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## Implementation of the Russian Table of Ranks During the Eighteenth Century

Peter the Great in 1722 introduced an entirely new system of ranking for the government service. His system embodied two marked departures from former practice. It provided for the separation of the civil from the military service, and it promised ennoblement to any commoner who attained a sufficiently high level of rank. A promotional ladder of fourteen steps was established, the eighth step from the top being designated as the one that would confer upon its fortunate possessors the status of nobility (*dvorianskoe zvanie*)—that is, if they did not already enjoy such distinction through birth or royal favor. This system, maintained with modifications until the downfall of the Russian Empire, was officially entitled the Table of Ranks (*Tabel' o rangakh*).<sup>1</sup>

Various principles were expressed in the Table of Ranks, and it is the purpose of this study to discover what meaning they had in eighteenth-century practice. Some principles the government consistently attempted to uphold, some it violated, and in certain cases practices were established that the Table had not dealt with at all. I have concerned myself almost entirely with the civil service and have relied particularly upon legislation of the period as an indicator of administrative developments. An understanding of the fate that befell the Table of Ranks should provide insights into the problems of eighteenth-century Russian administration.

The Table of Ranks contained specialized terminology which was quickly assimilated by government servitors and provided a common and familiar ground of understanding for those interested in public office. The word "rank" (*rang*) indicated a man's status as determined by his "title" (*chin*) and "class" (*klass*). Each of the fourteen steps of the promotional ladder was referred to as a "class." Within most classes there was more than one title, and each title was originally intended by Peter to describe a distinct office. Similar titles

1. *Polnoe sobranie zakonov rossiiskoi imperii*, first series, 46 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1830–39), vol. 6, Table of Ranks, Jan. 24, 1722, no. 3,890 (hereafter cited as *PSZ*). The table is printed on p. 284.

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TABLE OF RANKS

CLASS	CIVIL TITLE ( <i>chin</i> )	MILITARY TITLE
1	Chancellor	General-Field marshal
2	Actual privy councilors	Generals of cavalry and infantry
3	Procurator general	Lieutenant generals
4	Collegiate presidents Privy councilors Senior procurator	Major generals
5	Master of heraldry Master of requests ( <i>general reketmeister</i> ) Collegiate vice-presidents Director of police ( <i>general politseimeister</i> )	<i>Brigadiry</i>
6	Collegiate procurators Senate senior secretary Collegiate councilors	Colonels
7	Collegiate senior secretaries [first three colleges] <i>Ober-fiskal gosudarstvennoi</i>	Lieutenant colonels
8	Collegiate senior commissars Collegiate assessors Collegiate senior secretaries Senate secretaries Court councilor ( <i>nadvornoi sovetnik</i> ) <i>Voevody</i>	Majors
9	Titular councilor Collegiate secretaries [first three colleges] Provincial judges ( <i>landrikhtery v provintsiakh</i> ) Professors of the academies Doctors in service Archivists Senate translator Senate clerk ( <i>protokolist</i> )	Captains
10	Collegiate secretaries Collegiate translators [first three colleges] Collegiate clerks [first three colleges]	Junior captains
11	—	—
12	Chancellery and guberniia secretaries Collegiate financial clerk ( <i>kamerir</i> )	Lieutenants
13	Provincial secretaries Collegiate translators Collegiate clerks Senate registrar	Second lieutenants
14	Collegiate commissars <i>Fiskaly pri nadvornykh sudakh i guberniiaakh</i> Collegiate registrar Collegiate accountants ( <i>bukhgaltery</i> ) Collegiate Junkers	Ensigns

*Source:* See note 1. About forty civil service titles, those least often encountered in the literature, are omitted. The top military title of each step or class is included for comparison.

sometimes fell into different classes depending on the place of work. A collegiate senior secretary of the designated "first three colleges" (War, Admiralty, and Foreign Affairs) enjoyed a higher rank than a collegiate senior secretary of the other colleges.<sup>2</sup> The former was of the seventh class; the latter, of the eighth class. Both civilian and military officers in classes fourteen through nine were of "senior" grade, in eight through six, of "staff" grade, and in five through one, of "general" grade. In theory, all members of the Table of Ranks were to have decision-making authority. Mere aides and copyists were not to be included.<sup>3</sup>

