LIBRARY OF RATIONAL SOCIALISM

SUMMARY OF SOCIAL ECONOMY

ACCORDING TO THE IDEAS OF COLINS[1]

AGATHON DE POTTER

A long time ago, I wrote a very succinct summary of the social science discovered by Colins. It was published in the *Revue trimestrielle* (of Brussels) in 1861.[2]

I have been persuaded that it would be very useful to present, in summary, everything that relates more specifically to the economic aspect of rational socialism. This is what I propose to do in the following lines.

I will speak successively of Colins's personality and his ideas on social economy, ideas that I will expound dogmatically; I will then describe the organization of property as it will exist in the future society, then I will demonstrate the functioning of the institutions related to this organization; and finally, I will conclude by formulating and rebutting the objections that have been presented against the new social theory.

I

What I can say about Colins amounts to very little.

I extract the following details from a notice published in a Swiss newspaper by one of his devoted disciples, M. Hugentobler, to whom we owe the

[1] Translated from the second edition: Imprimerie Monnom, Brussels, 1912. Originally published in the *Revue du Socialisme rationnel*, no. 355 (février, 1912). — TRANSLATOR

The first edition of this excellent *Summary* being exhausted, we deemed it necessary to immediately produce a new one in order to satisfy the needs of propaganda. Our readers will be able, thanks to this work by Agathon De Potter, to get a general idea of the economic theory that he develops extensively in his *Social Economy*, also currently being published under the auspices of the *Revue*. — PUBLISHER'S NOTE

[2] "La science sociale d'après Colins et de Potter," *Revue trimestrielle*, 29 (janvier, 1861): 184-206. — TRANSLATOR

publication of a large part of the Belgian socialist's manuscripts.[3] I will only report the most interesting points, those relating to Colins's studies.

Jean-Guillaume-César-Alexandre-Hippolyte, Baron de Colins, born in Brussels on December 24, 1783, was the son of Chevalier Colins de Ham, chamberlain to the Emperor in Brussels. He was raised exclusively by his mother until the age of seven and a half.

At that age, his father, due to political circumstances, placed him with an old friend, a former Jesuit, an honest man, vicar of Dison.

At 18, he was appointed to represent the richest inhabitant of the colony on the island of Saint-Domingue. Arriving in Paris, he learned of the loss of Saint-Domingue.

The raid on England was about to take place. He volunteered as a private hussar in the 8th Regiment.

Sent to Lille to learn his trade, he attended mathematics classes and won first prize in geometry.

He earned all his ranks on the battlefield.

In 1810, his regiment sent him to the Imperial School of Alfort to study horse medicine. He was authorized to take courses in agriculture and rural economics. In 1811, he won first prize there. In 1812, he was excluded from the competition as too strong. In 1813, the Imperial Agricultural Society awarded him a gold medal while he was on the battlefield of Leipzig. In 1814, it received him into its ranks.

During his stay in Alfort, he studied medicine and attended classes in Paris.

In 1818, he was admitted to the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia.

In 1819, he went to the Spanish Antilles to clear land. He arrived in Havana, armed with recommendations for the island's captain general from the ambassadors of France and the Netherlands, certifying that he had pursued a political line different from theirs, but that he was a man of honor, deserving the esteem of honest people of all parties.

Having received his doctorate in Havana, he was appointed Fiscal of the Medical Court, covering a district of 300 square leagues. The best days of my life, he said, were spent in Havana, because I only dealt with the medicine of the poor.

In 1830, seeing the tricolor flag flying in the port of Havana, he left for France.

---

[3] "I declare that it is to my friend Adolphe Hugentobler that I dedicated my work entitled: *Social Science*, when I said: TO HIM, BY HIM, FOR ALL." (*Excerpt from the testament of Colins.*)

It was around 1833 that he devoted himself exclusively to the study of the sciences and their coordination, with the aim of achieving knowledge of the rules of both individual and social actions.

He then wrote and had printed in Paris, at his own expense, the *Pacte social*.[4]

From 1834 to 1844, he attended all the courses at five faculties, the Jardin des Plantes, and other institutions. He wanted to renew his education, which had been interrupted by his campaigns and travels.

Religious by education, he saw that contemporary science is essentially irreligious and materialistic. Since materialism cannot be the basis of order, he undertook to prove that contemporary science is a false science, and he succeeded. He thus attained a knowledge of real, scientific religion, the only one possible in the face of examination, which had now become incompressible.

Working to expound scientific religion and all its consequences for social organization became, from then on, his life's task.

In 1848, the Republic sentenced him to transportation.

In 1851, he published the first volume of What is Social Science?, followed by the second volume in 1858, and the third and fourth volumes in 1854.

