

# Free peasants war essay sample

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## **Abstract**

This essay revolves around the peasants' war of 1524-1525. The peasants' war, also known as the revolution of 1525, is the largest insurrection or revolt in the history of Europe before the French Revolution. The goal of this essay is to explain the history before the revolution on the administration, economic situation, the culture of the peasant in relation to their agrarian development and the different social classes that existed. The causes of the war outbreak, movements and the suppression of the peasants' war 1524 are discussed in the essay. Under the leadership of Martin Luther and Thomas Muntzer, an examination of their efforts during the movement and the revolts of the peasants' war are taken into consideration. Additionally, the essay will examine the treaties or demands that were established by both feudalists and the insurgent in the course of the war. The peasants' war in Germany had both advantage and disadvantage in the economic, social and political context of the Germany. The paper also examines the significance of the peasants' war to Germany and concludes by relating the peasants' war and the contemporary issue of the 21st century in relation to conflict dispute. The essay also looks at the movements, the apostles and their reformation on both ideologies of religion and politics, the effects of the war and achievements of the doctrines of the Catholic Religion. In the context of the Catholic religion, the paper examines the relationship of the Gospel by the priest of that time and the Gospel of Martin Luther.

## **The Peasants War of 1524**

### Introduction

The peasant war of 1524 to 1525, also known as the revolution of 1525, is the largest revolt or insurrection in the history of Europe. Due to inspiration from the changes brought about by the religious revolution or reformation, the southern and western Germany peasants demanded for the agrarian rights and freedom from being oppressed by the landlord and nobles of Germany. The peasant invoked the religious or divine laws to fight for their freedom and rights. The spread of the uprising led to the organization of armies by the peasants. The insurrection was supported by Huldrych Zwingli and Thomas Muntzer (Stayer 1994). The defeat of the revolt was contributed by the campaign of Martin Luther and the army of Swabian League (Bax 2013). This paper aims to delve into the Peasant War of 1524. To achieve this, the paper will trace the situation before the revolution, the outbreak of the peasant war, peasant war in the various fronts, and the overall significance of the war.

### **The Situation in Germany before the Revolution of 1525**

In the Middle Ages, Germany succeeded in the grouping of interests according to province and local centres. This was due to the rise of commerce and industry that led to linking of interest throughout the country. It led to political decentralization and eventually into the fall of a feudal empire (bonds of unity). Such changes turned the feudal empire to independent princes. The empires formed alliance either against each other or against the princes. The situation of decentralization raised conflict and violent action, which brought about the concept of “prince among princes”

(Engels 1850, 12). The independent princes possessed major part of sovereign rights; declared war and made peace for the sake of own, organized armies and levied taxes. They incorporate within their power all the cities and baronies. Baronies were small counties that were under the domination of barons. Barons were the members of the British aristocratic class but their rank was the lowest. The growing taste for money by the prince led to increasing taxes. The taxes were becoming more oppressive especially to the peasants. They had a brilliant fiscal system with skillful machination of finance “ wherever direct taxation was insufficient, indirect taxes were introduced” (Engels 1850). The autocracy within the emperors led to the emergence of clergy. Lower nobility and knighthood. The knighthood was on the war; robbed their merchants and own money. The clergy had two groups; feudal hierarchy formed aristocratic group of bishops and archbishops. The feudal hierarchy exploited wealth and richness through dubious mean such as forging documents and extortion. The behaviours and preaching operation of the clergy led to hatred. Another group of clergy was the plebeian faction, which consisted of preachers, rural and urban. They had no business with the operation of feudal hierarchy. Despite their status of being clergy, they were nearer and almost same as the masses. During the growth of commerce and handicraft, the cities had three groups of citizens; the patrician families who were the richest and deprived the community of every right to use the city forest and meadows, they used them for their own private benefit. The extortion of the patricians became more too severe; hence, the community started a movement to bring the city administration under their control. The community formed the

opposition groups; the middle-class opposition and the plebian opposition in the course of the peasant war.

## **Emergence of Christian Ideologies and the Main Opposition**

### Outbreak of the Peasant War

The peasant, who were the cultivator of the soil, robbed of his common pasture of the right of hunting and fishing on his own account ; compelled to perform all sorts of services for his lord at any time, were it haymaking, harvest, or-vintage, even though it meant to him the loss of his crop ; made to furnish dues of every description payable in kind and in money ; prohibited from driving away animals of the chase, even though they might be doing irreparable damage to agricultural produce; compelled to permit the lord's hunting dogs to devour his poultry at pleasure; obliged to offer his livestock first of all to the castle before selling it elsewhere; forced to furnish the castle with firewood and timber and (a significant item) wood for the stake on the occasion of executions (Bax 1899).

