor's house. "She also, I found, was a murderess." Consonant with the times, Howard had a Lombrosian familiarity with the "criminal type," and therefore concluded that "[i]n the faces of some, murder was as visible as if red-hot branding irons had burned and stamped 'Cain' across every feature." To give this simpleton the benefit of the doubt, his factual errors might actually have originated as tall tales by officials whose cynical disdain for the non-Russian-speaking Howard eluded his comprehension. Whatever the case, he fatuously claims that "almost exclusively double murderers" were exiled to Sakhalin; that in 1890 "as many as seven hundred and seventy" men voluntarily accompanied their exiled wives to the island; and that local prostitution was rare.³⁰ Each of these claims stands in direct contradiction to the archival record.

De Windt and Howard both devote long, gossipy passages to their fettering by Sakhalin's top officials, and describe a well-functioning penal colony in which convicts are lucky to be treated as they are. Like the above-mentioned writers, they emphasize Sakhalin's economic successes and potential. But their dehumanizing of the penal population is even more overt and reflects conceptual formulae that were then anachronistic even in Russia, where legalists were citing social factors to explain criminal behavior.³¹

Several years after the appearance of De Windt's and Howard's books another foreign traveler, Englishman Charles H. Hawes, published a memoir of his visit to the island. *In the Uttermost East* is important because it really does not belong to the genre of prison writing that characterizes the other two, but instead is more akin to the Russian and Siberian travel literature that bur-

28 Harry De Windt, *The New Siberia* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1896), p. 124.

29 Harry De Windt, "The Island of Sakhalin," *Fortnightly Review* 61 (January-June 1897), pp. 711-715 [here, p. 715]. Russia did abolish several categories of exile in 1900, but continued deporting penal laborers to Sakhalin.

30 Benjamin Howard, *Prisoners of Russia: A Personal Study of Convict Life in Sakhalin and Siberia* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1902), pp. xxiv, 81, 94, 161, 163.

31 See discussion in Laura Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Siècle Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), ch. 3 et passim.

geoned after serf emancipation. The capacious self-assurance characteristic of well-heeled and -educated pre-WWI British bachelors emboldened Hawes with the wherewithal to jot down his impressions of everything, from flora to fauna to weather, geography, and aboriginals. (To this extent, his book resembles Kennan's, which in addition to being a polemic is also a travel guide.) Hawes's descriptions of exiles are considerably more sympathetic than those of De Windt and Howard, owing in part to the distance he kept between himself and Sakhalin's officials.

Hawes's book appeared in 1904, and admittedly played little if any role in the debates concerning the penal colony before its collapse. But it is important for having combined two literary trends: one sympathetic to convicts as victims of injustice, and another – nearly opposite – one that sensationalized them as outlaws. Both trends are particularly evident in Hawes's account of the killing of the fugitive gang-leader Barratasvili, whom he describes on the one hand as a well-behaved prisoner originally sentenced for forgery, but on the other as "the Robin Hood of Sakhalin."³²

A similar tension between humanizing and sensationalizing Sakhalin's exiles exists in an article by W. C. Chisholm that appeared in 1905 in *Chamber's Journal*, a weekly publication founded in London in 1897. In "Saghalien, the Isle of the Russian Banished," Chisholm puns on Sakhalin's etymological origins in the Manchu word for "black":

Black are the crimes which brought large numbers of the convicts to that "dreary isle of punishment," black in many respects has the administration often been, and black are the prospects of those outcasts of humanity who have been deported to the farthestmost portion of the empire, from whose sea-girt shores there is but the slenderest prospect of return.³³

Chisholm's article is in fact a synopsis of Hawes's book, though it exaggerates the latter's tepid empathy toward exiles. It reflects the impact Kennan's work had by that time made upon Anglophone readers, for Chisholm reconfigures what is essentially a travelogue to make it instead fit into the genre (to which Peter Kropotkin and Lev Deich also contributed³⁴) of Anglophone publications castigating as barbaric Russia's treatment of prisoners.

