

Frederick William I (“the Soldier King”) Demands Unvarnished Information from the Pomeranian Commissariat (July 20, 1722)

Abstract

One weak point of all political systems headed by powerful (or seemingly all-powerful) individuals is the failure of subordinate officials to report to the political center on unwelcome conditions at the local level. Here, the Prussian king displays his awareness of common abuses by civil and military officials and demands ruthless frankness and unvarnished information.

Source

For some time past We have on various occasions remarked with particular displeasure that the reports rendered to Us, especially on matters concerning Our Provinces and towns, often contain statements that are unfounded, or, at least, not based on the necessary conscientious and mature examination of the true circumstances involved, and afterward, after closer scrutiny and examination, show that the event did not occur at all, or at any rate, not in the way in which it was represented, so that in the end We have not known what to believe, and what not. We wish therefore that this improper practice, which is directly contrary to the duty and obligations of Our servants, shall for the future cease absolutely, and no reports be rendered that do not rest on correct and truthful foundations and on mature precedent investigation of all and every attendant circumstance, as their authors have to answer for it before God, Us, and their consciences, under pain of Our extreme disfavor and most severe and active displeasure toward those who do not obey exactly this, Our express command, but continue to send in superficial reports in the belief that they are carrying out their duty if they simply put down something, whether founded on fact or not; which is, however, not to be interpreted as meaning that Our Colleges and servants should thereby be frightened into concealing and keeping secret from Us the true state of affairs. Our most gracious intention remains, as before, that complete information should be rendered to Us periodically on everything that occurs in the country and the towns, and on the true situation, particularly when there is any deficit in the land tax or the town excise, or any incident in the commercial field; and similarly when, as often occurs in connection with recruiting and billeting, excesses have been committed – real, not hearsay, but actual and demonstrable facts which have not been remedied by the commanding officers, to whom the complaints must, by regulation, be first addressed, detailed reports of all such and other similar cases must be sent to Us personally under seal, duplicates to be sent in every case to the General Commissariat of War. We hereby make known to you this, Our considered wish, and command you, not only yourselves to obey it in the future, but also to make it known to the magistrates and other persons whom it may concern, in order that each one may safeguard himself against trouble and certain punishment.

Source of English translation: C.A. Macartney, ed., *The Habsburg and Hohenzollern Dynasties in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, in *Documentary History of Western Civilization*. New York, Evanston, and London: Harper & Row, 1970, pp. 298-99. Introduction, editorial notes, chronology, translations by the editor; and compilation copyright © 1970 by C.A. Macartney. Used by permission of HarperCollins Publishers.

Source of original German text: *Acta Borussica*. Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin, 1892 ff., vol. 3, p. 267.

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