

Preface

When the Soviet Union fell in December 1991, an obvious question was what Russia's historical experience held by way of precedents for market-oriented reform. The most salient precedent, dredged from my memory of a high school course in European history, was Prime Minister Petr Stolypin's agrarian reforms, enabling peasants to transform "commune" property into private property. Looking around to get a clearer idea of what these reforms amounted to, I found a wealth of scholarly material. But I found neither a summary account of the story, aimed at the intelligent citizen with an interest in property rights and the development of liberal democracy, nor any sustained application of the fundamental insights of the modern law-and-economics movement. Thus this book.

I started the project with two intuitions that appeared to be in conflict. On the one hand, voluntary "reform" from above seemed unlikely to much advance liberal democracy. The logic of that intuition is simple. Liberal democracy appears to represent, above all, a diffusion of power. As new social forces gradually acquire enough negotiating strength, they can extract concessions that solidify their strength and institutionalize their accretion of power. At the same time, however, elites or autocrats holding predominant power can hardly be expected to give it up voluntarily. On the other hand, the Stolypin reforms appeared to be both voluntary and a serious step toward liberal democracy. Study of the reforms seemed likely to force me to qualify at least one of these intuitions—and indeed has.

I've been able to rely on the publications—and in important cases the advice, insight and suggestions—of Western scholars. Although I've also read a good deal of the secondary Russian-language sources, I have not attempted serious archival research. My study of Russian primary sources has focused almost entirely on the key legal documents—above all, the ukaz of November 9, 1906 and the statutes of June 14, 1910 and May 29, 1911. I include as an appendix my translation of the most important provisions.

NOTE ON ROMANIZATION

I have used the Library of Congress system, except for (1) making no attempt to distinguish between е, ё, and э; (2) using i for й; (3) omitting soft and hard signs; and (4) using standard English spelling for familiar Russian names or places, and making a few adjustments to match romanization in quoted titles.