FROM SUPPLICATION TO REVOLUTION

A Documentary Social History
of Imperial Russia

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E. URBAN SOCIETY
Manufacturers, Merchants, Townsmen

The urban population in eighteenth-century Russia was notoriously small, constituting only about three percent of the population and confirming foreigners' impression that the Russian Empire was still overwhelmingly rural and backward. With the exception of Moscow and a few other urban areas, most "cities" were more administrative than economic in function and configuration, with few of the corporate and industrial characteristics of contemporary cities in Western Europe. Indeed, even the largest cities of Russia retained a distinct semi-rural appearance, as some inhabitants not only plied commerce and crafts but relied partly upon agriculture for their sustenance. It was no accident that instructions from towns refer to inhabitants' livestock and express concern about the availability of agricultural land; over two-thirds of the towns in Moscow province, for example, raised the issue of land in their instructions to the Legislative Commission. Nothing so distressed the enlightened autocrat and enlightened bureaucrats in St. Petersburg, who were keenly interested in commercial development and in the formation of the "third estate" that seemed so characteristic and vital to the strength of the other great powers of contemporary Europe.

Like the instructions from the nobility, those from the urban population have been the subject of considerable research. That from Moscow—the largest city in the empire—has understandably received particular attention, for no other Russian city came close in size, economic vitality and social composition. Its instruction of 1767 (doc. 13), although partially influenced by the participation of nobles, nonetheless presents a rich mosaic of the city's profile, problems and needs. It is a long, complex, and pointedly contradictory document—with materials appropriate to a semi-agrarian village (e.g., art. 17 on urban pastures) and others more pertinent to a modern metropolis (such as the articles on building and zoning codes, water and sanitation, welfare and vice). The instruction also devoted considerable attention to problems of urban government; like the provincial nobility, townsmen pleaded for greater local self-rule, better courts and tighter public control over officials. The Moscow instruction also devoted considerable attention to problems of trade, displaying less concern about peasant traders than foreign competition, and also made a number of important recommendations to facilitate business—through better regulation of bills of exchange, establishment of effective guilds, promulgation of a bankruptcy law and the like. The townsmen of Moscow also vigorously protested the exclusive status of factory-owners, whose privileged status and virtual exemption from local government was a cause of recurrent complaint by merchants no less than noblemen. Finally, the Moscow instruction was sharply critical of the burdens of state service, whether in the form of "police duties" (a collective term encompassing various forms of individual civic responsibilities) or various kinds of state service (as tax and fiscal agents). Such services, as the Moscow and virtually all instructions endlessly reiterated, severely damaged the well-being of individual merchants and more broadly retarded the development of urban and commercial life.

The urban instructions from outside Moscow were generally much more laconic and presented only the basic complaints and needs of a smaller provincial town. One of the more extensive and interesting came from Kostroma (doc. 14), a commercial and industrial center in the north. Besides its length, this instruction is particularly valuable because the various individual categories of townspeople—industrialists, merchants and petty townsmen—submitted separate statements. At the same time, the instruction offered a fairly inclusive list of the demands that appeared frequently in the instructions of provincial townsmen—demands for better government, fewer obligatory services (personal service, quartering and various levies), restrictions on the commercial activities of peasants, and a reduction in the important privileges accorded to factory owners. Altogether, the Kostroma instruction—like those from most other provincial towns—reflected at once the townsmen's common grievances against such groups as trading peasants and squires, but also their common cause with other social groups in the demand for improved governance and reduced state obligations.
13. Instruction from the Residents of Moscow [1767]

An instruction from the inhabitants of the oldest capital, the city of Moscow, to the deputy elected to the Legislative Commission, Her Imperial Majesty’s General-in-chief, chamberlain and cavalier of various orders, Prince Aleksandr Mikhailovich Golitsyn.

In an imperial manifesto of 14 December 1766, Her Imperial Majesty most mercifully deigned to order that we select a deputy from our midst to the commission, and through him present all our needs and wants. Hence we the undersigned, in fulfillment of the monarch’s solicitous order and in accordance with the order prescribed in the manifesto, have elected Your Excellency as the deputy to represent this city because of our general confidence in you. Having given you full powers of representation, we entrust to you the following statement on our needs and ask that you present these wherever appropriate and, in the name of the entire local citizenry, petition:

1. To provide the desired security and tranquility for all the residents, we request a decree that the present system of street cordons and guard watches by private citizens be abolished, that all burdens of police and public services (public services, repair and upkeep of roads and bridges, and every form of billeting) no longer be imposed upon individual citizens. Replace this with a monetary levy that is bearable, equal for all, and proportionate to the economic status of a given area. As for other public services (upon which the preservation of life, health, honor, security, good order, and equally the advantages and capacity of the citizens is almost directly dependent), we place our trust in the solicitude of the perspicacious, all-merciful Empress for corrective measures or their abolition.

2. For protection against fires (which have repeatedly come very close to destroying this city), we deem it necessary to establish sufficient measures based on the model of other European cities. Certified masters should be specifically appointed to inspect the construction of stoves, fireplaces, hearths, and chimneys and flues. But given the great number of wooden structures crowded together here in a disorderly fashion, hardly any means could be devised that would act quickly enough to contain a fire. Under the circumstances, it is necessary to request that wooden structures be banned from the best sections of the city and that residents be obliged to cover stove structures and heated service buildings with tile.

