

DOI: 10.17516/1997-1370-0798  
УДК 94(57)

## Local Government in Siberia in the 18<sup>th</sup>-Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century

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Received 18.11.2019, received in revised form 01.05.2021, accepted 06.07.2021

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**Abstract.** The relevance of the chosen topic is determined by its insufficient study in the national historical science. Based on pre-revolutionary legislation, archival materials, and pre-revolutionary periodicals, the article examines the peculiarities of local government in Siberia during the imperial period. The research is grounded on the principles of historicism and objectivity and reveals the peculiarities of local government in Siberia in the 18<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The author comes to the conclusion that administration in Siberia was characterized by an almost complete absence of self-governing principles. Therefore, the powers of administrative and police bodies on the Siberian outskirts of the country had their own specifics and were broader than in the European provinces of Russia, along the almost absolute subordination of local self-government bodies to the police institutions of the regions, which was also specific for Siberia during the imperial period. Unable to resist additional challenges, the system of regional administration, which ensured public order in the Siberian region in the 18<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, was rapidly destroyed during the revolutionary events of February 1917.

**Keywords:** history of Siberia, administration, power, local self-government, governor, police, reform, powers.

Research area: Russian History

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Citation: Konovalov, I. A. (2021). Local government in Siberia in the 18<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> century. *J. Sib. Fed. Univ. Humanit. soc. sci.*, 14(8), 1231–1238. DOI: 10.17516/1997-1370-0798.

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## Местное самоуправление в Сибири в XVIII – начале XX в.

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**Аннотация.** Актуальность выбранной темы исследования определяется ее недостаточной изученностью в отечественной исторической науке. На основе дореволюционного законодательства, архивных материалов и дореволюционной периодической печати в статье рассматриваются особенности местного управления в Сибири в имперский период. Исследование основано на принципах историзма и объективности. В статье раскрываются особенности местного управления в Сибири в XVIII – начале XX вв. Автор приходит к выводу, что управление в Сибири характеризовалось почти полным отсутствием самоуправленческих начал. Поэтому полномочия административно-полицейских органов на сибирских окраинах страны имели свою специфику и были шире, чем в европейских губерниях России, для Сибири в имперский период было также характерно почти полное подчинение органов местного самоуправления полицейским учреждениям региона. Не выдержав дополнительных вызовов, система регионального управления, обеспечивавшая общественный порядок в сибирском крае в XVIII–XIX вв., была стремительно разрушена в ходе революционных событий февраля 1917 г.

**Ключевые слова:** история Сибири, администрация, власть, местное самоуправление, губернатор, полиция, реформа, полномочия.

Научная специальность: 07.00.02 – Отечественная история

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### Introduction

The relevance of retrospective views on local governance in pre-revolutionary Siberia is explained by the similarity of the problems that have determined the basic principles of regional policy. Administrative-territorial division, departmental disunity in management, information support of administrative processes, coordination of the activities of local and central authorities – all these problems have deep historical roots. Russian historiography lacks extensive knowledge of local government and self-government in Siberia in the 18<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. It is no coincidence that the issues related to the organization of local government in pre-revolutionary Siberia have always attracted the attention of researchers.

### Theoretical framework

M. O. Akishin in his monographic studies analysed the features of law enforcement, as

well as the reforms of Peter I and Catherine II in Siberia (Akishin, 2003). I. L. Dameshek defined the place and role of the region in the political mechanisms of imperial Russia (Dameshek, 2005). N. P. Matkhanova studied the peculiarities of the Governor-General's power on the Siberian outskirts of the empire (Matkhanova, 2002). I. A. Konovalov deals with the details of the activities of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the region (Konovalov, 2020). A particularly notable contribution to the study of local government in the Siberian outskirts of Russia was made by the Omsk researcher A. V. Remnev. In his monographs, he studied personnel policy, problems in the relations between Siberia and St. Petersburg (Remnev, 2015). However, despite the seeming abundance of works devoted to the administrative processes that took place in Siberia in the 18<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, many problems of local government and self-government often stay out of the field of view of researchers. Thus, the

question of the interaction of local state administration and self-government remains unresolved; there is no single, comprehensive work that would take into account all the organizational forms of local self-government that functioned in Siberia in the pre-revolutionary period: urban, peasant, Cossack and foreign. Therefore, the main purpose of the article is to conduct a comprehensive study of the features of the system of local government and self-government in Siberia in the 18<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### Discussion

At the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the political and administrative incorporation of Siberia into the system of government of the Russian state was basically completed. In 1708, other 8 provinces were founded, the Siberian Province was organized with the centre in the city of Tobolsk (PSZ RI, No. 2218, p. 436). At the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, an absolute monarchy was established in Russia. Military-administrative functions, which were the main ones in local government in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, began to be replaced by administrative-police ones. The police was created, which became the body through which the supreme power began to exercise its powers at the local level.

