FROM SUPPLICATION TO REVOLUTION

A Documentary Social History of Imperial Russia

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A. NOBILITY

Although many nobles failed to participate in preparing instructions or electing deputies, those who did took full advantage of the opportunity to voice their concerns and aspirations. The instructions varied considerably in length and detail, but for so diverse a group they nonetheless had much in common. Most notably, they rigorously eschewed any hint of political demands; indeed, they sugar-coated all their special requests with obsequious syntax (use of the interrogative conditional: “could it not be”), a diction of abject servility (“most humble slave”), and fatuous praise of the empress. To be sure, the nobles’ instructions did urge reform in provincial administration (including corporate noble election of local officials), but carefully limited the request to local administration and justified the proposal by referring to the incontrovertible need for improvements in local government and justice. If slow in advancing political claims, the nobles had no such inhibition in other issues and requested a host of special concessions—in particular, restrictions on the ennoblement of commoners, guarantee of the nobles’ monopoly on serf ownership, recognition of their commercial and economic interests, and privileges in the production and sale of spirits. Some also urged the government to broaden public services in such areas as roadways and education, but these demands took a distinctly lower priority in their agenda.

The instruction from Moscow (doc. 1), as sycophantic and florid as any, was particularly noteworthy for its enlightened tone, reflected not only in its references to European models but also in its professed—if disingenuous—desire to protect serfs from the hardships of estate division. The Moscow nobles also made a formal distinction between the corporate interests common to the entire rank and those specific to their district, thereby revealing a higher corporate consciousness transcending region and internal stratification. It is also significant that the Moscow nobles—like their provincial brethren—were unabashed to request commercial rights not only for their serfs but also for themselves, with no apparent concern for the derogation that troubled their European peers.

The instruction of Mikhailov District in Riazan province (doc. 2),
less prolix but no less obsequious than that from Moscow, is a fairly representative statement from the provincial nobility. Shorn of references to Europe, concise but comprehensive, it bluntly sought to protect noble privilege—the monopoly in serf ownership, the unrestricted authority to sell and relocate serfs, and the right to market all that their estates produced. Their request for land surveys makes for rather tedious reading, but the issue was obviously one of intense concern for provincial noblemen, provoking endless feuds, litigation and occasional land wars. Like peers in other parts of the empire, the nobles in Mikhailov urged a thorough-going reform in local administration and the election of noble marshals.

The laconic instruction from Kozel’skh District in Kaluga Province (doc. 3) contains not only the customary medley of requests but also an unusually vigorous assertion of corporate rights—above all, the proposal that the nobles elect the district governor [voevoda]. Nor were these nobles in Kozel’skh shy in other matters, as they requested the elimination of state duties on their serfs and the return of military recruits to their former squires. But it is important to emphasize how they draped this avarice in a clever appeal to raison d’état: approval of their requests would serve “the general welfare” and cause no harm to the state treasury. This line of argument, which recurs frequently in the instructions, was partly a rhetorical device (to dispel any hint of demand), but also constituted a realistic recognition that no private demand was likely to prevail if overtly contrary to state interest. The Kozel’skh instruction also contained an interesting critique of contemporary industrialists and factory-owners, who, though few in number, enjoyed the special protection of the state. Disgruntled over the privilege and influence of these entrepreneurs, the nobles of Kozel’skh sought to have local courts handle disputes involving factory-owners and nobles—doubtlessly because of their confidence that local judges would be more amenable to noble influence.

