

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)
Anti-Copyright



An Appeal to Russians

To the Government, the Revolutionists and the People

Leo Tolstoy

Leo Tolstoy
An Appeal to Russians
To the Government, the Revolutionists and the People
1906

Original text from RevoltLib.com, 2021. Translated by Louise and
Aylmer Maude.

usa.anarchistlibraries.net

1906

Contents

I. TO THE GOVERNMENT.	5
II. TO THE REVOLUTIONISTS.	8
III. TO THE PEOPLE.	13

of God and to His law. "He that endureth to the end will be saved,"
and your salvation is in your own hands.

new Government (or possibly at the hands of foreign Governments) you Russian laboring men have now no other course but to cease to obey the Government, and to begin to live without it.

You, country laborers as well as town workers, may at first have to suffer at the hands of the old as well as of the new Governments for your disobedience, and also from disagreements arising among yourselves ; but all the ills that may come from these causes are as nothing compared to the ills and sufferings you now endure and will yet have to endure from the Government, if (obeying one or other Government) you are drawn into participation in the murders, executions, and civil strife that are now being committed, and that will yet long continue to be committed by the contending Governments, unless you stop them by refusing to participate in them.

Only yield to what is demanded of you by this or that Government: only, for the support of the old Government, enter on a struggle with the Revolutionaries; serving in the army, or police, or joining the "Black-gang" mobs ; or, for the support of the Revolutionists, take part in strikes, the destruction of property, armed risings, or any unions, elections, or Dumas—and besides burdening your souls with many sins, and encountering much suffering, you will not have time to look round before one Government or other (even though you may have promoted its triumph) will fasten the deadly noose of slavery in which you have lived, and are still living, once more upon you.

Only do not submit to, and do not obey, either the one or the other, and you will rid yourselves of your miseries, and will be free.

From the present difficult circumstances you, Russian working people, have but one way of escape ; and that is by refusing to obey any force-using authority—humbly and meekly enduring violence, and refusing to participate in it

This way of escape is simple and easy, and undoubtedly leads to welfare. But to act in this way you must submit to the government

I. TO THE GOVERNMENT.

[By Government I mean those who, availing themselves of established authority can change the existing laws and put them in operation. In Russia, these people were and still are: the Czar, his Ministers, and his nearest advisers.]

The acknowledged basis of all Governmental power is solely the promotion of the welfare of the people over whom the power IS exerted.

But what are you who now govern Russia doing? You are fighting the Revolutionists with shifts and cunning such as they employ against you; and, worst of all, with cruelty even greater than theirs. But of two contending parties, the conqueror is not always the more shifty, cunning, cruel, or harsh of the two, but the one that is nearest to the aim towards which humanity is advancing.

Whether the Revolutionists rightly or wrongly define the aim towards which they strive, they certainly aim at some new arrangement of life ; while your only desire is to maintain yourselves in the profitable position in which you are established. Therefore, you will be unable to resist the Revolution, with your banner of Autocracy, even though it be with constitutional amendments, with perverted Christianity called Orthodoxy, a renovated Patriarchate, and all sorts of mystical interpretations.

All that Is moribund, and cannot be restored. Your salvation lies not in Dumas, elected in this way or in that ; still less in rifle-shots, cannons and executions ; but it lies in confessing your sin against the people, and trying to redeem it and efface it while you yet have time to do so. Set before the people ideals of equity, goodness and truth, more lofty and more just than those your opponents advocate. Place such an ideal before the people, not to save yourselves, but seriously and honestly setting yourselves to accomplish it, and you will not only save yourselves, but will save Russia from those ills which already afflict or are now threatening her.

Nor need you invent this ideal ; it is the old, old ideal of all the Russian folk: the ideal of the restoration to the whole people — not to the peasants only, but to the whole people — of their natural and just right to the land.