Local government in Siberia in the 18<sup>th</sup> century passed through three main stages: the voivodeship, then the governor's office for special orders, and after that the governor's office for the «Institutions for the Administration of Provinces» in 1775, during which there was a distribution of police bodies throughout the territory of the region.

In the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a four-tier model of regional government took its shape. It was led by the Governor-General, who was the head of local administrations and at the same time a supervisory authority. The second tier was the provincial administration. The third tier consisted of county and city administrations, and the fourth was represented by the volost peasant self-government. The bodies of peasant and urban self-government, which received final legal regulation in the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, were completely subordinate to the mayor and zemstvo police officers, who oversaw the local police bodies

(Kononov, Tolochko, 2019, p. 15). Even in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the report of the West Siberian Governor-General in 1847 stated that Siberians did not come to the elections of the city self-government bodies «because of indifference and restriction of the benefits of the rights granted to them» (Gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv Omskoi Oblasti. F. 3. Op. 1. D. 1736a, p. 69).

Regular, professional police bodies were established in Siberia during the reign of Empress Anna Ioannovna in 1733. The Act «On the establishment of police in cities» led to opening a police master's office in Tobolsk (PSZ RI, 6378, p. 93). The powers of the police were declared a general civil service, and all subjects were obliged to assist it. The police was created as a universal tool with which the crown power had to solve any political, social and even economic problems.

The 1780s were marked by qualitative additions of an organizational and legislative nature to the administrative and police bodies already operating in the cities and counties of Siberia based on the «Institutions for the Administration of Provinces» 1775 and the «Charter of the Police Department» 1782, which turned out to be stable normative and legal acts for many years determining the powers and structure of administrative and police bodies.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Russian Empire became an absolutist-police state. The socio-political consequence of the establishment of police bodies was the emergence of the Siberian police bureaucracy, which had its own world, its own ideas and interests, and even its own language (Gessen, 1904, p. 7). Service in administrative and police reports became the main indicator of the effectiveness of local government bodies. The lack of infrastructure and communications, the large territories, the weak intensity of political and socio-economic ties, and the lack of legal support gave rise to uncontrolled autonomy in the activities of administrative and police bodies on the Siberian outskirts of the Empire.

The absence of manorial system and self-government (even on the eve of 1861 in the Irkutsk Province there was not a single manorial estate, and in the Yenisei Province there was

only one) (Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Irkutskoi oblasti, p. 106), state ownership of land, the remoteness of Siberia from the capital determined the greater role of the bureaucracy in administrative and economic management, which was not separated from police activity. The term «police» in Siberia meant almost all local state institutions, and in local administration there was almost complete unity of the police and executive authorities.

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, after the creation of ministries, the administration of the region, along with the Governor-General, was carried out by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which concentrated the lion's share of administrative, economic and police powers. The general police began to include county and city and police institutions, governors and provincial governments.

The policy of the crown power in Siberia in the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century began the search for a more effective model of local administration. In 1822, the «Institution for the Administration of Siberian Provinces» prepared by M. M. Speransky was promulgated (Dameshek, 2003, p. 18). It was extended to the general governorates of Western and Eastern Siberia, which included the Yenisei, Irkutsk, Tomsk and Tobolsk Provinces, Omsk and Yakut regions, as well as three border departments: Okhotsk, Kamchatka and Troitse-Savskoe. In total, under the «Institution for the Administration of the Siberian provinces» the two general governorates turned into 4 provinces, 2 regions, 3 administrations and 36 districts, which became known as the former uyezds (PSZ RI, No 29, 125, p. 345). The reform of M. M. Speransky stabilized regional administration, but it created a police-bureaucratic, super-centralized system of management of the region. The level of corruption and the degree of bureaucratization in the province were higher than in the central provinces of the empire, this was due to the special composition of the population, the almost complete absence of self-governing elements, independent financial control and courts. So, in 1721, the first Siberian Governor, Prince M. P. Gagarin, was hanged for «unheard-of theft» (RGADA, p. 7). In 1736 the Irkutsk Vice-Governor, state

councilor A. Zhelobov, was executed for the fact that «he did malicious deeds, from bribes accumulated a fortune» (Prutchenko, 1899, p. 58). At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, under the Governor-General I. B. Pestel, the Tobolsk Governor B. A. Hermes, the Tomsk Governor V. S. Khvostov, and the Irkutsk Governor A. M. Kornilov were put on trial (Vagin, 1872, p. 17).

