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To the Working People.

BY LEO TOLSTOY.
(Translated by V. TCHERTKOFF and I. P. MAYO.)

"Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."
—John viii. 32.

THESE remains not long for me to live, and, before death, I would like to tell you, the working people, what I have thought about your oppressed position, and of those means by which you may free yourselves from it.

Perhaps something which I have thought and am thinking (and I have thought much about this) may be of use to you.

I naturally address myself to Russian working-men amongst whom I live, and whom I know better than the working-men of other countries; but I hope that some of my thoughts may be not useless to the working-men of other countries also.

I.

That you, working-men, are compelled to pass all your life in want and heavy work unnecessary to you, whereas other men, who do not work at all, profit by all you produce—that you are the slaves of these men, and that this should not be—this is evident to every one who possesses eyes and heart.

But what is to be done that it may not be so?

The first simple and natural solution appears to be—as from olden times it has appeared—that those who live by the unlawful profit of your labour should have it forcibly taken away from them. Thus in the most ancient times acted the slaves in Rome, and in the middle ages the peasants in Germany and France. Thus also in Russia the people often acted in the times of Stenka Rasin, of Pougachof. Thus even now Russian working-men sometimes act.

This means offers itself to the injured working men before all others, and yet this means not only never attains its aim, but always rather aggravates than improves their lot. In times of yore, when the power of Governments was not so strong as it is now, one could hope for success from such riots; but now when enormous funds, railways, telegraphs, police, gendarmes, and soldiers, are in the hands of the Government, all such attempts always terminate, as the riots in the governments of Poltava and Harkov terminated, by the rioters being tortured and executed; and the power of the non-workers over the workers only establishes itself still more permanently.

By endeavouring with violence to strive against violence, you, working-men, are doing what a bound man would do were he, in order to get free, to pull at the ropes which bind him; he would only further tighten the knots which hold him. So it is with your attempts to obtain by force that of which you are deprived by force.

II.

That the method of riots does not attain its aim—but instead of improving rather aggravates the position of the workers—has at present become evident. Latterly, therefore, a new means for the liberation of the workers has been invented by people who desire or, at all events, say they desire the welfare of the working classes. This new means is founded upon the teaching that all the workers after they have been deprived of the land which they formerly possessed, and have become hired workmen in factories (which, according to this teaching, must take place as inevitably as the sun rises at a certain hour), will, by organising unions, co-operations, demonstrations, and electing their partisans into Parliament, keep improving and improving their position, and will at last even appropriate for themselves all the mills and factories, in general all means of production, the land included; and then after that will be quite free and happy. Notwithstanding that the teaching which proposes this method is full of obscurities, arbitrary propositions, and contradictions, and is simply foolishness, it has of late been spreading more and more.

This teaching is accepted not only in those countries where the majority of the population has for several generations already given up agricultural labour, but also where the masses of workers have not yet thought of deserting the land.

It would seem that a teaching which first of all demands the transition of the country labourer from his habitual, healthy, and happy conditions of varied agricultural labour to the unhealthy, dismal, and pernicious conditions of monotonous, stupefying work—and from that independence which the country labourer feels, satisfying almost all his wants by his own labour, to the complete dependence of the factory workman on his master—it would seem that this teaching ought not to have any success in countries where the working-men are still living on the land by agricultural labour.

But the propaganda of this fashionable teaching called Socialism, even in such countries as Russia, where 98 per cent of the working population lives by agricultural labour, is willingly accepted by those 2 per cent of workmen who have desisted from agricultural labour.