STUDIES IN EUROPEAN HISTORY

VI

MIKHAIL N. KATKOV

A Political Biography

1818-1887

by

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PREFACE

This study of the political thought and attitude of Mikhail Nikiforovich Katkov (1818-1887) is intended as an introduction to a much-neglected yet important aspect of nineteenth-century Russian intellectual history - conservative Westernism. For the student of Russian thought and politics, this little-known ideological direction has interest because of the dilemma between modernization and traditionalism which rests at its very root. For the economic historian, Katkov's projects provide some striking prototypes of the general plans created half a century later by Stolypin. The student of the Russian revolutionary movement will find that Katkov was one of the first to realize the full implications of the alienated intelligentsia, but he will also find that Katkov's responses to the problem were either unacceptable to the government or later lacked the imagination and vigor necessary to provide a viable alternative to it. Those interested in the question of nationalism will find that a study of Katkov's ideological transformation from an aesthetic individualist to an integral nationalist is of special interest, both with respect to the subject's absence of strong cross-identities and with respect to the question of the necessity of a militant catalyst - war, civil war, or rebellion - to stimulate strong national feelings.

I have used a modified Library of Congress system of transliteration, that is without diacritical marks.

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to Professor Nicholas V. Riasanovsky for the constructive criticism which he offered throughout. I also am especially thankful to Professor Martin Malia, who gave much of his limited time in Europe to read and insightfully criticize the work. Professor Gregory Grossman deserves my sincere thanks for the helpful advice he offered.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- Belinskii, "Pis'ma" V. G. Belinskii, "Pis'ma", Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, XI (Moscow, 1956).
- Katkov, Sobranie M. N. Katkov, Sobranie peredovykh statei Moskovskikh vedomostei
- Katkov-Valuev Correspondence [V. Mustafin, ed.], "Mikhail Nikiforovich Katkov i graf Petr Aleksandrovich Valuev v ikh perepiske (1863-1879)", Russkaia starina.
- LOZRV "Literaturnoe obozrenie i zametki", section of Russkii vestnik.
- OZ Otechestvennyia zapiski.
- RV Russkii vestnik.
- SL "Sovremennaia letopis" of the Russkii vestnik.
- M Moscow.
- St. P. St. Petersburg.

INTRODUCTION

Early nineteenth-century Russian thought was strongly influenced by the literary and philosophical traditions of German romanticism in general and Idealistic philosophy in particular. Westernism, Slavophilism and Official Nationality indicate the three primary directions which this thought has taken.1 While the Russian ideological directions had not the depth, breadth, or seminal ideas of the German philosophical schools, they nevertheless had a profound influence upon the course not only of society, but of politics as well. What the young Russians of the thirties and forties lacked in sophistication, they made up for in their exuberance about and enchantment with the Hegelian and Schellingian heritage, which their German contemporaries already were beginning to view in a more jaded manner. The historiography of the three Russian directions has generally tended, by implication if not explicitly, to group them in terms of a political spectrum with Westernism on the "Left" and Official Nationality on the "Right". While there is admittedly much justification in such an approach as well as valuable insight to be gained from it, still this view of the problem does tend to obfuscate the thought of certain figures, such as Mikhail Nikiforovich Katkov (1818-1887). A translator and critic of romantic literature, a student of German Idealistic philosophy, an academician and philologist, his importance remains as an editor and publicist. Katkov was a Westerner, but he was also an incipient "conservative Westerner", whose course of development oscillated between convergence with, and divergence from his more liberal and radical colleagues, who also looked to the West for Russia's inspiration.

¹ A renewed interest in this problem by American historians is evidenced by three recent works: Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, Russia and the West in the Teaching of the Slavophiles (Cambridge, Mass., 1952); Riasanovsky, Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia (Berkeley, 1959); and Martin Malia, Alexander Herzen and the Birth of Russian Socialism (Cambridge, Mass., 1961).

