When the baillifs closed the doors on the thirty-third session of the Third Duma on November 30, 1911, the members of Russia’s lower house of parliament sat in privacy to discuss the first significant revision of the law which had regulated military service throughout the Romanov empire since 1874. Despite the fact that thirty-seven turbulent years had passed since the last examination of conscription laws, the bill was strikingly ideologically conservative. The military proposed no change to the principles developed by Dmitrii Miliutin (minister of war 1861–81) and decreed by Alexander II in 1874: army service was the sacred duty of every (male) subject of the Russian empire to the state. This duty was to be distributed “universally” and established on a “personal” basis between the state and its young conscripts.

In reality, however, neither universality nor the personal relationship had been fully implemented. Millions of non-Russians were still exempted from the performance of military service, and thousands more (especially Jews) lived under different and more limiting rules of service and promotion. Further, local officials, both civilian and military, still mediated the relationship between conscript and the “Tsar and Fatherland,” watering down the idea that a personal relationship of any real substance existed between citizen and center.

The status quo of universal and personal in principle, but not completely in practice, was assiduously preserved by the interministerial commission which drafted the reform bill, at least for the first round of legislative battles. This commission intended, in time, to address this blatant contradiction between principle and practice, but wanted first to press through what they thought would be the uncontroversial aspects of reform in a separate package.
of technical improvements to the process of the draft. Proposed changes to the exemptions and restrictions placed on many non-Russian nationalities, for instance, were to be addressed only in the second round of bureaucratic and legislative wrangling.3

Despite the caution exercised by the bill’s authors and “sponsors,” the resulting debate was marked by intense political and personal rancor,4 during which Miliutin’s principles and the War Ministry’s practice came under fierce attack. The first criticism came from the Russian nationalist benches and related to the bill’s provision that draft quotas would not be assessed for each draft region, but would be assessed and fulfilled throughout the whole territory of the empire. Deputy Sinadino from Bessarabia argued that any move towards a empire-wide system of assessing the draft was unwise and unfair because the central (read “Russian”) regions where evasion rates were low would have to pick up the slack for other regions (read “Jewish”) where the population did not fulfill their duty with sufficient “ardor.”5 The ensuing dispute over the omnipresent “Jewish question” culminated in a call from yet another right-wing nationalist, Krupenskii, to exclude Jews from the army altogether.6

At the same time that Russian right-wing nationalists were attacking the principle of universality in conscription policy, some non-Russian Duma members were pressing for the principle to be fully implemented in practice. One Muslim deputy stood up to protest the fact that the nationality question had not been addressed in the bill before the Duma, claiming: “we recognize as completely correct and fair . . . that the defense of the state is the sacred responsibility of every citizen” and asked that Muslims from the Caucasus be brought under the same conscription law as other nationalities in the region. Exclusion from the armed forces offended young Muslims, he claimed and they felt that “they were not sons of the whole motherland but stepsons (pasynki).”7

In this political struggle over the universality of military service, the right-wing nationalists lost. The majority of speakers came out in favor of

3. RGVIA, f. 2000, op. 3, d. 79, l. 3; RGVIA, f. 2000, op. 3, d. 71, l. 5ob.
4. In the most heated session (December 2, 1911) no less than three Duma members were expelled. Two Social Democrats (Tomilov and Voloishnikov) were thrown out for insulting the army and ultra-nationalist V. M. Purishkevich was sent out for “improper and uncensored exclamation” directed at Tomilov. Both Voloishnikov and Purishkevich received the maximum punishment allowed—fifteen sessions.
5. RGVIA, f. 2000, op. 3, d. 79, l. 1194.
6. Ibid., l. 1164ob.
7. Ibid., ll. 1163ob–64. The Russian word pasynki also means “outcasts,” a connotation which was no doubt intentional. See also l. 1179ob for similar sentiments from a deputy from Kazan’.
increased, rather than decreased, participation of non-Russians in the Russian army. Krupenskii's call for the exclusion of Jews was roundly criticized, for instance, by Deputy Kropotov, who argued that "if you really consider that the army should serve the state, defend it, then [you must argue] that the military burden should be fulfilled by every one in an equal measure..." and asked "who will bear the burden which we take from Muslims and Jews? Well, it will lie on the peasantry... You talk about equality, well then put equality into the law." 8

