

**PEASANT SELF-GOVERNMENT IN THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE:
COMMUNITY TRADITIONS UNDER THE TERMS OF MODERNIZATION
(SECOND HALF OF XIX – BEGINNING OF XX CENTURIES).**

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Abstract. The author analyzes use of community traditions in peasant self-government in the Russian Empire in the late nineteenth - early twentieth century. The factors that contributed to "dedication" of the Russian establishment leading representatives to the idea of using community traditions during the social and political modernization of the country are investigated in paper. The author believes that the use of the villagers government bodies by imperial power with punitive and repressive purpose while taming peasant uprisings in 1905-1907, against the activation of peasant gatherings and it's organized effect for the rural protests, in fact, has made a split in the peasant self-government system and triggered civil strife in the villag. Parish institutions were now opposed with eternal representative of the peasant masses - community, which even in 1861 was a basic element of peasant self-government. This had disastrous consequences for the whole country in the future, when during the Stolypin agrarian reform and during the First World War it has given impulse for the activation of protective mechanisms elaborated in previous centuries by peasant communities.

Keywords: peasant self-government, modernization, community, rural assembly, parish assembly

1. Introduction

Improving democratic institutions in Eastern Europe, the past of which is associated with being a part of the Romanov Empire, among other things, provides for study of these countries' experience in local government, in particular, the study of the peasants self-government that was introduced in 1861 in their territory (it was in force before the February Revolution of 1917) and included about 9/10 of the population.

Introduction of peasant self-government has become a major component of the agricultural system modernization and general socio-political and economic renewal of Russia. It has started with upgrading by imperial elite during deep systemic crisis that the country was after the defeat in the war with Turkey in 1853-1856. However, the project of peasant reform, including plans for the changes in rural management, was developed during several previous decades in the discussions between those who preferred the use during of European experience of modernization in building local governance on the basis of self-government (they were called «Westerners») and those who insisted on the need to follow their original way of using communal tradition (such called «Russification»); and other representatives of «enlightened bureaucrats» who insisted on bringing fiscal functions in the village and to avoid social upheavals in the empire as a whole. A kind of compromise between the different positions and restructuring projects in the rural system of management reform was the introduction of peasants self-government in 1861 that the majority reforms «fathers» considered as the initial phase of the introduction of self-government in the rural areas and in the future as general local governments and involvement of the peasantry in it. [1; 2]

2. Materials and Methods

The issue of patriarchal peasant traditions of self-government using that was developed within the community, has provoked sharp debate. The views of the Russian establishment representatives, the public, the political forces opposition about the role of the peasant communities in the villages self-government during the following decades and all over the country have not only consolidated, but rather represented a whole palette of different thoughts, ideas, projects, sometimes diametrically opposite to one another. In fact, the public debate that has raged in the Russian intellectual field in the second half of XIX - early XX century, has indicated the inability of the Russian elite to develop an optimal strategy for the socio-political and economic life updating of the rural country that ultimately had disastrous consequences for the Romanov empire: that community, or all people (read - the peasantry) during the tumultuous revolutionary events of 1917 were revolting against the government and in fact had led the rest of the Bolshevik regime to the government. In light of these events, the author of the paper puts forward the task to analyze what factors contributed to the "dedication" of Russian establishment idea's leading representatives to use community traditions during the social and political modernization in the second half of the nineteenth - early twentieth century and what impact it had on the events of the fateful early twentieth century.

The role of traditional community structures of peasant self-government in the Russian Empire of the late nineteenth - early twentieth century were analyzed by historians of the last third of the nineteenth - early twentieth century [3; 4] and several Soviet scientists [1; 5]. If the first mainly were interested in practical issues of the rural government institutions and problems of these institutions'

nature, the others were being faithful to class principles in the historical phenomena evaluation and usually considered peasants government as a tool of their oppression by nobility and rural «bourgeoisie» that was formed in country. Only a few scholars have paid attention to the social and economic processes in peasant communities and on the participation of peasantry government agencies in these processes [6], the dualism of peasant self-government system, which combined structure of government with local government structures represented by elected farmers on assembly by parish and village officials. [1] Today there is growing interest in the problems of peasant self-government, the individual stages of its history are being analyzed, but studies are still carried out mainly in the regional perspective [2; 7-21]. The analysis's of the community institutions' role in the development of peasant self-government throughout the period of its existence hasn't been yet conducted.

