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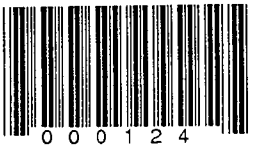
The Regulation of Agricultural Labour Conditions in Continental Europe



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The problem of the regulation of agricultural conditions in Europe depends in some part on factors of climate, land tenure, and the consumption demands of the populations. These three factors operating over a long period have combined to produce different types of labour and of labour conditions in the different countries. Three main systems can be distinguished. In the north of Europe the professional whole-time agricultural labourer is permanently employed on the farm of his employer; in the south and east a landless proletariat seeks to earn a living by employment on large-scale properties, employment which is often of an intermittent and seasonal, even of a casual, nature; in the middle zone the peasant proprietor cultivates his own plot, but when this plot is insufficient, he adds to his earnings by hiring himself out for part-time work on a larger neighbouring farm. The first system approaches the ordinary industrial system and best admits of regulation along progressive lines; the peasant proprietor is forced into very long hours and the improper employment of members of his own family, even as young children; the greatest problems, however, arise in regard to the second system, that of the landless proletariat, and it is still an open question whether regulation of conditions can be of much avail until the basic system of land tenure is radically modified.

THE difficulty of devising any uniform set of regulations to apply to agricultural labour, even within the single continent of Europe, is obvious. The varieties of climate, of cultural methods, of land tenure systems, and of forms of social organisation to be met with are many and are an inevitable hindrance to any sort of uniformity. It would be useful, nevertheless, to discover how far the difficulty can be accounted for by differences between various agricultural systems and whether these systems can be so classified as to make possible a uniform treatment of large groups of labour.

The nature of the existing systems of agriculture in Europe, together with the respective parts to be played in each by capital

and labour, is determined partly by physical conditions favouring this or that type of production, partly by the demands of the consumer, and partly by historical forms of land tenure.

Nature herself has gone far to determine that over the European plain agriculture shall be based on a combination of field crops and grass farming. In the Alpine, Balkan, and Pyrenean regions and in the north-west of Europe it is mainly stock-raising and grass and hay, while in the Mediterranean regions it tends to be mainly field crops, vine, and certain oleaginous fruits, such as the olive, which here replaces the fat from the milk which the northern man obtains from his more abundant pasture.

The demands of the consumer in their turn have been for nearly two thousand years widespread, steady, and general. Corn, milk, meat, wine, and oil have each or all been sought in such quantities as to ensure that a tolerable stock should be produced in the regions favourable to one or other of them. Further, the enlargement of the areas over which products are exchanged has tended to favour the specialised appropriation of certain districts to particular crops.

The influence of forms of land tenure is more complicated. A particular system of land tenure in any one area may or may not have promoted the raising of a special crop. In general, it may be said — anticipating some of the conclusions drawn from this article — that land tenure at least tends to conform to the requirements of profitable agriculture.

The Nature of the Agricultural Labour Force

The influence of different systems of land tenure is perhaps more vitally shown in regard to the kind of labour employed under each than in any other way. By historical processes the actual use of the land has in Europe come to be concentrated in the hands of one or other of two classes of persons, the large landowner or the peasant, so that the soil is being cultivated either on a capitalistic system or on one of partial self-employment. The place of hired labour obviously varies greatly as between the two systems ; in fact, the first of the two main factors determining conditions of agricultural labour may be put as a question : how far are operations carried out by landless labourers working for wages, and how far by land-holding peasants (and their families) and persons regarding themselves as belonging actually or potentially to a land-holding class. The second factor may at the same time be put thus : how far does the nature of the operations allow or prescribe of regular whole-time work, or how far must such operations necessarily be carried out by seasonal work performed by casual labour ?

These two factors, however theoretically distinct, in fact mutually influence each other. Thus capitalistic agriculture based on large-scale land holding will employ landless wage-earning labour, and at the same time may tend to concentrate on

certain forms of agriculture which from their nature do not lend themselves to all-the-year-round employment. Any one large-scale undertaking which is devoted to the raising of a single crop must mainly depend on seasonal labour, and a possibility of getting such labour is an indispensable condition for carrying on the enterprise. In other words, the existence is presupposed of a rural proletariat, and such an agricultural enterprise is, in fact, worked in a way not unlike that of modern capitalistic industry, which relies on a surplus of labour to be used during boom periods and thrown on the community during slumps. The equilibrium of such a system is no more stable in agriculture than it is in industry.