Just as universality was affirmed by most Duma members, so too was the personal nature of the relationship between the central state and citizen. The specific issue at stake here was also seemingly minor. In 1911 every twenty-one-year-old male with a second or third category exemption, as well as every conscript with no exemption, drew a number in the yearly draft lottery. The new bill contained a provision to lessen the number of men who actually had to stand in line and draw a number by improving the statistical procedures associated with the draft. Hence, if the statistical branches of the Ministry of Internal Affairs determined that the army would need to draft all healthy men without exemptions, all men with fourth category exemptions, half the men with third category exemptions, and none with second class exemptions, then only the third category recruits would need to draw lots, since draft numbers would be irrelevant for all the other categories of men. 9

But again, a revision which seemed to touch only upon the technical aspects of the draft raised a great furor for its social implications. This time the objections were raised mainly by centrist members of the Duma and coalesced behind a proposal by A. I. Guchkov, a powerful Duma spokesman on military affairs, to maintain the lottery for all recruits save those with first category exemptions.

Speaking in favor of Guchkov's proposal was Deputy L'vov from Saratov, who claimed that Guchkov's restoration of article 10 of the 1874 code was important because "... in the 1874 code the very drawing of the lot was the cornerstone of the whole edifice. With this act, the personal relationship of each man to his military burden was formed. This fundamental tenet suffused the whole code, and the proposition... to destroy the lottery system would destroy this personal relationship." 10

Most deputies, in the end, agreed with Guchkov's and L'vov's position, and Guchkov's amendment passed, establishing quite clearly that the mainte-

8. Ibid., II. 1165–65ob.
9. The new law also divided the third category of exemption into two separate categories, thus creating four categories of exemptions without expanding the number of people who received them.
10. RGVIA, f. 2000, op. 3, d. 79, l. 1244.
nance of a personal relationship between state and conscript overrode any concerns the War Ministry had with regards to efficiency.

The outcome of the Duma debate was clear: there were factions within the Duma who opposed Miliutin’s fundamental idea of the basis of military service, but, as was evident both in debate and in voting patterns, a majority of members wanted the army to work harder to transform Miliutin’s principles into practice. Further, the emotion that the issue raised, even in closed sessions, was an indicator that Russia’s politicians well knew the importance of the institution of conscription, both to the ideological fabric of the empire and to the everyday lives of their constituents. As one member from Tobol’sk put it: “I maintain that for the whole period of activity of the Third State Duma we have not yet had to examine such an important, such a serious bill as the present one. This bill concerns all strata of society and concerns . . . the population of the entire Russian Empire, and even each individual citizen.”

Changes in conscription law, even minor ones, meant something in practice to the average Russian. Every time the issue was addressed, the raw tendons and ligaments of the political community headed by the Romanov dynasty were exposed, and questions of who belonged to that community and the foundation of the relationship between each male citizen to the state came to the fore. These were questions of the highest political magnitude, and occasional calls from the center of the Duma chamber to keep politics (and party politics in particular) out of the discussion were justly unheeded.

But political battles in the waning days of the Romanov empire were not limited to the upper political and social stratum. Regular “constituents” also took part in the shaping of laws and the definition of the political community. And, it seems, conscription politics was a particularly ripe area for this participation, perhaps because the emperor himself had established the foundation of a personal relationship between the citizen and the state regarding the issue. To be sure, all Russian emperors (and the general secretaries and presidents who followed) construed this relationship as a one-sided one. It was a duty to serve, not an agreement. Most conscripts, however, clearly felt that the institution of a personal relationship between state and citizen, one which explicitly linked army service to membership in the political community, entailed a right on their part to participate in the forming and implementation of conscription law. The question, of course, was how to participate, given the lack of formalized institutions for political activism on the part of lower-class Russians.

11. Ibid., I. 1157ob.
12. Ibid., II. 1166ob, 1168, 1189.
The answer was the establishment of regular correspondence between individual subjects and central state officials regarding military service. Individual subjects contributed by writing letters to the center, and St. Petersburg bureaucrats replied by conscientiously reacting to the letters they received. Further, it was the promise of a direct relationship between the individual and the state which helped to determine both the volume of correspondence and the form and content of the correspondence itself.