While in prison in 1848, he was part of the editorial staff of the newspaper La Révolution démocratique et sociale. He was also an editor of La Tribune des peuple and wrote several articles in *La Presse*.

Between 1856 and 1858, the following works by Colins were published:

Political Economy, Source of Revolutions and So-Called Socialist Utopias, Volumes I, II, and III. Two or three volumes of material still remain to be printed;[5]

What is Freedom of Conscience? Letter to Mr. Jules Simon;

---

[4] It is interesting to note that it was in this work, published in 1835, that the idea of the collectivity of the soil first emerged. Here is the passage to which I refer:

"*Social Problem*.

"What is the organization of property that can, from now on, make humanity as happy as possible, relative to its state of education and wealth, and lead it by the shortest path to enjoy all the happiness of which it is capable?"

And Colins responds with the following series of measures:

"1... 2... 3...

"4. Real estate property belongs to all..."

The epigraph to this work: *Observe and reflect; God and liberty*, clearly shows that while the author had discovered the solution to the problem of the organization of property at that time, he did not yet possess a full understanding of moral truth.

[5] It is known that these last three volumes have been published for about twenty years. N.D.L.R.

Letter to Mr. P.-J. Proudhon on his work: *On Justice in the Revolution;*
The New Society, Its Necessity;
Sovereignty;
Social Science, of which only five volumes have appeared.[6]

Colins died on November 12, 1859. The day before, he was still working on a major work that was unfortunately unfinished and published in 1861 under the title Justice in Science, Outside the Church and Outside the Revolution. He left behind many manuscripts, some of which were published in Philosophy of the Future.

I will add to the above a few words that I copied from an unpublished note written by my father and placed by him at the end of the voluminous collection of letters he received from Colins when he left Paris and France for good to settle in Brussels.

> “I had met M. de Colins in Paris, through M. Sari, the brother of M. de Colins's brother-in-law, and whom I had often seen in Rome at the home of the former King Louis.
>
> “He struck me, from the very beginning, with his paradoxes, and he drew me to him by the vivacity with which he upheld them. For my part, I never failed to refute them. M. de Colins's originality had made me attentive to his words: the rigor and solidity of his reasoning soon captivated me. We always fought ardently, but I was constantly losing ground. I fought, yielding only inch by inch. But I felt that I was weakening every day; and the more I tried to regain my advantages, the more I let them take over me."

In his work entitled Reality, my father sets out the final result of these incessant discussions as follows:

> "For more than ten years, I fought against the new doctrine of which I now make myself the propagator. My preconceived opinions, my prejudices, the upbringing of my youth, the teaching that followed it, and perhaps, unwittingly, vanity and laziness, rejected this doctrine with all the power of deep-rooted habit. I finally gave in only when the moral constraint became irresistible."

Now that I have said what little I know about the personality of the Belgian socialist, I will dogmatically set out his main ideas on social economics.

II

The most important principle, the very one without which it is impossible to establish anything in terms of the organization of property, is the absolute

---

[6] Of the 20 volumes of Social Science, only volumes 8, 9, 10, and 20 remain to be published, from which we have been providing numerous excerpts for some time.

distinction between man and things. Colins cites some curious quotes from Aristotle in this regard in his *Social Science*.

Here is one:

> "It is not only to live together, but rather to live well that we have entered into society, etc... Without which, society would include slaves and other animals. Such beings take no part in the public happiness, nor do they live at their own will."

A 19th-century Aristotle would say, if he were frank:[7]

It is to live well that we have entered into society. Without this, society would include *proletarians* and OTHER ANIMALS. Such beings take no part in the public welfare, nor do they live at their own will.

Apart from an absolute distinction between humanity and things, it is logically impossible to maintain that one has the right to appropriate one being and not another. From then on, Aristotle had no reason not to place slaves and animals on the same level. And even today, when this absolute distinction is not yet socially accepted, there is no way to argue, with any semblance of logic, that slavery and the exploitation of the labor of certain men are not legitimate.

*
**

Another point on which Colins always insisted is the need not to confuse land with capital or movable property. And for what purpose? Here it is.

Under penalty of falling into absolute communism, that is, into absurdity, it is not permissible to maintain that everything that can be appropriated must be appropriated for the benefit of society. At least a portion of matter must be distributed among individuals, under the name of individual property, to constitute the reward for labor or wages, and thus serve as an incentive for each person's activity.

---

[7] The 19th century is frank, sometimes. Here is a quote from the Ami du Peuple (of Liège) of June 14, 1874, as proof.

"We can read in the toll tariff at the Maghin Bridge, the following:

"Subscription:

"One year, per person fr. 3.
per worker fr. 1

"The word person here replaces the word man; the word worker replaces the word animal, or thing."