On the other hand, all capitalist agriculture is not dependent on casual labour. It is manifest that labourers having charge of animals must be regularly employed, and this applies not merely to herdsmen looking after cattle, sheep, goats, and swine, but to labourers looking after horses, oxen, and mules used for carrying out agricultural processes. In the latter case the labourer is regularly employed for the same reason that a labourer in charge of machinery is regularly employed, i.e. because such employment can only be entrusted to persons of skill and experience (of whom there are a limited number) and because horses, mules, and oxen, like machinery, represent an important element in the working capital of an undertaking and their owners cannot afford to have them working only occasionally.

The Three Chief Agricultural Systems in Europe

The Northern Zone

The agricultural systems of Europe may be roughly classified as three according to the type of labour employed. In the countries of north and north-west Europe, especially in those bordering on the North Sea, the carrying on of agricultural operations is based on the work of the whole-time professional labourer. In this zone large-sized holdings are fairly common and agriculture is highly integrated, i.e. the keeping of stock is closely allied with arable farming and a rotation of crops is followed, combining the growing of forage crops, including rotation grasses, with cereals and root crops. Such a system is designed to provide the most regular labour for man, beast, and machine. Great Britain and northern Germany are the most populous countries where this industrialised farming exists, and the amount of labour engaged in it is in each country considerable. In Great Britain, it is true, the number of agricultural labourers has declined in the last generation, but is still about three-quarters of a million. According to the agricultural census taken in Germany in 1907 there were at that date in Prussia three million persons employed in agriculture other than owners or occupiers of land or their dependents. Among smaller countries mention may be made of

about two hundred thousand agricultural labourers in the Netherlands and one hundred thousand in Denmark. Those parts of northern France where large farms are common may also be included in this group of countries.

A slight distinction may be drawn between these parts of northern France and northern Germany as against Great Britain and the Scandinavian countries in regard to the larger proportion of women workers employed in France and Germany. Most of the work done by women on farms is of a laborious character and a great deal of it rather dirty and repulsive. The use of machinery has to some extent superseded the employment of women in harvest operations, where they were formerly much needed, except in the harvest of the potato and beet crops, where the machinery is less useful ; these two crops are, however, prominent in north European agriculture.

Certain other local variations are more important. Thus in eastern Germany the large landowners have managed to maintain agriculture on large units of land and on modern lines, but so far as labour is concerned with an adherence to arrangements which are far from modern. Sweden again stands midway between this system and that prevailing, e.g. in Great Britain. The land systems of southern and central Sweden and eastern Germany are alike in that in both regions the large manorial estate has persisted as the unit of rural economy. On the other hand, Swedish labour is more comparable to that in Great Britain, inasmuch as it falls into the three definite classes — horsemen, stockmen, and ordinary labourers — which are required by the combination of stock-keeping, cropping, and the use of the horse for the plough and allied operations in Great Britain. The organisation of labour also differs as between country and country. In Sweden and in Denmark — the last a country of small farms (the large manorial farm has completely disappeared) — the labourer has been well enough organised to enter into collective agreements with his employer, the farmer. Thus in Sweden a national hours' agreement was concluded in 1919. In France, on the other hand, he has been, as a rule, unable to conclude such agreements.

The Southern and Eastern Zones

In the south of Europe — Spain, south Italy and Sicily — the system is one of capitalist farming, mostly based on large-scale landholding. There is a lack of combined operations ; thus the keeping of stock is divorced from arable farming, which tends to be too exclusively a matter of grain-growing, and both again are distinct from the growing of the vine, olive, sugar cane, and other fruits. The result is a system of labour widely differing from the rural economy of northern Europe with its farm as a unit of rural life and a number of regularly employed labourers living on it. There can be little labour permanently employed

in the same place under the plantation system where a considerable area is given exclusively to one crop, such as the olive, which requires labour chiefly at harvest time (in winter). The labouring classes alike in Sicily and in Andalusia live in large villages and necessarily seek work at different operations and over a more or less wide area.