Therefore, Kennan influenced a number of Anglophone writers, pro and con. But by returning to the first literary series of associations mentioned earlier, the one linking him to Chekhov, we can better see how he influenced domestic criticism within Russia, particularly as it focused on Sakhalin.

32 Charles H. Hawes, *In the Uttermost East* (1904; rpt. New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1970), p. 129.

33 W. C. Chisholm, "Saghalien, the Isle of the Russian Banished," *Chamber's Journal* 8 (April 1905), pp. 301–304 [here, p. 301].

34 P. Kropotkin, *In Russian and French Prisons* (London: Ward and Downey, 1887); idem, *The Terror in Russia: An Appeal to the British Nation* (London: Methuen, 1909); L. G. Deich, *Sixteen Years in Siberia: Some Experiences of a Russian Revolutionist* (London: John Murray, 1903).

CHEKHOV'S SAKHALIN

Anton Chekhov's *Sakhalin Island* (*Ostrov Sakhalin*) is immediately distinguishable for its sympathy towards the exiles. Based on his 1890 visit to the island, the full text of what Natalia Pervukhin has aptly called a "literary investigation" first appeared in *Russian Thought* (*Russkaia mysl'*) in 1895, and was thereafter followed by a series of publications critical of the penal colony – a fact which alone counters Robert Payne's assertion that "Chekhov was never a social reformer."³⁵

Indeed, like Dostoevskii with his *Notes from a Dead House* and, later, Tolstoi with his novel *Resurrection*, Chekhov intended for his work to lead to improvements in the penal system. "Something is being done for the sick these days, but nothing for prisoners," he wrote A. S. Suvorin shortly before leaving for Sakhalin. "Prison management simply doesn't interest our jurists... I only wish that someone more familiar with this business and better able to arouse public interest was going [to Sakhalin]."³⁶

Admittedly, various factors motivated Chekhov's visit,³⁷ but high among them was his basic belief in human justice. "God's world is good," he wrote, concluding a rambling letter from December 1890 to Suvorin:

Only one thing is not good: us. How little justice and humility is in us, how stupidly we understand patriotism!... We, say the newspapers, love our great homeland, but how do we express this love? Instead of knowledge – effrontery and conceit beyond measure; instead of laboring – laziness and swinishness, not justice; and our understanding of honor goes no further than "honoring the uniform," a uniform typically adorning our defendants' docks. Work is necessary, to hell with everything else. Most importantly, there has to be justice, and the rest will come.³⁸

Chekhov's concern with justice and human rights grew still more after he returned from Sakhalin and began sorting through his experiences there.

35 Robert Payne, "Introduction," in Anton Chekhov, *The Island: A Journey to Sakhalin*, trans. Luba and Michael Terpak (1967; rpt. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), p. xxxiv. On the notion of Chekhov's book as a "Literary investigation" see Natalia Pervukhin, "The 'Experiment in Literary Investigation' (Chekhov's Sakhalin and Solzhenitsyn's Gulag)," *The Slavic and East European Journal* 35:4 (1991), pp. 489–502. See also Michael Finke, "The Hero's Descent to the Underworld in Chekhov," *Russian Review* 53:1 (1994), pp. 67–80; Cathy Popkin, "Chekhov as Ethnographer: Epistemological Crisis on Sakhalin Island," *Slavic Review* 51:1 (1992), pp. 36–51; Leonard A. Polakiewicz, "The Russian Prison System as Seen through the Eyes of Chekhov and Dostoevsky," *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 28:1–2 (2001 [2002]), pp. 157–186; Kenneth John Atchity, "Chekhov's Infernal Island," *Research Studies* 36:4 (December 1968), pp. 335–340.

36 Letter dated 9 March 1890, in Chekhov, *Sobranie* 11, p. 399.

37 See Donald Rayfield, *Understanding Chekhov: A Critical Study of Chekhov's Prose and Drama* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1999), pp. 94–95.