The vast majority of this correspondence supported the principles which the Duma supported in 1911-12: the expansion of personal and universal military service at the expense of the power of local officials and the narrow constructions of nationhood favored by right-wing nationalists. Indeed, most of the letters in pre-revolutionary archives directly addressed one or both of these founding principles.

Among the correspondence which stressed the ideal of a personal, unmediated relationship between conscript and center were letters of volunteers that flowed in to military authorities after the declaration of war against Germany in July 1914. The following telegram to Sukhomlinov, the war minister, from a group of men in Ekaterinograd, whose request to join the ranks had been stalled for nearly a week by the local commander, was typical: “We humbly ask your excellency to heed our request, and petition before His Highness to command that we volunteers be taken into the army to defend with all our soul our adored Tsar-father (Tsar-batiushka) and the motherland. We most humbly ask you to deign to notify the Ekaterinograd military commander about the royal favor which is so precious for us.”

These volunteers perceived their relationship to be directly with the center. They proposed to defend the tsar and motherland and corresponded directly with the war minister himself. The target of the letter was a favorite one, both for dissatisfied central officials and wronged citizens—the much-abused local official, who was needed to implement any state policy, but was left hanging out to dry within an ideological framework that stressed the immediacy of center-citizen relations.

Men like those in Ekaterinograd who complained about not being allowed into the army were the exception rather than the rule. Far more common were

13. Even rumors of changes in the draft law (and hence a change in the relationship between conscript and state) were enough to spark a barrage of letter-writing to officials in St. Petersburg. RGVIA, f. 2000, op. 3, d. 1159, l. 242.
14. Ibid., d. 2647, f. 16.
15. In fact, the obstruction was the fault of central authorities. Having focused all their attentions on the forced conscription of reservists in a general mobilization, the mobilization department had completely neglected to address the question of volunteers, and as a result those inflamed with patriotic fervor had to wait several weeks before guidelines concerning their enlistment were produced and sent to local military authorities.
letter-writers who protested unfair inductions into the armed forces. In addition to the numerous petitioners who complained that they or a relative had been personally wronged,\textsuperscript{16} there were multiple cases of denunciations (most of them anonymous)\textsuperscript{17} protesting the more general abuse of conscription laws. One denunciation addressed to the State Duma signed “from a peasant” on August 10, 1915, claimed that the local military doctor and draft committee in Kostroma were freeing healthy young men and enlisting the sick and unfit.\textsuperscript{18} Another writer took a more personal and bitter tone in his attack addressed to the Duma in 1915, in which he described a local military commander as a “blood drinker” (krovopivets) for his disregard for conscripts during mobilization.\textsuperscript{19}

The examples cited above belong to the heyday of draft denunciations—the World War I period\textsuperscript{20}—but the practice was quite prevalent even before the war. In 1910, for instance, Anton Orliuk, a peasant from Voledarka, wrote the following to the war minister:

In the fall of 1908, Ianakov, the [local] postman . . . was drafted and enlisted into the troops in Samara. According to the wife of the village clerk Mariia Vasil'evna Prokof'eva, with whom he boarded—Ianakov sought a way to evade performing his military duty and found the burden of the draft unbearable. However, his measures for evading service did not work and he was taken into military service. But after two months he was permanently released from military service for weak vision and he confessed to me that he secured his release on false premises. This is confirmed by events. After his departure from the regiment, supposedly for unfitness, Ianakov furnished the Tiflis Postal-telegraph district with a medical certificate of his excellent eyesight and health, and was once again accepted as a postman . . . where he performs more complicated service than that of an enlisted clerk in regimental chancelleries. In the interests of the state, I consider it my duty to inform (donesti) Your Excellency about these facts and request an

\textsuperscript{16} See for instance Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv (RGIA), f. 1292, op. 5, d. 304, l. 42, 53 and RGVIA, f. 2000, op. 3, d. 1159, l. 55–56.