3. But not every citizen has the means to build a stone house. To promote [such construction] as well as the splendor of the city, it appears legitimate to trouble Her Imperial Majesty with the city’s most humble request that state factories be founded to manufacture tiles and bricks. Or, a bank could be opened to make loans of money or raw materials to inhabitants (for a fixed period); the borrower would pay a fixed interest rate and, as collateral, use either the newly constructed building, some other form of real estate or personal property, under reliable guarantees (especially from those who own their own homes).

4. Private brickmakers should be subject to strict supervision in the preparation of clays as well as the forming and baking of bricks, and a standard size and weight should be established for the length, width, and thickness of each brick. Moreover, producers of white stone should be strictly required to trim the stone evenly on both ends so that it not bulge on the sides and cause unnecessary work and delays in construction. In general, all materials necessary for construction (including logs and boards), besides possessing the proper quality, should bear a price that is fixed and fair to both sellers and buyers. Prices should also be regulated for iron products. We entrust all this to the good judgment of the central government.

5. To ensure the internal and external cleanliness of the city (which is absolutely essential to public health and also promotes beauty, tranquility and good air), we ask that adequate public services be established at the inhabitants’ own expense, but within reasonable limits. For state properties, the treasury is to pay that share itself. Further, hospitals should be moved outside the city and the fish market relocated to an appropriate section elsewhere in the city. For the transport of human waste and garbage, special places should be designated outside inhabited areas. In addition, cemeteries often foul the city’s air and should be moved outside the city.

6. Clean water for human consumption is just as necessary as the above, but at certain times of the year Moscow’s inhabitants experience severe shortages of good water. To prevent such acute shortages, we request efforts to find good water in convenient places and a strict
ban on the dumping of garbage and rubbish into the Moscow River or any other waterway running through the city, or the hauling of such refuse onto the ice [in the winter]. In addition, it should be forbidden to build tanneries or other polluting factories upstream. It also appears necessary to deepen the city’s rivers by diverting water to them from nearby areas, if this is deemed good and feasible.

7. Because the Neglinnaya River is only slightly higher than the usual water level of the Moscow River [into which it empties], apparently the only way to avert floods is to build dams. Such dams were constructed in various places long ago, but the reservoirs formed as a result have become so polluted that the stagnant water in them produces a terrible stench in the summer. Therefore, we request an order to have these ponds dredged and maintained hereafter.

8. It is simply mankind’s duty to extend a helping hand to those unable to take care of themselves. Every day we see here a great number of people of both sexes (chiefly from the common people), who had earlier experienced a mild disease but lacked any means of treatment, and finally suffered a premature death or, at least, incapacitation for the rest of their lives. Likewise, the lack of special hospitals for contagious diseases causes healthy people to become infected. We most humbly request a decree that, after consideration by the central government, hospitals be built in the city. The amount needed to maintain such hospitals should be taken into account, and people of both sexes should be treated for a fair price; the poor and homeless should be treated at state expense.

9. It is simply impossible to determine how many unfortunate women and infants fall victim to the ignorance and incompetence of midwives. But, given local conditions, the number of victims presumably exceeds anything imaginable. Hence, to prevent somehow such unpunished homicide, we request an effort to increase the number of midwives certified as competent and to distribute them throughout the city (four to six per area, depending upon the number of dwellings and residents). They should also have signs on the buildings where they live so that, in event of need, one can find them more easily.

10. Equally regrettable is the fact that sudden, unexpected strokes reduce the number of inhabitants. In such cases these unfortunate people die primarily because there are not enough apothecaries, doctors and general physicians for so large and populous a city. Hence the ill person must send a long way for a doctor, general physician or medicine; because first aid is not immediately available, he is subject to great hardship and loss of life. Request that the number of apothecaries, doctors and general physicians be increased, that they be distributed throughout all parts of the city (leaving the exact number to the judgment of the central government), and that a fee be set to govern how much doctors and general physicians receive for each visit to the sick.

11. The generosity, magnanimity and mercy of Her Imperial Majesty toward all Her subjects is great and indescribable. Even without a most humble petition on our part, we hope for a most merciful decree to establish state grain reserves (and similar measures) so as to guarantee a sufficient quantity of grain to provision all the city’s residents. In that way there will never be a shortage of grain or an onerous price rise.

12. The various factories, plants and breweries that are increasing here always require a great quantity of wood fuel. At present, its careless consumption has caused a sharp rise in prices, for local forests have become exceedingly thin. Therefore request that the factory owners and brewers be shown (following the example of other states) profitable ways to build furnaces that conserve wood fuel, and that hereafter no more factories be built in Moscow or its environs.

13. It is absolutely essential and vital to the city that the food and other provisions to feed the inhabitants never be in short supply. Food supplies must also be within the means of every townsman (through his own labor and work), for the price of every artifact is determined by the cost of satisfying basic needs. Therefore we request the necessary measures as well as strict supervision to ensure that weights and measures in the city always be the same.

14. It is not possible to prevent altogether the presence in the city of citizens who, despite diligence in their handicrafts and trades, suffered misfortune through various accidents and illnesses that entailed poverty and destitution. These are the proper recipients of Christian charity and generosity; the charity given them is more pleasing to God and more useful to the state than alms dispensed indiscriminately to all who shamelessly thrust out their hands. This impels us to ask imperial assistance for the poor and maimed; they are to be distinguished from idle vagrants and parasites—who, for
the most part, simply do not wish to work, bother those who do, and sometimes cause great evil.

