

Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme

Political Corruption of Russian Doctorates

ARARAT L. OSIPIAN

Abstract: This paper addresses the issue of doctorates for sale in the Russian Federation. It focuses specifically on the practice of conferring fake or unearned doctoral degrees to elected politicians and other public officials. It assembles and analyzes a database of doctoral degrees, academic ranks, memberships in the academies, awards, decorations, and titles held by the members of the Russian government, the Federation Council and the State Duma. In theory, doctorates are needed to pursue scholarship and research. In practice, however, doctorates offer to their holders some indirect or intangible benefits, among which are public recognition and respect. These can then be transformed into direct and tangible benefits through different means, including the electoral process. Accordingly, it may be the case that Russian political elites abuse the existing system of conferring doctorates in order to improve their image, and use the degrees as status-symbols in the highly ceremonial society of modern Russia.

Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme (The Bourgeois Gentleman) is a comédie-ballet in five acts by Molière, first presented on October 14, 1670.

Keywords: corruption, dissertations, doctorates, Duma, elites, politicians, Russia

Politicians and other popular figures traditionally deploy verbal distinctions, high visibility, and publicity in an attempt to attract the public's attention and the votes of the electorate. The reputations of these public figures are often based on their entourage, decorations, titles, and high academic degrees. Historically, societal elites sought distinctions through music, poetry, clothing, bravery in battle, and so on. In China, yellow dye

Ararat L. Osipian is a PhD candidate in the Department of Leadership, Policy and Organizations at Peabody College of Education, Vanderbilt University. He holds a PhD in Political Economy from Kharkov National University (Ukraine) and an MA in Economics from Vanderbilt University. His research interests include corruption in higher education and inequalities in access to higher education in international perspective, nexus of education and economic growth, modern welfare states, and political economy of transition. He is the author of *The Impact of Human Capital on Economic Growth: A Case Study in Post-Soviet Ukraine, 1989-2009*. Copyright © 2010 World Affairs Institute

for clothing was exclusively reserved for the members of the Emperor's family. In France, carrying long swords was an exclusive right of nobles. In Russia, members of the Boyarskaya Duma had long beards and large stomachs; those without large stomachs used pillows to fit the profile. These are only a few charismatic examples in which elites possessed external and visible attributes of power. This article focuses on the process of politicians corrupting doctoral education by nefariously acquiring doctoral degrees. It uses the example of the Russian political establishment to analyze the issue of corruption in conferring doctorates. The article establishes the fact of corruption in Russian doctoral education based on the media reports, expert opinions, and data regarding the dynamics and structure of dissertations defended in Russia. It points to the practice of the conferral of doctoral degrees in exchange for illicit benefits. It develops an earlier-introduced theory of elites in order to explain how Russian politicians corrupt the country's currently existing system of doctoral education. In order to present the evidence in support of this theory, we consider the supply of dissertations for sale, the demand for doctorates, favorable conditions for such a business, and the context in which this business takes place. We consider these components according to the principle of measuring clandestine processes based on input and output. The evidence collected includes the data on firms that offer dissertations for sale and the number of leading politicians that hold doctorates. We also use data from opinion-polls conducted among scholars regarding the dissertations for sale.

The Problem of Corruption in Doctoral Education

The definition of education corruption includes the abuse of authority for material gain and is broadly defined as the abuse or misuse of public office or public trust for personal or private gain.¹ Education is an important public good, and because of this the definition of education corruption should include the abuse of authority for personal as well as material advancement.² University corruption takes place in both developing and developed countries.³ Corruption in higher education may be defined as a system of informal relations established to regulate unsanctioned access to material and nonmaterial assets through abuse of the office of public or corporate trust.⁴ Conferring doctoral degrees based on criteria other than academic merit may be considered corrupt. These include private donations, promise of material and nonmaterial benefits, favorable political decisions, or threat of use of political power against the granting body. In the centralized educational systems, obtaining a doctoral degree in exchange for money or other benefits constitutes the abuse of public trust. Furthermore, in the case of politicians, the exertion of powers given by the people in order to receive a doctorate constitutes the abuse of public office. Thus, corruption in conferring doctoral degrees to politicians anticipates abuse of public office on both sides of this illicit bargain.

University professors, including those who are members of the special academic boards⁵—later renamed dissertation boards⁶—abuse their office by conferring a doctoral degree on a basis other than the academic merit of the candidate. They either ignore the poor quality of the dissertation or do not take enough precautionary and controlling measures to assure that the dissertation submitted for the degree is written by the candidate and not by a hired ghostwriter.

An informal contract between the conferring body and the recipient results in the conferral of a doctoral degree in exchange for illicit benefits. Abuse of the office of public trust is committed by both the conferring body and by the recipient. But these are only internal

abuses of the system of conferring doctoral degrees. Conferral of a doctorate to a politician or public official as the result of a corrupt agreement anticipates further external abuses of public trust. It implies both implicit and explicit abuses. Politicians abuse public trust when they use doctoral degrees in order to be elected or re-elected for public office. They mislead the public regarding their academic merits, scholastic abilities, and leadership skills. This constitutes fraud and abuse of the electorate. University professors who are members of the conferring body betray other recipients of doctoral degrees who have honestly earned their doctorates. Finally, politicians undermine the reputation not only of doctorates, but of the legislative body as well. This causes damage to the collective reputations of scholars and the political establishment of the nation. Corruption in the conferral of doctoral degrees to elected politicians and other public officials can be defined as the abuse of the office of public trust and entrusted authority by both the conferring academic bodies and by the recipients in an expectation of material and other tangible benefits, including votes.

