

The Decembrists

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The design of the Masonic Order has never been to facilitate political aims, either individually or as a group. Nevertheless, that its teachings have been used as a platform for such cannot be disputed. We saw this with the American Revolution. However, what must be kept in mind is that the Order simply instills in its members a sense of trust and truth. In other words, members are obligated to “meet on the level” and be truthful and trustworthy with each other, and with all mankind.

Although these “qualities” as it were, should be a “given” in human relationships, they are not, and the result is conflict in every sense of that word.

The five individuals celebrated on this stamp were all Freemasons. However, in the course of events they left the Order. The following is from “Freemasonry in Russia” by W.M. Lans (MP Vol 18, No 7, March 1962, page 4, and Vol. 19, No. 3, November 1962, page 6, supplement by Marshall Loke):

Through the Napoleonic wars many young [Russian Freemason] officers come in contact with the ideas of the French Revolution. After their return to Russia, they tried to encourage political activity by the lodges, and when the old guard was not interested, out of disappointment many turned their backs to Freemasonry. Pestel, Muraviev and others let themselves be removed from the list of members of the Lodge, and joined secret societies which aimed for political revolution in Russia.

The five men honored became the leaders of an army of 3,000 men which tried to stop Nicholas (later Nicholas I) from ascending to the throne of Russia. A revolt took place on December 26, 1825 (thus the name “Decembrists”). The rebellion failed and all five were hanged (July 26, 1826).

I am sure there are many opinions as to the justification of the revolt, however, the postage stamp (issued in 1950) likely testifies to the opinion of the majority of the Russian people.

Whatever the case, one noted historian stated, “the reign of Nicholas I was a catastrophic failure in both domestic and foreign policy,” It appears the “Decembrists” were somehow on the “inside track.”



Stamp portraits from left to right: 1) Kondraty I. Ryleev, initiated in 1820, Lodge Etoile Flamboyante; 2) Piotr Kachowski, Lodge Amis du Nord; 3) Pavel I. Pestel, initiated in 1812, Lodge Les Amis Reunis, later a member of Lodge Syphinx, and Lodge Zu denk drei Tugenden; 4) Sergej I. Muraviev-Apostel, initiated 1817, Lodge Trois Vertus; 5) Mikhail Pavlovich Bestuzhev-Ryumin, Lodge unknown. The first three lodges are shown as being in St. Petersburg, Russia; no city shown for the other.

We know with certainty that Alexander I (father of Nicholas I) who died in 1825 was a Freemason, but he was evidently very suspicious of such organizations. In 1801 he banned all secret societies, but rescinded the prohibition in 1803. He then banned Freemasonry in 1822 due to concerns of the political power of some lodges. We can see here that the Masonic Order was “underground” during the time of the “Decembrists.”



Alexander I

Russian royalty under the next ruler, Nicholas II, was totally eradicated in 1918 with the assassination of the Czar and his entire family (Russian Revolution). We can reasonably conclude that Freemasons acting individually were involved in this movement, but it had nothing to do with the Masonic Order per se.

Freemasonry in Russia today is allowed and is still alive, but marginally. There are about 39 lodges with about 1,100 members.

(Russia #1536, 96)