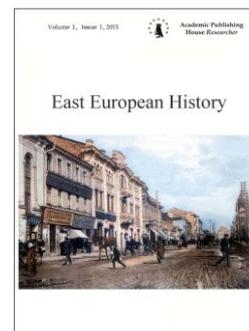


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Published in the Russian Federation
 East European History
 Has been issued since 2015.
 E-ISSN: 2500-1310
 Vol. 4, Is. 2, pp. 51-57, 2016

DOI: 10.13187/eeh.2016.4.51
www.ejournal49.com



Bribery and Extortion of the Civil Officialdom in the Russian Empire at the end of XVIII – the first half of the XIX century

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Abstract

The article is devoted to illegal actions of the civil officials in the Russian Empire, such as bribery and extortion. Relying on the works of the past and modern researchers, as well as on the archival materials, the authors came to the conclusion that one of the sources of bribery in the Russian Empire was the feudal system of "feedings", which lasted until the second half of the XVIII century. The government measures taken against bribery and extortion were ineffective and often were declarative, which led to the "conservation" of a negative image of the officials in the society. These offenses were so deeply ingrained in the bureaucratic and social systems of the Empire, that many of the contemporaries perceived them as a necessary component of the relationship between people and the representatives of the authorities. The officials who were suspected of bribery were rarely punished for this crime.

Keywords: Russian Empire, civil officials, bribery, XVIII–XIX centuries.

1. Introduction

These two terms, "bribery" and "extortion" are not identical. Our modern society sees both of these phenomena as manifestations of corruption in the broadest sense of it or simply calls it "bribery". In the studied period, these concepts differed. Many of the contemporaries, for example, did not even criticize extortion, as they interpreted this action as an expression of gratitude to the official.

Bribery and extortion were among the most severe and widespread kinds of abuse in the officialdom system. Their manifestations had a mixed perception in the society. In fact, those were two different kinds of bribes. The contents of these concepts were as follows:

a) a bribe – is a reward for the official for committing an unlawful act under his authority in favor of the giver;

b) an extortion – is a reward for the work that the employee was obliged to perform (It was given for the purpose of accelerating the working process, or as a reward after its execution). The official achieved this by delaying the case, delaying the decision-making and etc. Some people saw extortion as a form of "gratitude", which the official received for his services (this phenomenon was considered to be normal).

Both extortion and bribery were so deeply ingrained in the bureaucratic and social systems at all levels, that many contemporaries perceived them as a necessary component of the relationship between people and the officials. As a consequence, the government measures taken against these

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illegal acts were often unsuccessful, although prominent in the process of eradication of the service violations.

Many researchers studied the problem of service violations (including corruption) of the civil officialdom in the Russian Empire. Some of them studied this issue directly, and some – in the context of the history of the civil service and bureaucratic apparatus of the Empire. We should highlight Russian and Ukrainian scientists such as P. Zayonchkovsky, O. Moryakova, S. Degtyarev, L. Pisarkova, N. Eroshkin and many others (Degtyarev, 2014; Eroshkin, 1981; Zayonchkovsky, 1978; Moryakova, 1994; Pisarkova, 1995). Among the western scientists referring to this topic in their works are R. Givens, J. LeDonne, D. Orlovsky, W. Pintner, M. Raeff, R. Wortman and many others (Givens, 1993; LeDonne, 2002; Orlovsky, 1976; Pintner, 1970; Raeff, 1994; Wortman, 1976).

Attempts have been made to identify the roots of bribery and trace the evolution of the phenomenon. In particular, the Soviet historian V. Alexandrov pointed out that due to the fact that the unified scale of the bureaucratic salaries didn't exist at the beginning of the second half of the XVIII century, salaries to some extent were preserved in the feudal state of an individual wage or a "royal award". It follows that a transformed "feeding" system of the governmental officials was still preserved in some way during this period. It displayed the demand of the officialdom for their share of the feudal rent in the form of a bribe [the underlining is ours – S.D.] (Aleksandrov, 1976: 156). Thus, the bribe could actually be regarded as a kind of an official's "self-reward".