There is little question that Russian civil servants during the eighteenth century suffered from a sense of social inferiority in contrast with their supposed compeers in military service. The keynote for this state of affairs was sounded in the Table of Ranks. A general rule was set whereby all rank-holders would be promoted through a regular, step-by-step progression. Exceptions could be made, however, for those who rendered valiant *military* service. Nothing was said about valiant service as a civilian. Empress Anne made the priority of military over civil ranks quite explicit. In two decrees of 1731 she asserted, first, that all military servitors enjoyed precedence over their counterparts in other categories of service and, second, that men in the court and civil service must cease calling themselves by military titles.<sup>4</sup>

The temptation for a civil servant to appropriate a military title remained strong. In 1736 and 1793 further admonitions against this practice were issued. Other legislation adjusted promotion procedures to ensure that civil servants would never progress upward in rank more rapidly than their military equivalents.<sup>5</sup> Throughout the eighteenth century military service in Russia was accorded greater respect by society as a whole than any other occupation. The growing prestige of Russian military might during this period no doubt added to the glamour which the military profession had traditionally enjoyed. Typical was the regret expressed by a high-ranking official of the time, Ivan Vladimirovich Lopukhin, that he was unable to pursue a military career. He explained that ill health in the 1770s had forced him to enter the civil service instead. Filip Filipovich Vigel, born in 1786, commented at length on his own and his family's experiences in Russian government service. He was of the opinion that before and during Catherine II's reign young noblemen had preferred the

2. The chief administrative departments in Russia at this time were referred to as "colleges." Placed above them as a supervisory and coordinating agency, the power of which varied considerably during the century, was the Governing Senate.

3. On the concept of structuring civil servants into two categories, see N. F. Demidova, "Biurokratizatsiia gosudarstvennogo apparata absoliutizma v XVII-XVIII vv.," in *Absoliutizm v Rossii (XVII-XVIII vv.)* (Moscow, 1964), pp. 222 and 228-29.

4. *PSZ*, vol. 6, Table of Ranks, art. 13; vol. 8, Nov. 13, 1731, nos. 5,877-78.

5. *PSZ*, vol. 9, Aug. 2, 1736, no. 7,021; vol. 23, Nov. 3, 1793, no. 17,159; vol. 12, June 22, 1745, no. 9,179.

military as more brilliant, gayer, and easier than civil service.<sup>6</sup> In accord with such attitudes were both the government's preferential treatment of the military and the attempts of civilians to embellish themselves with military titles.

Even as a civilian, however, to be included in the Table of Ranks at all was a distinction. In the course of the century, certain social groups were legally excluded from the civil service. In 1727 household servants and peasants were declared ineligible. Catherine II prohibited service to subjects who were obligated to pay the poll tax (the great majority of urban dwellers and all peasants).<sup>7</sup> Beginning in 1766, children of ordinary soldiers were restricted from entering the civil service.<sup>8</sup> Most soldiers were former peasants who had been recruited; therefore, this provision was an additional safeguard against indirect peasant penetration of the civil service.

The policy toward merchants varied. Since the 1750s they had been admitted to the *Glavnyi magistrat*, an institution of the central government that acted as a ministry for municipal affairs. Catherine, however, in line with her sponsorship of the nobility, imposed a rule that merchants should be excluded from the *Glavnyi magistrat*. In spite of this legal restriction, merchants did sometimes achieve civil service rank. A decree of 1790 stipulated that titles for such persons were to be conferred solely by the sovereign. Four years later, access to the civil service for merchants was considerably eased; subsequently, when a merchant received a government appointment, his department was simply required to verify that the candidate had been released from his former status and was free of the poll tax. Evidently the pressure to bring persons from this group into the administration was considerable. They commanded an expertise on commerce that the government could not afford to ignore.<sup>9</sup>

The one significant group of Russians outside the nobility who did not encounter barriers to the civil service was the clergy. They were not subject to the poll tax and so were not barred on that ground. Sons of clergymen did have opportunities for education that gave them some qualification for government service. Of the *raznochintsy* who entered the Russian civil service in the eighteenth century, the offspring of clergymen were most numerous.