During our research we used general scientific methods of analysis, synthesis, deduction, induction, as well as specially-historical methods: historical and comparative, historical and genetic, historical and typological, historical, chronological, historical and systematic.

3. Main results

From the early nineteenth century the peasant question was in the focus of the ruling elite. Modern scholars argue that leading role in the development of rural reform strategy had the principles of humanity. [22] Reformers were united by the understanding the need for change in the management of the village, which took place in the context of modernization of all social and political life of the empire. [23] The first draft outline of the Great Reforms projects was developed in 1830-1840. And they were associated with the names of M.Speranskyi, P.Kyselov, A.Zablotskyi-Desiatovskiy, brothers Miliutyny, K.Kavelina, V.Bervi (Flerovskoho) and others. At the same time in Russia educational institutions were established that faced legal profile, and their graduates soon joined the discussion on the prospects for further socio-political and economic development. They studied the history of world legal thought. Quite popular were the ideas of Legalism, whose origins were in the East, in ancient China. Experience of managing this huge multi-ethnic empire that was generalized by Legist, attracted Russian reformers by the rule of law and the leading role of the state in social transformation. The future «parents» of the peasant reform also were fond of «Western» ideas, in particular, the ideas of Alexis de Tocqueville, who opposed the local government to state autocracy.

In subsequent years, leading representatives of the Russian bureaucracy started legal work in the deepening crisis after Russia's defeat in the Crimean War, and have tried, in fact, to find a "middle ground" between "Eastern" and "Western" legal concepts. This should indicate that European legal thought in those times was in its infancy. Thinkers from Germany, England, France, etc. actively developed legal aspects of government, local government, social and political modernization of traditional societies, and some were interested in peasant communities of Russia,

and visited it, understand the life of rural communities. In particular, in 1847 German scholar Avqust fon Haksthauzen has visited Russia and studied the peasant commune. He believed that the experience of social cohabitation of community members may occasionally develop a strategy for reforming the social system in Europe. Also the views of future reformers were influenced by European revolution in 1848 with its severe forms of social confrontation. Under this influence the range of pro-Western minded "enlightened bureaucrats" was narrowed [24; 25]. In the late 1850's, among the bureaucracy two alternative approaches to solving the peasant question were developed. The first was the so-called «state-community» approach with its key positions on administrative and judicial autonomy of peasant communities and communal ownership of land. The second was the «liberal-etat» approach, which advocates legal experience that is oriented towards the reform of the traditional society, gained in Europe. In ideological disputes was born a compromise containing elements of both approaches, while dominant, as the N. Dunayeva states, was the same «statesmanship by communal» paradigm of governance reforms of village life [24]. As in this context the task of fiscal functions and villagers protection from the landlords attacks were equally important, then the considerable influence on the views of the ruling elite had the beliefs of «Slavophil» or the defenders of peasant "community" with its centuries-old traditions of governments, mutual aid [8; 21].

The term "community", as experts point out, has appeared much later after the introduction of peasants self government in the Russian Empire. The term appeared as a translation of words that point to relevant European phenomenon and it has primarily meant union, community, land of collectively owned property. 'Native' for Russian reality was the term "community." Various forms of peasant's cohabitation were called like that and they have developed historically over the past centuries from peasant collectives that helped to cope with complex natural and socio-political circumstances. Traditions of communal coexistence care meant "community" for all its members to provide the bare minimum needed for survival [10; 14; 26]. A deep economic and financial crisis that has gripped the Russian Empire after its defeat in the Crimean War, forced the reformers of peasant reform while developing the project to pay attention to next experience: the lowest link of the newly created system of peasant self-government was the «community» (in the official language of the time - «Silske obshchestvo» [Agricultural society: Ed.]), the overall rise of which residents, according to historians of the late nineteenth century, has created a basic «tier» of «Agriculture parliamentary» (upper «tier» institutions were parish government or township assembly; on it were elected township board and parish court; to every parish assembly the «Silske obshchestvo» has delegated representatives of every 10 households).