15. The great expanse of this city, which is continually growing, and the resultant problems are well-known to all. To prevent this needless sprawl, it would be good to put a limit to the city's borders and thereby cause empty areas within to be built up. It is also necessary (both for the inhabitants and for visitors from other parts of the empire and other countries) to establish a certain number of reliable hired service people, carriages and barouches for hire, and inns and cabmen.

16. The construction of a special place to care for the insane and the necessary means to be allocated for this depends upon the mercy of Her Imperial Majesty. It is impossible (and this is confirmed by everyday experience) for a great city like Moscow not to have such people who do not commit any major offense, but lead a dissolute and licentious life of vice, sin and constant disorder. Both for their own sake and for the tranquility of the entire community it is necessary to construct a house of correction or Zuchthaus (after the model of other lands), where such dissolute people—who cast shame upon their parents and entire clan and bring themselves to certain ruin—could be used in constant labor until they became contrite and abandon their mischief. Or, if they do not, then they can spend their entire onerous lives [in these institutions] as a warning to others. To restrain shameful drunkenness, the vice that is so endemic to the common people and generates virtually all other forms of vice, it should be ordered that all commoners found lying unconscious in the streets from intoxication, regardless of their rank, free or serf, be taken without exception to the police and sentenced to a government work-gang for at least one week.

17. From earliest times, the city's residents have been assigned places to pasture their cattle, as circumstances permit. But as the great city grew in size, these areas have been mostly given over to construction and settlement, and the remaining amount of pasture-land is now quite small. Hence it is now almost impossible to pasture livestock in the summer. Therefore, we must humbly ask of Her Imperial Majesty that, as circumstances permit, she most graciously grant additional pastureland to our city.

18. Certain sections of the city have land plots of diverse legal status, namely: "musketeers' land" (for which an annual quitrent is paid to the treasury) and "lands of the Moscow merchant suburbs" (the so-called "tax-bearing" land). Although no payment is made from the latter category of land, its inhabitants are obliged to service the roadways, for that purpose land titles are composed and go from one person to the next, but only for the structures built on these lands. For better order and equality among townspeople, could it not be ordered that the owners pay once and for all a single sum and that they receive these lands in permanent, hereditary possession? The properties should remain under the general terms and obligations of regular townspeople and in all respects bear the legal title of city land.

19. To secure better order and justice among citizens for affairs among townsmen, we most humbly request the establishment here of a city court after the model of European cities. To provide one and all with prompt administration and satisfaction in the elimination of slanderous denunciations and red-tape, we hold it necessary for the court to be oral [and not employ formal, written procedures]. Here citizens—without exception, regardless of social rank or official position—could enjoy dispassionate justice. As to the competence of these auricular courts (including the maximum value of suits within its jurisdiction), we leave that to the good judgment of the central government. As for the people serving in these courts, we ask that they be chosen from townsmen by the entire citizenry [including non-townspeople residing in the city], or by electors voting under the supervision of the mayor (with the stipulation that nobles comprise no more than a third of the electors or the judges, and that the remaining two thirds be merchants). So that these people, who are honored by particular trust, not suffer needless financial loss during their judicial service (through distraction from their regular business affairs), it seems only fair that they (together with other lower officials in the city courts) be granted a salary. Judges are to be changed every year or two, with new ones elected according to the above procedure. The only reservation is that anyone who has served two years as judge may not serve for another ten years; anyone who served one year may not be reelected for another five years. If a former judge (at the request of the town's citizens) agrees to allow his reelection before these terms expire, it is left to his discretion to do so. Therefore, designate exact times for these elections—first, for the election of electors, then for the election of judges to the city.
courts. In the event of injustice and dissatisfaction, appeals against the court are to be made on the basis of the laws.

20. May this city court be granted jurisdiction over all merchants and guilds, as well as administrative authority over their contracts, the apportionment of their taxes and public duties, elections and everything that pertains to their internal order. The Chief Magistrate for Cities [in St. Petersburg] and its office are not to govern the merchants and townspeople in any respect. We also most humbly ask that this court be able to appeal and seek protection from the Governing Senate.

21. As the civil court that we most humbly request establishes the election of judges in the presence of the mayor (which we hereby confirm), we authorize [our deputy] to ask that Her Imperial Majesty most mercifully allow the election of the mayor in the future.

22. The forgery and abuse of bills of exchange cause some people considerable harm. But as these are extremely useful to all the merchants when they travel to purchase goods and transact other business, it is impossible to eliminate these without causing great harm to the merchants. Therefore, we ask that the law on bills of exchange actually be observed by all (with strict enforcement of its provisions), irrespective of the person, his official position or his social rank. However, to eliminate the perfidy and fraud that sometimes occur, we deem it necessary to order that dubious bills of exchange be taken to the board of merchants or court within six months [from date of issue]; if action is not brought against them within this period, the courts are not to accept complaints against them.

23. It is the responsibility of the police to see that no one ever suffers violence anywhere. If someone is summoned to a court, at no time is he to be taken by force from his own home or rented residence; the sole exception is criminals in felonious offenses. Rather, if a person fails to appear at court after three summonses and has signed the summonses (showing that he received them), and still does not come to the court or send an authorized representative to give valid reasons for his failure [to comply], he is to be found guilty without a court hearing. We leave it to the good judgment of the central government to decide how to design these summonses so that they are free of doubt and falsification.

