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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PEASANT
COMMUNE IN RUSSIA

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	INTRODUCTION	1
II	IDEOLOGICAL THEORIES REGARDING THE PEASANT COMMUNE	3
III	EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF THE PEASANT COMMUNE	15
IV	EMANCIPATION AND THE COMMUNE	34
V	DISINTEGRATION OF THE PEASANT COMMUNE	54
VI	CONCLUSION	65

"Even into paradise the peasants enter
only by communes."
--Khomiakov

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The subject of the origin and development of the peasant commune and of the practice of making a periodic redistribution of land is perhaps the most obscure and controversial question in the whole range of Russian history. This subject, however, gave origin to numerous theories and polemics in the minds of Russian intellectuals. The first aim of this thesis is not to present a complete history of the village commune in Russia. That task would demand too much research and, at the present time, there is not enough material available. Instead, the aim is more limited. This thesis undertakes only to bring forward some essential historical data to illuminate this important question.

Unfortunately, until the end of the fifteenth century, there is very little complete and substantial information concerning the life of the peasantry. Even the fragmentary hints about the peasant commune are obscured by different ideologies which were predominant in Russia prior to and after the eman-

cipation. Therefore, the second aim of this thesis is to disassociate the commune from the myth in which it has been wrapped by the overzealous and ardent theorists.

This thesis will try to prove that the village commune was not a peculiarly Slav phenomenon and that it was not fit to bring agrarian socialism to Russia. In Russia, where the needs of the state overwhelmed other public needs, the commune, under pressure of the government, was either weakened, strengthened, preserved, or abolished, according to the economic needs of the state. The commune in the Kievan period provided promising and extensive bases for individualism and self-expression within itself, but the growth of the centralized Russian state gradually transformed the commune into a regimented cell which Slavophiles and Westernizers ironically glorified and later revolutionaries looked upon with approval.

In order to prove his contentions, the author went through four steps. Chapter two shows briefly the ideologies regarding the peasant commune which were prevalent prior to and shortly after the peasant emancipation. The following chapters depict the peasant commune as it existed in reality, from the time of Kievan Russia until the reforms of Stolypin, focusing attention on its economic development and the powerful interference of the state, which shaped and determined the constitution and role of the Russian commune.

CHAPTER II

IDEOLOGICAL THEORIES REGARDING THE PEASANT COMMUNE

The several decades which preceded the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 were filled with discussions and debates among the searching intellectual minds of Russia concerning the future course and destiny of the serfs. Since Russia was predominantly agricultural and her people predominantly peasant, the deliberations mainly centered around Russia's future through agricultural transformation and development. The peasant commune in particular was the subject of heated debates and its presence in the village was considered a promising omen and an omnipotent weapon through which Russia would pass into a more glorious and fulfilling future. The schools of thought which concerned themselves with the question of the commune differed on particular issues, but firmly agreed in general as to the inevitably positive aspect of the commune for the future of Russia. The views dealing with the commune were characterized by their highly a priori theoretics and overly enthusiastic nature. The ideas of the time were distinguished by their severe anti-individualistic tendency and the firm belief in socialism and the communal principle for solving the problems of mankind. The institution of the com-

mune which previously had been latent and concealed was now dragged out into the light.

Now, the crusades of those days no longer stir our imagination or excite our feelings. The battle cries which then sounded daring and defiant are today either forgotten or bear the stamp of academic approbation. But now, the hideous ideology, collectivism, in present day Russia has enslaved the Russian peasants in morbidly equalitarian collectives which forever restrain their initiative and neither satisfy nor solve the agricultural problems of Russia.

The Slavophiles' interpretation of the commune was abstractly ethical rather than material, and went so far as to almost deify the plain peasantry and the Russian commune. The Slavophiles based their admiration of the commune upon their belief in the worthlessness of the separate entity. The principle of the commune has been a counterpart to that of the Slavophile's Sobornost; that is, the merging of the individual in the mass and the weakness of individual will and initiative.

To a large extent, the Slavophiles' praise of the commune reflected the theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church which declared that the spirit in the human being was a gift from heaven to illuminate his terrestrial darkness and to create in the individual the possibility of deification. The spiritual gift, however, was bestowed on the congregation of the faithful, and the individual received it only through his membership in the congregation. Hence, it is the duty of the

individual to conform to the congregation. The Church is built up of all its members, lay and ecclesiastic, gathered together in mutual love. This benevolence is the necessary prerequisite for the presence of heavenly truth. The words of Christ, "Where two or three are gathered together in Thy name Thou wilt grant their request." seems to correspond to the meaning of the peasant commune for the Slavophiles. Dostoevsky paraphrased the same idea by having one of his characters state that "All are responsible for everybody."--the belief that everyone is responsible for and must atone for the sins of all¹.

This theocratic-political doctrine, implying almost a deification of the commune, was further developed and strengthened by the able Slavophile spokesman, Konstantin Aksakov. Like all Slavophiles he considered pre-Petrine Russia and peasant Russia sacred and he literally adopted the title "holy". As a result, he regarded the capital of the Muscovite state, Moscow, as the ideal ethical capital of Holy Russia. In his political vision of Russia he regarded the commune and the communal principle as a necessary element for Russian existence. In this political sphere, according to Konstantin Aksakov, Russia possessed a two-fold structure--as country and as state. The former consisted of "the organic fusion of all the individual communes into a single community." Individual

¹John Maynard, Russia in Flux, pp. 222-30.

communes, according to him, represented a purely ethical entity based upon the unanimous consent of all its members. Aksakov praised the principle of the Russian commune in which, according to him, decisions have to be based on the unanimous consent of all its members; whereas in the West, the majority rules and oppression and coercion exist as a result. Aksakov characterized the Russian commune as possessing an "inner truth" which is acquired through the free conviction and conscience of all the involved individuals. In the West, however, a superficial or "outer truth exists which manifests itself in coercive and conquering authority established on laws, constitutions, and legal guarantees"¹.

The Slavophiles unjustly bestowed on the commune and the peasants a secret and mystic "inner truth" and saw Russia's salvation in the existence of this truth. By adopting a mystic attitude toward reality, the Slavophiles were guilty of promoting a cleavage between the intellectuals and the lower orders of society from which Russian society suffered for decades to come. They were the first overzealous worshippers of the peasants and plain folk. They held, at least in theory, that they should return to the people and unite with them on the ground of a common faith. Slavophile teaching was not a utilitarian philosophy capable of being applied in the villages, but rather an ethico-religious belief extensively separated

¹T. G. Masaryk, Spirit of Russia, v. 1, pp. 266-67.

from the actual reality of peasant life.

Another influential Slavophile spokesman sided with Konstantin Aksakov, however with chauvinistic tones, in glorifying the Russian commune. N. Y. Danilevsky, a mouthpiece for the Pan-Slavic movement, condemned the elements of individualism and violence which deformed the West, and praised the Russian commune for its cooperative aspect. Khomiakov also sided with Aksakov by praising the composition of the commune very highly, considering it a primitive, uncorrupted Russian institution where the gift of truth was attributed not to the totality of the associated members but to the moral principle of mutual love¹.

French socialism likewise exercised a decisive influence on Russian intellectuals, particularly the Westernizers. Although French socialism differed from the Slavophile's ethico-religious philosophy by its utilitarian-materialistic approach, the two schools nevertheless shared a common ground of the time--anti-individualism.

Fourier attacked the social evils which resulted from competition, speculation and the profit system. Society was totally maladjusted for proper development. Fourier did not believe in centralization, but wanted to create co-partnership communities, which, if increased in number, would slowly produce a complete social transformation.

¹Maynard, op. cit., pp. 233-38.

He emphasized agricultural and handicraft communities rather than manufacturing communities. Membership in these communities was to be entirely voluntary. Saint-Simon also urged that men should work in cooperatives and should earn according to capacity and productivity. Unscrupulous individualism, which created the industrial capitalism of the West, was regarded with morbid contempt by both Russian Slavophiles, Westernizers, and Radical Socialists. They wanted, if possible, to escape the horrors of capitalism by omitting this latter stage of development and by passing into socialism by using Russian agrarian socialism--the commune. Westernizers, contrary to the Slavophiles, gave the commune a socialistic significance. The commune, they held, preserved and would preserve Russia from the growth of capitalism and the hungry proletariat, and represented the agrarian communism desired by the socialists.

Even "scientific" Marx and Engels who exhibited ideological animosity towards the peasants in 1882, in writing an introduction for the Russian translation of the Communist Manifesto, reluctantly insisted that the commune ought not to be broken up as the village community had been in the West, for it might serve as the starting point of communistic development, but could do so only on the condition that the Russian revolution should give the signal for a working class revolution in the West¹.

¹Edmund Wilson, To the Finland Station, pp. 348-49.

