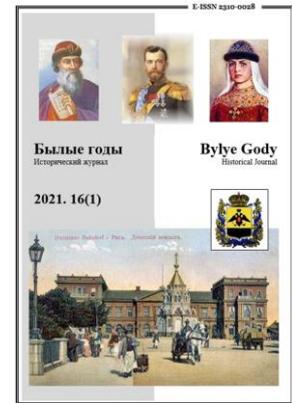


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## Discussion Aspects of the Establishment and Development of Serfdom in Russia (to the 160th Anniversary of the Peasant Reform of 1861)

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### Abstract

In the article the discussion questions are considered, connected to implementing and developing of serfdom in Russia. There is the contest of the concept itself and main concepts, which differently explain reasons of implementing serfdom in Russia in the second half of XVI – the first half of XVII centuries. A significant attention is paid to the characteristic of serfdom estimating stages in Russia and specialties of this process, concluding why in Russia serfdom was estimated when in most European states it was either canceled or significantly softened.

Further there are reasons of serfdom development in Russia in XVIII century in direction of maximum strengthening and depriving serfs of their remaining personal rights. There is a special attention on the role of Manifest of 1762 and Honorary Diploma to the Russian nobility of 1785, which freed nobles from compulsory service, and thus deprived the continued existence of serfdom of logical and moral justification. Exactly from this moment there starts changing of the managing course in direction of firstly softening, and then gradual cancellation of serfdom (Pavel I, Alexander I, Nicolas I). At the same time, there are reasons of failures of mentioned above Russian monarchs' attempts to cancel serfdom in the first half of XIX century.

**Keywords:** history of Russia, serfdom, concept of establishing serfdom in Russia, reasons for the tightening of serfdom in Russia in the XVIII century, attempts to cancel serfdom in Russia in the first half of XIX century.

### 1. Introduction

On the February 19, 2021 it will be 160 years since the moment of cancelling serfdom in Russia. It was really significant and epochal event in the history of Russia, which has finally ended up with shameful phenomenon, which has caused disagreements in the enlightened part of Russian society, but which was at the same time the basis of socially-economic and political development of Russian imperia during two centuries. In Russian and foreign historiography to the theme of estimating and developing serfdom there are a lot of works. However, a lot of aspects of this theme are still unsolved. The *goal* of this article is analysis of discussion problems, connected to estimation and development of serfdom in Russia up to 1861. In the center of authors attention, there are the following questions: what are the reasons of implementing serfdom in Russia and why this happened at the moment when in most European countries it was at the stage of liquidation (end of XVI – first half of XVII centuries); why did the serfdom receive hard forms in Russia, equal to slavery; why did it exist in Russia for a long time and why the attempts to begin cancellation of serfdom in the first half of XIX century did end up with failure.)

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## 2. Materials and methods

The article is an analytical review of the main concepts that explain the establishment and specificity of the development of serfdom in Russia. Therefore, it was prepared on the basis, first of all, of a historiographic analysis and study of the sources presented mainly in the works of Russian scientists. Among used published materials, it is necessary to highlight the legislative sources presented in the Complete Collection of Laws of the Russian Empire, as well as Code of Laws of 1497 and 1550. From archival sources, special attention should be paid to the materials of the scribal books of the XV-XVI centuries, which are mainly in the Russian State Archive of the Ancients acts, which reflect the dynamics of the establishment of serf relations in the central regions of the country.

The article uses, first of all, logical research methods: analysis, synthesis, comparison; modeling method; private scientific methods of historical research: historical-genetic (when analyzing the reasons for the introduction of serfdom in the late XVI – mid-XVII centuries, as well as the reasons for the failure to implement projects for the abolition of serfdom in the first half of XIX century), historical-comparative and historical-typological. The work also used the method of structural and functional analysis (for example, when analyzing the content of projects for the abolition of serfdom in the first half of XIX century, their explicit and hidden goals, interest in the expected results of certain social and political structures and institutions). The re-productive method is also used (in the comparative analysis of theories of enslavement of the peasants) and the abductive method, which is a logical step-by-step comparison of research concepts with documents included in the analysis.

