**Catherine the Great: *Decree on Serfs (1767)***

The Governing Senate. . . has deemed it necessary to make known; that the landlords' serfs and peasants . . . owe their landlords proper submission and absolute obedience in all matters, according to the laws r that have been enacted from time immemorial by the autocratic forefathers of Her Imperial Majesty and which have not been repealed, and which provide that all persons who dare to incite serfs and peasants to disobey their landlords shall be arrested and taken to the nearest government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 tranquility, 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... and forthwith deported to Nerchinsk to penal servitude for life and shall be counted as part of the quota of recruits which their landlords must furnish to the army. And in order that people everywhere may know of the present decree, it shall be read in all the churches on Sundays and holy days for one month after it is received and thereafter once every year during the great church festivals, lest anyone pretend ignorance.

From *A Source Book for Russian History,*G. Vernadsky, trans. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), Vol. 2, pp. 453-454.

*Although Catherine liked to use the liberal rhetoric of the Enlightenment, she actually ruled Russia with a heavy hand. Her government enacted this decree f- in the same year that the instructions about the proposed law code were* *issued.*