I. Instruction from the Nobility of Moscow [1767]

... The nobility of Moscow shares, in the same high degree as all true sons of Russia, the ubiquitous and most reverent gratitude to our most merciful empress for her work and achievements, which arise and grow stronger with each passing day. But it is now Her Majesty’s intention to give [our] fatherland a new set of fundamental laws—based upon natural justice, fully consonant with the changes in the circumstances of government and the mores of the different ranks of citizens. [This new deed] will stand as a solid and permanent monument to the wisdom, humanitarianism, and the incomparable glory of Her Imperial Majesty, not only among us and our heirs, but also in the very annals of the entire world. Therefore, with feelings of ecstatic jubilation, the nobility of Moscow deem it their first and sacred duty to fall to Her Majesty’s feet and proclaim their unanimous and most reverent gratitude as well as their solemn belief that the entire nobility—from the smallest to the greatest—regard the completion of this great enterprise as a blessing for themselves and for future generations. This [undertaking] was obviously inspired in the great soul of Catherine II by divine providence. Thus the nobility of Moscow joins all Her Imperial Majesty’s happy and loyal subjects in due praise of Her virtuous, good deeds, and further expresses their most fervent wish and prayer to the Lord that Her Majesty live to a grand old age. Her life will remain forever the period of rejuvenation and enlightenment in our beloved fatherland.

From the foregoing, our deputy can conclude for himself what his first task is to be when he approaches the throne. But as for the presentation of the nobility’s needs to the future commission that will draft a new law code, these may be divided into two natural components: those common to the entire Russian nobility and those specific to the district of Moscow. With regard to the latter category, we propose to explain certain disorders and difficulties that we have collectively reviewed and acknowledged. Nevertheless, we have complete confidence in our deputy’s well-known zeal and concern for the benefit and welfare of his fellow nobles; inspired by our instructions in these matters and by his own perspicacity, he will not fail at the proper moment to petition the Commission and, as general laws are adopted for the entire state, he will strive in cooperation and collaboration with others toward all which could serve the special benefit of the district of Moscow without harm to others.

With respect to the general needs of the whole Russian nobility, it is to be remembered that the nobility dates back to the earliest times. On the one hand, it is a corps that forms the power, defense and in-
dependence of the state (and hence the firmness of its sovereigns' rule); on the other hand, it entrusts its own privileges and security in the inviolability and steadfastness of the autocrats' power. Hence, in accordance with this natural mutual relationship, the nobility has always left the establishment and preservation of these [prerogatives] to the full discretion and good will of its autocrats. It seems that, finding ourselves now under the good rule of the Great Catherine, we should follow this praiseworthy example of our forefathers and, with full and unbounded confidence, leave all the new statutes and decrees that pertain to the nobility to the wise, perceptive and motherly discretion and judgment of Her Imperial Majesty. Each day her governance is distinguished by new blessings for her subjects and all mankind, and she has undertaken to crown these glorious deeds with the world's greatest deed—the establishment of our own prosperity on firm, solid foundations through laws that are appropriate to new times and mores.

Of course her great spirit, with respect to the essential matters of popular welfare, embraces everything that is necessary, proper and useful for the nobility in the general framework of the state system. Indeed, her spirit by itself is inclined not only to satisfy, but even to surpass the legitimate desires of the nobility. But Her Imperial Majesty, from a surfeit of mercy, designed to issue a published manifesto that each rank of her subjects present their needs for the drafting of a new law code. Hence [we shall comply with this order] for the sake of proper and exact fulfillment of Her Majesty’s will, and still more for the sake of our future heirs’ everlasting memory of that great, unlimited trust and the sincere loyalty of our forefathers. [These feelings] have been inspired by the monarch's indescribable generosity [as she] instructed them to submit to the throne of their true mother and sovereign all those needs, which they—through agreement among themselves—could only recognize as truly general and essential. [This instruction] does not in the least deal with general state institutions and statutes, which require the collective agreement of various parts of the state administration and the various peoples subordinate to it; nor has it dealt with government finances, which are always to be treated and managed by superior state authorities as the times, circumstances and needs warrant. We empower our deputy to transmit and represent at the time and proper place the following articles which pertain directly to the condition of the nobility, and in a seemingly fashion to petition that these be incorporated into the state laws in harmonious and unified agreement with the general statutes on all the inhabitants of various ranks in our fatherland. [We request:]

1. That the content of the rights and privileges inherent in and proper to the nobility be precisely explained; and that a fundamental law be issued once and for all to determine who may enjoy these rights and privileges and in what manner one may henceforth enter the noble rank through an exercise of the autocrat’s authority.