To men unaccustomed to think with their own minds, this idea seems unrealizable, because it is not a repetition of what has been done in Europe and America. But just because this ideal has nowhere yet been accomplished, it is the true ideal of our day : and, more, it is the nearest ideal, and one which, before it is accomplished in other countries, should now be accomplished in Russia. Wipe out your sins by a good deed ; while you still have the power, strive to destroy the ancient, crying, cruel injustice of private property in land, which is so vividly felt by the whole agricultural population, and from which they suffer so grievously ; and you will have the support of all the best people — the so-called "intellectuals." You will have with you all true Constitutionalists; who cannot but see that, before calling on the people to choose representatives, the people must be freed from the land-slavery in which it now lives. The Socialists, too, will have to admit that they are with you, for the ideal which they set before themselves : the nationalization of the implements of labor — is attainable first of all by the nationalization of the chief implement of labor—the land. The Revolutionists, too, will be on your side, for the revolution which you will be accomplishing by freeing the land from private ownership, is one of the chief points in their program. On your side, above all, will be the whole hundred- million agricultural peasantry, which alone represents the real Russian people. Only do what you, occupying the place of Government, are bound to do, and, while there is yet time, make it your business to establish the real welfare of the people ; and in place of the feeling of fear and anger which you now encounter, you will experience the joy of close union with the hundred-million Russian people ; you will know the love and gratitude of this kindly folk, who will not

Of old, human sacrifices, the worship of idols, divinations tortures, slavery, and many other things, were instituted. But they were all abolished when people were so far enlightened that these institutions became superfluous burdens and evils. So also with Governments. Governments were instituted when the nations were savage, cruel and coarse. The Governments set up were equally cruel and coarse. Nearly all the Governments took their laws from the heathen Romans ; and to the present day the Governments remain as coarse as they were in the days before Christianity, with their forcible requisitions, soldiers' prisons and executions- But the people, becoming enlightened, have less and less need of such Governments, and in our day most of the Christian nations have arrived at the stage when Government merely hinders them.

The shell is necessary for the egg until the bird is hatched. But when the bird is ready, the shell is but a hindrance. So it is with Governments ; most Christian nations feel this, and particularly Russian agricultural people now feel this acutely.

" Government is necessary, we cannot live without a Government," men say, and they are especially convinced of this now, when there are disturbances among the people. But who are these men, so concerned for the preservation of the Government ? They are the very men who live on the labor of the people, and, conscious of their sin, fear its exposure, and hope that the Government (being bound to them by unity of interest) will protect their wrong-doing by force. For these men, the Government is very necessary, but not for you — the peasantry. For you the Government has always been simply a burden; and now, that it has by its evil rule provoked riots, and brought it to pass that there are two rival Governments, it has become an evident misfortune and a great sin, which you must repudiate for your bodily and spiritual welfare.

Whether you, laboring Russian people, free yourselves at once from obedience to any Government, or whether you will yet have to suffer and endure at the hands of members of the old or of the

”But if you do not obey the Government, and do not pay taxes or supply soldiers, foreign nations will come and conquer you,” add those who wish to rule over you. Do not believe it. Only live acknowledging the land to be common property; not going as soldiers, and not paying taxes (except such as you voluntarily give for public works) and peacefully settling your disagreements through your village Communes—and other nations, seeing your good life, will not come and conquer you; or, if they come, on getting to know your good life they will adopt it and, instead of fighting you, will unite with you. For all the nations, like you yourselves, have suffered and now suffer from Governments; from the strife (in war, trade, and industry) of different Governments against one another, and from the strife of classes, and of different parties. Among all Christian nations an inner labor is going on, the chief aim of which is emancipation from Governments ; but this emancipation is particularly difficult for nations in which the majority have abandoned agricultural life, and live an industrial town life employing the labor of other races. Among such nations emancipation is being prepared by socialism. But for you Russian laborers, living mainly an agricultural life, and supplying your own needs, this emancipation is particularly easy. Government for you has long ceased to be a necessity or even a convenience, and has become a great and uncompensated burden and misfortune.

The Government, only the Government, by its power deprives you of land. Only the Government collects from you in taxes and customs-dues a great part of what you obtain by your labor. It alone, deprives you of the labor of your sons, taking them for soldiers and sending them to be killed.

But Government is not some essential condition of human life, which will exist as long as mankind lasts, like the cultivation of the soil, marriage, the family, or human intercourse—Government is a human institution, and like all human institutions, is set up when it is needed and abolished when it becomes unnecessary.

remember your sins, but will love you for the good you do them, as they now love him, or those, who freed them from slavery.