S. Troitsky studied the evolution of bribes from the "feeding" system in a sufficient detail. He pointed out that in 1726-1727 the Government of the Russian Empire reduced the cost of the state apparatus maintenance, including the reducing of a number of officials' posts who received salary. The government allowed the bulk of bureaucracy officials to take bribes instead of introducing fixed cash salaries and partially resumed the "feeding" or so-called "accidents" (the latter was also a legalized bribery) (Troitsky, 1974: 255). In fact, this domain's policy was that the authorities gave their employees an opportunity to use their official positions, to be "fed" by the society, instead of supporting them. It happened while high ranks of the officials led fairly comfortable lives. This lasted until 1764, when the "accidents" were eliminated. After this, fixed salaries were set for all the categories of central and local governmental officials (Klokov, 2006: 190). But the "feeding" had time to have a negative impact on the work of state institutions and to corrupt the officials. The employees who received salary, also took bribes.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Archival materials are the core source of the article, as well as memoirs of contemporaries and the legislative acts of the Russian Empire, which regulated relations in the field of civil service. In particular, we used the documents from Kiev, Podolsk and Volyn Governor-General Funds, that are stored in the Central State Historical Archive of Ukraine in Kyiv.

2.2. While working on this article, we used principles of historicism, objectivity and historical anthropologism. We took into account the specific historical circumstances of the studied period, connections between the events, causes, time and places of events, real facts and etc. The principle of historical anthropologism was the leading one, due to the fact that the central reference point of the article is a man (or rather a community of people of certain professional grounds).

3. Discussion and results

Not only the contemporaries, but also the researchers of the administrative apparatus of the Russian Empire point out the pervasive abuse and bribery of local officials at the end of XVIII – early XIX centuries. They note that the Russian population was devastated by these phenomena. This, of course, undermined the government's authority (Parusov, 1963: 166-167; Parusov, 1964: 172). One could often come across some negative comments regarding the officials of the judicial and police authorities in the literature. In particular, N. Efremova points out that the pre-reform courts were characterized by excessive bribery, litigation and by low intellectual and moral level of the judges personalities (Efremova, 1983: 50). Total bribery was indeed one of the main issues of the courts of that period. Everyone was involved in it, "from a small juridical pawn to the powerful high-ranked officials of the Ministry of Justice". The cases were solved not in their turn, but depending on judges' choice, which was made depending on the profitability of the case (Kataev: 18). Given that the number of the court and the police officials was quite large, it had no deterrent effect on the mass bribery and theft (Zayonchkovsky, 1978: 67).

Bribery and other abuses were often committed on a grand scale. It is known, for example, that in 1815 in the Volyn province, not only the underprivileged classes of the population, but also the nobility suffered from iniquities, committed by the local officials. People complained on violations during recruiting and on the confiscation of horses and cattle during the gathering of supply of fodder and provisions for the army, etc. All the taxes and military duties were taken in significantly over sized amounts. Senator Count Stroynovsky and 17 noblemen of the Vladimir County of this province complained, that in addition to taxes and other penalties they were forced to give bribes. In the same 1815 Count Stroynovsky filed a complaint against this abuse, addressed to the government. This document was assured by the signatures of 154 Volyn province landlords. It was after this complaint that the Privy Councilor Count Sievers was sent there for an inspection. The Emperor himself called this province "demonstrative of the evil that it nested" (Parusov, 1964: 198, 201-202).

