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Political Ideals and Loyalties of Some Russian Writers of the Early 1760s

During the initial years of her reign, Catherine II had to contend with political criticism and expectation of reform among nobles such as Denis Fonvizin and Ippolit Bogdanovich. Many Soviet scholars, particularly Makogonenko, Gukovskii and Pigarev, argue that the political writings of these critics can be interpreted as the initial evidence of a "constitutional" movement in Russia similar to those of mid-seventeenth century England and late eighteenth century France.¹ The goal was to force Catherine to share political power by accepting "fundamental laws" or a "constitution." Convinced of the need for such reforms, Fonvizin, Bogdanovich, and several other lesser known writers tried unsuccessfully in 1762 to win Catherine's approval of their projects. Failing to gain Catherine's support, the nobles became her political opponents—consistently and insistently advocating their political principles. This interpretation is valuable for its focus on the question of sovereignty and the individual's relation to the ruler as well as appealing for its attempt to integrate Russian events into a broader, European framework. Yet Soviet historians do not adequately specify and evaluate the theoretical origins of this "constitutional" opposition.² General references to contemporary European think-

1. Aside from numerous introductory essays to edited works, for the important monographs see G. Makogonenko, *Nikolai Novikov i russkoe prosveshchenie XVIII veka* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1951); G. Makogonenko, *Denis Fonvizin: Tvorcheskii put'* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1961); G. Makogonenko, *Ot Fonvizina do Pushkina* (Moscow, 1969); K. V. Pigarev, *Tvorchestvo Fonvizina* (Moscow, 1954); G. Gukovskii, *Ocherki po istorii russkoi literatury XVIII veka: Dvorianskaia fronda v literature 1750-kh–1760-kh godov* (Moscow, 1936); and G. Gukovskii, *Russkaia literatura XVIII veka* (Moscow, 1939).

2. For example, Makogonenko states in the introduction to *Denis Fonvizin* that Russian writers' "ties with the French and German Enlightenment are not fully discovered. . . ." The author then begins his study by virtually omitting not only the possible intellectual influences on Fonvizin before 1762, but also any mention of his subject's life before 1762. A remark about Fonvizin's first translations of the writings of Voltaire and Holberg states that "already the writer's initial literary efforts show the ties with the works of the enlighteners—Voltaire and Holberg. From youth, enlightened doctrine about man, [and] social and political problems attracted the attention of Fonvizin." The biography starts with a subject who is already formed intellectually and categorized as an "enlightener." This vague classification does little to specify "the ties with the French and German Enlightenment." See Makogonenko, *Denis Fonvizin*, pp. 4 and 16.

ers (British, French or German political philosophers) obscure their differences and assume the transfer of western European political ideas into Russia intact and unaltered in content or understanding. It is necessary, therefore, to investigate carefully the theoretical origins of the Russian writers' political ideals, their own version of these ideals, and the implications these opinions had for the writers' relationship to the ruler during the early 1760s.

Soviet scholars give scant attention to a valuable clue in this inquiry. Most of Catherine's critics in 1762 had been primarily under the influence of the political ideas of the German Enlightenment as students at Moscow University in the mid-1750s and early 1760s. Denis Fonvizin was enrolled in the nobles' boarding school at Moscow University in 1755, where he remained until 1762.³ His brother Pavel was a student at the same time.⁴ The Fonvizins' close friend, Sergei Gerasimovich Domashnev, entered the same *gimnaziia* shortly after Elizabeth exiled his mother to Moscow in 1754 for attempting to bewitch the empress.⁵ Aleksandr Grigor'evich Karin, sent to the University by his father, is listed in the student rolls of the nobles' *gimnaziia* in 1756.⁶ The future poet and author of *Dushen'ka*, Ippolit Fedorovich Bogdanovich, was educated in the mathematics school of the Senate for four years before he transferred to Moscow University in 1758.⁷ The famous jour-

3. P. Viazemskii, *Fonvizin* (St. Petersburg, 1848), p. 30; Makogonenko, *Denis Fonvizin*, p. 15; and G. Makogonenko, "Zhizn' i tvorchestvo D. I. Fonvizina," in D. Fonvizin, *Sobranie sochinenii*. Ed. G. Makogonenko, 2 vols. (Moscow and Leningrad, 1959), 1:vi-vii.

4. Pavel Fonvizin (1745-1803) coupled a long government career with a continuous interest in literature. His important service appointments were as an assistant to Grigorii Orlov at the peace congress at Focsani in 1772 and as a director of Moscow University with the rank of brigadier in 1784. He reached his highest rank in 1786 with a promotion to the second rank of privy councillor. See M. Longinov, "Russkie pisateli XVIII veka," *Russkaia starina*, 1871, no. 4, pp. 574-75.

5. Sergei Domashnev (1742?-96) was later a deputy at the Legislative Commission and was appointed in 1775 as director and vice-president of the Academy of Sciences. Domashnev so mismanaged this assignment as to cause Catherine's intervention and Domashnev's resignation. See S. A. Vengerov, ed., *Istochniki slovaria russkikh pisatelei*, 4 vols. (Petrograd, 1917), 2:292; and M. Longinov, "Russkie pisateli XVIII veka," *Russkaia starina*, 1871, no. 3, pp. 205-7.

