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Interpretation of the ‘On Reducing the Size of the Student Body in Gymnasiums and Progymnasiums and Changing the Composition Thereof’ Report in the Kharkov Educational District

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Abstract

This paper features an analysis of a set of documents produced in the Kharkov Educational District to enable pedagogues to interpret correctly the ‘On Reducing the Size of the Student Body in Gymnasiums and Progymnasiums and Changing the Composition Thereof’ report, more commonly known as “The Kitchen Staff Children Circulaire”. It is shown that the initial version of the document not only did not contain any specific measures to introduce the estate principle into education but also reflected the will of Alexander III, who regarded the introduction of tough estate restrictions for gymnasium students as inopportune and inconvenient. Yet the Trustee of the Kharkov Educational District, N.P. Vorontsov-Vel’yaminov, set a greater store by the mere wishes of the Minister of Public Education, I.D. Delyanov – the hope that administering control over the conditions in which gymnasium students were taught at home would make it possible to gradually free gymnasiums of children from the lower estates. N.P. Vorontsov-Vel’yaminov issued a special document intended to expound, and, in actual fact, to adjust, the ministerial circulaire and directed expressly that enrollment preference be given to gymnasium entrants of noble descent, while no children from the lower estates be admitted unless a special scholarship was available for them. Interestingly, in doing so N.P. Vorontsov-Vel’yaminov claimed that the new ministerial circulaire contained nothing particularly new and based the restrictions not on that document but on an 1870 legislation, which he interpreted in a biased manner. Thus, the estate restrictions introduced under Alexander III in Russian gymnasiums were engendered not so much by the ‘On Reducing the Size of the Student Body in Gymnasiums and Progymnasiums and Changing the Composition Thereof’

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report but by the administrative zeal of officials who set a greater store by the personal opinion of the Minister expressed in that report than by the formally recommended measures included therein.

Keywords: history of education, “The Kitchen Staff Children Circulaire”, ‘On Reducing the Size of the Student Body in Gymnasiums and Progymnasiums and Changing the Composition Thereof’ report, Kharkov Educational District, I.D. Delyanov, N.P. Vorontsov-Vel’yaminov.

1. Introduction

‘On Reducing the Size of the Student Body in Gymnasiums and Progymnasiums and Changing the Composition Thereof’ is a controversial report produced in the 1880s by I.D. Delyanov, Russia’s then-Minister of Public Education. More commonly known as “The Kitchen Staff Children Circulaire”, it is the most famous document on education in the Russian Empire. The document’s unofficial title has long become a part of Russian culture, being used figuratively in the context of prioritizing exclusive education for members of the higher strata of society. For instance, I.M. Il’yinsky, the current Rector of Moscow State University, who has held a number of posts in Russia’s State Duma, views the circulaire as having been typical for the world’s entire education system up to the 20th century: “Education, essentially, remained a privilege of and a blessing for members of high society. By contrast, the masses, i.e. members of the lower strata, were to acquire skills and abilities through learning crafts. A similar approach to education was practiced in Russia as well. On July 1, 1887, Tsar Alexander III signed into law a notorious document known as “The Kitchen Staff Children Circulaire”. Admission to gymnasiums and progymnasiums would be denied to children of Jews, “coachmen, lackeys, cooks, laundresses, small shopkeepers, and the like, whose children, with the exception of those gifted with ingenious abilities, should not aspire to receive secondary and higher education” (Il’inskii, 2012: 9). One of the sections in an article by Moscow Pedagogical University professors B.F. Slavin and B.A. Slavina, ‘On Relevant Issues in Education Reform’, is entitled ‘We Must Not Forgo Free Education and Replicate the “On Kitchen Staff Children” Law’ (Slavin, Slavina, 2016: 39). Note that the article makes no mention of the ‘On Reducing the Size of the Student Body in Gymnasiums and Progymnasiums’ report whatsoever, while the phrase ‘kitchen staff children’ is used in it to describe Russia’s contemporary education reform in the following context: “Replacing publicly-funded, free education with paid education, not accessible to most “kitchen staff children”, wholly contradicts the principles of democracy and is something that ever since the times of Alexander III has been condemned by most representatives of progressive social thought in Russia” (Slavin, Slavina, 2016: 40). Finally, O.N. Smolin, a member of the State Duma’s Education and Science Committee, notes the following on the matter in one of his articles: “Issuing new decrees on “kitchen staff children” in the early 21st century is a sign of having fallen behind the rest of the civilized world by at least a hundred years” (Smolin, 2002: 42). As we can see, the term ‘kitchen staff children’ is used in the article without mentioning not only the ‘On Reducing the Size of the Student Body in Gymnasiums and Progymnasiums’ report but any historical context.

“The Kitchen Staff Children Circulaire” remains a realm of collective memory for more than one social group in Russia. The phrase ‘kitchen staff children’ has turned into a fixed expression that can be used in relation to events from a whole different era. In this respect, of particular interest is an article by G.A. Ivanova, ‘Sociocultural Semantic “Expansions” of Precedent Linguistic Phenomena in Internet Discourse: The Case of the ‘Kitchen Staff Children’ Idiom’. This work suggests that the phrase ‘kitchen staff children’ (which, by the way, was not used in the original circulaire) has gradually expanded its meaning and continues to do so to this day (Ivanova, 2011: 97-103). In this regard, there is another consideration worth looking into. The semantic difference between the titles ‘On Reducing the Size of the Student Body in Gymnasiums and Progymnasiums and Changing the Composition Thereof’ and “The Kitchen Staff Children Circulaire” is obvious: the former is of an official-businesslike nature and is neutral in terms of judgment, while the latter, which outwardly seems to be modeled on officialese, contains a strain of hidden irony and criticism. However, even in textbooks they tend to use the second, unofficial, title almost exclusively. For instance, a History of Russia textbook for ninth-graders (part of an instructional suite under the editorship of Academician A.V. Torkunov) from Prosveshchenie, a major Russian publishing house, refers to said document as follows: “An infamous document known as “The Kitchen Staff Children Circulaire”” (Arsent’ev i dr., 2016: 7). While this wording is formally correct, it is clear that the document has a different title officially and this is its unofficial title,

which is widely used in culture. With no caveats the textbook thereafter refers to it as “The Kitchen Staff Children Circulaire” (Arsent’ev i dr.,, 2016: 9).