2. That ownership rights to personal, family and acquired properties be precisely defined, and that the law clarify the owners’ degree of discretion and authority in bequeathing this property to kinsmen and others by will and testament.

3. That a clear and precise statute regulate the inheritance of the nobility’s moveable and immovable properties that were acquired through inheritance, marriage and contractual purchase; and that it be issued without any supplementary explanatory codicils in order to preclude any misunderstandings, superfluous litigation and perverse interpretation by the courts.

4. That a decree be issued to protect [seigniorial] peasants and to avoid the disputes that so frequently occur among landowners when a populated estate is divided up at inheritance. If it is really impossible to prevent the subdivision of an individual hamlet into separate parts, then at least the divisions of a village by households should not be left to the caprice of the heirs. Rather, the division of households should start on one side of the village and run in orderly rows, while the apportionment of land to heirs should be made according to its worth. But division of individual households should be categorically prohibited.

5. That, in the event a husband and wife are legally separated, a statute should determine the division of personally owned land and also the rearing of any children produced by the marriage. At the same time, a law should also determine guardianship both for minors (up to a specified age) and for anyone else who may require this.

6. That, bearing in mind other well-ordered Christian parts of Europe, each landowner be given the rightful authority to bequeath, at his own discretion, some of his personal real estate and moveable property as indivisible inheritance; that one be empowered to give, to whomever and whatever one wishes and to prescribe the order for
the transmission of this property from one generation to the next. Our earlier law on entailed estates (known as “the articles of 1714”) borrowed something from similar models in certain European countries. But that decree did not survive, of course, because it restricted the landowner’s will in the narrowest terms, requiring that he give all the immovable property (the most important property of the Russian nobility) to a single person, to be chosen, admittedly, at the testator’s discretion. The present order recognizes three different types of landed property: (a) clan property, acquired by blood lineage from one’s parents; (b) property acquired fortuitously from another family branch through marriage or kinship (from childless relatives); and (c) personal property acquired by the landowner himself. It seems both possible and fair (according to natural reason) to establish the special legal right of the owner to dispose of these types of property, as noted above, more or less as he wishes. In that way the true aim and benefits to the state, sought by the decree of 1714, will be attained.

7. That a precise government statute be promulgated once and for all as to who may buy and sell villages and in what manner. The aim is to eliminate and avoid in the future the sales now transacted under various forms and pretexts, without clear rights and legal basis. In addition, the deputy is to make a particular effort (and to petition Her Imperial Majesty for an act of the monarch’s generosity and justness) to have the current ten-percent tax on the sale of immovable property abolished. This has hitherto been a great burden on the property of each citizen and has impeded the circulation of landed estates that is so necessary in a state—especially at the present, joyous time when nobles are moving from their home areas to other regions. May it please Her Imperial Majesty to set aside no more than a tenth of these [new lands to the state] for the benefit of the empire?

8. That, with respect to serfs and other people, it be ordered that these not be dealt with according to current kinship, but be returned to serfowners in accordance with the 1719 poll-tax census (as the law now requires). This will settle the matter once and for all, especially if it is deemed appropriate to destroy the old cadastres to eliminate altogether the basis for any new changes.

9. That a statute of limitations be established in landholding matters. Otherwise, these will forever come up for re-adjudication in the future, causing confusion in justice and in the property rights of everyone.

10. That the nobility be allowed to sell, wherever they wish, the agricultural products from their estates, to erect and operate factories and manufactories, to engage in domestic and foreign trade (both wholesale and retail), and to undertake every kind of commercial venture, with the stipulation, however, that they bear all the rights and obligations pertaining to the establishment and operation of commercial activity of townspeople’s enterprises in the empire. With respect to these needs (which pertain equally to the entire Russian nobility), the true benefit of the fatherland and the establishment of a permanent order make it desirable that new decrees and laws—on each citizen’s property rights and inheritance, but also on the nobility’s rights and privileges—be solemnly confirmed by the sovereign’s mercy and the sanctity of the imperial word for undeviating, permanent implementation in the future.