L. Pisarkova made an attempt to define a social group with the origin of the most flourished bribery. According to her, bribes were often demanded by the head clerks and the clergy secretaries who studied in religious schools, where it was common (Pisarkova, 1995: 154). In our opinion, this crime was also committed by the representatives of other social groups, including the noblemen. But we should accept L. Pisarkova's conclusion that when authorities fail to protect the interests of citizens through legislation, bribe was often the only way by which one could budge the bureaucratic machine. Society's attitude to people who permitted this abuse was quite tolerant. A person who received a bigger bribe, gained more respect (he gave more money to church, spent more on celebrations for his peers etc.). An honest official, as a rule, was "dry" in communication, inaccessible and unpleasant for the people (Pisarkova, 1995: 156).

A kind of "litmus paper," of the official's perception by the public was his image in fiction and periodicals. Most of the late XVII – the first half of the XIX century contemporaries agreed that the main cause of these adverse events was the poverty of the population and particularly the low financial status of the bureaucracy (Pisarkova, 1995: 152). Duke Shcherbatov, Radishchev, Kapnist and many others harshly criticized the government, authorities and the Court (since the second half of the reign of Catherine II) in their works. This happened despite the fact that one of the first directives of Catherine II was a decree "On judges and officials' retaining from the extortion". Most likely, this document was issued only to gain popularity of the public (Troitsky, 1982: 143), as it was declarative, and had no effect in reality. During this period Duke Shcherbatov's saying that "All the officials are corrupted, the unworthy are getting the positions, and those who pay to obtain them start to demand bribes from the people" became well known (Goltsev, 1896: 64-65).

D. Fonvizin, representing the civil service and the attitude towards it as a way for the illicit enrichment of the majority of officials in the second half of XVIII century, wrote: "The minds are only full of thoughts of enrichment. Who can rob – is robbing, who cannot rob – is stealing. When the Emperor builds houses on sand instead of issuing mandatory state laws, but constantly emitting certain ordinances to stop dreadful bribes, it means that he is not aware that every crime's impunity in his state can be bought with a bribe" (Fonvizin, 1981: 208). I. Aksakov expressed almost the same idea in the middle of the XIX century: "You do not know the lifestyle of a province. In any provincial town all the officials, literally from the first one to the last one are bribe takers". He even thought that it is not possible to eliminate bribery, and in his letters wrote that the pre-reform county courts were often distinguished by the "naive stupidity of laws and the administrative order" (Bochkaryov, 1915: 207, 214). N. Karamzin noted that it is very difficult to punish the "a judge, the skillful thief" according to Russian laws, both the one who gives a bribe and the one who receives it, are to be punished equally (Kataev: 68).

The famous Ukrainian poet and playwright I. Kotlyarevsky in his ode, dedicated to Duke Kurakin, Governor-General of Little Russia at that time, (1805) – pointed out the atrocities of the judges, who passed judgements in favor of the landlords "for sugar and money". He also revealed the intricacies of paperwork, which involved the whole army of clerks and other clerical employees. The official N. Grech wrote, that in the mid – XIX century abuses "merged with the social life, became an integral element of it. If there could be order and prosperity in the country where out of 60 million one can't meet 8 smart ministers and 50 honest governors, where theft, robbery and bribery are common and where there is no justice?" [Quotation according to N. Eroshkin] (Eroshkin, 1981: 56).

D. Horvat, Sloboda-Ukrainian Nobility Marshal (1793–1799) in his speech to the nobility complained about the long-lasting lawsuits and bribery in the judicial institutions, even among the minor officials. This phenomenon was typical for the whole Russian Empire. In 1821 Rileyev wrote that "the copyists have permanent profits from their robbery". The Russian scientist E. Anuchin wrote about the Zemstvo court officials that "the honest people resigned as soon as the possibility appeared. And those who were still employed, replenished their meager salaries by the extortions taken in any possible way". The honest officials were unable to perform their duties properly under such circumstances, and, as a consequence, were disfavoured by their superiors ([Anuchin, 1872: 116](#)).

