

"... [L]andlords' serfs and peasants . . . owe their landlords proper submission and absolute obedience in all matters, according to the laws that have been enacted from time immemorial by the autocratic forefathers of Her Imperial Majesty [Catherine] and which have not been repealed, and which provide that all persons who dare to incite serfs and peasants to disobey their landlords shall be arrested and taken to the nearest government office, there to be punished forthwith as disturbers of the public tranquillity, according to the laws and without leniency. And should it so happen that even after the publication of the present decree of Her Imperial Majesty any serfs and peasants should cease to give the proper obedience to their landlords . . . and should make bold to submit unlawful petitions complaining of their landlords, and especially to petition Her Imperial Majesty personally, then both those who make the complaints and those who write up the petitions shall be punished by the knout [a whip made of many rawhide strip and sometimes with pieces of metal] and forthwith deported to Nerchinsk [in Siberia] to penal servitude for life and shall be counted as part of the quota of recruits which their landlords must furnish to the army" (453-454).

-Catherine the Great, *Decree on Serfs* (1767) excerpt