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GROWTH OF AGRARIAN CONTRADICTIONS IN KUBAN DURING REVOLUTIONARY TRANSFORMATIONS OF 1917

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Abstract

The article studies agrarian contradictions during revolutionary transformations of 1917 in the Kuban region. They differed from similar processes in other regions of the Russian Empire which were associated with the colonization and social structure of the population. The study concluded that in 1917, the Kuban society was split by social and national groups of the region. Agrarian contradictions between the Cossacks and the nonresident peasantry were acute. Attempts to solve the agrarian issue using democratic methods failed. The Provisional Government could not create a power structure in the Kuban region. Abolishment of land committees, the regional council and executive committee marked the transfer of power to the Kuban Military Government which ignored interests of non-residents and the poorest Cossacks. This pushed the latter to solve land problems using violent methods. The Kuban Military Government was forced to use violent methods to suppress agrarian disorders. However, these efforts were not successful. The unwillingness of the Cossack leaders to make concessions, their inability to reach a compromise caused civil confrontations. The aim is to study the nature, characteristics and dynamics of the development of agrarian contradictions in the Kuban region during the revolutionary transformations of 1917. The research subject is agrarian contradictions in the Kuban region during the revolutionary transformations of 1917. The systems approach is important for studying agrarian contradictions during revolutionary transformations. The historical-genetic method, problem-chronological method and the historical-comparative method were used to study the development of the issue, its components and directions for further research.

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Keywords: Agrarian contradictions, mountaineers, land committees, nonresident peasants, Cossacks, self-capture of land.



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1. Introduction

The history of agrarian contradictions in the Russian province during the revolutionary period attracts a lot of research interest. There are a lot of historiographic works based on the analysis of a large amount of factual material. They allow for reconstruction of important events and processes of regional history. However, its characteristic feature is analysis of the problems of regional history connected with revolutionary events.

Western historians have changed the angle of analysis of the revolution and the agrarian issue in the Russian province (Raleigh, 1986, 2002; Badcock, 2007). They emphasized that in certain Russian regions, the revolution was caused by local conflicts.

This approach to the study of land conflicts in the Kuban region seems promising, expands the boundaries of the scientific vision of the problem.

2. Problem Statement

Agrarian contradictions in the Kuban region had a pronounced specificity due to the peculiarities of colonization and the social structure of the population. The lands of the Kuban Cossack army accounted for 79% of the land area of the region, the state owned 7.5%, private owners 6%, and rural societies 7% of land reserves. By 1905, among the Cossacks who made up 40% of the population the average land plot was 3 acres. Land plots of the mountaineers were 18 acres. Non-resident peasants who accounted for 36% of the population, were in the most difficult situation. Only 18.4% of these peasants had their own land plots (Gorodetsky, 1911). As a result, nonresidents were forced to rent land, mainly from the Cossacks. The extremely negative factor was the ever-increasing price of land rent.

Active agrarian colonization of the Kuban region caused one of the highest rates of population growth in Russia, amounting to 57% from 1900 to 1917. This growth had a negative impact on the land situation of all groups of the population, and reduced land plots of non-residents and noble residents. It is important to note that the share of noble residents was only 0.6% in the structure of the Kuban population.

The state provided the Cossacks with a whole set of land use benefits. The Cossack land was recognized inviolable and was not subject to alienation. A significant increase in the autocracy of the real status of one of the communities generated hostile attitudes of other classes. However, it is noteworthy that in the early twentieth century, socio-economic differentiation within the Cossack class increased, and the share of impoverished Cossacks increased.

The social structure and land use system were a major factor in the growth of social contradictions which became conflicting during the revolutionary events.

3. Research Questions

The research subject is agrarian contradictions in the Kuban region during the revolutionary transformations of 1917.

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim is to study the nature, characteristics and dynamics of the development of agrarian contradictions in the Kuban region during the revolutionary transformations of 1917.

5. Research Methods

The systems approach is important for studying agrarian contradictions during revolutionary transformations. It provides an opportunity to analyze the agrarian situation in the Kuban region as an integral system with its elements and characteristics and study socio-economic and political processes in the region and Russia as a whole.

The historical-genetic method was used to determine the nature of agrarian conflicts, their causes and circumstances, factors that influenced their aggravation.

The problem-chronological method was used to study the initial state of development of the issue, its components and directions for further research.

The study of the history of agrarian conflicts taking into account local conditions and conflicts required the historical-comparative method.

6. Findings

The February Revolution of 1917 exposed agrarian problems in the Kuban region and highlighted issues related to the ownership and use of land. The overthrow of the autocracy and democratic slogans were approved by the nonresident peasantry and the poorest Cossacks. They hoped to solve their agrarian problems.

Nonresident peasants and the poorest Cossacks demanded equal distribution of land which involved its partial withdrawal from the rich Cossacks. Self-seizure of land plots, refusal of rental payment aggravated contradictions between the Cossacks and non-resident peasants.