24. All non-noble outsiders residing in the city [raznochintsy] (and coming from within the empire and from foreign countries), who are here with passports and labor contracts (as servants or other positions), must be registered with the police. Clerks working for merchants, salesclerks in shop stalls, and workers employed by artisan-merchants are to register in the civic court. Once the term of the passports or contract has expired, all these people must obtain a statement of their orderly life from their [former] master, employer or master and may not be accepted by others without such certification.

25. Many foreigners have their own homes here, but bear no civic duties; they should be ordered to bear the various duties along with us. In addition, other foreigners who come here should be under the jurisdiction of a single court in all instances of disputes with local inhabitants.

26. State lands under various government agencies should have only official, not private buildings on them. We ask that no one be allowed to construct private buildings on these lands, that such buildings not be rented out, and that they also not be used to house outsiders.

27. Although Her Imperial Majesty is here only for short visits, the quartering and support of court servitors cause a considerable hardship for the households to which they are assigned. We most humbly ask that we be freed from this quartering.

28. There is no inheritance law to regulate merchants' moveable and immovable properties; as a result, they sometimes suffer various difficulties. We ask that this deficiency be eliminated either by promulgating a new, specific law or by permitting merchants to use general inheritance laws.

29. As for guilds and other artisans, we experience an acute need, for the present guilds exist only in name and are totally unsatisfactory in all other respects. Indeed, masters not only lack certification of competence, but also do not possess reliable documents and papers showing their domicile and status. As a result of these disorders, it is impossible for one to seek justice against them, or vice versa; hence the injured party cannot obtain satisfaction to his complaints. To avoid this, may it be ordered that all artisans (both Russians and foreigners) be put into a detailed registry and that a real guild then be established, fixing the seniority and special privileges of each? Then have a proper decree forbid any free person or serf who is not regis-
tered in a guild to engage in a commercial handicraft in the city; nobles' serfs who live in the city, however, may work for their masters' or their own household needs. The masters and artisans in the guild are also to be reported by the courts to the merchant board [ratusha] and city court and to bear all the burdens imposed upon townspeople. If there be a requisition to perform any state work, guild members are not to be taken by force, but hired through voluntary agreement.

30. To sell salt and perform many state services, each year local merchants select a considerable number of people, whose official duties require them to depart for service and thereby to abandon their own business. Most important, this protracted enlistment in state service causes them considerable hardship and great losses. Therefore we most humbly ask for imperial mercy to release the merchants from state service, so that, by enjoying total freedom, they might apply themselves without impediment to increasing the merchant population for the benefit of the entire state. In return, they take it upon themselves to pay each year the sum needed to support the people who will perform this service in their place.

31. Above all, the merchants most humbly request annulment of the 1763 law setting an 8 percent levy on all bills of exchange that are challenged—in consideration of the bad publicity for the merchants and other harm inflicted on the credit and exchanges of the merchants.

32. Many foreign merchants, who register themselves for a time as merchants and engage in business, accumulate considerable capital, transfer this to their own lands and then leave the [Russian] state. When they resign from the merchant list here, they always make a fraudulent declaration of ruin and destitution, thereby depriving the treasury of the 10 percent levy due on their capital when they leave Russia. Besides this injustice, they permit [other] foreign merchants who have not registered as merchants to trade with their wares and to import products into Russia under their name; as a result, they deprive the treasury of its right to transit duties. In addition, they engage here in retail trade and peddle from house to house, but do not have to bear the obligations of registered merchants. Under the circumstances, the merchants of Moscow most humbly request special consideration so that the state not be deprived of its due and the merchants not suffer loss in such cases.

33. The merchants of Moscow, who also engage in trade at various ports but especially in St. Petersburg, request that foreign merchants—unless registered as Russian merchants—be strictly forbidden to keep any kind of wares in their buildings. The only exception is perishables, to be kept under customs certification. This rule can only be enforced, however, if they are forbidden to take wares from customs to their houses, and if they are obliged to possess the necessary documents on all wares imported or purchased here (as stipulated by the customs statute). If any foreign merchant has unsold goods left in the warehouse, he must submit a customs declaration after one year; these goods are to be inspected annually and a transit custom is to be assessed if anyone has more than what he declared.

34. A well-established order in all states requires that every rank and official position engage in a specific form of activity so that people from other groups not dare to intrude in this. In acknowledgment of this, the merchants here most humbly request that no one undermine or interfere with their business and commercial activities, and that foreigners residing in private homes as teachers, valets, madames and the like—under pain of confiscation—not engage in commerce.

35. Commercial buildings were established long ago for merchants' business and constructed at considerable expense (before the establishment of markets and construction of stalls) in order that inhabitants be able to purchase near their homes those provisions and fresh wares that are regularly consumed. This matter we leave to the better judgment of the central government.

36. For better trust and more reliable supervision, local merchants request that the oral courts accept contracts and signed documents for consideration. In the case of individual debts that have been established by a court but are still unpaid at the due date, the legal interest should be collected each year from the debtor; this will force all to make a prompt, immediate settlement. When someone is found guilty of having a private debt (with or without a promissory note), information on repayment is to be collected when his property is seized for defaulting. The court should interrogate all witnesses, regardless of their social rank and official position, according to the code of military procedure and with confirmation of a witness's oath.

37. All disputes between business operators and their employees, clerks and workers are to be adjudicated by the auricular court.

