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## WE NEED A GREAT RUSSIA

By Peter Stolypin

The agrarian issue wrecked the First Duma; it continued to endanger the fate of the Second Duma as well, although the latter was dissolved on another pretext. There was clearly no basis of agreement between a government determined to protect private landed property and a Duma eager to confiscate it. And yet in retrospect it seems that Stolypin's solution to the land problem was a sensible and promising program which, in the decade in which it was applied, produced some impressive results. The man himself was probably the last Russian statesman of stature produced by the old regime. He stood head and shoulders above his colleagues, and his relations with the Duma indicated that he was interested in collaboration with the legislature provided it was a moderate body. But the chasm between the bureaucracy and the Second Duma, more radical than its predecessor, was too deep to bridge, and Stolypin found a way out of the impasse by violating the new Russian constitution and restricting the electoral law. Henceforth the Duma would be more conservative and would not advocate the socialist schemes abhorrent to the regime.

The solution of the land problem adopted by the Third Duma is described by the Octobrist chairman of its Agrarian Commission, Sergei Shidlovskii, in "The Imperial Duma and Land Settlement," *Russian Review*, November, 1912. The same issue also contains an article by his Kadet rival, Aleksandr Manuilov, "Agrarian Reform in Russia." Another Kadet deputy, Vasilii Maklakov, has written "The Peasant Question and the Russian Revolution," *Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. II (1923), and "The Agrarian Problem in Russia before the Revolution," *Russian Review*, 1950. Vladimir Lenin's biting comments on Stolypin's program are scattered throughout his *Collected Works*, Vols. XIII-XX, covering the period 1907-14. For articles on the Stolypin land reform see Donald Treadgold, "Was Stolypin in Favor of the Kulaks?" *American Slavic and East European Review*, Vol. XIV; George Yaney, "The Concept of the Stolypin Land Reform," *Slavic Review*, June, 1964; and W. Mosse, "Stolypin's Villages," *Slavonic and East European Review*, June, 1965. For studies of the agrarian problem as a whole see Geroid Robinson, *Rural Russia under the Old Regime*; George Pavlovsky, *Agrarian Russia on the Eve of Revolution*; and Donald Treadgold, *The Great Siberian Migration*. Alfred Levin's *The Second Duma* should also be consulted. See also Bertram Wolfe, "Lenin, Stolypin and the Russian Village," *Russian Review*, Vol. VI, and the memoirs of Stolypin's daughter, Maria Bock, "Stolypin in Saratov," in the same journal, Vol. XII.

From Gosudarstvennaia Duma, *Stenograficheskie Otechty* (St. Petersburg), May 10, 1907, pp. 433-45. Translated by Sylvia Fain.

Members of the State Duma: I have listened to the debates on the land question, studied them from the stenographic record, and have decided that, before the conclusion of this debate, I must make a statement about the questions raised here, and about the Government's own proposals. I do not propose to present the Government's entire agrarian program. One of our subordinate departments intends to do that before the Agrarian Commission. I learned only today that fundamental decisions are being made in this Commission; yet members of the Government are not invited to its sessions, and the materials at the Government's disposal are not being used.

I consider it necessary to confine myself to questions raised and discussed here. I proceed from the view that all persons with an interest in this matter most sincerely desire that it be solved. I think that the peasants most certainly desire a solution to the problem so central to their very existence. And I think the landlords must want their neighbors to be people who are peaceful and happy, and not angry people on the verge of starvation. I think all Russians who long for peace in their land desire a speedy solution to the problem which undoubtedly contributes to the growth of sedition and rebellion. Thus I will ignore all those insults and accusations which have been made here against the Government. Nor will I stop to discuss attacks which resembled hostile pressure on the regime. Nor will I discuss the principle of class revenge—former serfs against nobles—which some here have advanced. Rather, I will try to take a statesman-like point of view; and will try to handle this question completely objectively, and even dispassionately. I shall try to cover all the views which have been expressed here, remembering that opinions which dis-

agree with the Government's views cannot be considered products of seditious thought. Now, judging from the debate which has occurred here, and from the preliminary discussion of the question, there is clearly little chance that these various views will be brought together, or that the Agrarian Commission will be given precisely defined tasks. Thus it seems to me even more imperative that the Government make known its general position.