Most students of Russian intellectual and political history are accustomed to view Katkov as a symbol of nationalism and reaction rather than as a figure whose own thoughts might be worthy of investigation. This judgment is only half true. Katkov's ideas were very much his own within the Russian context; it would be quite incorrect to consider him as the mouthpiece for this or that group and hence unworthy of serious study because he was not an ideological fountainhead. Some of his more interesting concepts were within the same tradition which Stolypin followed several decades later. As a conservative Westerner, Katkov has much to offer the student of the Octobrist and similar movements at the end of the imperial regime. The political dilemma faced by the members of these movements was not fundamentally different from that encountered by Katkov during the late nineteenth century. The failure of Katkov and those like-minded individuals to cope effectively with the problems of the intelligentsia and the national minorities provided a prelude to the failure of the Right in such magnified problems after the turn of the century. For the student of nationalism, a study of Katkov's thought might prove interesting as a case study in the transformation of aesthetic individualism into integral nationalism, given the proper militant catalyst - war, civil war, or rebellion.

The earlier full-length treatment of Katkov, and the only one which can be recognized as a standard work on the man and his activities,² was composed hastily a year after the subject's death. Tatishchev's work was primarily responsible for the judgment that Katkov was an "opportunist", whose so-called "national direction" could not be taken seriously, but attested to the publicist's political immaturity and shallow convictions. Such a judgment, which Tatishchev at times himself contradicts,³ only tends to obscure the importance of ideas as determinants in Katkov's life. Opportunist, in the sense in which Tatishchev used the word, would indicate that Katkov was interested only in self-aggrandizement at the expense of principles. Such a view, while correctly calling attention to the publicist's inflated ego, neglects his persistence in pursuing principles at the expense of popularity in both state and society. In any case, Nevedenskii's conclusions have had a lasting effect upon later judgments of Katkov, which remain largely distorted.

² S. Nevedenskii [pseud. for S. S. Tatishchev], Katkov i ego vremia (St. Petersburg, 1888).

³ Nevedenskii, op. cit., pp. 106-107, cf. pp. 511ff: in the first instance Katkov's "opportunism" and lack of "ideinost" is emphasized; in the second a whole chapter is devoted to his change of "convictions".

On the other hand, the work of Katkov's friend and editor of the Russian Messenger, which Katkov himself published, while most valuable as a memoir, is a classic apologia and does not continue in detail past 1866, after which time the publicist's popularity rapidly declined.4 Other minor treatments of Katkov tend to be little more than projections of the polemics in which the publicist so vigorously engaged that they were not buried with him: for instance the work of Sementkovskii expresses in essay form the liberal view of a Katkov who was not only an opportunist, but one of the worst kind. Sementkovskii's primary hypothesis is that Katkov never had an idea of his own, not to speak of a direction, but rather made skillful use of those attitudes, trends, and programs which he felt had the best chance of success; according to this extreme view, "he almost always sang another's tune". 5 The refutation of this hypothesis will be made clear in the course of this book; let it only be noted at this point that some of Sementkovskii's conclusions are quite mistaken: for instance, the assertion that Katkov developed his antipathy for the intelligentsia by observing Bismarck's reaction belies the whole of Katkov's attitudes and thought. From the period of the late thirties and early forties, he became disenchanted with Belinskii and Bakunin; there is also the evidence of his polemics with Chernyshevskii, Dobroliubov, and Herzen, all of which took place before Bismarck's rise to power.6 The classic Polonophile denunciation of Katkov remains Grégoire Liwoff's very witty but unsubstantial biography.7 By the turn of the century, one historian of the Russian intellectual scene found himself in such despair when he tried to understand Katkov, that he dismissed the journalist with the remark: "It will be singularly difficult for the future historian and psychologist to follow the many-sided tergiversations of Katkovian internal and foreign policy, and to determine the principal kernel of his aspirations." 8 More recently, scholars less willing to be satisfied with the conclusion that Katkov was a hopeless "opportunist" or a riddle wrapped in an ineluctable enigma have seized on the argument that the publicist falls within that familiar category of persons who were liberal in youth and conservative

⁴ N. A. Liubimov, Mikhail Nikiforovich Katkov i ego istoricheskaia zasluga (St. P., 1889).

⁵ R. I. Sementkovskii, M. N. Katkov: ego zhizn' i literaturnaia deiatel'nost' (St. P., 1892), p. 51.

⁶ Ibid., p. 68.

⁷ Grégoire Liwoff, Michel Katkoff et son époque: quelques pages d'histoire contemporaine en Russie, 1855-1887 (Paris, 1887).

