

CHAPTER
21

Section 4

PRIMARY SOURCE **Peter the Great's Reforms**

Czar Peter I of Russia, known as Peter the Great, visited western Europe in 1697 to learn more about European customs and industry. Inspired by his trip, he sought to westernize Russia in order to strengthen Russia's position in the modern world. How did the following decrees change daily life in Russia?

A Decree on a New Calendar

The Great Sovereign has ordered it declared: the Great Sovereign knows that many European Christian countries as well as Slavic peoples are in complete accord with our Eastern Orthodox Church . . . —all these peoples number their years from eight days after the birth of Christ, this is from January 1, and not from the creation of the world. There is a great difference in those two calendars. This year is 1699 since the birth of Christ, and on January 1 it will be 1700 as well as a new century. To celebrate this happy and opportune occasion, the Great Sovereign has ordered that henceforth all government administrative departments and fortresses in all their official business use the new calendar beginning January 1, 1700. To commemorate this happy beginning and the new century in the capital city of Moscow, after a solemn prayer in churches and private dwellings, all major streets, homes of important people, and homes of distinguished religious and civil servants should be decorated with trees, pine, and fir branches similar to the decoration of the Merchant Palace or the Pharmacy Building—or as best as one knows how to decorate his place and gates. Poor people should put up at least one tree, or a branch on their gates or on their apartment [doors]. These decorations are to remain from January 1 to January 7, 1700. As a sign of happiness on January 1, friends should greet each other and the New Year and the new century as follows: when the Red Square will be lighted and shooting will begin—followed by that at the homes of boyars, courtiers, and important officials of the tsar, military and merchant classes—everyone who has a musket or any other fire arm should either salute thrice or shoot several rockets or as many as he has. . . .

Decrees on Compulsory Education of the Russian Nobility

Send to every gubernia [region] some persons from mathematical schools to teach the children of the nobility—except those of freeholders and gov-

ernment clerks—mathematics and geometry; as a penalty [for evasion] establish a rule that no one will be allowed to marry unless he learns these [subjects]. Inform all prelates to issue no marriage certificates to those who are ordered to go to schools. . . .

The Great Sovereign has decreed: in all gubernias children between the ages of ten and fifteen of the nobility, of government clerks, and of lesser officials, except those of freeholders, must be taught mathematics and some geometry. Toward that end, students should be sent from mathematical schools [as teachers], several into each gubernia, to prelates and to renowned monasteries to establish schools. During their instruction these teachers should be given food and financial remuneration . . . from gubernia revenues set aside for that purpose by personal orders of His Imperial Majesty. No fees should be collected from students. When they have mastered the material, they should then be given certificates written in their own handwriting. When the students are released they ought to pay one ruble each for their training. Without these certificates they should not be allowed to marry nor receive marriage certificates.

from Basil Dmytryshyn, Imperial Russia: A Sourcebook, 1700–1917 (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1967), 14–22. Reprinted in Peter N. Stearns, ed., Documents in World History, Vol. II (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1988), 32–34.

Discussion Questions

Clarifying

1. When did the new Russian calendar go into effect and how did Russia celebrate?
2. What penalty did children of Russian nobles face if they did not learn mathematics?
3. ***Drawing Conclusions*** What advantages do you think Russia gained by these reforms? What disadvantages, if any, do you see?