The father of the Russian Populist movement, A. Herzen, before he left Russia in the middle forties, maintained the opinion that the commune was not solely Slav nor Russian and he pointed out that similar communes existed in India and various other countries. At that time Herzen believed that the Russian commune was defective, primitive, patriarchal, and uncivilized. He criticized the commune for its absorption of the individual into conformity. However, when Herzen left Russia and witnessed the failure of the 1848 revolution in Europe and Europe's seeming inability to achieve socialism, he saw the foundation of a new Russia in the commune. The Russian commune, according to him, possessed three characteristics essential to socialistic development. These were mutual ownership of land, right of every individual to land, and self-government of the village community; all of which would have greater value than the political and social development of Europe. The abolition of serfdom would establish freedom of the individual and that of the commune. He did not believe it was necessary for Russia to follow any historical law, in accordance with which Russia should follow the path of Europe. Without capitalism and bourgeoisie, but upon the foundation of the commune, Russia could advance towards socialism. Furthermore, Herzen bluntly declared that Russia, with her roots in communes, was destined to bring socialism to Europe.

In his socialist program Herzen pointed to the commune as an example for future society. He did not believe in complete abolition of private property and advocated its distribution by

society in a manner identical with that of the commune. He exercised political contempt for centralization and praised the folk-state as his ideal. The supreme value of the commune was that it was not merely an abstract theory, but an institution which existed in reality among a huge population. In 1862 he wrote that the goal of the Russian revolution was to return to the peasant and the commune. In this new society the man of the future was the peasant. The single role of the Russian intelligentsia was to mediate between revolutionary Europe and the Russian people. He sternly criticized the Slavophiles for their ethico-religious philosophy and glorification of the commune which made it impossible for them to comprehend the true condition of the village. Herzen, however, could be accused of similar short sightedness and of neglecting to investigate closely the economic and social relations of the village, and of assigning to the assembly of the plain people the socialistic salvation of Russia and Europe. The Populists believed that it was the mission of the intelligentsia to mix with and to educate the peasants for a more successful growth and improvement of the commune for the future regeneration of Russia¹.

In analyzing sober minded and materialistic Chernyshevskii, praise can still be detected for the commune. However, it is more critical and less exuberant. He recognized its primitive

¹Masaryk, op. cit., pp. 413-14.

stage of development and its tendency to oppress the individual and admitted that the institution of the commune was neither Russian nor Slav, but that similar communes existed in Europe. Nonetheless, he urged that Russia should be socialized upon the foundation of the commune. He esteemed the commune most highly despite his critical attitude towards the peasants and their capabilities. The commune, according to him, was predestined to safeguard Russia from proletarianisation and the evils of capitalism. Chernyshevskii disregards the significance of the industrial worker and to him the peasant constitutes a more important segment of the population. Despite his differences from the Slavophiles, he, nevertheless struck a note which sounded in unison with the latter. He came to the conclusion that in Siberia where the peasant was generally in more comfortable circumstances, he must be democratically ranked higher than in England where the majority of the population was poverty-stricken. Chernyshevskii continued in his later years to praise the existence of the village commune and in a letter to Herzen wrote, "Give your lives to maintain equal rights in the soil, give your lives for the principle of the village community"¹. He demanded state protection for the commune. In his later, more revolutionary period, Chernyshevskii opposed any private ownership including the ownership of land by the peasants. He subsequently started to regard the commune and

¹Ibid.

its agrarian communism from the standpoint of the European socialists. Similarly he regarded the artel as a necessary device for future productive cooperatives.

Chernyshevskii's picture of the transition from the primitive village commune to the higher communistic stage resembles that of Herzen. Society, according to Chernyshevskii can, like a human being, deviate from normal evolution and development. It can overlap several stages of development until it reaches its final goal. He cites the general law of evolution which states that the final stage is a return to the initial stage. Here he compares a modern suspension bridge with a primitive one: the former is built on the same principle as the latter, but constitutes a completely different structure. Future communism in Russia will be built on the same principle, and as a result, Russia need not pass through the stages experienced by Europe. Russia can borrow the positive aspects of European evolution¹.

The internationally known anarchist, Bakunin, like Herzen and Chernyshevskii, was at first extremely critical of the commune. According to him, the institution of the commune was analogous to oriental immobility which repressed individuality, and was an obstacle for internal revolution. In 1868, after his frustration with European revolutionary movements, he began to regard the Russian people as being capable of conducting a socialist revolution and as proof of his view he brought forward the

¹Ibid., v. 2, p. 334.

Russian commune. Through communal ownership the land belonged to those who cultivated it, the peasants. This fact alone is enormously significant and shows a potential for socialism. The Slavs in general, and the Great Russians in particular, are peaceful nations and possess a passionate eagerness for collective use of the land. The Russians, according to Bakunin, are socialistic by instinct, and by nature they are revolutionary; therefore, they will initiate the federation of the world¹.

Russian radicals wished to abolish private property and especially private ownership of the land. The commune was regarded as the necessary prerequisite for such collective ownership. Every individual was obliged to belong to the village commune. The future social and democratic Russian republic would constitute a federative union of the village communities. Tkachev, an ardent radical, believed that the existing commune and land ownership would be transformed into a completely communistic local community. The exchange of products would be direct, excluding middle men, and the machinery for production would be owned by the community. The self-government of the communes would gradually replace the centralized state².

The government itself, sensing the inevitability of peasant emancipation, dreaded the impoverished army of proletarians which would be created. The institution of the commune seemed

¹Ibid., v. 1, pp. 460-61.

²Ibid., v. 2, p. 93.

to the government a convenient tool to prevent the possibility of proletarianisation and it would also be a useful organ for administering the newly liberated citizens.

The diversified ideological camps of Slavophiles, socialists, revolutionaries and the government itself formed the united front for preserving and strengthening the village commune. In the following discussion let us examine the development of the Russian commune apart from the existing ideologies, instead examining the economic and political forces within the state which shaped its development. For the purpose of our discourse, the history of the Russian commune will be examined in the next chapter from the formation in Kievan Russia to the Emancipation of 1861 with emphasis on the economic and political needs of the state.

CHAPTER III

EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF THE PEASANT COMMUNE

The history of the Russian commune from the time of Kievan Russia to the emancipation act of 1861, like the history of the Russian peasantry, constituted a slow but gradual change from a position of freedom and initiative to the abysmal darkness of bondage, compulsion and annihilation of human dignity. Russian communes of the early period constituted free and voluntary peasant associations for the mutual defense and convenience of the peasantry and permitted freedom of initiative and expression. It was not an innate tendency of the Russian peasant to desire communal equalization, but the forces of the state, and sometimes existing ideologies viewed him in that light despite his personal wishes. His desire was always to possess the land.

The Russian Slavs prior to Christian times had a patriarchal tribal organization. These tribes consisted of clans composed of families related to each other who worked and owned property collectively, tilled it together and were governed by an elder. Such families usually absorbed the children and grandchildren of the head of the household together with other relatives by blood and by marriage. The power and authority of the elder was well established. These patriarchal clans had mass assemblies known as the vieche where important questions

were decided. Patriarchal communes can survive only with the immobility of their members. But the constant feuds between the tribes and the movement of the population started gradually to transform the patriarchal communes of pre-Christian Russia into a new social arrangement. In addition, the growth of cities, the rise of commerce, and the arrival of princes with their military druzhinas still further transformed the patriarchal system among the Slavs and caused the formation of associations based on voluntary consent and economic interest¹.

Druzhinas themselves were organized strictly on a voluntary basis and consent of their members in contrast to the kinship relations of the clan. Under the influence of these forces the Russian Slavs gradually changed from the patriarchal organization of the clan and tribe to the contractual communal system. The latter was organized not on the blood ties of its members which formulated its transactions but on the voluntary consent of every person similarly as it existed at the time with druzhinas. In the north, the patriarchal communes remained much longer, but in the south, the patriarchal communes withered away sooner and found only slight reflection in *Russkaya Pravda*².

Patriarchal communal land ownership gave way to land proprietorship of the prince and the members of his druzhina. The

¹S. F. Platonov, History of Russia, p. 19.

²P. A. Sokolovsky, Ocherk istorii sel'skoi obshchiny na sieverie Rossii, p. 89.

patriarchal commune was transformed into the proprietorship commune which had one private owner together with the settlers on his land. Again in the north, free cities like Novgorod and Pskov escaped the private acquisition of the land by the princes. They preserved the free commune although it changed its previous character from the patriarchal system to the contractual system.