Clearly, the principle of career open to talent, inherent in the Table of Ranks, was violated by the subsequent de jure exclusion of certain classes. The

6. Ivan V. Lopukhin, *Zapiski moskovskago martinista senatora I. V. Lopukhina* (Moscow, 1884), pp. 4–5. Filip F. Vigel, *Zapiski*, 7 vols. in 3 (Moscow, 1891–93), 1:162.

7. Alexander V. Romanovich-Slavatinsky, *Dvorianstvo v Rossii ot nachala XVIII veka do otmeny krepostnogo prava*, 2nd ed. (Kiev, 1912), pp. 227–28. *PSZ*, vol. 19, Apr. 13, 1771, no. 13,596 and Feb. 15, 1772, no. 13,760.

8. Mikhail M. Shtrange, *Demokraticheskaiia intelligentsiia Rossii v XVIII veke* (Moscow, 1965), pp. 262–63; *PSZ*, vol. 25, Nov. 17, 1798, no. 18,755.

9. *PSZ*, vol. 16, Oct. 19, 1764, no. 12,267; vol. 23, Dec. 16, 1790, no. 16,930, and June 5, 1794, no. 17,212.

great majority of the Russian people were legally barred from government service—a situation resulting from the government's particular regard for the nobility as the class most trusted and best qualified to serve. Yet the force of circumstances did not permit the original principle to be entirely lost sight of. When talent was badly needed, ways were found to make use of it in spite of restrictive class legislation.

Two years after publishing the Table of Ranks, Peter declared that rank-holders in St. Petersburg should receive twice the salary of their counterparts in other locations. This was one of the many methods he employed to exalt his newly founded capital. The geographical location of one's work was thereafter always a determinant of salary and of prestige. In 1739 Peter's stipulation was reaffirmed with the specification that even administrators in Moscow were to receive one-half the pay of their peers in St. Petersburg. In the last decades of the century, salaries were still higher in St. Petersburg than in Moscow. The rationale by that time was that the cost of living was greater in the capital. Functionaries in the provinces were paid on a lower scale.<sup>10</sup>

As previously noted, the status of civil servants could vary according to the institutions in which they worked. During the brief reign of Peter II (1727–30), actual privy councilors (*deistvitel'nye tainye sovetniki*) who were members of the Supreme Privy Council (*Verkhovnyi tainyi sovet*), which at that time was an organ enjoying paramount political power, were awarded standing in the first class. Actual privy councilors in other government departments retained second class status.<sup>11</sup> This provision, incidentally, benefited the Dolgoruky faction, two members of which, Alexei Grigorievich and Vasiliï Lukich, had become actual privy councilors in the Supreme Privy Council three weeks before the law was passed. As a general rule, rank-holders in the Holy Synod (the government body that oversaw the Orthodox Church) were on an equal level with those in the Governing Senate. Functionaries in the "first three colleges" always enjoyed a higher status than their colleagues in other colleges.<sup>12</sup> No objections were ever raised to such discrimination on the basis of geographical or institutional location.

More frequently, when the government sought to implement principles set by the Table of Ranks, it was forced to grant exceptions and sometimes to condone outright violations. The Table itself could be ambiguous on some points, as was the case regarding the criterion for determining a man's rank. The Table drew a distinction between permanent and temporary bestowal of rank. Below the eighth class, men held rank only so long as they fulfilled the appropriate duties. If they were transferred or left the service, they had no right to

10. *PSZ*, vol. 10, May 21, 1739, no. 7,812. Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv drevnikh aktov, fond 248, *General-prokuror senata*, opis' 2, delo 6,437, pp. 808–17 reverse.