According to the results of the audit by M. M. Speransky, 48 police officials, including the Tobolsk and Irkutsk Governors, were put on trial in the region, and another 174 (almost the total number of the officials of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the region) were worthy of prison, according to M. M. Speransky, but were never brought to criminal responsibility. The Irkutsk Governor Treskin was deprived of marks of excellence, ranks and nobility. However, the Tobolsk governor, Fanbrin, not only escaped criminal responsibility, but even became a senator (Turgenev, 1895, p. 43). However, even after the «purge» of M. M. Speransky administrative and police apparatus of the region, the Governors-General V. Ia. Rupert and P. D. Gorchakov left Siberia not of their own free will (Remnev, 1995, p. 129).

In the second quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, political police operating independently of the Ministry of Internal Affairs was created in Russia, covering all regions of the country with its special department – the Corps of Gendarmes. In the 1830s, the 7<sup>th</sup>, and then the 8<sup>th</sup> district of the Gendarme Corps was established in the Siberian region. The district headquarters was first located in Tobolsk, and then, since 1839, in Omsk (Gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv Omskoi oblasti. F. 3. Op. 1. D. 3223, p. 6).

The supreme power sought to create special institutions on the spots to combat corruption and abuse, and to give the gendarmes the functions of a supervisory body independent of local administrators (Rumiantsev, 2017, p. 63). The intervention of the gendarmes in the local government caused opposition from the governors-general as the reports of gendarmerie officers to the third department of His Imperial Majesty's Own Chancellery revealed shortcomings on the ground. However, they lost their effect, since they concerned individ-

ual cases of abuse of power (Kononov, 2014, p. 17).

The police, in accordance with the «Institution» of 1822, was the most important attribute of the organization and functioning of the entire mechanism of the state. The term «police» was actually identical to the term «local state government».

In the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the administrative and territorial structure of Siberia was changed: instead of two general governorates (Eastern Siberia and Western Siberia), Irkutsk, Amur and Steppe General Governorates were established. Tobolsk and Tomsk provinces started to be directly subordinated to the Ministry of Internal Affairs (PSZ RI, No. 886, p. 212). The Supreme power made attempts to correct the «Institution» of 1822, abandoning its principles. The activities of the collegial councils under the governors-general and governors were curtailed. The peculiarity of the Siberian outskirts of the empire was that of the reforms of 1860–1870s only the military and urban ones became widespread in the region, the zemstvo reform was not implemented, and the judicial reform was carried out only in 1897–1899. Therefore, the powers of the local administrative and police department in the province and in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were broader than in the central provinces of the Empire.

The city reform of 1870 and the counter-reform of 1892 were based on the state concept of public self-government, which proceeded from the fact that self-government is obliged to carry out its activities primarily in the interests of the state. The city's public administration operated on the basis of state laws, and its subjects of responsibility were determined by the state. The functions and activities of public administration in cities and local government were considered homogeneous (Kononov, Shimanis, 2009, p. 26). The partial implementation of judicial reform in the region at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the refusal to spread the zemstvo reform inevitably led to the preservation of the role of police bodies in local government and self-government, their interference in the private and public life of Siberians. Prior to the introduction of the «Judicial Statutes» of

1864 in the region the bodies of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Siberia performed investigative and judicial powers. With the transfer of the prosecutor's office to the judiciary jurisdiction, the county police officers and governors were given the authority to exercise administrative supervision.

In some areas of Siberia, state authorities were either completely absent or poorly represented. The number of officials in the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the region has always been small. So, after the police reform in Siberia in 1867, there were only 206 officials in the East Siberian and 257 in the West Siberian general government (PSZ RI, No. 44681, p. 879).

The course of the supreme power in the field of Siberian administration after the construction of the Trans-Siberian railway was determined both by the general processes of economic and socio-political development of the country, and by the ideas of the crown power about the place of Siberia in the empire. The supreme power in the late 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries tried to revise its previous approaches to local government in Siberia, to unify and modernize the forms of local administrative and police bodies, taking into account the specific regional conditions. However, the police remained the main institution of state administration in the Siberian region. According to the «City Regulations» of 1892, the governors – police chiefs approved the heads of the city self-government, i. e. city mayors. The decisions of the Duma came into force only after the governor's approval. Members of the boards were equated with civil servants, and the governor could make orders to them and remove them from office (Gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv Omskoi oblasti. F. 172. Op. 1. D. 70, p. 8).

