



German History in Documents and Images

Volume 2. From Absolutism to Napoleon, 1648-1815

Emperor Joseph II's Instructions to all his Government Officials on the Principles of Fulfilling their Duty (December 13. 1783)

Celebrated in public opinion as Joseph's "Pastoral Letter" [*Hirtenbrief*], this long-winded statement demanded of the state servant, in a religion-suffused discourse, "a warm soul for the best interest of the state and the complete renunciation of himself and all leisure." In these instructions, Joseph also commanded an end to favoritism based on "religion or nation." But as a reward to competent and upright officials, he held out the promise of much-improved terms of service, retirement, and widows' and orphans' benefits.

Three years have now passed since I had to take over the state administration. Throughout that same period, I have abundantly displayed, in all parts of the administration, my principles, my views, and my intentions, with no small effort, conscientiousness, and forbearance. I was not content to simply order something, I worked it out and developed it; I remedied conditions that had arisen from prejudice and ingrained old habits through education and challenged them with facts. I have sought to instill in every servant of the state the love I feel for the general welfare and the zeal for service to it. It necessarily follows from this that, beginning with oneself, one must have no other intention in one's actions than the utility and welfare of the greater number. I placed trust in the heads and granted them power, so that they might exert their effect both on the mindset and actions of their subordinates. Choosing personnel was left entirely to their discretion. Ideas and adduced causes, and the ever-valued truth [were things that] I always welcomed from the heads, as well as from everyone: every day and hour, my door was open to them, in part to listen to their ideas, in part to clear up their doubts. Now, in accordance with my duty and the loyalty that I have devoted to the state in all my actions throughout my life, I most earnestly look to the fulfillment and implementation, without exception, of all orders and principles issued by me, which I have until now seen so sorely neglected, not without sorrow. That much is ordered and dispatched, but that no attention of any kind is paid to observance and implementation, gives rise to the fact that so many repeat orders must be given, and still one has no certainty about anything; indeed, most perform their affairs in a workmanlike fashion, in that they go about their business not with the intent of bringing about the good and instructing the people about it, but only do what is absolutely necessary to avoid getting embroiled in a lawsuit and being subject to dismissal.

In this mechanical-slavish manner, it is impossible to perform one's business in a useful way. Anyone who, in a court position or a state, wishes to be or remain a head, vice president or

chancellor, councilor, district chief, *Obergespann* or *Vicegespann*, of whatever type of clerical, temporal, or military estate, must

1st. From here on newly retrieve from the state registers, in accordance with the job of the state administration entrusted to him, all the chief decisions and normal resolutions I have passed, collect them and diligently read and peruse them in such a way that he completely absorbs their true meaning and intent.

2nd. Experience has unfortunately demonstrated that instead of searching out the good in a resolution and fathoming the meaning one does not immediately grasp, or, with just confidence in the known sentiments, grasping the same with zeal and making its implementation one's charge, one looks at it only from the disagreeable or wrong side, delays its implementation as long as possible, giving no explanation to that end, instructing no one, and in this way seeks merely to spread an ineffectual clamor, indeed, in most cases issues a meaningless instruction that is often not clear enough for compliance. And with this, one fails to note that the territorial prince, with his orders, reveals only his views and intentions, while his court and territorial offices are enjoined to declare in more detail the intent of his will, and to chose all paths that can lead to its more correct, more precise, and swifter implementation, and to remove delays. Moreover, to be constantly attentive that they are being followed diligently and without exception, because the true good can and will happen only from their entirety and precise implementation. Without this intent and disposition, the maintenance of so many court and territorial offices and officials associated with them would constitute the most noxious economy of state, because it would amount to keeping at such cost so many people who serve more to confuse and frustrate affairs than to promote and implement them; if these offices remain merely in material terms, are not effective and do not look after things, there could be no more economical provision than to eliminate them all and thus save millions, which would be remitted from the taxes, and from which the subject would experience a much greater boon than now comes his way from the bad administration of so many officials. And one could just as well have the orders and reports arrive here at the center from the *dominiis* or district heads, have the directives printed right here, sent out to all, as well as all matters concernng particulars taken care of, instead of, as is now the case, after a lengthy circulation, sending a mere note from the district captain or comitat, the state office, and likewise [sending] the subsequent decision without any further instruction, which only wastes time and money, as many are paid to write essays, ponder things, record them, copy them, and, finally, sign them. If, however, as I hope for the future and will know how to introduce, this entire administration paid for by the state will, solely in accordance with its office and with all its powers, adhere to all commands and watch over the explanation and introduction of all charges, and preserve and bring about the good in all parts, their number and maintenance is a fatherly provision, from which every individual in the monarchy will draw his usefulness and the good.

