

## THE PEASANTS AND THE STATE IN WESTERN AND CENTRAL EUROPE IN THE XVI–XVII CENTURIES: POLITICAL AND COMPARATIVE STUDY (ENGLAND AND SOME GERMANY'S DUCHIES)



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The article examines the agricultural policy of Western and Central Europe in the XVI–XVII centuries in the context of international relations in Early Modern Times (on the example of England and some German's duchies).

**Keywords:** foreign policy, agricultural policy, international relations, England, Germany.

The conception of the agrarian development of any European state will not be complete if we don't take into account the policy conducted by the absolute monarchies of XVI–XVII centuries with respect to peasants. In my opinion this problem has not been yet studied enough in historiography though some historians touched upon its various aspects in their investigations<sup>1</sup>.

In this present article I am making an attempt to define the main trends in interrelation between absolute monarchies and peasant's communities of the period on the example of England and German's duchies. A special notice will be paid to the question connected with peasant's perception of the agrarian policy in England.

The literary sources and monograph which are at my disposal speak for fact that in the XVI–XVII centuries the England monarchy and German duchies interfered in the agrarian relation in this or that way and tried to regulate it in the necessary direction. Therefore one can speak about their special agrarian policy or at least about its separate elements.

At present the agrarian policy of English monarchy of the XVI – the first third of the XVII centuries has been most fully studied in the English and Russian historiog-

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raphy<sup>2</sup>. The analyses of the sources shows that it came to three main directions: the publication of laws for limitation of enclosures, legislative and administrative regulation of corn and corn products trade and some measures aimed at expansion of arable land and encouraging agriculture in the kingdom (encouraging at drained the marches, limitation on sowing woad etc.)<sup>3</sup>.

The laws on limitation of enclosures could hardly guarantee the integrity of communes' lands from being seized and turned into sheep pastures by landlords though nominally the legislation declared the preservation of some minimum common land for peasants. The state however did not take any concrete measures in this respect. No guarantees of preserving of peasants' arable lands and especially those of copyholders who possessed less than 20 acres were provided either. There were many reservations in the laws which permitted enclosures to make a conversion of arable as well as common lands<sup>4</sup>.

From the mid of the XVI century English peasants showed different attitude to enclosures. In the one hand there were legitimate peasants' enclosures an agreement on the other hand there were legal and illegal peasants' actions against enclosures. Obviously one of the reasons explaining this fact is in the following. Traditionally peasants had a strong belief in the sense of justice and considered the monarch to be their defender against the oppression of landlords. The sources prove the fact that peasants knew about the existence of the laws directed on the limitation of enclosures and tried to make the authorities put them into practice. In their petitions to the Queen they did not complain on all enclosures; they complained only on those which were illegitimate from their point of view. There weren't any reference in concrete clauses of the law. They accepted them on the whole. In their mains enclosures were a negative phenomenon which was prohibited by the law and thus illegal. If enclosures were illegal therefore actions against them were considered to be legal. It explained the unusual persistence of English peasants in their struggle with enclosures in courts, their complaints to the Queen and highly state officials. Even open riots against enclosures were thought to be quite a lawful means of peasant's struggle<sup>5</sup>. «Illegitimate enclosures» were not a single peasants' argument. There was one more very important item in their petitions i.e. «general use of tillage». This question was even discussed in the Parliament which in 1598 adopted a law in support of tillage. Peasants' petitions speak about their firm belief that the Queen did not know anything about the dis-

astrous condition so peasants demand that the Crown be informed by the officials about the real situation in the country<sup>6</sup>.

There is no evidence of peasants' protest against Elizabeth Tudor's sharp changes of the agrarian policy in 1593 in the sources. Later however there were complaints about the conversions of arable lands and the eviction of peasants but in fact it was their reaction on the policy of enclosures but not on the absence of law against them. There were practically no complaints about the inconsistency of the laws directed to the limitation of enclosures. They saw in them what they wanted and either did not see or did not want to see those clauses which gave a chance of their realization.

Among peasants there grew a conviction that the laws could not guarantee from eviction that it was necessary to break the gentry's resistance to put into practice «good laws». Even formally legislation gave peasants an opportunity to act against gentry-enclosures through special informers who could be found in every parish.

The sources testify that there were a lot of cases of peasants' collective actions in the legal form i.e. collection of money for lawsuits for the hire of guards for their lands from enclosurers<sup>7</sup>.

Sometimes peasants' actions were supported by the clearly who feared that their income might fall because of the depopulation of parishes.

Quite definite policy with respect to peasants may be observed in German duchies to the West of the Eble. In general it is characterized by the intention to keep the status quo in the country which first of all was expressed in German duchies' attempt to forbid buying up of peasants' lands by representatives of other estates and to establish control over peasants' commons. There also passed the laws against keeping sheep. The duchess of Wurtemberg was the first to pass the laws directed on limitation of sheep-breeding. Later the same laws were adopted by other duchies. The police of limitation of sheep-breeding must have been a definite success. Nevertheless the number of sheep in the neighborhood of Osnabruck was constantly growing up to the beginning of the XVIII century. There townsmen possessed 50 thousand sheep<sup>8</sup>.

In XVI-th century the duchies of the Western part of Germany as well as the English monarchies were facing the problem of growing woad. But unlike the English who limited the sowing area under woad by granting patents for its growing German duchies in the XVI–XVII centuries gave numerous orders and instructions encouraging the growing of woad and etc<sup>9</sup>.

This aspect of the agrarian policy of German duchies wasn't too much of success. The 30-th war is known to undermine the growing of woad in Germany.