Remember that you are not czars, ministers, senators, and governors, but men ; and having done this, in place of grief, despair and terror, you will find the joy of forgiveness and of love. But that this may happen, you must not undertake this work superficially, as a means of safety, but sincerely, seriously, and with your soul’s whole strength. Then you will see what eager, reasonable, and harmonious activity will be displayed in the best spheres of society, bringing the best men of all classes to the front, and depriving of all importance those who now disturb Russia. Do this, and all those terrible, brutal elements of revenge, anger, avarice, vanity, ambition, and above all of ignorance, will disappear, which now come to the front, infecting, agitating, and tormenting Russia — and of which you are guilty.

Yes, only two courses are now open to you, men of the Government: a fratricidal slaughter, and all the horrors of a revolution leading to your inevitable and disgraceful destruction; or the peaceful fulfillment of the ancient and just demands of the whole people, showing other Christian nations both that the injustice from which men have suffered so long and so cruelly can be abolished, and how to abolish it.

Whether the form of social organization under which you hold power has or has not outlived its day, so long as you still hold power, use it not to multiply the evil you have already done, and the hatred you have already provoked; but use it to accomplish a great and good deed not for your nation alone, but for all mankind. If this social organization has outlived its day, let the last act done under it be one not of falsehood and cruelty, but of goodness and truth.*

- Regarding the remark in the appeal to the Government referring to

salvation ** not lying in Dumas elected in this way or that *we will allow* ourselves to make a slight reservation taking into consideration the fact that separate statements by Tolstoy are so often interpreted in a perverse sense. By these words he does not at all desire to advise the Government not to concede to the demands of public opinion. On the contrary, at the very time when this appeal was being prepared for publication we received from Tolstoy a letter in which he expresses himself thus :

“. . . The general irritation cannot be overcome by force, but the Government, i.e., those people who constitute the Government, are bound before God, before men, and before themselves, to cease all acts of violence — to do all that which is demanded of them, to relieve themselves of their responsibility ; to grant legislative assembly and a ballot, universal, equal, direct, and secret, and an amnesty to all political offenders, and everything ...”

Hence in the passage referred to in his appeal to the Government Tolstoy only wishes to convey that the gist of the matter lies not in the Duma but in a more radical alleviation of the position of the people. — Editor,

II. TO THE REVOLUTIONISTS.

[By Revolutionists I mean those people — beginning with the most peaceful Constitutionals and extending to the most militant Revolutionists — who wish to replace the present Governmental authority by another authority otherwise organized and consisting of other people.]

You, Revolutionists of all shades and denominations, consider the present Government harmful and in various ways—by organizing assemblies (allowed or prohibited by Government), by formulating projects, printing articles, making speeches, by unions, strikes and demonstrations, and, finally (as a natural and inevitable basis and consequence of all these activities) by murders, execu-

rule. But besides the fact that all your ills come from this union called Russia, this union involves a great sin in which you involuntarily participate when you obey Government. That there should be a Russia such as the existing one, the Poles, Finns, Letts, Georgians, Tartars, Armenians, and others, have to be held in subjection. And to hold them in subjection, it is necessary to forbid them to live as they wish to, and if they disobey this order, they have to be punished and killed. Why should you take part in these evil deeds when you yourselves suffer from them. Let those who have need of such a Russia, dominating Poland, Georgia, Finland, and other lands—let them arrange it if they can. But for you, working people, this is not at all necessary. What you need is something quite else. You only need enough land, and that no one should forcibly take your property, or oblige your sons to go as soldiers, and above all that no one should compel you to do evil deeds. And these evils will cease, if only you refuse to obey the demands of the Government—demands which ruin and destroy both your bodies and your souls.

”But how, without a Government, and when all live in separate Communes, are all large public affairs to be arranged? How will the ways of communication, railways, telegraphs, steamers, the post, the higher educational establishments, the libraries, and trade be managed without a Government?”

People are so accustomed to see the Government control all public affairs, that it seems to them that the work itself is done by Government, and that without Government it is impossible to organize High Schools, ways of communication, post-offices, libraries, or commercial relations. But this is not true. The largest public affairs, not only national but international, are arranged by private individuals without Governmental assistance. In this way all kinds of international, postal, learned, commercial and industrial alliances are arranged. Governments not only do not aid these voluntarily organized unions, but when they take part in them they always hinder them.