38 Letter dated 9 December 1890, in Chekhov, *Sobranie* 11, p. 468.

Chekhov believed that justice is manifested through individuals' treatment of one another and, rather than regarding it as an abstract inalienable right, he saw it as a practical expression of policies informed by notions of Christian humility and brotherly love. *Justice* therefore reads in Chekhovian discourse as an analogy of *love*, and accordingly carries many of the utopian assumptions associated with the latter term. Although Chekhov was not overly concerned with justice as an attribute of law (*pravo*), his assertion that, with it, "the rest will come," suggests an affinity with those Russian liberals who, as Andrzej Walicki writes, "were convinced that the preeminence of law might exist without full political freedom, but not the other way around..."³⁹

As such, Chekhov was not a political activist in the modern sense of this term, because he clearly believed that individual rights would result only from epistemological and behavioral change. His was a goal beyond politics, and therefore much more ambitious than a mere alteration of the power structure. Liberals were proposing that legalism should replace arbitrariness (*proizvol*) as the catchword in Russian governance. But Chekhov believed that justice – as he interpreted the term – would, once it became established as the defining feature of intercourse amongst Russia's citizenry, have a trickledown effect that would succeed in reordering both government and society.

However, like Kennan's oft-repeated invocation of *freedom*, Chekhov's similar devotion to *justice* reflected a naïve faith in a kind of secular nomism. Gradually, however, as a result of his visit to Sakhalin as well as his personal trials, Chekhov's nomistic faith deteriorated to the point that he eventually became, "by implication... a guarded anarchist," writes Rayfield, and filled his later works with "lunar imagery" reflective of a view of the world "as dead and absurd as the moon..."⁴⁰

But this would come later. While still engaged with his project, Chekhov imagined that the type of justice he believed in could be instituted, practically and immediately, if the government became more responsible toward the exilic population. Writing with characteristic self-deprecation to liberal jurist Anatolii F. Koni about the impoverished and exploited children he encountered there, Chekhov added:

Of course, I can't solve the children question. I don't know what to do. But it seems to me you won't do anything with charity and residual prison and other funds; in my view, to make the solution dependent upon charity, which in Russia assumes a happenstance character, and upon residuals, of which there are none, is injurious. I would prefer state funding.⁴¹

39 A. Valitskii [Andrzej Walicki], "Nravstvennost' i pravo v teoriiakh russkikh liberalov kontsa XIX – nachala XX vekov," *Voprosy filosofii* 8 (1991), pp. 25–40 [here, p. 30].

40 Rayfield, *Understanding Chekhov*, pp. 96–97.

41 Letter dated 26 January 1891, in Chekhov, *Sobranie*, vol. 11, p. 478.

Such a recommendation links Chekhov to those late imperial reformers who hoped to persuade the Russian government to behave more like its Western counterparts and begin providing welfare services.⁴² Yet at the same time, Chekhov believed that government officials' recognition of their moral responsibility would be sufficient to inculcate his version of justice. To this end, he intended for *Sakhalin Island* to be a primer, not about prison management in the strict sense, but rather about humility and brotherly love – both sentiments that Chekhov believed could be the foundations for a new kind of penology. By writing that “*Sakhalin [Island]* would do well to outlive me by a hundred years so as to be a literary source and aid for everyone engaged and interested in prison management,”⁴³ Chekhov was targeting not so much the tsarist officials of his day but rather the timeless executors of power in general. His was a universal message that coincidentally would confer upon its tubercular author an extension of life commensurate with the continuing popularity of his book.

Chekhov therefore intended for *Sakhalin Island* to function on three levels: as a literary investigation by which he sought to elevate himself into the ranks occupied by Dostoevskii and Tolstoi; as a fact-driven exposé that would replace “effrontery and conceit” with “knowledge” about Sakhalin's exiles and, as such, present to the educated public an issue (*vopros*) that needed to be solved; and as a work of art, a timeless psalm embodying Chekhov's elaboration and distillation of the Christian values of humility and love. It is primarily this second function, what might be called the book's didactic purpose, upon which this article will now focus.

