

HISTORICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECREE OF FARMERS FREE FROM SERFDOM IN THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE

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ABSTRACT

At the beginning of the reign of Alexander I in the Russian Empire, "The decree of farmers free from serfdom" outlined a new course of government policy towards the peasants. For the first time, the supreme power announced the possibility of freeing the peasants for ransom, which would later become the key provision of the reform on February 19, 1861. The text of the "The decree of farmers free from serfdom" reflected the instability of the position of Alexander I after his accession, when he was in no hurry to proclaim his political program. This explains the hidden meaning of the legislative act, which contained references to the historical and legal precedents of the previous century. During the reign of Catherine II, cautious attempts were made in legislative acts to start solving the peasant question, to which Alexander I refers. Among the precedents, the decree on free farmers does not mention the "Manifesto of the Three-Day Corvee" not only because it did not correspond to the statement of the young emperor to rule according to the precepts of his grandmother, and not his father. At that time, the government leaders, realizing the economic and moral harm of serfdom, still retained the idea of the need for control and guardianship over the peasants by the nobles. The analysis of the historical implications of the decree allows us to reconstruct the law-making laboratory of autocratic power and expand our understanding of its steps towards solving the peasant question. Refs 15.

Keywords: Autocracy, Peasant Question, Reform, Legislation, Serfdom.

INTRODUCTION

On February 19, 1861, Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich wrote in his diary: "A new history begins, a new era of Russia", thus assessing the significance of the abolition of serfdom. The course for peasant reform was set at the very beginning of the XIX century – on February 20, 1803, when Alexander I signed the "Decree on Free farmers". Despite the fact that the document clearly spelled out all the instructional provisions, it also has a hidden meaning. It is no accident that it presents all the significant measures taken by the emperor's predecessors to improve the situation of the peasants. In the 19th century, the autocratic government used other tools in its relations with society, for example, the Most Merciful manifestos. Also, other legislative acts served as signals of a change in the government's course for the subjects-in addition to manifestos drawn up on various occasions, ministerial circulars and personnel reshuffles. In some cases, the legislator considered it necessary to refer to a historical precedent in the preamble of the document in order to explain or give weight to innovations, as, for example, in the decree "On the Inheritance of the Throne" of 1722. Its preamble refers the subjects not only to the will of Ivan III to appoint his son Vasily as the heir, bypassing the grandson Dmitry, but also to biblical stories. The decree of February 20, 1803 is not so transparent.

The interpretation of its hidden meaning must begin with the legislative act adopted a hundred years before the liberation of the peasants from serfdom and marked the beginning of the last stage of the existence of the serf system, when the power of the landlords reached its apogee. On February 18, 1762, Peter III signed the Manifesto "On granting Liberty and Freedom to the

entire Russian nobility", granting the upper class broad privileges. At the same time, after the publication of this legislative act, there is a need to solve the peasant question.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A deep analysis of the "Manifesto on the freedom of the Nobility" was given by Klyuchevsky in the work devoted to the analysis of the literary work - "Nedorosl" by Fonvizin. At first glance, the historian's focus turned out to be a dramatic work, but the title of the article clarified that "an experiment in historical explanation of an educational play" would be undertaken. Indeed, the central plot of Klyuchevsky's work was not an artistic fiction, but a historical event, which he assessed as an important milestone in the history of Russia – the "decree on the liberties of the nobility". According to the historian, "noble liberty" was "understood by many as the dismissal of the estate from all special estate duties with the preservation of all class rights." However, despite the fact that in the Manifesto of 1762 "no new rights over serfs" were announced, many nobles, like the heroes of Fonvizin's play, interpreted it precisely as an extension of serfdom. "The nobles of the simpleton mind were misled by the fact that the law did not directly prescribe to serve", "this was a fatal mistake, a blatant misunderstanding". According to Klyuchevsky, the law "appealed" "to the public conscience", but this intention of the legislator was not clear to everyone. The reason for the lack of understanding by the noble society of the meaning of the Manifesto, the historian saw in the strict police control of Peter's reign and the lack of "soft civic education". The authoritarian regime did not allow the subjects of the Russian emperor to learn the basic truths of civil society, to realize that "rights without obligations are a legal absurdity <...>; a class with only rights without obligations is a political impossibility".