## 3. Discussion

At this moment in historiography there are at least *four theories*, which differently explain the process of enslavement and its reasons. The first was “*index*” theory of peasants’ enslavement. Its authors are known Russian historicists of the middle of XIX century, the representors of “public school”, *S.M. Solovyev* and *B.N. Chicherin*. Its meaning is leaded to the fact that serfdom was implemented with targeted actions of government authority as series of orders in the end of XVI century (from here comes the name of theory: index). The main reason is the necessity to provide the state’s defenses with the lack of resources. In other words, the state had nothing to pay for the military service of nobles. In the result, the state went by the way of adding peasants to the land, in order to provide land’s owners (landlords) the minimal level of income and fulfillment of military duty (during the war, the landowner had to arrive at the assembly point with a certain number of soldiers, providing himself and their weapons at his own expense). Peasants were sacrificed to the government interests (*Soloviev, 1997; Chicherin, 1858*). The strong side of this theory was a logical explanation of peasants’ enslavement, and the weak side was ignoring socially-economic reasons and long lasting of the enslavement process.

In the result in the second half of XIX century there was alternative “*unspecified*” enslavement theory. Its developer is *V.O. Klyuchevsky*, the best student of *S.M. Solovyev*, but totally disagreed on this question with his teacher. Truly, recently there was the opinion that the main states of unspecified theory were developed much earlier and come up to the labors of historic *M.P. Pogodin* (*Pogodin, 1867; Pochivalova, 2012*). Supporters of this theory did not deny the main states of mentioned theory, but at the same time thought that the main reasons of enslavement were socially-psychological and the process itself continued for some centuries and ended in the middle of XVII century. The beginning of the enslavement process was set up by Mongol-Tatar invasion, which led to the desolation of vast tracts of land. After some time, their new owners began inviting peasants from less suffered districts, promising different privileges. Migrants in economical and psychological plan lost connection with previous community and got into more and more dependency from their new owner. Gradually, this dependency transformed into serfdom. It has developed by itself, and the government only retroactively approved the relation that developed without its participation (*Klyuchevsky, 1885; Klyuchevsky, 1988*).

In the soviet period in 1930s – 1940s the third theory appeared: “*corvee*” enslavement theory, based on dogmatically understood Marxism. Its author was academic *B.D. Grekov*. In his opinion, the main reason was economical reason and, in more details, a strong growth of prices on production in West countries in XVI century (“prices’ revolution”), which has caused the desire of Russian merchants to increase incomes by increasing bread’s export. It was possible to be done through implementing corvee (free cultivation of the land of a feudal lord by peasants as a special type of feudal obligation), which supposed peasants’ personal freedom and attachment to the land and the identity of the owner. The government, which has shown interests of leading class, has fully satisfied the demand of its social support: nobility and enslaved the peasants in the end of XVI century (*Grekov, 1940; Grekov, 1946*). At first sight, the theory looked rather logical and reasoned, but all further researches have denied all thoughts of *B.D. Grekov*. At this moment Russia was in terms of self-isolation from West countries, the level of outer trade was rather low, that is why “prices’ revolution” on the West, which truly had place, did not reflect on Russian economy.

Finally, in 1970s – 1980s there was the fourth theory of enslavement, in the most systematized type, formed in works of *V.B. Kobrin*. In general it reminded the indicated theory of *S.M. Solovyev*, but was less tiring and more specific. Reasons of enslaving were seen in two concrete events: *aftermath of the Oprichnina and the Livonian War*. Punitive campaigns of guardsmen and a sharp increase in taxes during the long

Livonian War (1558–1583) led to the mass peasants' escape to the state edges. In the result there was a misbalance between the number of merchants, which constantly increased due to new sets to the army during the Livonian War and the number of peasants, which constantly decreased, especially in the central areas of the country. By this, a greater number of merchants could not provide themselves with arming, which sharply weakened the army and endangered the country's defense. In the end the state went by the way of implementing firstly temporary restrictions of peasants' transfer from one owner to another ("forbidden years"), and then total cancellation of transfers and implementing "fixed years" in 1590s (Kobrin, 1991).

The second discussion problem is *question about the reality of existing hypothetical order about full cancellation of peasants' transfers in 1592*. There exist two main points of view. Supporters of the first one, especially V.I. Sergeevich and V.I. Korecky, proved existence of order from 1592 about a full cancellation of "Saint George's Day" (it is still not found in archives), giving arguments on their position with the fact that without existence of such legal basis in the form of such an order, it was impossible to apply in practice the order of 1597 on a five-year period for the search for escaped peasants. Thus, the counting itself was made exactly from 1592 (Sergeevich, 1903; Koretsky, 1970; Koretsky, 1975). Supporters of the second point of view, for example Russian soviet scientists G.N. Anpilogov and V.M. Paneah, modern Russian historic V.A. Arakcheev, consider Korecky's and his fellows' proof as not enough one and in the whole deny existence of hypothetical order of 1592 year. In their minds, lack of the order's text itself does not allow making future-looking conclusions on this question, but estimating of exactly the five-year long period of the search for fugitive peasants is explained by the established tradition of land taxation in relation to migrant peasants (Anpilogov, 1972; Paneakh, 1972; Arakcheev, 2004; Arakcheev, 2008).

