



A Torch in the Darkness

by **ALEXANDRA TOLSTOY**

(From address at Henry George School
banquet)

IT is a great privilege to be with you tonight, and I'm going to speak about the relationship between my father and Henry George, though they never met. His son, however, visited us at our home, Yasnaya Poliana, (Sunny Meadows), in 1909, and that pleased my father very much.

Things have changed since those days. The values of life are different. There were many people with great spirit, like Emerson, George and Thoreau, whose book was always on my father's table, even when he left his home forever. To these philosophers the spirit meant much and material things little.

After my father read *Progress and Poverty* he spoke about Henry George a great deal and wrote a preface to his work. A disciple of his, Mr. Nikolaieff, also studied George and knew his writings so well he could quote many passages by heart. In 1894 an American named Ernest Crosby came to Yasnaya Poliana, because he had read my father's book on life and was carried away by it. My father talked to him about Henry George and asked if he would kindly, on his return to America, promote these ideas. Crosby did this, and organized a league for social reform.

My father was an idealist, as you know, and he believed there would be a time when the land would not belong to those who exploit it but to those who work on it. He wrote to the young Czar Nicholas II, after the death of Alexander III, expressing the hope that the Czar would do something to bring the theory of Henry George into Russia, but nothing happened. Later he wrote that the feet of the country were the farmers—they were the supports for the body and the whole population. But no one wanted to support the body—the feet were getting weaker and weaker, and the body larger and heavier.

Tolstoy did not believe that the revolution would bring any happiness to the world or to Russia—as the old government was keeping the power by force and violence, so would the new revolutionary government seize the power by force and violence. And he said that since the family of the Czar had already made their pile they wouldn't steal as dreadfully as the revolutionaries, and those words, I think, were a prophecy.

He said, however, that Russia, who was always behind other countries, would be ahead if only the reforms of Henry George could be established.

The revolutions were strongly supported by the people only because of the century-old injustice of land ownership, he said, and would end if this injustice was abolished. Of course that never happened.

Later my father wrote to the Prime Minister, asking him also to bring in the theory of Henry George. He replied that it was "just Utopia," and couldn't be done. Instead he brought reforms giving ownership of a patch of land to each peasant, but that didn't do much good. Tolstoy wrote, "every Russian mind is imbued with the ideas of Henry George and even of Thoreau (he was referring to their love of the land and Nature). Still later when the Duma, or Russian Parliament was established, he tried again to draw attention to the system of Henry George.

In 1900, on his eightieth birthday, there was a jubilee for my father. The best greeting he received was a telegram from Cincinnati stating, "since we learn that you have accepted the theory of our dear teacher, Henry George, we have more courage to stand up for his ideas, and more faith and assurance that the reign of truth is coming where justice will be the law of social relations and love." This gave my father tremendous joy.

In our family, Tanya, my oldest sister, was also carried away by the theory of Henry George, and when she received her estate under the will of my father (who gave away all his property), she resented somehow becoming the owner of land. So an experiment was started similar to the one outlined in *Resurrection* by the hero Nekhludoff. The peasants worked on the land and paid a tax, or rent, which was used for their needs. The peasants were very pleased with this arrangement and it worked well as long as my sister and father were there.

Well, as I said, Tolstoy's prophecy came true. What happened to the

Alexandra Tolstoy was introduced at the annual banquet of the Henry George School in New York, by the chairman, Arnold Weinstein, as the "illustrious daughter of an illustrious father."

Living and working hard at 77 on her American *Yasnaya Poliana*—and directing the Tolstoy Foundation from her office in New York City, affording hope to thousands of refugees, she captures the imagination and respect of everyone who comes into her presence. One senses nobility instinctively here, and the title, Countess, though long ago renounced, comes naturally to mind. Who can estimate the priceless worth to this country of the contribution made by personages such as this who fled to us for freedom and remained to love and serve?

land? What happened to the farmers? You may know that when my father died, at his request, all his writings became public domain. There was to be no private property in the family. I had been instructed to buy the land from my mother and brothers and distribute it among the peasants, and that is what I did. About 2400 acres were divided among the farmers, friends and neighbors in the four villages around our farm.

In the revolution the Soviets took all this land. I asked the President of the Executive Committee of the Soviets to leave it with the peasants, but all fields and forests were taken into government ownership. And what are those collective farms? I must tell you that the peasants hate them. They are not permitted to keep any produce beyond a certain very limited amount to feed themselves and their families. The Russian people and all other people behind the iron curtain are miserable and suffering, not only from the lack of enough food or clothing, but the complete lack of freedom. Even the children are robbed of their freedom and are taught to lie and speak falsely to say the things that will please the Communists.

Scores of thousands, many of them with children, have fled from tyranny since the time when my father said to my sister and me, "there are many other people besides Leo Tolstoy." Recalling his words later, we organized the Tolstoy Foundation and brought in 20 thousand victims of communism, who escaped to freedom. It was a job that gave great satisfaction and happiness to me. We have since organized a settlement center near Nyack, New York, where about six and a half thousand have stayed briefly and had their first feeling of hope in the United States.

Again I say, whole countries behind the iron curtain are suffering—temples, churches and religions are destroyed. People are being murdered

and enslaved. What is left? Sometimes I think there is nothing left! Sometimes I think we live in such a period of materialism that there is only darkness. But when I think of the spirit, the principles, the ideas and the religion of Christ, and of the great people like Buddha, Mahomet, Confucius and Laotse—when I think about people like Emerson, Thoreau, Henry George and Tolstoy—I know their spiritual values are always with us and cannot be destroyed. Then I feel better, and I see that like a torch in the darkness, we can follow these great men in our endeavors to help the world and make it better, and maybe to help the people who are enslaved regain freedom and live again like normal beings.



Man's Inhumanity

The "Third Straight Crop Failure" in Red China was again reported in May with a cataclysmic account of "natural calamities," with rations cut to a mere few ounces a day, virtually no meat, and only a few vegetables. However, according to a newspaper report originating in Tokyo, "weather men had noticed little unusual weather over China during 1960, and suspicions were raised that poor production methods and not failure were reasons for the poor showing."

Dr. Ellsworth Raymond, an expert on Russian area studies at New York University, who spoke at the Henry George School in New York, predicted the above crop failure report and said Khrushchev warned China that state farms in Russia had not met production—but the Red regime nevertheless gradually converted to total regimentation.

Russia is also suffering a food shortage, and, like China, is forced to buy from other countries although in Czarist times it was a great supplier of food. It is a historical fact that slavery stifles production. On collective farms, communes and state farms peasants simply refuse to work efficiently, and they have slaughtered thousands of animals rather than have them taken by the communes. Farmers, like factory workers, drop to their lowest production when incentive is lacking.

Private gardens in Russia provide nearly 50 per cent of the food, though they represent only 4 per cent of the land area. This shows the strength of private gardeners, although they are heavily taxed. Khrushchev doesn't like them, of course, and is now trying to take their livestock away. When a dictator fails he purges the opposition, in this case the farmer.