There was the penalty for the neglect any of these things; imprisonment in the lord's dungeon; the piercing out of eyes or, in some cases, death itself. More peasant came to unite in fighting for their fair share and against the feudalism (feudal dues) and death taxes. Therefore, the peasants who had organized an army from the black forest joined their neighbours of the southern Swabia and came up with the following demands. The obligation to hunt or fish for the lord was to be abolished, and all game, likewise fishing, was to be declared free, they should no longer be compelled to hang bells on their dogs necks, they should be free to carry weapons, They should not be liable to punishment from huntsmen and forest rangers, they should no

longer carry dung for their lord, they should have neither to mow, reap, hew wood, nor carry trusses of hay nor firewood for the uses of the castle, they were to be free of the heavy market, tolls and handicraft taxes, no one should be cast into the lord's, dungeon or otherwise imprisoned who could, give guarantees for his appearance at the judicial bar (Bax 1899).

They should no longer pay any tax, due, or charge whatsoever the right to which had not been judicially established, no tithe of growing corn should be exacted, nor any agricultural crop, neither man nor woman should be any longer punished for marrying without the permission of his or her lord, The goods of suicides should no longer, revert to the lord and the lord should no longer inherit where relations of the deceased were living, all bailiff rights should be abolished, he who had wine in his house should beat liberty to serve it to whomsoever he pleased a lord or his bailiff arrested any one, on account of a transgression which he was unable to prove with good witnesses, the accused and should be set at liberty.

In the course of the uprising, violence and fight between the feudal and the peasants, a movement known as “ Christian brotherhood” emerged. The Christian brotherhood was to form a bond of organization for the whole country. Therefore, the first meeting was held at the peasant parliament for the launch of “ twelve article” of which, its main purpose was the restoration of the ancient peasant’s privileges and conform to some of their demand.

The following were the agreement of the twelve article. The Christian Brotherhood was to form the bond of organization for the whole country. A president and four councilors were to be chosen from every camp or organized body of peasants. These should have plenary powers to enter into

agreements with other similar camps or bodies, as well as in certain cases to negotiate with constituted authorities (Stayer 1994).

No one was to enter into an agreement with his feudal lord without the consent of the whole countryside and even where such consent was granted, the tenants in question should nevertheless continue to belong to the Christian Brotherhood and to be subject to its decisions. Any who from any cause had to leave their native place should first swear before the headman of the district to do nothing to the hurt of the Christian Brotherhood, but to assist it by word and deed wherever necessary. The existing judicial functions should continue to exercise as before. Unbecoming pastimes, blasphemy and drunkenness should be forbidden, and all such offences duly punished. Lastly, no one should from any cause whatever, undertake any action against his lord, or commit any trespass on his lands or goods. The Swabian league sent a letter to the Christian brotherhood, acknowledged that the action taken from the twelve articles were in accordance with the gospel and divine law (Stayer 1994).

### **Demands, Ideals and Apostle of the Movement**

The demands entailed the twelve article, which was agrarian in character. Their lord established it to protect and safeguard the peasant against oppression. The twelve articles gave the peasant a way to cool down from revolt and embrace peace coexistence with their loads.

The twelve articles were mainly for the peasant's agrarian rights. In 1525, the political movement known as " Evangelical Divine Reformation". Two town men, Wendel Hilper and Friedrich Weigand, established this reformation. The aim of the reformation was to strengthen the power of the

emperor at the expense of the feudal estates, it is based on reforming the centralization system and the constitution of Kaiser Friedrich III which was characterized by bureaucracy. It can be said that this Reformation was aimed towards inspiring every individual who was searching for a way to overthrow the tyrannical and hierarchical domination of feudal lords and other exploiters in the government. The reformists stressed on the equality before the law, reformed the administration and imperial unity, the priest and pastor are to be chosen by the community. The pastor and priest were demanded to be excluded from all judiciary and political functions. Also, the princes and lords were to be reformed in such a manner that the poor man was not oppressed by them (Bax 1899).

In addition, Wendel Hilper proposed a fourfold social division of the empire with the equal justice netted to them. The social division consists of princes, counts and barons, knights and squires, townships and rural communities. The doctrines and social theories of Thomas Muntzer played a major part during the Thuringian revolt. In these doctrines and theories, the formulation was from the peasant point of view just like the twelve article. It was about the religious utopia on the tradition and the lines of medieval communism (Bax 1899).