For the author of the tariff in question, the proletarian is not a person, a man; he is not part of society properly speaking, and the author states this bluntly.

On the other hand, most socialists and some economists are beginning to recognize that the appropriation of all matter by a few enslaves others and produces a pauperism that increases in direct proportion to the increase in general wealth.

It has rightly been concluded from this economic situation that it has become necessary to establish collective property. But, apart from any subdivision within the general idea of what can be appropriated, it is impossible to say precisely: this thing must form collective property and that other thing can be appropriated individually; and thus one inevitably ends up either proposing absolute communism as the solution to the social evil, or admitting that there is no remedy.

With the distinction between landed and personal property, things are quite different. Let us first see what this distinction is based on.

The planet we inhabit pre-exists the humanity that populates it. It is not, originally, the result of labor. But, from the moment man developed there, he took possession of it to utilize its various parts, and, in this respect, the soil became a product of labor, the labor of taking possession, of appropriation.

From this time on, the results of labor on the planet appear in two different forms, depending on whether this result remains adherent to the soil, attached to the soil, incorporated into the soil, consisting solely of its modification or improvement, or whether it is detached from it, rendered mobile, capable of being transported far and wide. This is what differentiates landed material from movable material or capital.

Two consequences follow from the above, the second of which is directly applicable to the future organization of property:

1. Movable material comes exclusively from labor on the soil; the soil alone enjoys the quality of being indispensable to labor;

2. Of the two types of material, one landed, the other movable, only the first must be appropriated entirely for the benefit of all.

*
**

Another essential distinction must be made between wages and capital.

Wages and capital have in common that they are both products of labor; but they differ when we consider their purpose.

Wages are used for the preservation and development of both intellectual and physical life. Everything that exceeds this necessary quantity, everything that is set aside, saved, to be transformed into a new product, constitutes capital. Capital, from this point of view, was perfectly named by Colins as *accumulated* or *past* wages, that is, having more than sufficed for current needs. *Current* wages,

then, are wages properly speaking, serving for the preservation and development of the worker.

Wages relate to consumption, enjoyment, labor and humanity. Capital and its rent, interest, relate to production, wealth and property.

The distinction between wages and capital is especially important when it comes to taxes.

*
**

Colins has often demonstrated that individual appropriation of the soil is the source of growing poverty alongside the development of general wealth; this is not the place to repeat these demonstrations, since my goal is limited to dogmatically expounding his ideas. I only want to demonstrate the consequences of the individual or collective appropriation of the soil, relative to the state of freedom or slavery of labor.

Let us first examine the meaning of these latter expressions.

Labor is called free when the worker has no need of the permission of others to act. Otherwise, he is a slave.

And since labor and capital or wealth are always in a state of hostility, as Dupont-White has so aptly argued, there is domination of labor over wealth when labor is free; domination of wealth, exploitation of labor by wealth, when it is enslaved. Let us now see if there are several types of slavery or ways of exploiting labor, while remaining within the exclusively economic domain.

The freedom of labor consists, I have said, in the fact of being able to exercise one's activity without depending, in this regard, on an external will. Now, since man creates nothing, in order to work, he needs material to modify, to change form; this is obvious.

The indispensable condition for the freedom of labor is therefore the possession of a part of material. In the absence of this condition, the worker can only act if an owner agrees to lend him some, which clearly constitutes the subordination of labor to wealth, or the slavery of labor.

Now, this part of material Indispensable may be either the individual property of the person who transforms it, or his share in social or collective property. In the first case, labor is *domestically* free; in the second, it is *socially* free.

Let us now note that when the entirety of the soil and a certain amount of capital constitute collective property, labor is no longer exploited, either socially or domestically; whereas with the individual appropriation of the soil and the majority of capital, labor is always socially exploited, and is only free, domestically, among the tiny minority who individually own material.

Besides these two modes of labor slavery, there are two others to which it is important to draw attention.

The exploitation of labor can also be, in fact, *personal* or *hereditary*, depending on whether it affects a particular individual without continuing its effect beyond that, or whether, persisting after the death of the worker, it affects his family. The exploitation of labor is also personal or hereditary, depending on whether it benefits the capitalist alone, or, after the latter's death, to his estate.

And how is hereditary exploitation of labor established? In the simplest way: through the perpetuity of interest.

With the perpetuity of interest, the debt is hereditary relative to the lender, since it remains due to his heirs, and relative to the borrower, since it continues to remain due by the latter's heirs. From this results the particular type of exploitation of labor described as hereditary. This perpetuity places those who have not borrowed under the obligation to pay the interest on capital and consequently forces them to work to repay their debt before working to maintain their existence; which is, of course, an aggravation of slavery.

