

Electoral Saxony: Report of the Official Thomas Freiherr von Fritsch to Saxon Prime Minister Heinrich Graf Brühl on Administrative Reforms and Appointments (April 4, 1762)

Abstract

Thomas Freiherr von Fritsch (1700-75) headed the Saxon “Restoration Commission” (1762-63), which recommended reforms to heal the country from the deep wounds of the Seven Years’ War, caused in particular by Prussian devastation. Here Fritsch gives his thoughts on the awarding of posts in the civil service. He argues that highly coveted posts in the state administration should not be awarded to aristocratic favorites or opportunists, but to the most capable of candidates.

Source

How to recruit capable young people

The Abbé de St. Pierre’s intention with the so often recommended selection procedure is highly praiseworthy and concerns the proficient filling of offices, without which nothing good is to be expected from any government. However, because of how human nature is today and, as everything indicates, will be for a long time, this recommendation will never be actually implemented. Even if one could hope for a desirable staffing and could find a supply of good people in these offices, one would still have to presume that, for a time, they would be inclined to select their peers [to serve] alongside them. Thus, one must think of suggestions appropriate to these circumstances.

The test-reports are well intentioned, but they do not do any good, because a useful young person who has not yet had the opportunity to look into things can very easily miss the point, or a bad one [person] can succeed although he does not have the readiness to make a judgment. Furthermore, generally speaking, there is too much leniency towards bunglers.

During my service, my experience with the trust placed in test-reports in many ways turned me away from them. Emperor Carl VII wanted young people, and especially those who asked for a position in the Aulic Council, to be tested by members of this court, since this gave one the opportunity to test not only their memory but primarily their judgment. It would be good if one went to work on the matter with the same earnestness and did not allow personal issues to interfere so much.

Thus, the best advice would be that, in all ranks, as in the military ranks, one should work one’s way up from the bottom and actually show one’s capabilities before being promoted.

The civil offices can be justifiably divided into justice, the police, which I deliberately separate, and finances.

The reason I separate the police from justice is that when the former is only handled according to procedure matters are corrupted and hampered.

For all of these things, as we have established them, an acquaintance with the pertinent laws is necessary, yet one must not treat police work and finances as mere trades.

It would also be good if, in councils that are not solely concerned with upholding the law, only a couple of the same honest members with [legal] expertise were present, but the others, who solely focus on the object of their council, without law, should make up the majority.

The reason why legal experts are necessary in all councils is that, in all councils, one treats certain things procedurally and follows the delusion that a special honor requires having jurisdiction; additionally, official notifications bring in fees.

If everyone would only consider the common good, then one could avoid all jurisdictional matters and quickly and correctly decide all police and finance matters. However, when an investigation or discussion between parties is necessary, then refer it to the Legal Council and accept their judgment when it follows.

Because we need people for legal councils, for policy offices, and for finances, and there are a lot of young people who apply, consideration should be given as to how one could use appropriate means to recognize these young people or make them useful.

It is a real misfortune that everyone from every rank immediately wants to be at court in the upper councils, where one cannot be rid of the people if they do not work out. People from the middle class still decide to serve in the chancellery, and many good people are drawn there, people who could be recruited [to the upper councils], if the posts were not filled from the top, whereby some are scared off or are appeased with an entirely inappropriate title.

One sees this addiction to titles as harmless, but it has the saddest consequences for the commonwealth, in addition to being highly detrimental to those caught up in it.

Luxury is too great and exorbitant even among the lowest [ranks]; when someone with a low-ranking office is now given a higher rank and title, then the household will require more [money], and all means [of acquiring more money], even bad ones, will be attempted. The salaries are low and configured according to the old austerity, thus with rising prices it would not be possible to make ends meet, even with austerity. Now how should the new status be maintained with a family?

Few have their own fortunes, and they do not want to deprive their children of it, so the subordinates are troubled or others are loaded with debts.

Thus, it would be reasonable if every individual were instructed to be unashamed of his office and to keep an eye on his household budget, if one is to place one's trust in him. Salaries appropriate to the offices are necessary if one is going to demand loyal service from people, and this must come to pass once the positions are not entirely filled with useless people.