3rd. It follows from this that in all offices, and without exception, everyone must have such a zeal for his business that he measures his work not according to hours, not according to days, not according to pages, but exerts all his powers when he has business in order to perform it

according to expectations and his duty, and if he has none, then he may enjoy the rest that one justly experiences doubly so if one is conscious of having done one's duty.

The person who does not possess love for service to the fatherland and his fellow citizens, who does not find that he is inflamed by a special zeal to preserve the good, is not made for affairs and does not deserve to possess honorary titles and receive emoluments.

4th. Self-interest of every kind is the ruin of all affairs and the least forgiveable vice of a state servant. Self-interest should not be understood solely in monetary terms, but also in terms of all secondary intentions that obscure, cloak, conceal, delay, or enfeeble what is the only true and best, the assigned duty and truth in reports and accuracy in implementation. Anyone who is guilty of this is dangerous and noxious to all further state service, just as the person who knows about it and does not reveal it is in cahoots with him, and either draws his own advantage from that man's self-interest, or is simply waiting for an opportunity to do the same. [. . .]

5th. The person who wishes to serve the state and does so must put himself completely second, as was already said above. It follows from this that no other matter, no personal business, no conversation must keep him and take him away from the main business, also that no competency quarrel, no ceremony, courtesy, or rank must keep him in the least from effecting the best in attaining the main goal, from being the most zealous, for maintaining the most order among his subordinates. [. . .]

6th. Just as it is the duty of everyone to report reliably, judge all facts according to the main principles, and freely add his opinion, it is also the duty of every state official to ponder the elimination of all grievances, the true and best way of implementing orders, the uncovering of those acting against them, and, finally, everything that could redound to the prosperity and good of his fellow citizens, the service to whom is our calling. [. . .]

8th. Since the good can only be one thing, namely what concerns the general and the greatest number, and likewise all provinces of the monarchy make up simply a whole and can therefore only have one purpose, it is therefore necessary that all jealousy, all bias, which have until now often caused such useless wranglings between provinces and nations, then between departments, cease, and one must simply internalize that in the case of the body of the state, as with the human body, if not every part is healthy all suffer, and all must also contribute to healing even the smallest evil. Nation, religion must make no difference in all of this, and as brothers of a monarchy all must apply themselves equally to be useful to each other. [. . .]

10th. In affairs to serve the state, no personal like or dislike can have any influence. Just as different characters and ways of thinking cannot be compelled into a friendly relationship in social intercourse, likewise in affairs, their weal and promotion must be the sole goal of the servants, and the one dearest and most esteemed by all must be the one who is most capable and hard-working. [. . .]

13th. Since it all comes down to orders being correctly understood, precisely implemented, and so that the individuals who are employed are correctly judged and recognized for their ability or inability and employed accordingly, it is indispensably necessary that every year or so, as often as there is a mere suspicion that in one or another province things are either in disorder or proceeding too slowly or not effectively, either the head himself, or the man dispatched by him, promptly seek out the territorial office or the general command, investigate the circumstances *in loco*, examine the subjects who are being used, listen to everyone, and thereafter immediately and according to the already existing orders remedy what is not right, reprimand, or notify me of significant nuisances found, and at the same time arrange for the dismissal of the unfit subjects. [. . .]

14th. Everyone who is a true servant of the state and thinks rightly must, in all proposals and improvements that can clearly be more useful, simpler, or more befitting to the common good, be it in documentation, in taxation, or in economic conduct, never consider himself and [must never] assess the matter in accordance with his personal interest or convenience, and come out against it if it is troublesome to him, or in favor, if it is useful; instead, he must always act in accordance with the great principle that he is only a single individual, and that the common good of the greater number far surpasses his own, as it does that of any particular individual, and even that of the territorial lord, seen as a single man; he must consider that he himself, even if he does not grasp it at first, will subsequently share an advantage from what is useful to the general public, of which he forms a single part.

These, in brief, are my thoughts; my words and my example can prove that duty and conviction guide me to follow them, and one may hereafter be assured that I will implement the same. He who thinks this way with me and who wants to devote himself, by completely setting aside all other considerations, as a true servant of the state, for as long as he serves the same, he will understand my above sentences, and implementing them will be no more difficult than it is for me; but he who has his eyes only on the usefulness or honor attached to this service, and regards the management of the state as merely a secondary matter, he should rather say so beforehand and leave an office for which he is neither worthy nor made for, the administration of which demands a warm soul for the best interest of the state and the complete renunciation of himself and all leisure.

This is what I find I must make known to everyone, so that the very important work of state administration will be led to its essential final purpose by everyone who is used for that purpose.

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