As to the proposals of the various parties, I will first examine those made by parties on the Left. I will not dispute the statistics they have cited which seem to me highly debatable. I also readily agree with the picture they have drawn of agricultural Russia's impoverishment. Alarmed by this very process, the Government has already begun to take steps to improve the lot of the agricultural class. I must only say that the method those on the Left have suggested, the path they would choose, will overturn all existing civic relationships. It will lead to the subordination of the interests of the whole population to the interests of one class, albeit a large one. It will lead, gentlemen, to a social revolution. It seems to me that these speakers from the Left are well aware of this. One of them invited the regime to take extralegal measures in this situation. He declared that the whole problem of the present moment consists precisely in the destruction of the present state system with its landowning bureaucratic base, and the creation of a modern state based on new cultural principles constructed on the ruins of the old. Why does he propose that reason of state prevail over the legal limits of state authority? Because this will enable the state to return to its proper path of legality? No—rather because he believes the particular extralegal state action he advocates will strike a

death blow to the existing state system and the present state structure. In a word, nationalization of the land, with or without compensation, will lead to such a social upheaval, to such a shift of all values, to such an alteration of all social, legal, and civic relations as history has never seen. But, of course, this is no argument against the Leftists' proposal, if such upheavals are considered Russia's means of salvation. Let us assume for the moment that the Government sees the nationalization of land as a good, and that it takes lightly the destruction of the entire class of landowners (an educated class, and a large one, whatever has been said here). Suppose that the Government concurs in this destruction—what will come of this? Would even the basic problem of land allocation be solved? Would this method permit the peasants to farm their own land?

There are statistics which can give us the answer, and this is what they say: even if all the land without any exception, both privately and municipally owned land, were distributed to the peasants who now hold land allotments, then in Vologda province, with the presently available land, there would be 147 desiatins of land per household; there would be 185 in Olo-nets, and 1,309 in Archangel; while in fourteen provinces there would be less than 15 desiatins per family, and only 9 in Poltava, and 8 in Podolsk province. These disparities are explained by the extremely uneven distribution of public and private ownership of land from one province to another, and by the variations in allotment size. One-fourth of the privately owned land in the Empire is located in the twelve provinces where peasant allotments are above 15 desiatins per household. Only one seventh of the privately owned land

is located in the ten provinces where peasant allotments are the smallest, or about 7 desiatins for each household. These figures take into account all the land of all landowners, that is, not only the 107,000 nobles, but also the 490,000 peasants who have bought their own land, and the 85,000 burghers (these last two groups together hold nearly 17 million desiatins of land). Thus it follows that an equal division of all the land can scarcely satisfy the peasant's need for land. Instead, we must resort to that very thing which the government is proposing—resettlement. And we must abandon the idea of giving land to all the laboring people without providing any for the rest of the population.

The inadequacy of a general land distribution as a solution to our peasant problem is likewise confirmed by statistics for population growth over the last ten years in the fifty provinces of European Russia. Gentlemen, Russia's population is increasing faster than that of any other country in the world, by a rate of 1.5 per cent per year. This means a natural annual increase of 1,625,000 souls, or 341,000 households, in European Russia alone. Thus, merely keeping up with the population increase would require three and a half million desiatins of additional land a year (allowing 10 desiatins per household). It is clear, gentlemen, that expropriation and redistribution of all privately owned land will not solve our land problem. Such an expropriation would only be a stop-gap measure.

But leaving aside the economic consequences of a land redistribution, what would such a move mean morally? What is the pattern of life in our villages? Everyone must cultivate the same crops in the same way, the commune land must be periodically re-

divided, and it is impossible for a farmer with initiative to try out new ideas on the land temporarily in his care. Now, if everyone and everything were made equal, the land would become common, like water and air. But no human hand touches water or air, and no labor improves them. Otherwise there would undoubtedly be a price to pay for the improved water and air, with rights of ownership established for them. I daresay that land which would be distributed to the citizens, and which local Social Democratic officials would expropriate from some to give to others, would soon take on just those properties of water and air. It would be used, but no one would ever improve it, or put his labor into it, since the results of his labor would pass on to another. In general, the incentive to labor, that prudence which makes people work, would be scrapped. Each citizen—and there have always been and always will be some idlers and parasites in any society—will know that he has the right to have land and to till it if he so desires. But once the knowledge of this right begins to bore him, he may leave the land and go a-roaming. Everybody will be equal—but all can be equalized only at a lower level. It is impossible to equalize a lazy man with a conscientious one, or a weak mind with a capable one. Consequently, the cultural level of the country will deteriorate. A good farmer, a resourceful one, will be deprived of the opportunity to apply his knowledge to the land.