It remains here to cite the particular needs of Moscow district, which consists chiefly in the following requests to Her Imperial Majesty:

11. That the district nobility be permitted to elect from their number one or more commissars, who will assume this duty voluntarily, be replaced every year or two, and receive their support from the community. This office would attend to the following: (a) resolve minor disputes between nobles and other inhabitants of the district—e.g., cultivation of land outside one’s property boundary, taking trees from someone else’s woods, harvesting the grain of others, and taking other people’s grass and hay; (2) make an orderly judicial investigation when an act of violence, offense or murder has occurred (together with the nearest inhabitants, and immediately after some incident has occurred or as soon as someone demands it), and to report the findings to appropriate government authorities. This is the most convenient way to reduce the slowness of litigation and to protect the injured party from unnecessary red-tape; (3) accompany troops passing through the district and assign them to quarters. Moreover, he is to see that military people not inflict needless burdens and injury on local inhabitants; if such occurs, he is to report it immediately to the chief commander for corrective action.

12. That the present shortcomings in Moscow district with regard to prosecution and punishment of those squires who reside on their
estates rather than in the towns be eliminated and be corrected in the future. While those residing in towns fall under the authority of the judicial office, the others do not; hence there is nowhere to petition and obtain justice against squires living in rural areas.

13. That, to increase the livestock and fertilization required for agriculture, nobles be permitted to distill spirits and brew beer for personal consumption in any quantity they wish; and that they be able to sell the excess for a set price at a place designated by the state.

14. That the governor be directed, with respect to the maintenance of roads, to expend funds not only on villages along primary roads, but proportionately for the entire district. However, due attention should always be given to the amount of benefit accruing to settlements on the primary roads.

15. That the nobility in Moscow and contiguous central provinces be granted, through imperial mercy, the establishment of two institutions in this capital [Moscow] for the education of noble girls (one for young, another for older girls) and also a cadet corps for young boys. Such an institution has already been established in St. Petersburg and has begun to show its true benefits. As for the capital endowment required to establish and maintain these institutions, the nobility will gladly agree to levy an assessment on themselves (based upon their fixed assets) and, in addition, each year will pay a specific sum for the children enrolled in these institutions.

16. That the Moscow River be dredged to permit the unhindered transit of ships from Kolomna; and, especially, that a canal be built in the area of Marchuga. The requisite capital for this can be raised from an assessment on passing ships and will not constitute a burden.

17. That the regular petty levies still assessed on gentry estates (these will upon occasion be noted during the deliberations of the Commission) no longer be collected, but be completely abolished and annulled; and that the sums so raised be made part of the general state revenues (so that the state treasury, for its part, not suffer a loss) and incorporated in the poll tax—the simplest, purest assessment upon the nobility [through their serfs]. This will avert and eliminate superfluous bureaucratic red-tape and be of particular benefit to rural inhabitants. . . . (A proposal to erect a monument in honor of the empress is deleted—ed.)

2. Instruction from the Nobility of Mikhailov District (Riazan Province) [1767]

Her Imperial Majesty, our magnanimous mother and sovereign, through her wisdom and work has opened the path and unlocked the door to the chapel of true prosperity in life. As the means to raise all her subjects [to this condition] and keep them there forever, she had a manifesto published on the preparation of a draft law code, with the intention that, once confirmed, it will remain permanent and inviolate for all future generations. As loyal subjects with pure hearts, we will construct an altar for her; here will burn an eternal flame of loyalty, zeal and love that will forever inspire our future progeny.