About the questions *why in Russia serfdom received such harsh forms, equal to slavery and which existed for so long, and also why attempts to begin serfdom cancellation in the first half of XIX century*, there exist a large massive of scientific literature. In our point of view, the most significant contribution into studying these questions added P.A. Zayonchkovsky, M.M. Safonov, S.V. Mironenko and B.G. Litvak (Zayonchkovsky, 1968; Safonov, 1988; Mironenko, 1989; Litvak, 1991).

Nevertheless, despite studying many plots, connected with estimation and development of serfdom in Russia, some questions, which were mentioned above, are discussion and unsolved ones. Their analysis is the subject of this article.

#### 4. Results

Before talking about peasants reform in 1861 and its results, we think that we should begin with sources and find out, why serfdom was introduced in Russia comparatively late, when in most European countries it has already been cancelled or seriously deformed in the direction of reducing the peasants' addiction from land owners, and also why in Russia in XVIII century serfdom was made maximally hard and was almost completely close to classical slavery.

We begin with the concept. *Serfdom* is one of the elements of the development of feudal relations, this is a special form of personal dependence of the peasant as the main producer on the owner of the land (feudal lord), in which the peasant is deprived of freedom of movement, is attached to the land and the owner's personality and for using a plot of land is obliged to bear feudal obligations (payment (quitrent), labor (corvee) and others). A comparative study of the historical development of different peoples and states has shown that serfdom is not an integral part of the development of feudal relations. As the comparative studying of historical development of different nations, serfdom is not a non-replaced part of feudal relations' development. A row of countries, especially on the north of Europe (for example, Norway) escaped the establishment of serfdom. The same applies to the northern regions of European Russia and Siberia.

The question about *reasons and chronological gates of estimating serfdom* in Russia is still a discussion one. Scientists agree only in one thing: this process was lengthened in time, lasted more than one hundred years and finally ended in 1649, when according to the Cathedral Code, the peasants were deprived of the right of free movement, attached to the land on which they worked, an unlimited search for escaped peasants was introduced. As it was mentioned above, there exist four main theories, differently explaining reasons of enslaving peasants in Russia. In our point of view, the most reasoned is the *concept of V.B. Kobrin*, linking enslavement to specific events, the consequences of the Oprichnina and the Livonian War. Researches, first of all, Russian historians, truly allow making a conclusion that punitive campaigns of guardsmen and a sharp increase in taxes during the long Livonian War (1558–1583) led to the mass peasants' escape on state's edges and appearance of misbalance between the number of the nobility (which constantly increased due to more and more recruits in the army during the Livonian War), and the number of peasants (which constantly decreased, especially in the central regions of the country). In the result of mass nobility's impoverishment there appeared a threat of the county's defense and the government had to take the way of implementation of temporary restrictions of peasants' transfer from one owner to another ("forbidden years"), and then total cancellation of transfers and implementing "fixed years" in 1590s (Skrynnikov, 1973; Kobrin, 1991). In our point of view, this concept is more conveniently and logically explains the process of peasants' enslavement in Russia and is the most according to the real events.

The second discussion moment is the *question about stages and concrete events*, connected to serfdom estimation in Russia, especially about the *reality of existing of hypothetical order about the full*

*cancellation of peasants' transfers in 1592*. Nowadays, most scientists point out the following stages of enslavement. *The first stage*, which can be called preparative, is connected with publication of *Sudebnikov in 1497 and 1550*, in which there was *Saint George's Day rule*: peasants' transfers from one owner to another were restricted only by only 2 weeks per year (a week before and a week after Saint George's Day in autumn (in an old style it is November, 26), when the cycle of agricultural works ended up and the owner of the land during the winter period could find a replacement for the departed peasant) with paying the compensation: "pojiloe". Thus, according to *Sudebnik of 1550*, the size of compensation increased on 30%, which made the transfer process much harder. The following stage starts in 1581, when there are "forbidden years" in connection with peasants' mass escape and lowering the nobility incomes. Now, in the beginning of every year (at that time the year began on the first of September) the government said, what year will be the next, an ordinary or "forbidden", when transfers in Saint George's Day were cancelled. Thus, for the time being, temporary restrictions on the movement of peasants around the country were introduced, which with good reason can be considered as the first real step towards the establishment of serfdom.