\textsuperscript{17} That anonymous denunciations predominated is not only my own observation from archival research, but was the conclusion of War Minister A. A. Polivanov in 1915 as well. Ibid., d. 1196, l. 91.

\textsuperscript{18} RGIA, f. 1278, op. 5, d. 1193, l. 112.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., l. 161.

\textsuperscript{20} This appears to be the case not only because of heightened social tensions regarding military service, but also because the archive of the War Ministry had a policy, prior to the revolution, of destroying most of their documents after a specified length of time (usually ten years). As a result, it is impossible to say how prevalent correspondence to the War Ministry was before the turn of the century.
investigation of them, a verification (proverka) of his health and an accounting of guilty persons before the law. 21

As with nearly all other missives to the top, this denunciation stresses the themes of duty and state interest, and is based on a presumed alliance between a lowly peasant and the war minister to root out not only draft dodgers, but also possible miscreants in the military administration (for there was more than one guilty person who needed accounting before the law).

It should also be noted that there is no room for an explication of Orliuk's personal interest in this case, even though it is unclear why Ianakov should have confessed to him, or why Orliuk was writing more than a year after Ianakov had been released from service. All interest in this relationship between subject and state had to be represented as the general interest.

Of course, the motives for writing denunciations varied far more than the representation of these motives in the letters themselves would suggest. Clearly, draft denunciations were often used as a means to settle conflicts which had nothing to do with the draft. In some cases, people who were denounced, or their representatives, would write back to central authorities complaining that the charges leveled against them were based on personal, and not general, interests. For instance, Elena Glurzhidze telegraphed Guchkov (now the war minister) in March 1917 that her husband had been unfairly conscripted as the result of a "denunciation by personal enemies," a charge which led the mobilization department to order local military authorities to re-examine his case the very next day. 22

It is just as clear, however, that many of these denunciations were actually based on a desire to see general interests served. In the first place, the last drafted soldier in a district was not released from service if his neighbor was found to have unlawfully avoided service. Hence, denouncing a neighbor did not serve any positive use, like getting a son back, but only served as a method of revenge. It was certainly used this way from time to time, 23 but personal motives like revenge did not exhaust the motives for writing draft denunciations.

The desire to see general interests served was more obviously present in the second type of correspondence that flowed between subjects and central authorities, what we might call "subpopulation denunciations." This correspondence was not targeted at specific individuals. When mentioned at all, individuals were used only as examples of larger populations. Rather, these letters

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21. RGVIA, f. 2000, op. 3, d. 75, l. 50.
22. Ibid., d. 1195, ll. 131, 137.
23. Likewise, those who traded in military exemptions were often brought down by unsatisfied customers bent on revenge. See for instance ibid., d. 75, l. 19.
were targeted at whole groups of people who, legally or illegally, were not performing military service on an equal basis with the rest of the population, and hence were violating the "universal" principle of the conscription law. These letters, even more than denunciations of individuals, flourished during the war, and absolutely flooded military institutions during the great manpower crisis of 1915.

Some of the groups denounced for not properly fulfilling their duty were generals ("who never appear on the lists of dead and wounded" and "are standing to the side during the war"), German colonists ("There are no portraits of our . . . Emperor in their homes, rather, in every house there is a portrait of damned Kaiser Wilhelm"), and Muslims living in the Caucasus:

As you know . . . many Muslims . . . don't serve in the troops. I was just in Terskaia Province, where 50 percent of the population is Muslim and where the Russian population is in a desperate condition following the robberies, brigandage, and violence against women performed by the Muslim population. All healthy and strong Russian men have been mobilized and there is no one . . . to defend those remaining from the unruliness and violence of the mountain men. It seems to me that would be a great injustice to Russian and other nationalities, who have given their lives for the defense of the honor and integrity of our motherland, to leave the mountain men of the Caucasus undrafted in this great historical moment.  

These examples are just the tip of the iceberg. Indeed, judging by the volume of these letters extant in archives, it seems that large segments of the population felt it to be not only their right, but even their responsibility, to give expert opinion to the War Ministry regarding draft policy. The groups most targeted in these recommendations were policemen, "whiteticketers" (men freed from service for medical reasons and given a white ticket to prove this), rich people, and Jews.  