We firmly believe that because of Her Imperial Majesty’s amazing perspicacity in human affairs and love for the fatherland (and to her own immortal glory), she will give sacred orders for the drafting of the new law code. According to these rules, a clear and immutable law will be compiled that, for all times and circumstances, will preserve, defend and protect the honor, life and property of sons of the fatherland; extirpate all false denunciations and injustice; protect the weak from oppression by the strong, and the poor from the rich; not suffer the innocent to be condemned as guilty or give legal protection to the guilty. Each will enjoy in reality what is appropriate to his station in society, without infringement. As a result, all the numerous peoples of this vast empire will live in prosperity and tranquility, just as children live in peace in the home of a good father. Beyond this, so far as our feeble minds can discern, there is nothing further to be desired—save the most humble request that this newly established law be more expeditiously confirmed and reaffirm the hereditary rights of us Russian sons of Her Imperial Majesty (our protectress and mother). We have not the slightest doubt that the new law code being drafted will bring order to justice and punishment and thereby be beneficial to the entire state. But so that, in this memorable moment given by the Lord, particular shortcomings in our own internal order pertaining to the nobility and our peasants
be corrected, with Her Imperial Majesty's permission we make bold
to state these and to request most humbly of Her Imperial Majesty
the following:

1. [We request] that the nobility permanently have a marshal
(with four assistants), to be replaced through biennial elections, on
the same basis established as in the imperial manifesto for the elec-
tion of a marshal and deputies to draft this instruction.

2. This marshal and his assistants should hold court and set pen-
alties for disputes and lawsuits involving nobles, their people and
their peasants in all matters (save criminal offenses), in accordance
with the new law code, for all petty matters (less than ten rubles)
and through oral procedures (recorded, however, in a journal). In sig-
ficant cases, the judicial process is to be in written documents and
subject to appeals as determined by Her Imperial Majesty. The plain-
tiff must explain everything in his claim; the court is to accept no
supplementary depositions; correspondingly, the defendant is not
to write more than one statement in reply.

3. When this noble court issues a summons, at the plaintiff's re-
quest, for a defendant to appear (or send a legal representative) in
a fixed period of time, he will be found guilty if he fails to appear.
The only exception is for defendants in state service, who may re-
spond in the original court of venue; the same applies to nobles not
in state service. In the event that they do not want the noble court
to judge these matters, then either the plaintiff or the defendant may
request that the case be decided in the same place as before. If,
however, someone does not respond [to a court summons] within
the prescribed period, he forfeits the right to a change of venue for
his reply to the accusation.

4. If a noble, his servant, or [his] peasant has a dispute with a
landowner from a neighboring district, in this case the courts from
both districts are to investigate and adjudicate the matter jointly. For
this purpose, set aside several days each year for the heads of both
districts to meet in one city to resolve such cases.

5. The court is to be in session in the city from 1 November to
1 May. Petitions may be received until 1 February; thereafter abso-
lutely no new petitions for any dispute are to be accepted in order
that all petitions be resolved in the same year they are filed. If this
[rule] is violated, the marshal and his assistants not only will never
be reelected, but also will be held in contempt by their peers. When

new elections are held, the previous officials are to give an account-
ning to local nobles and, if they perform their duties well, will receive
the approbation of the entire community. In addition, [these officials]
are to act as guardians for [orphans] minors in the district.

6. Since many nobles own villages in several different districts,
as a consequence, not only is no one available to hold office, but
there are also very few nobles to make the selection (to judge from
the number of landowners assembled at the present election). So
that each district henceforth know how many landowners are avail-
able to hold office and participate in elections, could it not most
mercifully be ordered that each noble declare the district in which
he wishes to hold franchise and be eligible for office? Such a regis-
tration of nobles in one district deprives no one of the right to own
villages in other districts and to enjoy privileges equal to others.
This arrangement will enable the nobility, who are dispersed through-
out the state, to constitute a noble community in each district.