Once this change occurred under the influence of the prince, the druzhina, and commerce, it had repercussions in every direction. The agricultural population no longer represented an equalitarian patriarchal mass, but like the rest of the society was divided into the groups of kholops, slaves, and seignorial and monasterial peasants. In the appanage period, relations between the prince, the commune and the peasants remained extremely independent and free from any kind of burdensome restraint. Vast new lands required peasant labor and the supply was less than the demand. The general rule was that the land belonged to the prince and the peasants were regarded as tenants. The commune took charge of distributing vacant plots to newly arrived peasants and of paying taxes to the prince. Once given to the peasant, the plot constituted his property for an unlimited time and was transmittable to any heir or offspring. Those who were unable to pay duty to the prince could often transfer their plots to other persons¹.

¹B. N. Chicherin, Opyty po istorii russkago Prava, pp. 19-21.

The abandonment of the plots was a normal occurrence in ancient Russia. The abandonment constituted full and complete termination of the peasant's right on his plot. Any legal connection was thus eliminated, but not due to the fact of abandonment but rather to the cessation of labor. His rights on the land were extremely broad. He managed and cultivated his plot unrestricted by communal interference during his lifetime and after his death his heirs maintained the property. The peasant would acquire right to the land as soon as he settled unoccupied land. He acquired this right in proportion to labor invested. Peasants settled on the land of their choice, occupied plots according to their working capacity and because of the stable possession of the land they invested their labor and initiative abundantly. Later, collectors of the taxes appeared and established duties for the benefit of the prince¹.

When the plot was vacated, the commune tried to attract new settlers who would help the commune pay its share of duties and taxes. The commune was responsible for the payment of taxes to the prince and it was more convenient for the prince to collect all the taxes at once from the commune than from individual settlers who moved constantly².

The power of the commune over the peasants as a result,

¹V. B. El'yashevitch, Istoriia Prava Pozemel'noi Sobstvennosti V Rossii, pp. 60-65.

²Chicherin, op. cit., p. 23.

was quite limited and consisted mainly in redistribution of the vacated plots and collection of the taxes for the prince. It has been evident from peasant leases that the peasant who received a plot would build a fence around it. This indicates an individualistic mode of cultivation directly opposite to what existed after the emancipation and congregational teaching of the Slavophiles and the socialism of the Westernizers. The relations of the peasant with the commune were only contractual and the commune was limited in its power over the peasant. The latter would not have any responsibility until he received the land in proportion to which he paid duties and taxes. The size of the plot was determined by a free agreement between the commune and the peasants. New settlers either took the land offered to them or chose vacant plots according to their wishes. The heavier the duties and taxes the commune had to pay to the prince the harder it was for the commune to acquire new settlers. From the contracts at that time, it is evident that the peasant had the right to sell or mortgage his plot of land. Like any owner the peasant tried to have documents in order to prove his title, and he went to court if he considered his rights had been encroached upon¹.

Because of the peasants' freedom of movement, both the prince and the commune desired to keep the peasants immobile. The right to leave the commune and the prince was gradually

¹Ibid., pp. 97-100.

limited in the Muscovite State to St. George's Day. On St. George's Day, November 26, if the peasant had discharged all his obligations or had procured someone for his place, he could depart from the commune or his master. This specific date, St. George's Day, was established to regulate chaotic peasant departures; with the existing agricultural shortages it was very useful for the princes and the communes.

It was true that in Russia there existed peasant freeholders who did not belong to any commune. However, they were gradually eliminated until by the end of the sixteenth century there were none left, for the small freeholder was almost helpless before the heavy governmental duties and obligations. The peasants tried to shield themselves behind the communal land and the rich, powerful princes and abandoned their private land. This fact further shows that the Russian peasant exercised and possessed individualistic tendencies and only due to overwhelming circumstances was he forced into communal livelihood¹.

Communes had the nominal right to have their elected judges and to be tried by them even in criminal cases. Elected judges were responsible to the commune and the latter had the right to try them in cases of corruption. The authority of the elected judges was gradually usurped with the growth of the centralized state by the namestniki and volosteli--representatives of the central government. Furthermore, the commune had the

¹I. D. Beliaeff, Krest'iane Na Rusi, pp. 67-76.

authority of police, supervising peace and order and sometimes even peasant morality.

With the rise of Moscow, the state became interested in agrarian stability and in attracting peasants to itself for its own well-being. Princes of Moscow started to regard the commune as a potential weapon through which they could hold and control the peasantry of their state. The Sudebnik of John III not only recognized the commune, but reinforced its rights and privileges. Although the rights of the commune were well established before, common law was now transformed into a legal document. According to the Sudebnik, the peasant commune was recognized as the foremost defender of its members. In general, the end of the fifteenth and almost the whole sixteenth century was a time of prosperity for the peasant communes. The Moscow tsars, John III and John IV, favored the rights and privileges of the peasant communes.

In his struggle with the boyars, John IV relied heavily on the support of the other segments of the population. In 1550 John summoned an assembly of the land, a Zemsky Sobor, which represented all classes of the population including peasants. At the beginning of John's reign, petitions from the provinces arrived in great numbers through which the population asked permission to organize for the suppression of robbery and crime, because the local namestniki failed to achieve it. As a result of these petitions and John's policy, the powers of the namestniki were curbed extensively. At that time the popu-

lation was authorized to elect from all classes the gubnye starosty--special judicial authorities who had the power to judge and execute. Furthermore, local zemskii, officials on an elective basis had the right to collect local taxes, a duty formerly belonging to the namestniki. The namestniki, which consisted of the aristocracy, were not in accord with the new trends in the Muscovite State. They dealt with the affairs of the provinces as with their private property which was not convenient to the growing centralization of the Muscovite State¹.

In order to limit their power and curb local disorders, the government used those elements which had the least private character. Communes and the elective principle were called forward. Starosti and tselovalniki elected by the communes replaced the power of the namestniki and volosteli. Through this action, the communes received state significance. The newly elected local government was now not merely a tool for the collection of taxes for the landlord, but functioned for the central government also, and represented an essential part of the governmental machine. However, communes represented only a lower step in the administrative ladder. They could not satisfy all the growing needs of the state and the central government could not find in them a convenient form of administration. Communes were widely scattered and located far from the center of the state. Because of this, the newly created duty

¹B. A. Pares, A History of Russia, p. 107.

of the commune was absorbed by the voevodas in the near future¹.

Peasants ruined by the Livonian war escaped en masse from under the heavy burdens of taxation. With the constant movement of the population, and the shortage of agricultural labor, landlords applied all kinds of hideous devices to attract peasants from other estates. Large and powerful landlords imposed their power heavily over the smaller ones in recruiting peasantry from their estates. The government itself needed a tremendous amount of soldiery and revenues for state expansion and frequent wars. The main source of satisfying these needs was the peasantry; therefore, the government was keenly interested in stabilizing the peasant and preventing him from moving. But although more authority and importance was granted to the commune, it did not acquire the power of restriction nor coercive control over its members. The peasants could leave as freely as before and the commune could not interfere.

In the sixteenth century, particularly in the reign of John IV, the peasant was still not bound to his plot nor to his commune. He still possessed the freedom to change his plot, to leave the commune, or to cease to belong to the peasant class at all. Some evidence and documents of the sixteenth century show that during the period of thirty-five years, one particular village had six landowners who were derived from the peasantry. Peasants were treated as full members of society.

¹Chicherin, op. cit., p. 27.

They were tried in the same court as the rest of the population and penalties existed for peasant dishonor¹.

Russian society was still free and mobile. In the sixteenth century as in the appanage period the peasant was a free laborer who settled on someone's land by agreement with the commune or proprietor and his freedom was guaranteed in vykhod or otkaz. Landlords or the communes had no right to evict the peasant before St. George's Day and the peasant had to settle his debts and obligations before leaving. The land of the peasant was inviolable as long as he paid his duties and taxes properly. Rural communes of the sixteenth century had as yet no right of obligatory apportionment of land. Redistribution of peasant holdings did not exist at that time, unless the peasant was in arrears in his payment of taxes. It was true, however, that a plot which became vacant was usually divided among the members of the commune².

With the growth of the Russian state, separate small derevni (villages) were gradually transformed into the larger units of volosti. They were administered by namestniki and volosteli, officials of the central government. Volosti possessed powers of communal administration and communal assemblies met for the election of their own executive appointees. The administrative machine of a volost consisted of okladchiki or assessors who had the duty of administering equal assess-

¹V. O. Kluchevskii, A History of Russia, v. 3, pp. 207-208.

²Ibid.

ment of taxes and obligations among all the communal members. Another official was known as the starosta. Among other duties, the starosta assigned vacant plots in the volost to new settlers¹.