One could certainly get by with half of the subalterns, if one were to arrange matters in an orderly fashion and if expenses and incomes were not everywhere increasing unreasonably, to the burden of the lord and the lands. If the sum of the salaries were divided among half of them, it would be sufficient, and supernumeraries are only harmful. He who wants to be a supernumerary can learn something from the bottom up and then earn [a post] as a regular employee [*Ordinarius*]. If a supernumerary wants to live from his own means, then why does he not use his own means to learn something in lower positions and to demonstrate his talents there?

Now, occupying these positions requires some thinking. As for the nobility and the prosperous bourgeoisie: for the first, there are positions involving the leadership of an office [*Amts-Hauptmann-Stellen*] after they have been trained in the offices of police, law, and economic matters; and for the latter, there are positions as controllers of receipts or economic administration.

These controllers are so necessary that one should not grant the offices to legal scholars, but rather lease them to farmers, and the upholding of the law should be separated, if the lessee remains duty bound.

If one would clearly establish the bookkeeping of the offices and of the convoy [*Geleits-*], ferry, postal, and similar incomes, then monthly reconciliations would be very necessary, and this could be done with the involvement of the young people to be assigned, without any compensation.

In Bern, they have the so-called “outer council,” which is allowed to repeat everything that happens in the great council and in the other councils, so that young people can practice and be tested: they vaunt the usefulness of this institution.

The fact remains that if everyone were required to work their way up, then when they came straight from the university more cohesion would be brought into their heads.

In the tax office, the controllers are very useful when they are immediately [*auf dem jetzigen Fuß*] appointed after a preliminary test. They can become capable people, as generally in the tax office very good people work their way up, although they are discouraged when rude, though learned people are pushed in from above.

It can only be hoped that one would introduce in our entire finances the correct spirit of commercial bookkeeping. This not only reduces the work, but also allows for quick and clear insights when someone else desires or demands them.

It is and remains a highly detrimental problem [*Übel*] for the lord and the land that too many people study and, whether they turn out well or not, are eager for offices.

Because their parents, and even more so, their preconceptions, fail to set any realistic bounds, there is nothing left to do but be so tough in granting offices that people voluntarily go into the lower offices or remain without an office for their entire lives.

Supernumeraries, in the heretofore customary form, meaning that one cannot ever be rid of them, are a real plague. No directive aimed at only promoting the competent helps, no matter how well intentioned, because their patrons support them.

If the untimely ambition, which is largely based on the deep-rooted love of profligacy in the nation, were regulated, then no one would be ashamed, regardless of his social rank, to serve for a couple years, without compensation, as a secretary to an experienced minister or another councilor and to learn something from him, because then he, with experience or talent, could later be further tested with greater confidence.

When the circle and office leadership are correctly and usefully established, then the nobles who come from the university could be used by them, to become acquainted with the government in all of its branches, to comprehend the economy; and all of this without special expense. It would soon become evident which particular type of legal, police, or finance work suited one especially well, and [it would be clear] how he could be useful to the lord and his interests; or if he is suited to nothing, then he could avoid it all, without his honor suffering.

In a well staffed government, everything must be connected, and in addition to ensuring good servants, their successors must also be guaranteed.

If luxury and a poorly understood sense of honor — or better said, an empty sense of title — could be removed from their heads, and if one could impress upon them and remember well what a fatherland is, in which the lord is the first member and directs and demands cohesion, then everyone would be able to

mind his own matters in more peace and better conscience.

Source: *Die Staatsreformen in Kursachsen 1762–1763. Quellen zum kursächsischen Rétablissement nach dem Siebenjährigen Kriege*. Edited and introduced by Horst Schlechte. Berlin: Rütten & Loening, 1958, pp. 198–203; reprinted in Helmut Neuhaus, ed., *Zeitalter des Absolutismus 1648–1789. Deutsche Geschichte in Quellen und Darstellung*, edited by Rainer A. Müller, volume 5. Stuttgart: P. Reclam, 1997, pp. 405–11.

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