With lifelong interest, the debt becomes personal relative to the lender, since it expires with him, and relative to the borrower, since the latter's heirs pay only if something remains to be the assets of the estate. The exploitation of labor can therefore no longer be anything other than personal.

III

The organization of property will aim, in the future society, to establish and maintain the freedom of labor and at the same time to push its domination over wealth to the highest possible extent, which will translate, in practice, into raising wages to the maximum possible under the circumstances.

This particular organization will achieve the desired goal by means of a set of measures about which I will make a few remarks.

***

Collectivity of the soil. — It is sometimes imagined that the abolition of individual property in land, or the collection of rent by the State, would be sufficient to establish real collective ownership of the soil; this is a serious error. This pure and simple abolition would only result in the creation of restricted collective ownership, in favor of the rich alone. To be real, that is, to benefit all without exception, the collective ownership of the soil requires a set of conditions that I will outline.

True collective appropriation of the soil only exists if it is made equally available to all, and if, at the same time, the rent is spent for the benefit of all.

How should these conditions be observed? Let's start with the first point.

It is necessary:

1. That society undertakes to develop, with equal care, the intelligence of all children, as much as the abilities of each make it possible;

2. That it rents out fractions of the land with the furnishings essential for their proper exploitation;

3. That it gives each worker, upon entering the society of adults, a social dowry;

4. That it lends capital to those who have lost their dowry;

5. Finally, that leases be personal and that subletting be prohibited.

Apart from observing these various points, the soil would be made available exclusively to the rich. They alone would necessarily be accepted as tenants of the soil, because they would be able to offer a more advantageous rent to society.

Indeed, money and knowledge are required to be able to exploit the material fruitfully.

Now, as long as the education of the younger generations remains the responsibility of families, only the rich can possess a developed intelligence. Moreover, real property lacking the capital essential for its development can only be rented by those who already possess a certain degree of wealth. Finally, in the absence of exclusively personal leases, the richest would become the purchasers of the entirety of the soil, which they would then sublet to proletarian workers, obliged to comply with the conditions imposed on them.

*
**

Let us now see how the rent must be spent so that one can legitimately claim that it is for the benefit of all without exception.

1. Society must assume responsibility for the complete education and instruction of children until they reach the age of majority;

2. It must advance to each of them, upon their entry into adult society, a social dowry;

3. It must lend capital to those who, having lost theirs, would need it to work;

4. Finally, it must see to the maintenance of those who, old or sick, are incapable of working.

A person whose intelligence has remained uncultivated because his parents lacked the financial means to provide him with an education is entitled, in fact, to claim that society has not used the annuity for his benefit. Is it not the same with regard to someone who, having reached the age of majority, finds himself thrown into the midst of society without any means of existence, or to another

who, having lost what he possessed, finds himself deprived of all means of working? And the unfortunate person who is unable to support himself through his work is also entitled to say, if society does not come to his aid, that it has not used the rent for his benefit.

With the real collectivity of the soil, understood as I have just explained it, there is no longer either domestic exploitation or social exploitation of labor.

***

Socialization of capital. — We have already seen, from the above, that society must also own a certain amount of capital. It rents land to those who wish to work on land; it must also be able to lend capital to those who prefer to work on movable property.

This collective appropriation of capital has a first consequence: that of making any domestic exploitation of labor impossible.

It has yet another result: through the competition that society creates, by lending capital, with individual capitalists, it lowers interest to the level at which it should be maintained, so that the domination of labor is reinforced accordingly, and wages rise proportionally.

All capital cannot be socially appropriated, on pain of falling into the absurdity of absolute communism. But the capital left by past generations can fall into the public domain, except for the portion that must remain in the hands of individuals to serve as an incentive to work.

***

Non-perpetuity of interest. — All perpetual interest is prohibited, and debt repayment is made in annuities during the lender's lifetime.

In this way, any hereditary exploitation of labor is made impossible.

***

Social dowry. — It is also the socialization of a certain amount of movable wealth that allows society to advance to each person, upon reaching the age of majority, a dowry that enables them to escape, from the outset, any domestic exploitation of labor.

***

Association of laborers. — Workers' associations are authorized; those of capitalists are prohibited.

By these two measures, the intensity of labor's domination over wealth is increased accordingly.

*
**

Social competition in commerce. — By establishing bazaars where the worker deposits his products, setting the price at which he wishes to sell them, and where the consumer can purchase them, and by deducting a fee from the sale price for this service, the sole administrative cost, society competes with intermediaries whose effect is reduced to increasing the price of products.

Now, anything that tends to lower the price of things, when labor is free, increases consumption and, by extension, production.