24. RGIA, f. 1278, op. 5, d. 205, ll. 196–97.
25. Ibid., f. 1292, op. 5, d. 1192, l. 228ob.
27. For examples of the latter three cases, see ibid., d. 1246, l. 15; ibid., f. 400, op. 19, d. 147, ll. 9–10; ibid., f. 2000, op. 3, d. 2694, ll. 70–70ob. The question of Jews and military service is too complicated to deal with in a short article. They were the major exception to the idea that each subject, regardless of his social, religious or national group, should be equal in the eyes of the army. It will suffice here to say that anti-Semitism structured the military's dealing with Jewish conscripts, and the resulting horrid conditions of army life prompted many Jews to avoid serving the tsar, which in turn bolstered the anti-Semitism of state and military officials.
The exemption of policemen was a particularly sore point in conscription policy throughout the war, and a debate raged in government circles between the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which wanted to keep policemen around to keep an eye on the increasingly tense situation on the home front, and others (including officials in the War Ministry) who resented the fact that healthy, armed, and trained men were leading normal lives at home while forty-year-olds and only sons served at the front. But again, participation in this political battle was not limited to the Duma members who publicly lambasted the Ministry of Internal Affairs and to the Petrograd bureaucrats who privately exchanged memos on the subject; common subjects also took part, registering their distaste for the police exemption in a great number of letters to Duma members and ministers alike.

Some authors were quite judicious, and tried to reason with officials in Petrograd. One group of peasants, for instance, wrote to the Duma in August 1915 and maintained that police should be drafted before the second tier of the home guard (which included only sons with widowed mothers), arguing that "The government will probably demonstrate that the police and gendarmerie are necessary, that it is impossible to live without them. Yes, they are necessary, but not in such a terrifying quantity. And why are they necessary, when everything in the country is calm and quiet, there aren't many people, there is no vodka, and the womenfolk are a very quiet people?" 28

Other letters were more threatening, like the manifesto signed by workers in the Donbass on September 1, 1915, which was sent to the Minister of Internal Affairs complaining of the same situation, that the government was considering drafting second tier home guardists before policemen: "We're letting you know, that if the manifesto on drafting home guardists is decreed, then not a single home guardist will go serve, because we still have policemen, (draft the police first and we will go with pleasure, because we will know that there is no one left to go), and all we workers will stop work in all factories, both private and state, which produce articles for state defense. And with the declaration of mobilization an internal war with the government will be realized. All these lines are not a fantasy, but will be a real fact." 29

This letter was quite clearly detached from any individual interest. Not only was the letter signed by a large group of men, but they were men who were already exempted from service by virtue of working in defense industries. Further, they linked their protest with the understood contract between the state and their conscripts—only in the case of the police being undrafted would the "internal war" be declared. This letter, and many like it, demonstrates that the relationship between state and subject in the area of military service was not

28. RGIA, f. 1278, op. 5, d. 1193, ll. 106–07.
29. Ibid., f. 1292, op. 7, d. 298, ll. 122–22ob.
construed by subjects as a command-obedience relationship, as a simple matter of “sacred duty,” but as an interaction which was constantly being negotiated, and which required good faith efforts from both sides to maintain.

When we turn, then, to the state arena, we find the range of uses for subjects’ letters nearly as wide as the range of motives for writing them. There are two types of letters one finds in tsarist archives. The first category is comprised of censored letters. These letters were accorded great importance, and were used both as a means to locate violators of draft laws and as a voice of the populace in a country where no opinion polls were taken. The examination of this vast and varied source, however, lies beyond the scope of this article, as perused letters reveal dialogues between subjects and not between the subject and the state.

The second type of letter is the type analyzed above—the letter of the subject to the center. When turning to the ways in which military officials dealt with these missives, one is immediately struck by the tremendous reliance on information given by subjects to the state. Indeed, denunciations were virtually the sole means that the War Ministry had for gauging the extent of violations of draft laws. Most other means were concentrated in the hands of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (for whom denunciations were also a crucial source of information), and the War Ministry continually worried that the agents of that ministry were not sufficiently attentive to the problem of draft evasion.

