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SPERANSKY, MIKHAIL (1772–1839), Russian politician.

Mikhail Speransky was one of the most important Russian statesmen of the nineteenth century. Born on 12 January (1 January, old style) 1772 in Chertkutino, Vladimir Province, the son of a village priest, Speransky attended the Vladimir ecclesiastical seminary. In 1790 he was one of the first chosen to study at the new Alexander Nevsky Seminary in St. Petersburg. A brilliant student, he taught at the academy for a time after graduation until becoming secretary to Prince Alexei Kurakin in 1796, beginning a meteoric rise within the Russian bureaucracy. In 1798 he married Elizabeth Stephens, an English woman, with whom he had a daughter. After his wife's death in 1799, Speransky focused almost entirely on his work, leading an isolated life both socially and politically.

In 1801 Alexander I became emperor. Between 1801 and 1812, during the early—and generally considered to be liberal—years of Alexander's reign, Speransky's outstanding talents as a clear and compelling writer were increasingly in demand. In 1802 Speransky became the secretary of the minister of the interior, Prince Kochubei; in 1807 Alexander I made Speransky his personal assistant. In 1802 Speransky wrote his first important political work, "On the Fundamental Laws of the State," in which he argued that the powers of the monarchy needed to be limited by society, or, more specifically, by a self-aware and powerful nobility. In what is generally considered to be his most important reform program, the Plan of 1809, Speransky wrote that the spirit of the times called for a constitutional monarchy kept in check by public opinion. A legislative body, the State Duma, would assist in this process. These views made Speransky many high-placed enemies, and com-

bined with his social isolation and somewhat difficult personality led to his exile in March 1812.

In exile first in Nizhny Novgorod, then in the more remote town of Perm, Speransky worked for his rehabilitation. His appointment as governor of Penza Province in 1816 began his second career. Reorganizing the Penza bureaucracy prepared Speransky for the task of reforming the Siberian administration, which he undertook after being appointed governor-general of Siberia in 1819. Speransky's Siberian reforms, enacted in 1822, integrated the region into the Russian Empire and rationalized the administration. In 1821 he was allowed to return to St. Petersburg, where he oversaw the Siberian reforms and made plans for reorganizing local administration that, while not enacted, influenced later projects.

After Alexander I's death, in December 1825, a group of high-ranking officers staged a revolt against the new emperor, Nicholas I. During the inquiry following the failure of the coup, several of the "Decembrist" officers stated that Speransky had influenced them. Speransky was one of the participants in and organizers of the trial against the Decembrists, and called for harsh penalties.

After this show of loyalty to Nicholas, Speransky headed the effort to codify Russian laws. During his exile, Speransky had been influenced by the historical school of law. This school originated in Germany and argued that each nation developed according to its own essence, which was embodied in historical legal institutions and practices. The historical approach provided a foundation for Speransky's codification of Russian law, based on organizing and publishing the laws and edicts issued since the prior codification of 1649. Forty-five volumes of the *Complete Collection of the Laws of the Russian Empire* were issued in 1830; the fifteen-volume *Digest of the Laws*, which contained laws currently in effect, was published between 1832 and 1839. While the *Complete Collection of Laws* gave the texts of nearly all laws and edicts issued between 1649 and 1825, the *Digest* organized laws currently in effect by topic. Speransky incorporated a significant number of the concepts he put forth in the Plan of 1809 into the *Digest*. The codification was one of the main accomplishments of Nicholas's reign. After the codification was complete, Speransky

traveled abroad, acted as a member of the State Council, and lectured to the tsarevitch, the future Alexander II, on law. He was made a count of the Russian Empire in January 1839 and died in St. Petersburg on 23 February (11 February, old style) 1839.

See also **Alexander I**; **Law, Theories of**; **Nicholas I**; **Siberia**.

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SPIRITUALISM. Modern spiritualism began in the spring of 1848, with the appearance of a pamphlet describing a series of uncanny tapping noises in the Fox family home, a tiny wood-frame house in Hydesville, New York. These “raps,” which appeared to emanate from a variety of hard surfaces, always occurred in the presence of the two youngest Fox daughters, eleven-year-old Kate and fourteen-year-old Margaret. The Fox family quickly discovered that the force producing these raps could answer questions by tapping in a simple alphabetic code. Through this cumbersome method, the noise-producing force declared itself to be the disembodied soul of a murdered peddler. As word of this strange phenomenon spread, visitors flocked to the house.

Within a few weeks, Kate and Margaret discovered they could produce these noises anywhere, and on behalf of a vast array of different spirits. These raps were a telegraphic code through which any disembodied soul could send dispatches to loved ones still living. As word of this development spread, others followed the example of the Fox girls, discovering their own varied talents as mediums: trance speech, table-moving, and automatic writing emerged alongside raps as means of relaying spirit messages. The most gifted mediums, many of

whom were women, became celebrities whose exploits were reported in a burgeoning spiritualist press. Soon, it was possible to speak of modern spiritualism, a fully-fledged movement founded on the belief that the living could enter into regular communication with the dead.

In the early 1850s, this new movement traversed the Atlantic. Visiting American mediums caused a sensation in Great Britain, inspiring a nationwide interest in these phenomena. In elite circles, celebrity mediums impressed their audiences with spectacular manifestations. Beginning in 1855, for example, the American-born Daniel Dunglas Home (1833–1886) became famous for his ability to produce luminous spirit hands, to divine intimate secrets about strangers and their deceased relatives, to cause musical instruments to play of their own accord, and to hold himself suspended in mid-air. Aristocrats and eminent writers like Charles Dickens, Anthony and Rose Trollope, William Makepeace Thackeray, Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, John Ruskin, and Edward Bulwer-Lytton attended these gatherings. British spiritualism also flourished in humbler circumstances, where visionary communications tended to be more important than spectacular phenomena. Beginning in the mid-1850s, skilled workers formed spiritualist societies in industrial regions like Yorkshire, and in the burgeoning manufacturing cities of Manchester, Nottingham, Belfast, and Glasgow.

Spiritualism spread rapidly to the Continent as well. By 1853, séances had become a topic of fashionable discussion in France and Germany. As in Britain, these strange phenomena captured the interest of both elite and ordinary people. The author Victor Hugo received whole poems through an animated table, the French empress Eugénie (r. 1853–1871) figured among the glamorous guests at Home’s séances, and the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer published an essay on “Spirit Sight.” At the same time, pamphlets aimed at large audiences, containing instructions on how to produce the new phenomena and explanations of their significance, sold briskly.

Despite this initial burst of popularity, however, it took nearly a decade for organized spiritualism to emerge fully on the Continent—it began in the late 1850s in France, and in the 1870s traveled across the Rhine. By the 1880s, spiritualist circles were