7. These district lists of nobles are to be compiled by the marshals
and submitted by their deputies to the Legislative Commission. The
lists are to include the names of those landowners who send written
notification or file in person. For those men whose noble status is
suspect and cannot be clearly demonstrated, the procedure (to avoid
further investigations) is to include in the noble lists all current
landowners whose grandfathers held an officer's rank. If the grand-
father did not hold this rank, put the landowner on separate lists so
that no one not born to noble status may receive this rank without
a patent from the monarch.

8. Hereafter, if a landowner comes to a district by inheriting or
purchasing villages, and if he was not previously registered in an-
other district, and if he did not receive a patent of nobility from
the monarch, then—even if he was a person of high rank—do not
enter his name into the lists of nobility for the district without a
personal decree from Her Imperial Majesty.

9. [We request] that nobles and peasants be permitted to bring
grain (as well as all that grown and produced in the villages) to the
cities and markets to sell wholesale and retail from carts during an
entire trading day. But they are not to have their own shops in
the cities for such sales; nor are they to engage in commerce and be
admitted to ports. The trade in shops and foreign commerce is to
be reserved for merchants.
10. We request that, except for the poll tax, landowners and their serfs henceforth be exempt from the miscellaneous petty levies assessed by government chancelleries in towns—i.e., that they not pay the state assessments on mills, bathhouses, fisheries, and leases on lands and woods. This will free them from bureaucratic red-tape in the towns, and from chancellery messengers in obtaining written receipts for payment. At the same time, so that the treasury suffer no loss in revenues, but always receive the money still more efficiently and fully, set the sum for each tax item so that a landowner who so wishes can pay it all at once. For example, in lieu of the annual one-ruble tax on bathhouses, permit the landowner to pay 17 rubles once and for all. That will form a capital [fund], which the treasury can deposit in a bank and receive 2 kopecks [interest] per ruble. Employ this method to designate sums for other petty assessments so that those who so wish can make a single payment and thereby free their villages from [annual] assessments and the red-tape and inconvenience of dealing each year with government chancelleries. Those who do not wish to make a single payment under this law must follow the old order and make annual payments to the city chancelleries.

11. Nothing is more ruinous in rural life and more pernicious for the development of agriculture and conservation of forests than the intermingling of several squireys’ land in a single village. To be sure, the general survey is now reducing many of the disputes and lawsuits over land. But the survey will not eliminate the intertwining of strips, for it does not partition villages into their separate units. Consequently, the same difficulties shall persist in the future. To eliminate this evil, we request that when the land in each village or hamlet is surveyed and deeded separately for each landowner, these units (as well whole villages and hamlets) remain forever indivisible. Consequently, after this survey each unit will be transferred—in sales, mortgages, dowry and inheritance—as an entire village. But rectification of this evil may make it difficult to give equal shares of inheritance. For example, someone may have two villages, one with 100 male souls and another with 70, but there are three sons—what then is the third son to receive? Even if there were only two sons, one would receive a third more than the other. We think that this difficulty could be overcome in the following manner: (1) Require each of the present owners, at his own discretion, to designate all the villages that he wishes to remain indivisible. Each hamlet or village should have not less than four, nor more than one thousand souls (according the most recent census), but be between these two limits. Each [settlement], together with the accompanying land and resources, should be surveyed for future transfer as indivisible property. (2) Each owner should designate a special value for each of the villages that have been so surveyed and measured (according to its resources); (3) If the landowner has two villages, as noted above, one with 100 souls and another with 70 souls, the former is worth 5,000 rubles and the other 4,000 rubles. Hence the capital in these villages equals 9,000 rubles. If there are three sons, each will receive 3,000 rubles. The first son, who receives the village with 100 serfs that his father valued at 5,000 rubles, will pay the third son 2,000 rubles; the second son, receiving the estate with 70 souls and appraised at 4,000 rubles, is to pay the third son 1,000 rubles. Consequently, the heirs will receive equal shares. (4) This will give rise to a further difficulty: where are the first and second sons, without selling or mortgaging their estates, to obtain the money to pay the third son? Solve this by having the first two pay the third brother interest on the 3,000 rubles; the brother who receives this income is to be in state service and to find his happiness there. The noble court is to ensure that the interest is paid punctually.