The Provisional Government used lawful methods for solving agrarian problems and implemented measures to prevent land seizures. On March 19, 1917, it adopted a resolution "On development of materials on the land issue". It was noted that the land issue should be solved by the Constituent Assembly. The Kuban Commissioner of the Provisional Government L.K. Bardij protected private and military lands ignoring the interests of non-resident and poor Cossacks.

Particular attention was paid to the land issue at the First regional congress of representatives of settlements which took place in Ekaterinodar in April 1917. The deputies tried to resolve the existing contradictions and create a new system of local self-government. The congress confirmed the Cossacks' rights to land plots which contradicted the interests of the majority of non-resident population and the poorest part of the Cossacks.

In April 017, the congress of the Kuban Military Council was held in Yekatirinodar. The adopted resolution stated that all the land plots in the Kuban Region, the seven-dimensional maritime zone and the subsoil were property of the Kuban Cossack army. All private land plots allocated as the highest awards, state, monastic, and church lands became property of the Army. The lands of peasants and small owners

within the land norm remained in their use (Artyomov, 2007). Thus, the resolution expanded the privileges of the Cossacks which created conditions for social conflicts in the Kuban society.

The land issue in the Cossack regions was considered by the Second General Cossack Congress, held in Petrograd in June 1917. The resolution adopted by the Congress declared “all the lands of the Cossack troops, forests, water and subsoil” the historical heritage of the Cossacks. All private, state, church and monastic lands allocated as the highest awards should be returned to the property of each Cossack army. Thus, the congress confirmed the resolution on the land issue adopted by the April Kubank Rada’s congress.

Nonresidents’ attitude to the resolution was hostile since it pushed for the unauthorized seizure of military and landowner lands leaving no legal basis for resolving the issue taking their interests into account.

Trying to prevent further growth of discontent, in 1917, the Provisional Government adopted the Decree “On land committees”. It provided for creation of provincial, county, and volost land committees under the Ministry of Agriculture. They had to settle land conflicts, distribute land funds and prevent destruction of farms. Creation of land committees was a desperate attempt to prevent conflicts (Braun, 1992).

The idea of creating land committees was approved by the non-resident peasantry and the poorest Cossacks which considered them as bodies of revolutionary power which should fulfill their aspirations (Shustrouytsky, 2013). Peasant and Cossack assemblies made decisions about equalizing the land use.

All the regional departments reported land seizures and agrarian riots. The seizures were not spontaneous. Peasants acted rationally, using pseudo-legal means to seize the land, using revolutionary rhetoric of rights and freedoms (Badcock, 2007).

Kuban social revolutionaries took an active part in solving the agrarian issue. Based on the demands of nonresident peasants and the poorest Cossacks, they began to create peasant-Cossack unions throughout the region. In Ekaterinodar, the peasant-Cossack union was created on May 25, 1917. The main goal of the unions was to transfer all landlord and private lands into a special state fund for further allotment of land to all who wish to cultivate it.

Attempts of the social revolutionaries to discuss the issue of land delimitation caused irreconcilable disputes in the regional executive committee. The Cossacks took a discriminatory position, preventing the non-residents from participating in the distribution of land plots. The Cossacks wanted the military lands to remain under the jurisdiction of the Military government.

The Commissioner of the Kuban region suggested the most stringent measures to eliminate the unauthorized land plowing. Trying to stop the agrarian unrest, the regional government demanded to refrain from seizing the land.

Land committees were created under difficult conditions. In settlements where a lot of non-residents lived the process was rather easier.

For the Cossacks, creation of land committees was considered as a violation of their rights. The Military Government sent an appeal to the Main Land Committee arguing that the Decree of April 21, 1917, was not relevant for the Cossack regions. On May 25, Commissioner L.K. Bardizh appealed to the military government and the regional executive committee with a request to create a commission that would have to develop instructions for creation of land committees taking into account local conditions. This commission was created in June 1917. Its chairman Mikhail B. Gorodetsky was sent to the Second session

of the Main Land Committee where the Minister of Agriculture promised him to adopt a special decree on land committees in the Cossack regions.

In the conditions of growing contradictions between the Military government, nonresident and the poorest Cossacks, the regional congress of representatives of peasant-Cossack unions was convened on June 14 in Yekaterinodar. The program adopted by the congress dealt with the destruction of private property, transfer of all lands without redemption to the egalitarian use of working people, transfer of water, mineral resources, forests to the state. It involved creation of land committees in order to improve the agrarian situation and prepare documents for the Constituent Assembly.

However, the Cossack leaders continued to prevent land committees from being created. As a result, in June 1917, the regional commissariat decided to suspend the creation of land committees until a special provision on land committees in the Cossack regions is adopted.