In Russia in 2005, there were 35,000 dissertations defended, including 30,000 for the degree of Candidate of Science (CSc) and 5,000 for the degree of Doctor (DSc) of Science. Between 1993 and 2005, the number of the Candidate of Science dissertations approved by the Highest Attestation Commission (VAK), including those in the fields of military sciences, medical sciences, agriculture, humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and engineering, grew from 15,679 to 30,116. The number of CSc dissertations in the social sciences and the humanities increased during this period from 4,362 to 15,981—in other words, it almost quadrupled.⁷ The head of the Department of Information Technology at the Russian State Library (RGB), Alexandr Visly, said that in 2005 alone the library received 31,000 dissertations;⁸ this is the all-time record. In 2002, there were only 27,000 dissertations received by the library. For comparison, in the US in 2004 there were 40,000 PhD degrees conferred by accredited doctoral programs.⁹ The high numbers of doctoral defenses in the Russian Federation look somewhat suspicious when the continuously declining funding for science and education is taken into account.

There is a strong belief among scholars that such a phenomenal increase in the number of defended dissertations, especially those in the social sciences, can be attributed, at least in part, to the so-called “phenomenon” of dissertations for sale. The head of the consulting company *Nezavisimye Analiticheskie Sistemy* (Independent Analytical Systems), Pavel Lobanov, predicts that the number of dissertations for sale will likely increase: “Competition continues to grow. There are more players coming to the market. Everyone thinks that this is easy money.”¹⁰ The chief academic secretary of VAK, Feliks Shamhalov, has complained about the weakening state control over the quality of doctorates due to the lack of funding, personnel, and facilities.¹¹ Georgy Petrov and Paul Temple draw some implications for corruption in higher education in Russia, pointing to the need-driven bribery on the side of college professors.¹²

Spiegel names Russian former president (now prime minister) Vladimir Putin, former Minister for Regional Development Vladimir Yakovlev, former Defense Minister Boris Gryzlov, and President of the Chechnya Ramzan Kadyrov as dubious doctorate-holders.¹³ The media point toward the existing business of dissertations for sale for Russian politicians, including the effort of anonymous ghostwriters.¹⁴ Putin has been accused by the Western media of plagiarizing parts of his dissertation.¹⁵ It would be unfair to say that this situation is only common in Russia or in the former Soviet Bloc; recent scandals in Germany, as well, point to a dissertations-for-sale business, similar to the one in Russia.¹⁶

Die Welt has reported about the well-developed business of doctorates for sale in the country.¹⁷ Many busy professionals buy doctoral degrees with the help of private consulting firms and professors.¹⁸

Elites and Corruption

In this article, political corruption of doctorates refers to corruption by politicians. The word *corruption* comes from the Latin *corruptio*, which in medieval Latin expressed moral decay, wicked behavior, putridity, rottenness. *Corruptio* was consistent with the classical notion of corruption, thought to be in ancient Greece less the actions of individuals than the moral health of whole societies.¹⁹ The Latin *corruptus* means rotten, depraved, wicked, or influenced by bribery.²⁰ Capturing the essence of corruption in terms of *corruptio* requires differentiating between the two. The negative influence of political elites and the behavior of faculty and dissertation boards lead to corruption in the functioning of the system of doctorates, perverting the educational purposes of research and scholarship. In this way, politicians negatively influence processes of doctoral education as well as independent fundamental research. This process leads to the conversion of corruption as an illegal activity into *corruptio* as perversion of major purpose. We combine Loren Graham's views on Soviet academia, Tatiana Zaslavskaya's theories of post-Soviet transformation and social change, Gaetano Mosca's theory of the ruling class, and Olga Kryshtanovskaya's theories of Russian elites to figure out the reasons for such corruption and the ways in which it occurs.

Olga Kryshtanovskaya and Stephen White (1995) understand "elite" to mean "the ruling group in a society, consisting of the people who take decisions of national significance."²¹ These include, first of all, members of the Russian parliament, the government, and the presidential administration. Russian politicians utilize their administrative authority in order to "privatize" the resource "doctoral degrees." Kryshtanovskaya and White refer to this process as "privatization of the state by the state."²² It appears that the doctorates do not lift people up to the highest levels of hierarchical structures; instead, the elites acquire doctorates to compensate for their lack of education. Statistical data show that the rich have a much higher level of access to education than do other socioeconomic strata. They wealthy consume higher education services more intensively. This consumerist approach, rejected by earlier Soviet ideology, is now the norm, and may relate closely to the "consumption" of doctoral degrees.²³

The Russian political *beau monde*'s attraction to distinctions and regalia further corrupts the national system of doctoral degrees; politicians discredit academia by acquiring doctoral degrees that they do not deserve.²⁴ Such a pattern of behavior may be the norm for political elites. Gaetano Mosca (1939) discusses the characteristics of elites in his work on the ruling class. He addresses the issue of aristocratic tendency and social fossilization for the ruling class: "It may very well be that certain intellectual and, especially, moral qualities, which are necessary to a ruling class if it is to maintain its prestige and function properly, are useful also to society, yet require, if they are to develop and exert their influence, that the same families should hold fairly high social positions for a number of generations."²⁵ The issue of hereditary transmission of rights also comes into play; as Arthur Livingston notes, "The presence of a strong middle class in a society means that education is discovering and utilizing the resources of talent which, quite independently of race and heredity, are forever developing in the human masses at large (resources which

backward societies somehow fail to use; that is why they are backward).”²⁶ The level of education of Russian legislators—i.e. the amount of human capital accumulated at the top of the political pyramid—may be crucial for the success of market reforms. If, however, political elites acquire doctorates with no academic merit, then the real amount of human capital in the top legislative body is difficult to determine. It is possible that political elites exchange doctorates and favors with academic elites while not allowing the latter into the realm of state politics. In this way, state officialdom and academia exist separately and do not diffuse—they merely exchange favors, regalia, and state funds.

Mikul’skiy et al. (1996) separate several types of elites in Russia, including power, political, academic, ideological, and business elites.²⁷ Anton Steen and Vladimir Gel’man (1999) follow the role of the elites in the democratic process in Russia.²⁸ Doctoral degrees offer self-confidence to their holders, and politicians are not exempt from this temptation. Steen (2003) points to the high level of self-confidence of both political elites and their governmental bodies: “A large proportion of the central political elite (members of the State Duma and the Federation Council) has confidence in the State Duma, and the legislators are also quite confident in themselves.”²⁹ In 2000, 77 percent of the Duma members were confident in the State Duma, down from 84 percent in 1998, while in the Soviet of Federation this institutional self-confidence reached 100 percent in 2000, up from 97 percent in 1998.³⁰ While elites are self-confident, the democratic process in Russia is rather slow and non-linear.