These fears were bolstered by the high volume of letters that the War Ministry received regarding draft evasion. In the summer of 1915, as the manpower situation worsened and the number of denunciations increased, the military’s distrust surfaced in a letter from A. A. Polivanov, the war minister, to Prince Shcherbatov, the minister of internal affairs. Polivanov noted that military officials in Petrograd and at the front were receiving a great number of denunciations, all of which were being duly forwarded to the police, but that the measures then taken by the local police were not working “since the number of these letters are not only not decreasing, but are significantly increasing with each day.”

Polivanov underlined the importance of enforcing draft laws, noting that the “mass evasions” not only hurt the army but also “engendered extreme unhappiness and rumblings among the population.” The war minister concluded his appeal to Shcherbatov by noting the need for the “most energetic

30. ROVIA, f. 2000, op. 3, d. 1159, l. 161; ibid., d. 1221, l. 98.
31. See for instance RGIA, f. 1278, op. 5, d. 216, l. 78; RGVIA, f. 2003, op. 2, d. 784, l. 23.
32. RGVIA, f. 2000, op. 3, d. 1196, l. 910b.
33. Ibid.
measures” to be taken to find draft dodgers and “fervently” asked Shcherbatov to take those measures.

Two months later, the Ministry of Internal Affairs responded that all denunciations were being assiduously followed up, but that, in fact, most denunciations turned out to be false. This was the case, the ministry claimed, because “many physical deficiencies and internal ailments are unnoticed by other people . . . and [because] of the desire to settle personal scores with one or another person. . . .”

This exchange revealed not only the growing tension between the two ministries responsible for carrying out the draft, but also the importance that Petrograd officials placed on messages from below. The War Ministry clearly felt that denunciations pointed to serious deficiencies in local administration, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, though unable to agree with this assessment, nevertheless still assiduously investigated each denunciation that came its way.

For a clearer view of the whole phenomenon of draft denunciations, it is perhaps best to follow one case from beginning to end. One investigation began with a letter written to the War Ministry in Petrograd on June 13, 1916 and signed only as “Bamaulets” (a resident of the city of Barnaul). “Your excellency,” the letter began:

Turn your attention to the administration of the Barnaul district military commander, because we have three clerks who ran away from the administration. Filipets, Solov’ev, and a third whose name I forget committed forgery on the books. They destroyed their documents and made forged ones. When after five days Filipets appeared alone, then Mr. Stazhevskii [the district military commander] arrested him and put him in the guardhouse for thirty days, and that was it, he only told [Filipets] that [Filipets] was a fool and that he knew that [Filipets] had made money during mobilization. . . . It is now clear that everyone was hushed up, that Filipets split all his bribes with Stazhevskii. . . . It is clear how things go with us. Some spill their blood and others stuff their pockets. This is not honest and will end up badly from your point of view.

“Bamaulets” went on to say that corruption existed even within the units, that soldiers were not getting the food and clothing they were promised, and

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34. Ibid., l. 93–93ob.
35. Ibid., d. 1554, l. 21. The rambling nature of this letter is intensified by poor punctuation. I inserted some punctuation in the translation to make it more understandable.
that commanders of reserve battalions were making money from this corruption.

The letter was received in Petrograd on July 2, 1916, and an investigation was immediately set in motion. Officials in the Main Administration of the General Staff sent the letter to the commander of forces of the Omsk military district, who in turn dispatched a General Akulov to investigate the charges. Within two weeks, Akulov had prepared and presented a report totalling over fifty pages, which was sent both to Omsk and to Petrograd.

Akulov’s investigation resulted in a full clearing of the local military commander and vindicated most of the other targets of the denunciation as well. Of all the charges levelled by “Barnaulets” only the fact of the desertion of two enlisted men was correct, according to Akulov, and even then the reason for their flight was clearly misrepresented. In regard to the charges of not providing conscripts with proper gear, the failure of the units in question to provide their soldiers with underwear was completely “accidental.” Further, the Barnaul district military commander was not only innocent, but was in addition “an unassuming, profound, and good man, totally devoted to service.”

