

Claude-Henri Saint-Simon
Letter to the Workers*
(1821)

Gentlemen,

The chief aim which I set myself in my works is to improve your situation as much as possible. I hold no office, I possess no power. Thus, the only way I can be of use to you is to give you good advice. I invite you to speak as follows to the chiefs of the most important houses of agriculture, manufacture, and commerce. It seems certain to me that great advantages will result for you, and that your existence will be quickly improved. It is you who are going to speak.

'Gentlemen - Heads of the Most Important Houses of Agriculture, Manufacture, and Commerce,

'You are rich, and we are poor. You work with your brains, we with our hands. As a result of these two fundamental differences between us, we are and we should be your subordinates.

'Since you are our leaders, gentlemen, it is to you that we must address the grievances which we wish to reach the throne; and that is what we are going to do, by inviting you to make known to *His Majesty* what we say to you. *Henry IV* thought all the Government's energy should be directed towards making it possible for us to eat chicken every Sunday. The present Bourbons can realise the desire of this good Prince of whom they are glorified to be the descendants!

'Gentlemen,

'Our good sense is sufficient to show us that the affairs of the French nation are very badly administered, its resources are badly employed, its activity is badly directed, or rather is paralysed through the wrong direction it has been given.

'Again, our good sense is sufficient to show us that it would be easy to enrich the nation, to render it happier and more powerful than it has hitherto been. It is also sufficient to make us realise what means must be employed to achieve this great aim.

'Gentlemen,

'In less than ten years the value of French territory can be doubled. To do that it would be necessary to clear uncultivated land, drain marshland, open up new roads, improve those that already exist, construct all the bridges necessary to shorten routes, and build all the canals which can be of use for shipping as well as for irrigation.

'There will be no shortage of funds with which to realise a good project for the general improvement of French territory. The capital will soon be forthcoming if the State (restricting itself to the increase in taxation which will inevitably result from the growth of wealth) grants to entrepreneurs, as far as is possible, all the benefits resulting from their enterprises.

Space for Notes



'There will be no shortage of labour either, for in the absence of the measure which we have just recommended, which is the only one able generally to stimulate production, a large number of navvies are always unemployed. The ordinary work of agriculture provides full employment during the harvest, but once the harvest has ended, one-eighth of the population is all that is required for ploughing, seeding, harrowing, threshing, and looking after the herds; so that in those places where the population is not employed in the manufacture of wrought goods, the vast majority of workers have nothing to do for a large part of the year. It may certainly be estimated that six million navvies are without work between harvests.

'Gentlemen, trouble yourselves to fix your attention on what we have just said; think about the idea which we have just submitted to you; and you will easily recognise that if the Government announced that it would, as far as is possible, grant to the entrepreneurs of projects promoting an increase in the value of French territory all the particular advantages resulting from these projects, enterprises of this kind would be energetically pursued and quickly carried out.

'You will recognise equally that the adoption of this measure will bring, for you as well as for us, the most important advantages which society can afford. It will increase your wealth, it will give us work and consequently the comforts of life.

'Those of you and those of us engaged in agriculture will enjoy directly the advantages resulting from this operation. Those engaged in manufacturing wrought goods and in commerce will be just as well off, although for them the advantages can only be indirect, since agricultural workers, finding themselves employed all year, will receive 120 to 150 millions more in salaries each month, and will consequently consume 1,500 to 1,800 millions more per year, which will increase manufacturing and commercial activity to a degree hitherto unknown, even in England.

'The present administration of public affairs is defective on this first count: the number of administrators and their subordinates is much too large, which makes the cost of this administration exorbitant, imposing a heavy burden on the nation, which is of no use to it.

'It is defective on one even more important count: the administrators are chosen from the classes of society whose capacity is not administrative, whose interests are in many respects contrary to those of the productive class, which is the only class whose work aims directly to increase the power, comfort, and positive happiness of the nation.

'The disadvantages resulting from the poor composition of the administration are infinitely greater than those occasioned by the multiplicity of employees, and by the huge number of appointments made to staff-offices placed uselessly at the head of every administrative body.

'The economies which could be made in the cost of the present administration would amount in all to 200 millions per year at most; and one can estimate without exaggeration that France would increase its capital value (both land and moveables) by 3,000 millions per year if the administration were composed of capable men, men interested in giving the greatest stimulus to every branch of industry.

'In short, the present administration is directed chiefly by nobles, lawyers, and the military. Now, these three classes understand perfectly well how to consume the products of industry, but they are completely incapable of directing the work of

producers; they even have, in certain respects, an interest in opposing the success of industry, because success of this kind tends to increase the importance of the producers and diminish that of the nobles, lawyers, and the military

‘It is our class, gentlemen, which suffers directly the disadvantages of the present maladministration. It pays most taxation and receives no salary. It proves that it alone has everything to gain. It is thus natural that we should be taxing our ingenuity to find the remedy for the evils which afflict us in particular.

‘These disadvantages, gentlemen, have an even more direct and powerful effect on workers such as us than on you who are rich and able, since as a result more of us face suffering in terms of life's primary needs. It is thus up to us to take the initiative in indicating the means of bringing to an end our miseries which will obviously cease as soon as public affairs are decently administered.

‘Here is what we propose to you.

‘We invite you - you who are our leaders, who have become, through the progress of civilisation, the nation's most important, most useful, and most capable persons -to ask the King to give you responsibility for directing the administration of public affairs. We invite you to declare to His Majesty that you are certain to enrich France by more than 3,000 millions per year; that you are certain to provide us all with the means of eating chicken every Sunday; finally, that you are certain to establish a lasting peace by destroying all the factions that will continue to exist (whatever one does) as long as the waste of public money, which each hopes to turn to its own benefit, is allowed to go on.

‘We authorise you, gentlemen, to make this demand in our name. Thus, it will be on behalf of twenty-five million men. Now, since this demand is in conformity with every principle of justice, and aims directly to improve the condition of the vast majority of the nation, we can hope that it will receive the attention of His Majesty.’

Gentlemen - Workers,

The only obstacle of any importance which today stands in the way of an improvement in your condition arises from the industrial chiefs' lack of confidence in their capacity to administer public affairs. I shall address to them at once a text to remove their worries on this account, and to rectify their ideas with respect to some other errors that they commit every day, and which are extremely prejudicial to them, as well as to you.

I have the honour to be,

Gentlemen, Workers,
Your most humble servant,
HENRI SAINT-SIMON
Rue de Richelieu, No. 34

P.S. All industrials who want this brochure may come to me for it. I shall let them have copies for themselves and their friends.

*Henri Saint-Simon a Messieurs les ouvriers, *Du systeme industriel*, pt. II, 1821)
[Oeuvres, vol. VI, pp.437-44.1]