As it was briefly mentioned before, the sixteenth century and the reign of John IV in particular, constituted a turning point in all future relations of the peasants, landlords and the state. Already the wars of John III required tremendous expenditure of manpower and finances. The Muscovite state could not permit millions of its peasants to continue to wander. The constant and prolonged wars of John IV with Kazan, Livonia, Poland, and Sweden required huge armies. Peasants, however, possessing freedom of movement, wandered from place to place to avoid being taken into the army and paying heavy taxes. During the reign of John IV, grants of pomestia for the governmental service reached its peak. Without a settled labor force these lands would be worthless. Communes and landlords, using the constant movement of the peasants as a pretext to avoid paying taxes, tried to show the government more vacant land².

It was evident that the new order required power of compulsion. In the sixteenth century after the conquest of Novgorod, Pskov, and Kazan, the tsar's power reached its highest peak. Land was recognized as the property of the grand prince.

¹Ibid., pp. 199-208.

²Beliaeff, op. cit., p. 88.

The point of view became prevalent that the individual and the duty of the classes was to serve the state as their foremost objective. The ideal became not the attainment of personal stature but rather its resignation in the name of the state. Peasant communes lacked the power of compulsion over their members. The changed role of the communes bestowed on them by John IV proved more of a burden than a help. They were quite weak before the immense power of the state and in their new role, the communes were faced with responsibilities beyond their power. Throughout most of the century there were numbers of attempts to change the ancient agrarian conditions according to the newly created needs of the state¹.

The Sudebnik of John III limited free movement of the peasants to St. George's Day; this measure was later confirmed by other edicts. These measures tried to strengthen the hold of the commune over its members as it alone could enforce the edict and suffered most from its breach. Gradually the communes received the right to retrieve their run-away members from the monasteries. Peasants escaped in overwhelming numbers to the wilderness and the elected officials did not have the means nor the wish to curb them. So the attempt for compulsion and agrarian stabilization via the commune failed and as a result the government set aside the communes from the mechanism of the government and stepped in itself².

¹Sokolovsky, op. cit., p. 214.

²Ibid., pp. 225-237.

It is unknown when the first edict was issued which restricted peasants to the land. However, it is possible to believe that it was issued at the beginning of Fedor's reign. The earliest edict which mentioned restrictions on the peasants' right to leave appears in 1517. By the end of the sixteenth century communes started to exercise only a secondary position and their administration was overshadowed by the voevodas. The nobility made urgent demands for the restoration of their fugitive peasants. In 1597 Boris Godunov had fixed five years as the time limit in which owners might hunt out their fugitive peasants. The Time of Troubles and its social chaos further strengthened the forces that desired to restrict the peasants to the land. After the termination of instability, St. George's Day was a thing of the past. The Edict of March, 1640, set up a ten to fifteen year limit for the restoration of the fugitives instead of the original five year period. It is true, however, that during the reign of Michael, although St. George's Day was a forgotten event, serfdom was still not firmly established. It was not until the Ulozhenie of 1649 that the peasants' remaining freedom disappeared completely.

From 1646 all landlords according to legislation were required to enter the names of their peasants in the governmental registers which thus fixed the ownership of the landlords. Peasants who were registered in a given estate now were regarded as legally attached to that estate. As this applied to all subsequent generations, serfdom became hereditary. Tsar

Alexis, in 1649, issued the Ulozhenie which finally confirmed the establishment of serfdom as a state institution. It was probably not the intention of the government at that time to hand the peasants over to the landlords, but the necessity and the needs of the expanding state forced the government to that stern measure. It should be remembered that all the classes in the Muscovite state were under obligation to serve the state¹.

In that period of changing times, the communes still tried to maintain their independence and authority. Land was still owned collectively by the peasants and they called themselves tenants not serfs. The commune as before assigned taxation on the landlord's as well as on the state land and performed contractual relations with the government. The Ulozhenie still forbade transferring the peasant away from his plot to the landlord's house and turning him into a kholop. The commune at that time stood separate from the landlord. The government dealt through its organs directly with the peasant commune. Only by the end of Alexis' reign did the peasants, as in the case of the kholops, become the object of private deals among the landlords. They started to be sold and exchanged separately from the land. The peasants came to be regarded more and more as chattels. The only limitations on the landlord's power resulted from the scarcity of agricultural labor and the

¹Pares, op. cit., p. 157.

authority of the commune, which was, however, rapidly declining. It was evident from the deeds of that time that the peasant settled on the landlord's estate with the notion of fulfilling all the landlord's duties and responsibilities jointly with the other peasants, and as a result he joined the members of the commune. All the orders of the landlord were directed to the commune, but not to the individual peasants. The struggle with the commune was not as easy as with the individual helpless kholop¹.

In general, however, the powers and abuses of the landlords developed extensively and at every opportunity the peasants' old rights and privileges were absorbed by the landlords. The commune itself was becoming subordinate in its operation to the landlord and his steward. They started to interfere with the decisions of the commune and the authority of the landlord even penetrated all peasant relations including those of his family. Peasants were already not far from being transformed into slaves and kholops. By about 1700 landlords started to interfere with and to absorb the police function of the commune. By the edict of October 29, 1707, peasants were deprived the right of leasehold, the right to collect custom, and tavern taxes².

During the reign of Peter the Great, to meet all expenses of the state, he imposed numerous taxes which effected the

¹Beliaeff, op. cit., pp. 147-193.

²Ibid., pp. 196-233.

peasantry with particular weight. So far, taxation was according to the amount of land one possessed, but according to the new law, it was shifted onto the person. In order to carry out its execution, Peter ordered a general census. With the census, peasants and communes lost the remainder of their rights. This act put them into the same category as the domestic peasants of the landlord. Landlords now acquired the duty of collecting and paying the peasants' taxes to the state, a task which had formerly belonged to the communes. At first glance, it seemed that this was only shifting the responsibility from the communes to the landlords, but in reality the landlord now screened the communes and peasants from any contacts with the state, therefore making the peasants responsible solely to the landlord.

Prior to the census, taxes from the slaves and kholops were not accepted as, according to the law, they did not possess any property and were considered exclusively as the chattel of the landlord. As a result of this act the peasants legally entered the social strata of the slaves and kholops¹.

During Peter's reign peasants were forbidden to engage in trade, which was left exclusively to the merchants. A peasant's property became almost that of his landlord and could be taken or borrowed at the latter's request. The landlord's court came into existence and it was the only one to which the

¹Ibid., pp. 238-39.

peasant could appeal. Communal elders were flogged for any discrepancy in the administration of the landlord's orders. At this time landlords' estates were managed either by the elected communal elder or by a steward; very often both authorities were in operation. The steward was responsible only to the landlord and the commune had no right or power to limit his authority, other than sending its grievances to the landlord. Village elders on the other hand were responsible both to the landlord and to the commune by which he was elected. So gradually, landlords and their stewards absorbed the remaining authority of the commune¹.

Peter's poll tax had the following results. Because an equal amount of taxes was collected from each individual and every individual was responsible for its payment each person had to possess an equal amount of land. With the growth of the population in the commune and with the impossibility of movement, land inequality naturally came into existence. Therefore, in order to restore the normal equality, the land had to be redistributed. This was easily done as the land belonged either to the state or to the private landlord and the peasants were considered as temporary settlers attached to the land. However, the practice came into existence gradually and at first on the private estates. The interests of the landlord demanded redistribution of the land and he could realize it without difficulty

¹Ibid., p. 262.

due to the immense rights and powers that he had acquired¹.

During the second census during the reign of Elizabeth, a ukase was ordered which required that all of the free and wandering people who did not have a trade or belong to a guild be assigned to a landlord in order that the government could receive their poll tax. By 1736 landlords had begun to fix the punishment of a fugitive themselves, and they possessed the right to send a peasant to forced labor in Siberia. Peasants were sold freely away from their land and families. The journals during the reign of Elizabeth contained advertisements of serfs for sale, especially girls. The criminal code of 1754 contained no provisions for peasants, who were considered the property of a master. It gave the landlord almost complete power over the peasants as only torture and manslaughter were excluded. The edict of 1762 by Peter III emancipated the gentry from state service, but left the peasants in servitude. In December, 1766, when Catherine II summoned a commission of the land to Moscow in connection with the Nakaz, the landlord's peasants were omitted.

Because of a variety of governmental measures and edicts, and the growing influence and power of the nobility, the peasants and their communes lost their independence and authority in the two-hundred year period following the sixteenth century.

The Kievan and the subsequent appanage period were char-

¹Chicherin, op. cit., pp. 44-45.

acterized by considerable freedom of relations between the princes and the peasant communes, due to the fact that the economic and the political needs of the states could be satisfied with little coercion and compulsion. The power of the communes over their members was, however, extensively limited at this time.