The following stage can be considered an *order of 1597* about implementing «fixed years», i.e. five-year terms of finding escaped peasants. In 1970, the historian V.I. Korecky, basing on works of pre-revolutionary historian V.I. Sergeevich, proposed the theory about existing *hypothetical order of 1592-1593*, which text did not save until today and in which transfers on Saint George's Day were cancelled forever. The main argumentation was led to the fact that for using an order "fixed years" of 1597, we had to have the legal basis on which the peasant could be considered a fugitive. Such basis could be only an order about full restrict a rule of Saint George's Day. In addition, in 1597, there was implemented exactly five-year term of finding escaped peasants, consequently, the count was made from 1592 (Koretsky, 1970; Koretsky, 1975; Sergeevich, 1903). Scientists' opinions on the theory of V.I. Korecky were separated. Some of them, such as V.B. Kobrin and partly R.G. Skrynnikov, in general, with the concept of V.I. Korecky were agree (Kobrin, 1991; Skrynnikov, 1973). Others, such as G.N. Anpilogov, V.M. Paneah, recently V.A. Arakcheev, consider Korecky's argumentation insufficient and generally deny the existence of a hypothetical order of 1592 (Anpilogov, 1972; Paneakh, 1972; Arakcheev, 2004).

In our opinion, arguments of supporters of the order of 1592 come as rather reasonable and logical. In addition, there can be given another argument. In 1607 an order of Vasily Shuisky about increasing the term of finding escaped peasants from 5 to 15 years was accepted. As we see, the count was made from an event, which had happened 15 years before this, i.e. in 1592. However, the opposite side has a reasonable argument: supposed order from 1592-1593, which still has not been found in archives and thoughts of V.I. Korecky and his supporters were built on indirect data, not on the analysis of concrete resource. Thus, the question about the order from 1592-1593 about a full cancellation stays unsolved and discussion.

Anyway, in the end of XVI century a significant number of peasants was left without personal freedom and stitched to the place, where they lived, which can be considered as the main element of serfdom addiction estimation. However, as the following events showed, it was not final. Measures, which were taken in 1590s, caused a sharp growth of society's disagreement, which was made worse by hunger in 1601-1603. From our point of view, enslavement policy of B. Godunov and negative reaction on it from peasants and Cossacks and their desire to return lost freedom, can be considered as a social reason of Time of Troubles. Without getting in details, we have to point out that in time of Time of Troubles, the policy of different governments to peasants' enslavement was really controversial. Outspoken concessions to the lower classes (for example orders of B. Godunov during hunger in 1602-1603, which temporarily solved peasants' transfers, who suffered from hunger in districts) changed by measures of making enslavement policy harder (the already mentioned order of V. Shuisky of 1607 on the introduction of a fifteen-year term for the search for fugitive peasants, which, however, was almost never observed and was of a declarative nature). In the whole, in our point of view, active participation of the lower classes in Smuta's events slowed the enslavement process down, in fact there was recovered the rule of Saint George's Day, though enslavement orders formally continued to act. Such duality continued until the end of recovery period, i.e. until 1640s, when during central authority impact defense, the government under pressure of nobility re-started attack measures against peasants' rights. The conclusion was *Resolutions of the Cathedral Code of 1649*, which have finally cancelled peasants' transfers in Saint George's Day and which have established termless finding of escaped peasants. This meant the second and now final implementation of serfdom. The consequences of this were rather contractionary. From the one side, there was provided a minimum level of merchants' incomes, which were the main social basis of the ruled regime, and by this there was guaranteed state defense. At the same time there was increased the monarch's power, because nobility turned out to completely depend on central authority, without having the possibility to individually cope with peasants' rivals. Enslavement was useful for the government and from *fiscal considerations*: attaching peasants to the land and the citizens to the place of living eased the taxes' collections. From the other side, after 1649 in Russia there was destroyed market of free workforce, which sharply slowed the formation of new capitalistic relations down. In the future, this determined more and more progressing lag from West countries, firstly, in the sphere of economy. Enslavement of the most part of society had and negative psychological consequences: lowered state of personality in the society and formation of slavery psychology in all parts of society, including nobility. While having peasants, the merchants themselves more and more turned into "government slaves",

