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## THE LAND QUESTION IN THE PEASANT LIFE OF RUSSIA IN THE XIX CENTURY

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### Abstract

In the first half of the XIX century Russia was still an agrarian country. The main mass of the population was made up of peasants, most of whom belonged to landlords and were under serfdom. In solving the peasant question Russia lagged far behind other European countries. The personal dependence of peasants on landlords and, consequently, their disinterest in the results of labor made agriculture less efficient. The urgent need to change the existing situation became obvious already in the second half of the XVIII century. At the beginning of the XIX-th century, the government tried to cover up the most socially reprehensible forms of serfdom. Thus, it was forbidden to print advertisements in newspapers about the sale of serfs.

**Keywords:** land, power, peasants, emperor, agriculture.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Under Nicholas I, the peasant question became even more acute. The leading public figures demanded its immediate solution. The peasants expressed their discontent with the unrest (as Kornilov notes, during the reign of Nicholas I counted at least 556 peasant unrest, often - entire villages and volosts, most of which had to be subdued not by simple police means, i.e., by the departure of police authorities and flogging of peasants, but by calling military commands, often with bloodshed. This shows that it was impossible to look at this situation really calmly, even from the point of view of state security.

Therefore, the peasant question occupied by no means the last place in the reign of Nicholas I. To find means to improve the situation of the peasants, several times convened Secret Committees, whose members were the highest government officials chosen by the Emperor, bound by a non-disclosure of information about their occupations. The emperor put before the Secret Committees questions connected both with the elaboration of general principles of the reorganization of the village and with the creation of private legislative acts. The committees arose at the discretion of the emperor, and the activity of most of them was fruitless.

Attention should be paid to the attitude of Nicholas I himself to this problem. The Emperor understood the peasant question, first of all, as a question of the abolition of serfdom, the liberation of peasants. At the same time, experience showed that the liberation of the peasants not accompanied by the allocation of land to them significantly worsens their economic situation. Peasants could be freed only if they would be endowed with part of the land belonging to the landlord.



However, Nicholas I was convinced that land was the private property of the nobility by law, and the emperor could not break the law, as he considered it incompatible with the dignity of the monarch.

## II. METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

The processing of the results is based on a critical and analytical approach. The main provisions and conclusions are based on specific local materials. Retrospective and synchronic methods were also used. The multidimensional nature of the topic necessitated the use of a wide range of archival and statistical sources. In this regard, mathematical and statistical analysis was applied. The combination of all methods allowed us to consider the problem comprehensively.

The Crimean War contributed to the deepening of the existing crisis, giving it a comprehensive character, showed that serfdom was the main cause of economic and military-technical backwardness of the country. Alexander II, who came to the throne in 1855, faced acute economic and political challenges: to solve acute social problems, to get out of the severe economic crisis and to maintain Russia's position as one of the leading powers of the world.

That serfdom in Russia must be eradicated, and foreigners declared. Thus, in June 1857, the Prussian economist August Gaxtgausen submitted to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia A. M. Gorchakov a note to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia. M. Gorchakov a note in which he wrote: "The issue of peasant liberation, being a special issue for Russia, is at the same time and political, and the most important not only in relation to Russia, but for the whole of Europe". And further: "I say this to remind that Russia can not stop halfway, that it is impossible to leave the most important issues of people's existence to their own development, but that the government must first take a considered and active part in them, so that events, ahead of him, did not seize the reins and did not wrest from him concessions that would lead him to fall"[4]. We see that the danger of a peasant ("social") revolution was so great that it was talked about not only in Russia, but also abroad. That is why it was impossible to delay the reform of the liberation of the peasants.

For the first time, Alexander II officially announced the need to abolish serfdom in a brief speech he made on March 30, 1856, to representatives of the Moscow nobility. In this speech, the emperor, having mentioned his unwillingness to give freedom to the peasants now, had to declare the necessity in principle to start preparing a reform of their liberation, noting that it would be better to abolish serfdom "from above".

However, during the whole of 1856 practically nothing was done in this direction, except that attempts were made to find out the attitude of the nobility to the forthcoming reform and to obtain the initiative of the latter in the projected cause. At the end of 1856, the Emperor wrote to the Grand Duchess Helena Pavlovna, who declared her intention to free the peasants in her estate Karlovka Poltava province: "I am waiting for well-meaning owners of inhabited estates themselves to express to what extent they believe it is possible to improve the lot of their peasants ". It is worth noting that the vast majority of the Russian nobility was serfdom and opposed any serious reforms. The emperor was supported by the liberal part of the landlords, whose economy was more strongly involved in market relations.