38. Merchants must be strictly required to employ people as shop
assistants and salespeople (or to accept them for training) for only six years or more. Moreover, when this period expires, the merchants are to give them written certification of their good behavior and service. If these shop assistants and salespeople go to distant cities for their own commercial activities, they are to be given the appropriate certification by their employer.

39. Not only merchants, but the entire urban population suffers considerable hardship from the fact that owners of plants, factories and distilleries are exempt from holding various official posts as well as from all state dues and civic duties. Indeed, the exemption holds not only for these people but also for their authorized representatives as well. We most humbly request that all these people, as true residents of the city, without fail be subject to the same law as all members of the city and bear equal duties and responsibilities. If they engage in commerce or other business, they should be treated on the same basis as merchants, with the reservation that as manufacturers they suffer no interference in their production.

40. For want of a statute on bankruptcy, the merchants suffer great losses and ruination. To protect honest people from perfidy, to establish good and mutual faith among people (as the first protection for merchants), and to distinguish involuntary accidents and misfortune from deliberate fraud, we all fervently request that a statute on bankruptcy be issued. It should be augmented by the rule that punishment for all fraud, no matter who perpetrated it, be commensurate with the damages inflicted.

41. So that they not suffer offense, local merchants request that no merchant be appointed to any form of Her Imperial Majesty’s service without first obtaining permission from the Board of Merchants or the city court, conducting an audit of his business and settling accounts with creditors. Those given such a release and enlisted in service should be counted against the list of military recruits, and a receipt for this should be given the board of merchants.

42. We also request that no monopolies be given in this city (save those customarily farmed out by the treasury), and that escheat of townspeople not be given to military hospitals or confiscated by the state, but be reserved for the use of city schools and other [local] needs.

43. May it be decreed that merchants departing for other countries, in accordance with earlier statutes, provide surety on their own, without requiring this from others?

44. Children who have debts, but whose own parents are still alive, are themselves to be liable to the courts and to be treated in accordance with the general laws on indebtedness that will be promulgated. In addition, orphans and widows, who have received no property from their deceased [parents and husbands], are not to be liable for repayment of debts incurred by the deceased. However, parents whose children have died are to inherit the latter’s moveable and immovable property; other heirs are to receive none of this....

14. Instruction from the Residents of Kostroma
10 April 1767

This instruction, together with the most humble petition to Her Imperial Majesty, is given from the inhabitants of Kostroma to its deputy, Vasilii Ivanovich Strigalev (a merchant in Kostroma and owner of a linen factory), who is leaving Kostroma to attend the Legislative Commission. The entire citizenry of Kostroma most humbly petitions Her Imperial Majesty about the following.

MERCHANTS

1. That the all-merciful imperial, autocratic authority grant and confirm the rights and privileges of merchants and that their precise terms (in accordance with Her Majesty’s decision) be clarified. That will prevent anyone who does not hold the rank of merchant from enjoying these. All cases concerning [solely] merchants and factory-owners (unless important matters of state are involved) should also be judged by city magistrates—as was previously established by the blessed and eternally praiseworthy Emperor Peter the Great (in chap. 9 of the regulations on the chief magistracy) to protect merchants from being ruined by false accusations. Hence anyone who has suffered injury should petition these magistrates, not some other office of the government. The court procedure is to be solely based on in-
vestigation, not formal [written] evidence; the latter usually tends to be long and drawn-out, is not well-known to every merchant, and can delay a settlement because it is so slow. If circumstances permit, a verbal decision is superior, for it always affords the injured party the quickest satisfaction.

2. Most mercifully order the establishment of commercial houses in cities (for the import and storage of wares) as well as a single, standard system of weights and measures under the supervision of the magistrate and board of merchants (similar to that established by the Governing Senate in 1755 for the salt trade). If fraudulent weighing is suspected, government scales should be brought in to verify the weighing. All merchants and other people are to have weights and measures with inspection tags, which, after comparison with state instruments, are to be attached by the magistrate and boards of merchants (not in provincial chancelleries, since the former are more appropriate).

3. Do not permit the nobility to engage in commerce or to have factories and plants, and permit no one to purchase the rights of a merchant. The nobility has its own rights, which are accompanied by great privilege; they should sell only what their own estates produce, and should be prohibited from buying anything from others [for resale]. In the event their peasants take any surplus products [to the city], they are to file a declaration at the city magistrate, obtain certificates for transit, and on that basis bring their wares to those places listed in the certificate; after obtaining certification of delivery, they are to file a [second] declaration at the magistrate that issued the certificate. This will prevent them from transporting any other products for sale (under the pretext of selling surplus wares). If any noble is found to have engaged in commerce and thus in an activity unworthy of his rank (i.e., he begins to buy and trade or, under the pretext of selling surplus, to transport other products to the city), then Her Imperial Majesty's treasury should confiscate everything that he purchased and imported without certification.

4. According to established rules, peasants living in major villages and hamlets on primary roadways may conduct trade only with travellers and only with what they produce in their capacity as peasants (on a small scale [to satisfy] the travellers' most essential needs). However, during the annual fairs and on [weekly] trading days, peasants in many villages violate these laws: they keep shops, trade in brocade and other silk wares, and buy linen of various quality in ports and cities, thereby causing great injury and difficulties for merchants. To aid the merchants, may it be ordered that this peasant commerce be prohibited in all villages and hamlets and that, except for cities and suburbs and places with large grain wharves, no other place have markets, shops and manufactories (in order to eliminate unauthorized commerce). But if anyone from the peasantry or various other ranks wishes to exercise a merchant's rights, order him (in accordance with Emperor Peter the Great's decree of 13 February 1722) to register at the local magistrate as a permanent merchant and in all respects to be equal to other merchants.