Only let the town workmen, as well as the villagers cease to obey or serve Government, and, with the abolition of its power, the slavish conditions in which you live will vanish of themselves, for they are maintained only by governmental violence. And the violence the Government employs is supplied by yourselves. It is that power alone which places customs-duties on goods imported or exported; it alone collects taxes on articles made in the country . it (the power of the Government) makes the laws which maintain the monopolies owned by private people, and the right of private property in land ; only that power, controlling the army which you yourselves supply, holds you in continual subjection or submission to itself, and to its abettors—the rich.

When you, town-workers as well as villagers, cease to obey the Government, it will no longer be necessary for you (town-workmen) to accept whatever conditions the owners of the mills and factories dictate to you, but you yourselves will give them your conditions, or will start your own cooperative manufacture of things needed by the people ; or, having free land, you will resume a natural agricultural life.

”But if we Russian folk begin at once to live like that, not obeying the Government—there will be no Russia,” say those to whom it seems that the existence of Russia—that is to say, the union of many different nations under one Government—is something important, great, and useful.

In reality, this combination of many different nations, called Russia, is not only not important for you, Russian working men, but just this combination is a chief cause of your miseries.

If they oppress you with taxes and duties, as they oppressed your forefathers, accumulating vast debts which you have to pay ; if they take you as soldiers and send you to different ends of the earth to fight people with whom you have nothing to do, and who have nothing to do with you, all this is only done to maintain Russia, I.e. to maintain a forcible combination of Poland, the Caucasus, Finland, Central Asia, Manchuria, and other lands and peoples, under one

tions and armed insurrections—you strive to replace the existing authority by another, a new one.

Though you are all at variance among yourselves as to what this new authority should be, yet to bring about the arrangements proposed by each of your groups, you stop short at no crimes: murders, explosions, executions, or civil war.

You have no words strong enough to express your condemnation and contempt for those official personages who struggle against you; but it should not be forgotten that all the cruel acts committed by members of the Government in their struggle with you, are justified in their eyes, because they, from the Czar to the lowest policeman, having been educated in unlimited respect for the established order hallowed by age and tradition, when defending this order, feel fully convinced that they are doing what is demanded of them by millions of people, who acknowledge the rightfulness of the existing order and of their position in it. So that the moral responsibility for their cruel actions rests not on them alone, but is shared by many people. You, on the other hand: people of all sorts of professions — doctors, teachers, engineers, students, professors, journalists, women-students, railway-men, laborers, lawyers, merchants, land-owners, occupied till now with special pursuits which have nothing to do with Government — you, who are not appealed to or recognized by anyone but yourselves, having suddenly become indubitably aware of the precise organization needed by Russia, in the name of this organization (which is to be realized in the future, and which each of you defines in his own way) take upon yourselves the whole responsibility for these very terrible acts you commit; and you throw bombs, destroy, murder and execute.

Thousands have been killed ; all Russians have been reduced to despair, embittered and brutalized. And what is it all for? It is all because among a small group of people, hardly one ten-thousandth of the whole nation, some have decided that what is needed for the very best organization of the Russian Empire is the continuation of the Duma which lately sat; while others say that what is needed is

a Duma chosen by universal, secret, and equal voting; a third party say that what is needed is a Republic : and yet a fourth party declare that what is needed is not an ordinary Republic, but a Socialist Republic. And for the sake of this, you provoke a civil war!

You say you do it for the people's sake, and that your chief aim is the welfare of the people. But the hundred-millions for whom you do it, do not ask it of you, and do not want all these things which you, by such evil means, try to obtain. The mass of the people do not need you at all, but always has regarded and still regards you, and cannot but regard you, as useless grubs who, in one way or another, consume the fruits of its labor and are a burden upon it. Only realize to yourselves clearly the life of this hundred-million Russian agricultural peasantry, who strictly speaking alone constitute the body of the Russian nation ; and understand that you all — professors and factory hands, doctors* engineers, journalists, students, land-owners, women-students veterinary surgeons, merchants, lawyers and railway-men : the very people so concerned about its welfare — are all harmful parasites on that body, sucking its sap, rotting upon it, and communicating to it your own corruption.