Arguably, making a certain event part of collective memory does not necessarily facilitate the objective perception and scholarly study thereof. According to French historian P. Nora, collective memory is even in opposition to history, as it “nourishes recollections that may be out of focus or telescopic, global or detached, particular or symbolic-responsive to each avenue of conveyance or phenomenal screen, to every censorship or projection” (Nora, 1999: 20). The aforementioned examples of contemporary authors invoking “The Kitchen Staff Children Circulaire” seem to align perfectly with this description by the French historian. I.M. Il’yinsky, B.F. Slavin, B.A. Slavina, and O.N. Smolin do not describe the historical report ‘On Reducing the Size of the Student Body in Gymnasiums and Progymnasiums and Changing the Composition Thereof’ in the context of an era. Instead, in analyzing issues in contemporary education they appeal to the very concept of “kitchen staff children”, as a socially vulnerable group of people, those subject to segregation within the educational environment.

Thus, while the idiom ‘kitchen staff children’ is regularly used in both the literature and opinion writing, the amount of historical and pedagogical research devoted to the actual report ‘On Reducing the Size of the Student Body in Gymnasiums and Progymnasiums’ is relatively limited, while issues related to its use in actual practice are brought up even more rarely. In this regard, of particular interest is an article by R.R. Shakirov, ‘Systematic Totalitarianism in School Management: The ‘On Reducing Gymnasium Education’ Report (1887)’, which talks about a mechanism for legitimizing in scientific research opinions that are commonly accepted in collective memory (Shakirov, 2013: 65-71). The article states that the Ministry of Public Education “issued a well-known circulaire, ‘On Kitchen Staff Children’” (Shakirov, 2013: 67). It is clear that this is not a deliberate error but the use of a commonly accepted unofficial title. Yet it consequently acquires in the narrative the features of an official title, one given by the Ministry. Without comparing the document with other documents produced in that era, R.R. Shakirov draws the following conclusion: “The Ministry of Public Education created a unique document that was incompatible with the rule of law. The instruction, characterized by the use of examples rather than precise formulations, must have been made vague for no other reason than to ensure the arbitrary use of power by a local executive authority, which was expected via the circulaire to act not in accordance with the letter of the law but in harmony with the spirit of departmental direction” (Shakirov, 2013: 67). While such an assessment is acceptable, it must be remembered that Russia’s 19th century education system was characterized by high levels of autonomy at local level, with broad rights exercised by local executives. In 1861, the Kharkov Educational District even published in its official circulaires a report by famous pedagogue N.A. Lavrovsky, a Kharkov University professor, addressing the issue in question (Tsirkulyar, 1861b: 13-19). N.A. Lavrovsky criticized the then-existing state of affairs regarding legal support for the educational process for tendencies to use “general expressions” and “give full scope to arbitrary rule” instead of using clear-cut criteria for assessing the quality of education (Tsirkulyar, 1861b: 14). Therefore, in analyzing the ‘On Reducing the Size of the Student Body in Gymnasiums and Progymnasiums’ report in the context of an era, it seems reasonable to base one’s judgment not on general notions of what education-related legislation must be like but on specific mechanisms for applying it in practice. Otherwise, too great is the risk of just illustrating the opinion entrenched in collective memory that restricting access to education for members of the lower estates under Alexander III was a mistake both pedagogical and historical. It can be argued that, from a scholarly standpoint, it is a lot more important to get an idea of what estate restrictions in gymnasiums looked like in practice at that time, how severe the arbitrary use of power by local executive authorities was, and to what degree that power was abused to implement social stratification specifically.

An attempt to analyze the document under examination in the context of an era specifically was undertaken by T.A. Magsumov in an article entitled ‘The ‘On Reducing Gymnasium Education’ Report (1887)’ (Magsumov, 2013: 488-489). The paper points out that the actual author of the circulaire, Minister of Public Education I.D. Delyanov, was at once subjected to criticism from both the left and the right. For instance, V.P. Meshchersky and A.A. Kireev, who backed the report, regarded it as composed in an inept manner, and even suggested that it should be classified altogether (Magsumov, 2013: 488). With that said, while formally the report *was* published as secret, it became public knowledge due to negligence at local level. For instance, in the Odessa Educational District a public ordinance for gymnasium principals was drawn up based on it, while in the Moscow

Educational District children from the lower estates willing to enter a gymnasium were directly told to try a different educational institution, one with a more suitable curriculum (Magsumov, 2013: 488). The article also mentions an apology issued by I.D. Delyanov, who reasoned that he was seeking to prevent access to gymnasiums not for children from the lower estates but for children who could not pursue education in an appropriate manner due to family circumstances (Magsumov, 2013: 488). Finally, the historian argues that the ‘On Reducing the Size of the Student Body in Gymnasiums and Progymnasiums’ report was a tactical mistake by I.D. Delyanov, who discredited ideas of his own that by and large had the backing of Russian conservatives.

In the light of the aforesaid, of particular interest is the question of in what manner, from the standpoint of the local pedagogical authorities, the Delyanov report was to be applied in practice, considering that the Ministry of Public Education and educational district trustees had expounded its gist to gymnasium principals and teachers, as well as engaged in working out a set of principles underlying the legal enforcement of the new ordinance. It is worth remembering that the actual text of the circulaire contained a caveat that children from the lower estates who were “gifted with ingenious abilities” *could* be admitted to gymnasiums. Given the aforementioned autonomy of local education in the Russian Empire, this provided local pedagogues with the freedom to both deny “kitchen staff children” access to gymnasiums and let some bright children from the lower estates enter them.

The present work examines official circulaires for the Kharkov Educational District in order to establish which way it went on the issue. It will not focus on any other narratives related to the ‘On Reducing the Size of the Student Body in Gymnasiums and Progymnasiums and Changing the Composition Thereof’ circulaire (e.g., reducing the size of the Jewish student body in gymnasiums). These narratives warrant a separate study, as they were regulated by whole different documents in the Kharkov Educational District.