11. *PSZ*, vol. 8, Feb. 26, 1728, no. 5,245.

12. *PSZ*, vol. 16, Mar. 11, 1764, no. 12,083, and Oct. 19, 1764, no. 12,267.

use their former titles. At higher levels; titles once attained could always be employed thereafter. A premise of the Table was that a title should accurately reflect duties. If a man of a certain rank (presumably in the eight top steps) was assigned to a lower-level position, however, he still had the right to claim his original rank.<sup>13</sup> This practice would, of course, violate the premise that rank reflected duties.

The government at first set out to base various kinds of awards upon duties actually performed. A 1744 law directed that chancellery secretaries who were responsible to the Senate, and who were liaison men with the colleges, were to hold the same rank (tenth class) as collegiate secretaries. The duties of the two groups were comparable, so their ranks were made identical. When the Senate was divided into departments (1763), a rule was laid down that if a servitor was promoted to higher rank but remained at his former duties, he must be paid in accordance with those duties, without regard to his new rank. Here is frank admission that *rank* might not reflect duties but insistence that *pay* should.<sup>14</sup> By this time, it was common practice to award servitors a higher title after a certain time period, regardless of whether or not their duties changed. Frequent promotions, even if in title only, were to everyone's individual advantage within the service. Such promotions were also easy to justify because of expanding government operations that required increased staffs. Supervisors had more opportunity to advance themselves, and they could command loyalty by promoting their subordinates.<sup>15</sup>

Although not dealt with in the Table of Ranks, length of time in the service was quickly recognized as a criterion for determining seniority. As early as 1728 a decree defined the senior man in a given rank as the one who had served longest.<sup>16</sup> Ultimately, specific periods of time began to be designated as requisite for promotion. After 1760 a series of laws were promulgated that specified the number of years that had to be spent in certain ranks before promotion was possible. These laws led in practice to automatic promotion based on length of service, not on merit. A fundamental tenet of the Table was thereby disregarded. By the end of the eighteenth century, promotions were made without regard to available vacancies.<sup>17</sup> Commoners had to serve at least

13. Table of Ranks, arts. 12 and 17.

14. *PSZ*, vol. 12, Sept. 28, 1744, no. 9,041; vol. 16, Dec. 15, 1763, no. 11,989.

15. The establishment in 1775 of new provincial agencies significantly increased the size of the civil administration. The territory administered became more extensive, new acquisitions under Catherine amounting to about 200,000 square miles. This included heavily populated and well-developed, formerly Polish, regions over which administration was no simple task. On the causes of frequent promotions, see Nikolai F. Dubrovin, "Russkaia zhizn' v nachale 19 v.," *Russkaia starina*, 104, no. 11 (1900): 264.

16. *PSZ*, vol. 8, Feb. 26, 1728, no. 5,245.

17. The practice of automatic promotion is discussed by H. J. Torke, "Das russische Beamtentum in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts," *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte*, 13 (Berlin, 1967): 53–56.



twelve years at the ninth step before they could make the crucial jump to the eighth class and ennoblement.<sup>18</sup> But this oft-repeated principle of minimum time periods in each class was frequently evaded. In practice many civil servants gained promotion before their prescribed period in one rank was fulfilled. A typical instance is given in a report (December 2, 1798) from the senior procurator (*ober-prokuror*) of the temporary Senate surveying department. He wrote to the procurator general that the secretaries and some of the clerks in his department deserved promotion "although they have not served their full periods. . . ."<sup>19</sup> Demand for qualified personnel was generally high, and if a man appeared capable of accepting greater responsibilities, he would usually be promoted, regardless of his length of time in service. This practice became so widespread that it was expressly forbidden by a decree of 1808.<sup>20</sup>