In some respects Hungary and Roumania are in a position similar to that of these southern regions. Large estates are common and they are either managed directly by the owners or let to leaseholders, who make arrangements with the peasantry to work them. In these two countries the growth of cereals, such as wheat, barley, and maize — and to a less extent the vine — is the dominant element in their agriculture. On the whole, cultivation tends to be of an extensive character as compared with the intensive farm of the countries of northern Europe which have adopted more elaborate systems of rotation. Hence, as compared with the position in these latter countries, the labouring classes are working under conditions that are inevitably unfavourable to them. The weakness of this relatively primitive type of agriculture is indicated by the fact that, while the landowners may complain of scarcity of labour, the labourer may also complain of unemployment. This curious result is reached because the landowner wants all his labour in great force for two or three important operations and has very little for it to do in the intervals. This is truer of Roumania than of Hungary, and will become less true as Roumania's large estates are broken up and distributed among the peasantry — a process which has been going on rapidly during the last few years.

Mid-European Zone

Intervening between northern and Mediterranean Europe is a broad zone in which peasant landholding and peasant agriculture predominates. The area is so great that there is no one style of agriculture such as might be prescribed in a smaller area by uniform physical conditions. On the contrary, in the Alpine regions the peasant mainly raises stock ; in the south of France, in many parts of Italy, and in the north and south of Spain, he cultivates the vine ; in all lowland areas he cultivates cereals, except where market-gardening prevails.

In theory small holdings are better cultivated on specialised lines. In northern countries where there are a predominate number of large holdings which determine in general the type of crop to be raised, this will often be done. But where the small peasant holding is itself predominant, it will be found that there is little at which the peasant landholder will not try his hand. Exponents of capitalist agriculture often think the peasant ill-advised in trying to do too many different things on his holding, but such observers nearly always tend to underestimate the part played by labour in agriculture. In peasant

landholding communities labour is nearly everything. The labour power of the peasant and his family is as important an element in his capital as the land, or the tools, or the stock. Such communities survive by an unstinted outpouring of labour. The varied operations of the peasant holder are his only way of making full use of the labour at his disposal. If he has part of his holding in fruit crops which only require attention at intervals, he will also have field crops and stock with which to fill in the year.

Nevertheless, another factor intervenes owing to the different sizes of the holdings owned. Some are sufficiently large to require casual labour at particular seasons. Others are so small as to be uneconomic, especially in countries where the law of succession to property is based on a division among the children. The owners of the uneconomic holdings supply the labour required on the larger properties, but only on a system of part-time work. Hired labourers in peasant communities like those on capitalist estates of southern Europe, and wholly unlike those on the farms of northern Europe, are not whole-time professional labour but part-time day labour (*journaliers*). While living in communities the greater portion of whose inhabitants are virtually members of the labouring class, they at the same time usually own a little land themselves, and would like more, which gives them a certain solidarity of sentiment with their employer. Thus, while their lot is unenviable, the situation cannot well be cleared up on the lines of class difference, by which an understanding might be reached as between two distinct parties.

Hence in countries where the peasant landholder is numerous, advanced legislation for the protection of the agricultural labourer is difficult to pass. The contrast is clearly seen as between Spain and France. In Spain, which is on the whole a capitalist country, an Act prescribing an 8-hour day for agricultural labourers has been passed ; but in France, which is mainly a peasant country, no such Act exists. Where disputes have occurred in France they have usually been with larger bodies of seasonal labourers, such as woodcutters or vine workers. The French peasant worker is much more disposed to enter a combined association with his peasant employer and not a purely workers' union, and within that combined association he settles questions in a friendly way.

The Scope of Regulation in Agriculture

Some years ago the Netherlands' Government had an exhaustive enquiry made into the economic position of the land worker in that country. In dealing with the conditions of labour in agriculture the Netherlands' Commission singled out the following points : (1) hours of labour ; (2) women's and children's labour ; (3) casual labour ; (4) Sunday labour ; (5) conditions of service ;

(6) proper housing of the worker during his work ; (7) the charge of animals, machines, and other dangerous employments ; (8) work in covered places.