2. Materials and methods

The main source employed in conducting the research reported in the present work is ‘Circulaires for the Kharkov Educational District’. Essentially, these circulaires were a periodical. As of 1887, they were published once a month and were in the public domain. A subscription cost 6 rubles per year, with it being mandatory for educational institutions within the District to get a subscription to it (Tsirkulyar, 1887b: 71-72). Thus, regardless of the degree of secrecy around the initial text of the ‘On Reducing the Size of the Student Body in Gymnasiums and Progymnasiums and Changing the Composition Thereof’ report, all the information associated with the document and brought to the notice of pedagogues through ‘Circulaires for the Kharkov Educational District’ would inevitably become public knowledge. The Circulaires had quite a complex structure. For the purposes of the present study, only two sections from the publication will be explored herein. Information obtained from the Ministry of Public Education would be communicated to pedagogues via the ‘Ministerial Ordinances’ section. However, as a rule, ordinances received from Saint Petersburg would not be published. Instead, a brief retelling thereof would be provided. Specifically, the ‘Ministerial Ordinances’ section of the August issue for 1887 contained 11 texts, with just two of them (scholarship provisions) reproducing governmental documents word for word, and nine of them being a brief retelling of recommendations and orders from the central authorities (Tsirkulyar, 1887a: 8-21). This provided the District’s Trustee with a certain amount of latitude – it was up to him to decide in what form and with an emphasis on what to bring to pedagogues’ notice orders from the higher-ups. Besides, some of the Circulaires had a section entitled ‘Directives of the District’s Administration’, in which the Trustee addressed pedagogues personally, including, as it will be shown below, in an effort to explain to them how to interpret ministerial ordinances. Thus, the actual mechanism underlying ‘Circulaires for the Kharkov Educational District’, as a tool for informing pedagogues of changes in education, made them highly subordinate to the District’s, as opposed to the Ministry’s, Administration. Even without issuing express directives, the Trustee could make it clear to teachers what he expected of them. In this context, it is worth mentioning once more the report by N.A. Lavrovsky published in ‘Circulaires for the Kharkov Educational District’ in 1861. At that time, the views of this esteemed pedagogue had been presented on the pages of the Circulaires more than once, with them tending to have the nature not of official directives but of a sort of a guidepost for provincial teachers that had not been captured in law (Tsirkulyar, 1861a: 7). What is more, the District’s Administration

would publish the results of checks in gymnasiums and schools in an effort to let the public know of the methodological causes behind both their successes and failures (Tsirkulyar, 1861c: 85-87).

Note, however, that by 1887 'Circulaires for the Kharkov Educational District' had taken on a much more formal nature, with some of the issues even carrying no directives from the District's Administration and unofficial reports, and with checks results increasingly ceasing to be published altogether. This, of course, was also associated with the overall state of affairs in the Empire. Yet it appears to make sense to take into consideration the characteristics of the character of a particular trustee. In the early 1860s, the Kharkov Educational District was headed by General D.S. Levshin, whom a famous scholar named A.V. Nikitenko called "the best trustee", stressing particularly that, while this not-the-most-competent military person did not mind taking advice from others, he would do so "without becoming a slave to them" (Nikitenko, 1955: 429-430). In 1887, the District was headed by N.P. Vorontsov-Vel'yaminov, of whose activity as a trustee nothing has been found in writings by his contemporaries. He was a former military person with no university education (a graduate of an artillery school). However, he had served for many years (since 1870) within the system of the Ministry of Public Education (Vorontsov-Vel'yaminov, 1901: 373-374). It is in the context of the 'On Reducing the Size of the Student Body in Gymnasiums and Progymnasiums and Changing the Composition Thereof' report that the experienced official deemed it necessary to provide detailed explanations as to how to interpret directives from the Ministry of Public Education.

The authors have in their possession the original text of the 'On Reducing the Size of the Student Body in Gymnasiums and Progymnasiums and Changing the Composition Thereof' report, a retelling of this text in 'Circulaires for the Kharkov Educational District' (which differs from the original significantly), and a set of detailed guidelines from N.P. Vorontsov-Vel'yaminov on how to implement such directives in practice. Juxtaposing these texts using the historical-comparative method could help establish how much they match the image of "The Kitchen Staff Children Circulaire" entrenched in collective memory, and, most importantly, who in actual fact was behind the attempts to install in the Kharkov Educational District an education system based exclusively on social stratification.

3. Results

For a start, here is a brief reminder of the key facts about the controversial report 'On Reducing the Size of the Student Body in Gymnasiums and Progymnasiums and Changing the Composition Thereof'. Arguably, as is typically the case with realms of memory, there are a few large gray areas about how this document has been interpreted in the public consciousness. I.D. Delyanov did, indeed, propose that one should admit "to gymnasiums and progymnasiums children from only some of the estates – those not lower than merchants of the 2nd guild" (Sbornik postanovlenii..., 1894: 880). However, Alexander III turned this proposition down as "inopportune and inconvenient". Instead, he set the Minister the objective of "deflecting the influx into gymnasiums and progymnasiums of children of persons whose family circumstances are such that they do not comport with expectations in the area of secondary education" (Sbornik postanovlenii..., 1894: 880-881). Thus, it was I.D. Delyanov who advocated rigorous compliance with the principle of social stratification in education. However challengeable it may seem, Alexander III's position on the matter was broader – denying admission to gymnasiums only to children whose family circumstances did not permit them to pursue a course of study in an appropriate manner. In his report, I.D. Delyanov mentioned the Emperor's criticism of the idea of implementing rigorous social stratification in education, spoke of the objective set by the emperor, and then recommended two specific measures to achieve it: (1) increasing tuition fees and (2) "advising those in charge of gymnasiums and progymnasiums to only admit children who are in the custody of persons who can provide sufficient assurance that there is proper family oversight and that all the necessary comfort is provided to ensure proper schooling for the child" (Sbornik postanovlenii..., 1894: 881). However, later on I.D. Delyanov did take the liberty to insult members of the lower estates in a gross manner. He expressed the hope that, following the implementation of the measures recommended by him, "gymnasiums and progymnasiums will be free from the need to admit to them children of coachmen, lackeys, cooks, laundresses, small shopkeepers, and the like, whose children, with the exception of those gifted with ingenious abilities, should not aspire to receive secondary and higher education" (Sbornik postanovlenii..., 1894: 881). Nevertheless, this odious phrase was merely I.D. Delyanov's wish for the future, something with no

statutory force. Thus, the notion entrenched in collective memory that the Delyanov report expressly barred “kitchen staff children” from entering gymnasiums is not true – legally, it denied admission to gymnasiums only to those whose parents, regardless of estate background, could not ensure appropriate conditions for their education.

