

RUSSIAN SOCIETY

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PETER THE GREAT REFORMS RUSSIA

Peter the Great ruled Russia as tsar from 1682 until 1725. A huge man, Peter pushed his government into many new directions. He brutally repressed protest, executing certain army mutineers personally. He moved vigorously in war, winning new territory in the Baltic region, where he located a new westward-looking capital he modestly called St. Petersburg. With its military success, Russia was on its way to becoming a major European power; it was already a growing empire in Central Asia.

Peter was also eager to update Russia's administration and economy, which he saw as essential for military purposes and to establish Russian prestige and position in the wider European arena. His measures were both symbolic and real: He enforced Western-style dress on his *boyars* (the nobles) and required them to cut off their Mongol-style beards. He developed a major iron industry to serve as a basis for armaments production and to avoid Russian dependence on the West in this crucial sector.

The following selections show a number of Peter's initiatives to reform Russia and bring it in line with Western patterns. In these reforms Peter sets up an administrative council to improve the direction of the state bureaucracy and expand its functions. He works to improve education, particularly of the nobility, and to facilitate manufacturing as well. These reforms, in sum, give a good picture of the directions in which the tsar was pushing his vast empire.

Peter's reforms also suggest important links with authoritarian political trends in Russia, including a willingness to regiment ordinary workers and peasants. While other European rulers at this time, such as Louis XIV in France, were claiming new powers in the name of military goals, Peter seemed unusually free to order his nobility about and command their service. He was not interested in aspects of Western politics such as parliaments that stressed restraints on the monarch. Not surprisingly, then, Peter's vision of a Western-

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Not for the good of his people; for the army & Russian "prestige."

ized Russia proved highly selective, as he found certain aspects of the Russian tradition eminently useful. Peter's reforms must be interpreted in terms of how much they changed, but also in terms of their confirmation of distinctive features of the Russian state and society.

Peter the Great clearly illustrates a reform process from the top down. How do you think Russians at various levels would have reacted? From what you can judge by these documents, was Peter moving Russia in a useful direction?

PETER THE GREAT

I. DECREES ON THE DUTIES OF THE SENATE

This *ukaz* [decree] should be made known. We have decreed that during our absence administration of the country is to be [in the hands of] the Governing Senate [Peter then names its new members].

no election, dah!

Each *gubernia* [region] is to send two officials to advise the Senate on judicial and legislative matters. . . .

In our absence the Senate is charged by this *ukaz* with the following:

1. To establish a just court, to deprive unjust judges of their offices and of all their property, and to administer the same treatment to all slanderers. - *No critics*
2. To supervise governmental expenditures throughout the country and cancel unnecessary and, above all, useless things.
3. To collect as much money as possible because money is the artery of war.
4. To recruit young noblemen for officer training, especially those who try to evade it; also to select about 1000 educated *boyars* for the same purpose.
5. To reform letters of exchange and keep these in one place.
6. To take inventory of goods leased to offices or *gubernias*.
7. To farm out the salt trade in an effort to receive some profit [for the state].
8. To organize a good company and assign to it the China trade.
9. To increase trade with Persia and by all possible means to attract in great numbers Armenians [to that trade]. To organize inspectors and inform them of their responsibilities.

II. DECREES ON COMPULSORY EDUCATION OF THE RUSSIAN NOBILITY (JANUARY 12 AND FEBRUARY 28, 1714)

Send to every *gubernia* [region] some persons from mathematical schools to teach the children of the nobility—except those of freeholders and government clerks—mathematics and geometry; as a penalty [for evasion] establish a rule that no one will be allowed to marry unless he learns these [subjects]. Inform all prelates to issue no marriage certificates to those who are ordered to go to schools. . . .

The Great Sovereign has decreed: in all *gubernias* children between the ages of ten and fifteen of the nobility, of government clerks, and of lesser officials,

except those of freeholders, must be taught mathematics and some geometry. Toward that end, students should be sent from mathematical schools [as teachers], several into each *gubernia*, to prelates and to renowned monasteries to establish schools. During their instruction these teachers should be given food and financial remuneration of three *altyns* and two *dengas* per day from *gubernia* revenues set aside for that purpose by personal orders of His Imperial Majesty. No fees should be collected from students. When they have mastered the material, they should then be given certificates written in their own handwriting. When the students are released they ought to pay one ruble each for their training. Without these certificates they should not be allowed to marry nor receive marriage certificates.

III. AN INSTRUCTION TO RUSSIAN STUDENTS ABROAD STUDYING NAVIGATION

Standards-based?