Considering land committees as institutions ensuring representation and protection of their agrarian interests, on July 1, 1917, non-residents supported by social revolutionaries tried to legalize land committees by forming country councils. However, irreconcilable differences between representatives of the Cossacks and non-residents split divided the Oblast Executive Committee into the Kuban Military Council and the Non-Resident Regional Executive Committee.

On July 4, Bardizh issued an order abolishing the Oblast Executive Committee. On July 9, he announced the transfer of full powers to the Kuban Rada. The civilian committees were abolished.

The Kuban Military Government possessed all the powers. Implementation of the decrees of the regional commissioner meant the concentration of all powers in the hands of the Cossack leaders.

Trying to resist the Cossack administration, on July 9, 1917, the leadership of the moderate socialist parties of Ekaterinodar Council, the regional executive committee of the Peasant Cossack Deputies Soviets, and the regional executive committee of non-residents adopted a resolution which said that the transfer of all powers to the military government can deprive non-residents their civil rights.

Abolishment of the Oblast Executive Committee, civil committees and suspension of the work of the land committees aggravated social confrontation. The Kuban regional government received letters with numerous complaints.

The Kuban Military Government was forced to eliminate land squatting. To combat agrarian unrest, on August 14, 1917, a special order creating local police was adopted. However, the measures were not successful.

The fears of the Cossacks regarding the land issue were associated with agrarian riots and the decisive position on the land issue of the Minister of Agriculture who was convinced that " the Cossacks will have to sacrifice part of their lands" (Holguist, 2002).

In August 12, 1917, the chairman of the main land committee A. Yushko attempted to renew the work of land committees. However, they faced opposition of the Military government and the regional commissioner who said that the provision on land committees is only suitable for the provinces.

The issue of land committees was discussed by the II Regional Peasant-Cossack Congress. The delegates concluded that the Commissioner of the Provisional Government and the Military Government relied on brute force and organized terror, and that non-resident people face hunger.

In the conditions of growing agrarian contradictions, on September 24, the Second Kuban Regional Council began its work in Ekaterinodar. Issues of the renewal of the work of land committees and measures to combat agrarian unrest were discussed. In order to preserve the Cossack lands, they adopted a resolution according to which cases of agrarian conflicts were considered by the courts out of turn. The resolution provided for the right to use armed force against any land seizure.

The Rada criticized activities of the land committees, noting that they "became party organizations which ruined land business in the Kuban region". Thus, the land committee creation program failed due to stubborn opposition of the Cossacks.

The agrarian policy of the Provisional Government failed in other Russian regions as well. The American historian Retish (2008) wrote that the Provisional Government did not succeed in incorporating the multi-million Russian peasantry into its political national project.

The study of Kuban land conflicts actualizes the study of the agrarian issue in relation to the mountain population of the region. The mountain minority of the region became significant.

In the conditions of growing contradictions with non-residents, the Cossacks made an attempt to establish a union with the highlanders. Cossack agitators were sent to the mountain villages of the region.

In August 1917, in Khakurinohabl, a congress of mountaineers of the Kuban region was held. The congress was attended by representatives of the Cossacks who wanted to incline delegates to the side of the Military government. The participants of the congress adopted a resolution containing land immunity provisions, establishing the right to the unconditional use of mountain pastures and preservation of prices and conditions for the land rental (GAKK). Land distribution requirements were not put forward.

The congress discussed the issue of support in regional disagreements. Under the influence of local aristocracy and Cossacks, they decided to establish a union with the Cossacks to defend their interests in the future Constituent Assembly (GAKK). This decision was dictated by the fact that the Highlanders considered the Cossacks the most influential political force which can solve national-political and socio-economic problems (Emtyl, 2011).

Some participants told about contradictions between the Cossacks and non-residents which can be transformed into armed conflicts. In this regard, they saw no reason to quarrel with non-resident people who did not claim their "land plots" (Emtyl, 2011).

The establishment of a union between the Highlanders and the Cossacks was negatively perceived by non-residents who treated it as a conspiracy. In autumn of 1917, the Kuban society was split.

7. Conclusion

The revolutionary events of February 1917 aggravated agrarian contradictions between the social groups of Kuban. The relations of the Cossacks and the nonresident peasantry were acute. The inconsistent actions of the Provisional Government aggravated this confrontation.

Attempts to create land committees which had to implement land reforms and resolve local land conflicts were not successful. Land committees faced stubborn resistance from the leaders of the Cossacks who were against any agrarian reforms that changed the existing land legislation and limited Cossack land privileges.

Attempts to solve the agrarian issue using democratic methods were not successful. The abolishment of the land committees, the regional council and executive committee, local civilian committees marked the transfer of full power to the Kuban Military Government. This encouraged the non-residents and poor Cossacks to solve land problems using violent methods.

The Kuban Military Government used violent methods to suppress unrest. However, its efforts were not successful. The unwillingness of the Cossack leaders to make concessions, their inability to compromise caused a large-scale civil confrontation.

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