However, on June 5, 1887 (hereinafter all dates given are Old Style), Alexander III stamped “Imperially Approved” on the complete text of the Delyanov report ([Sbornik postanovlenii..., 1894: 880](#)). This created a specific situation, one arguably typical for the late Russian Empire – while the new statute did not introduce social stratification in gymnasium education directly, there was clear and unequivocal indication that the Minister of Public Education was a proponent of doing so. With that said, as mentioned earlier based on a work by T.A. Magsumov, the actual document was secret – yet it was necessary to bring its gist to the knowledge of gymnasium principals and teachers.

Consequently, the ‘Ministerial Ordinances’ section of the August issue of ‘Circulaires for the Kharkov Educational District’ carried a text entitled ‘On the Measures to Enhance the Composition of the Student Body in Gymnasiums and Progymnasiums and on the Increase in the Cost of Tuition at Such Educational Institutions’ ([Tsirkulyar, 1887a: 14-16](#)). Note that the text has a title that is different from that of the scandalous Delyanov report, which may indicate that the Ministry of Public Education was seeking to enhance the quality of, not reduce, the student body in gymnasiums. And that is no coincidence. The Kharkov Educational District Trustee’s retelling did not mention Alexander III’s stance about the inopportuneness of implementing social stratification in education. Nor did it mention the objective, set by him, of reducing the number of students in gymnasiums at the expense of children who were unable to pursue a program of study in them in a quality manner. Instead, it stated that I.D. Delyanov was personally preoccupied with the issue of “enhancing the composition of the student body in gymnasiums and progymnasiums” ([Tsirkulyar, 1887a: 14](#)). While the subsequent text reproduced the ministerial report almost word for word, it did so in a whole different context – for the purpose of “enhancing the composition of the student body”, it was directed that gymnasiums and progymnasiums should admit only “children who are in the custody of persons who can provide sufficient assurance that there is proper family oversight and that all the necessary comfort is provided to ensure proper schooling for the child”, followed by the expression of the proverbial hope that “gymnasiums and progymnasiums will be free from the need to admit to them children of coachmen, lackeys, cooks, laundresses, small shopkeepers, and the like, whose children, with the exception of those gifted with ingenious abilities, should not aspire to receive secondary and higher education” ([Tsirkulyar, 1887a: 14](#)). What is more, there appeared a substantiation regarding what kind of harm children from the lower estates were causing, something not present in the text signed by the Emperor. It was stated that such children “should by no means leave the environment that they belong to – lest that, as indicated by the many years’ experience in the field, should lead to disregard for the will of one’s parents, discontent with one’s daily life, and frustration with existing – naturally inevitable – inequality in material circumstances” ([Tsirkulyar, 1887a: 14](#)).

While no assertion will be ventured herein as to which institution was behind the changes, the Ministry of Public Education or the Kharkov Educational District, it is obvious that between the initial text of the ‘On Reducing the Size of the Student Body in Gymnasiums and Progymnasiums and Changing the Composition Thereof’ report and its local interpretation in the ‘On the Measures to Enhance the Composition of the Student Body in Gymnasiums and Progymnasiums and on the Increase in the Cost of Tuition at Such Educational Institutions’ ordinance there was a major difference, despite a literal overlap in text between some of the key provisions. It can be clearly seen from the report signed by Alexander III that the stance of the Emperor (and, accordingly, of the Russian Empire as a whole) on social stratification in education was different from I.D. Delyanov’s and no objective of preventing children from the lower estates completely from pursuing gymnasium education had been expressly set at imperial level. Note that they did not express in the circulaire for the Kharkov Educational District the Emperor’s position, but did express I.D. Delyanov’s as the only one to follow (and, accordingly, the official position of the Russian Empire). Thus, it appears that the new measures were being introduced specifically in order to provide a formal pretext for refusing to admit to gymnasiums children from the lower estates (the objective being that of “enhancing the composition of the student body in gymnasiums”, as opposed to “deflecting the influx into gymnasiums and progymnasiums of children of persons whose family circumstances are such that they do not comport with

expectations in the area of secondary education”). And the next thing they did was to bring into play the nonpublicness of the Emperor-signed report – the interpretation of the unpublished document in the Kharkov Educational District was a lot more hardline and discriminatory than the original, but those who had no access to the initial text had no idea of that!

