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RATIONALISTIC DIRECTION IN ANGLO-AMERICAN HISTORIOGRAPHY: BASIC APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF GERMAN QUESTION IN POSTWAR DECADE

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to present a comprehensive analysis of the approaches of British and American rationalist historians to the study of the German question in the postwar decade.

This article establishes the prerequisites and conditions for the formation of the rationalistic approach in Anglo-American historiography in the postwar period. The main aspects of the German problem, which became the subject of research in Anglo-American historiography, are identified, and the characteristic features and patterns of analysis of the the German problem in the works of rationalist historians are revealed.

The results and conclusions of this article can be used in further study of the main trends in the development of historical science in the UK and the USA in the postwar period, as well as in analyzing the German problem in the system of international relations in the second half of the twentieth century.

Keywords: Anglo-American historiography, rationalism, post-revisionism, German question, Cold War, postwar decade

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1. INTRODUCTION

A new stream appeared in the historical science of the United States and Great Britain in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which became evident in the work of historians concerned with the problems of international politics in the postwar period. In the USA the new direction in historiography was called post-revisionism. As for Great Britain, it was mostly represented by researchers of the English school of International relations study who supported the rationalist tradition. The strengthening of the rationalist direction in Anglo-American historiography took place in the context of international detente and the transitional settlement of the German question. In some ways it was also a result of the new *Ostpolitik* implementation, which culminated in the signing of the Moscow Treaty in 1970, the Quadripartite Agreement on Berlin in 1971 and the Basic Treaty of 1972 between East and West Germany.

When studying the German question in the postwar decade, representatives of the rationalistic direction assume that the USSR and the USA were mutually responsible for the emergence of the Cold War and the division of Germany. The authors refer to the incompatibility of the objective economic and geopolitical goals of the great powers as the main cause of the German problem. Rationalist historians deny the existence of “big plans” in relation to Germany and analyze Soviet and American policies taking into account a number of factors (economic and social problems of the great powers, the influence of public opinion, changes in Germany itself, etc.). They explain the internal tensions in the relations of the allies in the early postwar years by the mutual distrust of the USSR and the Western countries towards each other, as well as by different ideas about the postwar structure of Germany and Europe (Pittman, 1992).

2. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH METHODS

The research methodology includes principles of historicism and objectivity, as well as retrospective, geopolitical and axiological approaches. In conducting the study, logical (analysis and synthesis of the material) and special historical (historical-genetic, historical-comparative, historical-systemic) research methods were used.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

British and American historians traditionally distinguish between several aspects in the composition of the German problem in the postwar decade: the reasons for the German division and the role played in it by the allies; the first Berlin crisis; Soviet initiatives on the German issue in the first half of the 1950s; and West German rearmament. In their analyses of the reasons for the German division and the responsibility of the allies, rationalists seriously disagree with the representatives of “political idealism” (Weir, 1949), arguing that the policies of Western governments in occupied Germany demonstrated the priority of their practical interests over democratic ideals and values (Gimbel, 1968). The allies succeeded in developing plans for the occupation and possible dismemberment of Germany, with international law and agreement, and not moral principles, acting over the whole process of the German settlement (Lewkowicz, 2010). At the same time, unlike conservative historians, rationalists

emphasize the need for international dialogue and cooperation. Representatives of this approach believe that the differences in interests and ideologies of the great powers forced the allies to work out a legislative and diplomatic basis for the establishment of their respective spheres of influence in Germany and the rest of Europe. In the context of the Cold War, this prevented an escalation of a conflict between the superpowers. In contrast to the followers of the “containment” school, rationalists believe that the great powers did not initially have clear plans for postwar Germany. The policy of the allies in the occupation zones in 1945–1949 was largely based on improvisation and responses to the actions of the other side. In this situation, the split of Germany was an unintended consequence of the Cold War, and not the result of a planned policy of the great powers (Calleo, 1978), (Deighton, 2014) (Fulbrook, 2000) (Judt, 2005), (Naimark, 1996).

Representatives of the rationalist direction differently assess the contribution of the USSR and Western countries to the German division. Most historians point out that in 1945–1946 the USSR and France showed the greatest rigidity toward German settlement. The main reason for disagreements with the Soviet side was the problem of reparations. The authors analyze the problem of reparations as a consequence of incompatible objective interests of the great powers, and the contradictory nature of the legal framework of the German settlement. They note that the Yalta and Potsdam agreements regarding the German problem contained a lot of uncertainty, with a contradiction between the agreement to treat Germany as an economic whole and the agreement concerning reparations. Consequently, the issue of reparations was initially considered as a separating factor. Reparation agreements increased the independence of individual zones and contributed to the economic disintegration of Germany. Since it was not an economically coherent entity, it could not be politically united. At the same time, the followers of the rationalist direction point out that the tough reparation policy of the Soviet Union was justified by the difficult state in which it found itself after the war, and an urgent need to rebuild its economy. It is notable that in the period 1945–1949 Soviet short-term economic goals had primacy over political ones (Childs, 1983). At the same time, the authors emphasize that Western countries also could not afford to passively observe the deterioration of economic situation in Germany, which could destabilize the political situation by provoking the rise of both revanchist and ultra-leftist sentiments. In addition, Western allies were not willing use their own budgets to pay for the viability of the occupation zones, the economies of which could have remained paralyzed for many years as a result of complying with Moscow’s reparation requirements. Accordingly, the inability to harmonize economic policies in Germany as a whole led to the formation of the Bizone, the launch of the Marshall Plan, and the process of monetary reform in the western zones (Fulbrook, 2009).