Chekhov organized *Sakhalin Island* according to the sketch-, or *zapiska*-, style that Dostoevskii had used for *Dead House* and, like Dostoevskii, Chekhov details numerous problems in prison management. The following is typical:

Generally speaking, repressive measures in the struggle against escapes have no future. They are divorced from our legislative ideals, which primarily see punishment as a method of rehabilitation. When all the jail-keep's energy and inventiveness is day by day turned only to keeping the prisoner in difficult physical straits so as to prevent his possible flight, then this is not rehabilitation, and there can be no question that the prisoner is transformed into a beast and the prison into a menagerie.⁴⁴

Similarly, while discussing Sakhalin's exile-settlers, Chekhov opines: “as a matter of fact, it's quite difficult to believe that a settler can build his hut, prepare his fields, and earn his daily bread all at once.”⁴⁵ After challenging this and other long-established assumptions regarding criminals' transformation into farm-

42 See Adele Lindenmeyr, *Poverty is Not a Vice: Charity, Society, and the State in Imperial Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 5–6, p. 143.

43 Letter to Suvorin dated 30 August 1891, in Chekhov, *Sobranie* 11, p. 502.

44 A. P. Chekhov, *Ostrov Sakhalin* (Moskva: Kukushka, 2004), pp. 350–351.

45 Ibid., p. 236.

ers, he adds that exile-settlers are often victimized "due to the dissoluteness and muddle-headedness of clerks and the clumsiness of junior officials..."⁴⁶

Yet, despite its many rational arguments, *Sakhalin Island*'s overall tone is similar to Chekhov's short stories and plays: dispassionate, matter-of-fact, and ironic. There is none of the moral condemnation of a Tolstoi or the hysteria of a Dostoevskii. Chekhov makes no overt political demands. Possibly, he was wary of censorship; but it is more likely that this reflects his abovementioned apoliticism. In either case, it is this lack of political rhetoric that endows *Sakhalin Island* with such moral authority and results in it being an indictment of not only the penal colony but the very assumptions upon which it was founded. Instead of political argument Chekhov offers vignettes of individual exiles that serve to humanize society's castaways and thereby to interrogate the assumptions that led to their banishment and maltreatment. Contemporaries recognized and understood this as a method of social reform. For example, Koni recalled a "[f]eeling of gratitude for the great spiritual satisfaction his works afforded me [and] that elicited an appreciation of not only the artistic but the social contribution connected to his book on Sakhalin."⁴⁷

CHEKHOV'S HEIRS

As mentioned, Chekhov's book inspired several critiques of the penal colony. One of the first was an article by the former director of the Main Prison Administration (GTU), Aleksandr P. Salomon, based on his 1897 inspection of the island and which was, interestingly enough, published in 1901 in the *Prison Herald* (*Tiuremnyi vestnik*) – the GTU's official mouthpiece.⁴⁸ Despite being consigned to the "unofficial section," Salomon's article obviously enjoyed considerable support from leading officials with the Ministry of Justice, to which the GTU was assigned after 1896. To give force to his argument that the penal colony was both founded upon and operating according to false assumptions, Salomon leaned heavily upon Chekhov's descriptive approach, though he was less able than the playwright to contain his outrage. For example, he informed readers that Derbinsk Prison possessed for its 435 inmates only 183 cubic *sazhens* of space, figures that equal a ratio of less than one cubic yard per man. After reporting this data, he went on:

During an inspection of this prison... I found in both its sections such stuffiness, closeness, and foul air that despite persistent requests to familiarize myself with their nighttime arrangements, I had not the strength to tour a single

46 Ibid., p. 238.

47 Anatolii Fedorovich Koni, "Vospominaniia o Chekhove" [excerpted from Anatolii Fedorovich Koni, *Izbrannoe* (Moskva: "Sov. Rossiia," 1989); http://www.lib.ru/MEMUARY/KONI_A_F/chehov.txt#0, accessed 4 Sept. 2006].