The measure in question will therefore result in an increase in the demand for labor and consequently a greater dominance of labor over wealth, a stronger tendency for wages to rise.

*
**

Freedom to make a will. — The incentive to labor results not only from the certainty that all the product belongs to the one who is its author, but also from the latter's ability to dispose of it as he sees fit. In this respect, the future organization of inheritance completes all the measures I mentioned previously.

Everyone can therefore dispose of what they own by will, in favor of whomever they wish. Any intestate succession falls within the social domain, but only in the absence of a direct line. And any testamentary inheritance is subject to tax.

IV

I have just explained how property will be organized in the future society. Let us now see this mechanism in action.

Every human being is a member of the collective proprietor of almost all matter. They have the right, by virtue of their human nature, to the enjoyment of social property and to social protection, regardless of any consideration of wealth or birth. They also have the duty to protect the social organization.

To clearly illustrate the relations that will exist at that time between society and each individual, let us suppose the arrival on our planet of a child who, hypothetically, fell from the sky.

Current society could not act otherwise than to place this child, without property or family, in the Foundling Home. It would then provide him with an education based on a religious revelation in which it itself does not believe, followed by the *minimum* possible instruction.

Now this is what would necessarily happen in the social organization of the future.

Society takes this child. It raises them and gives them a complete education and instruction, that is, it develops their intelligence as much as their particular aptitudes allow. In addition to the care it devotes to their organic development, it teaches them how they should make the most of their material resources and how they should behave toward their fellow human beings. Who could claim that this child has not enjoyed, as much as they could, social spending? And, on the other hand, would anyone dare to argue that they have benefited from their share of the social income, if society had not behaved toward them as I have just described?

*
**

Upon reaching adulthood, this human being, if they were lucky enough to emerge alive from the Foundling Home and escape the all-too-numerous causes of death that decimate poor children, would find themselves thrown into the middle of the adult generation and left without resources, or with paltry material and intellectual resources, to their own devices.

Things will be different in the society of the future. The adult who, upon leaving educational institutions, has remained for some time in the service of society to complete a sort of social internship or apprenticeship in life, will receive a dowry that will enable them to escape, from the outset, any domestic exploitation of labor.

This is a new way in which every human being will benefit, for their part, from social spending.

*
**

Once they have entered the workforce, two paths open to the worker: they can remain isolated, or they can join forces with other workers to produce together.

In today's society, whose entire organization favors wealth and its owners, the isolated worker is exploited domestically and socially, and workers' associations, far from being protected, are rendered, as much as possible, powerless. All of society's concern is reserved for capital associations, which is, moreover, logical on the part of a bourgeois society.

In the society of the future, on the contrary, the isolated worker will be exploited neither domestically nor socially, and workers' associations alone will be permitted and protected. To this end, their original working capital can never be increased by means of the profits made by the association, and these will be shared among its members proportionally, not to the stake, but to each individual's salary.

Finally, it may still happen that, instead of associating with others, or working in isolation for himself, an individual prefers to act under external direction. Well, in this case again, they will not be exploited, and their salary will be raised to the maximum possible level under the circumstances. It goes without saying, in fact, that a man does not work for the benefit of another for a wage less than that which he could obtain by exercising his activity, whether on a parcel of the land or on any other material. Now, this is precisely what every man will always be in a position to do, as I will immediately show.

*
**

In today's society, the worker can only earn a living when those who own property need their services and, consequently, if they entrust them with land or capital, an instrument of labor. When, on the contrary, the worker cannot be of use to them, which often happens, then they abandon them to his own devices; and since, in this case, society does not come to their aid, for it only lends to the rich, it is with complete truth that J.-B. Say was able to write the following proposition: *it is distressing to think, but it is true to say, that even among the most prosperous nations, a portion of the population perishes every year from want*.

What will happen in this regard in the future society?

Every worker, or rather every man, will be the owner of his inalienable share in the planet and his alienable share in collective capital. This dual quality will manifest itself, in practice, in the following two ways.

The part of the soil that can be exploited by individuals or domestic associations — and by soil I mean the surface of the globe, the buildings erected on its surface, and the subsoil: landed property, in a word — this part of the planet, I say, will be divided into more or less large fractions, according to localities, the needs of the populations, the convenience of implementation, etc.

Leasing will be made to the highest and last bidder, either to isolated workers or to workers' associations, always according to the needs of the exploitation. I have already noted that leases must be personal and subletting prohibited, showing at the same time that this measure is entirely in favor of the domination of labor. I have also already said that rural, industrial, mining, etc., exploitations must be furnished with all the furnishings essential to their proper development, and this for the same reason as above. As for working capital, it will come either from the social dowry, or from acquired or inherited wealth, or from social credit, as I will demonstrate when discussing how each person will own their alienable share in collective capital.