6. Aleksandr Grigor'evich Karin (?-1769) had a modestly successful, if brief, career in literature and service. He published a three act drama, *Graf Karamelli*, in 1759, an unpublished tragedy, *Antigona*, and an unpublished comedy, *Rossiianin, vozvrativshis'ia iz Frantsii*. He died in Saratov on September 22, 1769 on a military mission. See G. Gennadi, *Spravocnyi slovar' o russkikh pisateliakh i uchenykh*, 3 vols. (Berlin and Moscow, 1876-1908), 2:117; and M. Longinov, "Russkie pisateli XVIII veka," *Russkaia starina*, 1870, no. 2, pp. 74-75.

7. A. A. Polovtsov, ed., *Russkii biograficheskii slovar'*, 25 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1896-1918), 3:129-30; and Mitropolit Evgenii, *Slovar' rossiiskikh svetskikh pisatelei*, 2 vols. (Moscow, 1845), 1:43-44.

nalist, Nikolai Ivanovich Novikov, was enrolled by his parents in the *gimnazii* for the nobility in the late 1750s.⁸ Many of Catherine's later critics received their formal education in the late 1750s and early 1760s in the same boarding school and lecture halls of Moscow University.

This common academic training has a particular significance because the instructional arrangements at Moscow University enabled the professors to exercise a continued, proximate, and potentially intense influence on the students. In the late 1750s and early 1760s there were few students in the University. (The boarding schools did not graduate anyone until 1759.⁹) When Fonvizin, Novikov and Bogdanovich were students in the University itself, there were many more professors than students and classes could be quite small. Fonvizin remembered one course with only three students.¹⁰ Moreover, the young nobles were taught in the University by the very same men who directed their studies in the boarding schools.¹¹

These circumstances are important because most of the instructors were hired on the recommendation of Gerhard Friedrich Müller (1705–83), the academician, historian and publisher. Müller, a graduate of Leipzig before his arrival in Russia in 1725, relied on the suggestions of former colleagues and acquaintances at the most prestigious German universities. At this time Leipzig, Halle and Tübingen were intellectual havens of the German Enlightenment, and consequently, Müller's nominees were scholars familiar with the important German theorists such as the natural law jurists, Christian Wolff and Samuel Pufendorf. Wolff and Pufendorf were especially well represented by the new professors at Moscow University. Ioannes Matthias Shaden, a graduate of Tübingen in 1756, was a persuasive interpreter of Wolff's philosophy in his courses on moral philosophy and on Greek and Roman history.¹² Heinrich Philipp Dilthey was one of Pufendorf's students before he

8. G. Vernadskii, *Nikolai Ivanovich Novikov* (Petrograd, 1918), p. 2.

9. A. A. Kizevter, "Moskovskii universitet (istoricheskii ocherk)," in V. B. El'iashevich, A. A. Kizevter and M. M. Novikov, eds., *Moskovskii universitet 1755–1930: Iubileinyi sbornik* (Paris, 1930), p. 40.

10. Fonvizin, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 2:88.

11. M. V. Sychev-Mikhailov, *Iz istorii russkoi shkoly i pedagogiki XVII veka*. Ed. N. A. Konstantinov and M. F. Shabaev (Moscow, 1960), p. 77; and A. A. Kizevter, "Moskovskii universitet," p. 22.

12. *Biograficheskii slovar' professorov i prepodavatelei imperatorskogo moskovskogo universiteta*, 2 vols. (Moscow, 1855), 2:558–74. See also Sychev-Mikhailov, *Iz istorii russkoi shkoly*, pp. 79–80; and M. I. Demkov, *Istoriia russkoi pedagogiki*, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (Moscow, 1910), 2:425–27. One of Shaden's students, Denis Fonvizin, described Shaden ". . . as a scholarly man who had an excellent gift for giving lectures and explaining so clearly that our [Denis and Pavel Fonvizin] success was evident. . . ." Fonvizin, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 2:93.

was invited to Moscow in 1756 to teach history and law.¹³ A majority of the new professors was similarly schooled within the general framework of the ideas of the *Aufklärung*: Reichel and Kellner from Leipzig, Rost from Göttingen, and Froman from Stuttgart.¹⁴ The faculty's common philosophical persuasion does not, of course, necessarily mean that students were taught only the ideas of Wolff and Pufendorf, but does suggest the dominant influence of the German Enlightenment. The students' criticisms of 1762 are only fully understandable with reference, via the German-born professors at Moscow University, to the political writings of German philosophers.

The dominant, as well as representative, political opinions among German jurists were those of Pufendorf and Wolff. In early modern Germany, according to Holborn, Pufendorf's "influence prevailed in academic political thought."¹⁵ Pufendorf was quite definitely opposed to any separation of governmental powers. Sovereignty (*imperium*) was possessed solely by the monarch.¹⁶ The rights of the ruler were virtually unconditional, subject only to God. A government which divided political sovereignty was "simply a case of *respublica irregularis*; and a state of that kind is a diseased or 'perverted' state. . . ."¹⁷ Separation of powers was favorably considered in only a single reference to the understanding that a monarch's rule could be ultimately limited (*imperium limitatum*)¹⁸ by the assent of the citizens. This rather startling and potentially contradictory statement was, however, an exception to the rule.

