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"Walpole" by John Morley: the formation of the Whig policy from the perspective of British classical liberals

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Abstract

The article presents the investigation of the ways constructing the political portrait of Robert Walpole in the common scheme of the biographical work "Walpole". The object of the article is the study of John Morley's main views of the political image and lines of action of Robert Walpole, such as policy of isolationism. According to the author, "Walpole" gives an impression of a vivid, meticulous work, where the aspects of policies took the first place, in particular, the peace foreign policy which afterwards led Morley to take up a decisive stand against the British imperialism and militarism in the course of the line of the liberal party. In this article the author comes to the conclusion that John Morley was successful in showing versatile talents and many-sided nature of Robert Walpole, all his streaks of political prudence. The biography created by John Morley is a piece of well-written work and the best man of letters' impartial assessment.

Keywords

John Morley, Robert Walpole, political biography, parliamentary crisis, Liberal party.

Introduction

"English Men of Letters" – a series of historical works of an outstand-

ing essayist and historian John Morley (1838-1923), representing biographies of British politicians, thanks to which J. Morley was considered an authoritative

writer in intellectual elite ranks. Particular interest found the work of 1889 about the first British Prime Minister Robert Walpole (1676-1745). J. Morley himself had little love and pride for "Walpole", rarely mentioned it, never quoted or referred to it¹ in political, public or friendly discussions as he did with his other works. R. Walpole in his interests and temperament was opposite to John Morley. Prudent and clever English politician of the first half of the XVIII century had nothing in common with literature or education, moreover, he only gave several pensions to some poets. R. Walpole even not too fond of reading, did not possess the art of making speeches and moral-ethical glamour of a thinker – i.e., those that was appreciated in historical figures by highly gifted writer J. Morley.

Two politicians-liberals: the object of a biographical study and its author

R. Walpole hardly could have interested J. Morley as a research subject, if he did not belong to the Whig party throughout his career. The researcher Staebler U. (1912-2004) expressed doubts about

the appearance of such a work as "Walpole" if John Morley "not volunteered to be a literary admirer of the history of his party"². Foreign policy of R. Walpole in the representation of classic British liberal was exemplary – unlike his successors, he was opposed to a military solutions³ and for nearly two decades had held England away from major military conflicts in Western Europe, with the exception of the war with Spain (the so-called "The War of Jenkins' Ear"), which was forced by public opinion to be accepted⁴. Being original personality and possessing undoubted political acumen, R. Walpole created a "special style of the national diplomacy"⁵. If the views of researchers about him as an individual ranged to diametrically op-

2 Ibid.

3 Kiselev, A.A. (2006), "Great Britain in the War of Austrian Succession" ["Velikobritaniya v voine za avstriiskoe nasledstvo"], *Vestnik Volgogradskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*, No. 5, p. 11.

4 Alekseeva, M. N. (2005), "The War of Jenkins' Ear", *The Retrospection: the world history through the eyes of young researchers: Collected papers* ["Voina iz-za "ukha Dzenkinsa", *Retrospektiva: vsemirnaya istoriya glazami molodykh issledovatelei: Sb. st.*], RGU im. I. Kanta, Kaliningrad, p. 37.

5 Kiselev, A.A. (2005), "Robert Walpole and British foreign policy in 1725-1742" ["Robert Uolpol i vneshnyaya politika Velikobritanii v 1725-1742 gg."], *Vestnik Volgogradskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*, No. 4(1), p. 42.

1 Staebler, W. (1943), *The liberal mind of John Morley*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, p. 159.

posed to each other, then because of the specific foreign policy he remained a strict isolationist in the history of international relations. R. Walpole sought to "less adventurous ... and cheaper policy that implied a lower level of intervention in European affairs"⁶. R. Walpole internal policy was to maintain a low level of taxation. In the 1720-1730s he enjoyed enormous popularity and support at court; before R. Walpole seized political and economic influence in the country, the idea that the government can be controlled by one of the ministers in England was considered pretentious and impractical⁷. Thanks to him in the second quarter of XVIII century England experienced an economic growth, the country was prepared for the Seven Years' War of 1756-1763, to the Industrial Revolution and to further establishment of the British Empire⁸. Life jour-

ney of J. Morley was closely linked with the Liberal Party of Great Britain. He was a journalist who actively promoted liberal ideas through print, politician, historian and a recognized liberal thinker, he served as Chief Secretary for Ireland, as well as was drafting a bill of self-government of this country, opposed the war and an aggressive foreign policy. R. Walpole as an individual was quite strange to him, but a single political line connecting the two politicians through the ages, common interests, goals and, most importantly, methods of achieving them, led to the creation of original and talented work.

"The Sacheverell Affair" and its impact on inter-party relations

Work "Walpole" was not large in size – about two hundred pages, and the emphasis was made on the political biography of the hero. J. Morley took no more than ten pages to childhood coverage, youth and early political path of R. Walpole. Already in the first chapter, entitled "Early Years and the first stages of public life" he described the scandal involving the English priest and politician Henry Sacheverell (1674-1724) and noted the

6 Kiselev, A.A. (2007), "Great Britain in the system of international relations in the late XVII – the first half of XVIII centuries" ["Velikobritaniya v sisteme mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenii kontsa XVII – pervoi poloviny XVIII veka"], *Vestnik Volgogradskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*, No. 6, pp. 8-15.