Society will therefore advance capital to those who would prefer to work on movable property and who do not own any of their own. It will make this loan at

as low an interest rate as possible, while ensuring that its rate is sufficient to ensure that there is still an advantage for individuals to capitalize. For it is not the death of individual capital that the future society will seek, but exclusively its enslavement under the predominance of labor. And this is the goal it will achieve by the measure I am speaking of, for those who wish to use their capital by renting it out will necessarily have to demand a lower interest rate than that which will be set by society, if they wish to have preference.

Here are a few more considerations on the leasing of public land and social credit.

When the worker pays the rent on land and capital to an individual owner, as happens in today's society, this rent is lost to them and will increase the lender's wealth accordingly; and this is how J.-B. Say was able to truthfully argue, once again, that *the savings of the rich are made at the expense of the poor*. But if the rent and interest are paid to society and at the same time society spends its income for the benefit of all without exception, then it is exactly as if one were paying the rent and interest to oneself.

In the future society, interest will be for life only. In this way, all hereditary exploitation of labor will be made impossible. Moreover, the personal exploitation of labor will be annihilated by means of social credit.

*
**

I have spoken several times of the social exploitation of labor. Here, in a few words, is how it is practiced.

Let us again consider the worker who, hypothetically, owns nothing of his own, and whom I have already successively related to current and future society.

In current society, where, as a result of the alienation of land to individuals, wealth dominates, any tax, however imposed, always ends up falling entirely on labor. This is obvious, since wealth keeps everything for itself, leaving the worker only what is strictly indispensable for self-preservation and reproduction. Well, it is this obligation to pay the tax that constitutes, with regard to labor, its social exploitation. It is no longer, in fact, this or that capitalist or particular landowner who reduces wages to the minimum possible; it is the special organization of property that is the cause; it is the alienation of land to individuals.

The worker without individual property, who lives in today's society, therefore, in addition to the domestic exploitation resulting from his lack of ownership, suffers another form of exploitation, this time impersonal, stemming from his lack of participation in the ownership of our planet, which

translates into the obligatory, enforced payment of taxes. He must therefore first deduct from his wages enough to settle the tax; only afterward can he consider using what remains to live.

In the future society, as a result of the collective appropriation of the soil, it will be labor's turn to dominate. It is therefore labor that, this time, will shift all the burdens onto capital.

The worker without individual property will therefore be exploited no more socially than domestically.

With respect to taxes, the difference between current and future societies lies in the fact that, in the latter, they will be paid by wealth, whereas today they are paid by labor.

*
**

Social protection manifests itself towards individuals, depending on the era, in two entirely opposing ways.

When the soil is alienated, that is, when wealth dominates, when force is sovereign, society favors only the strong, or the rich alone, and this is logical on its part. When the land is collective property, labor is free and reason reigns, society will grant its protection to labor, that is, to all, and this will also be logical.

How are wealth and labor, in turn, socially favored? Society protects wealth — which here means the rich, or the accumulation of wealth in a few hands:

1. By abandoning the responsibility of raising and educating children to domestic families, which makes the development of intelligence the privilege of wealth;

2. By monopolizing the soil for the benefit of the strong;

3. By leaving the greater part of capital to individual appropriation;

4. By extending the family well beyond the direct line, and by establishing forced inheritance in its favor;

5. By protecting capital associations, notably by sometimes guaranteeing them a minimum interest rate, which, given the necessary antagonism between capital and labor, amounts to preventing wages from exceeding a certain rate;

6. By establishing or at least authorizing the perpetuity of interest;

7. By borrowing, which burdens not only the labor of existing generations, but also that of future generations.

These are the principal ways in which society grants its protection to wealth.

Thus, when a man who has nothing but his labor finds himself in such a society, everything, absolutely everything, conspires against him. He is a slave

in terms of intelligence as well as property; he is exploited intellectually and materially, personally and hereditarily in his descendants, domestically and socially, by isolated capitalists and by associated capitalists, which increases their strength a hundredfold.

The future society will protect labor by means of a series of measures that are the counterpart to those I have just listed. And this will not result in the persecution and diminution of wealth — far from it — but rather its distribution among all, proportionally to the labor of each.