At the same time, the authorities were afraid of such an interpretation of "liberty" and were in no hurry to free the upper class from compulsory service to the state. Klyuchevsky cites the refusal of the Senate in 1731 to introduce a 25-year term of service for the nobles with the right to reduce it in the future, as this may corrupt the nobility, which will live in laziness and idleness. Thirty years later, the ruling elite decided that the consciousness of the noble class has reached maturity (thanks to the vigilant efforts of the authorities), and it is possible to release it from compulsory public service. These considerations were put by the legislator in the preamble of the Manifesto of 1762.

Indeed, some of the nobles accepted the "moral duty" that the legislator now imposed on them – "to take care of the abandoned class, the peasantry"⁷, become enlightenment guides, "cultural trappers", "prepare for the responsible and patriotic role of the head of local government and society". However, the other part of the privileged class "thought and understood their position in a simple way" – as the right to dispose of the life and fate of their serfs at their whim, left to their full power.

This interpretation of the Manifesto of 1762 is developed by Kamensky in his fundamental work on the history of the reforms of the XVIII century based on the work of M. The Manifesto

On the Liberties of the nobility as "a kind of revolution, a revolution in the entire system of social relations of the Russian state", since from that moment the right to own serfs was no longer associated with public service, and the supreme power did not leave itself the tools of direct interaction with the landowners' peasants.

Until the end of the XVIII century, the monarch did not interfere in the relations of peasants and landowners, despite the fact that in the reign of Catherine II there were projects to improve the serf system, and the enlightened monarch herself thought about the inconsistency of serfdom with the spirit of the time. But the Empress did not dare to make radical changes in social relations, confirming the privileges of the nobility with a Letter of Commendation, and only indirectly indicated the possible direction of solving the peasant question in the Manifesto of 1775. Kamensky believes that the prohibition contained in the legislative act to re-convert to serfdom the peasants who found themselves at liberty directly indicated "the possibility of

liberation from serfdom." The historian connects two documents of Catherine's reign—the Manifesto of 1775 and the general plan of an Educational home for brought children and a hospital for poor maternity patients from Moscow in 1763. In the General plan of the Moscow educational home, it was stipulated that all pupils and their descendants "will remain free" "and under no circumstances can they be enslaved or fortified". According to Kamensky, "in this way, the possibility of liberation from serfdom was practically demonstrated".

The "Manifesto on Freedom of Enterprise" or, as it was officially called, "Manifesto on the most high-granted favors to various estates, on the occasion of the peace concluded with the Ottoman Port" was published by Catherine II on the occasion of the end of the Russian-Turkish war of 1768-1774. According to the Kyuchuk-Kainarji peace, Russia received Kerch, Azov and other lands, as well as access to the Black and Azov Seas. In honor of this, the Empress, in her manifesto, granted certain rights and freedoms to various segments of society, including permission for free entrepreneurial activity, and abolished several tax collections. In total, there were 47 items in the Manifesto. So, in point 46 of the Manifesto it is said that all who were released by the landowners to freedom, now have the right "not to register for anyone", and during the audit they must inform "in what kind of Our service, or in the petty-bourgeois, or merchant state they want to enter". It goes on to say that their choice depends on what taxes they will pay¹⁵. Perhaps the empress felt that the victorious war strengthened her position, and against this background, the landowners will accept the changes announced in the Manifesto quite calmly. She was afraid, as Kamensky noted that any attempt at a radical solution would inevitably cause a wave of noble protest, which could overwhelm her. The Empress wrote that she could not even say that the peasants were the same people, because in this case she risked power.

However, the Manifesto did not appear immediately after the victorious end of the war, but almost six months later. Most likely, Catherine II wanted to first restore the economy after the war, and then improve the social and economic situation of her subjects. In addition, in Russia at this time there was a peasant war under the leadership of Pugachev, which ended two months before the announcement of the Manifesto, therefore, in order to prevent new peasant unrest, forgiveness was proclaimed for those who, through their own ignorance, joined the rebels, and it was forbidden to re-convert the released peasants to serfdom.

Kamensky considers the Manifesto of 1775 as a "direct" continuation of the "started by the legislation on the Foundling Home". However, he emphasizes that Catherine II "did not dare to leave the liberated peasants in the same rank": they had to become burghers or merchants (as well as the children of the Orphanage). Kamensky sees in these measures not only an attempt to preserve the "social balance", but, first of all, the implementation of "one of the most important goals of Catherine's reforms" - the creation of the third estate.