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The general public does not share the elite’s confidence in the political establishment. According to the survey, conducted by the Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM) on June 12, 2010, only 33 percent of respondents approve of the State Duma and the Federation Council. In 2006, the level of approval was even lower—27 percent and 31 percent, respectively. The disapproval rating for the Duma is currently 39 percent, while for the Federation Council it is 31 percent. These numbers point to the low popularity of the major political establishment. Perhaps the low level of professionalism and political discipline contributes to the negative image of these legislative bodies. This situation does not match the high academic credentials of its members.³¹

Steen (2003) comments on the academic achievements and scholarly abilities of the Duma members from a positive standpoint: “More than 90 percent of the respondents in the State Duma and 100 percent in the Federation Council have completed post-graduate studies, and a large proportion has a scientific degree. Intellectual capital is thus merged with considerable political experience at lower and intermediate level. Most of the new political elites are academics who have made use of democratic institutions as career ladders in politics.”³² Steen (2003) links the Duma’s educated members to the issue of human capital allocation and utilization. He writes: “But, education is a type of ‘human capital’ that may be converted into both political and business opportunities. The political elite

in the State Duma and Federation Council are not ‘bright youngsters’ without political experience.”³³ According to Steen, “Education is human capital that is easily transferable from one regime to another, for expertise is to a larger extent regime-independent and new regimes, in particular, need skilled personnel. The post-Communist transition thus opened up many career opportunities to the highly educated, careers that previously were restricted to loyal party activists.”³⁴

The presence of a large number of doctorates in the Russian political establishment may create the illusion that there is a close link between academia and politics—this would be a misperception. There is no real blending or exchange between academia and political elites. The high concentration of doctorates in state power structures does not mean that academics receive governmental positions or are elected to political bodies. On the contrary, it means that those in power receive academic regalia for mere operational reasons. First, they convert their authority into personal assets; this process is a classical form of rent-seeking behavior. Second, they build up their reputation in order to be elected, reelected, appointed, promoted, or rewarded within the existing bureaucratic or political hierarchy. Fundamentally, these doctorates have no value, but on the functional level, they serve as an indication of reputation. Holders of doctoral degrees are allowed to express an “expert knowledge” or “expert opinion,” not just their personal views.

Those in power, including politicians, see their “entitlements” in different spheres of life. In this sense, receiving a doctorate is their entitlement in the sphere of academia. The image of academia is simply exploited by politicians in order to add to their sense of elitism. It may be true that doctorates are used to compensate for the inferiority complex. In this case, representatives of the political elites would still have to add the prefix “HE” to their names.³⁵ In fact, some of them already do when on foreign voyages. It is unlikely that doctoral degrees serve as golden parachutes for politicians to land faculty positions in universities.

The idea of a doctoral degree as an attribute of the leisure class may find its manifestation in the way the masses perceive work and non-productive activities or occupations. Michail Chernish (2002) studies the changing values in contemporary Russian society and points to a specific understanding of a politician’s work commitment: “An in-depth interview project by a team from the Institute of Sociology revealed that the most widespread understanding of work only comprises those activities that lead to the growth of public wealth. The occupation of a broker or deputy of the State Duma, for instance, are not viewed as that kind of activity, but are judged as forms of a self-seeking redistributive pastime that is detrimental rather than beneficial for society as a whole.”³⁶ This approach may explain, in part, the parasitic positioning of the elites in regard to doctoral education. Parasitism of Russian political elites finds its expression in the aforementioned rent-seeking behavior, when mechanisms of influence on the academic community are used as tools to acquire doctorates; politicians benefit from holding doctorates in terms of reputation and pretentious expert or professional poise.

In order to change the existing situation in the conferral of doctoral degrees, a major shift in the elite’s priorities may be needed. Russian elites traditionally played a significant role in reforms, including those undertaken in the education sector. Tatiana Zaslavskaya (2002) emphasizes the significance of elites in reform: “The reform potential of a society is determined, first of all, by the quality and activities of the ruling elites and the top level of bureaucracy, i.e. groups that have a direct institutionalized impact on the reform. These

groups design new rules of the game, clothe them in legal clothes, organize and control their administration, and at the same time pursue their own interests.”³⁷ The social trajectory of the reforming Russia is also studied in Zaslavskaya and Kalugina (1999).³⁸ Judith Kullberg, John Higley, and Jan Pakulski (1995) warn against the dichotomy of “new” democratizing elites versus “old” *nomenklatura* that opposes the change. They write: “Working mainly from the stratification rather than the institutional stream of elite theory, these studies are tending to replace the earlier juxtaposition of ‘red’ versus ‘expert’ elites with a juxtaposition of ‘old’ ex-communist versus ‘new’ non-communist elites.”³⁹ Tatiana Zaslavskaya (1990) separates classes of conservators and reactionaries among others. She writes that reactionaries “live purely for the sake of grabbing as much as they can of the public’s money without regard for any legal or moral considerations. Another section, corrupted by their unlimited power over many thousands of people, are doing their best to regain or retain this power, which was provided them with a special ‘elitist’ lifestyle and legal impunity.”⁴⁰ Zaslavskaya suggests that these people are not going to change and that the only solution would be to remove them from power.⁴¹ Zaslavskaya also mentions the ideology of “barrack socialism” characteristic of conservators and reactionaries.⁴² The discussion about how “new” the new elites are, and how much of a legacy they take from the Soviet times, continues.