I will briefly go over these measures of social protection at work, having already said a few words:

1. The distribution of knowledge will take place through the care and at the expense of society, so that the development of intelligence will no longer be monopolized by wealth;

2. Land and capital will be made available to all, in the manner I have explained above;

3. Through social credit for individuals, interest on capital will not be able to exceed a certain rate, or, what amounts to the same thing, wages will not be able to fall below a certain minimum;

4. The family will be limited to the direct line, and there will be freedom of testament;

5. By proscribing associations of capital and allowing only those of workers, society will enable them to combine their individual predominance over wealth and will thereby strengthen the supremacy of labor;

6. The abolition of perpetuity of interest and of state loans will protect the worker against any fear of seeing his descendants forced to pay the interest on a debt they did not contract;

7. Finally, through social competition in individual commerce, there is a further limitation on the profits of merchant capitalists, and, as a result, an increase in wages.

If now we suppose an individual, without any material resources, suddenly arriving in the midst of a society constituted as I have just described, far from being isolated and abandoned, as would be the case with our current organization of property, he would find himself constantly covered by social protection. The same can be said of the workers who will have the good fortune to live in the future society; I do not think I need to dwell on this.

*
**

And that is not all.

What happens, in each of the two systems of property, to those who, without wealth, are incapable of working, either through age or illness, and who consequently cannot earn a living, and to those who are ruined by an act of God?

Current society owes them nothing, since it is constituted exclusively in the interest of the rich,[8] and it makes this clear. When it does not come to their aid through official charity, that is to say, through insufficient and insulting almsgiving, and when they are not helped by private charity, they are left to die of poverty more or less quickly, or to commit suicide.

And in the society of the future?

Every human being will, by this very fact, be recognized as the joint owner of the terrestrial globe, and of a large portion of the capital. They will therefore have the right to enjoy this heritage of humanity, to have the means to produce, when they are capable, or to live and live well, when they are unable to work. This will not be alms that society will grant to the unfortunate, but a right that it will recognize and allow them to enjoy.

---

[8] "Let everyone in this world," exclaims Malthus, "answer by themselves and for themselves; too bad for those who are superfluous here below! We would have too much to do if WE wanted to give bread to all those who cry out with hunger; who even knows if there would be enough left for the rich?"

Do you see that WE exclusively signifies the society of the rich? When society is composed of *all*, it will obviously provide bread for all.

"Strictly speaking," says J.-B. Say, "society owes no aid, no means of subsistence to its members."

"Feeding the incapable at the expense of the capable is a great cruelty," says Mr. Herbert Spencer. "It is a store of misery purposely amassed for future generations. One cannot give posterity a sadder gift than to burden it with an ever-increasing number of imbeciles, lazy people, and criminals... One has the right to wonder whether foolish philanthropy, which thinks only of softening the ills of the moment and persists in ignoring indirect evils, does not, in total, produce a greater sum of misery than extreme selfishness."

There would be much to say on this subject. I will limit myself to asking how Mr. Herbert Spencer reconciles his refusal to allow the incapable to participate in the enjoyment of the land with the following three propositions contained in his work, *Social Statics*, which are incontestable.

"Given a race of beings having an equal right to pursue the goal of their desires, and given a world designed for the satisfaction of these desires and where these beings are born in equal conditions, it follows that they have equal rights to enjoy this world...

"Justice therefore does not admit (individual) property applied to the soil...

"The theory of the collective right of inheritance of land recognized for every man is consistent with the development of the highest degree of civilization."

The future society will, in a word, constitute a mutual insurance policy for all against misfortune.

V

I have just succinctly formulated the economic aspect of rational socialism as taught by Colins. It now remains for me to present and combat the objections to which it has given rise.

Until recently, very little attention has been paid to rational socialism. It is only recently that people have begun to take an interest in it, to examine it and to criticize it.

It was first claimed that rational socialism demanded the division of the soil, the abolition of individual property — two points that would be difficult to reconcile — and the abolition of heredity.

The reader who has followed me attentively up to this point will certainly agree with me that the author of such an accusation has not read the exposition of the theory he was attacking.

But let us move on to more serious objections.

The collective appropriation of the land by humanity is rigorously logical, it has been said, but practically impossible.

This is to assert that something can be true in theory and false in practice.

I dare to think that the author of this objection, after reading the preceding work, will no longer maintain that humanity cannot practically own the globe.

***

It has also been argued that the result of applying rational socialism would simply be to transform rent into a tax, by allocating the rent to the State.

I have shown that the allocation of ground rent to the State is far from sufficient to constitute the collective appropriation of the land for the benefit of all without exception; and anyone who wishes to resort to proof of this proposition will immediately recognize the weakness of the objection.

***

Another difficulty has been raised. In the organization proposed by rational socialism, it has been claimed, the tenant would not have security of tenure.

What! Society would rent by personal and life leases to families, and by thirty-year leases to workers' associations, that is, it would undertake to keep its tenants on the farm for this entire period, and they would not have security of tenure? I probably didn't grasp the point of the criticism.

*
**

It has also been asserted that, in a rational organization, only the rich would be declared successful bidders, when society publicly rented the land, and that the poor would have to continue working for them.