The interaction between local government and self-government was based on the principle of «hierarchy», «unity» and power, which laid down a strict subordination of self-government bodies to local government institutions, ensuring common ways of resolving issues, unquestioning and mandatory compliance with the instructions of the Governor-General, provincial and county administrations (Kononov, 1997, p. 25). Only the gendarmerie departments, the

state chambers, the courts, and the excise departments were outside the control of the governors.

In the rural areas of the region, since there were no zemstvo institutions in the Siberian region, the district police officers managed not only the protection of public order and security, but also the economic activities of the counties, with the help of peasant chiefs, bailiffs and volost public administration. Only the county treasuries were outside their jurisdiction.

Significant changes in the activities and organization of local government at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were made after the extension to Siberia in 1897 of the «Judicial Statutes» of 1864, the «City Regulations» of 1892 and the «Temporary Regulations on Peasant Chiefs» of 1898. Nevertheless, as before, administrative and police bodies occupied a central place in the system of local government bodies. Its modernization, despite historical challenges, was largely non-systemic in nature.

Officials of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, who made up the lion's share of all employees of the region, in addition to executing their official powers, followed all the instructions of their leaders, even going beyond the legal framework, so they could not but cause discontent on the part of the local population. Administrative and police bodies were often used by the supreme power as punitive tools to suppress public initiatives. Law enforcement activities were sometimes accompanied by unjustified violence against the local population. Periodicals and archival materials show that the victims of brutality and arbitrariness on the part of the police were not only those who committed illegal actions, but even respectable Siberians (Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Tomskoi Oblasti, p.181).

In the pre-revolutionary period, there was no mechanism for the formation of managerial personnel, which would be based on the formation of a qualified personnel corps. Arbitrariness and corruption, which were widespread in the police environment, could not exert a positive impact on all managerial activities (Sibirskii vestnik, 2). Since the establishment of the regular police in Siberia, there have always been certain difficulties in recruiting

general police bodies due to the unpopularity of the police service, rather low salaries and a lack of trained employees. The way out of this situation was seen in improving the material, moral and educational level of employees of the local state administration, in further legal regulation of the service, in establishing public control over the activities of administrations of different levels. The normative legal acts that established the competence, rights and duties, as well as the responsibility of administrative and police officers, were not codified in the pre-revolutionary period. As a legal institution, the local government bodies were still in their infancy. As a result of the weak development of administrative legislation in pre-revolutionary Russia, local government bodies in Siberia were often guided in their activities not by the norms of law, but by established customs and traditions, which also aggravated arbitrariness on the ground.

### Conclusion

The decline in the authority of the crown power among a large part of Siberians, against the background of the use of administrative and police punitive measures, led to the discrediting and crisis of local regional governance. The population of the Siberian region was not protected from the arbitrariness of corrupt administrative and police officers by establishing their actual methods of bringing them to justice for violating the law and official duty (Sibirskie voprosy, 24).

Protecting first and foremost the political regime and only after that, the rights and freedoms of the population, the local government bodies lost contact with their subjects and their trustors, and even opposed the Siberians. Yet, the collapse of the local government system in Siberia in 1917 is explained not so much by the imperfection of the organizational and regulatory framework and its activities, but by the large-scale crisis of the existing political regime and, above all, malpractice of the highest authorities of pre-revolutionary Russia.

The growth of social tension and the economic crisis in the region had a negative impact on the activities of the local government apparatus, making almost all of its activities useless

and ineffective. During the World War I, there were almost no mass anti-government protests in Siberia, such as during the revolution of 1905–1907, but the existing system of local government and self-government began to fail doing its current activities. The crime situation deteriorated sharply, inflation increased, and the number of serious crimes increased (Larkov, Chernova, Vojtovich, 2002, p. 127).

An analysis of the organization of local administration in Siberia at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century shows that local government bodies, in the absence of zemstvos in the region, no longer met the changed conditions. The Siberian police bureaucracy at the begin-

ning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century minimized its efforts in management activities (Siegelbaum, 2017, p. 37). Unable to resist additional challenges, the system of regional administration, which ensured public order in the Siberian region in the 18<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, was rapidly destroyed during the revolutionary events of February 1917. The local self-government bodies of the region were somewhat more fortunate: after the February revolution, a zemstvo public administration appeared in Siberia. However, following the city councils example, it ceased its activity during the civil war and military intervention, with the establishment of Soviet power in the region.

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