What is especially noteworthy is that the Ministry of Public Education demonstrated a striking bureaucratic resourcefulness in getting the Delyanov report implemented in practice. It follows from the ‘On the Measures to Enhance the Composition of the Student Body in Gymnasiums and Progymnasiums and on the Increase in the Cost of Tuition at Such Educational Institutions’ ordinance that the Ministry “left to the discretion of the District’s Trustee the matter of providing relevant guidance in this respect [implementing the circulaire] to those in charge of gymnasiums and progymnasiums” (Tsirkulyar, 1887a: 14). Thus, it was up to local executives to devise how to ensure that gymnasiums were attended only by “children who are in the custody of persons who can provide sufficient assurance that there is proper family oversight and that all the necessary comfort is provided to ensure proper schooling for the child”. The Ministry of Public Education recommended to the Administration of Kharkov Educational District only some measures, none of which dealt with social stratification. For instance, I.D. Delyanov personally recommended (“would personally deem it useful”) that, upon receipt of requests for children to be allowed to take an entrance exam, gymnasium and progymnasium principals should “ask the requester directly and try to make relevant inquiries about their material and family circumstances, about the way they have brought up their offspring up to that point, and so on; and, if the person’s family circumstances do not match the aforesaid conditions, their requests are to be resolutely turned down, followed by a recommendation that they should try other educational institutions, those with a less lengthy program of study and one that matches their circumstances better” (Tsirkulyar, 1887a: 14-15). Thus, the main measure proposed by I.D. Delyanov, one he was responsible for personally, was well in line with the objective set by the Emperor – the one of “deflecting the influx into gymnasiums and progymnasiums of children of persons whose family circumstances are such that they do not comport with expectations in the area of secondary education”. Pursuant to this objective, gymnasium principals were to gain an integrated insight into the characteristics of the way children were being brought up in their families, study the morals of their parents, and, on that basis, weed out only those proved certain not to have the ability to complete a program of study in a gymnasium due to family or financial circumstances – but by no means every single member of the lower estates. That said, measures aligned with I.D. Delyanov’s personal beliefs regarding a need for rigorous social stratification in education and contravening Alexander III’s stance on the issue were invented at local level, with the Minister’s scandalous statement that “children of coachmen, lackeys, cooks, laundresses, small shopkeepers, and the like” should not be admitted to gymnasiums being positioned to pedagogues not as an assumption about a possible repercussion of the planned reform but as a primary objective for it.

All this created the preconditions for ‘On Reducing the Size of the Student Body in Gymnasiums and Progymnasiums and Changing the Composition Thereof’, a much more controversial report, to be implemented – at least within the Kharkov Educational District – specifically as “The Kitchen Staff Children Circulaire”, as it exists in collective memory, i.e. with a focus on barring children from the lower estates from entering gymnasiums. Considering all of the above facts, one could arguably doubt even the assumption by T.A. Magsumov that the ‘On Reducing the Size of the Student Body in Gymnasiums and Progymnasiums’ report was a tactical mistake by I.D. Delyanov. A whole different picture emerges: the Minister, whose proposition with regard to implementing an education system based purely on social stratification had been turned down, deliberately rendered his idea in an ambiguous fashion, in hopes that the general measures proposed by him would lead to rigorous social stratification in education. Technically, the Ministry of Public Education seems to have subsequently fulfilled the will of the Emperor in a strict manner, with the measures it recommended in relation to the report he had signed into law not being focused on enforcing social stratification in education. Yet the same Ministry created the conditions for local officials to use their own initiative in implementing the report, with the latter being misled with regard to the primary objective for it – they were being told that the report was a step in the direction of implementing rigorous social stratification in education. Clearing up the details of this situation may require conducting an archive search – it is not quite clear if it was I.D. Delyanov himself who perverted the Emperor’s will before the Trustee

of the Kharkov Educational District or if it was the District's Administration that opted to "see" in the ambiguous report 'On Reducing the Size of the Student Body in Gymnasiums and Progymnasiums' the opinion of their immediate superior, the Minister of Public Education, exclusively. However, it can be argued that a blunder by I.D. Delyanov is out of the question here – to "err" that way, one would have had to have a good understanding of how the functionary apparatus in the Russian Empire worked. The experienced bureaucrat managed to take advantage of officials' tendency to be obsequious toward their immediate superiors, arranging things in such a way that they would be implementing his own ideas at local level, despite the Emperor's disapproval of the actual approach. With that said, the Minister would naturally come under harsh criticism from the public. Had he fulfilled the will of Alexander III properly, "The Kitchen Staff Children Circulaire" would have never made its way into collective memory; the authorities would have toughened the rules on admission to gymnasiums with a focus on prospective students' living standard, dependability, and social status – rather than just their estate background. While it is quite likely that such a law would have increased the share of members of the higher estates among the country's students, the idea of completely barring children from the lower estates from attending gymnasiums would have fallen off the radar, and the 'On Reducing the Size of the Student Body in Gymnasiums and Progymnasiums and Changing the Composition Thereof' report would have become just another conservative statute produced in the era of Alexander III.

Working out specific measures to bar unsuitable persons from entering gymnasiums and progymnasiums was up to the Trustee of the Kharkov Educational District, N.P. Vorontsov-Vel'yaminov, personally. Indeed, the September issue of 'Circulaires for the Kharkov Educational District' carried 'A Copy of Proposition of the Trustee of the Kharkov Educational District to Gymnasium and Progymnasium Principals No. 4387 of August 12, 1887' (Tsirkulyar, 1887b: 22-28). This document is very important for understanding the real mechanism behind the implementation of the 'On Reducing the Size of the Student Body in Gymnasiums and Progymnasiums and Changing the Composition Thereof' circulaire. Formally, it was of a recommendatory nature (the term 'proposition' being present in the very title thereof). But there is more to it. It appears that N.P. Vorontsov-Vel'yaminov realized the complexity of the situation he was in; so, following in the footsteps of I.D. Delyanov, he simply resolved not to directly order that his subordinates stop admitting children from the lower estates to gymnasiums but have them refuse such children admission without a formal order.

Of particular interest is the preamble to the document in question. One learns from it that, while N.P. Vorontsov-Vel'yaminov did mail out to gymnasium and progymnasium principals the ministerial circulaire of June 18, 1887 (i.e. I.D. Delyanov's version of the 'On Reducing the Size of the Student Body in Gymnasiums and Progymnasiums and Changing the Composition Thereof' report), he had found it necessary to attach to it some guidelines of his own – "to ensure the circulaire will be applied as correctly as possible" (Tsirkulyar, 1887b: 22). Thus, technically, the will of the Emperor *was* brought to the knowledge of the immediate executives – the principals of gymnasiums and progymnasiums. However, almost simultaneously they received another two texts – 'On the Measures to Enhance the Composition of the Student Body in Gymnasiums and Progymnasiums and on the Increase in the Cost of Tuition at Such Educational Institutions' and 'Proposition of the Trustee of the Kharkov Educational District to Gymnasium and Progymnasium Principals No. 4387 of August 12, 1887', which adjusted the practical application of the ministerial circulaire substantially. Apparently, that was sufficient for experienced education officials to figure out what it was that their immediate superiors expected of them.

