

THE PROBLEM
OF THE ORGANIZATION OF LABOR
BEFORE THE
CENTRAL CONGRESS OF AGRICULTURE.

TO THE MEMBERS
OF THE
CENTRAL AGRICULTURAL CONGRESS.

Learned and honorable colleagues!

When I requested, less than a month ago, the honor of being part of this honorable assembly, it was with the aim of submitting to you some progressive ideas that I found directly related to the subject of your serious studies. I ventured to do so, then, only to draw attention to these ideas indirectly, fearing to arouse against them the *hostile and blind* passions, contrary to all social reform, which were currently prevalent in the centers of power.

Since then, a vast revolution has taken place, which, in turn, has brought to the forefront of humanity a social problem to which are connected the ideas I had intended to submit to you, as well as all the questions included in the program of this *congress*. This is the problem of the *organization of labor*.

Having been solemnly proclaimed as the social goal, of which political revolution is merely the means, I must hope that today my ideas will be received not only without prejudice, but with confidence by the friends of humanity.

Everyone knows that *labor* is performed on *materials*, and that materials come from the *soil*. Labor applied directly to the surface of the soil and to the products of that surface constitutes agriculture and agricultural industry. Labor applied to the products of agricultural and mining industries constitutes manufacturing.

From this initial perspective, it is already easy to understand the close connection and interdependence of the problem of the *organization of labor* with agricultural science.

But *labor*, generally speaking, is everything in society: society exists only through labor, and labor is the defining characteristic of humankind. Therefore, the phrase *organization of labor* means *organization of society*. Once this is achieved, *labor* will naturally find itself *organized* by itself.

The organization of society comprises these two aspects: the physical and the moral. The physical organization of society is the organization of wealth; the moral organization of society is the organization of education. — We need not concern ourselves with the latter for our purposes.

As for the organization of wealth, since it is divided into landed wealth and movable wealth, and since the former rests on ownership of the *soil*, agricultural science must examine the influence of this social condition of the land on the application of labor to it. The problem of social organization is thus directly dependent on the institution of land ownership. Indeed, to resolve this problem, it is necessary to decide beforehand whether society, whether *labor*, can be rationally organized under the system of land appropriation by a class of individuals. I will submit this question to the examination of the socialists. Now I address myself to the farmers.

All branches of agricultural science in general, and therefore all the problems on the program of this congress and all future congresses, relate to the land and its products. Since the soil is appropriated and its products naturally belong to the landowners, it becomes evident that the condition of the soil as appropriated must have a direct influence on all the problems on the program.

Indeed, land ownership in general, and in particular as it has been constituted in France since the Revolution of 1795, either by its essential quality of being land inherent to a certain number of families, or by the divisions and transmissions that the land undergoes through inheritance; Land ownership, I say, appears in the examination of all major agricultural problems as a disruptive element that prevents their solution.

I lack the time to review all these problems and demonstrate, for each one individually and for all of them together, the impossibility of a rational solution while maintaining land ownership and the divisions and transfers that current legislation permits. It will be enough for me, before such learned men, to mention the problems of *agricultural credit*, *land registration*, *irrigation*, *plantations*, *forestry*, *flood prevention works*, *land clearing*, and *determining the nature and system of agricultural exploitation in relation to the nature of the soil and the economic needs of the country*, etc., etc.; it will suffice, I say, to state these problems to make it clear that their solution is hampered by the conditions of the current organization of the soil, which is appropriated for certain individuals.

I did not allude in this letter to the seventh topic of the second series of the Congress program, concerning the *Method of organizing agricultural advisory chambers*, which was discussed in Thursday's session; — because I believe the examination of this question entirely inappropriate in an assembly composed, for the most part, of agricultural landowners. Furthermore, a reasonable solution to such a question, not requiring specialized agricultural knowledge, falls outside the scope of similar topics and is beyond the scope of the Congress's composition.

What, then, must be done to provide these problems with a solution favorable to humanity? — The answer is simple. Remove the obstacle that stands in the way of the solution. Bring the soil back into the hands of the State, so that the essential element of all production can be placed at the disposal of labor; for then, and only then, will labor be free, and labor will be organized.

But you want the abolition of land ownership; one might say to me: you want the destruction of the foundation of the current order: you want, in short, *communism*? — I will answer these questions.

First, I will say that I want nothing at all. I will further say that for a man of science, a logical man, *wanting* what should or should not happen in the moral order is foolishness. The logical man reasons, deduces truths, and presents them to the public, for the publication of truths is a duty when society demands that the truth be presented to it. The logical man knows that, in the moral order, *what must be will be*: the power of his will therefore becomes perfectly null.

Now I will answer the objections:

1. The abolition of landed property must be proclaimed when its maintenance is incompatible with the social order that must be established for the happiness of humanity;

2. The destruction of the foundation of the current order must be proclaimed when the maintenance of this so-called order is incompatible with the true social order that the happiness of humanity demands;

3. The return of the soil to the State, so that the social power can establish suitable land divisions for agricultural exploitation, according to the state of science, and carry out general improvement works for the good of all inhabitants, and grant the right to cultivate the land to all individuals who wish and are able to work it; these forms, I say, are not *communism*; they are true social organization.

But, it will be said again that the return of the soil to the State implies expropriation and the ruin of families, an injustice; in short, a revolution.

I will respond again, beginning by declaring that a social reform would cease to be rational the moment it committed a single injustice. Now, I say:

1. The return of the soil to the State can be done peacefully, without disorder, without loss to any of the existing families. Social science will provide the solution to this problem when the solution is socially recognized and proclaimed necessary and indispensable.

2. Political and social revolutions, achieved through force, only ever occur as a result of irrational obstacles to the dissemination of rational principles, made necessary to humanity by the progress of civilization.

These, my honorable and learned colleagues, are the points that I intended to submit to you. Their importance and the vast scope they encompass render them inadmissible for consideration by this congress. It is not for me to predict the resolution they require from you. I present them to you, believing I am fulfilling a social duty, and I present them to you with great confidence in your wisdom, and above all, in your love of humanity.

RAMON DE LA SAGRA,
Correspondant of the Institute.

Paris, March 1848.