The cycle of denunciations had not yet run its course in Barnaul, though, for while Akulov was investigating the original charges someone took advantage of his presence to slip him yet another denunciation, this one signed merely “A wounded man living in Barnaul.” This one stated:

Your excellency, I inform you of this news. Mikhail Ivanovich Zakovriashin was drafted with me in 1907, but was enlisted in the reserves as a teacher. I served out my active duty and was called up during the mobilization in 1914. Now I have been mustered out of service, but Zakovriashin is still living at home. I saw his certificate of completion of military service in which it is written that he was completely released from a unit on active duty, but I well know that Zakovriashin never served in any unit and he himself says that he was never in a unit, but he has the documents. . . . The Barnaul District Military Commander summoned him to his office but for some reason sent him home, maybe because he is a rich man and he brought meat to the Military Commander. . . . I earnestly request your excellency to personally call in Zakovriashin and interrogate him as to why and how he was released and also to verify his documents and the certificate with which he was released from service.

36. Ibid., l. 19.
37. Ibid., ll. 76–76ob.
This new denunciation against Zakovriashin and by implication also against Stazhevskii was given for further investigation to Stazhevskii himself by Akulov. Stazhevskii responded by sending a few inconclusive documents about Zakovriashin’s status and the measures being taken in the case back to Omsk, at which point the paper trail of the case ended.

The Barnaul case is representative in many ways of the practice of draft denunciation in prerevolutionary Russia. To begin with, both letters were anonymous, and both were framed with reference to the two major bases of the military service contract—universal application of military service laws on the state’s part and personal responsibility to the state on the conscript’s part. In the first letter, in addition to the concrete allegations, there is a palpable indignation at the ability of the rich and well connected to free themselves from the army, at the striking non-universality of military service. In the second letter, in addition to this not entirely unfounded belief that money could get one out of going to war, one gets a taste of personal motives, and also of a strident sense of unfairness that the letter writer had performed his personal responsibility, while his neighbor had not.

For their part, central military officials (in this case including those from Omsk, who were sufficiently powerful and sufficiently removed from Barnaul to root out corruption had they found it) responded quickly and diligently to the rambling letters from below. In the end, however, the chickens were entrusted to the fox. In both investigations, Gen. Akulov relied heavily on the object of his investigation, Stazhevskii, to provide evidence. Not surprisingly, the evidence Stazhevskii provided gave no hint of corruption in Barnaul. The favorable personal impression that Stazhevskii made upon Akulov no doubt also played a role—after all, Akulov entrusted Stazhevskii with the investigation of the second denunciation prior to his final determination of guilt in the first investigation.

This problem of how to conduct local investigations without using local officials befuddled Petrograd military authorities throughout the late imperial period. When the charges were leveled against a peasant the problem of using local officials to gather evidence and prosecute the case presented little problem. But when the officials themselves were charged with corruption, the center was often left with the word of an anonymous denouncer against the word of a fellow officer. In a few cases, corroborating evidence was found and local officials were prosecuted—in most, the officer’s word won the day.

Finally, it is clear from these letters, as it is clear in many others, that fairness (spravedlivost’) was the structuring theme of the discourse on the draft. The idea that each male subject, regardless of social or economic status, should be treated equally before the draft board and should bear the same re-

38. Ibid., l. 76ob.
responsibility to the state struck a responsive chord with the population of the Russian empire, and rich and poor alike wrote a great many letters to demonstrate their support for the ideal. But the chord struck by the universal aspect to the empire’s conscription law was a dissonant one, for it gave state sanction to the liberal idea that male subjects should be equal and autonomous individuals in a land where inequality based on caste, religion, and race was blatant and often enshrined in law.

Even more dissonant was the chord struck by the personal aspect of the conscription law. Here the conflict lay in the fact that universal military service was interpreted as a contract, as a two-sided relationship, by most conscripts, while the state persisted in claiming that military service was a one-sided relationship, a duty that had to be fulfilled regardless of state action (or inaction). Both civilian and military officials closed their eyes to the numerous signals, not least among them private letters from citizens and conscripts themselves, that most draftees construed “sacred duty” in a much different way than the General Staff did. And when it came time, during the climax of the clanging symphony of the great war, for this chord to be resolved, it was the General Staff that had to alter its pitch, not the conscripts.

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