

**VOLOST ADMINISTRATION IN THE STATUTE ON SIBERIAN PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATION  
OF 1822  
(To the 250th birth anniversary of Michael Speransky)**

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The subject. Many shortcomings in the current state of local government and self-government systems are that in the process of forming the institutions of Russian public power, there were not evolutionary qualitative changes, but, on the contrary, there were processes of quantitative complication of mechanisms and institutions for the exercise of public power, making the role of the people in administrative processes impossible or insignificant. The experience of pre-revolutionary Siberian local self-government is a proven resource in historical practice for improving the organization of local government, as well as the mechanism of public administration, which was prepared on local, Siberian soil, and was not copied from the socio-political systems of foreign countries.

The purpose of the article is to identify principles and features of the peasant self-government in Siberia laid down by the reform of the outstanding Russian statesman Michael Speransky.

The theoretical and methodological basis of the research are the categories and principles of materialistic dialectics, formal-logical, systemic, comparative-legal and formal-legal methods.

The main results. The conditions of life and traditions of self-governing peasant communities in Siberia made it possible for a very long period, up to the revolutionary upheavals of 1917, to find a solution that freed the crown government from the costs of the lower level of local government and its performance of the functions of administration and court in the Siberian village.

Conclusions. Peasant self-government was endowed with state powers and included in the mechanism of state power according to the reform of Michael Speransky.

## 1. Introduction

Socio-political life in modern Russia is characterized by serious changes in the economic, political and social spheres. Knowledge of the historical past has not only cognitive and theoretical significance, they are important components of research about the present. In many ways, therefore, it is especially important to conduct research on the history of self-governing principles in pre-Soviet Russia and Siberia. When studying the problems facing local self-government in the modern Russian Federation, it is necessary to turn to its emergence and development, which will make it possible to isolate positive trends and identify negative phenomena. Knowledge about its structure, powers and their main forms of activity will make it possible to have a correct judgment about the past and help predict the future. Negative results of scientifically unsupported recommendations for the use of pre-Soviet self-governing systems for the present institutions increase the importance of reliable knowledge about them. The urgent need is to explain the complex processes that took place in the relations of power and society on the Siberian outskirts of the Russian Empire, it is necessary to study both positive and negative experience that was accumulated by pre-Soviet self-governing bodies, to identify those problems of self-government organization that, for various reasons, do not come into view and are overboard by researchers.-lawyers [1, p. 4].

The relevance of the chosen topic is also determined by the fact that one of the main directions of the democratization of society in the Russian Federation is the organization of local self-government as the fundamental basis of civil society. The peculiarity of the formation of self-governing institutions, both in modern and pre-revolutionary Russia, is that self-governing principles appeared and received legal regulation not "from below", as it happened in some Western countries, but "from above" - as a result of the implementation of state reforms [2, p. 18].

## 2. Estate peasant self-government in Siberia before the reform of M.M. Speransky

The traditional form of self-government organization among the Siberian state peasants, who did not know landlord oppression, was communal - secular self-government, which existed within the peasant communities. Its purpose was to fulfill the functions of local self-government by the estate worlds-corporations of peasants, which was delegated by the state. Moreover, the attitude of Siberian peasants to elective service for the benefit of the community was as negative as to other duties in favor of the state, which was reflected in peasant everyday views. The institutions of self-government in Siberia were characterized by administrative guardianship by local police authorities, a high degree of centralization, as well as strict bureaucratic subordination [3, p. 323].

The local Siberian state authorities sought to attract loyal and authoritative peasants to perform administrative and police powers, trying to strengthen communal principles in the region. The crown power saw the main tasks of the peasant "worlds" in guaranteeing the payment of taxes and the performance of duties, as well as in ensuring public order and uninterrupted recruitment into the army.