The Muscovite state because of its constant growth and expansion had to draw upon all available economic resources in order to maintain its existence. The peasantry of necessity played an important part. Muscovite princes tried to rely on the peasant communes to enforce the law but without much success. As a result the government turned away from the communes and enacted more stern legislation concerning peasant movements. During the reign of Peter one of the main objectives again was the acquisition of revenue for the state. To secure these Peter established a poll tax. The consequence of the poll tax was the redistribution of land and the growing importance of the gentry. They now stood between the state and the peasant communes, almost nullifying the importance of the communes. The defeat in the Crimean War and the general unrest in the countryside showed the rulers of Russia that the state needed agrarian change. In the new agrarian order after 1861 the significance of the commune in the village was again restored by the state and invested with considerable authority. Let us now examine the Russian agrarian situation just prior to and after the emancipation as well as the new role of the commune in the emancipated village.

CHAPTER IV

EMANCIPATION AND THE COMMUNE

In 1855, with the reign of Alexander II, Russian society witnessed the beginning of the great reforms. Emancipation of the serfs was the most important and complex question to be solved. An alarming increase in violence and minor outbreaks spread throughout Russia and there were four hundred known cases in ten years. Two hundred thirty landlords and their stewards had been murdered by peasants between 1835 and 1854 and fifty-three between 1858 and 1861. The statement was made by the Emperor himself "that it is better to abolish serfdom from above than to wait until the serfs begin to liberate themselves from below"¹. As the initial step, a Secret Committee was organized in 1857 which began to work on preparing a reform act. The committee was divided in its views regarding emancipation of the serfs. Some members of the committee desired liberation without land while others advocated liberation with land; the Emperor himself sided with the latter group.

In 1857 a proclamation was issued to the public announcing the beginning of the reforms and the Secret Committee was re-organized into a Main Committee under the chairmanship of the

¹Hugh Seton-Watson, The Decline of Imperial Russia, p. 5.

Emperor. In general, the work of the emancipation was decentralized extensively. Special Provincial Committees were working in the provinces on projects of emancipation according to local specific needs and characteristics. These Provincial Committees sent their representatives to the Main Committee, which tried to coordinate the interests of the provinces. After almost four years of painstaking work the reform project was completed and presented to the State Council. On February 19, 1861, the Emperor signed a manifesto which brought the institution of serfdom to an end¹.

The different conditions of peasant life in the immense empire, in spite of the laborious and painstaking work of various committees suffered from contradictions which were felt as late as 1906.

These laws of 1861 were so very loose, so full of variables, so loaded down with qualifications and exceptions, and in general so astonishingly involved and complicated, that it is difficult to understand how any serf could ever, by any possibility, have known what rights might be hidden in this legislative haystack. As late as 1906 the Ministry of the Interior could still quite properly report to the Council of Ministers that the provisions of the peasant land laws were incomplete, inexact, and in some instances, even contradictory².

In general, the Emancipation Act of 1861 forever abolished serfdom, and serfs became free citizens of the empire. The

¹S. F. Platonov, Russian History, pp. 442-44.

²G. T. Robinson, Rural Russia, p. 65

lands on which peasants resided were considered the property of the landlord and the latter was compensated for its loss by the state. Peasants, on the other hand, were obliged to buy these lands from the state in installment payments. Special banks were established to assist peasants in financing the purchase. The peasant owed the bank redemption payments which, according to the law, he was supposed to pay in forty-nine years. The landlords did not receive any redemption payments for the loss of their liberated serfs. The government did not regard this act as a private property violation and stated that serfdom was "instituted by the autocracy and that only the autocracy had complete right to abolish it"¹. Special agents chosen from the nobility supervised the relations between the peasants and the landlords to avoid all possible disagreements. Emancipation procedures on the provincial levels were conducted and supervised by special committees chosen from the local nobility under the chairmanship of the governor².

One of the most difficult questions in the reform act of 1861 was land allotment. In the south where land was highly fertile, landlords were interested in liberating the serfs with the least possible land being allotted to them. In the north, however, actual cost of land was less than appraised by the government and landlords were interested in furnishing peasants

¹Platonov, op. cit., pp. 444-47.

²Ibid.

with large land allotments. The government was in the difficult position of being unable to establish common satisfaction, and allotments differed from province to province. In general, peasants received less land than they had cultivated for themselves during the time of serfdom. The peasant population was now obliged to feed itself on less land area than before the emancipation¹.

Peasant redemption payments were in an analogous situation.

The amount of compensation to landlords was fixed at a rate considerably higher than the prices of land prevailing at the time of the reform. The sums paid to the landlords are compared with the value of average land prices for 1863-72².

(In millions of rubles)

	Redemption Cost	Land Value
Black soil provinces	341	284
Non-black soil provinces	340	180*

The scarcity of land was created as a result of the reforms. The southern peasantry with their dependence on land and lack of domestic craftsmanship found themselves in a much worse condition than the northern peasantry. However, Russian peasants owned more land than did the French peasants but unproductive methods of cultivation made the Russian peasant

¹P. P. Maslov, Agrarny i Vopros v Rossii, p. 147.

²Seton-Watson, op. cit., p. 44.

*Ibid.

dependent on larger land allotments¹. Furthermore, the burden of payments was not divided equally among subsequent generations, but was dumped on the first generation the members of which were obliged to buy the land for their heirs. Yet they were not assured a certain amount of land for their heirs as the permanent distribution of land could be conducted only after the final payment, and distributed according to the number of peasants in the commune at that time. Market prices on agricultural products remained low in 1861, which added more instability to the post-reform situation. As a result, 97 out of 113 of the communes interrogated were frightened by the additional responsibility created by the reforms².

In pre-reform Russia, the peasant's life was entirely subject to the landlord's administration. Landlords collected recruits for the army and administered the payment of taxes by the peasants. Landlords had unlimited authority in redistributing land between households. He could restrict the right of serfs to borrow money, rent land, or earn wages by working outside. Landlords could also confiscate peasants' movable goods. Until 1830, landlords could sell a serf to another person without his family, and he could command or prevent marriage. Landlords prior to emancipation had almost unlimited judicial power. They could send peasants to forced

¹Maslov, op. cit., p. 147.

²K. Kacharovskii, Russkaya Obshchina, p. 65.

labor in Siberia, or impose flogging. Prior to the reforms of 1861, a peasant was obliged to perform corvee on the landlord's estate, known as "barshchina" or to pay in goods or money, known as "obrok" if they failed to perform the required services. Barshchina usually consisted of three days labor every week on the landlord's estate, but during the labor shortage a serf was sometimes forced to work continuously for the landlord and to neglect his own plot. State serfs paid obrok rather than barshchina and it was usually lower than the amount paid by landlord's peasants. As was mentioned previously, state peasants had more opportunity of self-expression through their peasant commune than did the private serfs whose commune was entirely subject to the will of the landowner.

In this process of peasant emancipation, the Reform Act of 1861 preserved the village commune and invested it with more power and authority than it had ever before possessed. The numerous although diversified forces described in chapter two worked feverishly toward the same goal--the preservation of the peasant commune in the post-reform peasant society. By doing so, the government tried to preserve the established way of life in the village from abrupt change and possible peasant unrest. Through the commune, it was much easier for the government to control, administer and tax peasants. It was also more convenient for the landlords to deal with the peasant commune than with individual peasants in the matter of land disputes and

redemption payments¹.

As a result, peasants were not individually free, but were given a new master--the commune. The emancipation law provided compulsory membership in a village commune for every peasant, and no peasant could legally leave the village without obtaining a passport which was issued to him by the household elder and communal authorities. The village commune acquired almost quasi-dictatorial powers over the lives of the peasants after the emancipation. The village commune was jointly responsible for the payments of taxes and various other obligations. In case taxes and various other payments of the household were in arrears, the householder or any member of his family could be sentenced by the village assembly to compulsory labor, corporal punishment, confiscation of most of his property, army service, and, under certain conditions, banishment².

The land which was purchased by the government for the newly emancipated peasants was allotted to the commune and not to individual peasants. These allotted lands were declared by law inalienable and made the joint property of the whole village commune. The commune had the duty of redistributing and endowing peasants with strips of land for some indefinite period of time. The decisions for redistribution and size of plots for

¹Maslov, op. cit., p. 248.

²Michael T. Florinsky, Russia, v. 2, p. 894.

the peasant households were decided at the communal meetings by a majority vote of two-thirds of the members. The whole of the communal arable land was first of all divided into three fields, to suit the triennial rotation of crops, and each field was again divided into a number of long, narrow strips corresponding to the number of male members in the commune. The plots were as nearly as possible equal to each other in area, quality, and distance from the peasants' homes. In 124 villages near Moscow, the sizes of the strips varied from 3 to 45 arshins and on the average equaled 11 arshins¹. These strips were redistributed between the eligible communal members.