In conditions of landlord's patrimonial rights cancellation this was an excellent alternative to increase the officials staff and to increase savings: peasant government institutions' functioning was provided by «myrskiy podatok» [worldly tax: Ed.], it was introduced on the principles

of «self taxation» of peasant communities, because they could determine its size and the fact how this tax would be spent. This tax is laid in parallel with the «official», and from 1864 – by even separate provincial taxes. The state took a course on agriculture modernization and the entire socio-political system in the country by the legislation of the traditional institution - «community», sought to resolve several challenges. In particular, farmers were not only involved in the process of village modernization, but their rural government institutions had a «sacred» duty to perform fiscal functions, so they also financed their needs and provided social support to those who needed help [7; 9]. Chairman of the rural institutions, representing the local population, also have delegated certain powers to them, that were both kind of link between administrative vertical of the state and «horizontal» rural society, the life of which to a great extent was regulated by means of peasants self government. Thus, in 1861 the reform established a peculiar system of «parliamentary agriculture» that has combined into a single mechanism the structure of representative peasants government institutions (parish and village gatherings), and lower tiers of Empire management personnel - village chiefs, township heads (the latter, in fact, have represented a peasant bureaucracy). Thus according to such method in the post-reform times the quite radical measure was implemented that was designed by «architects» of Great reform, peasant link” was uploaded to the system of governance Integrating of «community» to the peasant self-government system, as the researchers point out, in effect, has legitimized historical forms of peasants’ self-government [27].

In the context of this issue, however let’s remember, how the intellectual environment was characterized in post-reform decades. Paradoxically, in many projects of leading figures from the ranks of populists, socialists, liberals, conservatives appeared exactly peasant «community» and the peasant self-government that was sanctified through centuries of previous historical experience of «mundane» life [28 - 30]. Even in the early twentieth century, when even among Russian establishment intensive development of agricultural modernization projects has began, and according to V.Hurko a significant number of members of the higher bureaucracy were on the side of sympathy towards peasant communities, part of the «extreme right» created from it not less “fetish” than revolutionary populist currents did (i.e., the Social-Revolutionaries saw «community» as the basic structure of local government in the structure of the future socialist society) [31; 32]. Of course, in addition to “protective” aspirations of autocracy defenders, this was due to the natural desire of the Russian elite to understand, in fact, in national categories present and future of multicultural Russian society, who became the path to modernization. So the archaic traditional institution during 56 years after the Great Reforms has remained part of various modernization projects.

The mere use of traditional institution or peasant «community» during the rural life modernization in the Russian empire is highly controversial, but at the same time, being as a compromise in theoretically difficult economic

circumstances in the post-reform years it has created conditions for a flexible policy on existing social structures and relations, their gradual replace with new ones. Actually, that last has been designed by the «architects» of the peasant reform: the rejection of old in the future and the gradual introduction of new technological paradigm were kind of reformist course. In terms of practical social activity in the village, it in particular meant that instead of creating new structures and the state officials increasing, villagers now had a «right» to provide assistance to others by means of «public administration», performing fiscal functions and more. Several post-reform decades served to the interests of the state and peasant circular taxes payments and duties served for the performance of the state and Zemstvo as well; it also served for the food and employment support of disabled, terminally ill, single elderly farmers, orphans, widows families, mobilized. The peasant «community» supported everything and «worldly tax» was spent on arranging almshouses, teacher’s payments and farmers stay in hospitals, construction of schools, hospitals and so on. Thus, during post-reform years, in fact, the village wasn’t using state money, but the state has used the village: by the means of peasant self-government institutions, that in the administration of their social functions applied the powerful tradition of peasant self-help, the empire was re-established, its economy renewed and conditions for further policy reforms were secured.