Wolff, on the other hand, pursued the possibilities of limited sovereignty. "Supreme sovereignty (*imperium summum*) is originally with the people, and it remains the property of the people, even if it shall have been transferred completely to the ruler of the state as regards substance."¹⁹ These rights were not exchanged when the people or nation (*gens*) formed civil society (*societas*) or when civil society submitted to a ruler.²⁰ As a guarantee of these rights, a governor should be accepted only with conditions. These stipulations, termed fundamental laws, were unconditionally binding on mon-

13. *Ibid.*, 1:301–11.

14. *Ibid.*, 1:403–4; 2:340–48, 362–69, 536–37.

15. Hajo Holborn, *History of Modern Germany 1648–1840* (New York, 1964), p. 161.

16. Samuel Pufendorf, *Elementorum Jurisprudentiae Universalis Libri Duo*. Trans. William Abbott Oldfather, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1931), 2:14.

17. Otto Gierke, *Natural Law and the Theory of Society 1500–1800*. Trans. Ernest Barker (Boston, 1957), p. 155.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

19. Christian Wolff, *Jus Gentium Methodo Scientifica Pertractatum*. Trans. Joseph H. Drake, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1934), 2:222.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 313.

archs. "Comme il doit bien gouverner l'État . . . , il ne doit pas confondre la souveraineté de l'empire avec le pouvoir arbitraire; par conséquent *il doit bien connoître la nature des droits de majesté & leur légitime usage . . . , de même que les loix fondamentales, s'il y en a, qu'il est obligé d'observer. . . .*"²¹ Wolff seems to have revised Pufendorf's absolutist opinions in favor of popular sovereignty, a change significant for its potential implications for political opinion in the German states, or in Russia.

This element of Wolff's political theory was tested when he attempted to define what type of fundamental laws best served the nation. Laws establishing absolute popular sovereignty were dismissed as readily as those providing for absolute royal power.²² The proper balance between popular sovereignty and royal power was not defined but, in one instance, Wolff approximated a specific answer to the general question. In enumerating the duties of nations to one another, Wolff assumed that each nation was to offer all possible aid toward the security and perfection of the second nation.²³ What if the ruler of one nation decides to wage an unjust war on the government and nation of the other? "Since he represents his nation when he deals with other nations, if by some act of his own he does a wrong or causes a loss to some nation, . . . the people subject to him is understood to have done this. Therefore, the people is bound to assume as its own the act of the ruler of a state as such, by which injury is caused to outsiders."²⁴ The nation's responsibility seems to imply the right to refuse support for its ruler's unjust war. However, in this single clear test case of Wolff's principles, his response was that the nation had a duty to obey its monarch.²⁵ Thus, Wolff's opinions on sovereignty represent essential agreement with Pufendorf in the preference for absolutist rulers, unhindered by any limitations.

The ruler was restricted not in his possession of sovereignty but in his exercise of it. The functions of the monarch were commonly defined by Wolff and Pufendorf in relation to the purposes of civil society. "*Le but de la société est 1. d'avoir ce qui suffit à la vie, . . . 2. la tranquillité de la société, c'est-à-dire, d'être sans crainte des injures, ou de la violation de son droit . . . , 3. la sécurité, ou l'exemption de crainte de violence sur tout du dehors. Il*

21. Christian Wolff, *Institutions du droit de la nature et des gens*. Trans. Mr. M***, ed. Elie Luzac, 2 vols. (Aleyde, 1772), 2:179. For the original work in Latin, see Wolff, *Institutiones Juris Naturae Et Gentium* in Christian Wolff, *Gesammelte Werke*. Ed. M. Thomann, 36 vols. (Hildesheim, 1964-), 26:671-72.

22. *Ibid.*, 2:150-51; Wolff, *Gesammelte Werke*, 26:613-18.

23. Wolff, *Jus Gentium*, 2:135.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 307.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 487-88.

paroit encore, que le salut de la société civile consiste dans la jouissance de ce qui suffit à la vie, de la tranquillité et de la sécurité. . . .”²⁶ This understanding of the public welfare determined the only acceptable functions of the ruler.²⁷ A monarch had to preserve the security of his citizens by neither insufficiently nor excessively guarding against wars. The ruler was allowed to go to war only on the very carefully specified bases of defense, a legitimate claim against another monarch, an irreparable wrong inflicted by one sovereign on the other or the threat of an irreparable wrong.²⁸ Wars begun for any other reason were the consequence of rulers blinded by a passion for glory or revenge. “In every period the more civilized nations have recognized that unjust belligerents are to be classed with robbers, invaders, and bandits, . . . unjust war is not only opposed to the personal glory of the ruler of the state, but also to the glory of his nation, for which he ought to care.”²⁹ A monarch would be capable of avoiding unjust wars and fulfilling his obligations to the common good if he cultivated the ideals of reason and virtue. A sovereign whose conduct was rationally regulated could resist any abusive implementation of his power. Without this “purity of mind,”³⁰ a monarch would be prey to his own passions and consequently either “. . . devoid of the arts of reigning, and unconcerned, or insufficiently concerned, for the state, and prostitutes it to be rent asunder by the ambition or avarice of unworthy ministers; or . . . dreaded for his cruelty and proneness to anger. . . .”³¹ A monarch should act with the same concern for security and order within his own state as he did in his relations with other states.