So, what is it that N.P. Vorontsov-Vel'yaminov personally recommended to his subordinates? He took a roundabout approach to it, reasoning that "in the new proposition by Mr. Minister there is nothing that is not based directly on the substance of the current statute and all the rules already in place for gymnasiums" (Tsirkulyar, 1887b: 23). Thus, it turns out that, although the new circulaire by I.D. Delyanov contained only recommendations, not orders, gymnasium principals were hardly in a position to refuse to implement it, as those recommendations were, as asserted by the Trustee, based directly on the gymnasium statute and rules in place at the time.

Indeed, N.P. Vorontsov-Vel'yaminov next proceeded to blast the then-existing practices dealing with the running of gymnasiums. He unequivocally argued that gymnasiums were filled with "scores of students with neither the aptitude to pursue higher academic education nor the financial means to engage in school learning continuously and over a number of years" (Tsirkulyar,

1887b: 23). This suggestion was supported by the fact that, as established by an educational district official who was present at an entrance exam, in some gymnasiums only “less than half of all applicants deserved to be granted a matriculation certificate” (Tsirkulyar, 1887b: 23). In the view of N.P. Vorontsov-Vel’yaminov, it was “more than likely” that the presence of an educational district official would have exposed the same problem in many other gymnasiums (Tsirkulyar, 1887b: 23). The Trustee further suggested that individuals with failed matriculation exams or with matriculation certificates received as a result of the examiner being soft on them were not only of no use but also could grow up to be a menace to society: “The danger with such individuals is that their shortcomings resulting from undereducation, such as being light-minded and overly superficial in reasoning, coupled with being pretentious and overly conceited, may become the source or agent of harmful aspirations in society” (Tsirkulyar, 1887b: 24). The Trustee stressed that a gymnasium indulging undiligent students was “bastardizing and being grossly unmindful of” their direct purpose as “an educational institution intended to prepare one for university” (Tsirkulyar, 1887b: 23). Indeed, there was evidence to back up the claims made by N.P. Vorontsov-Vel’yaminov. As an example illustrating the fact that his predecessors had been soft on undiligent students, Novocherkassk Gymnasium, a school within the Kharkov Educational District, had in the early 1880s “an original way of promoting students to the next grade: promotion would be granted to students with overall grades of 2 ½ and 2 ¼ in one or two core subjects, and even to straight 2 students” (Artinskii, 1907: 286).

The Trustee’s next move is a particularly interesting one. He suggested that, among other things, the problem stemmed from many gymnasium executives not paying enough attention to the fact that, pursuant to ‘The Rules on Examinations for Gymnasium and Progymnasium Students’, in placing their child in a gymnasium parents were entering in written form into a *commitment* [italicized in the original] (Tsirkulyar, 1887b: 24). Indeed, ‘The Rules on Examinations for Gymnasium and Progymnasium Students’, signed into law on December 8, 1872, captured the following obligations to be assumed by one’s parents or guardians: 1) Purchase the student the required school uniform and textbooks and effect payment for their tuition; 2) “Make every effort” to ensure the student will comply with all directives from the Administration; 3) Notify the Gymnasium of a change in the student’s place of residence (Pravila..., 1873: 67). Hence, as quite logically argued by N.P. Vorontsov-Vel’yaminov, gymnasium and progymnasium principals who *knowingly* [italicized in the original] admitted children whose parents were unable to fulfill said obligations, could be regarded as acting in violation of the law. A practice of this kind could in the long run lead to schools being filled with children unable to learn in an adequate manner (Tsirkulyar, 1887b: 24).

Arguably, the aforementioned arguments by N.P. Vorontsov-Vel’yaminov are quite cogent, and they were well in line with the expressly stated wish of Alexander III, i.e. the objective of “deflecting the influx into gymnasiums and progymnasiums of children of persons whose family circumstances are such that they do not comport with expectations in the area of secondary education”. However, the Trustee went on to make some even more controversial statements. N.P. Vorontsov-Vel’yaminov endeavored to make it look like an obvious fact that only children from the higher estates could meet those rules, which had been established for gymnasium students long before the proverbial circulaire came out: “The gymnasium student rules (e.g., “on the lifestyle of students; on observing the regulations and proprieties of the educational institution; on observing the dress code; on student apartments”; etc.) expressly imply most of the students being from families that are in decent material circumstances and have members who have a decent standing in society or the job market by virtue of their education level and subsequent activity” (Tsirkulyar, 1887b: 24-25). This also provided the grounds for justifying I.D. Delyanov’s odious grouping in terms of who should never be admitted to a gymnasium (“children of coachmen, lackeys, cooks, laundresses, small shopkeepers, and the like”). This grouping took on the form of an express directive: “The circulaire from Mr. Minister expressly mentions a category of such persons, i.e. individuals whose material and family circumstances and intellectual development are such that no assurance can be provided that there is proper family oversight of them and proper effort is made to facilitate their successful learning” (Tsirkulyar, 1887b: 24).