The policy of the crown authorities preserved the traditions that had become patriarchal in Siberian peasant societies, striving to preserve the mechanisms of paternalism and social guardianship in any way. The main task of the crown power was also the desire to avoid pauperization, to preserve the peasant solvency, to strengthen its interests in fiscal and tax policy. The supreme power, acting in this direction, not only strengthened administrative, police and financial oppression, but also sought to rationalize the economic system, increase the level of education of peasants, improve local governance. Siberian peasant "worlds" acted as courts of first instance for minor crimes and civil disputes between members of communities, and also ensured the protection of public order and security on their territory [4, p. 141].

The absence of landlords and noble self-

government, the huge size of the territories of the Siberian counties, forced the supreme power, during the reign of Emperor Paul I, to legislate in the region in 1797, the lower administrative units that had arisen before - volosts. The law also established elective positions of volost heads, who performed their duties for remuneration, on an exempt basis. The inner life of rural peasant "worlds" was determined by the decisions of volost and rural peasant gatherings [5, p. 56]. At peasant meetings, volost secular huts were chosen – rural volost administrations. They consisted of the volost head, elders, foremen, clerks, tax collectors and desyatskys. The secular huts under the supervision of local police bodies – the zemstvo courts were supposed to supervise everything that was done in the territories of the volosts. In cases of special importance, the village assembly could choose attorneys and pass sentences. Extraordinary powers were granted to the attorneys, and officials of the volost administrations were reassigned to them for the duration of their powers [6, p. 112].

### **3. Prerequisites for the reform of class peasant self-government in Siberia**

M.M. Speransky was appointed the new Siberian governor-General in 1819, who had extensive experience in state-building and knew well that noble goals in practice may not be realized, or will be realized, but not as the legislator suggests [7, p. 24]. He spoke about the huge difference between the Siberian outskirts and the European provinces of the empire, as well as the fact that local administration, established on the model of central Russia, is not suitable for the region without major changes [8, p. 38].

M.M. Speransky has also repeatedly said that "local government bodies in Siberia contribute to abuse not only passively, but also actively" [9, p. 24]. The main reason, in his opinion, was the lack of legality in local administration: "where laws are not enforced, or they do not exist at all, personal power dominates everything. That is why no one in Siberia relies on laws, but on officials, and in almost every case they resort to bribes" [10, p.

103].

Having worked in Siberia for a year and a half, M.M. Speransky, with the help of his closest employees G.S. Batenkov and F.I. Zeyer prepared a project for the reform of local government in Siberia. Its main tasks were to create and systematize local regional legislation and legal regulation of local administration [11, p. 18]. In total, 10 draft laws were prepared on the main issues of the region's vital activity. The projects involved the reorganization of the administration and territorial structure of the Siberian outskirts of the empire, they regulated the duties of the population, stimulated the development of local agriculture, trade and industry, determined the legal status of the indigenous peoples of the region. One of them was a bill on the reorganization and legal regulation of the estate peasant volost administration [12, p. 32].

Taken together, these 10 bills, after discussion in a specially created Siberian Committee and promulgation, bypassing the State Council, by Emperor Alexander I, became known as the "Institution for the Administration of Siberian Provinces" in 1822 [13, p. 44]. It became for M.M. Speransky the first experience of systematization of legislation, which determined, subsequently, under his leadership, the first incorporation and codification of domestic legislation. The "establishment" of 1822 was also the first experience of creating regional legislation in the Russian Empire.

### **4. The essence of the reform of class peasant self-government in Siberia**

According to the "Institution for the Administration of the Siberian Provinces" of 1822, the volost boards included volost heads, elders and clerks. Elections of the above-mentioned officials of the volost board were held annually in December, representatives-attorneys from each of the settlements of the volost. Each attorney (male householder) was elected from one hundred voters. Having gathered together, the attorneys formed the so-called lay assembly - the assembly of electors. The volost head, the headman and the

clerk elected at the lay meeting were represented by the zemstvo court for approval by the local regional or provincial government, and the elected elders were approved by the local district zemstvo court. The "institution" abolished the positions of hundreds and fifties that had previously existed in the settlements, and only the desyatskys elected in the settlements were left, who became known as "foremen", and a new position of the head of the volost administration was introduced – the "volost head" [14, p. 358].