If the monarch violated his expected functions, did individual citizens have the right to question the continued legitimacy of his sovereignty? Could citizens assume an adversary relationship toward the ruler? The German jurists analyzed this possibility by reference to the issue of just resistance. Pufendorf’s writings were virtually unqualified in reaffirming the subjects’ duty to obey a ruler no matter what. “Upon the subjects, indeed, there rests the perfect obligation of doing the bidding of the prince, and that the prince has ground for action against the disobedient. . . . But upon the prince . . . it is merely an imperfect obligation, for the reason that it merely binds him

26. Wolff, *Institutions*, 2:138–40; Wolff, *Gesammelte Werke*, 26:597–98. See also Samuel Pufendorf, *De Jure Naturae Et Gentium Libri Octo*. Trans. C. J. and W. A. Oldfather, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1934), 2:959; Pufendorf, *Elementorum*, 2:286–87.

27. Samuel Pufendorf, *De Officio Hominis Et Civis Juxta Legem Naturalem Libri Duo*. Trans. Frank Gardner Moore, 2 vols. (New York, 1927), 2:121. See also Wolff, *Institutions*, 2:152, 155, 179; Wolff, *Gesammelte Werke*, 26:617–18, 624, 670.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 138. See also Wolff, *Jus Gentium*, 2:316.

29. Wolff, *Jus Gentium*, 2:402.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 334.

31. Pufendorf, *De Officio Hominis*, 2:114.

by the force of the law of God and the law of nature, but not as by the force of some civil law. . . .”³² The nature of the sovereign’s power was a precedent quality overriding any evaluation of his conduct by his citizens. A citizen could resist his ruler only if the sovereign commanded obedience to a civil law which contradicted divine laws or when the monarch no longer protected the citizen but treated him as an enemy.³³ This very narrow basis for just resistance was broadened somewhat by Wolff. The ruler had a perfect duty to obey his obligations to his citizens. “Et comme le Souverain n’a aucun droit de commander des choses contraires aux lois fondamentales . . . , il ne faut pas obéir . . . et même il est permis de résister au Souverain et de la réprimer. . . .”³⁴ Citizens were not bound to obey a monarch who “tyrannizes” and abuses his authority.³⁵ But who was to judge a ruler’s abuse of power? Popular opinion was dismissed as unreliable.³⁶ The only other assessor of royal conduct was the sovereign himself. Wolff’s opinion, therefore, led him to admonish subjects to obey a ruler whatever his qualities.³⁷ Wolff had changed the bases for considering just resistance from a reliance on the quality of the sovereign’s authority to the agreement establishing that power as expressed in the fundamental laws. However, this contractual and potentially reciprocal premise is not as important as the more general agreement on the question of legitimate resistance. Pufendorf and Wolff provided virtually no theoretical bases for opposing the policies and authority of a monarch.

This understanding of the individual’s relation to a state which possesses full, undivided sovereignty is characteristic not only of the writings of Pufendorf and Wolff but also of the political tradition which the two jurists represent. If the political philosophy of the *Aufklärung* was, in its original and typical form, a rationale for absolutism, Russian interpreters of the German jurists developed their own political opinions only within the framework of absolutist principles. To be sure, Russian writers did not maintain German political ideals with the comprehensiveness and elaboration typical of the original German works. The Russian nobles were not philosophers but university students with limited intellectual experiences. They were not, however, merely

32. Pufendorf, *Elementorum*, 2:76.

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 287–88.

34. Wolff, *Institutions*, 2:180; Wolff, *Gesammelte Werke*, 26:672–73.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 133; Wolff, *Gesammelte Werke*, 26:589–90. The reference was to relations between masters and serfs on estates but was used by Wolff inferentially as an example of the rights and duties of members of several types of associations such as the family, the estate, and the civil government.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 144–45; Wolff, *Gesammelte Werke*, 26:605.

37. Wolff, *Jus Gentium*, 2:308.

conveyers of German political opinion, accepting the German ideas totally and uncritically. The Russian students actively interpreted these principles and adapted them to contemporary Russian circumstances.

The young nobles' interest in the political ideas of Wolff and Pufendorf was very selective. They were less interested in the jurists' political philosophies *in toto* than in defining their own understanding of the particular question of the ruler's proper functions. In the student periodicals,³⁸ the young *littérateurs* made repeated attempts to describe the necessary qualities of an ideal monarch. This utopian image was best outlined by Sergei Domashnev,³⁹ who recounted his dream of a trip up a high mountain path. His escort explained that the path was one of false glory nourished by pride and vanity. Its travelers had failed to master their passions.⁴⁰ The author recognized Alexander the Great along the way and asked the guide the reason for this ruler's presence. His guide responded that ". . . *Alexander* is called *Great* because he more than others is blinded by pride."⁴¹ Alexander had not realized that the glory he desired to satisfy his pride and vanity could not be attained by military victories but only by improving his own citizens' prosperity.⁴² Domashnev noted that ". . . it seemed very strange to me that the name of Hero is given to people who surpassed others only in lawless actions (*bezzakonie*) and became famous by blood-letting, laying waste to lands and causing countless calamities for the human race."⁴³ When, subsequently in the dream, the author climbed a second mountain, following the path of true fame, he met fewer rulers, but he did encounter Marcus Aurelius, Augustus, and Peter the Great. The characters of these men were typified by the dominance of reason, cultivation of virtue and concern more for benefiting their subjects than waging unnecessary wars.⁴⁴ Domashnev's "dream," typical of similar articles by other students,⁴⁵ stressed the monarch's duty to act rationally by restraining his passions and avoiding "lawless actions."