And yet, in the view of the authorities, serfdom has not yet exhausted its potential, primarily administrative. This explains the distribution of state-owned peasants to private ownership in the reign of Paul I. According to Tartakovsky, Paul I assimilated the ideas of the Enlightenment and "never sympathized with the serfdom order, realizing all their perniciousness for Russia in moral, social, and economic relations". This statement is more true in moral terms – Paul I, as an enlightened person, should have condemned the inhumane manifestations of serfdom. And at the same time, he held the view of serfdom that was characteristic of the first half of the century. "The landowner was then considered the natural patron and economic guardian of his peasants, and his presence was regarded as a boon to them"²¹. Tartakovsky, relying on the evidence of contemporaries, believed that the emperor "was deeply convinced that the landowner peasants, who should be paternally cared for by their owners, live in Russia much better than the state-owned ones, who tolerate abuse and arbitrariness of local officials"²².

The policy of Paul I in the peasant question is one of the most controversial issues in historiography. On April 5, 1797, the day of the coronation, the emperor issued a Manifesto "On the three-day work of the landowner's peasants in favor of the landowner, and on the non-compulsion to work on Sunday days", limiting the time of peasant work for the landowner to

three days a week. The appearance of this legislative act was dictated not so much by concern for the peasants, as by the desire to regulate their relations with the landowners, to interfere with their broad privileges, to show the limit of "noble freedom". As Tartakovsky emphasized, for the first time the autocratic power "stood between the landowner and the peasant" in order to monitor "the proper performance by the landowners of their duties to the peasants." For Paul, as an absolute monarch, "the sovereign of all classes", all subjects were on the same level - under his authority, "in relation to him they acted as one common mass and in this respect were equal to each other." The historian cites the decrees prohibiting the sale of domestic servants and peasants without land (February 10, 1797) and the same decree concerning the Little Russian peasants (October 16, 1798) as evidence that "in the opinion of Paul I, peasants can be attached to the land, but do not constitute the personal property of the landowner". The emperor applied the "general equalization principle" to all submitted documents", which Klyuchevsky rightly called "general disenfranchisement". This is also shown by the apparition of serfs to swear an oath to the new emperor on an equal basis with the rest of the estates. Exactly the same step was taken by Alexander III upon his accession to the throne, but it was dictated by other considerations: if in post-reform Russia it testified to the new status of personally free peasants, then at the end of the XVIII century it demonstrated the subordination of serfs directly to the monarch and symbolized the breadth of his power. Paul I was a typical autocrat: it seemed to him that only the personal control of the autocrat over everything that happens in the country will allow restoring order. He was a proponent of "strict subordination" and "strict centralization" in management, seeing in the legislation "a kind of rein that keeps the subjects in obedience". As his contemporary noted: "And there, so that the flatterer does not creep in with a lie, // and the slanderer does not deceive, // With His own hand he began to do everything // and he looked with his own eye".

At the same time, Tartakovsky gave the "Manifesto on the three-day serfdom" the character of a program document, which, together with other "peasant legalizations of Paul I, largely anticipated the evolution of anti-serf legislation in the reigns of Alexander I and Nicholas I (up to the preparation of the peasant reform itself)." As proof, the historian referred to the opinion of the members of the Secret Committee of 1826. Tartakovsky noted that "modern historical thought recognizes that it is from this Pavlovian manifesto that the process of governmental emancipation of the peasants in Russia originates".

However, this legislative act is not mentioned in the program document of the next reign - the Decree of February 20, 1803. Did Alexander I accidentally or intentionally ignore the activities of his father in the peasant question?

The beginning of the reign of Alexander I raises many questions among historians, the main of which are the intentions of the young emperor, the presence or absence of his program. Researchers look for answers in the first legislative acts of the monarch.

There is not a single sketch or reasoning of Alexander I, written by him with his own hand, where he would have reflected on the ways to solve the peasant question. Mironenko believes that he did not have a clear plan of action, a transformative program in this area³⁰. However, Tsamutali gave a different explanation for this fact. Reconstructing the situation of the first years of the reign, the historian focuses on the environment of the emperor, emphasizing that he had to maneuver between the conspirators and the former Catherine nobles, without the support of "young friends", of which at the time of the accession of the young monarch was only one - Mr. Stroganov. Being in such a "delicate situation", Alexander I, with his usual caution, was in no hurry to "reveal his cards" and declare his transformative program³¹. Its presence in Alexander I does not cause any doubt in the historian. All the previous education and preparation of the Grand Duke for the future rule contributed to the formation of his reformist sentiments.