Martin Luther who was after freeing the soul; Luther had given the plebeian movement a powerful weapon, a translation of the Bible. Through the Bible, he contrasted feudal Christianity of his time with moderate Christianity of the first century. It was actually in opposition to decaying feudal society or the feudal hierarchy. The peasants had made extensive use of this weapon against the forces of the princes, the nobility, and the clergy. Now Luther



turned the same weapon against the peasants, extracting from the Bible a veritable hymn to the authorities ordained by God; a feat hardly exceeded by any lackey of absolute monarchy. Here the Biblical accounts are regarded as weapons. The Bible was sanctioning princedom by the grace of God, passive resistance, even serfdom. Thus, Luther repudiated not only the peasant insurrection but also even his own revolt against religious and lay authority. He not only betrayed the popular movement to the princes, but the middle-class movement as well (Audin & Audin 1854, 155). This was a significant move against the bureaucracy as no one had opposed the highest officials in this way before Luther. It was a great and very bold move on the part of Luther as he contradicted the existing rules and regulations that were made to make the life of the poor miserable. Therefore, the use of Biblical verses was truly the employment of a powerful weapon against the brutal and cruel.

## **Revolutions and Movements in Germany (1524-1525)**

### The Movement In Southern Germany

The peasant of the black forest and the south Swabia came together to revolt against the feudal lords. The peasant came up with the treaty that outlined their demand. Due to a small force of the force of Swabian League, the negotiation was partially accepted (keeping the feudal with unrealistic promises) for the purpose of military moderation. The feudal army waited and coped up with the peasants while waiting the army to increase in number. The Swabian league under the command of The Archduke Ferdinand, succeeded by obtaining soldiers of at least 6000. They attacked the peasants resulting to the demolition of the castle of count of Lupfen (Bax 1899).

## **The Peasants' War in Franconia**

The movement in Franconia consisted of a group of six centers. The revolution broke throughout Franconia. Tension and political instability increased. The war in Franconia was characterized by the formation of two insurrection camps in Noerdlingen, formation of a revolutionary party under the leadership of Anton Forner. the peasants, lower middle class and the plebeians overthrown the rule of honourable in Rotenberg. The peasants' war in Franconia favoured the peasants door the tactical and strategic planning of grouping Franconia into six centuries. The movement in the east and west and The Thuringian Revolt and Thomas Muntzer where the major blow of the peasant's war ever recorded (Gritsch 2006, 129). The significant part of this the Thuringian Revolt was the doctrines and social theories of Muntzer movement. Muntzer and Luther had the same mission of preaching against the feudal or clergy who did not comply well with the Gospel.

## **Suppression of the Peasants' War/ Insurrection**

Martin Luther was on the front line in the suppression of insurrection throughout Germany. He preached on the freeing of the soul, preaching of the Gospel and opposed the clergy. However, the articles favored the insurgent than the feudalist. In the first article i. e. " An Extortion to Peace on the Twelve Articles of the Peasantry in Swabia", he counseled and preached about the lords or princes and peasants on the peaceful coexistence. In Wittenberg, Martin Luther wrote the second article i. e. " Against the Murderous and Thievish Bands of Peasants". In this article, he talked about the contemporary issue, and in fact, he preached against the peasants whom he referred them as sinner in relation to God commandments

(GrouchoMarxist 2013). The overthrow of the movement of south Germany; Trunchsess and the league of Swabian soldiers destroyed the Swabian insurgents while some peasants surrendered. The treaty of Offenburg that created peace between the peasants and their lords. Several movements collapsed due to the crusade of Trunchsess.

### **Significance of the Peasants' War in Germany.**

The peasant's war led to the suffering of the clergy. Endowment and monasteries were burned down. The hatred of the people especially the peasants fell on them. It led to the suffering of the nobility; the destruction of their castles and killings of their families. The nobility lost their significance as free estate and came under the power and authority of princes. The peasant war also led to the decentralization of Germany, strengthen and widen it to the global world of commercial activities and industry. provincial and local decentralization led to the disunity of the middle class, peasantry and the plebeians. They could not come under one term of national goal or action. The peasants' war led to the emergence of social classes such the princes, feudal, middle class, counts and barons, knights etc. Lastly, the war gave an opportunity for the Germans to reform itself both politically, socially and economically (Engels 1850).

### **Conclusion**

The peasants' war like any other war brought misery, death of innocents, physical suffering, economic instability and erosion of the social heritage. Although, a war entails fighting for freedom but the sword does preach peace coexistence but rather bloodshed and death. The reformist like Martin

Luther and Muntzer gives a good example of how an oppressed can fight for his or her freedom from the oppressors. Hence, the establishments of treaties and agreement through diplomatic means is the best dispute in any conflict.

### **Annotated Bibliography**

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