Instead «self» «community» has preserved, developed it as a self-contained phenomenon that contributed to the fact that the modernization of the peasantry existed «as itself», as local world which opposed the «master’s» bureaucratic, city. This government policy toward the peasantry did not promote the «discovery» of this peasant world, social integration and cooperation of villagers with other states that, in fact, has minimized Age of Reform efforts. Given the fact that the whole mentality of the peasants was characterized by anti-etic sentiments, involving «community» to the general management of the state has involved certain element of destruction, because, as experts have concluded, in general peasantry was «inconvenient» for the state class, it has accumulated over centuries, strengthened «anti-governmental, anarchist in its general sense desires» [33; 34]. Artificially created in 1861 parish and all its structures in relation to the «community» were a strange formation and slowly turned to administrative superstructure that was «hanging» over «community.» No wonder the contemporaries noted a «clerical» character of township government, that has become another «prysutstviye» [presence: Ed.] with «bureaucratic spirit» to the village [16]. For the average farmer the parish has represented an alien world of officials, to which rural «philistine» feared the deal because nothing good except new taxes would become of that, since during parish assembly only tax questions were resolved. It is clear that even a slight increase of township officials’ administrative authority (as well as the village ones) for the average farmer would alienate many of these peasant leaders of peasant masses institutions, which eventually were able to lead to a split in the middle peasant self-

government and even opposition between the «settlement» and parish links. During crisis times similar, such split priori could be extremely dangerous in terms of violations of social balance in the countryside, because peasant self government has least regulated social and economic life in rural areas: it is the institution of peasants self-government that applied the traditions of collective coexistence of earlier times, redistributed tax burden between «strong» (wealthy) and «weak» (poor) community members that prevented the lumpenization of peasant masses [14; 35; 36].

In the post-reform days, as the researchers note, the peasant governments have manifested themselves as a representative and defenders of the peasant masses interests, dutifully performing (though not as effective as it seemed to the «father» of the peasant reform) guidelines on the implementation of the local administration on fiscal problems in the village. Overall the peasant groups were unable to work effectively, and the country was faced with the threat of large-scale destruction of entire agricultural system, as created peasant institutions started to show signs of corruption, and have not performed even a minimal amount of their functions. At a time when parish courts were entitled to use «local legal practice» (and such as representatives of testified bureaucracy and peasants themselves stated, almost did not exist), legal vacuum was witnessed in the village and there were no sustainable foundations for solving important for rural property issues, including family sections [16; 17]. State taxes arrears have grew steadily, that was risking complexity increasing of the empire` financial situation in general, since peasant taxes in this agricultural country were the lion`s share of those who filled the state treasury.

Regicide in 1881 and government policy changes that followed it and were aimed at corporate caste traditions strengthening in the socio-economic and political life of the empire, and as we know, have led to further conservation of patriarchal order that existed in the village. Land hunger, delay in solving «land issues», a few lean years that occurred during the 1890`s, 1901-1902 crop failures, the economic crisis and the first Socialist propaganda of the twentieth century have contributed to revolutionizing the peasantry, deployment of systemic crisis that marked the empire [10; 18]. Activation of peasant self-government institutions, increasing their weight in the life of rural society are observed during the peasant uprisings in 1902-1904 and during revolutionary events of 1905-1907: within the overall social protest, that was primarily associated with unresolved land issues, farmers often demanded immediate leaders re-election of peasant self-government institutions. Among the reasons for such radical steps we should specify the abuse and violation of legislation by the heads of these institutions, in collecting taxes and punishing the villagers; floor documents; excessive «service» to local officials, in particular - rural chiefs; bribery peasant electors; theft of «community» money; pressure on members of rural and parish gatherings to force them to accept solutions for the benefit of members of township boards or wealthy villagers, for example, salaries increase for township heads, lease costs for scarce public property and so on.