The Environment: Corruption as a Perceived Norm

In 2006, 80 percent of Russians thought that corruption was widespread through the government, while only 5 percent thought that it was not. For the year 2007, these numbers were 83 and 4 percent, and for 2008, 74 and 6 percent—the remaining respondents either were not sure or refused to respond. Sixty-nine percent of Russians did not think that the government did enough to fight corruption, with only 13 percent stating that it did. In 2007, Patricia Guadalupe reported that “More than half (57%) of respondents in 14 former Soviet republics tell Gallup the level of corruption in their country is higher now than it was during the days of the Soviet Union. Eighteen percent say the level of corruption is about the same, and just 8% say it is lower.”⁴³ In Russia, 75 percent believed that corruption was higher than it was during Soviet times; only two percent thought that there was more corruption in the Soviet system than in modern Russia.⁴⁴ And as of 2009, corruption is rated as the number one problem in Russian business, named as such by 62 percent of surveyed businessmen in September of that year.⁴⁵

According to Viktor Petukhov, in 2005 55 percent of Russians considered bureaucracy and the corruption of political and economic elites to be a key obstacle to Russia’s surmounting its socioeconomic crisis.⁴⁶ At the same time, only 15 percent named corruption and bureaucracy as a major threat to future economic development. Twenty-two percent named federal authorities as the country’s most corrupt entity, and 34 percent gave this designation to local authorities. The ineffective state and weak laws were named as the major causes of corruption by 40 percent of the population, followed by the greed and low morale of bureaucrats and public officials at 37 percent.⁴⁷ Half of all the polled Russians noted “no one” when asked to define the most effective anticorruption organization.⁴⁸ According to people’s perceptions, Putin’s presidency was not marked by a reduction in corruption, despite his emphasis on the fight against corruption. Specifically, 41 percent saw no changes in corruption; 40 percent saw little success, if any; 7 percent said that corruption had grown worse; and only 5 percent saw significant improvements.⁴⁹

According to a survey conducted by the Moscow-based Levada Center in 130 cities and towns of the Russian Federation on April 16, 2010, 55 percent of the respondents believe that all Russians who have to deal with bureaucrats pay bribes. Only 11 percent of Russians pay bribes easily, while 80 percent pay bribes with the sense of opposition to this practice. The average size of a bribe is around \$300, 56 percent higher than it was in 2000.⁵⁰

Russian universities suffer from corruption, and reforms of the education sector do not constitute holistic change.⁵¹ Likewise, the advancement of the “feed from the service” concept also help politicians achieve their ambitions.⁵² The culture of forgeries is widespread in Russia.⁵³ Doctoral education is no exception, with doctoral degrees or certificates of

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doctoral degrees being available for sale to those who are willing and able to pay. It is paradoxical that while fewer people are interested in academia, the prestige of being employed in academia disappears, the demand for doctoral degrees increases steadily. If politicians represent the demand for doctoral degrees, the professoriate in the dissertation boards, along with the numerous firms that write dissertations for sale, represent the supply of these degrees.

Offerings of Doctorates

In order to present evidence in support of our suggestions, we conducted a preliminary study of the “dissertations for sale” market in Russia. We have identified a total of 169 firms located in the Russian Federation that offer dissertations for sale. We excluded individuals that offer similar services, focusing only on firms. The number of firms is impressive and points to the open access for those wishing to acquire and defend a dissertation. All of these firms advertise online, and most of them emphasize confidentiality for their clients. As follows from their contact information and office addresses, their head offices are located in Moscow and St. Petersburg. These firms hire university faculty and researchers with doctoral degrees for ghost writing of dissertations and other academic works, including publications and accompanying documents for VAK. Firms openly advertise their services and most advanced ones name their product as scientific research. They are legally registered and pay taxes.

“Dissertations for sale” is a buyer’s market. There are almost two hundred providers and virtually no such advertisements as “will buy a dissertation.” Prices for CSc dissertations vary from \$900⁵⁴ to \$13500.⁵⁵ Prices for Doctor of Sciences (DSc) dissertations are much higher, ranging from \$4000 to \$25000.⁵⁶ These are the starting prices. Final prices with complete package of services can go much higher. The average starting price for a Candidate of Sciences (CSc) dissertation is around \$4000, while for DSc it is \$10000. Prices in Moscow are 1.5 times higher than in other cities.⁵⁷ In addition to dissertations, publications, and documentation, friendly dissertation boards are needed for successful defense of those with low academic abilities. Expenses for pushing the dissertation through the hurdles of academic bureaucracy may well exceed the cost of the dissertation itself. The consulting company

Robotron offers a dissertation for \$2000 or a full “all inclusive” package for \$6100.⁵⁸ This means that the “bureaucracy” costs at least twice as much as the dissertation itself. The high cost of the dissertation defense may be lowered if a candidate has political or administrative power or is in possession of other means of economic and non-economic influence. Politicians, including members of the Duma, are a good example of such candidates who can reduce these costs by exercising their influence over academics. Aleksandr Khinshtein (2007) also points to the attraction of politicians to doctorates.⁵⁹

Why did the professoriate let the system loosen its control? Apparently, every member of the system uses the collectively established structure of doctoral education to advance his or her own agenda. Every holder of a doctorate understands that this type of rent-seeking behavior threatens the system, but the immediate material benefits are given preference. Chernish (2002) concludes that “in a society gripped by crisis, values are often weighted against one another, with some deemed as more important than others. In response to the deformed need structure that stresses survival beyond all other commitments, the values are ranked as ‘vital,’ ‘less vital’ and ‘sacrificable,’ the latter often being the loftier ones but with less immediate effect on living standards.”⁶⁰ Both the reputation of each particular doctoral degree and that of the doctorates overall is undermined. The intelligentsia acts according to the demands presented by the authorities. If doctoral degrees are demanded, they are sold. Of course, the reputation of each doctorate declines, but the immediate benefits and the need to meet the demands of the ruling regime appear to be more important considerations. As a result, Russia suffers from degree inflation and devaluation. Figuratively speaking, doctorates cut the branch upon which they sit.