We must realize that in such conditions a new revolution would be accomplished: the gifted, strong, and capable man would establish his right to property and to the results of his labors by force. Truly, gentlemen, property has always been based on force, backed by

a moral right. Remember, the distribution of marshlands under Catherine the Great was justified by the necessity of utilizing huge uncultivated areas. (Voice from the Center: "Oh, really!") Now that was reason of state. In this way the right of the capable and gifted created property rights in the West. Is it possible that this experience will be repeated? Will we see the re-establishment of property rights in a Russian countryside ruined by an exaggerated egalitarianism? And this re-carved and equalized Russia—would she be richer and more powerful? The power of a country consists of the wealth of its people. The state as a whole would gain nothing from a general land redistribution. Not a single additional piece of bread would be added to the national wealth, while cultural life and activity would have perished. Temporarily, peasant allotments would be enlarged, but as the population grows, land hunger would return. Masses of impoverished peasants would leave the land to join the urban proletariat. But even supposing that this picture is an incorrect and exaggerated one, who would deny that such a shock, such a huge social revolution would not, perhaps, affect Russia's very survival as a nation?

Now gentlemen, these spokesmen for the Left propose to destroy the existing state system. They propose to ruin Russia in order to build a new fatherland on the ruins. I think that in the second millennium of her life Russia will not permit herself to be ruined. I think that she will be renewed, and that she will improve her way of life and advance in the family of nations. But this will not be the result of decomposition, for decomposition means death.

Now we turn, gentlemen, to another project set before us, that of the party

of the Popular Freedom [Kadets]. This party offers no sweeping solutions, but confines itself to the problem of increasing the size of peasant landholdings. Their project does not recognize or create any right to land at all, for anyone. I must confess that I do not understand all of their plan, which seems contradictory on many points. The party's spokesman was very critical of the principle of the nationalization of land. I expected that he would, logically, advocate the recognition of the principle of private property. He did so—but only partially. He recognized the right of the peasants to the inviolate use of their land in perpetuity. But, at the same time, he avowed the necessity of denying the large landlords any such rights, in order to give the peasants more land. But once the principle of expropriation has been admitted in one case, what is to prevent expropriation of the peasants' own land, should that ever be considered necessary? Thus, it seems to me that in this respect the project of the Leftist parties is much more honest and straightforward. They recognize the possibility of a revision of working norms, taking away extra land from all householders. The principle proposed by the Kadet party is one of mandatory quantitative expropriations, that is, the principle that land may be taken from those who have much in order to give it to those who have little. In the final analysis this principle leads to nothing other than the nationalization of the land. Under their program, if a landowner has, say, 3,000 desiatins, 2,500 would be taken away. But with a change in farming methods and with the growth of population, he will doubtless run the risk of losing his remaining 500 desiatins. It seems to me, too, that no peasant in need of land would understand why he

should be moved to some place far away, if the neighboring landlord still has land, and a grand house where he lives "in style." Why must he go to Siberia in search of land? Why should he not be assigned land from the neighboring estate? It also seems clear to me that this project would abolish the right of private ownership of land insofar as the right to buy and sell land freely would disappear. No one will apply their labor to land knowing that the fruits of their labor may after several years be expropriated. The Kadet speaker estimated the compensation paid for expropriated land would average 80 rubles per desiatin in European Russia. This could hardly encourage those who have invested heavily in the development of land which originally cost 200-300 rubles per desiatin. The prospect of an expropriation which would entail such losses could hardly encourage them to make any further investments in their property.

But there is one further point which deserves the most serious attention: The Kadet speaker declared that we must let the peasants run their own affairs, in whatever way they choose. The law is not called upon to instruct the peasant or to impose any theories upon him, however basic and correct these theories may be considered by the legislators. Leave each peasant to his own initiative—only then can we really help the population. It is impossible not to welcome such a declaration. The Government itself continually emphasizes one thing in all that it does: we must remove those fetters which have been placed on the peasants and give each one the opportunity to choose for himself that method of using the land which most suits him.