The Commission came to the principal conclusion that the protection of the worker on the land ought to be scientifically regulated. Among other specific recommendations were the following : that a "scientific, universal, maximum working day of 10 or 8 hours" might be applied to land work as a variable maximum working day ; that hours of labour should be regulated separately for particular classes of workers and particular kinds of work, and that in such regulation provision of a satisfactory period of night rest should be included. The Commission also dealt with the application to the land worker of various forms of insurance against sickness, accident, invalidity, and old age.

The question of hours together with allied questions (Sunday labour, etc.) stands in a measure by itself. It is meant to apply to all classes of agricultural labour and not least to the adult male, to those regularly employed as well as to the casual worker. Hence it is meant to operate under all systems of agricultural organisation. It should be kept in view that the regulation of hours of labour cannot be kept apart from determination of rates of wages. The two things involve each other, much as security of tenure and judicial rents imply each other. Any attempts to fix wages by external authority lead to a settlement of the length of the working day and to a prescription of overtime rates. Only those who choose to ignore what is implied in any such system of regulation can maintain, as is often done, that it is impossible to regulate hours of labour in agriculture. A farmer can always secure overtime work if he likes to pay for it at overtime rates. The regulation gives him an inducement to distribute the work as far as possible in such a way as to bring it within the limits of an average week, which in northern Europe will vary from season to season, being lowest in the winter. Such regulation, on the whole, is easier in the scientific farming of capitalist farmers in northern Europe than elsewhere.

It is probable that the ability to employ a large proportion of casual labour for heavy seasonal operations gives the farmer a certain superficial advantage in bargaining with his regular labour force. The regular labourers lose the opportunity of striking a better bargain with their employer at the time when work is most urgent, and possibly see the higher wages which should have been theirs paid to a casual labour force which is at once indispensable and available. The advance of scientific agriculture, however, tends to make these spurts of work much less important, for the more scientific agriculture becomes, the less helplessly does it follow the routine prescribed by nature.

The second group of provisions, unlike the first group, relates to the work of other than whole-time adult male labourers. Any proposals for regulations proceed on the assumption that such forms of labour will have stability in agriculture. Here one is

disposed to recall the history of the regulation of female and juvenile labour in other industries and to note that while, e.g. in Great Britain, statutory regulation ended the work of women in coal mines, where it was unsuitable, such labour nevertheless survives on a large scale in textile manufacture, where the nature of the operations least excludes it.

The third group of provisions may be classified as insurance provisions. Insurance against accident stands on a different footing from some of the other risks, and the case of a land worker dealing with machinery, especially if worked by mechanical power, is not distinguishable from that of any other class of workman so occupied. Insurance against risks other than accident is on a somewhat different footing. The state forms of social insurance provide against needs which would otherwise have to be met, if at all, out of wages and by corporate effort, which is more easily organised among skilled workers associating habitually with one another in the course of their work than among workers scattered in very small groups, such as land workers ; where land workers are employed in considerable numbers their association is often fortuitous, as of persons engaged in some casual occupation. Hence the application of state schemes of social insurance is of relatively greater benefit to land workers than to other workers.

The Purpose implied by Regulation

The regulation of agricultural conditions and the institution of schemes of social insurance for rural workers are resorted to by governments from time to time as 'remedial' measures, not necessarily corresponding with the expressed demands of the class of agricultural workers, but as high exercises in the art of government, and selected with a view to counteract such so-called evils as rural depopulation. The question, however, arises whether aims so pursued are in the long run the best ; whether the rural economy of a country has not, for instance, reached a stage at which the migration of the rural population is healthy and inevitable, whereas the attempt to keep a considerable population on the land, to guarantee labour to an employing class or to live under uneconomic conditions, may not be unsound and ineffective. Thus in the past generation there was a great exodus from the Prussian provinces east of the Elbe to the industrial districts of Germany. Under the modern régime of liberty of movement this could not have been checked. Only a reimposition of serfdom could have prevented the labouring people in these agricultural districts from seeking higher wages and the benefit of the communal services and the social life of the town. Similarly in France, while the total population has increased only at a slow rate, certain towns have increased much more rapidly, with the consequence that some rural districts, especially those of the centre of France, have had to give up a great number of their inhabitants.