Let us now consider the Trustee’s most revealing arguments on the matter. As noted earlier, neither the circulaire ‘On Reducing the Size of the Student Body in Gymnasiums and Progymnasiums and Changing the Composition Thereof’ nor the ordinance ‘On the Measures to Enhance the

Composition of the Student Body in Gymnasiums and Progymnasiums and on the Increase in the Cost of Tuition at Such Educational Institutions' contained specific measures to expressly restrict admission to gymnasiums for children from the lower estates. The Emperor's directive envisaged "advising those in charge of gymnasiums and progymnasiums to only admit children who are in the custody of persons who can provide sufficient assurance that there is proper family oversight and that all the necessary comfort is provided to ensure proper schooling for the child", while the Minister's recommendation required that they "ask the requester directly and try to make relevant inquiries about their material and family circumstances, about the way they have brought up their offspring up to that point, and so on". From the Trustee's viewpoint, there was a need to come up with a statutory basis for both the actual principle of social stratification in education and the specific measures via which this principle was to be implemented, for the new circulaire allegedly merely reminded gymnasium and progymnasium principals of their duties, with such measures already being in place statutorily but failing to be implemented. So N.P. Vorontsov-Vel'yaminov invoked 'The Rules on Examinations for Gymnasium and Progymnasium Students' once more. He argued that Article 8 thereof required that, along with their gymnasium enrollment application, parents submit documentation about their "material and social circumstances" (Tsirkulyar, 1887b: 25). In actuality, this article of 'The Rules on Examinations for Gymnasium and Progymnasium Students' required that parents and guardians only submit the following two documents, neither expressly having to do with "material and social circumstances": (1) an "age certificate" (a birth certificate or a certified copy of the birth registration) and (2) a "rank certificate" (e.g., a deputy assembly certificate, a nobility conferral certificate, a father's service record, or an identity card) (Pravila..., 1873: 38). N.P. Vorontsov-Vel'yaminov recommended that gymnasium principals base their decision about whether or not to allow a child to take an entrance exam on these documents specifically, not on conversations with parents and special inquiries made for the purpose, as proposed by I.D. Delyanov (Tsirkulyar, 1887b: 25-26).

The Trustee did not have the brass face to state directly that children from the lower estates would never be provided with appropriate conditions for learning in school, and their parents would not help them with their school work. In fact, he conceded that one should not disregard "the family's central part in the religious and moral education of their offspring, regardless of financial circumstances", and even admitted openly that parents' social status was more important than which estate they represented (Tsirkulyar, 1887b: 26). Still, this portion of N.P. Vorontsov-Vel'yaminov's reasonings does contain a conclusion that a child from a higher estate was more amenable to gymnasium education: "Yet it is a more natural and frequent phenomenon that the aforementioned positive conditions tend to be provided in families with a generations-long tradition of providing good education for their members, as tends to be the case with those belonging to the estate of nobility" (Tsirkulyar, 1887b: 26).

Thus, it was the Trustee of the Kharkov Educational District, not the Minister of Public Education or the Emperor, who expressly directed that preference in enrolling in gymnasiums within the District be given to children of nobles. Note once more that in doing so he invoked not the 'On Reducing the Size of the Student Body in Gymnasiums and Progymnasiums and Changing the Composition Thereof' report and the Ministry's recommendations on it but some much earlier statutes, most importantly 'The Rules on Examinations for Gymnasium and Progymnasium Students', suggesting that those requirements could de facto be met only by children from families of high social standing or belonging to the estate of nobility. According to N.P. Vorontsov-Vel'yaminov, the mechanism permitting the weeding out of children from unsuitable families, which had been prescribed back in 1872, was not being implemented by gymnasium administrations at all. This mechanism, which the Trustee reduced to the formal checking of the applicant estate background documentation submitted to the gymnasium administration, was in open contravention of the new recommendations by I.D. Delyanov, which did prescribe that conversations be conducted with parents and inquiries be made about their circumstances, regardless of which estate they represented, in order to establish the suitability of their child for gymnasium education.

N.P. Vorontsov-Vel'yaminov next proceeded to directives as to how to go about talented children from the lower estates. He again undertook to invoke 'The Rules on Examinations for Gymnasium and Progymnasium Students', this time appealing to Article 12 and claiming that, pursuant to it, entrance exams were to be conducted under the personal direction of principals and done so "in a most circumstantial manner" (Tsirkulyar, 1887b: 26). Here the Trustee engaged in outright imposture, as the article read as follows in the source: "Each entrance examination must

be conducted by a teacher of relevant subjects in the course of study that an examinee is willing to enroll in and under the supervision of a principal, an inspector, or a supervising instructor” (Tsirkulyar,..., 1873: 39). Apparently, N.P. Vorontsov-Vel’yaminov wished that in his educational district responsibility for each child from a lower estate admitted to a gymnasium be taken by the school’s principal, who would be required to attend the exam personally. The Trustee disguised his main idea behind beautiful phrases about the importance of talented children from the lower estates (e.g., “Such children will always be the object of special care on the part of a gymnasium’s Administration, so that their intellectual development can benefit, not harm, them” (Tsirkulyar, 1887b: 27)). However, he subsequently argued that one should not delude oneself over strong entrance exam performances: “A person’s extraordinarily rapid, yet often shallow, intellectual development at a very young age is by no means a guarantee that their development will be as progressive in later years” (Tsirkulyar, 1887b: 27). The Trustee even went on to suggest that some of them being of outstanding intellect should not serve as the basis for believing that children from the lower estates should be admitted to a gymnasium: “It is to be considered in relation to individuals in tight financial circumstances that successfully completing a long journey of attending a gymnasium and later a university requires not just intellectual ability but also character and willpower, which are as significant” (Tsirkulyar, 1887b: 27). Therefore, in the end N.P. Vorontsov-Vel’yaminov unequivocally recommended that gymnasium principals (who, as noted earlier, were seen as personally responsible for the admission of children to their school) should not admit children from the lower estates, regardless of their talent, unless an all-expenses-paid scholarship was available for them: “It would help to admit children in said category only to gymnasiums that can steadily provide scholarships that are sufficient to cover all student expenses” (Tsirkulyar, 1887b: 27).