Only imagine vividly to yourselves these millions, ever patiently laboring, and supporting your unnatural and artificial lives on their shoulders ; imagine them possessed of all these reforms you are hoping to obtain, and you will see how foreign to this people is all that professedly for their advantage, you are aiming at. They have other tasks, and see more profoundly that you do the aim that is before them; and they express this consciousness of their destiny, not in newspaper articles, but by the whole life of a hundred-million people.

But no, you cannot understand this. You are firmly convinced that this coarse folk has no roots of its own, and that it will be a great blessing for it, if you enlighten it with the latest article you have read, and by so doing make it as pitiful, helpless, and perverted as yourselves.

Therefore, laboring Christian people : now that the Czar's Government calls on you to fight against your brothers, and the Revolutionists call on you to do the same, you evidently, not for your own benefit alone, but before God and your consciences, must and should join neither the old nor the new Government, and take no part in the unchristian doings either of the one or the other.

And not to take part in the doings of the old Government means not to serve as soldiers, guards, constables, town or country police; not to serve in any Government institutions and offices, County-Councils (Zemstvos), Assemblies, or Dumas. Not to take part in the doings of Revolutionists means: not to form meetings or unions, or take part in strikes ; not to burn or wreck other people's houses, and not to join any armed rebellion.

Two Governments hostile to one another now rule you, and they both summon you to take part in cruel, unchristian deeds. What can you do but reject all Government ?

People say that it is difficult and even impossible to live without a Government, but you Russian workmen — especially agriculturists—know that when you live a peaceful, laborious country life in the villages, cultivating the land on terms of equality, and deciding your public affairs in the Commune (Mir), you have no need at all of a Government.

The Government needs you, but you—Russian agriculturists—do not need a Government. And, therefore, in the present difficult circumstances, when it is equally bad to join either Government, it is reasonable and beneficial for you, agricultural Russians, not to obey any Government.

But if this is so for the agricultural folk, what should the factory-hands and foundry-workers do, of whom there are more in many lands than there are agriculturists, and whose lives are quite in the power of the Government.

They should do the same as the village workers: not obey any Government, and with all their strength try to return to agricultural life.

towns, but you, the great, real, hundred-million agricultural people ?

The old Government of the Czar says to you: "Do not listen to the rebels; they promise much, and will deceive you. Remain true to me, and I will satisfy all your wants."

The rebels say: "Do not believe the Czar's Government, which has always tormented you, and will continue to do so. Join us help us—and we will arrange for you a Government like that of the freest countries. Then you will choose your own rulers, and will govern yourselves, and right all your wrongs."

What are you to do ?

Support the old Government? But, as you know, the old Government has long promised to lighten your burdens, but instead of lightening them, it has only increased your greatest evils: lack of land, taxes and conscription.

Join the rebels? They promise to arrange for you an elected Government such as exists in the freest countries. But wherever such elected Governments exist, in the countries that have most freedom, in the French and American Republics for instance, just as among ourselves, the chief ills of the people are not remedied: as among us, or to an even greater degree, the land is in the hands of the rich; just as among us the people are laden with taxes and customs-duties without being asked, and as among us, armies are maintained and wars declared when those in power desire it, without the people being consulted. Moreover, our new Government is not yet established, and we do not know what it will be like.

Not only is it not to your advantage to join either Government, but you cannot do it conscientiously before God. To defend the old Government means to do what was done recently in Odessa Sevastopol, Kiev, Riga, the Caucasus, and Moscow, i.e. to capture, kill, hang, burn alive, execute, and shoot in the streets, killing children and women. But to join the Revolutionists means to do the same: to kill people, throw bombs, burn, rob, fight with soldiers, execute and hang.

You say you want a just organization of life, but in fact you can exist only under an irregular, unjust organization. Should a really just organization be established, with no place for those who live on the labor of others, you all—landlords, merchants, doctors, professors, and lawyers, as well as factory-hands, manufacturers, workshop-owners, engineers, teachers and producers of cannons, tobacco, spirits, looking-glasses, velvet, etc., together with the members of the Government — would starve to death.