The second aspect of the German question on which British and American researchers focused their attention were the causes and consequences of the first Berlin crisis. Representatives of post-revisionism confirm that the Berlin blockade was the Soviet response to the Western policy aimed at creating a separate West German state. The actions of the Soviet side are viewed as a pragmatic step taken in response to the decisions of the London Conference of Western Powers. The termination of the transport connection between West Berlin and the Federal Republic of Germany is regarded as Josef Stalin’s “diplomatic adventure,” and not a part of a well-thought-out aggressive plan against Western states (Northedge, 1974). Post-revisionists are confident that the Soviet leader was not going to

unleash a war over Berlin; his goal was to resume the quadripartite talks concerning Germany on terms more favorable for the Soviet side. Stalin, guided by the interests of security, sought to create a united, neutral Germany which would be friendly towards the USSR (Gaddis, 1989), (Judt, 2005).

The main task of Western countries in Berlin, according to the rationalists, was to minimize risks and stabilize the situation without weakening their positions in a confrontation with the USSR. Creating a united neutral Germany, which could become a potential ally of the Soviet Union in the Cold War, was unacceptable. In fact, by then Western countries had decided on the creation of a separate West German government and were not interested in the resumption of the quadripartite talks. The actions of the American side during the crisis had an experimental, pragmatic nature, and were aimed at bringing about the economic recovery of Germany and Western Europe (Prowe, 2004). At the same time, representatives of the rationalist approach point out that the United States, Great Britain, and France were interested in maintaining the occupational status of Berlin. This gave them grounds for maintaining a military presence in the western sectors of the city, and indicated that the German problem had not been resolved. If representatives of the Western Allies were to depart from the city and the Berlin question were to be closed in the context of the formation of the West German government, the whole project of its creation and exploitation of its potential in the interests of the West could have been jeopardized. For the same reason, the United States, Great Britain, and France later expressed opposition to the inclusion of West Berlin in the Federal Republic of Germany, maintaining the city's special status (Turner, 1992).

In their analyses of the results of the first Berlin crisis, representatives of the rationalist approach point out that this event had negative consequences for the realization of Soviet interests in Germany. The attempt to prevent the formation of the West German government through the Berlin blockade only accelerated its creation. As a result of the crisis, the economic division of Germany was completed. The blockade ruled out the possibility of restoring negotiations on terms acceptable to the Soviet side. In the end, the USSR had to accept the division of Germany and recognize its moral defeat. The Soviet Union, rather than Germany, established itself as the main threat to the security of the West. The crisis also contributed to the harmonization of the German policy by the Western Allies. The Berlin blockade showed Germans that any hope for a rapid unification of Germany through negotiations with the Soviet side was lost. The blockade also predetermined the formation of NATO and the subsequent course of West German rearmament (Fulbrook, 2009).

Soviet initiatives regarding the German question in the first half of the 1950s represent another subject of careful analysis by British and American researchers. In historical science, a discussion emerged about the true character, goals, and possible prospects for implementation of these initiatives. In contrast to conservative historians who called Stalin's notes a "tactical trick", rationalists often regarded them as a "missed opportunity" for German settlement. In their works the main Soviet initiatives (dated March 10, 1952) are considered as a constructive proposal aimed at "resetting" the four-party talks on the German problem. Analyzing the Soviet initiatives of 1952, the authors come to the conclusion that due to the lack of interest of the Western countries in the creation of a united neutral Germany, they were never seriously studied or considered as a background for the resumption of negotiations. The process of incorporating the economic and military potential of the FRG into Western

structures, forced by the United States in 1950 following the outbreak of the Korean War, turned out to be irreversible by that time. According to Mary Fulbrook (University College London), the United States and Great Britain went too far in their rearmament planning to consider Soviet proposals seriously, while Stalin's note was a genuine attempt to create a united Germany (Fulbrook, 2000). The work of the British historian, Professor Donald Watt (London School of Economics) contains a similar assessment. He notes that in 1952 it was much more important for the United States to retain and preserve West Germany than to implement the project of German unification. In the Western countries' response to the Soviet note, Watt saw a final refusal of the very idea of discussing German unification (Watt, 1965). American author James Warburg concluded that the note of March 10, 1952, signaled a possible acceptance by the Soviet side of German unity by holding free elections and forming a democratic all-German government (Warburg, 1953). At the same time, the author expresses confidence that the US government firmly decided to preserve the division of Germany as early as 1951, because it was obsessed with the possible nightmare of a communist *coup d'état*. Thus, according to Norman LaPorte (the University of South Wales), the need to firmly attach West Germany to integration structures, and to minimize the risks of reviving German nationalism, made the idea of creating a united neutral Germany unacceptable to Western Allies (Berger, LaPorte, 2015).