Thus, while formally ‘Proposition of the Trustee of the Kharkov Educational District to Gymnasium and Progymnasium Principals No. 4387 of August 12, 1887’ contained only recommendations, as opposed to direct orders, in actual fact the will of N.P. Vorontsov-Vel’yaminov was brought to the notice of the subordinates via this document in quite an unequivocal way – preference, in admitting children to a gymnasium, was to be given to children of nobles, while children from the lower estates were to be admitted only if there was a scholarship available for them there. An interesting situation, one arguably typical for the Russian Empire, emerged – in expounding to his subordinates the governmental circulaire, the Trustee of the Kharkov Educational District was guided not by the will of the Emperor and not by a set of existing measures but the opinion of his immediate superior, Minister of Public Education I.D. Delyanov, voiced in it. Powerless to direct, based on the circulaire, that only children from the higher estates be admitted to gymnasiums, N.P. Vorontsov-Vel’yaminov interpreted certain long-existing statutes in such a way as though they de facto already barred children from the lower estates from enrolling in gymnasiums and the Minister only reminded one of that through his circulaire. An unusual conclusion can be drawn here – what in the Kharkov Educational District became “The Kitchen Staff Children Circulaire”, i.e. a document introducing rigorous social stratification in education, was not the famous report ‘On Reducing the Size of the Student Body in Gymnasiums and Progymnasiums and Changing the Composition Thereof’ but the additions to it issued by the local Administration so as to ensure that gymnasium principals would interpret the governmental text “correctly” upon coming in it across the specific idea that Alexander III had unequivocally opposed. Even I.D. Delyanov offered a caveat that children from the lower estates “gifted with ingenious abilities” were not to be barred from pursuing gymnasium education. But N.P. Vorontsov-Vel’yaminov took it further and claimed that even bright members of the lower classes should not attend gymnasiums, as they may lack “the character and willpower” to succeed.

4. Conclusion

According to German politician and historian F. Mehring, there are “two types of historical legend, which are different from each other as much as plaster is from marble. The former are created artificially, and the latter – naturally. Those of the first type are a meaningless lie, and those of the second are an unconscious truth. The former are represented by false play under a scholarly disguise; the latter – by authentic knowledge that just needs clear expounding. The former are easy to break; yet they are also easy to mold back in place; the latter are knowledge broken with a heavy hammer once and for all – something that can never be restored; but its fragments continue to shine like gemstones” (Mering, 1941: 91-92). As demonstrated earlier,

“The Kitchen Staff Children Circulaire” could be subsumed under the second type of historical legend. What is more, one could regard as felicitous the actual difference in title between ‘On Reducing the Size of the Student Body in Gymnasiums and Progymnasiums and Changing the Composition Thereof’, as a real report, and “The Kitchen Staff Children Circulaire”, as what has been preserved in public memory.

As demonstrated earlier, the report’s initial text, signed by the Emperor personally, not only did not envisage implementing social stratification in Russian education but also mentioned that the proposition by I.D. Delyanov to restrict admission to gymnasiums for children from estates “lower than merchants of the 2nd guild” had been turned down. The specific measures provided in the circulaire did not specifically deal with social stratification either – it was recommended that children should be denied admission to a gymnasium not based on their estate background but based on whether or not their family could provide the proper conditions for their education. The famed phrase “gymnasiums and progymnasiums will be free from the need to admit to them children of coachmen, lackeys, cooks, laundresses, small shopkeepers, and the like, whose children, with the exception of those gifted with ingenious abilities, should not aspire to receive secondary and higher education” did not occupy a central place in the text – in the initial context, it just reflected the hopes of I.D. Delyanov.

Accordingly, as such ‘On Reducing the Size of the Student Body in Gymnasiums and Progymnasiums and Changing the Composition Thereof’ does not deserve the ill fame that has been attached to it. Officials in the Kharkov Educational District ended up fulfilling not the will of the Emperor expressly specified in that report but the wish of the Minister voiced therein. The District’s Trustee, N.P. Vorontsov-Vel’yaminov, personally accompanied the mail-out of the ministerial circulaire with a special document that unequivocally implied that in admitting children to gymnasiums preference should be given to children of nobles, while children from the lower estates should be denied all access to gymnasiums unless a special scholarship was available for them. What is particularly paradoxical about the whole situation is that in trying to substantiate this idea the Trustee invoked not the ‘On Reducing the Size of the Student Body in Gymnasiums and Progymnasiums’ report (which simply contained no direct grounds for that) but some much earlier statutes, including those created back in the Great Reforms era, interpreting them in the sense that as of 1872 parents placing their child in a gymnasium statutorily entered into a commitment, and only nobles or people of high social status had the means to live up to those commitments. Ergo, by enrolling a child from a lower estate a principal would knowingly be acting in violation of a law that had been in place since as early as 1872!

Therefore, it appears to be logical to draw a line between the ‘On Reducing the Size of the Student Body in Gymnasiums and Progymnasiums and Changing the Composition Thereof’ report and “The Kitchen Staff Children Circulaire” – the latter being not some specific government document but a collection of acts intended to explain to those in charge of a gymnasium how to interpret the above report correctly. Within the Kharkov Educational District, such acts were created at local level by officials willing to please I.D. Delyanov. Yet, in actual fact, they reduced his position to an absurdity. Whereas the Minister at least recommended that conclusions be drawn as to a child’s suitability for attending a gymnasium based on communication with their parents and making relevant inquiries about their family, N.P. Vorontsov-Vel’yaminov, essentially, reduced things to formally checking their estate background.

Of course, as a report ‘On Reducing the Size of the Student Body in Gymnasiums and Progymnasiums and Changing the Composition Thereof’ is far from being perfect, and “children of coachmen, lackeys, cooks, laundresses, small shopkeepers, and the like” is a passage that is unacceptable both aesthetically and ethically. However, the history of interpretation of this report in the Kharkov Educational District arguably indicates that the real problem was not the direct purport of directives from above but the administrative zeal of local officials who were willing to violate those directives in order to please their superiors. In a healthier environment, they would have fulfilled the part of the report that prescribed specific measures of quite an adequate nature. Alas – N.P. Vorontsov-Vel’yaminov opted to satisfy the wish of the Minister expressed in the document but not supported in it with specific measures – that gymnasiums be free from children from the lower estates. He even thought up for it a substantiation using some laws he interpreted in a biased manner.

Be it in substance rather than title, “The Kitchen Staff Children Circulaire” did circulate in certain educational districts in the Russian Empire. But the causes of that lay not so much in

I.D. Delyanov's imperfect legislative activity but in the cadre policy practiced by the Ministry of Public Education at the time – local education officials letting their loyalty to the higher-ups and willingness to please them prevail over pedagogical principles – and even over the law itself.

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