Communal land in Russia consisted of two kinds--arable land and land on which the village was built. Along with a total right of the commune as a whole to possess, administer, and use all its lands, there existed personal hereditary property. The peasant had personal possession of his dwelling and garden, and of the land on which they were located; he also had personal possession of his agricultural implements. All of these could be left to his heirs².

The most important function of the commune was the redistribution of land. There was not any written statute or law governing this within the commune. It could happen without regularity, according to changing agricultural or human factors,

¹one arshin = twenty-eight inches.

²Kachorovskii, op. cit., p. 69.

or it could take place at regularly appointed dates, depending on the custom of the various communes. In the latter case, dates varied from one to thirty years or even longer¹.

The method of redistribution again varied from place to place and was dependent on the amount of land available to the commune. In general, land was redistributed in proportion to the taxes a peasant family had to pay. In some cases, equal strips were given to any male member of the commune. For instance, if an infant were born the day before the redistribution he would receive land also. In other instances, land was given to male members of the commune only after they reached a certain age and were able to work. Some communes redistributed land according to the productive abilities of the families. In situations like this, redistribution depended on the age that the commune considered as most capable to produce. There were communes in which youths of 16 to 18 years would receive $1\frac{1}{2}$ units of land; men from 18 to 55 years received 2 units; and elderly men from 55 to 60 years received 1 unit. This meant that households with two workers from 18 to 55 years of age would receive four land allotments and would pay taxes according to those four allotments. Households, which had one worker between 16 and 18 years old and another between 18 and 55 years of age would receive $3\frac{1}{2}$ land allotments and would pay taxes accordingly².

¹Ibid.

²A. A. Karelin, Obshchinoye Vladenye v Rossii, pp. 10-21.

The right of women to own land also varied from one commune to another. In some instances they were unfairly denied the right to land altogether, and in other cases they shared equal rights with the male members of the commune. In Tambovskaya and Arkhangelskaya provinces, widows were entitled to land. In return they had the responsibility of paying taxes regularly and of not neglecting their plots. Sometimes, widows and orphans received plots of land as an act of benevolence. However, in other instances widows had to pay bribes in order to hold their land. The only case in which redistribution of land took place in the idyllic Slavophile atmosphere of brotherhood was when the commune possessed a sufficient amount of land for every household, where, during the meeting, peasants claimed the needed amount of land in compliance with their needs and working potential¹.

Peasant garden plots remained the isolated islands of individualistic enterprises. Peasants' apiaries, orchards, and gardens with improved agriculture were left for their private concern. The right to possess these lands was unstable, however, and interference by the commune was not an unusual matter. Despite the private character of garden plots, in many cases it was impossible to sell or transfer them to an outsider. If the peasant terminated his duties and the payment of his taxes, the commune in some instances could take away his private pos-

¹Ibid., pp. 19-20.

sessions. His inheritance, furthermore, was often abused by communal interference. Often the commune forbade the sale of these private possessions not only to outsiders, but even to its own members¹.

The peasant's cattle also remained his private possession but grazed in one herd with a communal herder. Grazing land was never redistributed, but was used by the whole commune. Hay fields were redistributed in the manner of cultivated lands. The use of communal forests was based on the same principle of redistribution as the cultivated lands and hay fields. In general, the commune annually set aside part of the coppice which was divided into sections. Every group of communal members received one of these sections and either redistributed it among its members or cut it as a group. Forest was redistributed according to the circumference of the trunk, height and type of the trees. Sometimes communes possessed their own commercial enterprises such as docks, mills, and warehouses. In order to escape any misunderstandings these were almost always rented and the income was used to pay communal taxes².

The assembly of the village commune elected a village elder, an executive board, and a court which tried minor civil and criminal cases involving only peasants. The communal assembly also decided if a new member should be admitted into the

¹Ibid., p. 26.

²Ibid., pp. 43-47.

commune, what measures to undertake against tax delinquents, to elect tax collectors and watchmen. The commune even interfered whenever it thought necessary in the domestic affairs of its members. Moreover, the commune determined a common crop cycle obligatory to all its members.

The procedure of the assembly was simple and informal. It took place somewhere in the open air on Sunday with no attempts at speech making.

The assembly has the appearance of a crowd of people who have accidentally come together and are discussing in little groups subjects of local interest. Gradually some one group containing two or three peasants who have more moral influence than their fellows, attracts the others and the discussion becomes general. Two or more peasants may speak together at a time and interrupt each other freely¹.

Communal measures were generally agreed upon by acclamation and when this became too difficult to distinguish, the opposing parties were separated and counted. The village elder mixed with the crowd like an ordinary member wearing the insignia of his position. There were no rules governing communal procedure, and unwritten traditional customs regulated the communal meeting. It is curious to note that during the reign of Nicholas I, an effort was made to regulate by written law the procedure of the village assemblies of the state peasants and even voting by ballot was instructed, but the new

¹Sir Wallace D. Mackenzie, Russia, pp. 129-34.

regulation never was popular with the peasants and was soon abandoned¹.

Village assemblies in the northern provinces, where a considerable number of the male population was working as hired laborers outside the village, were represented in majority by the female members, women who at that time happened to be heads of households. Contrary to Western type elections, nobody sought office as it represented a burden rather than a privilege. Fights and quarrels were frequent during the communal assemblies. Fights between the peasants in Tambovskaya province, because of the land redistribution, brought criminal investigation. In another instance, redistribution failed because prosperous opponents of redistribution used intoxicating beverages on the majority of the poor peasants².

Village communes were of two types: the first consisted of hereditary household tenure, and the second of repartitional tenure. In both cases, land was allotted to the communes and not to the individual peasant. The communes with hereditary household tenure were located mostly in western and southwestern provinces of Russia. The principle of this communal type was that homesteads as well as strips of arable land were assigned by the commune to households in hereditary tenure and were not subject to repartition. In communes of the second

¹Ibid.

²Karelin, op. cit., p. 129.

type, only homesteads were assigned to households in hereditary tenure, but arable land was subject to constant repartition. In both types, arable land was divided into a number of strips which necessitated a common rotation of crops. In 1861, a new territorial administrative subdivision, the township unit, was established. It consisted of one or several village communes with populations from 300 to 2,000 male peasants¹.

The variety and heterogeneity of communal systems should be emphasized as it existed geographically in Russia after the emancipation. If an imaginary line were drawn through Russia from eastern Siberia toward the western provinces of European Russia, it would pass through the area of communal inception, communal maturity, and finally communal decline as it reached the western borders of Russia. A similarly striking decrease in the peasant holdings was evident in the same geographical direction. Abundance of land at first insured predominance of private ownership and loose communal authority, but thereupon dense population, and scarcity of land caused the development of a strong communal system. Finally, the acute shortage of arable land and the meager size of strips tended to destroy the communal system².

One of the most ancient types of communal agriculture was that of the first seizure. Its basic principle and requirement

¹Kachorovskii, op. cit., p. 79.

²Ibid.

was the abundance of land and right of any communal member to seize and hold any amount of land for his possession and use. At this period, communal authority and restraints were weak and communes of this type were predominant in the early period of Russian history. This type of weak communal authority continued in Siberia after the emancipation. Peasants in the waste wilderness of the Lena River region in Siberia used to seize and cultivate any amount of land they wanted. They owned this land during their lifetime, transferred it to their children, and when the opportunity came they sold or transferred their plots¹.

An interesting table was made by G. Ushakov to demonstrate the distribution of communal tenure in different zones of European Russia as compared to the whole peasant population.

Eastern steppe	98.4
Extreme north	98.0
Western Great Russia (densely populated)	98.0
Western Great Russia (sparsely populated)	96.5
Great Russia	95.8
Perm region	93.0
Novarossia	88.9
Slobodskaya Ukraine	80.4
Bessarabia	77.0
White Russia	39.0
Left bank Ukraine	33.0
Right bank Ukraine	13.9
Litva	00
Baltic region	00

The above table correctly reveals the spread of communal tenure from the west to the east².

¹Karelin, op. cit., p. 187.

²Kachorovskii, op. cit., p. 74.

The continual redistribution of land by the commune created an insurpassable block which did not permit the peasants to undertake expensive and complicated agricultural improvements and innovations, and even hampered and detained the introduction of elementary methods of intensive agriculture. The peasants very often neglected manuring their lands where it was extremely necessary, and some communes which were forced to manure their land would stop doing so a couple of years prior to redistribution. To insure more stability of peasants' property, the law of June 8, 1893, vaguely stated that peasants who improved their plots should receive them after redistribution in the same place if possible. But while uncertainty existed, peasants were hesitant to commit themselves to any sort of improvements. Furthermore, transportation of manure to remote miniature strips was useless, for the expenditure of time and labor was always more than could be repaid by even the most prosperous harvest. Movements from one strip to another consumed so much time that even simple primitive cultivation incurred losses and often the most distant strips were turned back into waste land¹.