The nobility, although jealous of their preferment in government service, viewed such service ambivalently. Peter the Great had seized upon the Muscovite tradition by which the nobility were obligated to serve the state, and had driven the class to carry out his modernization schemes. Many noblemen sought to escape the dreaded burden of state service during Peter's lifetime. In the following decades the Russian nobility obtained a number of concessions from the government concerning service, culminating in the famous manifesto of 1762 which liberated them entirely from any obligation to serve. Extravagant expressions of gratitude met this "liberation," which was confirmed by Catherine II in her 1785 Charter to the Nobility. These government publications clearly let it be known, however, that any nobleman who valued his reputation and social status would voluntarily seek to serve the state. Several factors combined to attract considerable numbers of noblemen into the service after 1762. The nobility as a whole felt *morally* obliged to serve the state; the tradition was a long and deeply ingrained one. And one year after the original liberation manifesto, civil service salaries were substantially raised.<sup>21</sup> Many noblemen came to depend heavily upon the income they derived from government service. Finally, the government's strictures on the ignominy of refusing to serve were supported by the common personal conviction that service really was the key to a satisfying life. Vigel, referring to the year 1800, commented on this feeling: "State service in Russia is life. Almost all of us go into retirement like the living into the grave. . . . In times past people were more sensible on this account. Even then, however, some

18. *PSZ*, vol. 15, June 8, 1760, no. 11,066; vol. 23, Dec. 16, 1790, no. 16,930.

19. Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv v Leningrade, fond 1,374, *General-prokuror senata*, opis' 2, delo 1,296, p. 82.

20. Grigorii A. Evreinov, *Grazhdanskoe chino-proizvodstvo v Rossii: Istoricheskii ocherk* (St. Petersburg, 1888), p. 53.

21. *PSZ*, vol. 16, Dec. 15, 1763, no. 11,988; Demidova, "Biurokratizatsiia," p. 239.

families, and mine among them, felt that retirement incurred humiliation, loss of all hope, and deprivation of self-respect."<sup>22</sup>

Rank and titles in themselves had become highly valued as status symbols. A decree of 1800 illustrates the importance that rank had attained strictly as an attribute of honor.<sup>23</sup> A procedure was indicated whereby officials, in order to secure the distinction (*otlichie*) that they had gained through service, were to have their class and title registered at a court. Should an official be assigned to duties which were ordinarily associated with lower rank, his court registration would protect his honor, ensuring that any new titles he might receive would be appropriate to his class, regardless of his duties.

Even those born to wealth and prestige were most sensitive to questions of rank and title. As a student, the young aristocrat Alexei Kurakin wrote to his brother: "I am resolved to remain, one hundred years if necessary, in my quarters rather than to appear in public with the title of sergeant. . . . it is neither rank nor title [*ni les titres ni les rangs*] which I seek, but simply to escape so humiliating a grade [*un grade aussi humiliant*]. . . . I would be readily received in good company [*les compagnies honnêtes*] as an officer, but for the present I can frequent only the haunts of junior officers."<sup>24</sup> Kurakin at the age of sixteen found it degrading to bear a junior officer's title and stressed the access to desirable society which higher rank would entail. By Catherine II's reign, the promise of "rank" was an inducement for the nobility to enter service which the government proffered in place of the former obligation to serve.<sup>25</sup>

The government carried on a constant battle with persons who attempted to enhance their prestige by using unauthorized titles. Professional men were frequently guilty. Architects, physicians, and professors received reprimands for having used the titles of collegiate councilor and collegiate assessor. A physician might be in the government service at the same level (sixth class) as a collegiate councilor but was not permitted to use the latter's title, which carried more prestige.<sup>26</sup> A specific title conferred a certain status, and as time went on was even looked upon as giving one a right to certain duties, an idea not to be found in the Table of Ranks.<sup>27</sup>

22. Vigel, *Zapiski*, 1: 159.

23. *PSZ*, vol. 26, Aug. 3, 1800, no. 19,503.

24. *Arkhiv kniazia F. A. Kurakina*, ed. Fedor A. Kurakin (Saratov, 1893-1902), 8: 247.

25. The idea of rank becoming a substitute for obligatory service is well developed by Torke, "Das russische Beamtentum," pp. 28, 48-56.

26. *PSZ*, vol. 26, Aug. 3, 1800, no. 19,503.