The urban settlements of the region were located at considerable distances from each other and their role as centers pulling together administrative and economic areas was weaker than in the central provinces of the country. This increased the importance of the volost administration and even gave it some autonomy.

The powers of the volost boards under the "Establishment" of 1822 duplicated the powers of the district police departments, with the only difference that the scope of their activities extended only to the volosts they managed. In addition to exercising police powers, they were engaged in collecting tax arrears and administering justice for "unimportant offenses" [15, p.16]. Volost boards dealt with economic disputes between societies and settlements within their volosts. According to the law, the affairs of elections to volost administrations in the districts were under the jurisdiction of local district police (district chiefs and zemstvo police officers), and in the provinces – local bodies of the Ministry of Internal Affairs – provincial boards. The removal from office and bringing to legal responsibility of volost heads, elders and clerks depended on the governors-General and the Councils of the Main Departments of the Siberian Governorates-General [16, p.53].

The volost board was obliged to publish decrees and orders of state authorities. The peasant volost self-government was entrusted with a wide range of responsibilities. It was engaged in the annual distribution of taxes and duties, both local – volost and national. He was entrusted with the supervision of the maintenance of roads and posts, the fight against epidemics, public and fire safety, apartment

military service, the distribution of exiles, the collection of indisputable obligations and even the administration of justice in unimportant cases [14, p. 354].

In the organization of peasant public administration, there were tendencies to strengthen control by local bodies of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which performed the functions of state administrations, over elected peasant-volost self-governing institutions [17, p. 1236]. The "institution" of 1822 sought to bureaucratize peasant self-government from within, the legislator sought to supplant the customary law that existed in peasant communities-worlds with imperial legislation. However, at the same time, such an impact, as well as the focus of the activities of local government bodies on the volost administration, led to the alienation of bodies and officials of peasant self-governing institutions from local peasant voters [18, p. 98].

Volost administration, from the moment of its appearance in Siberia and with the beginning of state regulation of its activities, gradually became tightly controlled and even absorbed by the system of local state police management, which in its activities began to successfully use the institutions of communal peasant self-organization [19, p. 198]. Among the members of the volost boards, the positions of volost clerks who knew the office work well became particularly significant [20, p. 43]. In 1823, in a report on the West Siberian Governor-General, the local Governor-General P.M. Kaptsevich directly noted: "volost boards are completely dependent on clerks, since the peasants from whom they choose volost heads and elders are not literate and do not know clerical practice at all" [21, p. 15].

The reform of peasant volost self-government in the first half of the XIX century consolidated the system of relations between the elected and state authorities in accordance with the principles of paternalism and centralism, which provided for the subordination of volost administration to local state bodies [22, p. 21]. Siberian peasant self-government bodies were incorporated into the system of local state authorities and became part of a single vertical of power [23, p. 775]. They differed only in the nature and conditions of their

activities, the structure and forms of their organization and were under the supervision of local bodies of the Ministry of Internal Affairs – zemstvo courts, which, however, was perceived by Siberian peasants and the volost board itself as a completely justified and legitimate state of affairs [24, p. 234].

## 5. Conclusions

M.M. Speransky laid the principle of "unity" and "hierarchy" of local authorities in the basis of interaction between the estate peasant volost self-government and local state administration, represented in Siberia by the zemstvo courts and district chiefs, which consolidated the strict subordination of the volost administration to officials and bodies of the regional administrative and police vertical of power and provided a commonality of ways to solve issues and the unquestioning execution of the instructions and instructions of the crown administration [25, p. 91].

Peasant self-government, according to the reform of M.M. Speransky, was endowed with state powers, as well as the rights of a legal entity and was included in the mechanism of state power [26, p. 69]. The conditions of life and traditions of self-governing peasant communities in Siberia made it possible for a very long period, up to the revolutionary upheavals of 1917, to find a solution that freed the crown government from the costs of the lower level of local government and its performance of the functions of administration and court in the Siberian village. Some features and traditions in the organization of volost administration were embodied in volost and rural self-government in post-revolutionary Russia and the USSR.

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