What you need is not a really just order of life: for nothing would be more dangerous for you than an order in which everyone had to do work useful to all.

Only cease to deceive yourselves: consider well the place you hold among the Russian people and what you are doing, and it will be clear to you that your struggle with the Government is the struggle of two parasites on a healthy body, and that both contending parties are equally harmful to the people. Speak, therefore, of your own interests ; but do not speak for the people. Do not lie about them, but leave them in peace. Fight the Government, if you cannot refrain; but know that you are fighting for yourselves not for the people, and that in this violent struggle there is not only nothing noble or good, but that your struggle is a very stupid and harmful and, above all, a very immoral affair.

Your activity aims, you say, at making the general condition of the people better. But that the people's condition should be better, it is necessary for people themselves to be better. This is as much a truism, as that to heat a vessel of water, all the drops in it must be heated. That people may become better, it is necessary that they should turn their attention ever more and more to their inner life. But external public activity, and especially public strife, always diverts men's minds from the inner life; and, therefore, by perverting people, always and inevitably lowers the level of general morality, as has everywhere been the case, and as we now see most strikingly exemplified in Russia. This lowering of the level of general morality causes the most immoral part of society to come more and

more to the top ; and an immoral public opinion is formed which not only permits, but even approves crimes, robberies, debauchery, and murder itself. Thus a vicious circle is set up: the evil elements of society, evoked by the social struggle, throw themselves hotly into public activity corresponding to the low level of their morality, and this activity again attracts to itself yet worse elements of society. Morality is lowered more and more, and the most immoral of men: the Dantons, Marats, Napoleons, Talleyrands, Bismarcks, become the heroes of the day. So that participation in public activity and strife, is not only not an elevated, useful and good thing (as it is customarily supposed and said to be by those who are engaged in this struggle) but on the contrary it is a most unquestionably stupid, harmful and immoral affair.

Reflect on this, especially you, young people, who are not yet immersed in the sticky mud of political activity. Shake off from yourself the terrible hypnotism you are under ; free yourselves from the lie of this pseudo-service of the people, in the name of which you consider that everything is permitted you ; above all, think of the highest qualities of your soul, demanding of you neither equal and secret voting, nor armed insurrections, nor legislative assemblies, nor any similar stupidities and cruelties, but solely that you should live good and true lives.

What is necessary for your good and sincere life is, first of all, not to deceive yourselves by supposing that by yielding to your petty passions : vanity, ambition, envy and bravado, or desiring to find an outlet for your spare energy, or to improve your own position, you can serve the people. No; what is necessary is to examine yourselves, and to endeavor to correct your own failings and become better men. If you wish to think of public life, think first of your sins against the people; try to consume as little of their labor as possible, and if you cannot help the peasantry, try at least not to mislead and confuse them, committing the terrible crime many of you now commit by deceiving and provoking them,

inciting them to robberies and insurrections, which always end in suffering and the yet greater enslavement for the people.

The intricate and difficult circumstances amid which we live in Russia demand of you, especially at the present time, not newspaper articles, nor speeches in assemblies, nor promenading in the streets with revolvers, nor the (often dishonest) incitement of the peasants while you evade responsibility yourselves ; but a frank and strict relation to yourselves and to your own lives, which alone are in your power, and the improvement of which is the sole means by which you can improve the general condition of the people.

III. TO THE PEOPLE.

[By the people I mean the whole Russian people, but especially the working, agricultural people who by their labor support the lives of all the rest.]

You, Russian working people, chiefly agricultural peasants, now find yourselves in Russia in a specially difficult position. However hard it was for you to live with little land and large taxes and customs-duties and wars, which the Government devised, you lived, till quite recently, believing in the Czar, and believing that it was impossible to live without a Czar and without his authority ; and you humbly submitted to the Government.

However badly the Czar's Government ruled you, you humbly submitted to it as long as there was only one Government. But now, when it has come about that a part of the people has rebelled, and ceasing to obey the Czar's Government, has begun to fight against it: when in many places instead of one Government there are two, each of them demanding obedience, you can no longer humbly submit to the powers that be, without considering whether the Government rules you well or ill; but have to choose which of the two you will submit to. What are you to do? Not those tens of thousands of workmen who bustle and are hustled about in the