27. Cf. Paul Dukes, *Catherine the Great and the Russian Nobility: A Study Based on the Materials of the Legislative Commission of 1767* (Cambridge, Eng., 1967), p. 184; Romanovich-Slavatinsky, *Dvorianstvo*, pp. 228-29; and Sergei A. Korf, *Dvorianstvo i ego soslovnnoe upravlenie za stoletie 1762-1855 godov* (St. Petersburg, 1906), p. 212.



The Heraldry Board (*Departament gerol'dii*) of the Senate in theory authorized each title granted by issuing a patent to its holder. A patent was legal proof of status. It could be used, for instance, to verify a man's nobility by indicating that he had attained rank of the eighth class or above.<sup>28</sup> The government more than recouped its expenses in issuing patents. Men of the second through fourth classes paid from 120 to 200 rubles each for theirs, a collegiate assessor of the eighth class paid 12½ rubles, and most of those in the lower ranks paid 1½ rubles. The requisite sum was withheld from the person's salary.<sup>29</sup> Many men, however, were promoted to a new rank without ever receiving a patent. A decree of 1782 reprimanded supervisors throughout the administration for their laxity in notifying the Heraldry Board of promotions. The decree pointed out that prompt and comprehensive issuance of patents would benefit the state treasury.<sup>30</sup>

The Russians, unlike the British, never sold office. In the British service, men often held office only nominally, paying someone else a portion of the income to do the actual work.<sup>31</sup> The British view of office as personal property was not present in Russia. When a Russian acquired a civil service post, he held it at the pleasure of the government and had no right to dispose of it himself. Beginning in the 1740s, however, rank as opposed to office was available for purchase strictly as a means of gaining prestige. In such cases the buyer obtained a patent of title without assignment to any actual position. This practice does not seem to have been very common, and in any case military titles were more popular than civil ones.<sup>32</sup>

Regular rules of promotion were sometimes set aside by the government. An early instance of this practice affected those persons working as senate secretaries. The position of senate secretary (eighth class) proved to be a most advantageous jumping-off place for higher ranks. The secretary had considerable responsibility. It was he who supervised paper work and determined the order of business as it would be presented to the senators. There were a number of these secretaries, each of whom handled a certain category of business. In 1737 a government decree observed that the turnover among senate secretaries was high, because many of them were promoted to such positions as collegiate councilors (sixth class) and even vice-governors. The number of promotions was declared excessive, and royal confirmation was required for future promotions from that position.<sup>33</sup> Such a requirement was

28. *PSZ*, vol. 22, Charter to the Nobility, Apr. 21, 1785, no. 16,187, art. 92.

29. *PSZ*, vol. 23, July 12, 1795, no. 17,355.

30. *PSZ*, vol. 21, Apr. 18, 1782, no. 15,381.

31. Emmeline W. Cohen, *The Growth of the British Civil Service, 1780-1939* (London, 1941), pp. 25-26.

32. Mikhail S. Aleksandrov, *Gosudarstvo biurokратиia i absoliutizm v istorii Rossii*, 3rd ed. (Moscow, 1925), p. 117.

33. *PSZ*, vol. 10, May 24, 1737, no. 7,262.

not usually imposed at that level of the service. Field Marshal Burkhard Christopher Munnich, politically powerful in the 1730s, was of the opinion that Russia was governed by “secretaries and senior secretaries.”<sup>34</sup> Catherine II also recognized the peculiar significance of the secretarial position. She warned her procurator general, “It will be most difficult for you to rule [*praviti*] the Senate chancellery and not to be deceived.”<sup>35</sup> Chancellery personnel, specifically the secretaries, shared the arcane knowledge of finding their way through an ever-increasing mass of uncodified laws. The duties of a secretary, either in the Senate or the colleges, gave him an unparalleled insight into the processes of government administration, and he continued to be a figure of central importance throughout the eighteenth century.