Doctorates in the Russian Parliament

We collected the data from biographies of Russian politicians, including members of the Presidential Administration, the Cabinet of Ministers, the Federation Council, and the State Duma. The Federal Assembly consists of the Federation Council, with 166 members, and the State Duma consists of 446 members, for a total of 612 members.⁶¹ Table 1 presents data about members of the Duma of the 5th Assembly that serve their term from 2008 to 2011. This data is especially on-target, since it captures their education, including doctoral degrees, by the time they entered their term, even though for some this is not their first term. The data for members of the previous assemblies of the Federation Council are unavailable. The data for members of the previous Assemblies of the State Duma are available, but those who hold doctoral degrees now are listed after-the-fact.

As follows from the data presented in Table 1, 349 members of the Federation Council and the State Duma hold doctoral degrees, but only 76 of them hold academic ranks of Professor or Associate Professor. Economics is the most popular major for doctorates in both the Federation Council and the State Duma, including DSc and CSc degrees. The second most popular major is Jurisprudence. Technical sciences and political sciences occupy the third and fourth positions, respectively. Sciences, natural sciences, and medicine are not nearly as popular among politicians as are social sciences. The Federation Council appears to be even more educated than is the State Duma, with 67 percent of its members holding doctoral degrees, versus 54 percent in the Duma.

Only one out of five doctorates in the Federation Council and in the State Duma holds academic ranks, such as full professor and associate professor. In addition, members of the

TABLE 1. Members of the Federal Assembly with doctoral degrees, 2009

<u>Field</u>	<u>Federation Council</u>		<u>Duma</u>		<u>Total by degree</u>		<u>Percentage</u>		
	DSc	CSc	DSc	CSc	DSc	CSc	Total	Docs	Mbr
Economics	15	23	23	65	38	88	126	36	21
Jurisprudence	12	9	8	25	20	34	54	15	9
Technical Sciences	6	10	6	17	12	27	39	11	6
Political Sciences	1	4	3	18	4	22	26	7	4
History	0	6	3	10	3	16	19	5	3
Philosophy	3	3	5	4	8	7	15	4	2
Sociology	2	1	1	10	3	11	14	4	2
Pedagogical Sciences	1	1	2	6	3	7	10	3	2
Medical Sciences	0	0	7	3	7	3	10	3	2
Physics and Mathematics	1	1	5	2	6	3	9	3	2
Agriculture	1	2	1	4	2	6	8	2	1
Psychological Sciences	0	2	0	4	0	6	6	2	1
Military Sciences	1	1	0	1	1	2	3	1	0
Philological Sciences	0	1	0	2	0	3	3	1	0
Biological Sciences	0	1	0	2	0	3	3	1	0
Geographic Sciences	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	0	0
Electro-technical Sciences	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
Geology and Mineral Sciences	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
<u>Totals</u>									
Total by degree	44	66	65	174	109	240	349		
Total	110		239		349				
Percentage by degree	27	40	15	39	18	39			
Total percentage	67		54		57				
Grand total percentage			57						
Academic rank									
Full professor	14	1	34	0	48	1			
Associate professor	2	6	2	17	4	23			
<u>Totals</u>									
Total by degree	16	7	36	17	52	24			
Total	23		53		76				

Russian Parliament hold memberships in 44 different academies. Here, the red flag goes up. The doctorates are produced by universities and research institutions. It used to be the case that potential candidates for doctoral programs were told that they needed a doctorate only if they wanted to teach or wanted to do research in state research institutions. The system produced doctorates to fill positions in colleges and research laboratories. Very rarely doctoral degrees were earned by those who did not belong to academia, including party functioneers, bureaucrats, and heads of state enterprises. In light of this, it is unclear why there are so few members of the Duma among those with doctorates who hold academic ranks. Academic ranks are awarded by the state, not by the universities. Earning an academic rank requires a certain number of years of college-level teaching—five years for an associate professor and ten years for a full professor, along with scholarly publications and other academic requirements. For instance, in order to receive a rank of professor, one has to produce at least five CSc degrees from his or her doctoral students. Hence, it may not be as easy to buy an academic rank as it is to buy a doctoral degree. Academic ranks are closely attached to employment, while doctorates are not.

The Russian Parliament looks more like a research institution, with 349 out of 612 members holding doctoral degrees—i.e. more than half—and a third of them being members of different academies. If the Parliament were converted into a university, it would definitely receive state accreditation with 57 percent of its “faculty” holding doctoral degrees. Moreover, it would be possible to organize over a dozen of dissertation boards in the Russian Parliament, of which almost half would be dissertation boards for economics. In this way, the Parliament would be able to produce even more doctorates, starting with its own members who had not yet earned their doctorates. There might be some problems, however. For instance, 73 members of the Duma do not hold college degrees. This may be normal, since a college degree is not required to participate in the elections and be elected. In Soviet times, the quasi-parliament, then called the Verhovny Sovet (Supreme Council), consisted of delegates of all social strata, with preference given to workers and peasants rather than to the intelligentsia. Naturally, many of them did not hold college degrees, but they were nonetheless decorated with state orders and medals for their professional achievements and military service. This was a part of proletarian ideology, equally popular under Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev. The proletarian origins and lack of college education of Soviet legislators served as a magnet for critiques from the Western media.