5. Merchants are not to sell their rights to anyone, nor to give bills of credit to peasants and people of various other ranks [raznochintsy], nor to send wares with them (except for people hired to haul wares). Under no condition are merchants to put such people in shops; as stipulated by the customs statute (ch. 2, art. 11), merchants are to use their own people as shop assistants and salesmen; however, annul the requirement for notarized contracts (which are usually prepared in provincial chancelleries) and accept signed documents (with guarantees) that the merchants alone authorize as the legal equivalent of notarized deeds. If anyone else from the peasantry or various other ranks engages in commerce, even if acting under consignment from merchants, his entire property is to be confiscated by the state; no excuses are to be considered. That will enable the smaller merchants, rather than people of other ranks, to enjoy this commerce and augment their wealth; in the contrary case, people of other ranks will occupy the place properly belonging to [regular merchants] and force them to support themselves by working as peasants.

6. In general, all the peasants in villages and cities should be able to sell to people of any social group what they produce in their rural economy. But peasants are not to purchase products from others for resale on pain of confiscation of everything that they purchased (the proceeds to be given for the benefit of military hospitals). In accordance with the Law Code [Ulozhenie] of 1649 (ch. 19, art. 15), only merchants are to possess houses, factories, shops or inns in towns; leave this trade to the poorer merchants so they can improve their affairs, as ordered by the Regulations of the Chief Magistrate.

7. Peasants and people of other ranks are not to engage in trade at seaports or in internal cities located along rivers; the only exception
concerns grain and whatever exceeds their personal needs. However, only merchants should haul grain or any other wares on boats and barges.

8. It is useful for merchants to make representation on the following: according to the customs statute and decrees, shopkeepers are forbidden to purchase grain and other provisions brought by peasants until the afternoon. In the city of Kostroma, the grain trade on market days lasts from morning until 4 in the afternoon. But by afternoon, there are almost no sellers and merchants left and hence the shopkeepers have nothing to buy; as a result, they experience considerable disruptions and difficulties in their business and commerce. Therefore, allow the shopkeepers, like all inhabitants, to buy grain and the like before noon without interference.

9. Decrees from the Chief Magistrate [in St. Petersburg] have reiterated the admonition to regional, provincial and district chancelleries that they are not to issue guarantees for merchants on immovable property or deeds without consultation and contact with the magistrates in those cities. This is so that no merchant who has collected money for bills of exchange or who has served in tax collection can sell his property without an audit; otherwise, he might harm the interests of the treasury or deprive his creditors of money given for bills of exchange. However, through various ruses (both in their home city and elsewhere), many debtors write sales and mortgage documents without approval from the magistrate, thereby depriving creditors of any claim against the bills of exchange. Therefore [request] a provision in the new law code that no one write deeds or loan agreements without notarization by the magistrate and boards of merchants; unnotarized agreements are to be cancelled and declared null and void.

10. Request that regional and provincial chancelleries not demand tellers from the merchant population to count petty silver and copper coins and that the chancelleries not dispatch them to serve in other towns (so that in their trade and business merchants not suffer disruption, still less ruination, because of such absences). Each state office should rely solely upon its own staff.

11. Leave the police in this city on the same terms as established in Emperor Peter the Great's regulations for the magistrate. Recognizing the great benefit for the merchants, the all-wise monarch (in chapters 10, 13 and especially 14) ordered that only the magistrate administer justice over urban citizens, keep the police under his supervision, collect the revenues assessed from townsmen, manage city finances, and represent its interests before the Chief Magistrate [in St. Petersburg]. In matters pertaining to the civil court and finances, townsmen are not to be subordinated to the provincial governors and district governors [voevody]; moreover, neither in civil nor in military matters is the chief state official to summon a citizen to his chanceller for judgment, but to petition the magistrate for judicial action.

12. A decree of the Governing Senate in 1761 directed that [the accounts] on salt and money, filed by tax collectors present at the sale of salt, be audited by provincial and district governors jointly with a member from the city magistrate. On the basis of this law, the salt assessors from Kostroma (together with their records and other documents) are sent each year to the provincial chancellery in Kostroma. But because of the increase in provincial chancellery's current business and because of the numerous queries to the magistrate, these audits last a long time. Some assessors spend three years and more at this audit and, during this entire time, are not permitted to leave Kostroma for business. The result is considerable difficulty and disruption for merchants. Therefore, it may be ordered that—as the best assistance to merchants—salt and other tax duties be assigned to the magistrate alone and that the audit be sent (with the magistrate's certification) directly to the [central] colleges responsible for the particular tax? The [provincial] chancelleries should have no role in this, for such audits should be completed and sent without any delays and red-tape. In the event of misfeasance by tax collectors, restitution of missing funds can be made more promptly to the treasury.

13. Both the merchants and chancellery clerks are sorely in need of people to work in their homes and to perform the public services due the city. For, lacking their own house serfs, merchants must abandon their business (and clerks must neglect their assigned duties) to do the work necessary at home and to perform the obligatory public duties. More important, when they are away on business, they have an acute need for their own reliable people. Therefore, could not permission most graciously be given for merchants to purchase male souls (first guild up to five male serfs and second guild up to two male serfs, with an equal number of female serfs); chancellers
should be allowed to purchase as many serfs as the [Legislative] Commission decides. Serfs previously purchased are to remain permanently with them.