Alexander I was born in 1777 and was raised by his grandmother, the Empress Catherine II. She took care of her grandson, seeing him as her heir. Alexander I's teacher was Frederick Caesar Lagarp, who instilled liberal views in his pupil. Perhaps it was the mentor of the future emperor who influenced his desire to free the peasants. As early as 1796, Grand Duke Alexander Pavlovich confessed to one of his "young friends", Adam Czartoryski, that he "hates despotism

everywhere, in whatever form it manifests itself, that he loves freedom, which, in his opinion, should equally belong to all people." And in 1801, Lagarp wrote to Alexander I that serfdom is an obstacle to education, and also gave recommendations for the abolition of serfdom. The young emperor chose to remain an independent and independent ruler, after which Lagarp left for Switzerland forever, but their confidential correspondence lasted all his life.

Meanwhile, it was not possible for Alexander I to make these intentions public immediately after his accession to the throne. "It was necessary to please the mood that gripped the majority, and he openly condemned the despotism of Paul I and said that he promised to rule "according to the laws and heart" of his grandmother Catherine II"³⁴. In addition, from the tragic outcome of the reign of Paul I, his son "learned" an important lesson: the monarch can only stay on the throne by "enlightened absolutism", "*i.e.*, personal authority" and "promises", which did not oblige him to do anything.

Almost immediately after coming to power, the emperor created two higher institutions that operated in parallel in the first years of his reign – the Indispensable Council (1801-1810) and the Secret Committee (1801-1803).

The secret committee was not an official body, as its name suggests. In this way, it differed from the Indispensable Council, which developed and discussed the most important draft laws, and was also the main advisory body. They differed not only in their time of existence, their functions, but also in the composition and number of participants, and their views. The permanent council consisted of twelve dignitaries (Zavadovsky, Vorontsov & Zubov, Rumyantsev). "At first, and Palen had great influence in the Council" – participants in the conspiracy of March 11, 1801. In addition, representatives of the Catherine's nobility sat in the Indispensable Council. Griboyedov in Chatsky's monologue outlined the contradictions and differences in the worldviews of the "Catherine's old men" and the youth of the Alexander reign with bright strokes: "For the antiquity of years // To free life their enmity is irreconcilable, // Judgments draw from forgotten newspapers // Times of Ochakovsky and pokorennya of the Crimea". Griboyedov wrote "Woe from Wit" in 1824, at the end of Alexander's reign. But even at the beginning of his reign, the contradictions between the generations were quite acute. This confirms the fact that even attempts to eliminate abuses on the part of landlords have not received legislative expression. The Indispensable Council rejected a decree banning the sale of peasants without land, because the older generation did not want to put up with the idea of limiting their privileges.

It turns out that two different generations gathered in the advisory bodies of the Russian Empire under Alexander I. It can be assumed that the emperor did not trust the Catherine nobles, so he secretly discussed the affairs of the state in a secret committee created a month after the establishment of the Indispensable Council, when the "young friends" gathered around the emperor. The secret committee was called upon to assist the monarch "in the systematic work of reforming the shapeless edifice of the administration of the empire.". The emperor considered it necessary to solve the peasant question with his "young friends", who sat in a Secret committee. It included Kochubey, Novosiltsev, Chartorysky, Stroganov.

After the coronation on September 15, 1801, the emperor felt more confident (besides gradually removing the most active conspirators- Palen, Panin and Zubov) and began to gradually implement the reform program. One of the first steps in the peasant policy was the decree of December 12, 1801, "on granting merchants, philistines and state-owned settlers to acquire land by purchase". In terms of volume, this decree is small, it provides only one right – the purchase of land not inhabited by peasants, but the main thing is that it was granted not only to merchants, philistines and all urban, but also to "state-owned settlers". Probably, Alexander I wanted to show the landowners that the monarch gives rights to the peasants living on state lands, and that the landowners should take an example from him.

On February 20, 1803, a more radical measure in this direction followed. The full title of the document, known in the scientific and educational literature as the "Decree on free farmers "- " Decree on the release of the landowner of his peasants to freedom after the conclusion of conditions on mutual consent".