More interesting is that there are also 34 members of the Duma with a CSc degree who do not hold college degrees. This should be impossible by definition, since one cannot earn a doctorate without first obtaining a college degree. There are even five members who hold DSc degrees without having any higher education. There are also a few academicians without doctoral degrees and even three academicians without college degrees. In the Federation Council, two members hold memberships in three academies each, while not even having doctoral degrees. Two Senators, one from Bashkortostan and another from Primorsky kray, have mentioned the F.E. Dzerzhinsky KGB Higher School as the only higher educational institution they have attended. One member of the Duma holds two DSc degrees; two other members hold two CSc degrees each, in economics and jurisprudence. While top politicians are immune from prosecution, no one seems to be immune from corruption. One member of the Duma admits that he was approached at least three times by men who offered him a full-service doctoral degree with the dissertation written by a ghost writer on a topic of his choice. He noted that these people should have first checked

his biography to find that he spent twelve years in a research lab in order to complete his DSc degree in technical sciences in 1987.⁶²

Despite the high concentration of doctorates in the parliament, the professionalism of Russian parliamentarians is not always clear. For instance, one can find a member of the Science and High Technologies Committee who does not even hold a college degree. It is unclear how such a person can contribute to the work of the Committee. If during Soviet times low professionalism was explained by the dominance of the working class and the nominal role that the Supreme Council played in state politics, now such low professionalism is hard to explain. Many interesting things can be learned about the Russian Parliament through information about its members. For instance, Alexandr Korzhakov, former Chief of the Personal Security Services of then-president Boris Yeltsin,⁶³ holds a college degree in jurisprudence; a CSc degree in economics; and, surprisingly, is a member of the Academy of Medico-Technical Sciences. But this is not so surprising for the Russian Parliament, where medical doctors hold doctorates in political science, aviation engineers hold doctorates in economics, and so on.

Not only is scholarship not of much interest to the MPs; they are seemingly not interested in the work of the State Duma, either. Often, there are only five or so deputies presented during the sessions, out of 450 total. The presenters often give speeches in front of an empty auditorium. Some of the scheduled presenters miss their own presentations or show up late⁶⁴—they may be busy defending dissertations or developing science-based strategies for Russian reforms. The media often uses broadcasts from older sessions in order to create an impression that there are deputies in the Hall. Anecdotally, some of the faces that appear in such video reports are often no longer members of the Duma, or are even deceased. Sergey Mironov notes that Russia “is a presidential republic, all decisions are made by the President, and the government should consist of professionals.”⁶⁵ He is against a party-based government. However, judging by the number of holders of doctorates, the Federal Assembly consists of much higher-level professionals than do the presidential administration and the government. In the State Duma and the Federation Council, 57 percent of members hold doctoral degrees, as compared to about a half in the Cabinet of Ministers and only a third in the administration.

Discussion

There are several components that point to the problem of corruption in doctoral education and the involvement of politicians as consumers in the business of “dissertations for sale.” The number of dissertations is growing steadily, despite the equally steady decline in state funding for research institutes and universities. Interest in scholarship is in decline as well. There are a large number of firms that offer doctoral dissertations for sale; the high supply of ghostwriting services and their affordable prices also point to a significant supply of dissertations and a high degree of access to this service for politicians. Main political organs in Russia have a suspiciously high concentration of doctorates, while their level of professionalism is comparatively low. Low public confidence in politicians’ professionalism confirms this. Politicians who hold doctoral degrees are not involved in research and teaching. Most of them have never been affiliated with universities or research institutes. Corruption in the country is widespread, even in the education sector. The media openly discusses the problem of dissertations for sale, along with the dubious doctoral degrees of politicians, naming quite a few of them. Finally, interviews with scholars and educators

point to the same problem. Even politicians themselves admit to being offered dissertations and the services of ghostwriters. These components constitute the evidentiary basis for this research. Some of this evidence is direct, such as the information on firms that offer dissertations for sale, write dissertations for clients, hire ghostwriters among scholars, list degree prices, and openly advertise their services. Some of the evidence is more indirect, such as the understanding that politicians buy doctorates. This research collates facts that point to the existence of “dissertations for sale” problem and analyze the contribution of politicians to this problem.

Doctorates are often needed to put a title of “Dr.” before one’s name. It gives a feeling of self-respect and personal accomplishment. Verbal distinctions come, change, and disappear over time. Noble titles in France, for example, inherited over generations and then simply sold by the Crown to the merchants, are now nearing extinction. Nobility in France has been abolished, while Britain still awards titles of “Sir” to some distinguished citizens. Larry Riggs writes about the imitation of nobility by the bourgeoisie in France: “The gradual evolution of French political administration toward what we would call ‘meritocracy’ did not keep bourgeois who wanted to benefit from the porosity of the class barrier from imitating noble manners and décor. Indeed, even provincial nobles, upon arriving in Paris, often went directly to second-hand clothes dealers to buy, frequently on credit, the costumes appropriate to their pretensions. The alacrity with which commoners bought ‘nobility’ reflected its desirability, but also accelerated its decline.”⁶⁶ Russian society is also reflective of this imitation. The behavior of Russian politicians mimics that of the French nobles. Similar to provincial nobles arriving in Paris, members of the Russian political establishment, especially those arriving in Moscow from the regions, may well consider acquiring doctorates in an attempt to fit in and overcome the complex of provincialism.

The role of political elites and the distribution of political power were researched even while the USSR still existed.⁶⁷ During the Soviet period, members of the Politburo and heads of industries traditionally had technical backgrounds with little knowledge of management, economics, humanities or social sciences. They were later referred to as technocrats. The top Soviet leadership did not have a strong tradition of academic affiliations and college degrees, while doctorates were even rarer. Of seven Soviet leaders, only three had college degrees. Vladimir Lenin and Mikhail Gorbachev held university degrees in jurisprudence and Brezhnev held a degree in metallurgy engineering. Joseph Stalin, Nikita Khrushchev, Yuri Andropov, and Konstantin Chernenko did not have college degrees. None of the leaders held doctorates. Political indoctrination of social sciences and humanities did not result in a massive intrusion of party cadres and bureaucrats in the body of scholars. It may be explained, in part, by the fact that the state functionaries were focused more on the dedication to the party principles, honesty, and solution of economic, social, and national defense problems rather than verbal distinctions and doubtful doctorates. In addition, it might be a challenge for a mid-level party bureaucrat to justify a personal attraction to a doctoral degree in the totalitarian society where the top leader did not hold even a college degree. Holders of doctoral degrees were used in the societal production in a most effective way and at a most effective rate, i.e. in research and teaching. Doctoral degrees were reserved for those in research institutes and universities. Since the research and education was closely linked to production, heads of state enterprises, including those in the defense industry, later started acquiring doctoral degrees. These doctorates were not in economics and jurisprudence, but in technical sciences. Of modern Russian

leaders, Boris Yeltsin had a college degree in engineering, while Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev both hold doctoral degrees. In line with modern trends, their doctorates are in economics and jurisprudence, respectively.