The very existence of a landless rural proletariat is a special problem which has arisen in modern times. Mediaeval capitalist agriculture did not know it, for though the villein certainly worked for his lord, he certainly also worked for himself on peasant land. Modern capitalist agriculture has alone raised this problem, and even so not by any means in all countries, for over a great part of Europe the peasant does not accept his exclusion from the land. On the other hand, the phenomenon has also arisen, in partial form at least, under a non-capitalist system of exploitation. The growth of population in the nineteenth century has been so great that a peasant proprietary has grown to be a peasant proletariat, because the law of division of land on succession has operated to reduce holdings decidedly below the economic limit of subsistence, thus compelling the so-called peasant landholder to supplement the proceeds of his holding by seeking outside work. This is peculiarly liable to happen in countries such as France, where the peasant has got into his possession the greater part of the whole soil. The Spanish province of Galicia and Northern Portugal are also instances of communities in which there is a surplus of labour arising from a peasant proprietary. Equally a rural proletariat may exist in countries in which in spite of those changes in the status of the peasantry which came over a greater part of Europe as the consequence of the French Revolution — or later in the nineteenth century in eastern Europe — the greater part of the land nevertheless still remains in the possession of the large landowners and the peasantry, though occupying a little land themselves, are yet driven to working on the estates of these landholders.

The problems of the rural proletariat in Europe are being modified and partly solved by various factors. There is constantly the influence of the demand which industry makes upon all available supplies of labour. Permanent emigration to overseas countries has been another important factor. A certain degree of mobility has been secured through seasonal emigration for agricultural purposes to neighbouring countries within Europe (sometimes, however, over great distances) and by the existence of opportunities, as already stated, of more or less continuous work on neighbouring large estates. As to the latter factor it is doubtful whether there is any social advantage in seeking to introduce into such a régime a system of statutory regulation of the conditions of labour. Many of the large areas of land are treated as units of exploitation, largely because they are units of property. Frequently the owners may have insufficient capital, they may lack professional skill and managing ability to ensure that their land is farmed according to modern standards. It is doubtful whether or not such a condition of things has any stability. In Hungary this line was taken by the Government early in this century, but since the war the other method of improving the lot of the labourer by giving him access to land has been adopted.

The Problem of the Rural Proletariat

The curious conflict which has gone on in the countries of eastern Europe between the large landowner and the peasant as to the ultimate form of the agricultural organisation of those countries illustrates the struggle on the one side to maintain, and on the other to advance beyond, the conditions sketched above. In Hungary, Poland, and Russia serfdom was abolished about the middle of the nineteenth century and the consequence was that large landowners had to make new arrangements for obtaining labour to work their land. The question was whether the possession of some land of their own would enable the ex-serfs to hold out against the desire of the large landowners to employ them as labourers, and would compel those landowners to let their land in order to satisfy the growing demand of the peasant population rather than to work it themselves. In Russia and Poland the peasants won for the most part, and more and more land was let or sold to them by the large landowners, who, after a struggle, found this the most convenient way of disposing of their land. These results were secured in advance of the wholesale dispossession of Russian landowners at the Revolution. In Roumania, on the other hand, the process did not take place until after 1919, when millions of hectares were apportioned among the landless peasants under legislative sanction.

Hungary remains the one country of this part of Europe where there is a large landless rural labouring class. It falls therefore into the group including such districts as Prussia east of the Elbe, south Italy, and south Spain. It is proposed in the following paragraphs to examine the main similarities and differences between the various countries of this group — the group of the landless proletariat countries.

The Hungarian landworker is a descendant mainly of one of the two classes of serfs who were liberated in 1848. The one class had land which they retained under the settlement and their descendants are the land-holding peasants of Hungary. There were at the beginning of the twentieth century in undivided Hungary, exclusive of Croatia and Slavonia, about 700,000 holdings of between 5 and 50 jochs (a joch being a little more than an acre). The greater part of these were in the Hungarian Alföld or plain, being the basin of the Danube and the Tisza, the essential Hungary of the Magyars. On the other hand, the domestic servants had no land assigned to them in 1848 and their descendants are still landless. Their ranks have been reinforced by those smallholders who failed in the latter part of the nineteenth century. These landless labourers fall into two groups: (1) regularly employed servants with a yearly contract, living for the most part on a farm under somewhat patriachal conditions, numbering nearly half a million at the beginning of this century; and (2) about one and a quarter millions of day or casual labourers.