which came out in, for example, the fact that while turning to the tsar with requests, they had to sign it in this way “your slave, Sovereign...” and call themselves diminutive or even derogatory names. Such practice was destroyed only in the times of Ekaterina II. At the same time, implementation of serfdom sharply *increased mobilization possibilities* of existing system. The government any time could direct on free works or in an army large mass of government and landlord peasants. All this led to the fact that serfdom turned into the main element of further socially-economic and political development of Russia. The fact that serfdom was introduced in Russia at that moment, when in Western Europe countries was cancelled or was in the stage of destruction, is explained by the main stadial lag of Russia, which arose due to the Mongol-Tatar invasion and two centuries of dependence on the Golden Horde.

Further development of Russia went by the way of more *tightening of serf relationships*. Especially it showed during reforms of Petr I in the first quarter of XVIII century. Peasantry was used as the main provider of people and material resources for reaching set up foreign policy tasks (sending recruits to the army and navy, forced labor on the construction of canals, Saint Petersburg, etc.). The level of exploitation has significantly increased, and the level of life of a big peasants’ mass has sharply decreased. Thus, during the times of Peter I real enslavement was made on the nobility itself, which had a task of the *duty of an indefinite* (essentially lifelong) *public service*. In such system of total unfreedom really free person was only the autocratic monarch and his closest surrounding, and not even the full one. During *post-Peter the Great era of palace coups* (1725–1801) nobility more actively started fighting for their rights, and in the end, it reached its goal. During the times of Anna Ioannovna (1730–1740) there was cancelled the indefinite service and was introduced the term in 25 years. With Elizaveta Petrovna this term was more reduced. Finally, in 1762 by the *Manifest on the liberty of the nobility*, which was signed by Peter III, merchants were freed from the necessary service and corporal punishment. Ekaterina II in 1785 in Charter to the nobility confirmed all these privileges, giving the nobility status of “noble class”.

Peasants’ (government and merchants) right status during XVIII century always got worse. In 1760 in the end of Elizaveta Petrovna’s rule and in the beginning of Ekaterina II comes out a full row of orders, which forbade peasants to complain about their landowners, who allowed the landowners to sell peasants without land and exile them to settle in Siberia without a court decision with a credit as recruits, etc. At the same time serfdom expanded broad wise, taking new and new territories (for example, in 1775, serf relationships were spread on Little Russia). Except from this, starting from Anna Ioannovna, there became popular *practice of giving government peasants into good hands* as presents to favorites, courtiers, generals and officials. It has reached its top during the rule of Ekaterina II (1762–1796), in the years if whose rule there were given about 800 000 revision souls, and together with women and children it was about 2 000 000 people. Exactly during the times of Elizaveta II peasants have lost remnants of rights and were actually turned into slaves. From the classical slaves they were distinguished in the period of antiquity only by the formal saving of the right to life. The murder of a serf was considered as a criminal offense. Cases of murder of serfs rarely reached the court, although precedents did happen (one can recall the notorious “Saltychikha case” in 1768). The fact that such a policy was carried out exactly during the reign of Catherine II, at first glance, is surprising. After all, it was at the beginning of her reign that she became famous for liberal measures (convocation of the Legislative Commission with the election of deputies, writing of Instruction to the deputies of this commission with discussions on the rule of law, equality of all before the law, etc.), correspondence with Voltaire and other figures of the French Enlightenment, statements in personal conversations in a negative way about serfdom, organization in 1765 of the Free Economic Society competition on the possible granting of property rights to peasants, etc. And, nevertheless, exactly during the rule of Ekaterina, peasantry turned into absolutely disenfranchised estate, and the level of serf exploitation and merchant’s outrage reached it maximum. In our point of view, this contradiction can be explained very simply. Ekaterina II did not have any rights to the throne; she was brought to rule by the nobles in the person of the guards as a result of a palace coup. Thus, she found herself in complete dependence on the nobility, and was forced to “pay the bills” throughout all her reign, giving the nobility more and more privileges, primarily at the expense of the peasants. However, giving the nobility maximum privileges, self-freedom, getting rid of necessary state service in fact in historical perspective meant beginning of the serfdom end as political and socially-economic perspective, at least in the ways it formed in Russia. Because serfdom was implemented under the excuse of providing material tools to nobility that it could normally complete its duties on the government and firstly military service. This looked like a reasonable and convincing reason for the saving of the serfdom institution in Russia. Even illiterate peasants understood that, yes, life was bad, we were oppressed, but our masters and nobles were also tried to work for the good of the state. Thus, it was necessary, it is necessary and it was fair. Everything for the good of the common cause, for the good of the state, its greatness, i.e. what Peter I was trying to do: all estates serve the greatness of the Russian state. And now, with the release of the nobles from compulsory service (in 1762), this explanation destructed itself. Under the new conditions, the saving of serfdom lost all meaning. Now it was impossible to explain why it was needed at all, since the nobles were no longer forced to serve. Serfdom after 1762 was like an unjust institution, which finally turned into an exploitation instrument of the mass of the population by a minority, and nothing justified its continued existence. However, the idea of justice has always had a huge role in the process of social relations regulation, especially in pre-industrial societies, in which the mass of the