7 Morozov, V.I. (2006), "On the parliamentary elections in Great Britain" ["O parlamentskikh vyborakh v Velikobritanii"], *Upravlencheskoe konsul'tirovanie*, No. 1, p. 139.

8 Kiselev, A.A. (2005), "Robert Walpole and British foreign policy in 1725-1742" ["Robert Uolpol i vneshnyaya politika

Velikobritanii v 1725-1742 gg."], *Vestnik Volgogradskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*, No. 4(1), p. 42.

direct participation of R. Walpole. On November 5, 1709 in St. Paul's Cathedral in London he preached "Adversity in false brethren", that described the "sin and danger" threatening England from the Government of the Whig Party⁹. At the time the most influential people after the royal family was Commander John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough (1650-1722) and his friend, Lord Treasurer Sidney Godolphin (1645-1712), leaning toward the Whig position, which was struck by the public response to the crisis of 1709 in England. J. Morley wrote that the problems raised by H. Sacheverell quarreled Whig and Tory factions in parliament. R. Walpole expressed the opinion that Mr. Sacheverell was influenced by dignitaries who have thought his statement¹⁰. At the initiative of Godolphin priest was banned to minister for three years, and this "foolish blunder"¹¹ was "a disaster for the gov-

ernment and the whole Whig Party"¹², as J. Morley assessed political implications of this event. Minister of War in the Whig in 1708-1710, R. Walpole, in 1711 after the Tories coming to power, temporarily lost his position all the way to imprisonment on bribery charges. He "learned from this case a practical morality"¹³. It follows that J. Morley researched biography of R. Walpole in the context of the political history of England in the XVIII cent. Liberal politician John Morley wondered what place in the history of the Whig took R. Walpole.

R. Walpole and H. Bolingbroke: personal and political confrontation

"Walpole" fully deserves to be called a political portrait: from 11 chapters only two are directly related to the identity of R. Walpole ("Young years..." and "Characteristics"), the other five – to his career and features of the policy ("Coming to power and Bolingbroke", "The Fall of Walpole", "Monetary Policy", "Internal Policy", " Foreign Policy"), and four "historical" chapters in which J. Morley actually considered the formation of the Whig party ("The last four years of Queen

9 Sacheverell, H. (1709), *The perils of false brethren, both in Church and state: set forth in a sermon preach'd before the Right Honourable the Lord-Mayor, aldermen, and citizens of London, at the Cathedral Church of St. Paul on the 5th of November, 1709*, Henry Clements, London, p. 11.

10 Walpole, R. (1710), "The second letter", *Four letters to a friend in North Britain upon publishing the Trial of Dr. Sacheverell*, London, p. 7.

11 Morley, J. (1921), "Walpole", *The works of lord Morley. In 15 vols. Vol. 13*, Macmillan & Co., London, p. 14.

12 Ibid. P. 13.

13 Ibid. P. 16.

Anne", "New reign and a split among the Whigs", "Court", "Cabinet"). Confrontation of political parties is covered in detail in J. Morley's "Walpole" particularly on the example of a protracted struggle of R. Walpole and Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke (1678-1751), a representative of the Tory party. Both politicians were too different as for political beliefs, the nature and behavior¹⁴. H. Bolingbroke gained fame not only as a politician but as a philosopher. He owns a famous essay of 1738 "Letters on the study and use of history". Outstanding publicist H. Bolingbroke was interested in "general principles of virtue and wisdom ... and fair policy"¹⁵ though not quite sincerely, as his personal scandalous and viciousness life stood out even against the general trend of immoral aristocracy of the XVIII century.

Mutual antipathy of R. Walpole and H. Bolingbroke went through the entire first half of the XVIII century in

14 Coxe, W. (1800), *Memoirs of the life and administration of Sir Robert Walpole, Earl of Orford*. In 3 vols. Vol. 1, London, pp. 344-346; Coxe, W. (1800), *Memoirs of the life and administration of Sir Robert Walpole, Earl of Orford*. In 3 vols. Vol. 2, London, pp. 91-92; Coxe, W. (1800), *Memoirs of the life and administration of Sir Robert Walpole, Earl of Orford*. In 3 vols. Vol. 3, London, p. 100.