14. Townspeople suffer considerable hardship from the billeting of regular and staff officers: many officers choose quarters at whim, while others accept assigned quarters but, if the least dissatisfied, oppress the owners and drive them from their homes; the only possible outcome afterwards is disputes and animosity. Therefore, could not Her Imperial Majesty mercifully deign, for the tranquillity and placidity of townspeople, to forbid the assignment of regular and staff officers (and others who hold such positions) to [private quarters]? That was ordered by the blessed and eternally praiseworthy Empress Anna Ioannovna in a decree of 11 November 1738, which ordered officers to be satisfied with the rented quarters that they choose; the lower ranks (i.e., noncommissioned officers and soldiers) are to be assigned to townspeople in turns, without omitting any household, so that no one experience hardship or advantage over others.

15. According to previous laws, chancellors and merchants owning property in excess of 50 rubles must pay an annual bathhouse tax of one ruble. However, because many pay this tax but many others do not (by resorting to various devices), for the sake of equity among townspeople it would be [an expression of] Her Imperial Majesty's maternal compassion if the bathhouse tax were abolished for [all] these people (as was done for the lower ranks, both those in the poll-tax rolls and those not, in a decree of 1725). Although that would entail a loss for Her Imperial Majesty's treasury, a prosperous merchant group that increases trade will more than compensate for the loss through customs duties.

16. The merchants of Kostroma feel duty-bound to request that the Legislative Commission send the strictest order to the city governments in this province, directing that merchants who travel without passports (like fugitives) be received by neither nobles nor merchants, but be returned to their domicile, as soon as possible and without the slightest delay. Those who violate this rule—like anyone who takes in a fugitive—should be fined, for many of the merchants' and artisans' people, after committing a crime or obtaining a large sum from bills of exchange, leave without permission and live in other places without the slightest fear. The merchants who remain behind must pay the poll-tax for them and bear their other obligations, causing the merchants considerable hardship.

17. It has been observed in previous incidents that fathers and mothers give their property to their children and then live with them. But by the will of God the children sometimes die first. In the event the children die first, fathers and mothers should not be deprived of their own property; it seems fair to return the property to their mothers and fathers. Likewise, if sons and daughters have no children of their own and die [before their parents], no one can be a closer heir to their property than their own parents. It seems equally fair for a widow who has children to manage her husband's household until her death, remarriage or monastic tonsure; likewise a widower who has children should hold his wife's estate until his death, remarriage or monastic tonsure. In all other matters pertaining to the rights of inheritance we defer to the supreme judgment of Her Imperial Majesty.

18. It would be a special act of maternal mercy toward the merchants if Her Imperial Majesty would permit them to establish linen and other manufactories on whatever scale they wish. However, these manufacturers and plant-owners should not be exempt from civic duties and taxation, but should be under the jurisdiction of the magistrate, like all other merchants.

19. These following decrees were issued in prior years: (1) a decree of 11 August 1731 ordering that all factory owners and merchants, without exception, participate in city elections and councils and be obedient to these, and (so as not to oppress other merchants) that no owner of plants and factories be exempt from civic obligations; (2) a decree of 1737: once manufactories have been established and fully put into operation, the manufacturers and merchant-owners are again under the magistrate's jurisdiction; (3) a decree of 22 December 1746: so that manufacturers not engage in commerce gratis [without bearing merchants' obligations] and thereby cause hardship for other townspeople, manufacturers are to hold the same status as merchants and are categorically bound to pay taxes for essential expenditures per the decrees of 1724 and 1742 (which levied tax assessors according to one's wealth). But, as is well-known, for a long time factories (especially for the production of linen) have been increasing in many cities of the Russian empire. Even in recent times, some merchants of the first guild have established old-fashioned linen
factories solely for their own profit and enrichment; moreover, they make use of a manifesto (the regulations of the colleges) to be subject only to the college of manufactures and to be exempt from civil courts, the payment of taxes and the performance of civic duties along with merchants; they also [now] wish to be exempted from the poll-tax. If the latter is granted to the factory owners, other upper and middling merchants, desiring the same privilege, also will eagerly want to establish factories (even if as a joint operation) and abandon their commercial activities. The remaining poorer merchants (who lack the means to establish a factory) will be unable to pay the present poll tax because of their poverty, age, or minority. In addition, the remaining population of poorest merchants will be obliged to pay the poll tax for the deceased, for those drafted into the army, and the large number of other people who have left the city on various occasions. Furthermore, this remnant of the poorest merchants will then have to provide all basic expenditures for the city as well as various public and other services, which previously had been performed jointly with the entire population of merchants and factory owners (and with considerable assistance from the richest townspeople). As a result, they will be totally ruined and be deprived of their business; in the event of their ruination, they will be subject to forcible tax collection, put in prison and die of starvation. In the event manufacturers commit an offense, the remaining merchants will have no way to seek justice from the College of Manufactures because of their poverty and because the College [in St. Petersburg] is so far away; hence they will have to endure such offenses without obtaining satisfaction. Therefore, will Her Imperial Majesty, as a special act of her monarchical mercy, not protect the above poor merchants from ruination and (in accordance with earlier government laws) order that those merchants and factory owners with canvas plants not be exempted from all civic services and taxes, and that they remain under the jurisdiction of the city magistrates together with ordinary merchants, as these (prior to the establishment of factories) had been from the earliest times?