Standard rules for appointment and promotion were also abrogated to take advantage of an individual’s special qualifications. Frequently of value in this regard were language skills. A law of 1754 dealing with the promotion of Junkers (*iunkera*—young noblemen of the fourteenth class starting in the service) stated that, in general, they were to be promoted according to seniority. Thus, when a position became available the senior man should get it, even if it meant transferring him from one department to another. But Junkers in the Justice College and College of State Revenue (*Kamer kollegiia*) for the Baltic provinces were not to be transferred, because of their knowledge of German. The same exception applied to persons with specialized training in the College of Manufactures, the College of Mines, and the Office of the Mint (*Monetnaia kantseliaria*).<sup>36</sup>

One of the fundamental ideas underlying the Table of Ranks, that promotion in government service should be based on merit, was too much at variance with the structure of Russian society to be fully realized. At all times, men of noble birth were for the most part favored over commoners. Preferential treatment of noblemen was especially prominent during the long reign of Catherine II (1762–96).<sup>37</sup> Paul (1796–1801) also favored the nobility, but his stringent efforts to force noblemen into *military* service probably somewhat eased the commoner’s path in the civil administration.<sup>38</sup> Beginning about mid-century the nobility had been invited to send their offspring to the University of

34. Cited by V. N. Latkin, *Uchebnik istorii russkago prava perioda imperii (XVIII i XIX st.)*, 2nd ed. (St. Petersburg, 1909), p. 355.

35. Quotation in V. M. Gribovsky, *Vysshii sud i nadzor v Rossii, v pervuiu polovinu tsarstvovaniia Imperatritsy Ekateriny Vtoroi* (St. Petersburg, 1901), p. 170.

36. *PSZ*, vol. 14, July 26, 1754, no. 10,267. See also the requirement that judicial secretaries in Kiev had to have a command of Polish, *PSZ*, vol. 25, Sept. 17, 1798, no. 18,670.

37. Romanovich-Slavatinsky, *Dvorianstvo*, pp. 227–28.

38. *PSZ*, vol. 25, Oct. 5, 1799, no. 19,136, and Oct. 6, 1799, no. 19,140; vol. 26, Apr. 12, 1800, no. 19,376. Mikhail V. Klochkov, *Ocherki pravitel'stvennoi deiatel'nosti vremeni Pavla I* (Petrograd, 1916), p. 483.

Moscow as preparation for the civil service. Students could count their university years as credit toward promotion.<sup>39</sup> One of Catherine's first legislative acts very pointedly singled out the nobility for favored treatment. A decree permitted all noblemen who retired from service because of illness to be awarded officer's rank so that they would have precedence over commoners in retirement.<sup>40</sup> Beginning in the 1760s, the Russian nobleman automatically was promoted by one class if he transferred from military into civil service. The law specified that noblemen were preferred for the civil service over commoners.<sup>41</sup> Upon retirement, only noblemen were raised by one class, and only they could freely transfer from civil to military service.<sup>42</sup>

The implicit promise in the Table of Ranks of advancement based on merit, even for a commoner, had not entirely dropped from sight, however. The outstanding example of achievement by a commoner is the career of Michael Speransky, the son of a village priest. He entered government service in January 1797 at the age of twenty-five. After three months he obtained the eighth rank, being named a collegiate assessor. In November 1798 Speransky reached the sixth rank as a collegiate councilor. Toward the end of his career he was named Count of the Russian Empire by Nicholas I. Dmitrii Prokofevich Troshchinsky furnishes another example. Born in the Ukraine of unknown background, under Alexander I he became an actual privy councilor and served twice as a minister. Even Karamzin, who strongly favored preferment for the nobility in government service, wrote as follows: "Appointments must be made strictly according to ability not only in republics, but also in monarchies. Some men are gradually led, others are lifted to great heights by the omnipotent arm of the monarch; the law of gradual progress holds for most, but not for all men. A person endowed with a ministerial mind must not end up as a head clerk or secretary."<sup>43</sup>

Persons in the service enjoyed certain privileges as a group. They had the opportunity of membership in honorary orders such as the St. Vladimir's, St. Andrew's, and St. Anne's. To achieve inclusion in such an order with the right to wear the appropriate medal or ribbon was a matter of great pride. Financial privileges were also available to government servitors. Early in the century, concern for possible conflict of interests had been expressed by a law that prohibited civil servants from purchasing immovable property in the district where they worked. By 1778 Catherine declared this law outmoded.