Another example from the late XVIII shows the indifferent attitude of the society towards bribery. In December 1782, Bakhtin, a lawyer from Glukhov, representing A. Sulima in court in several cases, advised him for the most successful solution of the case "to take measures against unpleasant accidents and to bribe". He even pointed out the exact amounts of money that should be given to "thank" the officials, that affected the results of the cases. For example, the four of the General Court and the Board officials (probably assessors) were recommended to be given 200 roubles.; 100 roubles to the court clerk (he was characterized by the attorney as an intelligent, honest and just man); another four officials were to receive 200 roub.; and 100 roubles was to be given to the prosecutor. All of the officials named by Bakhtin had high personnel ranks or the ranks of the Cossack officers: collegiate assessors, court counselors, bunchukovy tovarishch etc. These funds were to be sent to the attorney, who had to decide "how much to pay... depending on the diligence of the judges" ([Sulima archive: 129-131](#)).

The lack of the proper control over the activities of the government apparatus led to lawlessness and bribery. These issues were discussed in the Senate, and in special commissions, but the government failed to take specific and effective measures. In addition, the sense of self-control (without which the outside control is not meaningful) was not typical for the Imperial bureaucracy apparatus. Not only the self-control of the central bureaucracy was weak – it even did not exist in the outskirts ([Lazarevsky, 1905: 207](#)).

Alexander I, during the administrative reforms projects' discussions, had the intention to alter the government system substantially. He wanted to leave no room for the extortion and bribery in the officials practice ([Kataev: 16](#)). In 1802, the issue of the legal framework control regarding the eradication of extortion was raised in the Senate and the brainstorming would generate the ideas to combat this phenomenon. Solicitors (in counties) and prosecutors (in the provinces) were engaged in order to protect the population against bribery and other abuses from the local authorities. Said officials could not perform this function. They were subordinates to the local authorities (which also were to be monitored), and therefore they risked to get under the repressions of the latter ([Parusov, 1964: 172](#)).

Some of the researchers associate the attempts to fight bribery that were made during the reign of Nicholas I, with the industrial progress which took place in the Empire in the first half of the XIX century. Recently, the capitalist could spend to the "hundreds of thousands" on bribes. Now when commerce and industry gained quite a powerful swing, the same capitalist risked tens of millions of roubles, and this, of course, he could not tolerate. The war on bribery was declared. The government was forced to allow the exposure of small bribe takers, and that was covered in the newspapers, magazines, comedies, novels, etc. This period gave birth to such works as "Dead Souls" and "The Government Inspector" by Gogol, as well as many others.

In the first half of the XIX century, the officials for special assignments appeared to observe the "behavior" of civil servants. They acted on the special requirements of Governors or the central government and their observations were set out in the form of official reports. But the activities of these officials also had a little effect on the situation.

Rittmeister Stogov was inspecting the activities of police agencies and their officials in Kyiv, Volyn and Podolsk provinces in 1839. During the inspection Stogov's attention was drawn to 17 police officers, on which he filed an appropriate characteristics report. Thus, private bailiff Pavlovich was described as a bold and proud man, who loved bribes, and was hated by the local population. County court secretary Kovalsky was also characterized as a bribe taker and a master to tighten the case to obtain a personal benefit. Chekhovsky, Zemsky Court secretary was characterized to be a capable man, well-versed in affairs, but who wanted to benefit from everything. He had a big family. Thus, despite the clarity of the characteristics, according to the

latest evaluation of Stogov we see that he was impacted by "double standards" – the greediness of the court secretary was justified by his large family (TsGIAUK, f.442, op.789a, d. 177).

The Governor-General of Kiev, Podolsk and Volynsk seconded several special assignment officials to these provinces for inspection in 1847-1848. One of the tasks set for them, was to check out the dignity of the local officials, how they perform their duties and if they are respectable people. Major Yuzefovich who inspected Kanevsky County, negatively characterized Fatimsky and Grinevich, bailiffs of the 2nd and 3rd camps,. It was said that they "are competing with each other in extortion" (TsGIAUK, f.442, op.797, d. 61).