⁸ Ivan Ivanov, Istoriia russkoi kritiki (St. P., 1900), p. 492.

or even reactionary in dotage. With this hypothesis somehow held valid without proof, they set off to search for the "turning points" - was it the Polish Rebellion that "changed" his thought, or was it the Vera Zasulich affair? This line of reasoning, while useful in explaining certain variations in approach on various political questions of the time, still did not provide convincing explanations for the more basic rationale of his thought and behavior. It was applied and rejected by this student, Rather it was found that a certain kind of logic did in fact run through Katkov's thought: that he was a man guided by certain ideas, which were not easily cast off; that as a conservative Westerner he undertook to an ever-increasing degree to influence not only public opinion, but the government directly, and that his motto - the unity of Russia - cannot be dismissed as a rootless direction because it lacks the "social content" characteristic of Herzen or the religious feeling of Khomiakov. Rather, Katkov's motto must be understood mainly within the more precise context of integral nationalism, which derived largely from the writings of the publicist himself, Ivan Aksakov, Iurii Samarin, Danilevskii, and others.

Katkov's nationalism is of special interest to the intellectual historian because it represents the development from an aesthetic individualism (a self-identity) to an integral nationalism (a Volk-identity) without the conflicting cross-identities of religion, social class or even state that characterized the development of so many others. The only phenomenon of a nature which might have entered Katkov's thought as a challenge to his national identity as Great Russian was his attachment to the locale of Moscow; and this came to be more of a symbol of Russia in Katkov's mind than of a local particularistic identification.

The whole of Katkov's thought was inbued with the romantic-idealistic tradition. Even his Westernism, which was manifested by an eagerness to incorporate Western techniques, was characterized by the urge to absorb everything possible within the solvent of the self and the nation. But this organic absorption stopped short of any ideas which were recognized to be predicated fundamentally upon the principles of the Enlightenment. While wishing to see Russia develop as a European nation, Katkov was unwilling to deny that Russia too had a recognized Eigenart which must be preserved. With this tradition of conservative Westernism, Katkov in many respects represents the precursor of that ill-fated conservative Westerner of tsarist Russia's last days – Stolypin.

A CONSERVATIVE WESTERNER

"If one looks at the universe and has to choose between one of two extreme attitudes, it is easier to become a mystic than a nihilist. We are everywhere surrounded by miracles."

M. N. Katkov, "Sochineniia v stikhakh i proze grafini S. F. Tolstoi", Otechestvennyia zapiski (1840), Vol. XII, Bk. 10, Sec. V, p. 17.

"Only from Peter's time did Russia arise as a mighty gigantic state; only from Peter's time did the Russian people become a nation..."

M. N. Katkov, "Pesni russkago naroda, izd. Sakharovym", Otechestvennyia zapiski (1839), Vol. IV, Bk. 6, Sec. VI, p. 8.

Mikhail Nikiforovich Katkov was born in Moscow on November 1, 1818, in the same year as Turgenev and Alexander II; in later life, the publicist was to point out the coincidence to his coeval, the Emperor, as if it bore some providential significance. The paternal branch of the family was relatively undistinguished, and there is little known about it. Nikifor Vasil'evich Katkov, Mikhail's father, descended from one of those intermediate strata in the Russian social complex known as the kantseliarskie chinovniki, the lay officials who managed the extensive Church properties in the pre-Petrine era. The descendants of this group, who themselves branched off into various pursuits, some unconnected with the Church, were known as arkhiereiskie deti, the children of officials attached to the hierarchy. Nikifor Vasil'evich had no official connection with the Church, but was rather a minor functionary in the Moscow provincial administration. He had risen to the ninth position,

¹ "Vozhd' reaktsii 60-80-kh godov (Pis'ma Katkova Aleksandru II i Aleksandru III)", Byloe, No. 4 (26), Oct. 1917, p. 4.