12. It is quite essential to encourage peasants engaged in agriculture so that they are better able to reside permanently in their villages. Then, without sparing their means or labor, they could fertilize their land more zealously and diligently, develop and conserve their forests, and expend all their home construction on a secure basis. To do this, the landowner of a surveyed, indivisible hamlet or village should not sell peasants without land. If the peasants in a certain village or hamlet increase such that those bearing dues lack sufficient land, then the owner may transfer them to another district—to a hereditary village or to land that he has purchased. He may even sell them to another estate, but only in the same district (so that the peasants involved be near to their kinsmen). But the owner does have the authority to transfer peasants from one village to another within the same district. As for peasants who neglect agriculture or indulge in other vices, the landowner should retain the right to send them into exile with credit [toward his recruit obligation], as fixed in current law.
13. If the noble court is most mercifully established, could it not be empowered to deal with people who are not legally permitted to own villages and serfs? These illegal owners ruin many villages that are presently under their control, for—as temporary owners—they are aware that their ownership of serfs is just transitory and make no attempt to take care of them. But when these have been deprived of their servants and peasants, they will be forced to hire free people, for they cannot live without servants. But freely hired labor is unavailable; the only exception is state peasants, many of whom have abandoned agriculture and support themselves in the towns by engaging in various trades and hiring themselves out. When these people of various non-noble ranks [raznochintsy] have lost their servants and are forced to induce such peasants to abandon agriculture and work for them, there will be a decline of many agricultural producers and an increase in consumers. Agriculture, as a result, will decline. So that these non-nobles have no need to lure people away from agriculture to work for them, they should be provided with labor in the following manner: people of every rank should be allowed to purchase abroad people of every foreign confession, except Christians. This is limited by the following: if the purchased foreigner is more than 15 years old, he is bonded to his master for no more than twenty years from date of purchase; if younger than 15, his indenture is 30 years from date of purchase. After this term has elapsed, he may serve as a free man wherever and for whomever he wishes. It seems that in this way the non-nobles, having been provided with labor, will not need to reduce the number of agriculturalists through the enticement of large payments.

14. If the request in point 11 is most mercifully approved, then we most humbly request that, in order to obtain the desired survey more quickly, a surveyor be commissioned at our expense.

15. If our nobility encounters any general need in the future, we most humbly request that we be mercifully permitted to submit a representation wherever deemed appropriate.

3. **Instruction from the Nobility of Kozel'sk District (Kaluga Province) [1767]**

... 1. From past times up to the present, the Governing Senate has appointed district governors [voevody] to [serve in] towns. Given the large number of people appointed as district governors, however, the Governing Senate cannot possibly know the personal traits that are necessary for this office. So could not the nobility of that town [and district] be permitted to select the district governor from their own ranks? The election could follow the same procedure prescribed in Her Imperial Majesty’s manifesto of 14 December 1766 for the selection of a marshal and a deputy to the Legislative Commission....

2. State forests, administered by the Tula Armaments Chancellery and scattered amidst private woods, are put in the care of seigniorial peasants, who endure great ruin and intolerable corporal punishment in judicial offices for accidentally taking timber. There are also many reprimands from state foresters (especially from those who are constantly drunk), as if they were the serfs’ commanders: they declare every stump a felled tree and deem it a case of illegal timbering. But it is hardly possible for the serf to guard an area so vast that a musket shot is not audible from one end to the other; how then can the sound of an axe be heard? Besides, the peasant has to cultivate and harvest grain, pay state taxes, and provide labor and goods for the squire. To spare the squires such trouble when their serfs are taken away to be prosecuted by the government, could it not be ordered that the serfs be exempted from this guard duty? ...