On February 19, 1861, during the sixth year of his reign since his accession to the throne, Alexander II signed the Manifesto on the Abolition of Serfdom and the "Statute on peasants out of serfdom", thanks to these documents in the history of Russia, Emperor Alexander II will be known as the "Liberator" (Figure 1). These acts were the beginning of a transitional era from the serfed state of the peasantry to the state of free inhabitants of rural and village settlements.

Their position in terms of law and jurisprudence changed significantly: all of them began to enjoy personal freedom and most of the general civil rights (entering into transactions, opening commercial and industrial enterprises, transferring to other estates of society).



**Alexander II "the Liberator"**

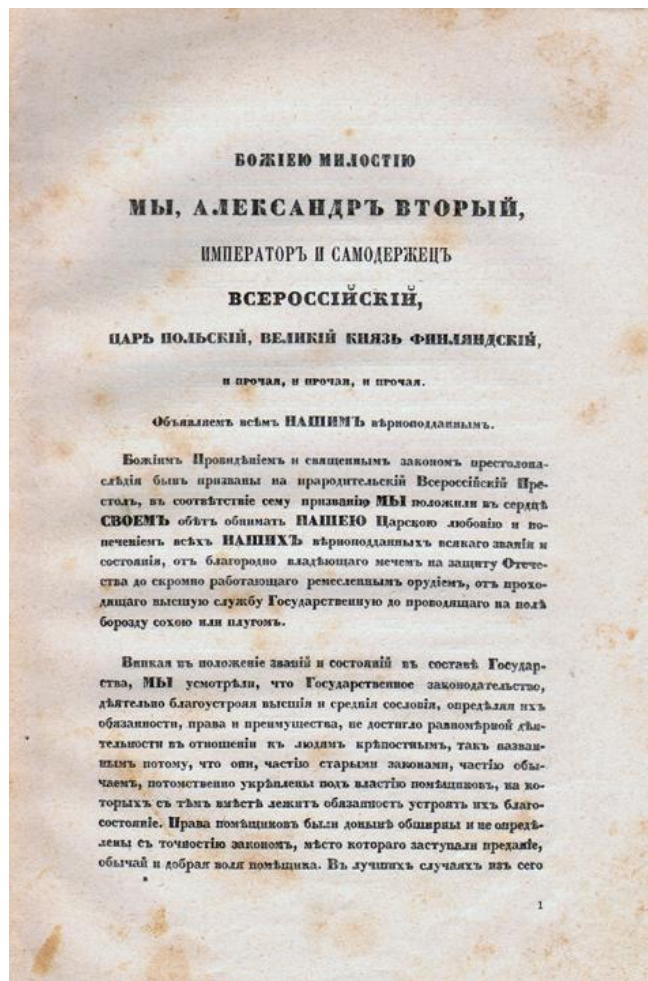
Due to the fact that the land was the property of the nobility, peasants, receiving a land plot in ownership, had to pay a monetary redemption for it. After the redemption operation was completed, the land plot was the personal property of the peasant.

Of course, there was a question about the volume of this redemption. In order to clarify it, the feudal principle was taken as a basis, rather than the capitalist principle implying the market value of land, which was based on the need to compensate the landlord for the loss of serf labor.

Before 1861, commodity relations in the peasant economy developed against the background of the communal system, which had been preserved since ancient times, under which the peasant himself did not own the land plot. The landlord or the state, which was its owner, provided it for the use of the entire peasant community. In the case of the communal system, the peasants could use the land all together, divided among the yards, i.e. families, into plots on the principle of equalization, and sometimes redistributed land plots among themselves.

This approach to the distribution of land did little to foster a "sense of mastery," nor did it contribute to a sense of being a landowner or to the value of productivity as something to worry about. The principle of circular bail, which bound the members of the peasant community, meant that they were responsible for the payment of taxes and other duties "with the whole world". Consequently, those who prospered supplemented the missing difference for those who went bankrupt or became poorer during the past period. Not surprisingly, according to this principle, the formation of a wealthy, bourgeois layer in the Russian countryside was quite slow.

Circle bail created a strong dependence on the community, which limited the freedom of movement of peasants. The presence of the community could also explain the phenomena of stagnation and routinization of productive forces in the Russian village. And according to the terms of the 1861 reform, the land documents only stated how much land a given yard would receive, but in no way defined the location of the land or its limits. The community had the right to exchange one plot for another.



Facsimile of the manifesto of February 19, 1861 according to The Great Reform, 1911.

In the 1980s, Professor Chodsky published a book devoted to the elucidation of the situation of peasants on the basis of the reform, where he tried to find out the approximate material security of each category of peasants. Earlier, in 1876, this task was undertaken by Prof. Janson, who, on the basis of very insufficient figures, tried to calculate the endowments and duties of the peasants.