"The basis of the reforms should be the definition of the rights of citizens, the main among which is the right to freedom and property," – this was the position of Alexander I. Perhaps it was she who formed the basis of the "Decree on free farmers". It is one of the attempts of the government to legislate the possibility of freeing the peasants. Historians differ in their assessment of this document. Platonov believed that the decree "remained almost without application, but served as a reliable sign for society, by which it was possible to conclude about the direction of the government in the peasant question". Mironenko notes that it was in the decree on free farmers that "for the first time the principle was publicly announced, which was then, of course, in a greatly modified form, the basis of the peasant reform of 1861"⁴³. Dolgikh examines the decree and its consequences in detail, but some aspects remain outside the scope of his article.

This decree is well known to historians, but this legislative act has a subtext, the task of which was to justify the actions of the authorities in the eyes of society, giving them greater validity. The legislator "insured" his decisions by mentioning the decree of Elizabeth Petrovna on February 14, 1761, two legislative acts of the reign of Catherine II (the "Manifesto on Freedom of Enterprise" of 1775 and the decree of October 25, 1765) and the decree of the first year of the reign of Alexander I-December 12, 1801.

RESULTS

The "Decree on free farmers" consists of a preamble and the main part, which contains 10 points. In the preamble, the legislator emphasizes that the proposal to release the peasants to freedom for ransom does not come from the supreme power, but is a "private initiative"⁴⁵ representative of the local nobility: "The actual Privy Councilor, Count Sergei Rumyantsev, has expressed a desire..." It should be noted that this desire of Rumyantsev was sincere-later he repeatedly released the peasants to freedom. For example, in 1834, in memory of the events of 1812, he released 745 serfs with the right to use their lands. The peasants, in gratitude for their freedom, wished to build a monument in honor of the exploits in the Patriotic War and Field Marshal M. I. Kutuzov. They collected 44 thousand rubles. With this money, a 22-meter monument was installed on one of the fortifications of the Tarutinsky camp. On the stone base of the monument there is an inscription: "In this place, the Russian army under the leadership of Field Marshal M. I. Kutuzov, fortified, saved Russia and Europe" and "This monument was erected on the dependency of the peasants of the village of Tarutina, who received from Count Rumyantsev unlimited freedom". Such a desire to liberate the peasants was dictated by the liberal views of the count, which was educated at the University of Leiden (which was made possible by the Manifesto of February 18, 1762).

In 1803, Sergei Petrovich Rumyantsev was a member of the Indispensable Council, the highest government institution, and not an unspoken (secret) committee. His appeal to the government in November 1802 with an initiative to liberate the serfs who belonged to him and grant them land gave rise to a return to the peasant question. Count Rumyantsev enjoyed the favor of the emperor, and, most likely, was aware of his reformist plans. Russian autocrats often did not openly declare their intentions; it was believed that the environment foresaw them. So it could be in the case of the initiative of gr. Rumyantsev, which became a way out of the "predicament"⁴⁹, in which Alexander I found himself at the beginning of his reign.

In addition, Rumyantsev was a figure who connected two generations – "Catherine's old men" and "young friends" of Alexander I. He received an education abroad in the spirit of the Enlightenment, and by age he belonged to the representatives of the Catherine era, but not to the "old men", but to the middle age. His father, Rumyantsev-Zadunaisky, commanded the 2nd army in the Russian-Turkish war of 1768-1774 and concluded the peace of Kuchuk-Kainardzhi, on the occasion of which the Manifesto of 1775 was published, mentioned in the Decree of 1803.

DISCUSSION

Referring to the "Manifesto on Freedom of Enterprise", Alexander I pursued several goals. First, he wanted to show that he remembered his promise to rule the state "according to the laws and according to the heart" of his grandmother. And, secondly, he stressed that one of these laws openly declared the possibility of the liberation of the peasants. Perhaps he wanted to show that the new law was not his personal will, because, like Catherine II, he was afraid that the landowners would not understand it. Alexander I at that time was in power for only two years and every decision could undermine his authority.

The preamble to the Manifesto of 1803 also mentions the Decree of December 12, 1801, issued by Alexander I. This document was published, but during the discussion in the "intimate" council, *i.e.* the Secret committee, it was decided to abandon it, so "the decree of December 12, 1801, did not receive further development". Perhaps the legislator refers to this decree in order to convince the landowners that the freed peasants will have their own income, which they will receive from the land.