In particular, the peasant sentences during 1905-1907, that were accepted and sent to the supreme power in the mass mode, stated: «parish management shall be changed»; «parish population should enjoy complete freedom in the choice of officials ... and conduct their public affairs», «instead of the current township government, which depends on the Provincial Chief, we arrange administration, which would depend on us peasants, not on paper but in practice». Certainly not the last role in the protests against the rural public officials have played social factors, because often leaders of township institutions were «kurkuli» [wealthy people: Ed.] or so called «community eaters» that during the election for township leaders, haven`t disdained openly adventurous ways of obtaining positions: specially trained numerous «screaming» loud shouted their names during gatherings, and it provided their victory during the voting. However, during the 1902-1906 there were many cases when elders and township heads themselves took part in resistance actions in the country, performed together with «community» (sometimes even they led these actions) against the tyranny of rural chiefs, high taxes, cancellation of class restrictions on the peasantry, «fair» use of land, land, forests, etc. [18]. «Community» was the basis of self-organization in peasant uprisings; showed his anti-etic nature, rustic stairs, as experts note, have lead to revolution, as part of the «community» observed peasantry rallying and strengthened social solidarity [10; 36; 37; 38; 39].

The suppression of peasant uprisings during 1906-1907 was accompanied with punitive actions against those who participated during previous years in robberies of wealthy estates. On the side of the government during these actions were parish heads and village chiefs. Not rare were the cases when local gendarmerie leaders and managers required gatherings to decide on eviction from the village and punishment of those who participated in agrarian unrest during 1902-1906; during the gatherings farmers were forced to kneel and bring repentance and then they started physical punishment for participants of agrarian unrest. [40] It certainly has made a split in the peasant system of government and provoked civil strife in the village, parish institutions were now eternal opposed representative of the peasant masses - community, which even in 1861 was a basic element of peasant self-government. By curbing the revolutionary actions of the peasantry and the beginning of the 1906-1911 agrarian reform, there was developed clearly a serious confrontation between village officials (peasant bureaucracy) and representative institutions of self-government farmers - rural and township gatherings. On the one hand, township heads were granted certain powers in the legal registration of farmers` holdings (besides township heads were often part of the land management committees that were directly engaged in land sections, signatures and seals of officers and chiefs were reinforced decisions on the allocation of land during gatherings); on the other - protests actions of peasants (often they included all the congregation) under the state attack on communal land, have stated that those years showed that «community» is resisting the attempts of the authorities to split it. Accordingly, the peasant bureaucracy, that was

facilitating the implementation of official agricultural policy, has found itself on the opposite side, as it represented the lower-level administrative structures.

Under the pressure from the modernization processes in early twentieth century, the crisis of traditional communal peasant mentality has intensified, and during the First World War it was deepening: there was shortage of workers due to the mobilization, economic rural situation worsening in general, those subsequent times created the circumstances in which peasant union for the community share was the key to survival. Amid desecration of the monarchy, destruction of religious consciousness there was hostility to the authorities in general and particularly the bureaucracy that ultimately led to the popular movements radicalization and to the collapse of imperial statehood in 1917, that has immediately lead to the dynasty overthrow and in 1905-1907. Villagers en masse began to re-elect leaders of peasant self-government institutions, sometimes even whole communities declared withdrawal from the parish or immediately proceeded to the new revolutionary institutions organization in the countryside [19]. Under acute socio-political and economic crisis in 1917 farmers that suffered leftists campaigning, with all «community» stood for «better life», which determined the sad fate of democratic local self-government on «one sixth» of terrestrial land, the Land of the Soviets, and has affected the world historical development.

4. Conclusions

Use of community traditions in peasant self-government under the terms of socio-political and economic modernization in Russia in the late nineteenth - early twentieth century was first evidence of the imperial elite's quest for optimal method updating of the social life that was associated with relevant experience in Europe and the East. Instead, the conservation of community traditions in the following decades, the delay in peasant question solving, hard taming of peasant protests in 1902-1906., during which the peasant representative institutions were used to organize repressive and punitive actions, government efforts to split the community during the agrarian reform 1906-1911 have provoked civil strife in the country, and gave impetus to protective mechanisms activation that are elaborated by peasant communities during previous centuries. In 1917 it had tragic consequences for the Romanov empire's and the fate of democratic local governance in post-imperial space.

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