38. The student periodicals from 1760 to 1764 were quite similar to the didactic journals throughout western Europe which were patterned on the *Spectator*. The first Russian "moral weekly" was *Poleznoe uveselenie*, published weekly from January 1760 to December 1761 and thereafter monthly until closed in June 1762. Its editor, Mikhail Kheraskov (1733–1807), subsequently began publication of a monthly, *Svobodnye chasy*, in January 1763. At the same time as *Svobodnye chasy*, Bogdanovich edited a new monthly, *Nevinnoe uprazhnenie*, which closed in June 1763. *Dobroe namerenie* was a monthly published in 1764 under the editorship of Vasilii Sankovskii.

39. S. Domashnev, "Son," *Poleznoe uveselenie*, December 1761, no. 23, pp. 209–20.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 211.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 213.

42. *Ibid.*

43. *Ibid.*, p. 209.

44. *Ibid.*, pp. 215–18.

45. For other examples, see A. Karin, "Son: Khram dobrodeteli," *ibid.*, December 1761, no. 26, pp. 249–59; Andrei Nartov, "Rech' skiifskago posla k Aleksandru Velikommu,"

Domashnev's criticism of warlike rulers was expanded and detailed by many of his peers. Belligerent monarchs like Alexander the Great provided sufficient examples to raise doubts about the influence of the values of reason and virtue. These doubts, aroused perhaps by despair or cynicism, were ultimately based on pessimistic appraisals of human nature. In a partial translation of Swift's *Tale of a Tub*,⁴⁶ the translator chose a selection satirizing man's peculiar capacity to support large armies for mutual destruction.⁴⁷ Rulers whose conduct was not morally regulated were reminded that they had been commissioned in their positions by God as the impersonal executor of his intentions.⁴⁸ Sovereigns were oblivious to this mission if they arrogated victories, wealth and territory to their own credit. A monarch should remember that ". . . those and only those are favored and acceptable to God who love peace and virtue."⁴⁹ A ruler who violated his expected role was threatened with God's revenge.⁵⁰ Monarchs who waged unnecessary wars and pursued expansionary foreign policies risked God's intervention, violated divine stewardship and lacked the necessary rationally controlled conduct.

This concern with rulers who failed to fulfill their proper functions can be ascribed, to a certain degree, to the similar interests of Pufendorf and Wolff. Yet what accounts for the stress on this single part of the German jurists' political philosophies, particularly in comparison to the attention paid to the two other cardinal points of sovereignty and just resistance? The Russian students expressed no interest in deliberating on the nature and possession of sovereignty, and potentially provocative references to Pufendorf's *imperium limitatum* and Wolff's *imperium summum* were not pursued. Similarly, the very limited bases for just resistance were neither challenged

ibid., January 1761, no. 5, pp. 41–44; Dmitrii Anichkov, trans., "Rech' kotoruiu govorel odin razumnoi chelovek iz garamantov k Aleksandru Velikomu," ibid., September 1761, no. 11, pp. 81–91.

46. G. K. [Grigorii Kozitskii], trans., "Kratkoe izobrazhenie o estestve, pol'ze i neobkhodimoi potrebnosti voiny i ssor," *Trudoliubivaia pchela*, September 1759, pp. 571–74. *Trudoliubivaia pchela* was the immediate predecessor of the periodicals of 1760 to 1764. The editor, A. P. Sumarokov, published monthly issues from January to December 1759.

47. Ibid., p. 574.

48. For example, see M. Permskii, "Rech' nekotorigo krest'ianina, . . . k rimskim senatoram," *Dobroe namerenie*, August 1764, pp. 372–83; September 1764, pp. 401–18. Another later example of a distrust of rulers and the corresponding fear of wars was clear in Bogdanovich's translation in 1771 of Rousseau's long commentary on the project for a "république européenne" as proposed by Charles Drenee Castel, Abbé de Sainte Pierre (1658–1743). See J. J. Rousseau, *Extrait du Projet de paix perpétuelle de Monsieur l'Abbé de Saint-Pierre* (n.p., 1761).

49. Ibid., p. 402.

50. Ibid., pp. 374–75.

nor even described in print. The students were selective in their reference to the political ideas of Pufendorf and Wolff not because of disagreement or disregard but because of contemporary Russian literary and political circumstances.

The students' emphasis on the functions of the monarch was influenced not only by the works of German jurists but also by the political ideals described in Fenelon's *Les Aventures de Télémaque, Fils d'Ulysse*. Fenelon's book publicized an ideal ruler whose qualities closely coincided with those valued by the young writers. Telemachus, a man of reason and virtue, and a ruler of peaceful intentions, was contrasted with his rival Pygmalion who lacked these same qualities. This book was ". . . the first French work to become a smash literary hit in Russia. It was translated several times, and inspired a Russian continuation: the *Tilemakhida* of Trediakovskii. . . ."51 In 1769 Fonvizin referred to his translation of Bitaubé's *Joseph* as a book similar to *Telemachus (Telemak)*, presumably that of Fenelon rather than Trediakovskii.⁵² The political ideals associated with Telemachus reinforced the German philosophers' concern about the proper functions of the ruler and were conducive to the formation of the students' own political ideas.