Special assignment officer collegiate counselor Lvov noticed, that assessor Zvarsky administrates the Letychivsky Court of the Podolsk County but the judge. Zvarsky was said to be a capable officer, but not quite fair and disinterested Here one can see an example of authorities' prejudice towards the wrongdoing official. In his characteristics of the Litinskii county judge (of the same province) Pavlovsky, Lvov noted that he "did not forget about himself ... when he was approached with a request on the case, he asked the petitioner the question:" Will there be any petsiki?" (in this region half-imperials were called petses)". Generally, Lvov recorded many examples of bribery and extortion (he even noted the amounts of the bribes, which were quite large – 300 roub., 1000 roub. etc.) (TsGIAUK, f.442, op.797, d. 61).

Every six months, since January 1, 1847 until July 1, 1848, the staff officer of the gendarmerie in Poltava province reported of bribery of the Civil Chamber Court chairman Tereshchenko. But it had no effect (Zayonchkovsky, 1975: 51). Many violations took place on the Right Bank Ukraine under the management of the Governor-General D. Bibikov, who later became the Minister of Internal Affairs. Even his closest officials took large bribes. In particular, the Head of the Office of the Governor-General N. Pisarev demanded an annual duty even from the governors. This official received 46 thousand roubles only from the Polish nobility involved in the Konarsky case in 1840, and in 1847 he received 35 thousand roubles from the Volyn landowners, due to the introduction of the inventories. These crime cases were known even to Nicholas I, but there were no consequences for this criminal official (Zayonchkovsky, 1975: 36).

The representatives of the supreme authorities of the Empire also revealed the large scale of bribery in governmental offices. By doing so they did not only identify this phenomenon, but also sought out for its causes and tried to evaluate it, etc. Thus, Adjutant General Kutuzov in his memorandum to Nicholas I in 1841 pointed out, the large number of officials who only wanted to enrich themselves was a significant flaw in the administrative structure of the Empire "and this leads to injustice in court" (Kataev: 92). Late 40's – early 50's of the XIX century is often characterized as a period of total bribery, embezzlement of state funds, fraud and hypocrisy (Zayonchkovsky, 1975: 33). In 1847, Lieutenant General Muravyov (later – the Minister of State Property) noted that "Abuse and extortion of officials in our government offices who are our new nobility, are not considered to be dishonest yet, and now only an honest supervision and threat of punishment can restrain them" (Anunchin, 1872: 133). Analyzing the phenomenon of extortion, Count Mordvinov wrote that "extreme injustice is if the one who received the award of gratitude for the right decision of the case, and the one who sold the justice in court will be subjects to equal punishment" (The meaning of extortion: 115; On extortion: 651-652). He pointed out that "...The judges and clerk ministers should not only be punished (with the supreme penalty, which is hard labor) for bribes and presents given by the defendants, but it should be impossible to prohibit bribes, until as the judges and clerk ministers get high enough salary to provide for themselves and their families" (The meaning of extortion: 117). Thus, he contrasted two serious service offenses, bringing the extortion to the level of the official gratitude for the executed work.

4. Conclusion

In the conclusion we would like to add that during the studied period both extortion and bribery were so deeply ingrained in the bureaucratic and social systems at all levels, that many of the contemporaries perceived them as a necessary component of the relations between people and the representatives of the authorities. Despite the wide spread of these negative phenomena, they were practically not reflected in the official documents, particularly in the reports of the III department, as well as in ministerial, gubernatorial or senatorial reports. The governmental

actions against bribery and extortion were often ineffective and declarative. This led to the "conservation" of the negative image of an official in the society.

5. Acknowledgements

The authors thank the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine for the support of this research within "The historical development of the Northeast Frontier of Ukraine as a means of constructing a national model of historical memory" (№ 0115U000677) and "Mechanisms of civil society institutions' influence on the European integration processes in Ukraine" projects (№ 0116U006811).

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