population is illiterate. And now this fundamental and at the same time preventing factor began to fast disappear. In the future, this could lead to serious social cataclysms. And the Pugachev peasant war in 1773–1775, with difficulty suppressed by government militaries, was the first warning. The most enlightened members of the nobility also started understanding this. At the end of the reign of Ekaterina II, at first very shy, and then more and more bravely, voices began to be heard about the necessity of the gradual serfdom cancellation. The most striking example is the famous "*Journey from Saint Petersburg to Moscow*" of A.N. Radishchev, in which the author, who, incidentally, held an important position in the central administration and a former friend of the influential dignitary, Count A.R. Vorontsov, came down with a sharp criticism of serfdom, and not only from a moral and ethical standpoint, but also based on state interests in general (Radishchev, 1981). However, the getting older empress, found the work of A.N. Radishchev as a challenge to herself, she said that the author is "rebel, worse than Pugachev", ordered to bring him to trial by the Senate, which in 1790 indicatively (so that others would disagree) sentenced Radishchev to death, "mercifully" replaced by Ekaterina with reference to Siberia. A similar fate reached another public figure, educator and concurrently head of the Moscow Masons N.I. Novikov, sent in 1792 to prison in the Shlisselburg fortress.

At the same time, despite the repression, the sprouts of new ideas gradually gatecrashed into the highest government circles. They also began to understand, at least, the unfairness of the existing relations between landlords and peasants. So, the new Emperor Pavel I, continuing the practice of distributing state peasants to private hands, at the same time for the first time intervened in the arrangements between peasants and landowners and took a number of measures that limited the level of exploitation of serfs. The most striking example is the so-called Manifest on the three-day corvee, adopted during the coronation on April 5, 1797, which emphasized the importance of this event. Landowners had no right to involve peasants to work in the serfdom on Sundays and no more than three days a week. Thus, the peasants were given the remaining three days to work "for themselves", which guaranteed the peasants at least a minimum level of income and increase the stability of the peasant economy, which was also important for the interests of the Treasury. All attempts by Soviet historians to belittle the significance of this Manifest and prove its purely recommendatory nature, in our opinion, do not stand up to any criticism (Zakharov, 2017; Zakharov, 2019). When Pavel ascended the throne, serfs were directly sworn in to the Emperor for the first time in a hundred years. Before that, landlords did it for them. That way, for the first time, serfs were recognized as people and subjects, not just objects of law. In any case, during the reign of Pavel I, which was characterized by extreme contradictions, the situation of the peasants, and especially the serfs, for the first time did not become the worst, but at least slightly improved. The foundations were laid for a new policy aimed at easing and, in the future, gradually eliminating serfdom (Ataeva, 2007).

