

## **The Prussian Reform Edict** **(9 October 1807)**

We, Frederick William, by the Grace of God King of Prussia, etc., etc., Hereby make known and give to understand: Since peace has been established we have been occupied before everything else with the care for the depressed condition of our faithful subjects and the speediest revival and greatest possible improvement in this respect. We have considered that in face of the prevailing want the means at our disposal would be insufficient to aid each individual, and even if they were we could not hope to accomplish our object, and that, moreover, in accordance with the imperative demands of justice and the principles of a judicious economic policy it behoves us to remove every obstacle which has hitherto prevented the individual from attaining such a state of prosperity as he was capable of reaching. We have farther considered that the existing restrictions both on the possession and enjoyment of landed property and on the personal condition of the agricultural labourer especially interfere with our benevolent purpose and disable a great force which might be applied to the restoration of cultivation, the former by their prejudicial influence upon the value of landed property and the credit of the proprietor, the latter by diminishing the value of labour. We desire therefore to reduce both kinds of restrictions so far as the common well-being demands and accordingly ordain the following:

1. Every inhabitant of our States is competent, without any limitation on the part of the State, to own or mortgage landed property of every kind. The noble may therefore own not only noble but also non-noble, citizen and peasant lands of every kind and the citizen and peasant may possess not only citizen, peasant and other non-noble, but also noble tracts of land, without in any case needing special permission for any acquisition whatever, although henceforth, as before, every change of ownership must be announced to the authorities. All privileges which are possessed by noble over citizen inheritances are entirely abolished, as well as the restrictions and suspension of certain property rights based upon the personal status of the holder.

Special laws shall still continue to regulate the right of those to acquire land who are by reason of their religious beliefs precluded from performing all the duties of citizenship.

2. Every noble is henceforth permitted, without any derogation from his station, to engage in citizen occupation and every citizen or peasant is allowed to pass from the peasant into the citizen class or from the citizen into the peasant class.

[...]

6. If a landed proprietor finds himself unable to restore and maintain the several peasant holdings existing upon an estate which are not held hereditarily either on a perpetual lease or of copyhold, he is required to inform the authorities of the province, with the sanction of which the consolidation of several holdings into a single peasant estate or with outlying land shall be permissible so soon as serfdom shall have ceased to exist on the estate. The provincial authorities will be provided with special instructions to meet these cases.

[...]

10. From the date of this ordinance no new relation of serfdom whether by birth or marriage, or by assuming the position of a serf, or by contract can be created.

11. With the publication of the present ordinance the existing relations of serfdom of those serfs, with their wives and children, who possess their peasant holdings by inheritance, or in their own right, or by perpetual leases or of copy hold shall cease entirely together with all mutual rights and duties.

12. From Martinmas ["Feast of St. Martin", 11 November], one thousand eight hundred and ten (1810) all serfdom shall cease throughout our whole realm. From Martinmas 1810 there shall be only free persons, as is already the case upon the royal domains in all our provinces, free persons, however, still subject, as a matter of course, to all obligations which bind them as free persons by reason of the possession of an estate or by virtue of a special contract.

To this declaration of our supreme will everyone whom it may concern and in particular our provincial authorities and other officials are exactly and dutifully to conform and the present ordinance is to be universally made known.

Authentically under our own royal signature, given at Memel, 19 October 1807.

Frederich William,  
Schrötter, Stein, Schrötter II.

[Source: James H. Robinson, ed., *Translations and Reprints from the Original Sources of European History, vol II, no. 2: The Napoleonic Period* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1902), pp. 27-30. Downloaded from <http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/d/517/>, edited by Mark R. Hatlie]