² The oral family tradition was recounted by Mr. George Katkov (the greatnephew of Mikhail Nikiforovich Katkov), Fellow of St. Antony's College, Oxford. See also Biograficheskii slovar' professorov i prepodavetelei imperatorskago moskovskago universiteta (1755-1855) (Moscow, 1855), Pt. I, 381-3.

that of titular councillor, in Peter's Table of Ranks, which conferred gentry status only for life, and not upon one's descendants. Hence, Mikhail Nikiforovich was born without noble title. Nikifor Vasil'evich died when his oldest son, Mikhail, was five, and his youngest son, Mefodii, was three. The problem of raising the two children then fell upon their mother, Varvara Ekimovna *née* Tulaeva; she was forced temporarily to give the younger boy to his aunt, Vera, while retaining custody of her first-born, Mikhail. Such was the poverty of the widowed Varvara Ekimovna that, with the aid of her patroness, she was forced to find employment as wardress of a women's prison.³

Unfortunately, there is very little available material about the child-hood of Mikhail Nikiforovich. It is known that his time was divided between his mother's quarters at the prison on the one hand, and the mansions of various noble families, especially that of Princess Anna Borisovna Meshcherskaia, on the other. That there may have been an "identity problem" for young Mikhail is suggested by the many references to the world of escape and fantasy, both in his own recollections and those of a little girl with whom he used to play, and who was later to become the Iakovlev family memorialist, Tatiana Petrovna Passek.⁴

The relationship between the Princess Anna Borisovna and Mikhail Katkov's mother, Varvara Ekimovna, was especially close, because the Princess was in fact Varvara's foster-mother upon the death of Mikhail's maternal grandparents, the Tulaevs. Indeed, Anna Borisovna performed the same role for the Iakovlev children, including Herzen's father, Ivan Alekseevich Iakovlev. As Mikhail began to grow older, he visited other gentry homes on holidays – the Iakovlevs', the Khovanskiis' and the Golokhvastovs' – as well as that of his future in-laws, the Shalikovs'. Though Prince Peter Ivanovich Shalikov, a minor sentimentalist poet, was the titular head of the poor but noble family, it was not he, but his daughter Natalia Petrovna – Mikhail's future sister-in-law – who was best known in the literary salons of Moscow society; her stories and novelettes were written under the nom de plume, E. Narskaia. She herself was several years older than Mikhail and was said to have

Vospominaniia T. P. Passek ("Iz dal'nikh let"), 2nd ed. (St. P., 1906), III, p. 288.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 287-291. "Iz pisem M. N. Katkova k materi i bratu", Russkii vestnik [hereafter RV] (Aug. 1897), [art. cited hereafter "Katkov k materi"], p. 161: "I was very unfortunate, remembering our childhood years", he wrote to his brother later, "being separated from people and from real social relationships, uninterrupted reading early led me to play at dream and fantasy".

found the child "well-read and educated beyond his years," 5 Unfortunately, however, there is no available evidence to indicate which authors most interested the young Katkov before he entered gymnasium. His mother, however, was a well-educated woman by the standards of the day, and gave Mikhail his first lessons in Russian, French, and arithmetic. At the age of eight, he entered the Preobrazhenskii Orphans' Institute; his secondary education was conducted in two of Russia's most distinguished institutions - the First Moscow Gymnasium (before its transformation into the "Moscow Gentry Institute" by the ukaz of February 22, 1833), and the well-known pension of Professor M. G. Pavlov.⁶ By the Statute of 1828, the gymnasia throughout Russia assumed a greater classical character, and were limited to the children of the gentry and civil officials; because of his father's official position. Mikhail was eligible to enter the First Moscow Gymnasium, in which he studied Latin and Greek extensively, as well as religion, Russian, mathematics or geography, and the modern languages.

Katkov's education at the First Moscow Gymnasium was steeped in the classical tradition; and it may reasonably be assumed he entered gymnasium with a well-developed taste for the romantic literature which bulked large in the libraries of the various gentry families whom he visited. However, when he entered the pension of Professor Pavlov, he walked into not an ordinary educational institution, but a "system" in its own right. Pavlov, at the time, was one of the foremost proponents of Schellingian philosophy, which meant a primary emphasis upon his Naturphilosophie, with all of its pantheistic implications. For young Katkov, as for his fellows at Pavlov's, it meant an opportunity to reconcile the whole world of romanticism, with its emphasis upon "feelings", with the world of thought - of science (nauka) - which was then seen in terms of Schelling's system. Schelling's Idealism, first introduced to Katkov through Professor Pavlov, was, as will be seen, reinforced through his experiences in the kruzhok (circle) founded by Stankevich, by his lecture courses at the university, and finally by his sojourn in Germany where he personally attended Schelling's courses at Berlin and where he became personally acquainted with the philoso-

Preface to "Katkov k materi", p. 134.