Such policy was continued by the sons of Pavel I: Alexander I and Nicolas I. During the rule of Alexander I (1801–1825), who was focused, especially firstly, very liberally, there was *taken the course on gradual serfdom cancelation*. Alexander himself, due to impact of his teacher F.C. Lagarpa, was certain oppositionist of serfdom. However, the state was made worse by pro-serf moods of the most part of the nobility. And the emperor had to take into account that in front of him there was an example of his father, who dared to encroach on the privileges of the nobility and became a victim of a palace coup. That is why all events on peasants' questions were prepared in totally secret state and proceeded from the principle of voluntariness on the part of the nobility (Safonov, 1988). Alexander I began by ending the practice of distributing state peasants into private hands and eliminating the noblemen's monopoly on land ownership. By order on December 12, 1801, merchants, bourgeois and state peasants received the right to acquire uninhabited lands. In 1803–1804 the government moved to concrete measures to gradually cancel serfdom, but on the basis of the principle of voluntariness on the part of the landowners. By the order of February 20, 1803 (called the order on "free cultivators"), which was based on the initiative of the large landowner S.P. Rumyantsev, the landowners received the right to release the peasants for ransom with the obligatory allotment of land to them on the basis of the right of private ownership. The liberated peasants passed into a special category of free people or free farmers. However, the emperor's hopes for the humanism of the enlightened nobles did not come true. By 1825, a little more than a dozen landowners took advantage of this decree, having freed 33 782 male souls, which was only about 0.5 % of the total number of serfs (Zayonchkovsky, 1968). A year later, on February 20, 1804, an order was issued to improve the situation of the Ostsee peasants (in Livonia), and on August 27, 1804, it was extended to Estland. Here it was possible to achieve that the local nobility came forward with the initiative to free the peasants. The Baltic provinces were at a higher stage of socio-economic development, and most of the local nobility realized the economic disadvantage of serf relations. However, under this reform, local peasants received only personal freedom, albeit free of charge, but all the land remained in the ownership of the landowners. The reform was finally completed in 1816–1819, while it was extended to Courland.

Thus by 1820 there were tested two possible variants of peasants' freeing: with land and for a ransom (according to the order "on free farmers" in 1803) and free, but landless liberation in the Baltics. Among the anti-serfdom measures of the era of Alexander I, one can also note the cancelation in 1809 of the right of landowners to exile peasants to Siberia without trial and the original project of the gradual cancelation of serfdom, prepared in 1817 on behalf of the emperor by his confidant General A.A. Arakcheev. The project

came with the gradual redemption of the peasants from the landlords by the state and their transfer to the category of government peasants. For these purposes, it was supposed to annually allocate 5 000 000 rubles from the treasury. A.A. Arakcheev was not implemented, because was deemed overwhelming for the budget. At the same time, like the previous measures on the peasants' question, it was based on the principle of voluntariness on the part of the landowners (Mironenko, 1989).

If summarizing all the actions of Alexander I on the peasants' question, then we can say that the first real steps were taken to begin the serfdom cancellation in Russia, but the results were minimal. The principle of voluntariness on the part of the landowners worked only in the Baltic States, while in the main part of the Russian Empire, the nobility was sharply against any measures to improve the situation of the peasants. Alexander I did not dare to go against the opinion of his social support, remembering the fate of his father. In addition, the *foreign policy environment* did not made success for the reform implementation. After the victory over Napoleon, in the eyes of the nobility, there was no reason and no need to change anything. In addition, in 1820 a new series of revolutions began in Europe, which frightened the emperor himself and buried plans for further reforms, including the peasants' question.

His smaller brother Nicolas I (1825–1855) in the whole also was the supporter of gradual serfdom cancellation. The same position held the highest dignitaries from the closest circle of the emperor. In particular, the head of the III Department of His Imperial Majesty's Own Chancellery, Count A.Kh. Benckendorff, who enjoyed the special trust of Nicholas I, directly called serfdom a "powder cellar" under the foundations of the empire (Zayonchkovsky, 1968). The failed revel of the Decembrists also played a role. During the investigation, Decembrists, who developed several options for the elimination of serfdom, in every possible way tried to show the perniciousness of this institution for the further development of the country and also induce Nicholas I to carry out the necessary reforms. However, all this ran into the pro-serf position of the overwhelming part of the nobility. Nicholas I, like his predecessor, was not brave enough to go against to the opinion of the main social support of the ruling regime. In addition, the extreme conservatism of the world outlook of the emperor himself affected.