48 A. P. Salomon, "O. Sakhalin," *Tiuremnyi vestnik* 1 (1901), pp. 20–53; idem, "O. Sakhalin. Okonchanie," *Tiuremnyi vestnik* 2 (1901), pp. 68–80.

ward, and upon exiting into the fresh air I was unable to rid myself of the indescribably loathsome stench that clung to me.⁴⁹

Salomon gives similar descriptions of conditions faced by medical patients, exile-settlers, and children, and borrowed Chekhov's technique of demonstrating that agriculture was nearly impossible due to the island's soil and climatic conditions. The sum total of this information begged the question of why Petersburg ever believed an agricultural colony could be created there in the first place. "In particular," he writes,

I found the management of affairs on Sakhalin to be inconsistent in all regards; but having been on the island for all of one month I cannot make a definitive judgment as to whether this situation is due to the impossibility of organizing a penal colony in general, or to mistaken leadership and the staffing of local functionaries by unskilled and not always conscientious people.⁵⁰

Here, Salomon uses a traditional trope that suggested personnel, and not policy, could be to blame for the problems on the ground. Admittedly, it was probably necessary for even a former director of the GTU to be politic, and this may also explain why he largely ignored the question of what to do with the island's exile population. His only prescription was that "intensive agriculture" might be possible with the introduction of "sufficient numbers of hired laborers and many livestock – in a word, organized farming, but not Russian peasant agriculture [*fermerskoe, a ne russkoe krest'ianskoe zemlepol'zovanie*]."⁵¹

Two years after Salomon, in 1903, Vlas Doroshevich and Nikolai Novombergskii more pointedly criticized the penal colony. Doroshevich's *Sakhalin (Katorga)* is a collection of the journalist's dispatches from his 1897 visit to the island. It was Doroshevich's best-selling book, going through four editions prior to 1917, and was as a result probably read more widely than Chekhov's book. Except in terms of length, its so called feuilletons are stylistically little different than Dostoevskii's and Chekhov's *zapiski*, and several (such as those on a prison theatrical and exile-settlers' domestic arrangements) almost certainly intentionally mimic descriptions by the earlier authors. Alert to the tastes of his boulevard press readers, Doroshevich was an unapologetically sensationalistic writer. Nonetheless, archival sources verify most of his claims,⁵² and his ability to get even closer than Chekhov to individual convicts renders *Sakhalin* a compelling read.

Doroshevich was, like his forbear, a social reformer insofar as he humanized these exiles and thereby challenged a dehumanizing penology. Yet he also

49 Salomon, "O. Sakhalin," p. 26.

50 Salomon, "O. Sakhalin. Okonchanie," p. 79.

51 Salomon, "O. Sakhalin," p. 52.

52 For example, cf. the accounts of cannibalism in V. M. Doroshevich, *Sakhalin (Katorga)*, 2 vols. (Moskva: I. D. Sytin, 1903) 2, pp. 54–67; and in Rossiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv Dal'nego Vostoka (RGIA DV), f. 702 [Kantseliaria Priamurskogo general-gubernatora 1861–1920], op. 4, d. 296.

resembled Tolstoi, given his passionate digressions against the death penalty, the situation of Sakhalin's female population, and *katorga* itself, which, in his opening pages, he describes as "nothing less than serfdom":

The same forced labor, the same people with no rights whatsoever, the degrading punishments, the same pre-Reform regimen, the endless bureaucratic red tape, the same appraisal of a person as "living inventory," the same ordering around of a person "per discretion," the same cohabitating through contract marriages as under peasant law – based not on desire or attraction but according to directive, such is the convict so viewed like a peasant – all of serfdom's old "accouterments," the compulsory "mincing and shuffling" – it all created a total illusion of that "bygone era."⁵³

The second book of 1903 was Novombergskii's *Sakhalin Island, With an Autobiography and Portrait of the Murderer Feodor Shirokolobov*. This history of the penal colony by a jurist and justice ministry official drew liberally upon, but was more empirical than, the works already mentioned. Novombergskii mercilessly criticized the poor planning and administration of the colony, which he describes as being in a "chaotic state." He analyzed the costs associated with establishing the colony and with subsidizing that majority of exile-settlers who failed to achieve even basic self-sufficiency, which was, as he writes, "*condition sine qua non* from the Sakhalin administration's viewpoint for the privilege of inclusion in the peasantry upon completion of one's term [of punishment]." Even more than Salomon, Novombergskii placed the blame for these problems on Russia's top leaders, caustically opining that "it becomes clear that exile to Sakhalin stands defiant as the elements to some defective system of 'top-down control' [*verkhnee skreplenie*]."⁵⁴

