



PEASANTS IN TRANSITION. FORMS AND METHODS OF PEASANT RESISTANCE IN SOVIET ARMENIA IN 1929- 1930S

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Armenian realities of dekulakization¹ processes, legitimized by the policy of forced collectivization in the USSR in 1929-1930, still remain one of the areas in the history of Soviet Armenia that need more in-depth research. The socialist economic restructuring of the village, presented by the Bolsheviks as an effective policy of modernization, gradually led to the changes in the peasant lifestyle. This reorganization of the villages caused various forms of reaction among the peasants, the largest wave of which rose in 1928-1932, during the period of the first five-year plan (*первая пятилетка*), in response to the dekulakization process. It was manifested in different ways of resistance: armed and peaceful, boycotts, terrorist acts, as well as in passive or everyday forms. This study examines the main forms and methods of passive and active peasant resistance in Soviet Armenia, the motives and causes of armed resistance not only as an act and movement in defense of individual property, but also as an instrument for peasant identity preservation.

¹ The liquidation of kulaks as a class.

Rural culture, which included religious, family, inter-communal traditions, was a unique heart¹ of a desert and became the symbol of the village's autonomy. The measures against religion and the church during the years of mass collectivization were actually targeting the rural culture. The Armenian church had not only been a religious institution, but also a community center in the village and community. During the centuries in time of different conflicts in self-defense crises the church also served as an arsenal. This phenomenon became more noticeable during the forced collectivization, when the churches became a social platform for the uprising, a place for rallies against the Soviet regime and also for discussions of the rebellious peasants². In this respect, measures against religion and the church have become the most striking and vivid manifestation of the policy of attacking rural culture and over the years of mass forced collectivization, which had turned into a real war against religion and religious symbols.

The collectivization and the socialist reorganization of the village provoked various forms of reaction within the peasantry, shaping the culture of resistance, through which some specifications of interaction of the peasantry and the state were exposed. Its uniqueness was that, along with its flexibility, adaptability and the passive or everyday forms of resistance, it was the imposition of the will of the peasantry to the authorities.

The biggest wave of active-passive resistance in the 1930s in Soviet Armenia rose during the period of the first five-year plan, in particular in 1930 in response to the anti-religious as well as the dekulakization policy. The resistance manifested itself in riots, uprisings, rallies (armed and peaceful), boycotts, terrorist acts (arson, assault and murder), as well as in passive or everyday forms: foot dragging, sabotage, discrimination, false compliance, feigned ignorance, stonewalling, evasion, spreading rumors and so forth which, according to Scott, were the key to communicating with dominant cultures.

The Forms of the Resistance

It should be noted that against the background of forced collectivization, seizures of property and deportations, the political situation in the village was extremely aggravated. The discontent of the peasantry in various regions made the underground groups of the Dashnaktsutyun Party become

¹ G. C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990, p. 15.

² *Armenian Review*, 1 February, 1995.