The Kadet project also put forth another interesting principle: the prin-

ciple of state aid. It is proposed that the Treasury pay half the value of the land which is expropriated for the peasants. I will return to this in a moment, but here I will point out that this seems to me somewhat contradictory to the principle of expropriation which this party advanced. How can they simultaneously accept compulsory expropriation and advocate a necessity for the whole state, for all classes of people, to come to the aid of the neediest part of the population? If this last is the goal, then why is it necessary to deal so harshly with 130,000 landlords? For not only would they be treated unfairly, but they would be taken from their accustomed labor, which is after all a useful contribution to society. But, gentlemen, is it impossible to manage without some form of expropriation?

Before submitting to you in general outlines the views of the Government, I will dwell on yet another method for solving the land question which has settled in many heads. I am talking about violence. You all know, gentlemen, how easily our simple peasant listens to all sorts of rumors, how easily he is aroused to extralegal action and to violence, especially in order to satisfy his hunger for land. Our ignorant peasants have already paid for their excesses several times. I must say that at present the danger of new violence and new troubles in the countryside is rising. The Government must take into account two things: on the one hand, it is necessary and evidently widely desired and urged that the Government set to work on new legislation aimed at improving our national life without departing from sound legal principles. The Government must welcome this desire and do everything possible to meet it. But along with this there exists another current of thinking. There are

some who want to stir up discontent in the land, to sow seeds of rebellion and doubt. They wish to destroy confidence in the Government, undermine its authority, and thus to unite all forces hostile to the Government. It was from this very rostrum, gentlemen, that someone shouted: "We have come here not to buy land, but to take it!" (Voices: True! That's right!) From these very halls, gentlemen, letters went out to the provinces, to the country, letters which were printed in the provincial newspapers and aroused much confusion and indignation in the localities. The authors of these letters denied responsibility, but just think, gentlemen, what went on in the minds of those country people who read them. The letters advised the peasants to resort to violence and seize land by force, in view of the Government's alleged crimes, its coercive tactics, and cruel oppression. I shall not trouble you, gentlemen, with a survey of these documents. I will be frank, as a Minister must be when speaking to the Duma, and I will say only that the very existence of such writings suggests that renewed attempts to acquire land by force and violence will be made. I must say that at the present time this danger is still remote. However, it is vitally important to define the limits beyond which open addresses to the people become really dangerous. The Government, of course, cannot allow anyone to overstep this limit, otherwise it would cease to be the Government and would become an accomplice to its own destruction. All that I have said, gentlemen, has been a critique of those various proposals which in the Government's opinion do not supply the answers or solutions which Russia awaits. Violence will not be tolerated. And in the Government's view, nationalization

of the land would be a national disaster. The project of the Kadets, that is, semi-expropriation, semi-nationalization, would in the last analysis lead to the same results as the proposals from the Left.

Where is the way out? Where are the answers? Does the Government intend to limit itself to half-measures and mere maintenance of order?

Before speaking of methods we should first clarify our goal. The Government wants above all to promote and enhance peasant land ownership. It wants to see the peasant earning well and eating well, since where there is prosperity there is enlightenment and also true freedom. But for this it is necessary to give opportunity to the capable, industrious peasant, who is the salt of the Russian earth. He must be freed from the vise of his present situation. He must be given the chance to consolidate the fruits of his labor and consider them his inalienable property. Let property be general where the commune is operative still; let it be household ownership where the commune no longer exists; but let it be hereditary, with firm legal guarantees. The Government should then assist such peasant smallholders with advice and credit facilities. Now a stubborn problem immediately presents itself: what of all those peasants who farm their land, but who do not have enough land? All these land-hungry peasants should be given the chance to utilize Russia's existing land reserves—as much land as they need, on favorable terms. We have heard here that we would need 57 million desiatins in order to give enough land to all the peasants. Now I repeat, I am not disputing these figures. It has been pointed out that the Government has at its disposal only 10 million desiatins of land. But,