As follows from the data presented in Table 1, over one-third of all the doctorates in the Russian parliament hold their degrees in economics. One out of every five members of the Federal Assembly holds his or her doctorate in economics. Jurisprudence is second in popularity among members of the Russian parliament. Contrary to expectations, political science is only fourth most popular major for doctorates, lagging behind technical sciences. Technical sciences are also ahead of such social science disciplines as history, philosophy, and sociology. Doctorates in pedagogical sciences are considered relatively cheap by many, since the demand on this major is not high. Nevertheless, doctorates in pedagogical sciences are not popular among politicians, maybe because the field is not very relevant to their occupation.

Politicians want to position themselves closer to their electorate. For that reason, they prefer not to advertise their personal wealth and relations with big business. At the same time, they have to be distinct from the crowd and signify their leadership skills. "Wealth" in the post-Soviet states has a negative connotation. The duality of politicians' distancing themselves from big business on the one hand, and the need for distinctiveness on the other hand, leads to the need to acquire publicly recognized distinctions that are not affiliated with wealth. Among such distinctions, state decorations and advanced academic degrees are of especially high value. First, they indicate close affiliation of politicians with the state. Politicians occupy places in the state hierarchy and are, indeed, an essential part of the state. Second, they demonstrate high intellectual abilities and merits of politicians.

The data shows that politicians are only interested in the national doctorates. They do not acquire foreign doctorates, easily available from diploma mills, including those operating on-line and based in the US and the UK. Nor do they demand foreign decorations, honorary titles, or memberships in foreign academies. It would be unpatriotic. The public is no longer impressed with anything foreign, as it used to be in the late 1980s. The only public official who claims a degree from a foreign university is a deputy chair of the Cabinet of Ministers, Alexandr Zhukov. He graduated from Harvard University in 1991. Zhukov served as a member of the Duma from 1994 to 2004, prior to being appointed to the Government. Despite his degrees from MGU and Harvard, and high state positions, Zhukov does not hold a doctoral degree. No other members of the State Duma, the Federation Council, the presidential administration, and the Cabinet of Ministers hold a degree from a foreign higher education institution. It is unlikely that Russian political elite will restraint itself from receiving doctorates. The much discussed proposals to ban state bureaucrats from defending dissertations did not move beyond mere points of argument.

Absurd situations on one side of the system lead to a state of denial on the side of the public and some intellectuals. World Chess Champion Vladimir Kramnik, for example, does not have a college degree. Kramnik, a Russian born in 1975, who held the title from 2000 to 2007, commented that he does not need a college education or a diploma, because it is too easy to buy one. Garry Kasparov, the longest-standing World Chess Champion and now the leader of political opposition coalition the Other Russia, lacks not only a doctorate, but a college degree.

If political elites will not create a barrier to prevent the sale of doctorates, then will the scholars reverse this process? In the Offerings section, we demonstrated the scale of

the “dissertations for sale” business. This business is being run by the scholars in order to sustain themselves financially by matching the demand for doctoral degrees presented, among others, by politicians and top bureaucrats. Of course, there is only part of all the academics involved in this business. Perhaps, just a small portion of them make their living from this business or supplement their income. This leaves the hope that the majority of scholars will resist dissertations for sale business and initiate or at least support changes in the education sector. These changes, if implemented, would prevent conferral of doctoral degrees without academic merit. This projection, however, is also questionable. The history of relations between the state power and the scholars in Russia does not point to the leading role of intelligentsia in this initiative.

Loren Graham maintains that Soviet science is not nearly as directly dependent on political freedom as Western analysts tend to present. He suggests that “Russian science at the moment is barely hanging on, even though Russian scientists currently enjoy greater political freedoms than at any previous time.”⁶⁸ Financial constraints appear to be more powerful than political restraints. The strive for financial survival moves scientists toward opportunistic behavior that manifests itself, among other things, in writing dissertations for sale and awarding doctoral degrees to outsiders, including politicians. Russian intelligentsia is traditionally considered as being “lost” in the streamlines of major social changes, such as revolutions and Perestroika. It does not represent a strong united front but rather an amorphous body of educated professionals, often underpaid, and despite of this, afraid to take an active citizen stance and speak out. The overall formula of the social contract between the state and intelligentsia was one of a forced love: the intelligentsia served the state and the state provided for intelligentsia.

According to Gary Neill (2008), Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who in the West was considered Russian intelligentsia’s paramount voice, refused to use the word intelligentsia, forming instead offensive obrazovanshchina that roughly means “educatedness.” Solzhenitsyn claimed that Russian intelligentsia failed to represent the people, suppressed by the authoritarian regime. The author points out that “The very word intelligentsia is a Russian invention. In the West it usually evokes the image of a talented intellectual, otherworldly, harassed by the state, soulful and conscientious. But the Soviet intelligentsia was different. It was summoned into being by the state for a particular purpose, one that had little in common with its 19th-century antecedents.”⁶⁹

Neill maintains that Soviet scientists enjoyed near-ideal conditions for their research and living, provided by the state: “The conditions created for the scientists were close to ideal: they had status, money, equipment and no distractions. Science was the favorite child in the hands of the government, says Vladimir Fortov, a member of Russia’s Academy of Sciences. It was prestigious and well paid. We could do our research and not concern ourselves with anything else. Russian nuclear physicists were settled in closed or semi-closed towns and housed not in barracks but in attractive cottages, which resembled Swiss chalets or small Russian mansions, amid forests. The best Russian scientists were exempted from joining the Communist Party and had direct access to the Kremlin.”⁷⁰ Not all the scientists were treated well, especially before the WWII. Some were imprisoned or executed on suspicion of anti-communist treason. Leonid Abalkin (2001) notes that repressions touched members of the Institute of the Economy of RAN. Some were arrested and spent time in labor camps. Heyneman, Krasovsky, Kvasha, Maksimov, Gurvich-Buharina, Rubinshtein, Shahovskaya and others became victims of Stalinist regime.⁷¹