In general, temporary ownership of land directed peasant activity toward a most crude exploitation of natural resources of the land with the least effort for its improvement. It was noted in Kurskaya province what vigorous efforts energetic

¹A. A. Rittikh, Krest'yanskoye Zemlepolzovanye, pp. 17-27.

peasants could display to conduct intensive agriculture on the land of temporary ownership. Peasants did not have the fair possibility or even the right for improvement. They were hampered in their efforts to set up a fence or cultivate a productive orchard. They were faced with the possibility that their fences could be broken and their orchards wiped out. They could not sow the crop they wanted. They must sow, according to the will of the commune, in designated places, their winter or spring crop. They must chop down part of their forest when the communal assembly ordered them to do so. But certain enterprising individuals with extraordinary stamina and endurance succeeded, however, in installing and retaining improvements of their possessions. Sometimes in order to achieve this they used bribes and corruption of the influential persons in the communes and even whole assemblies. They were, however, never free from ill treatment and abuses from any member of the commune¹.

If a peasant displayed any disrespect or inattention to the commune he was in danger that his improved plots might be forcibly wiped out and transformed into waste land. There were cases when communal assemblies confiscated part of the improved land for disobedience on the part of an enterprising peasant. There were cases in which the plot was confiscated from the prosperous peasant simply because he possessed 175 desiatinas

¹Ibid., p. 18.

of his own private land. With the absence of any protective law, the possibility existed that the communal assembly, due to the shortage of land, envy for their more prosperous members, and intrigues by persons of shady reputation such as paupers, drunkards, and transient peasants, would destroy everything that constituted the well-being of the village. The negative attitude of peasants toward communal property came not as the result of bad qualities of the Russian peasant, but as a direct consequence of the unstable right of property, which destroyed the initiative and creative ability of the peasants¹.

The evils of land redistribution can be seen from the following example which represented a frequent practice within the communal system. Some peasants unscrupulously cut timber from their forest plots, whereas other peasants remained within the limits of natural exploitation of their timber resources. The process of redistribution held the possibility that the former would again receive plots with timber whereas the latter might inherit devastated plots. Situations like this hampered the development of the lumber industry within the communal system. Furthermore, the commune had the disadvantage of lacking the necessary elements to transform itself into a cooperative. Cooperatives in the West were based on firm private property rights, free and unrestricted withdrawal and admittance into

¹Ibid., pp. 20-21.

the cooperative, and division of profits in proportion to the size of property and invested capital¹.

The communal system prevented the establishment of the correct understanding of private property among the peasants. Rational development of private land property would create a rural middle class so lacking in Russia, which generally constitutes the best support for order within the state and represents a conservative political element. The government, fearing the growth of a proletariat, retained and strengthened the commune after the emancipation. However, its shortcomings and inadequacies overshadowed the danger of proletarianization and blocked agricultural progress and the growth of the badly needed peasant middle class. Defense of the communal system consisted in its ability to insure for the mass of population distribution of the basic means of existence. It safeguarded the economical independence of the weaker part of the population and prevented it from sinking into the debts of pauperism. Sometimes the commune acted in solidarity to protect its members from the unscrupulous acts of the "ragged individuals". Frequently the commune organized philanthropy and supported insolvent and impoverished peasant households and cared for the sick, the aged, and the upbringing of orphans.

In the long run, however, the commune was doomed to disintegrate, and with the increase in population its equalitarian

¹Ibid., p. 34.

redistribution would create strips of land so small as to be unfit to feed its inhabitants. Therefore, restrained power of the commune should be lifted to permit surplus of population either to flow into cities, colonize waste Russian domains, or to form independent, self-sufficient peasant economies with the desirable prevalence of the middle class element.

In the emancipated village the government invested the commune with almost quasi-dictatorial power. Although the authority of the commune in Russia varied from one region to another, nevertheless, the commune interfered considerably in all walks of peasant life. Communal redistribution of land and other interference with private property of peasants created general agricultural instability and blocked the incentive for agricultural improvement. The commune was defended and safe-guarded by the government until almost 1900. The advancement of sweeping economic forces and keen understanding of the agricultural situation in Russia by Stolypin finally created a new policy for the village which promised the creation of strong private ownership by self-sufficient farmers.

CHAPTER V

DISINTEGRATION OF THE PEASANT COMMUNE

Despite the negative effects of the commune on agricultural life in Russia, the government, fearing an abrupt change, maintained the policy of supporting the village commune almost until the beginning of the twentieth century. The government tried to promote peasant welfare without abolishing the commune. By 1881, redemption payments were lowered and measures were taken to expand the arable land of the peasants. A law of May 22, 1881, authorized leasing state lands to the village communes. A year later the State Peasant Bank was established to assist communes in purchasing additional lands. As a result peasants acquired through the bank almost 2.4 million desiatinas. The law of December 14, 1893, tried to prevent village communes from breaking up by abolishing the sale of communal lands without approval of the local administration, forbade the mortgage of land by the peasants, and authorized the sale of land only to peasant purchasers. Moreover, the government tried again to restrict separatist movements of the peasants away from their communes. It amended the provision of the emancipation which permitted peasants who had paid their share of the redemption debt to separate from the commune and to acquire individual title to land. With the amendment, all with-

drawals from the commune under the law of December 14, 1893, were dependent on the approval of the village commune¹.

Joint responsibility of the peasant was not removed until 1903. On June 3, 1894, the government sponsored a new passport law according to which the peasant was still restricted to his village commune unless he obtained a passport and the consent of the village assembly. The statute of the emancipation recognized the peasant household as a family unit. The breaking of a household was forbidden unless approved by a two-thirds majority of the village commune. The government instituted a policy which was "indeed a triumph for the principle of tutelage by the village commune over its members"².

Furthermore, the government at that time tried to rejuvenate the control and predominance of the nobility over the countryside and the peasant communes. By the law of July 12, 1889, the government made the peasant commune subject to the control of a new official, the land captain, who was elected from the hereditary nobility. The same law did away with the justices of the peace, except in the larger cities, and their functions in the rural areas were transferred to the land captains. Land captains received almost unlimited power over the communes. They could remove or suspend elective peasant officials, veto decisions of the communal assembly, and impose

¹Florinsky, op. cit., pp. 1101-1104.

²Ibid., pp. 1094-95.

finances on peasants or their officials without official trial. They could also impose their decisions upon the commune if they felt it was for the best interests of the community and its members, even if the parties concerned declared themselves to be opposed to their judgement. Land captains supervised the communes' most important function, redistribution of land among its members. Indeed nothing pertaining to the financial, economic, social, and cultural welfare of the rural community escaped the jurisdiction of the land captains. Some of their decisions were final and not subject to review, others could be appealed to higher authorities, the county session and the provincial board.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the tide gradually started to change in Russia. By 1905, strong anti-communal opinion gained momentum and delivered the final blow to the institution of the village commune. Agrarian unrest of the peasants in 1905, the steady growth of industry, and intensive agriculture forced the Russian government to make a sharp turn-about in its usual communal support. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the question of village and rural revolution due to the acutely difficult and inferior conditions of the peasantry became a very important and urgent problem of economic policy for the government. After the famine and crop failure of 1901, it created numerous committees to investigate the rural situation. Peasant disturbances of 1902 pressed the Ministry for Internal Affairs to organize commissions to in-

investigate all legislations effecting the peasantry and the many issues of economic policy, such as land ownership, the communal mutual responsibility, and others¹.

This was the time when Russian industry and agriculture were growing vigorously and steadily. One aspect of Russian history is the process of colonization and the occupation of vast new lands. Throughout this expansion the whole development of agriculture was through the extensive mode of cultivation, that is, using more land area rather than revitalizing old fields. During the nineteenth century, new lands were still available and as a result, productivity of arable land could be disregarded. Productivity per desiatina remained static throughout this period. By the end of the nineteenth century, the conditions of agriculture had begun to change. Extensification reached its limits, at least in Central Russia. With the lack of vacant lands for future expansion, extensive agriculture of the three field system started to experience a crisis, and agriculture, as never before, was ready for intensification, i. e., higher productivity from the same amount of land.

Its fulfillment required a complete change of the existing conditions in the village. Rapid growth of industry in Russia pushed agriculture into a more capitalistic money economy. Expanding railway construction started to connect the village with

¹Peter I. Lyashchenko, History of the National Economy of Russia to the 1917 Revolution, p. 744.

domestic and foreign markets. In 1890, an extensive program of railway construction was undertaken. Some 15,000 miles of railway lines were built, including the Trans-Siberian railway. The railway construction in turn intensified business activities. According to official data, the number of workers employed in manufacturing, mining, and metallurgy increased from 1.4 million in 1890 to 2.3 million in 1900 and to 3 million in 1913¹.