gentlemen, the Government only recently began to set up a land fund. The Peasant Bank has at its disposal more land than it can handle. Some here have attacked the Peasant Bank, and the attacks were rather serious in nature. Someone said the Bank should be done away with. In the Government's opinion, it is not necessary to do away with anything. Rather, the project we have begun should be improved. In this matter we must return to the idea to which I alluded earlier—the ideal of state assistance. Let us pause to recall, gentlemen, that a state is a single organism. If the parts of the organism are at odds with each other, then the state becomes a "house divided against itself" and must inevitably perish. At the present time our state is ailing, and the peasantry is the sickest part. They must be helped. A simple, completely automatic, completely mechanical method has been proposed to aid them: to seize and divide up all 130,000 existing estates. Is this in the interest of the state as a whole? Does this sound like the story of Trishkin, who cut off the bottom of his coat so he could add length to his sleeves? Gentlemen, it is impossible to strengthen a sick body by feeding it with pieces of its own flesh. The organism must be infused with nutrient fluids before it can overcome a disease. The whole state must be mobilized to fight the illness; all parts of the state must come to the aid of that part which at present seems weakest. The idea that all elements of the state must come to the aid of its weakest part may appear to be the principle of socialism; but if this be socialism it is state socialism, which has often been practiced in western Europe, and has had real and visible results. In our country, this principle would be realized if the Government

were to take responsibility for paying a part of the interest which the peasants will have to pay for the land granted to them. The matter would come to the following: the state would buy pieces of land offered for sale, which together with the state lands and independent crown lands would comprise a state land fund. With so much land on the market, land prices would not rise. The peasants who are farming now but who need more land could apply to the land fund. But the peasantry is at present unable to pay the relatively high interest rates set by the Government. Therefore the state should pay that part of the required interest which the administration may determine is beyond the peasant's ability to pay. This difference would be made up from the state budget, and would be included with the estimated annual expenses. Thus, it would come about that the entire state and all classes of the population would be helping the peasants acquire the land they need. All taxpayers, all civil servants, merchants, professional people, the peasants themselves, and the estate owners, would have taken part in this. Everyone would share equally in this task. It would not be made the burden of one small class of 130,000 persons, whose destruction would mean the loss of important sources of culture, whatever may be said to the contrary.

Now the Government has already taken steps in this direction. The interest rates charged by the Peasant Bank have been temporarily reduced. This approach is more flexible, and less sweeping, than the Kadet proposal that the Government pay half the cost of the land which the peasants may purchase. Now if, together with this, a procedure were established for leaving the communes, thus building up the class of hardy individual proprietors, and if

there were a program of planned resettlement, if land loans were easily available, and if expanded agricultural credit facilities were created—if these things were done, hope would be seen, even if the full program of land reforms which the Government has proposed might not be enacted. And, viewing the land problem as a whole, perhaps this notorious question of compulsory expropriation would appear in a clearer light. It is time to put this question in its proper perspective; it is time, gentlemen, not to see it as a magic formula, a panacea for all evils. Expropriation seems a bold move only because it will also create a class of ruined landowners. Compulsory expropriation might really seem necessary in some circumstances. But, gentlemen, only as an exceptional measure, and not a general rule; and only accompanied by clear and precise legal guarantees. Compulsory expropriation could be qualitative instead of quantitative. It should be used chiefly when the peasants can settle locally, and in order to improve their methods of cultivation. It ought to be considered only when necessary to help make a transition to improved means of cultivation—perhaps to facilitate setting up watering places for livestock, digging wells, building roads, or to allow the farmers to consolidate separated bits of land into one or two good-size holdings. But, gentlemen, I am not giving you a full agrarian program, as I said earlier. I am only calling your attention to the outstanding features of the Government's proposals. We have offered to submit a more complete project to the Agrarian Committee, should they elect to hear us.

I have been concerned with the problem of our agrarian landholding system for some ten years. I can assure you that this matter will require prolonged

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and unpleasant, difficult work. It is impossible to solve this question all at once; it must be solved over a period of time. This has required decades in Western countries. We propose to you a moderate path, but a true one. Those

who oppose our state system prefer the path of radicalism, a path of emancipation from Russia's historic past, and from its cultural traditions. They need great upheavals—we need a great Russia! (Applause from the Right.)