Both groups, especially the latter, have long been dissatisfied with their conditions of life, but those of the day labourers are much the more miserable. Like the peasantry of most European countries, they look for relief, first, to a wholesale division of land among them, and following that to higher wages. But the large landowners in Hungary have consolidated their position. Large estates have become inalienable by a process of family settlements under trust, often with primogeniture, such as the state sanctions within certain limits under the Magyar laws of succession. Ecclesiastical bodies and communes also hold a great deal of land, which is in practice held in perpetuity.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the labourers, exasperated with their lot, went so far as to strike during the harvest season — a terrible weapon to use in a country like Hungary where large landowners had replaced the cattle-grazing of an earlier day with arable cultivation, concentrating on such crops as wheat, maize, tobacco, and others favoured by the hot Hungarian summer. In fact, this one-sided type of agriculture tended to maintain the division of the Hungarian landworkers into a smaller class of permanently employed semi-bondsmen and an army of day labourers whom the system condemned to six months' hard labour reaching a maximum of 16 hours a day, and a winter of unemployment.

The labourer lives in large villages, as in Sicily, a relic of the time when the Turkish occupation made life in the open country insecure, and apparently gets hopelessly in debt to the merchants by the end of winter. An oppressive policy against strikes by the day labourers was adopted after the strike of 1897 and a law passed strictly enforcing agricultural contracts of service. A further law was passed some years later and the right of association was practically refused to agricultural labourers. These laws were, however, tempered by certain provisions securing to the labourers more equitable treatment in some of the terms of their contracts with their employers. In 1907-1908, after the extension of the franchise, certain remedial measures were passed, including one for a system of insurance, on the German model, against the normal social risks of life. It is not surprising, however, that the Hungarian land workers during these agitated years lent an ear alike to the orators of the Social Democratic Party and to the emigration agent.

It is customary to speak of the Prussian provinces of the Elbe as containing numbers of large estates. Nevertheless, single estates over one thousand hectares in extent are very rare. Further, these large estates in Prussia are differentiated from similar properties in the other countries mentioned by the fact that if they are farmed as units they are also so dealt with by their owners, who have enough capital to work them and have, or can command, the necessary ability to manage them according to the standards of modern agriculture. All this tends to ensure that the labourers playing their part in such an economic scheme will be skilled and in regular employment.

Coming to south Italy, Sicily, and south Spain, we find a very different state of affairs, more closely resembling conditions in Hungary. There is one distinguishing characteristic of these southern districts and that is the large village. The rural workers congregate into these large villages, which thus reproduce in the open country the character of a town slum. In Sicily 10,000 inhabitants may be crowded into labour settlements of this kind, usually lying on the slope of the hill. The relative distance from the large estates (*latifondi*) on which they work imposes on the labourers a journey of one or two hours twice a day. At ploughing and at harvest time they are forced to sleep on the spot for weeks together, wives and children doing the same at the latter season.

These large estates cover about one-third of the productive area of Sicily. They are units of exploitation rather than of property, including both grass and arable land. The owners are frequently absentees, who make over their estates to a lessee, and it is the lessee who makes labour contracts of various types with the labourer. The latter are not in the position of ordinary wage-earning labourers on arable farms in northern Europe, but have short-time contracts with the lessees and undertake the cultivation of an assigned area of land for two years, or according to the term of the rotation. They supply instruments and animals if the soil is broken up with the plough, but their equipment and methods are primitive. In so far as the system leads to the working of large areas of land under primitive conditions of husbandry it is condemned by economists. In the early years of the twentieth century, when the great migration to America gave those who remained a slight pull in the labour market, there was an improvement in the general welfare of the labourer. A certain amount of land was forced on the market and some of it bought by returned "Americanos" and others. A more important innovation was made when groups of labourers were able to treat directly with the owners of large estates, thus eliminating the middleman (*gabellotto* or *affituario*). It is on the lines of such collective leasing by labourers that some observers think that progress can best be made; this view assumes that the large estate rather than the peasant holding is the more suitable unit to farm. At any rate, it is clear that unless a change in the agricultural system were to be accompanied by a migration of the labourers from the large villages, some of the social advantages of the individual peasant holdings regarded as a homestead will be lost.