These political opinions, however, were the outgrowth of not only European political ideals but also contemporary Russian political events and personalities. Descriptions of monarchs who avoided unnecessary wars and carefully fulfilled their duties to their subjects were in sharp contrast to the conduct of Elizabeth I. The empress was concerned more with her health and her desire for luxuries than the responsibilities of a ruler. A contemporary and diplomatic ally, the Austrian envoy Count Mercy d'Argenteau reported to Vienna on November 11, 1762 that ". . . the Sovereign cares very little, even not at all, about the fulfillment of her commands and since ill-mentioned and self-interested executors remain. . ."53 virtually nothing is accomplished. "Consequently, the state is in poor condition and disorder, but the Empress meanwhile continues her carefree life. . . ."54 The unfavorable comparison of Elizabeth with the virtuous, conscientious ruler of the journals was certainly clear to the shrewd, contemporary reader. The empress was also vulnerable to criticism of her military policies. Her continued support of Russia's participation in the Seven Years War was an extremely unpopular policy in the early 1760s, but the students did not explicitly appeal to this discontent

51. James Billington, *The Icon and the Axe* (New York, 1966), p. 235.

52. Paul Jérémie Bitaubé, *Iosif*. Trans. and with an intro. by Fonvizin, in Fonvizin, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 1:443.

53. Quoted in A. Shefer [A. Schaefer], "Iz poslednikh dnei russkoi imperatritsy Elisavety," *Chteniia v moskovskom obshchestve istorii i drevnostei*, no. 2 (1877), p. 5.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

through public criticism of involvement in the war. Rather, they quite prudently criticized Elizabeth's war policies only by implication by associating themselves with a preference for a less belligerent ruler. Their writings were public notice of a lack of confidence in the empress and an attempt to gain the attention of her successors.

After Elizabeth's death on December 25, 1761, the accession of Peter III was the occasion of many panegyric odes in the student journals. Bogdanovich expressed common opinion by praising the new emperor as one who would "console the Russian lands,/ and frighten her enemies. . . ." ⁵⁵ His subjects should be grateful. "Virtue triumphs now,/ Insidious malice is scattered by the wind:/ Ours is a happy fate,/ When PETER rules us. . . ." ⁵⁶ Confident of the virtuous character of the new monarch, Russians could also rely on Peter for military protection. "Subduing destroyers of the peace/ By the power of his own hand:/ Who can take up arms in battle/ Against the Russian hero?" ⁵⁷ Bogdanovich hoped the new emperor would personify in his character and programs the qualities of the ideal ruler and pay heed to attempts to curry his favor. The expectations of all the young writers were quickly proved unfounded. Peter's personal conduct and official policies no more resembled those of an ideal ruler than had Elizabeth's. If Peter paid any attention to the student *littérateurs*, his opinion of their work did not lead to any rewards of money or rank.

Though there is no evidence that the young writers had already established contact with the grand duchess, Catherine's accession to the throne was greeted with the same initial response that Peter had received. She was the subject of several odes, each enthusiastic in praise and expectation of the new empress, each careful to contrast the hopes in Catherine with the disappointing characteristics of her husband's reign; and all, cumulatively, portraying an image of the new ruler as a law-abiding, peace-loving monarch. ⁵⁸ A complete description of Catherine was best expressed inferentially

55. I. F. Bogdanovich, "Oda na den' vosshestviia na vsrossiiskii prestol ego velichestva gosudaria imperatora PETRA FEODOROVICHA, samoderzhtsa vsrossiiskogo," *Poleznoe wveselenie*, January 1762, p. 1.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

58. I. F. Bogdanovich, "Oda eia imperatorskomu velichestvu, gosudaryne Ekaterine Alekseevne, samoderzhitse vsrossiiskoi. Na novyi 1763 god," in I. F. Bogdanovich, *Sochineniia Bogdanovicha*. Ed. A. Smirdin, 2 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1848), 1:252-56. For the dating of the ode in 1762, see Bogdanovich, *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy*. Ed. I. Z. Serman (Leningrad, 1957), note to pp. 150-53. See also Aleksandr Karin, "Oda na den' vosshestviia na prestol imperatritsy Ekateriny II," cited in Saitov, *Fedor Grigor'evich Karin*, p. 22, and Sergei Domashnev, "Oda na vosshestvie na prestol imperatritsy Ekateriny II," cited in M. Longinov, "Russkie pisateli XVIII veka," *Russkaia starina*, 1871, no. 3, p. 206.

in one of Denis Fonvizin's initial prose works in a periodical published soon after the coup. The article, which included an extract from his translation of Jean Terrasson's *Séthos, vie tirée des monuments de l'ancienne Égypte*,⁵⁹ described an Egyptian ruler who ". . . fulfilled faithfully all the duties for which she was obligated to the gods. . . . Her concern for the general welfare and zeal shown in that regard clearly demonstrated that she preserved the divine laws immutably and that they directed her heart."⁶⁰ Conscientious in observing her obligations to her own subjects, the monarch also ". . . mastered external enemies by her bravery and her inviolable word. . . ."⁶¹ The ruler ". . . did all this with true virtue, respecting with good reason the fulfillment of her duties and the purpose of the general welfare. She did not use sovereign power for the satisfaction of her passions; but she determined that the tranquility of her domains depended on the tranquility of her soul. . . ."⁶² This description of a dispassionate ruler, careful to fulfill her duties—to defend her subjects and observe the laws—was an unmistakable sign of the trust and confidence in Catherine and a restatement of the standards of official conduct expected of her.