Appended to Novombergskii's book is an autobiography of one of Russia's most notorious criminals. (Doroshevich discusses Shirokolobov throughout his book, calling him "the terror and horror of Sakhalin.") Despite having almost certainly been ghost-written (though it should be mentioned that a surprisingly high proportion of penal laborers was literate), Shirokolobov's autobiography is nonetheless remarkable for being one of the few memoirs by a criminal (*ugolovnyi*) – as opposed to a political – exile. Similar to Chekhov's and Doroshevich's accounts of criminals, it was designed to horrify readers with casual descriptions of multiple murders while at the same time insisting that Shirokolobov and other criminals did not comprise a sub-species of humanity. In other words, the paradoxical intent that characterized Hawes's descriptions of exiles is replicated in this Russian publication. After escaping and remaining at large for some while on Sakhalin, Shirokolobov was captured and chained to a wheelbarrow for five and a half years. Of this time, he writes:

53 Doroshevich, *Sakhalin* 1, p. 14.

54 N[ikolai Iakovlevich] Novombergskii, *Ostrov Sakhalin s prilozheniem avtobiografii i portreta ubiitsy Feodora Shirokolobova* (Sanktpeterburg: Tipografiia Doma Prizreniia Maloletnykh Bednykh, 1903), pp. 4, 5, 26.

I came to the opinion that if I was inhuman from a moral point of view, then I had at least come to *resemble* a man: my punishment turned me into some kind of ridiculous laboring chattel. I would look, look at my spousal wheelbarrow and become absurdly, shamefully bitter. Indeed, not any sort of shameful principle in the sense of bragging, but the shameful shame of a human being. Perhaps it seems improbable that such a sinful monster as I could possess human shame. But it is a shame that people, hastening to judge and not wishing to carefully understand our souls, do not well and truly know us – that is, the criminals, or outcasts, or, finally, the unfortunates [*neschastnye*].⁵⁵

The last work to be considered, A. A. Panov's *Sakhalin as a Colony*, was published in 1905 and therefore, like Hawes's book, had little bearing on the debates concerning the colony. It is nevertheless important for several reasons. First, Panov's choice of title homages Nikolai M. Iadrintsev's *Siberia as a Colony*,⁵⁶ which was first published in 1882 and galvanized Siberia's intelligentsia in vocally opposing the exile system. Second, Panov dedicated his book to Princess Elizaveta A. Naryshkina, whose founding, in 1891, of the Society for the Care of *Katorga* Families reflected an awareness by some aristocrats of the penal system's problems.⁵⁷ What amounts to an appeal by Panov to someone with direct access to government leaders demonstrates that Sakhalin had become a springboard to push for wider reforms.

Third, and most significantly, Panov contextualizes his book within the literary genre discussed here. "Beginning with A. P. Chekhov," he writes, "Sakhalin has repeatedly drawn the attention of the press, and the Russian public has therefore had wide opportunity to become familiar with this distant island's ways of life and mores."⁵⁸ Indeed, like Chekhov, Panov focused upon the plight of Sakhalin's exiles, shared a publisher with Doroshevich, and relied upon Novombergskii's empirical approach. Yet, more than any other author, he lambastes "Sakhalin's relentless panegyrists" and the GTU's "complete ignorance regarding the nature of colonization on Sakhalin..."; witheringly adds that "the colony itself... has in essence not left the planning stage"; and accuses