1. Learn [how to draw] plans and charts and how to use the compass and other naval indicators.
2. [Learn] how to navigate a vessel in battle as well as in a simple maneuver, and learn how to use all appropriate tools and instruments; namely, sails, ropes, and oars, and the like matters, on row boats and other vessels.
3. Discover as much as possible how to put ships to sea during a naval battle. Those who cannot succeed in this effort must diligently ascertain what action should be taken by the vessels that do and those that do not put to sea during such a situation [naval battle]. Obtain from [foreign] naval officers written statements, bearing their signatures and seals, of how adequately you [Russian students] are prepared for [naval] duties.
4. If, upon his return, anyone wishes to receive [from the Tsar] greater favors for himself, he should learn, in addition to the above enumerated instructions, how to construct those vessels aboard which he would like to demonstrate his skills.
5. Upon his return to Moscow, every [foreign-trained Russian] should bring with him at his own expense, for which he will later be reimbursed, at least two experienced masters of naval science. They [the returnees] will be assigned soldiers, one soldier per returnee, to teach them [what they have learned abroad]. And if they do not wish to accept soldiers they may teach their acquaintances or their own people. The treasury will pay for transportation and maintenance of soldiers. And if anyone other than soldiers learns [the art of navigation] the treasury will pay 100 rubles for the maintenance of every such individual. . . .

IV. A DECREE ON THE RIGHT OF FACTORIES TO BUY VILLAGES (JANUARY 18, 1721)

Previous decrees have denied merchants the right to obtain villages. This prohibition was instituted because those people, outside their business, did not have any establishments that could be of any use to the state. Nowadays, thanks to Our decrees, as every one can see, many merchants have companies and many have succeeded in establishing new enterprises for the benefit of the state; namely: silver,

copper, iron, coal and the like, as well as silk, linen, and woolen industries, many of which have begun operations. As a result, by this Our *ukaz* aimed at the increase of factories. We permit the nobility as well as merchants to freely purchase villages for these factories, with the sanction of the Mining and Manufacturing College, under one condition: that these villages be always integral parts of these factories. Consequently, neither the nobility nor merchants may sell or mortgage these villages without the factories . . . and should someone decide to sell these villages with the factories because of pressing needs, it must be done with the permission of the Mining and Manufacturing College. And whoever violates this procedure will have his possessions confiscated.

And should someone try to establish a small factory for the sake of appearance in order to purchase a village, such an entrepreneur should not be allowed to purchase anything. The Mining and Manufacturing College should adhere to this rule very strictly. Should such a thing happen, those responsible for it should be deprived of all their movable and immovable property.

Against corruption

V. A DECREE ON THE FOUNDING OF THE ACADEMY (JANUARY 28, 1724)

His Imperial Majesty decreed the establishment of an academy, wherein languages as well as other sciences and important arts could be taught, and where books could be translated. On January 22 [1724], during his stay in the Winter Palace, His Majesty approved the project for the Academy, and with his own hand signed a decree that stipulates that the Academy's budget of 24,912 rubles annually should come from revenues from custom dues and export-import license fees collecting in the following cities: Narva, Dorpat, Pernov and Arensburg. . . .

Usually two kinds of institutions are used in organizing arts and sciences. One is known as a University; the other as an Academy or society of arts and sciences.

1. A University is an association of learned individuals who teach the young people the development of such distinguished sciences as theology and jurisprudence (the legal skill), and medicine and philosophy. An Academy, on the other hand, is an association of learned and skilled people who not only know their subjects to the same degree [as their counterparts in the University] but who, in addition, improve and develop them through research and inventions. They have no obligation to teach others.
2. While the Academy consists of the same scientific disciplines and has the same members as the University, these two institutions, in other states, have no connection between themselves in training many other well-qualified people who could organize different societies. This is done to prevent interference into the activity of the Academy, whose sole task is to improve arts and sciences through theoretical research that would benefit professors as well as students of universities. Freed from the pressure of research, universities can concentrate on educating the young people.
3. Now that an institution aimed at the cultivation of arts and sciences is to be chartered in Russia, there is no need to follow the practice that is accepted in other states. It is essential to take into account the existing

- circumstances of this state [Russia], consider [the quality of Russian] teachers and students, and organize such an institution that would not only immediately increase the glory of this [Russian] state through the development of sciences, but would also, through teaching and dissemination [of knowledge], benefit the people [of Russia] in the future.
4. These two aims will not be realized if the Academy of Sciences alone is chartered, because while the Academy may try to promote and disseminate arts and sciences, these will not spread among the people. The establishment of a university will do even less, simply because there are no elementary schools, gymnasia or seminaries [in Russia] where young people could learn the fundamentals before studying more advanced subjects [at the University] (to make themselves useful.) It is therefore inconceivable that under these circumstances a university would be of some value [to Russia].
5. Consequently what is needed most [in Russia] is the establishment of an institution that would consist of the most learned people, who, in turn, would be willing: (a) to promote and perfect the sciences while at the same time, wherever possible, be willing (b) to give public instruction to young people (if they feel the latter are qualified) and (c) instruct some people individually so that they in turn could train young people [of Russia] in the fundamental principles of all sciences.

"useful"
-pragmatism

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What were the main purposes of Peter's reforms?
2. What relationship between tsar and nobility did the reforms suggest?
3. What kind of economy was Peter seeking to build? For what reasons?
4. How did Peter's moves relate to changes occurring in Western European politics and culture around 1700? What major trends did Peter ignore?
5. Did Peter's reforms make Russian society more or less like that of Western Europe at the time?
6. In what ways did Russian reactions to the West differ from those of other parts of the world in the early modern period, and why?