

TOLSTOY ATTACKS STOLYPIN PLAN AND SUGGESTS ADOPTION OF THE SINGLE TAX

On July 26, 1907, Leo Tolstoy wrote to Stolypin, asking that he substitute Henry George's Single Tax idea for the Stolypin plan. Tolstoy had served with Stolypin's father in the Crimean War, and hoped that this personal friendship might carry weight. Tolstoy criticized Stolypin's policies, asserting that:

"In destroying the age-old great and universal injustice of land ownership, you can do a truly good work by satisfying the legitimate desires of the people . . . by putting an end to the horrible misdeeds which are now being enacted both by the revolutionaries and by the government."

Stolypin wrote back to Tolstoy on October 23, 1907, stating:

"Do not think I have not paid any attention to your letter. I have been unable to answer it because it cut too deep. You consider what I consider good for Russia. It seems to me that lack of 'property' among the peasants creates all our unbalance. Nature implanted certain in-born instincts in man . . . and one of the most powerful is the sense of property."

Stolypin stated that:

"It is ridiculous to talk to these people (the peasants) about freedom.

"I do not reject the teachings of George, and I think that the single tax will, in time, help in the struggle against very large ownership of property, but now I do not see any purpose here in Russia of driving off the land the more developed class of landholders; but, on the contrary, I see the undoubted necessity of relieving the peasant by giving him the legitimate opportunity to acquire the piece of land he needs and granting him full ownership of it."

Stolypin stated that he was doing what he felt to be for the good of the people. Tolstoy replied to Stolypin in a letter which seemingly attacked private ownership of land, but actually sought private ownership with a single tax on land values. • • • •

Tolstoy wrote:

"You thought to pacify the aroused population which was waiting for and desirous of one thing; the doing away with the right to hold landed property (a right as shocking in our times as the right of serfdom was a half a century ago), to pacify the population by destroying the commune in order to form small landed holdings. This mistake was tremendous. Instead of making use of the consciousness still alive among the people of the illegality of individual land ownership, a consciousness which coincides with the teachings of the most forward-looking people in the world, you sought to pacify them by means of seducing them with the base, old, outworn concept of the relation of man to land that still exists."

Tolstoy concluded that Stolypin's mistakes could be corrected by: "The recognition of the fact that all land is equally the property of all the people, and the fixing of a tax which corresponds to the relative advantages of this land, this to replace all other taxes or a part of them. This measure alone could pacify the people and render powerless the efforts of the revolutionaries, who now draw their support from the people, and it would make unnecessary the dreadful measures of violence which are now being used against the violators."

Stolypin was not persuaded to change his course. The Government's executions, exiles, and imprisonments and reckless assassinations by the revolutionary Marxists continued. On September, 1911, Stolypin was assassinated. After the March, 1917, revolution against the Tsars, the democratic provincial Kerenski government promoted a system of land value taxation for agriculture. But before it could be put into effect, the Bolsheviks overthrew Kerenski in November, 1917, murdered a few million peasants and inaugurated their disastrous State collective farms. The Bolshevik system of State owned and directed farm ownership was not much worse than the land oligopoly of the Tsars -- a major cause of the March, 1917, revolution. • • • •