In the result, during the rule of Nicolas I, Secret Committees on the peasant question were constantly created: in 1826, 1835, 1839–1840, 1844, 1846–1847 and 1848. But the effect of their activities was minimal. In 1837–1840 the reform of the state peasants was carried out under the leadership of P.D. Kiselyov ("chief manager for peasant affairs" as Nicholas I called him), which improved the position of almost half of the peasant population (size of land allotments and duties were clearly regulated, volost self-government was introduced), but did not affect the landlord peasants. On April 2, 1842, an order on "obliged peasants" was issued, which can be considered a conservative addition to the order on "free farmers". Its essence boiled down to the fact that in the event of an agreement with the landowner, the peasant received personal freedom and was transferred to the category of "obligated peasants". He received the land allotment not as property, as according to the order of 1803, but only for use for the performance of duties, the amount of which was determined in the contract. The conditions of release were extremely unfavorable for the peasants, and there were few who wanted to use this order. The result of its application turned out to be even more modest than that of the order on "free farmers". By 1857, according to it, several landowners had freed 24 708 revision souls or 0.25 % of the total number of serfs (Zayonchkovsky, 1968). In 1847–1848 the so-called Inventory Reform was carried out in the Western Territory (Right-Bank Ukraine and Belarus), which had a pronounced political orientation. The exact sizes of allotments (they could not be reduced arbitrarily) and duties (they could not be increased arbitrarily) were established. For the first time, the government directly intervened in the relationship between peasants and landowners, in fact, on the side of the peasants. This is explained by the fact that most of the landowners were Poles, and the government tried to isolate them in the event of a new possible uprising, winning over the peasants (among whom Ukrainians and Belarusians predominated). It can also be noted the order of June 12, 1844 on the right of the landowner to release the household servants without land and on the right to release the household servants in the estates mortgaged in banks, the order on November 8, 1848 on the right of peasants to buy back the land in the event of the sale of the estate at auction, and the order of March 3, 1848 on the right of peasants to acquire real estate, but with the consent of the landlords (Zayonchkovsky, 1968; Litvak, 1991).

Thus, there continued the course of Alexander I, which was focused on gradual peasants' freeing, but taken measures had private character and were reduced to a partial improvement in the situation of certain categories of peasants or extended to strictly defined territories (such as the Inventory Reform). There still prevailed the principle of voluntariness on the part of the nobility. The question of the forced cancellation of serfdom was not even considered. The foreign policy factor also did not contribute to the successful implementation of the peasant reform. Until the Crimean War, foreign policy successes created the illusion of visible prosperity and strengthened the desire of the ruling circles for maximum stability and preservation of the existing order and relations.

## 5. Conclusion

In the course of the research, the authors came to the following conclusions. Firstly, the process of serfdom establishing in Russia was stretched in time and lasted at least a century and a half from 1497 to 1649. The question about the reasons of enslavement is still being discussed. Most likely, there was a

combination of several factors: desire of the government to ensure the country's defense with a minimum of financial resources (concept of S.M. Solovyov); consequences of the Oprichnina and the Livonian war, which caused a mass escape of peasants to the suburbs, decline of tax collection and at the same time the revenue of the nobles, which had a negative impact on their ability to sustain military duties (concept of V.B. Kobrin); long process of enslavement of the peasantry in the reclaiming new territories (concept of V.O. Klyuchevsky). At the same time, serfdom in Russia was finally established when in the countries of Western Europe it was cancelled many years ago, or was in the stage of destruction, which once again testifies the socially-economic delay of Russia because of the Mongol invasion and long-term dependence on the Golden Horde.

Secondly, serfdom in Russia had really hard forms, starting from the rule of Peter I, which has turned into system-forming factor of socially-economic and political development. In terms of militarily-mobilization development model exactly serf relation allowed reaching industrial production expansion, treasury revenues and the achievement of foreign policy goals. However, all these achievements were reached due to sharp tightening of society's exploitation and falling of the life level, especially peasants. During the rule of Ekaterina II serfdom in Russia reached its apogee. Being addicted to nobility, which in the face of guard led it to power, it had to constantly increase the amount of nobility's privileges, mostly by using peasants. During her reign peasants, whose number constantly increased because of giving peasants away to good hands, were out of remained rights. Their right status came very close to the status of slaves. At the same time, the liberation of the nobility from compulsory public service (1762, 1785) left serfdom without any meaning for its further existence, both in moral and state terms. Therefore, it is quite logical that Russian monarchs, beginning from Pavel I, are taking a course towards improving the situation of the peasants and the gradual cancellation of serfdom, such policy was especially actively pursued under Alexander I. However, the state was made worse by the fact that the main social base of ruling regime, nobility, most part of which was against any measures, focused on serfdom cancellation. The government was really afraid of going against the opinions of the most nobility. Only the defeat in the Crimean War (1853–1856), which showed the full degree of Russia's backwardness from the advanced countries of the West, forced the government to take action and take a course towards the forced cancellation of serfdom, despite protests from the nobility.

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