39. See Marc Raeff, "L'État, le gouvernement et la tradition politique en Russie impériale," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 9 (Oct.-Dec. 1962): 299.

40. *PSZ*, vol. 16, July 15, 1762, no. 11,611.

41. *PSZ*, vol. 17, Sept. 5, 1765, no. 12,465.

42. Romanovich-Slavatinsky, *Dvorianstvo*, p. 230. *PSZ*, vol. 23, Dec. 16, 1790, no. 16,930.

43. Translation by Richard Pipes, *Karamzin's Memoir on Ancient and Modern Russia* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), p. 193.

In her view, men in the service were trustworthy, and besides, the network of procurators, the watchdogs of administrative legality, provided insurance against wrongdoing. Catherine concluded that civil servants were now free to buy and sell estates. The Charter to the Towns guaranteed civil and military servitors who resided in towns, and did not engage in trade, freedom from the taxes and obligations levied on ordinary townsmen. As an occupation group in Russia, then, civil servants had the benefit of definite social and economic advantages.<sup>44</sup>

Throughout the eighteenth century, civil servants in Russia were not looked upon as, nor did they consider themselves to be, a specific interest group. Their majority, particularly at the top, was made up of noblemen who tended to see the interests of the state and of themselves as identical.<sup>45</sup> A sense of corporateness among state officials did appear in the nineteenth century, and one of its earliest manifestations was a reaction to Speransky's attempted reform.

As a part of his effort toward fundamental reform of the Russian government structure, Speransky sponsored a law on civil service examinations, enacted in 1809.<sup>46</sup> To reach staff or general grade rank required passing a broad examination. No legislative precedent for this requirement existed, but Peter the Great had on occasion personally tested young candidates for government service. The 1809 law may be seen as an endeavor to restore the original Petrine conception of basing promotion on capability. By means of examination, Speransky hoped to end automatic promotion based on mere length of service. The response of civil servants was swift, uniform, and venomous. They saw guaranteed promotion threatened and were successful in preventing the law from ever becoming operative.<sup>47</sup> The law of 1809 failed to establish demonstrated capability as the criterion for civil service promotion, but it did catalyze the civil servants to act as a distinct interest group. Such behavior was to become characteristic in succeeding decades and marked a new era in the history of the Russian civil service.

Fundamentally, the Table of Ranks was an attempt to establish merit instead of birth as the basis for awarding government positions. Since eighteenth-century Russia was a class society with the nobility in a strongly dominating position, this attempt failed. Only those provisions of the Table of Ranks that reinforced prevailing attitudes met with general acceptance. Such was the case in favoring military over civil service. The influence of

44. *PSZ*, vol. 20, Jan. 28, 1778, no. 14,701; vol. 22, Charter to the Towns, Apr. 21, 1785, no. 16,188, art. 14.

45. Cf. Dukes, *Catherine the Great*, p. 174.

46. *PSZ*, vol. 30, Aug. 6, 1809, no. 23,771.

47. See Marc Raeff, *Michael Speransky: Statesman of Imperial Russia, 1772-1839* (The Hague, 1957), pp. 177-78.

social mores is illustrated by the various ways in which noblemen were preferred over commoners in government service, although the Table had implied that there should be no such discrimination. But the Table did provide a rationale whereby exceptions could be made to traditional practice. In the eighteenth century, the size and functions of Russian administration increased, many men with special skills were required, and often the only man available was of common origin. Without the official sanction for bringing commoners into state service which the Table of Ranks provided, the eighteenth-century Russian administration might well have been much more exclusively the preserve of the nobility. This same sanction also permitted commoners to achieve noble status, thus counteracting the nobility's natural tendency toward a closed caste.