


Russia in the second half of the XIXth century

Bourgeois reforms in Russia in the 60s - 70s

The development of capitalist relations in pre-reform Russia came into ever greater contradiction with the feudal-serf system. The defeat in the Crimean War exposed the rottenness and impotence of serf Russia. A crisis began in the policy of the ruling feudal class, which could no longer carry it out with the old serf methods. Urgent economic, social and political reforms were needed to prevent a revolutionary explosion in the country. On the country's agenda were the measures necessary in order not only to preserve, but also to strengthen the social and economic base of the autocracy.

All this was well aware of the new Russian emperor Alexander II, who ascended the throne on February 19, 1855. He understood the need for concessions, as well as a compromise in the interests of state life. After his accession to the throne, the young emperor brought into the cabinet of ministers his brother Constantine, who was a staunch liberal. The next steps of the emperor were also progressive - they allowed free travel abroad, the Decembrists were amnestied, censorship on publications was partially lifted, and other liberal measures were taken.

Alexander II took the problem of the abolition of serfdom with great seriousness. Starting from the end of 1857, a number of committees and commissions were created in Russia, the main task of which was to resolve the issue of liberating the peasantry from serfdom. At the beginning of 1859, to summarize and process the projects of the committees, Editorial commissions were created. The project developed by them was submitted to the government.



On February 19, 1861, Alexander II issued a manifesto on the emancipation of the peasants, as well as the "Regulations" regulating their new state. According to these documents, Russian peasants received personal freedom and most of the general civil rights, peasant self-government was introduced, whose duties included the collection of taxes and some judicial powers. At the same time, the peasant community and communal land tenure remained. The peasants still had to pay the poll tax and carry the conscription. As before, corporal punishment was applied to the peasants. The government believed that the normal development of the agrarian sector would make it possible for two types of farms to coexist: large landowners and small peasants. However, the peasants got land for allotments 20% less than those plots that they used before liberation. This greatly complicated the development of the peasant economy, and in a number of cases brought it to nothing. For the land received, the peasants had to pay the landowners a ransom that exceeded its value by one and a half times. But this was unrealistic, so 80% of the value of the land was paid to the landlords by the state. Thus, the peasants became debtors of the state and were obliged to return this amount within 50 years with interest. Be that as it may, the reform created significant opportunities for the agrarian development of Russia, although it retained a number of vestiges in the form of class isolation of the peasantry and communities.

The peasant reform entailed transformations of many aspects of the country's social and state life. 1864 was the year of birth of zemstvos - local government bodies. The sphere of competence of zemstvos was quite wide: they had the right to collect taxes for local needs and hire employees, were in charge of economic issues, schools, medical institutions, as well as charity issues.

Reforms and city life were also touched upon. Since 1870, self-government bodies began to form in cities. They were mainly in charge of economic life. The self-government body was named the City Duma, which formed the council. At the head of the Duma and the executive body was the mayor. The very same Duma was elected by city voters, whose composition was formed in accordance with the social and property qualification.

However, the most radical was the judicial reform carried out in 1864. The former class and closed court was canceled. Now the verdict in the reformed court was passed by jurors who were representatives of the public. The process itself became public, oral and adversarial. On behalf of the state, the prosecutor-prosecutor acted at the trial, and the defense of the accused was carried out by a lawyer - a sworn attorney.

Mass media and educational institutions were not ignored. In 1863 and 1864, new university charters were introduced, which restored autonomy to them. A new regulation on school institutions was adopted, according to which the state, zemstvos and city councils, as well as the church took care of them. Education was proclaimed accessible to all classes and confessions. In 1865, the preliminary censorship of publications was lifted and the responsibility for already published articles was placed on the publishers.

Serious reforms were carried out in the army as well. Russia was divided into fifteen military districts. Military educational institutions and the court-martial were modified. Since 1874, instead of recruiting, universal military service was introduced. The transformations also affected the sphere of finance, the Orthodox clergy and church educational institutions.

All these reforms, called "great", brought the socio-political structure of Russia in line with the needs of the second half of the XIX century, mobilized all representatives of society to solve national problems. The first step was taken towards the formation of the rule of law and civil society. Russia has entered a new, capitalist path of its development.

Alexander III and his counter-reforms

After the death of Alexander II in March 1881 as a result of a terrorist act organized by the People's Will, members of a secret organization of Russian utopian socialists, his son, Alexander III, ascended the Russian throne. At the beginning of his reign, confusion reigned in the government: knowing nothing about the forces of the populists, Alexander III did not dare to dismiss the supporters of his father's liberal reforms.

However, the very first steps of Alexander III's state activity showed that the new emperor was not going to sympathize with liberalism. The punitive system was significantly improved. In 1881, the Regulation on Measures to Preserve State Security and Public Peace was approved. This document expanded the powers of the governors, giving them the right to declare a state of emergency for an unlimited period and carry out any repressive actions. There were "security departments" under the jurisdiction of the gendarme corps, whose activities were aimed at suppressing and suppressing any illegal activity.

In 1882, measures were taken to tighten censorship, and in 1884 higher educational institutions were effectively deprived of their self-government. The government of Alexander III closed down liberal publications, increased by several times the tuition fee. The decree of 1887 "on the cook's children" made it difficult for children of the lower classes to enter higher educational institutions and gymnasiums. At the end of the 80s, reactionary laws were adopted, which, in fact, canceled a number of provisions of the reforms of the 60s and 70s.

Thus, the peasant estates remained and consolidated, and power was transferred to officials from among the local landowners, who combined judicial and administrative powers in their hands. The new Zemsky Code and the City Statute not only significantly reduced the independence of local self-government, but also reduced the number of voters several times. Changes were made in the activities of the court. The reactionaryness of the government of Alexander III manifested itself in the socio-economic sphere. An attempt to protect the interests of the ruined landowners led to a toughening of policy in relation to the peasantry. In order to prevent the emergence of a rural bourgeoisie, family divisions of the peasants were limited and obstacles were imposed on the alienation of peasant holdings. However, in the context of the increasingly complicated international situation, the government could not but encourage the development of capitalist relations, primarily in the field of industrial production. The priority was given to enterprises and industries of strategic importance. A policy of their encouragement and state protection was pursued, which led to their transformation into monopolists. As a result of these actions, threatening imbalances were growing, which could lead to economic and social upheavals.

The reactionary transformations of the 1880s-1890s were called "counterreforms". Their successful implementation was due to the lack of forces in Russian society that would be able to create an active opposition to the government's policy. To top it all off, they have greatly exacerbated the relationship between government and society. However, the counter-reforms did not achieve their goals: society could no longer be stopped in its development.