Literary support for the new empress was supplemented in at least one instance by direct aid. The evidence suggests that Novikov and possibly Karin and Domashnev were stationed in military units and were able to prove their allegiance to Catherine on June 28. Novikov and Domashnev were on the rolls of the Izmailovskii regiment, whose leader, Count Kirill Grigor'evich Razumovskii (1728–1803), used his troops on Catherine's behalf on the night of June 28. As a result, Nikolai Novikov, a member of the unit since January 1762,⁶³ was involved in the coup although the extent of his participation is not clear. He may have marched to Peterhof and back⁶⁴ or simply been on duty at regimental headquarters when Catherine returned from Peterhof.⁶⁵ The role of Sergei Domashnev is vague. He had been enrolled in the 12th

59. [Denis Fonvizin, trans.], "Rech' kotoruiu glavnoi zhrets Memfisa, govoril, pri pogrebenii Egipetskoï tsaritsy, materi Sifovoi," *Sobranie luchshikh sochinenii k rasprostraneniû znaniiã i k proizvedeniû udovol'stviã*, part 3 (July–September 1762), pp. 105–12. Jean Terrasson (1670–1750) was a French writer who wrote *Séthos* probably in imitation of Fenelon's *Les Aventures de Télémaque, Fils d'Ulysse*. Fonvizin published his translation in four parts, between 1762 and 1768. See Fonvizin, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 1:xv.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

63. M. N. Longinov, *Novikov i moskovskie martinisty* (Moscow, 1867), pp. 11–12; and G. Vernadskii, *Nikolai Ivanovich Novikov*, p. 4.

64. Longinov, *Novikov*, p. 13.

65. P. E. (?), "Predislovie," *Truten*, p. viii. The editor is not known, though probably Efremov.

company of the Izmailovskii regiment since February 12, 1760⁶⁶ and he may have witnessed the coup. Similarly, Aleksandr Karin had some degree of involvement, though his precise role is unclear. His biographer notes only that Karin “took an active part” in the events of June 28.⁶⁷

The attempts to win Catherine’s attention, unlike the attempt to attract Peter, were successful for reasons quite independent of the ideals expressed by these few Russian students. Catherine wanted to disassociate herself from her husband and create a public image of a virtuous monarch, intent on ruling according to the laws and unwilling to pursue belligerent military policies.⁶⁸ Since this pose coincided with the political ideals of the writers, the empress received a particular, if minor, benefit from their public praise. Consequently, she was disposed to reward the littérateurs and her favor was revealed by appointments and rank. In October 1762, Denis Fonvizin was transferred from Moscow University to the College of Foreign Affairs at the tenth rank of lieutenant (*poruchik*).⁶⁹ On October 7, 1763, he was promoted to the ninth rank of titular councillor (*tituliarnyi sovetnik*) with the duty to translate petitions to the empress not originally written in Russian and to write, in rare instances, extracts of reports for Catherine herself.⁷⁰ Bogdanovich was also remarkably successful in beginning his service career. On October 29, 1761, he was appointed “to supervise classes” at Moscow University at the thirteenth rank of ensign (*praporshchik*).⁷¹ Reappointments quickly followed which transferred him first in May 1763 to the War College as a translator for Petr Panin and then within a year to the College of Foreign Affairs to work with Nikita Panin.⁷² Three other writers received promotion and rank in the military soon after June 28. Pavel Fonvizin was given a position in “the lower ranks” of the Semenovskii regiment of the Light Guards.⁷³ Nikolai Novikov was promoted to the status of a noncommissioned officer (*unter-ofitser*),⁷⁴ a title common to the last three ranks in the Table of Ranks. On

66. M. D. Khmyrov, “Primechanie,” in M. Longinov, “Russkie pisateli XVIII veka,” *Russkaia starina*, 1871, no. 3, note no. 3 to p. 205.

67. M. Longinov, “Russkie pisateli XVIII veka,” *Russkaia starina*, 1870, no. 2, p. 74.

68. Catherine’s justification of the coup of June 28 and her intentions as the new ruler were summarized in her manifesto of July 6, 1762. See V. A. Bil’basov, *Istoriia Ekateriny Vtoroi*, 12 vols. (Berlin, 1900), 2:84–91. For a recent interpretation of Catherine’s intent to rule by laws, see D. Griffiths, “Catherine II, The Republican Empress,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 21, no. 3 (1973): 323–44.

69. Fonvizin, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 2:94. See also Viazemskii, *Fonvizin*, p. 465.

70. Ibid. For a copy of the original *ukaz* of 1763, see Viazemskii, *Fonvizin*, p. 466.

71. I. F. Bogdanovich, “Avtobiografia I. F. Bogdanovicha,” *Otechestvennye zapiski*, 1853, no. 87, p. 184.

72. Ibid.

73. M. Longinov, “Russkie pisateli XVIII veka,” *Russkaia starina*, 1871, no. 4, p. 574.

74. Vernadskii, *Nikolai Ivanovich Novikov*, p. 4.

August 3, 1762, Aleksandr Karin was rewarded for his commitment on June 28, as well as for his endorsements in print, by an appointment to the Horse Guards at the twelfth rank of cornet (*kornet*).⁷⁵ The promotions were modest tokens of imperial favor, yet indicated that the writers were favored by Catherine to a degree that fairly accurately assessed their rôle in the events of June 1762.