Industrial expansion exercised a pronounced effect on Russian exports. Annual exports increased from 698 million roubles in 1896 to 941 million in 1901-5; to 1,203 million in 1906-10; and to 1,540 million in 1911-13. The bulk of exports consisted of agricultural goods, raw materials and semi-manufactured items. The expansion of industry facilitated the development of banking. The number of joint stock commercial banks, municipal banks, and state savings banks increased remarkably from 1890 to 1913. This extraordinary progress urgently demanded swift change in the village to bring it into step with increased expansion. The necessity for political stability also influenced the government to re-examine its rural policies. The ideological advocates of the commune, such as the Slavophiles and Westernizers, by 1900 had long ago passed into oblivion. The Russian government was no longer the overwhelmingly aristocratic government it had been in 1861. The

¹S. Dubrovskii, Stolypinskaya Reforma, p. 14.

government of Nicholas II had to consider more than ever before the interests and opinions of the middle class, both urban and rural.

In 1902, the Conference on the Needs of the Agricultural Industry under the chairmanship of Witte convened and strongly expressed the desire to decrease the power of the commune. Witte was an opponent of the commune himself. In his notes he indicated that the commune was a barrier to culture and, contrary to popular opinion, did not constitute a weapon against proletarianism. The law of March 12, 1903, sponsored by Witte, brought to an end the joint responsibility of the village commune for state obligations in most provinces. This act considerably weakened the power of the village commune over its members¹.

Meanwhile, numerous commissions on the needs of agriculture presented the ideas which later found their expression in the famous Stolypin Reform of 1906. Most of the commissions stressed the technological backwardness of the village and urged abolition of the three field system and adaptation of multiple systems which included planting grass and root crops. Further, most of the commissions indicated that the communes constituted a substantial block against technological improvement. They urged transformation of the village commune into individual farmsteads and that the peasant be given the right to

¹Florinsky, op. cit., p. 1,214.



separate from the commune, irrespective of the wishes of the latter¹.

The basis of Stolypin's political program became the emancipation of the peasants from the tyranny of the village commune. In his speech to the Third Duma, Stolypin remarked that "the government had placed its wager not on the needy and the drunken in the village, but on the strong--the sturdy individual proprietor"². The reform was undertaken by Stolypin after he was appointed president of the Council of Ministers. The Stolypin reform was directed toward abolishing communal tenure, merging scattered strips into one whole, and making individual farmers out of communal peasants. As a prelude to the general reform, Stolypin, by the Ukase of October 5, 1906, stripped the commune of many of its previous responsibilities. The peasant now could obtain passports and travel freely throughout Russia without asking permission of communal authorities. The authority and disciplinary powers of the land captains were diminished except those concerning elected peasant officials³.

The land reform was incorporated in the Ukase of November 9, 1906, and issued without the approval of the Duma. After a lapse of nearly four years the Third State Duma approved the

¹Lyashchenko, op. cit., p. 744.

²Florinsky, op. cit., pp. 1,215-1,220.

³Ibid.

measure and expanded the Ukase into the law of June 14, 1910, and the Land Settlement Act of May 29, 1911. The Stolypin Reform was of a complex nature since it possessed different rules and regulations for the communes with repartitional tenure than for those with hereditary household tenure. Communes which did not redistribute their land for 24 years and over were classified as having hereditary household tenure. Communes with hereditary household tenure were declared to have passed to the regime of individual ownership even without consulting the wishes of the communal members. In the communes with repartitional tenure, every householder received the right to receive individual ownership at any time by redistribution. By the law of 1911, the peasants were allowed to divide among the householders pastures and grazing lands which according to the earlier legislation were left under communal ownership¹.

The breaking of the communal system went along with the consolidation of scattered strips. If a peasant owned cross-strip fields he now had the right to request the commune to consolidate them in a single plot as far as possible. The provisions of the reform were so constructed to encourage peasants to consolidate their holdings. The supervision of consolidation was in the hands of a network of local committees which functioned under the direction of the central land settlement committee. Furthermore, a peasant could request the consolidation

¹Ibid., p. 1,216.

of his land plots; if one-fifth of the total number of householders agreed to this request, it was mandatory for the commune to grant it.

Article 13 of the law permitted communes to pay money in cases where consolidation became impossible. Furthermore, reform made it possible for the peasants to sell or purchase their plots if they so wished. Some peasants who owned little land or derived their existence from industry rather than from agriculture chose to sell their lands and migrated to the cities. At the same time, well-to-do peasants could have an opportunity to purchase more land for cultivation on a larger scale. The law, however, placed definite restrictions upon the accumulation and purchase of allotment land, which could not exceed six personal allotments.

The next major aspect of the Stolypin Reform was the abolition of joint family ownership. The household elder now was recognized as the only owner of the allotment belonging to the household. This provision helped to strengthen peasant ownership and lifted the uncertainty which surrounded it. The changed mood of the government was reflected in the lending policies of the State Peasant Bank towards communal tenure. From 1883 to 1894, 98.7 percent of the loans made by the Peasant Bank went for the collective purchase of land to the village communes and peasant associations, and only 1.3 per cent of the loans went to private individuals. In 1906, however, a sharp turn-about took place. Individual loans increased to 18.7 per

cent and in 1912 further increased to 82.9 per cent.

The diversity of communal development in Russia made the difficulty of separation vary from one geographical region to another, and was most successful in the places where the commune was declining. The west bank of the Ukraine, which had the most capitalistic agriculture, also had the biggest percentage of privately secured land. It was followed by White Russia; communal dissolution progressively diminished further north and toward Siberia. By the end of 1908, Stolypin could claim the creation of almost one million landed proprietors. By the end of 1915, 7.3 million households, or more than half of the 13 to 14 million households in 50 provinces of European Russia were settled on allotment lands and held it in hereditary tenure¹.

In general, the Stolypin Reform achieved considerable success.

Whole areas of land far distant from the village and therefore left uncultivated, when divided up among the peasants, became prosperous farms; the villages themselves tended to become depots of industry for these farms. Cattle greatly improved in quality. Most interesting of all, cooperation, which had remained a dream so long as the village community was joint owner of all property, began to spring up of itself everywhere as soon as the individual peasant had something of his own to cooperate with--especially in dairy produce and marketing of farm products².

¹Ibid., p. 1,216.

²Dubrovski, op. cit., p. 12.

Concerning the Stolypin Reform, Lenin wrote that: "The fate of the bourgeois revolution in Russia, not only the present revolution in Russia, but future possible democratic revolutions, depend above all on the success or failure of this measure"¹. Russian revolutionaries, especially the Socialist revolutionaries, still looked disapprovingly on the creation of individualism in the village. In October, 1917, when the Bolsheviks gained power, they encouraged once again the preservation of the peasant commune. They issued a land decree which aimed at preserving the equalitarian principle in the village and advocated periodic land redistribution--the basic principle of the village commune. However, the Russian countryside, from the Stolypin Reforms until almost 1929, except for the period of the Civil War, was more or less free from any pressure of ideological compulsion until savagely ordered into equalitarian Soviet collectives by Marxist theorists.

Again the changing conditions and necessities of the state dictated new policies in the treatment of the peasant commune. Agrarian unrest and expanding economic forces finally resulted in a complete turn-about from the traditional support of the peasant commune. The chief of Stolypin's reforms was directed towards emancipating the peasants from the commune, and towards consolidating their strips into one whole. Through these measures the government tried to create a conservative, proprietary element so vital for political stability.

¹Pares, op. cit., p. 465.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion it becomes evident that the Russian commune was not a Slav phenomenon nor did it possess the idealized characteristics of an exclusively agricultural society destined to bring "inner truth" and brotherhood or agrarian socialism to the Russian countryside.

Early Russian communes of the Kievan period did not possess coercive or equalitarian powers over their members. Relations were based on voluntary agreements with extensive ground for individualistic self-expression. Equalitarian tendencies were not present in the village commune at this time. Peasants possessed unequal and diversified amounts of land; redistribution was not practiced. This practice, so cherished by Russia's Slavophiles and socialists, was a result of the external forces which acted upon the commune.

Peter's poll tax which established equal payment of taxes from every peasant necessitated equal redistribution of land among the communal members. After the emancipation, the commune acquired broad powers in this question. This was made possible by the government granting the peasant commune the power and authority that had previously been held by the landlords. By creating a strong commune, the government hoped to

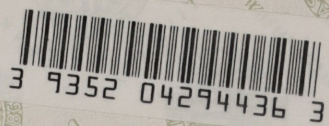
preserve political stability and peace in the village.

In 1906, however, when new forces started to invade the Russian countryside and economy, it took Stolypin and action by the government to undertake a second emancipation--the emancipation of the peasant from the commune.

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