55 Ibid., p. 247.

56 Cited above.

57 On the *Obshchestvo popecheniia o sem'iakh ssyl'no-katorzhnykh* see Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiskoi Federatsii (GARF), f. 122 [Glavnoe tiur'emnoe upravlenie pri Ministerstve iustitsii 1879–1917], op. 3, d. 325, ll. 44–52, 53–58, 59–62, 73–75, 311–314, 345–362, 602–604; D. A. Dril', *Ssylka i katorga v Rossii (Iz lichnykh nabliudenii vo vremia poezdki v Priamurskii krai i Sibir')* (Sanktpeterburg: Tipografiia Pravitel'stviushchago Senata, 1898), p. 25; Koni, "Vospominaniia o Chekhove." A descendent of the princely Kurakin line, Elizaveta Alekseevna Naryshkina (1848–1928) was the widow of chamberlain (*kamenger*) Anatolii D. Naryshkin and a lady-in-waiting to Empress Alexandra. After the revolution she moved to France. Her memoirs were published as *Under Three Tsars: The Memoirs of the Lady-in-Waiting, Elizabeth Narishkin-Kurakin* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1931).

58 A. A. Panov, *Sakhalin kak koloniia: Ocherki kolonizatsii i sovremennago polozheniia Sakhalina* (Moskva: I. D. Sytin, 1905), p. 2.

the island's administrators of ignoring Petersburg and operating as "something of a little Asian satrapy [*chto-to v rode vostochnago pashalyka*]." ⁵⁹

This phrase highlights the irony that the Russian outpost Butkovskii and other planners had envisaged would "cut" into an alien world of Asiatics had itself become a satrapy by virtue of its own homegrown disdain for criminals as subhumans. As such, Sakhalin, even before the embarrassments occasioned by the war with Japan, revealed the delusions informing the government's imperial aspirations.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the genealogy from Chekhov to Panov (which itself had connections to Kennan) produced an increasingly sophisticated literary canon that directed its fire ever higher up the government's bastions. Panov in particular redirected attention from Sakhalin's indefensible economics and exiles' supposed iniquity to focus squarely on government maladministration and callousness. The advent of investigatory journalism combined with a burgeoning sense of social justice conditioned Doroshevich, Novombergskii, and others to challenge opaque decision-making processes that created the Sakhalin catastrophe. Censorship and class propriety prevented these critics from going so far as to name names in their indictments, but they nonetheless imprinted new meaning onto the penal colony, so that it inspired a questioning of, rather than a cowering before, political authority.

As such, Sakhalin came to be re-signified as a *cause célèbre* – a glaring example of government mismanagement that had profoundly deleterious consequences for tens of thousands of people who, though mostly criminals, were increasingly regarded with sympathy thanks to the efforts of Chekhov and others. Sakhalin came to represent two notions that were interrelated and gathering steam during the late imperial period: first, that tsarism could no longer be trusted to do the right thing; second, that everyone, even convicted criminals, should be accorded basic human rights. Critiques of Sakhalin indicate that Russians no longer thought of themselves as subjects whose primary duty it was to serve their ruler; instead, they were increasingly regarding themselves as citizens whose rights it was the government's primary duty to guarantee.

Sakhalin's penal colony collapsed after the island was invaded and its southern half annexed by Japan. Therefore, during the interim leading up to February 1917, it no longer stood as a foremost example of the regime's failings and abuse of its subjects. However, it remains that Petersburg neglected to heed the significance of the widespread revulsion toward the colony that resulted from Chekhov and his successors' publications. Between 1905 and 1917, opportunities to abolish or significantly improve the exile system were not only missed, the problems associated with it worsened in many regards.

59 Ibid., pp. 65, 69, 70, 93.

These problems continued to attract criticism and public attention. Hence, in the same way that Attica still does in the United States, or even Devil's Island does in France, Sakhalin lived on in Russia's cultural consciousness as a symbol of tyranny. Indeed, the fact that Doroshevich's 1903 book has, since 1991, appeared in a least five separate editions indicates that, to this day, Sakhalin holds a certain resonance among contemporary Russians. As we have seen, the penal colony's iconic significance has its origins in the writings of Chekhov and a number of other critics who questioned the official discourse and used their own literary abilities to re-signify the colony as a *cause célèbre*.