3. With respect to the form of judicial procedure (which is presently an oral proceeding before an official desk), could it not be ordered that this court proceeding be in writing and conducted thus: once the defendant has received the plaintiff’s petition, he has eight days in which to respond? A copy of his reply is sent to the plaintiff, who also has eight days in which to respond and to supply evidence; and so on until the case is finished. As for legal notes and other devices used in judicial matters, reaffirm that these be sent promptly, without delays and within a specified period of time. The virtue of this [proposal] derives from the fact that the state does not have as
many lawyers as are needed; those available are in exceedingly short supply, and not all of them are men of integrity. Under the circumstances, [if the court procedure] is written, each can handle judicial matters himself.

4. In minor towns of a province, no legal contracts of any variety may exceed a value of 100 rubles; those exceeding that value must be drawn up [and notarized] in a provincial capital. But, for a variety of reasons (in particular, infirmity of health), some people cannot travel to the provincial capital. Could not such documents be made in district towns as well as provincial capitals? This will not harm the treasury and will make things easier for society. In addition, illiterate people sometimes wish to transact sales; in this case such sellers should be questioned either at the Estates College [Bureau] or [elsewhere] according to a decree from that office. In this event could not matters be alleviated for poor people by conducting this formal inquiry in the cities at the time of the sale and without any delay (when the documents are signed in the Estates College)? This will be a significant amelioration for poor people.

5. All complaints of injury and damage against owners of ironworks and various factories are adjudicated by the state colleges [bureaux] for mining and manufacturing. Some have been granted special privileges and are not liable to adjudication in those colleges. They sometimes cause damages to nobles who reside in the same districts and near their plants and factories; however, because of the distance from the above colleges [in St. Petersburg] or lack of means, the injured parties cannot bring legal action. Hence, with respect to our petitions on damages by factory and plant owners, could not the adjudication be held in those cities where the factories and plants are located?

6. Some retired soldiers (i.e., those permanently released from active service) suffer want of support, while others have adequate support but are a source of disorder and burden to society because of their bad morals. Could not these soldiers, instead of retirement, be returned to their former domicile, where they can live with their family, wives and children, or with their mothers and fathers? Their children (both those born before the father’s induction and those born after his return home) should be regular seignioral serfs. The benefit here is a reduction in the number of idle vagrants in the state. Moreover, because they will be included in the poll-tax registry, they will bring benefit as peasants, from whom poll taxes, recruits and all kinds of state levies can be collected.

7. The establishment of an appeals system is most useful for securing one’s rights. When an honest person is wrongly accused at a court of the first instance, he can sometimes suffer ruin from a false denunciation. When the accuser sees that he will be found in the wrong by the law, he dreams up all kinds of delays and files an appeal to ruin his adversary. When that does not succeed, he appeals somewhere else, even going as far as the Senate; by shifting the case about, he seeks every chance (even illegally) to evade his guilt. Could not an extremely heavy fine be imposed upon such false accusers? To wit: when such people are found guilty [of false denunciations] at the province level, assess double the fine; at the higher regional [guberniiia] level, triple the fine; at the Judicial College, one half of his estate; at the Senate, confiscate the entire estate and deprive the false accuser of noble status (or, for a non-noble, his honorable occupation). Such expulsions will rid society of a great burden, and this craft [of making false accusations] will gradually lose its teachers and completely disappear.

8. With respect to public health, we who live in rural districts have no protection whatsoever. Therefore could not an adequate apothecary and a physician [lekär'] be established in each district town? Because Kozel'sk District encompasses an extensive territory and has a large number of inhabitants, it is necessary to appoint two physicians here. One should be responsible for the apothecary and be given a state salary; the other would receive a salary from the nobility. The two will manage the medical practice jointly: the one in charge of the apothecary will visit the sick close to town, the other attending to remote areas. Establishment of the apothecary and appointment of physicians will not harm the state treasury, for the medicine will be sold for money, thereby yielding a profit. This profit will pay the salary of the physician responsible for the apothecary, while the salary of the other will be paid by nobles residing in the district. (A final paragraph, proposing to erect a monument in honor of the Empress, is omitted here.)