Why would only the rich be declared successful bidders, when the landed farms would be furnished with the necessary furniture for their proper development, and working capital would be provided, if necessary, by society; when, consequently, one would not have to be individually rich to be able to get by?

How could there be poor people, when everyone would be the joint owner of all the soil and a large part of the capital?

How could there be people forced to labor for others, when everyone will be free to work for themselves?

A more important objection than those I have just reported is this:

In the future organization, workers, remaining wage earners, would still be exploited as they are today.

So, I will examine and discuss it at greater length than the previous ones.

At first glance, one might think that the author of the objection is calling, like some socialists, for the abolition of wages.

To this I reply that wages being the price of labor, the reward for labor, the abolition of wages is an absurdity. Since wage labor necessarily exists wherever there is labor, workers will always be wage earners.

But the author of the objection probably meant that workers who must receive their wages from an employer will, by that very fact, be slaves as they are today.

Here, a distinction must be made.

Anyone who, in order to act, cannot do without the help of a capitalist or an individual owner, anyone who needs the goodwill of this owner or capitalist, is, by that very fact, dependent, enslaved; and receives from his employer only what is barely sufficient to live.

But in the future organization, one will always be able to labor, not for others, but for oneself; or will be able to transform landed or movable property belonging not to another, but to oneself. From then on, one will be in a position to demand, and one will necessarily receive, from the one whose capital one agrees to exploit, at least what one would have obtained by working for oneself, that is to say, a wage at the maximum of the circumstances. There is more: It is not the capitalist who, in general, will employ and pay the worker, but rather the

latter who will come to the capitalist's aid and pay him the interest on his capital.

Now, can we call someone exploited or a slave who, being economically independent, only accepts the help of a capitalist if it suits him?

*
**

Here is another point that deserves in-depth discussion.

We recognize that in the future society, it has been said, everyone must be landowners; but this result would not be achieved through the practice of rational collectivism; it can only be achieved in two ways:

Through universalized private property, through *democratized* property;

Through communal collective property with periodic sharing (*Allmend*).

Let us begin by refuting the second point.

To do this, I will simply limit myself to reporting M. Émile De Laveleye's opinion on the *Allmend*, considered as a solution to the economic problem. No one, of course, will dream of challenging M. De Laveleye as a judge on this issue, for he has made a special study of the *Allmend* and similar forms of land appropriation.

"The point of right is this," says Mr. De Laveleye: "to every man his own instrument of labor."

"How can this be achieved in a society like ours?"

"The *Allmend*, when it encompassed the entire territory of the commune, offered the solution for a *primitive and purely agricultural and pastoral* society.

"But today, what complications and difficulties!"

Let us then move on to the proposal to universalize individual land ownership.

It would first be a question of dividing the entire planet, surface area, subsoil and buildings,[9] into as many parts of equal value as there are human beings on the surface of the globe; then taking the necessary measures to ensure that each person always remains in possession of their share.

The division of the planet would have to begin anew with each birth and each death, otherwise we would find people without landed property, and estates that would not be appropriated; For, let us note, the disposition of plots of land by will or inheritance should be prohibited, under penalty of seeing inequality established in the quantities of land owned by each person. Moreover, either the

[9] Are there not constructions and mines whose value would be destroyed by division?

alienation of land shares or the purchase of these shares should be prohibited, to prevent the land from being monopolized by the rich.

Can one fully comprehend the absurdity of such an organization of property? I am only speaking for the record of the difficulty in which the holder of a plot of land might find himself in enjoying it if, living in Paris, for example, his share of land were in China.

Let us add that land ownership thus supposedly universalized is no longer an allodial, democratic property, whose essence is precisely division and alienability.

But, the author of the proposal might say, we are not asking for that much; it would be enough for everyone to possess the *minimum* amount of land necessary to be able to live on it.

So be it; But first, it prevents the globe from being covered with a population as large as the one it is capable of supporting; then, it would always be necessary to decree the inalienability of *minimum* plots, to proscribe heredity in land, to make each plot a sort of fief, and finally to abolish the democratic or bourgeois organization of property.

In short, to demand the *universalization* of *individual* landed property is to demand something impossible, absurd, and whose elements are contradictory.

*
**

Finally, one last observation has been made about rational socialism: that the landed collectivity it advocates already existed in primitive societies.

But it is enough to recall the conditions necessary for the reality of the appropriation of land by all to immediately convince oneself that one must see, in these primitive forms of property, only collective appropriations for the benefit of certain individuals or certain castes.

AGATHON DE POTTER

Working translation by Shawn P. Wilbur; last revised May 31, 2025.

A CORVUS EDITION