⁶ Biograficheskii slovar' ... moskovskago univ..., Pt. I, 381-3. Nicholas Hans, History of Russian Educational Policy (London, 1931), pp. 68-72. V. Rozhdestvenskii, Istoricheskii obzor deiatel'nosti ministerstva narodnogo prosveshcheniia, 1802-1902 (St. P., 1902), pp. 194-203. Passek, op. cit., p. 291.

⁷ For a picture of the Moscow gentry around 1825 see M. O. Gershenzon, *Griboedovskaia Moskva*, 2nd rev. ed. (Moscow, 1916).

pher.8 Katkov probably became acquainted with Stankevich while they both attended Pavlov's pension, though the latter was several years older than Katkov and was already a university student while Katkov was still a gimnasist. When Katkov actually became affiliated with the Stankevich kruzhok remains in doubt; however, there is some indication that this occured only in the mid-thirties, after Katkov had already entered the university (1834), and after the circle had already become cloyed with Schelling and had moved on to an interest in Hegel. If this were the case, then Katkov's affiliation was contemporary with that of Kavelin, the future liberal Westerner, and Kudriavtsev, Katkov's future colleague in the editorship of the Russian Messenger (Russkii vestnik).9

In 1834, Mikhail Katkov successfully passed the university entrance examination and enrolled in the philological faculty. At the university he found a further reinforcement for the Schellingian outlook of Pavlov's system: Davydov, Nadezhdin, Pogodin, and Shevyrëv, all in their own way, and despite the prohibition of philosophy courses per se, were able to introduce the tenor and content of German Idealism into their entire approach to literature, history, philology, and other less related subjects. While Katkov heard their lectures, he became the disciple of none, and indeed developed an implacable enmity toward Shevyrëv and an oscillating relationship with Pogodin, for whom he served as a translator as well as a student. Pogodin commented upon Katkov and his contemporaries in his final year, 1838: "first place is held by Iurii Samarin. He has much knowledge and possesses the means to attain more. . . . " Second place, Pogodin wrote, was held collectively by a few students including Katkov, whom he listed as "first in the love of knowledge" and added that "he possesses much".10

But like many young students of the time, Katkov's main interest centered not in the strictly controlled lecture halls, but in the intimate comaraderie of the *kruzhok*, whose adherents were not under the watchful eye of the government inspectors, but enjoyed the freedom of the com-

⁸ P. V. Annenkov, "N. V. Stankevich", in Vospominaniia i kriticheskiia ocherki (St. P., 1881), vol. III.

For the development of Schellingian thought in early nineteenth-century Russia, see Alexandre Koyré, La philosophie et le problème national en Russie au début du XIXe siècle (Paris, 1929), and V. Sechkarev, Schellings Einfluss in der russischen Literatur der 20er und 30er Jahre des XIX. Jahrhunderts (Leipzig, 1939). The profound influence of romanticism and Idealism (especially Schelling) on the thought of Pogodin and Shevyrëv is indicated in Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, "Pogodin and Shevyrëv in Russian Intellectual History", in Russian Thought and Politics ('s-Gravenhage, 1957).

¹⁰ Nikolai Barsukov, Zhizn' i trudy M. P. Pogodina (St. P., 1891), V, 139.