The initial bureaucratic and military assignments, however modest, suggest the reasons underlying both the young writers' development of their own version of German political ideals and their attempts to curry the favor of the ruler during the early 1760s. As students, the writers had an acute interest in obtaining advantageous government posts. They wanted positions which afforded prestige, visibility and, preferably, enough free time to pursue literary and social interests. The goal was not a university post but a regiment or government office. This career aim was a significant influence on the students' use of their university education, particularly of their familiarity with German political theory. The nobles had no interest in bringing the sum total of their knowledge of German natural law to print but did recognize the advantage of publicizing selective elements of that philosophy. Repeated references to the proper functions of the ruler were made on the assumption that public criticism of Elizabeth would draw the attention of Peter and Catherine. The journals did not include articles on either the question of legitimate types of political authority or the bases of just resistance because there was no personal advantage in supporting either of these two concepts. Selective reference to the writings of the German jurists was a means of currying imperial favor at a time when they were about to leave student life to begin service in the military or civil bureaucracy. The young writers were quite willing to employ German political ideals to promote their own career interests.

Service advancement, however, is insufficient as the sole explanation of the nobles' concerns. If self-interest was the exclusive concern, how does one account for the students' consistent support of their conception of the ruler's proper functions? Public criticism of belligerent, negligent monarchs could ingratiate the writers with Peter during the last two years of Elizabeth's reign and the initial period of Peter's own rule. But once the new emperor's policies and personal qualities were accurately assessed, the students' continued adherence to the same principles would only have been detrimental to their career ambitions. Yet there is no evidence the writers were willing to revise, change or mute their political criticisms. As a rule, a young nobleman did not promote his chances for prestigious service assignments by indirectly

75. M. Longinov, "Russkie pisateli XVIII veka," *Russkaia starina*, 1870, no. 2, p. 74.

criticizing two successive monarchs. The consistency of this criticism suggests that the students' political writings were not simply the dictates of expediency but were also assured, perhaps even bold, advocacies of conviction. The descriptions of the ideal monarch were meant to advance the writers' political principles as well as improve their favor with the throne.

A complementary interest in career and conviction was reaffirmed after the events of June 28, 1762. When Catherine II portrayed herself as a monarch whose rule would avoid the abuses of her two predecessors and approximate the qualities of the ideal ruler, her public image enabled the students to curry her favor without violating their political principles. They could support her on the theoretical basis of political conviction and, during the initial years of Catherine's reign, the young writers were able to reconcile harmoniously political preferences and the promotion of service advancement.

This accommodation of opportunism and principle suggests the proper framework for considering the writers' political ideals and loyalties to Catherine. The students' political convictions were not "constitutionalist," as Soviet scholars argue, but absolutist. Again contrary to Soviet interpretations, the writers were not opponents of the empress, intent on limiting her powers, but supporters, eager for her favor. However, the relationship between Catherine and the writers certainly included the potential for conflict. In 1762 and 1763 the students did not yet need to evaluate their commitments to theoretical and career interests, or to decide the relative importance of each in order to choose between the two. Of course, choice was not necessary as long as Catherine's policies and the students' political convictions coincided, but the empress could not be expected to adhere consistently and permanently to programs initially adopted for conditions typical only of the early 1760s. If Catherine changed her plans for governing by laws and with peaceful intentions, her young supporters would then have to decide between career and principle, and commit their primary loyalties to one or the other. What this choice would be is not evident from their activities in 1762 and 1763. Subsequently, the students did not completely abandon either their interest in maintaining a bureaucratic post or their political ideals of the early 1760s. They remained in the civil or military service for most of their lives. (The single exception was Novikov who chose to retire in 1768.⁷⁶) They enjoyed modestly successful careers and attained relatively high ranks.⁷⁷

76. Bogdanovich retired in 1795 (d.1803); Denis Fonvizin in 1782 (d.1792); Pavel Fonvizin at an unspecified date during Paul's reign of 1796–1801 (d.1803); Sergei Domashnev in 1783 (d.1796); Aleksandr Karin died in service in 1769; and, the only exception, Nikolai Novikov retired in 1768 (d.1818).

77. Bogdanovich achieved promotions to sixth rank of collegial councillor (*kollezhskii sovetnik*); Denis Fonvizin the fifth rank of state councillor (*statskii sovetnik*);

The writers were not, however, simply state servants with a gloss of literary distinction. Their support for Catherine did have a theoretical basis in their own interpretation of her duties. As students, although they had been willing to submit to the intellectual authority of German political philosophers, they were capable of elaborating their own understanding of the original works and able to establish their own originality and theoretical independence. As mature bureaucrats, they were convinced advocates of enlightened absolutism. It is obvious that a political opposition to the empress could have been formed on the very same theoretical bases on which Elizabeth and Peter III were criticized in the early 1760s and Catherine herself was praised in 1762 and 1763. Thus, the political ideals of the student journalists included a potential element capable of providing the rationale for independent criticism of imperial policies.

Pavel Fonvizin the second rank of privy councillor (*deistvitel'nyi tainyi sovetnik*); Domashnev the fourth rank of state councillor (*deistvitel'nyi statskii sovetnik*); Karin the twelfth rank of cornet (*kornet*); and Novikov the tenth rank of lieutenant (*poruchik*).