

In every period of human development there is a proximate step to the realization of those better forms of life to which it (life) tends. Fifty years ago such a proximate step was the abolition of slavery. In our time such a step is that which is called the labor question—*i.e.*, the liberation of the working masses from the minority which oppresses them.

In Russia, where an enormous portion of the population lives on the land and is in complete dependence upon the large landlords, the liberation of the workers obviously cannot be achieved through the transference of factories and mines into common use. For the Russian people such a liberation can be attained only by the recognition of the land as a common possession.

I know that these suggestions will be regarded by your counsellors as being the height of light-mindedness, but I also know that in order not to be compelled to commit ever more and more cruel acts of violence on the people there is but one means—namely, to take as one's object such an aim as stands in front of the people's desires, and, without waiting till the descending cart knocks against one's legs, to draw it oneself.

Your advisers will tell you that the liberation of the land from the right of property is a fantastical and unrealizable idea. According to their opinion, to force one hundred million live people to cease to live, or to show signs of life, and to squeeze them back into a shell out of which they have long ago grown—that is not fantasy, and is not only realizable, but the wisest and most practical work.

At all events the first thing which now lies before the Government is the abolition of that oppression which prevents the people from expressing their desires and needs. One cannot do good to a man whose mouth has been gagged in order not to hear what he

desires for his welfare. Only after having ascertained the desires and needs of your people, or of the majority of them, is it possible to rule the people and to do them good.

Dear brother, you have but one life in this world, and you can spend it painfully in futile efforts to arrest the God-ordained progress of mankind from evil to good, from darkness to light, or you may, entering into the needs and desires of the people and devoting your life to their satisfaction, peacefully and joyously pass it in the service of God and men.

However great is your responsibility for those years of your reign during which you may do much good or much evil, yet still greater is your responsibility before God for your life here, upon which depends your eternal life, and which God has given you not that you may order all kinds of evil deeds or even merely participate in them and permit them, but in order to fulfil His will. And His will is that good and not evil should be done unto men.

Think about this not before the face of men, but before God—*i.e.*, your own conscience. Do not be troubled by those obstacles which you will meet, if you will enter upon this new way of life. These obstacles will disappear of themselves, and you will not notice them if only that which you do you will do not for human glory, but for your own soul—*i.e.*, for God.

Pardon me if I have unintentionally grieved you by what I have written in this letter. I was guided solely by the desire of welfare for the Russian people and for you.

Whether I have attained this the future shall decide, which, according to all probability, I shall not see. I have done that which I considered my duty.

Truly desiring your true welfare,

Your brother, LEO TOLSTOY.