Thomas Hughes (2000) says that Graham (1998) “compares two eras with different types of stress: the years from 1929 to 1953, when the Stalinist regime subjected engineers and scientists to harassment, imprisonment, and execution on a scale unprecedented in history, and the period from 1989 to the present, when Russian science and engineering have suffered under drastic financial constraints. Graham finds science and engineering to have been more robust under political oppression than under slashed budgets.”⁷² The state largely preserves the function of reward and punishment. It may be true that the academics and the intelligentsia in general wait on the sign from the state, but the state and the ruling class in its present form is not likely to initiate changes. It is interesting to see how scholars view the practice of dissertations for sale. Results of the survey conducted by the Institute of Psychology of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAN) in 2006 supports this view. Responding to the question “How do you view the phenomenon of conferral of doctoral degrees to people very distant from sciences, i.e. businessmen, politicians, etc?” members of academic community expressed predominantly negative attitudes. In particular, 84 percent were negative, 7 percent were neutral, 8 percent gave other responses, and 1 percent found this difficult to say. No academics considered dissertations for sale as a positive trend. Another question was “Should the academic community oppose the practice of conferral doctoral degrees by people very distant from sciences?” 78 percent said “yes”, 6 percent said “no”, and 16 percent found it difficult to say.⁷³

It may be a good thing that the majority of bought doctorates are in social sciences and humanities. When the development of the dissertations for sale business will make the very doctoral degree in social sciences and humanities a mere absurd, the more active part of intelligentsia may eventually demand the change. According to Zaslavskaya (1990), social and humanitarian intelligentsia is both the initiator and the supporter of changes, while scientific and technological intelligentsia can only play a role of supporters.⁷⁴ Indeed, the passive role of the Soviet and post-Soviet intelligentsia in the process of societal changes does not position it well in terms of becoming a major moving force for the reform and prevention of the pervasive practice of conferring doctoral degrees to those who are distant from the world of scholarship.

The key question is: Who will be the moving force in changing the system? Elites will not change the system because they seem to be interested in the corrupt means of obtaining doctorates while maintaining the state-based prestige of the degree. Scholars and broader intelligentsia are unlikely to bring up significant changes and create barriers for abuse of the system because they are focused on personal rather than collective benefits and do not possess the necessary power to resist political elites. Administrative methods may prove ineffective in resisting political corruption of Russian doctorates. First, politicians enjoy legal immunity even though the vast majority of Russians, 85 percent, think that politicians should be stripped of immunity.⁷⁵ They believe that no immunity from criminal prosecution for politicians will be effective in fighting corruption. But the proposals to take the immunity away from politicians are far from being realized. Accordingly, politicians cannot be held accountable for buying doctoral degrees. The solution may be found in the further advancement of market reforms, including those taking place in the education sector.

There is no value in market reforms per se. However, the market reforms may become instrumental in shaping the new type social contract. Accordingly, the new social contract can allow to meet the demands of different parties in a mutually beneficial way. A new contract between the intelligentsia and the ruling class may allot the reputation

component of the doctorate to the elites while leaving the scholarly recognition component to the scholars. The reputation component will be in form of the honorary doctorate that acknowledges non-scholarly contributions of a public figure. The scholarly recognition component will be carried with a new doctorate. Also, there is no point in introducing a new type doctorate, such as PhD, until the system is changed. Otherwise this new doctorate will bring nothing else but the name change. The widespread corruption in higher education, including in doctoral education, threatens the successful implementation of Bologna Declaration that anticipates comparability of educational programs and degrees.⁷⁶

Conclusion

This article researches the negative impact of the Russian political establishment on the national system of doctoral education. It investigates this issue in an indirect way, by putting together the supply or the offerings of doctorates, the results that manifest themselves in the number of politicians with doctorates, and the context in which this continuous transaction takes place. The media reports that point to the dubious doctorates of Russian politicians are also used as an evidentiary base of this research while the theories of elites form a theoretical base. The analytical discussion points to possible partial solutions to the problem of doctorates for sale. The negative influence of the ruling regime on universities may be much more significant if universities suffer from corruption. Compliance, collusion, and control become major considerations in the state-university relations.⁷⁷ Corruption hierarchies in higher education in Russia coincide with the bureaucratic structures of the state.⁷⁸

Russian political elites enjoy legal immunity that often converts into impunity; the also demonstrate rent-seeking behavior by accessing material and non-material assets by abusing their privileged position entrusted to them by the public. One of the assets often acquired by politicians is doctoral degrees, used as academic distinctions and signs of scholarly achievements. The restructuring of university hierarchies and state-university relations may be needed to free Dissertation Boards from the influence of politicians and corruption. Such a restructuring will result in a new system, where the university's own internal mechanisms of quality control will dominate and replace externally imposed centralized control in their function of quality assurance. Collective reputation of doctorates on the university level will prevail over the now malfunctioning statewide supervision and oversight. Leading universities are no longer comfortable with the system that equates and averages their doctorates with doctorates of dubious quality. Until now, Russian scholars have been unable to form a self-regulating system of production and quality control in doctoral education. Unlike in the US, where universities offer doctoral programs of different quality, in Russia the state continues to pretend to control the quality of doctorates, claiming standardized requirements and high quality outcomes. Despite the understanding of all participating parties about corruption in doctoral education, a critical mass is needed to initiate necessary structural changes. These changes would be non-incremental. The Russian intelligentsia is waiting on the signal from the state, but the political elites are unlikely to give it, as they benefit from the current situation. Institutional rigidity in the education sector and political structures also prevents changes in doctoral education.

NOTES

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57. See, for instance, the price list of Diplomtime company at <http://diplomtime.ru/price.aspx> (accessed July 6, 2010).

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