15 Bolingbroke, H. (1978), *Letters on the Study of history [Pis'ma ob izuchenii i pol'ze istorii]*, Moscow, p. 62.

England, influenced the formation of the cabinets, foreign policy, and in case of a less stable position of R. Walpole could lead to war France, Spain and even Sweden. Antagonism between the two personalities ended in complete defeat and political collapse ambitious hopes of H. Bolingbroke. J. Morley wrote that the deposition and subsequent prosecution of Ministers considered the turn of the XVII-XVIII centuries as a legitimate action against those who supposedly "caused deep resentment"¹⁶ of the public, and it was the only way to control the degree of responsibility of politicians to parliament. J. Morley avoided ethically to comment on the Tories prosecution by the Whigs. He called unexecuted and then appealed death sentence of H. Bolingbroke and several of his supporters as a last political impeachment case in English history: "They were the last ministers of those who have ever forced to bear personal responsibility for the submission of bad advice and dishonest policy conduct, and since political mistake has ceased to be a crime"¹⁷. From the analysis of J. Morley it is clear that the lawsuit against Mr. Bolingbroke was revanchist revenge, a "doubtless intrigue"

16 Morley, J. (1921), "Walpole", *The works of lord Morley*. In 15 vols. Vol. 13, Macmillan & Co., London, pp. 39-40.

17 Ibid. P. 40.

of R. Walpole, put to the Tower for his initiative in 1711; but in characteristic of H. Bolingbroke as a "genius for intrigues", who "made the ravage of Walpole a goal of his entire life"¹⁸, the priorities of the author became visible. J. Morley was far from idealizing historical figures of the R. Walpole epoch, the word "intrigue", "mischief makers" and other derivatives from them very often mentioned in the work.

J. Morley personal assessment of political activities and personality of R. Walpole

The only area in which the activity of R. Walpole was fully approved by J. Morley was his foreign policy. J. Morley wrote that monetary policy did not represent a national necessity, although it was wise¹⁹, but the main economic benefit brought to England was the absence of war, which allowed to transfer all of the energy of the population on the development of trade and production²⁰, to build a solid economic foundation for future prosperity. According to the author, R. Walpole's policy was fully consistent with the needs of his age – "a transitional era" when reli-

gion has not played a decisive role in the society, the time of national factor has not come yet, dynastic struggle that upheaved Europe was nearing its end, but the battle began for trade and influence in the New World²¹. From this perspective, J. Morley came to the unconditional conclusion on the relevance of R. Walpole's activities. "He was a great minister of a peacetime, despite the fact that his career does not inspire any sympathy for his personal virtues, nor inspiration relatively to lofty social ideals"²². J. Morley wrote that, despite the reliability and courage²³ of R. Walpole, he had nothing "heroic"²⁴, and it was quite in the spirit of the era of British politics and trends of the XVIII century. He described a statesman as funny, gregarious person who did not attach great importance to his own failures, hostile enemies, the alleged infidelity of his wife and dubious origin of eldest son²⁵, and this carefree attitude towards life – the best character trait of the politician that managed to find his biographer. J. Morley in his work about R. Wal-

18 Ibid. P. 78.

19 Ibid. P. 166.

20 Ibid. P. 186.

21 Ibid. P. 189.

22 Ibid. P. 95.

23 Morley, J. (1917), *Recollections. In 2 vol. Vol. 2*, The Macmillan Co. of Canada, Toronto, p. 144.

24 Morley, J. (1921), "Warpole", *The works of lord Morley. In 15 vols. Vol. 13*, Macmillan & Co., London, pp. 95-96.

25 Ibid. Pp. 97, 99-100.

pole attempted to present a specific set of positive qualities of his character, but objectivity made him write that "the world will never put Walpole on a par with those great leaders... that affect us not only to those what they did, but what they were"²⁶. Reviewer appraised the work of J. Morley, referring to thoroughness and honesty with which the history of political parties of early Georgian period investigated, but noted that "Mr. Morley's sympathy are entirely on the side of the Whigs"²⁷.

Conclusion

J. Morley showed himself content and objective biographer in the preparation of a political portrait of R. Walpole. He was able to show the versatile and quite mysterious nature of this political figure, combining agility, earthiness and greed with peacefulness and openness, ruthlessly pursuing the enemy, but constantly concerning about the welfare of the state and the interests of England. In J. Morley's work a deep conviction of R. Walpole in a feasibility of peaceful and balanced foreign policy is not contrasted with his personal grudge. These lines were a manifestation of different aspects

of the personality of the first Prime Minister. On the background of standard political biographies of the XIX century, in which state leaders were either blackened or idealized, a special sincerity was felt in J. Morley, who showed R. Walpole in the diversity of his talent as a politician.

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²⁶ Ibid. P. 104.

²⁷ "Our literary letter, from our correspondent", *The Press*, 1890, No. 7441, p. 5.

6. Kiselev, A.A. (2005), "Robert Walpole and British foreign policy in 1725-1742" ["Robert Uolpol i vneshnyaya politika Velikobritanii v 1725-1742 gg."], *Vestnik Volgogradskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*, No. 4(1), pp. 42-47.
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«Уолпол» Джона Морли: становление политики вигов с позиции классических британских либералов

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Аннотация

В статье анализируется восприятие поздневикторианскими вигами своих политических родоначальников, в частности, деятельность Роберта Уолпола как политика в представлении Джона Морли. Рассматриваются особенности оценки жизненного пути Р. Уолпола с позиции классических британских либералов, анализируется становление политики вигов на примере кабинета первого премьер-министра. Отдельное внимание уделено такому малоизученному парламентскому кризису, как судебный процесс Генри Сакеверелла, в контексте мировоззрения викторианского общества.

Ключевые слова

Джон Морли, Роберт Уолпол, политическая биография, парламентский кризис, либеральная партия.

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