pany of close friends whom they could trust and with whom they could share their deepest personal as well as philosophical and literary experiences. The Stankevich kruzhok, as opposed to that of Herzen and Ogarey, was characterized by its more purely apolitical and speculative nature. The prevalence of German Idealism in the Stankevich circle was satirized by Turgenev's well-known quip, "ein kruzhok in der Stadt Moskau". The "old timers" in the circle - Belinskii, Bakunin, Botkin, and K. Aksakov - looked upon Katkov as a "junior" disciple of the group even though he was not appreciably younger than the others. This is partly explained by the fact that Katkov remained infatuated with Schellingian philosophy, and especially Schellings' "rationalization of reality" at a time when Belinskii and Bakunin had developed a strong interest in Hegel. Katkov, very much an "aesthetic individualist" and quite a Schellingian at heart, chose as his contribution to the group that aspect of Hegelian thought which was least contradictory to his Schellingian preconceptions - he placed great emphasis upon the aesthetic expression of the individual genius, as well as upon the reconciliation of the subjective and the objective in the highest stage of self-consciousness, the Absolute. Hegelian aesthetics were quite inoffensive to the sensitive youth, and involved little of the concepts of struggle implicit in the Hegelian dialectic. Why Katkov was so averse to follow the lead of the older members of the group toward Hegel, toward the dialectic of struggle, and finally toward the ethos of civic responsibility in art, was never made entirely explicit, either by Katkov or his contemporaries. One can only take note of his recurrent aversion to struggle as an idea, to alienation as a concept, and to his continuous and increasing sympathy for the idea of reconciliation and finally organic unity in the deepest national sense. From the known circumstances of his childhood, spent on the margin of Moscow gentry society, from the loss of his father at a very early age, and the necessity in his youth and manhood to assume the role of "father" toward his mother and younger brother, one might suggest that his proclivity toward Schellingian "reconciliation", and later toward a mania for "unity" was the expression of a deep-seated psychological "identity problem". However, until more evidence concerning Katkov's childhood becomes available, this suggestion must remain very tentative.11

Katkov's translation of Hegelian aesthetics is discussed in Herbert E. Bowman, Vissarion Belinskii, 1811-1848... (Cambridge, Mass., 1954), pp. 96, 102. 152. For Belinskii's immediate reaction to Katkov's work see V. G. Belinskii, "Pis'ma", in Polnoe sobranie sochinenii (Moscow, 1956), XI [hereafter Belinskii, "Pis'ma"], p. 189.

Personal relations between Belinskii and Katkov were not all steady. and indeed vacillated more than between most adherents of the kruzhok. Katkov probably resented the inferior position which he was forced to assume as a "junior" member, but it would also appear that he reacted early against Belinskii's "reconciliation with reality", albeit a conservative principle, because it threatened to shatter Katkov's world of Idealism in its most purely speculative form. Unfortunately, the available evidence on the relationship comes from sources other than Katkov. It appears that Katkov had no wish to remember either his childhood or student days and it seems that he was ill-disposed as a diarist: but Belinskii's letters accurately portray the other side of the relationship. As early as 1837, Belinskii recalled how he was at first ill-disposed toward Katkov, how he "took some kind of vile satisfaction should I hear anything against him".12 This was during the time when Katkov was engaged in his translation not only of Hegel's aesthetics, but of the work of a minor Hegelian, also on the same theme - that of H. T. Roetscher, Das Verhältniss der Philosophie der Kunst und der Kritik zum einzelnen Kunstwerk. In the meanwhile, Bakunin, representing the essential direction of the kruzhok, translated Hegel's Gymnasium Lectures, which were farther removed from Schellingian tradition, and even more removed from the earlier ecstatic prekrasnodushie (the Russian equivalent of the Schillerian die schöne Seele), which Katkov still found completely captivating, but which Belinskii felt was not only passé but immature.13 Yet it was in these years that Katkov not only immersed himself in Schellingian Idealism, but demonstrated no mean talent as a translator of romantic literature, which aside from his wellknown translation of Romeo and Juliet, included Heine's Salamanca, Die Wacht, Die Grenadieren and William Ratcliff, among others. Among other German romantic poets whom Katkov translated was Friedrich Rückert; and together with I. I. Panaev and M. A. Iazykov, he translated James Fenimore Cooper's The Pathfinder (rendered as Putevoditel' v pustyne, ili Ozero-more). 14 Katkov's literary criticism also expressed his romanticism; and under the influence of such incipient romantic-nationalism as was to be seen in Heine and Rückert, he was inspired to express himself in much the same vein in his criticism of

¹² Ibid., p. 189.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 399, 436, 444, 447, 448, and passim.

¹⁴ D. D. Iazykov, "Obzor zhizni i trudov pokoinykh russkikh pisatelei: vyp. 7 – russkie pisateli, umershie v 1887", in *Bibliograficheskiia zapiski*, No. 2 (Feb., 1892), pp. 33-36, which includes a complete bibliography of Katkov's works written in the late thirties and early forties.