From the second part of the XVI-th century the duchies of the South-Western part of Germany adopted laws encouraging the expansion of the area under crop. The duchies as well as the English monarchs forbade to turn arable lands into pastures, vineyards, gardens, hopyards etc.<sup>10</sup>

In German duchies to the East from the Eble we see quite a different attitude to peasants. Thus the duchies of Brandenburg in 1540 and 1572 adopted decrees, permitting landlords to by peasants' lands if they wish to live on them<sup>11</sup>. This decrees gave the landowners a wide opportunity their dolmen at the expense of peasants' land.

The decrees of 1616 in Pomerania, 1621, 1633, 1654 in Mecklenburg admitted the unlimited «Ab-schlachten der Bauern». Actually this decrees recognized the fact that German peasants were deprived of any rights on the land<sup>12</sup>.

The attempts of struggle with «Bauerlegen» were undertaking in Prussia and Austria for fiscal reasons in fact. The government of these lands was interested in landlords' land (Rittergut), freed from any taxes, being enlarged at the expense of peasant ' land. Therefore it was settled that the status of peasants' land would remain the same no matter who possessed it at that mo-

ment. Such decrees are known to have been adopted in Moravia in 1669 and in Bohemia in 1717.

As the lands of the Austrian Hapsburgs one not probably spoken about any definite state police because all agrarian questions were solved in local assemblies with feudal lords dominating there. Till the XIII-th century the emperors from the Habsburgs dynasty interfered with the decision of agrarian questions only in extreme cases.

In the XVI-th and XVII-th centuries the English monarchs and German duchies had to interfere with the agrarian relations and regulate them. Though the reasons of this interest were different nevertheless there were some common aspects in their police to peasants which influenced the fate the latter.

In my opinion the English monarchs established a more scale policy in respect to peasants. However it was inconsistent in many ways and not too effective in regard to preserving traditional agrarian relations and population. But even in this form, it allowed the English peasantry either to get use to the gradually changing conceptions of their life or to transfer to other categories of the English society.

However one should remember that this transference was very hard for the most part of small land copyholders and cotters.

At the same time the prolongation of the agrarian upheaval (the end of the XV-th — XVII-th centuries) softened this morbid feeling in this or that way.

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<sup>2</sup> Thirsk J. op. cit.; Martin J. op. cit.

<sup>3</sup> Statutes of the Realm of England. Vol. IV./Ed. by Luders A. and Tomlins L., 1819.; Great Britain. Privy Council. Acts of The Privy Council of England. Vols. 32 L., 1891-1900; Calendar of State Papers. Domestic series. Vols. 1547-1640.; A Complete Journal of the notes, speeches and debates, both of the House of Lords and House of Commons throughout the Reign of Queen Elizabeth/ by D'Ewes. L., 1693.; etc.

<sup>4</sup> Statutes... Vol. IV. 2 and 3 Phil. And Mary C.2, 5. Eliz. C. 2., 39 Eliz. C.1,2.

<sup>5</sup> The Victoria History of The Counties of England. A History of Yorkshire. Vol. 3. P. 472-478.; A History of Somersetshire. Vol. 2. P. 32.; Acts of the Privy Council of England. Vol. 13. p. 338, vol. 14. p. 91,133,159. vol. 24. p. 201., vol. 28. p. 442-443. etc.; Calendar of State Papers. Vol. 1591-1597. p. 316, 323 etc.

<sup>6</sup> Peasants' demand uprising against enclosures in Midland counties in 1607 testify the fact (VH Warwick. Vol. 2. p. 161. ; Tudor and Stuart Proclamations. Vol. 1. P. 121-122., ACP Vol. 25.p. 296. vol. 11.p. 113, 178. CSPD Vol. 1566-1579. p. 513 etc.).

<sup>7</sup> See: CSPD Vol. 1547-1625. According to the information of Acts of Privy Council (1574-1591) there were 30 collective complaints from peasants of 15 counties (APC vol. 13. p. 338, vol. 14. p. 96, 133, 159 etc.). For instance commoners of manor Hillmorton (Warwick) brought charges against their landlords 30 times in different courts.

<sup>8</sup> In Russian historiography agrarian police of German's duchies has not been studied in special monographs so far. Майер В.Е. Указ. соч. с. 42.

<sup>9</sup> Tudor and Stuart Proclamations. Vol.I. p. 84 etc.

Майер Е. В. Указ. соч. с. 42.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>11</sup> Кулишер М. Лекции по истории экономического быта Западной Европы. Ч.3. М., 1923. – С. 62-63.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem.

**Митрофанов В.П. Крестьяне и государство в Западной и Центральной Европе в XVI–XVII вв.: политико-сравнительное изучение (Англия и Германские княжества) / Пензенский государственный университет.**

В статье анализируется аграрная политика государств Западной и Центральной Европы в XVI–XVII веках в контексте формирования межгосударственных отношений раннего Нового времени (на примере Англии и Германских княжеств).

**Ключевые слова:** внешняя политика, аграрная политика, межгосударственные отношения, Англия, Германия.

**Митрофанов В.П. Селяни і держава в Західній і Центральній Європі в XVI–XVII ст.: політико-порівняльне вивчення (Англія і Німецькі князівства) / Пензенський державний університет.**

У статті аналізується аграрна політика держав Західної та Центральної Європи в XVI–XVII століттях в контексті формування міждержавних відносин раннього Нового часу (на прикладі Англії і Німецьких князівств).

**Ключові слова:** зовнішня політика, аграрна політика, міждержавні відносини, Англія, Німеччина.

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