MANUFACTURERS

20. It would be a special act of maternal mercy by Her Imperial Majesty if manufacturers who presently own factories were excluded from the poll-tax registers and placed under the jurisdiction of [the central] government, not [local city] office. That would stimulate every entrepreneur to reduce the use of European products (for the general benefit); [that applies] not only to those activities already existing (and bringing fruit and glory to Russia), but to others which could be established and be the object of diligent efforts. This would serve the state’s interests and the needs and benefit of society. A personal decree of Her Imperial Majesty (signed by Her Majesty and given to the College of Commerce on 9 December 1762), exempts all factory and plant owners from unseemly services. But the manufacturers from the merchant population in Kostroma are assigned to every kind of civic service and the production in their factories is thereby interrupted; as a result, state interests are harmed and some manufacturers suffer losses. In addition, beyond the payment of port taxes for linen, Her Imperial Majesty’s personal decree of 15 December 1763 ordered that manufacturers pay one ruble from each mill, as well as the poll tax, regular levies on merchants, and also every kind of assessment by the city magistrate. No social rank pays so many different assessments as manufacturers. The manufacturers most humbly request that Her Imperial Majesty deign to have the Legislative Commission consider this article.

21. As is well known, the state derives considerable benefit from manufactories through the payment of customs and imposition of other duties. But when these manufactories were introduced, equipped and granted privileges a decree signed by the blessed and eternally praiseworthy Emperor Peter the Great (in his regulations for the College of Manufactures, dated 3 December 1723) declared: whoever establishes a factory, together with his children and brothers, is exempt from service obligations (pt. 13). Furthermore, whereas previous imperial laws forbade merchants to purchase [populated] estates (so as to prevent anyone except merchants, for the benefit of the state, from having factories), it is now apparent to all that many people have formed companies and, in order to contribute to the benefit of the state, have undertaken to establish various manufactories and plants, many of which have begun operation. Therefore, so that factories proliferate, both the nobility and merchants are permitted, with the consent of the College of Manufactures, to establish factories in the countryside. But a decree of the blessed and eternally praiseworthy Empress Elizabeth Petrovna (27 July 1744) and a de-
cree of the Governing Senate (8 April 1752) prescribed a proportion for the purchase of serfs and land for such plants and factories: 28 male souls per mill. But according to the personal decree of Her Imperial Majesty (8 August 1762), until the new law code is confirmed by Her Imperial Majesty, factory and plant owners are forbidden to purchase [serfs], with or without land. But it is impossible for the manufacturers to increase and improve their plants and factories without their own serfs, because free hired labor can never be so obedient as are one's own serfs (or peasants consigned to work in factories); hence free labor can never be so effective. Therefore any improvements that a manufacturer might consider for the state's benefit and glory seem objectionable to the [hired laborers] because of their novelty, and one cannot compel them to comply for any amount of wages; they are willing to work only in accustomed ways. That is not true of factories, as in Jaroslav and elsewhere, which have their own large populated estates [of serfs] and where these factories have been brought into superb condition. Other factories could be raised to this level through the same means. And if this appears unobjectionable to the imperial, wise judgment of Her Imperial Majesty, permit (in accordance with previous laws of the Russian Empire) the purchase of male and female serfs for those factories and plants, even if not per the former rates. But for linen factories it is necessary to set no less than three males (together with any female dependents) per mill. For, unless a factory has its own serfs, it cannot be made to thrive (for the reasons given above). Moreover, free hired labor does not suffice to expand linen factories. That is especially true in the summer, when factories cannot perform half their work because the peasants leave to work in the fields. [Two final points, from minor civil and ecclesiastical servitors, are omitted here—ed.]

**F. PEASANTRY**

In the mid-eighteenth century the peasantry included a congeries of distinct sub-categories—from the freer state peasants at one end to the lowly serf at the other, often living cheek by jowl in the same district. State peasants (themselves comprising a host of legal categories) held a relatively higher status; though they had to pay various taxes and render dues to the government, they enjoyed a high degree of individual independence and personal rights. That higher status found further confirmation in the fact that they were explicitly invited to submit instructions to the Legislative Commission. Nevertheless, as these instructions stressed, their economic condition was far from satisfactory, for their land and other resources were simply not sufficient to enable them to satisfy the various government demands. That was particularly true for state peasants in northern Russia, where the land was simply so infertile and so reduced by merchant encroachments that (so the peasants claimed) they could not pay the poll tax, especially in the wake of recent harvest failures (docs. 15–18). Significantly, these peasant supplicants did not challenge the levies or labor obligations in principle (or, understandably, the state's right to impose or increase them), but rather based their argument on traditional appeals for charity and relief, even if given only temporarily. Like other groups, peasants tended to make "negative supplications": whether from convention or conviction, they seemed to anticipate negative responses, phrased their requests as beggarly pleas, and bargained away their demand into a temporary concession.

Not all peasants were so humble and reticent, however. Particularly strident were the petitions from "single homesteaders" [odnodvortsy], a category of farmer-warriors who had ranked somewhere between the service classes and peasantry in seventeenth-century Russia. But in the eighteenth, they gradually descended into the lower, poll-tax population of state peasants, a change that not only entailed important new obligations to the state, but also exposed them to depredations and abuse by the nobility, especially the un-