However, the researchers note that Western countries could not directly reject the Soviet proposals. As regards the German question, public opinion also had to be taken into account. The disappointment in Western policy caused by the Big Three's public refusal to discuss the draft concerning German unity could have turned the Germans from strategic allies into potential enemies, the "fifth column" of NATO in Europe. Under such circumstances, Western response notes were used as a means of buying additional time. Historians note that the preconditions stated in the Western notes were initially unacceptable to the Soviet side. In practice, the West did not take any steps to resume negotiations on the German problem (Hughes, 2007). Representatives of the rationalistic approach note that, despite the lack of obvious evidence in declassified archival documents, in 1952 Stalin was very likely ready to abandon the GDR in exchange for a united neutral Germany (Bitzer, 1969). Professor John Lewis Gaddis (University of Ohio) noted that Stalin never sought to form an independent East German state, and in all possibility he could have considered the East German regime as expendable material. Gaddis called Stalin's note "the last attempt" and "fragile hope" to reach an agreement with the Western countries on the German problem (Gaddis, 1998). A similar position was held by the American historian Ronald Bitzer, who concluded that, for both political and economic reasons, Stalin was willing to pay a high price for the unification of Germany. The rapid increase in the US military budget in the early 1950s, the trade and economic barriers imposed by Western countries on the USSR after the outbreak of the Korean War, the prospect of rearming Germany and the inevitable costs associated with strengthening the military power of the GDR – all made the project of creating a united neutral Germany and reducing tensions between superpowers extremely attractive to the Soviet leadership. Consequently, diplomatic initiatives by the USSR should be considered as a sincere attempt to resolve the German problem in cooperation with Western powers (Bitzer, 1969).

West German rearmament is the last aspect of the German question in postwar decade that was carefully studied by British and American historians. In the framework of the

rationalistic approach, rearmament of the FRG is regarded as a reluctantly taken but necessary move. The authors note that Western countries had to take this step in connection with Soviet attempts to change the geopolitical structure of the world, including usage of military methods. American historian Stephen Rearden notes that until 1950, despite deteriorating relations with the USSR, the Western allies followed with regard to both the USSR and Germany a policy of “dual containment” (Rearden, 2004). The final decision to remilitarize the FRG was made by the US leadership in connection with the war in Korea. The situation on the divided Korean peninsula was directly associated with the situation in Central Europe, where the Soviet military forces considerably exceeded those of Western countries. When the economic situation of the European allies did not allow for an effective solution to security problems, it seemed inevitable that the FRG’s industrial and military potential would be utilized (Brady, 2004), (Hughes, 2007), (Mawby, 1999). In the works of many researchers, Britain and France are shown as unwilling to authorize the FRG rearmament, and an emphasis is placed on the pressure exerted by America on its Western allies. The authors draw attention to the concerns of European states about a possible USSR response, for which West German rearmament represented an anti-Soviet provocation (Dockrill, 1992), (Large, 2004). At the same time, under the influence of a number of factors – the Berlin blockade, the Czechoslovak crisis, the successful testing of the USSR atomic system, the communist victory in China, the beginning of the war in Korea – Western states agreed on the issue of West Germany rearmament. As the British historian Martin McCauley noted, Europeans wanted to hide under the umbrella of the American defense and Big Sam was the only one who could drive the big and evil Moscow wolf away from their door (McCauley, 2004).

Compared to the works of American researchers, the publications of British historians more clearly express concerns about the possible revival of revanchist sentiments in remilitarized Germany. Control of its military potential by the United States and NATO is considered a reliable guarantee of European security. In this regard, British researchers accord a high assessment to the “Eden plan” (the British initiative of 1954). The authors note that the scheme proposed by the British Prime Minister allowed, on the one hand, to give in to the United States on the issue of West Germany rearmament, and, on the other hand, reliably integrate the German forces into the NATO structure and prevent the withdrawal of American troops from Europe (Dockrill, 1989), (Mawby, 1999), (Watt, 1965).

4. CONCLUSIONS

Summing up, representatives of the rationalistic direction traditionally pay special attention to the factor of negotiations and the search for ways to resolve international problems with the utmost consideration of the interests of all sides. Many of them express regret that the US refused to follow the course of foreign policy established by the Roosevelt administration, which subsequently led to the development of the Cold War. It should be noted that the main prerequisite for the analysis of the German problem in the works of rationalist historians is the acceptance of objective differences in the postwar foreign policies of the Soviet Union and of the United States. Thus, the need to solve the problems of economic recovery led the USSR to adopt a tough stance on the issue of reparations, and to the desire of creating a united neutral Germany, which would not become a new threat to the security of the Soviet state – resulting in the first Berlin crisis and a series of diplomatic initiatives

of the early 1950s. In contrast, rationalist historians explain the policy of the Western allies as driven by their unwillingness to take on an additional financial burden of restoring and defending Germany, as well as fears of the dissemination of communism in Europe. The analysis of the German question in the works of rationalist historians is characterized by measured assessments and a pursuit of a comprehensive approach to the problem, taking into account the goals and motivations of all the actors.

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