Later we shall have to dwell on his calculations and conclusions, but now, in order to clarify the general picture of land ownership in Russia, I will give you Professor Hodskey's figures, as they are based on the data of the Central Statistical Committee, published in 1878. L. V. Chodsky calculated that out of 10,670 thousand male peasants, former state and appanage peasants, 5400 thousand souls, or 50%, were endowed generously; then 3800 thousand souls, or 35%, were endowed sufficiently and 1455 thousand souls, or 13.7%, were endowed insufficiently.

But what are "generously", "sufficiently" and "insufficiently" according to the terminology of Prof. Chodsky? These terms have the following conditional meaning: because the government did not have any cadastral data that would have made it possible to accurately calculate whether a peasant's landholding was sufficient or insufficient according to the consumption rate, i.e. "the extent to which a given landholding absorbs the labor force of a peasant family.



Prof. Chodsky proposed a rather crude method of assessing the peasant land supply; he suggested proceeding from the everyday conditions that had historically developed in the pre-reform period, when life itself determined the sufficiency or insufficiency of land norms, from the point of view of current economic conditions.

He rightly pointed out that in pre-reform times the landowner's peasants (in essence, however, only those who worked on the barstool) had norms of plots of land determined by the ability to work these plots of land during those three days a week, which the peasants used for themselves.

Thus, this, in fact, amounted, at the maximum allotment, to half of the amount of land that peasants could cultivate if they worked for themselves for a whole week and did not have to work the barstool. At the same time, this allotment enabled the peasants to meet their elementary food needs, of course, more or less to a bare minimum. It was this norm that corresponded to the maximum allotment of landowning peasants.

In the 1950s, not only liberals, but also conservatives, who demanded the gradual emancipation of peasants with land redemption, publicly expressed their support for the abolition of serfdom. This was exemplified by the projects of such public figures as M.P. Posen, K.D. Kavelin, A.I. Koshelev, Y.F. Samarin. Their opponent with a more radical view on the solution of the peasant question was A.M. Unkovsky, who refuted the projects of liberal figures, believing that the liberation of the peasants should happen at once and without remuneration. Radical thinking public figures proposed to make the peasants land tenants in place of land redemption.

The landlords agreed that the personal liberation of the peasants should take place as soon as possible in order to avoid unrest among the peasants waiting for the tsar's will, which could break out at once in all provinces of Russia.

Thus, the abolition of serfdom was conditioned by economic and social tensions in the social life of peasants and landlords, where the moral prerequisites were higher than the economic claims of the ruling class.

### III. CONCLUSION

The granting of land to peasants was a way of solving the most important state task - to guarantee the existence of the peasantry as a class. There is a conscious effort to treat the rights of peasants as a separate legal system, different from the rights of all other estates. The right to land reserved for the peasant was completely different from the right of ownership of land of all other estates. Thus, the preconditions for the subsequent widening of the gap between the legal consciousness of peasants and other estates of the Russian Empire were formed. The transformation of peasants into small owners was postponed.

At the same time, the class principle of organization of the entire Russian society remained unchanged. The peasantry was perceived as a class that needed guardianship and patronage, from which followed the need for special peasant governance. The landlord's authority was replaced by peasant self-government, which was in charge of tax collection and minor court cases.

Village (based on the community) and volost societies were formed with elected officials elected by the peasants through village assemblies. Peasant self-government had two functions: together with fiscal functions under the control of the local administration, it became the basis for the peasantry's involvement in civil life - participation in zemstvos, jury trials and other institutions.



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## ЗЕМЕЛЬНЫЙ ВОПРОС В КРЕСТЬЯНСКОЙ ЖИЗНИ РОССИИ В XIX ВЕКЕ

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### Аннотация

В первой половине XIX века Россия по-прежнему оставалась аграрной страной. Основную массу населения составляли крестьяне, большинство из которых принадлежали помещикам и находились в крепостной зависимости. В решении крестьянского вопроса Россия значительно отставала от других европейских стран. Личная зависимость крестьян от помещиков и, как следствие, незаинтересованность в результатах труда делали сельское хозяйство менее эффективным. Острая необходимость изменить сложившуюся ситуацию стала очевидной уже во второй половине XVIII века. В начале XIX века правительство пыталось скрыть наиболее предосудительные с социальной точки зрения формы крепостного права. Так, было запрещено печатать в газетах объявления о продаже крепостных.

**Ключевые слова:** земля, власть, крестьяне, император, сельское хозяйство.

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