The reference to the Manifesto of 1775 and the Decree of 1801 anticipates the objections of G. A. Derzhavin, who during the discussion of the project of Rumyantsev in the Indispensable Council indicated that serfs after paying the ransom will remain without means of subsistence (they will be given by the land) and will again turn into serfdom (and this is prohibited by the "Manifesto on Freedom of Enterprise").

In the ninth paragraph of the "Decree on Free grain farmers", two more legislative acts of Alexander I's predecessors are given: the Decrees of 1761 and 1765. In fact, these two documents prohibit peasants from "committing themselves to a bill of exchange", *i.e.*, borrowing. This is due to the fact that in the middle of the XVIII century, many peasants took passports for their food and left for different cities to earn money. Due to the lack of money, they found themselves in debt, which they could not pay, and therefore remained to live with merchants, who deliberately kept them in dependence to accumulate interest. This drew the attention of Elizabeth Petrovna, who issued a decree in 1761 "On the prohibition of peasants to commit themselves to bills of exchange and enter into surety". However, it was practically not executed, so Catherine II had to issue a new act in 1765 – "On the incontinence of state peasants by merchants in work for debts", almost completely repeating the decree of the Elizabethan reign and for edification giving the history of its violation in the Kazan province in 1764 in relation to the state peasants.

The decree of 1803 removes the restrictions imposed in the XVIII century on freed peasants, expanding their civil rights – to write bills of exchange and act as guarantors. Perhaps Alexander I believed that free peasants, choosing the type of activity, will be able to earn and pay off the debt. It can also be assumed that the emperor did not clearly represent the financial situation of the peasants. Karamzin drew attention to this side of the Decree of 1803 in his note "On Ancient and New Russia", emphasizing that few serfs are rich and "will want to give the last for freedom"⁵⁴. By the way, his view of serfdom in this work bears the imprint of the last century, and even of the Pavlovian reign: "There is no doubt that the peasants of a prudent landowner <...> are happier than the state-owned ones, having in them a vigilant guardian or intercessor"⁵⁵.

CONCLUSION

It seems that, "going through" the legislative acts of his grandmother on the peasant question, Alexander I uses them as a precedent, carefully preparing the ground for changes. At the same time, he does not mention the "Manifesto on three-day serfdom". Most likely, he had several reasons for this. First, Alexander I understood that for the landowners, whose rights were curtailed by Paul I, an appeal to the legislation of the Pavlovian reign would not be a serious argument. Moreover, Alexander I himself openly demonstrated the denial of his father's activities. And, secondly, the meaning of the Manifesto of 1797 could not be perceived by contemporaries as a step towards the liberation of the peasants. Semevsky in his work on the

history of the peasant question quotes the words of Radishchev, who assessed this act as a ban on working on Sundays and "advice" to allocate three days "for master's work". At the same time, the document "the condition of neither the farmer nor the yard is not defined". It was only in the reign of Nicholas I, when the memories of the despotism of the Pavlovian period no longer disturbed contemporaries, that the government leaders began to use the Manifesto of 1797 as a precedent in the peasant question and to seek in it a justification for their search for improving the situation of the peasants.

And yet, the "Decree on free grain farmers" caused heated debates in the Indispensable Council, especially Derzhavin persisted. Despite the opposition, Alexander I showed his will, and the legislative act was adopted. "The publication of the decree did not oblige, but rather called on the landowners to release the peasants". As you know, this call was followed by a few. But the significance of the decree, which turned out to be less radical than the projects discussed, is that, first, Alexander I, in demonstrating his intention to abandon the serf system, went further than Catherine II (and Paul I), determining the social status of freedmen – they could remain in their own class and not move to others. Secondly, the decree "approved the idea of freeing the peasants for ransom", thereby demonstrating a change in the government's course in the peasant question. A course was set for the liberation of the peasants, which would later lead to the abolition of serfdom on February 19, 1861. The decision of Alexander I had its reasons – at the beginning of the XIX century, the pace of economic development of the country accelerated, ties with European countries became closer, and a catastrophic lag behind them was clearly revealed. Political stability was directly dependent on economic stability, and Alexander I, like his successors, clearly understood this. That is why in his reign there is a choice of the path that Russia will follow for at least a quarter of a century (and in relation to serfdom-the entire first half of it). And if in the next reign the authorities were still forced to justify their steps along this path by historical precedents (as the Secret Committee did in 1826, referring to the "Manifesto on The Three-day Corvee"), then under Alexander II, reality itself proved the need to cancel radical changes after the tragic defeat of Russia in the Crimean War.

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