A similar position exists in parts of Andalusia, especially in the province of Seville. Of their own accord the agronomists employed in connection with the cadastral survey made a report to the Government four years ago on the agrarian question in Andalusia and the causes of distress among labourers. They cited cases of single estates extending from 4,000 to 5,000 hectares, and in a few cases to as much as 10,000 to 20,000 hectares. Great parts of these huge estates were uncultivated, and this was due

not so much to natural causes as to the system of land tenure, a handful of persons owning most of the land and multitudes having no share in it. There are two classes of labourers, those employed whole-time, residing on the farm (*finca*), mainly engaged in looking after stock and separated from their families who live in the *pueblos*, except for visits on holidays. Their wages vary from 1.25 to 2.25 pesetas a day, together with their food, valued at 1.25 pesetas, consisting of bread, olives, and vegetables. The larger class, however, is that of the day labourers who normally live in the villages and work seasonally on the estates, on which they stay at such times unless the accommodation is so unsatisfactory that they go home to sleep ; in this case the time taken in travelling to and fro' is wasted and the net working day is only four or five hours in winter, and not much longer at other seasons. Their busiest time is during olive picking and the sowing and harvesting of cereals, but for a quarter of the year they may be out of work ; hence their women and children have to do something in order to provide a livelihood for the family.

The investigators recommended that such large estates, so far as they were not cultivated or inadequately cultivated, should be compulsorily acquired by the state and leased in small holdings to the workers, who should be compelled to form themselves into associations for the better provision of working capital.

Another hindrance to overcoming the economic conditions which are adverse to the social well-being of the agricultural labourer is the existence, alike in Seville and in Andalusia, of great numbers of plantations which, while not excessive in extent, are given over to special crops, such as olives and other fruits. Here no criticism can be made on the ground that the land is not producing all it might. On the contrary, this is obviously a form of intensive cultivation. At the same time planters who specialise in crops of this kind employ labour for no other purpose, so that in these areas work becomes seasonal. But that labour can successfully resist such conditions is shown by the fact that in the south of France it has proved impossible to introduce the large olive plantation, as the rural proletariat is unwilling to undertake the necessary seasonal labour. The peasants grow on their own holding a combination of field crops and olives together, which provides them with work all the year round.

For these reasons doubt may indeed be raised as to the comparative ability of the existing rural economy of southern Spain and Italy. Would it be wise or fair to attempt to regulate the conditions of labour, or to try to improve the well-being of the labourer by social measures in the belief that in its essence the system of landholding and farming might survive without radical change? The question may well be raised as to whether or not it is futile to try to regulate, in the narrower sense, the conditions of labour of a rural proletariat when its whole scheme of life tends to condemn it to illiteracy, to absence from home for considerable periods of the year of part and for some periods of

the whole family, and to life at best in a squalid house in which the very task of rearing the family is interrupted because wife and children have themselves to go to work. All these areas, which may be roughly grouped together as areas of a landless proletariat, appear to stand in an isolation the more marked now that the peasantry of eastern Europe have been strong enough to help themselves to the lands formerly belonging to the great landlords.

Problems of Smallholding Areas

The ratio of hired labour employed in agriculture to all persons so employed within a given area will characterise such area as either belonging to the smallholding group or outside it; where hired labour is under 50 per cent. of all persons engaged in agricultural pursuits an area may be classified as a smallholding area. In such areas the fact that the majority of the agricultural labouring population is composed of landholders and their families will result in making the conditions of life of the hired labourer conform to those of the majority, especially as in such a community no alien workers are likely to find employment.

France may be taken as a typical country in which the smallholder predominates. The position of the hired labourer in this country is complicated by the fact that two types of such hired labour are employed: the farm servant (*domestique*) living and permanently employed on the farm, and the day or casual labourer (*journalier*) not living on the farm; the latter again may often have a little allotment and so be a landholder on a small scale himself. In the centre and south of France, for instance, the landholding day labourers are more numerous than the landowners, while in 1892 there were stated to be throughout France 588,000 of the former as against only a slightly larger number, namely, 621,000 of the latter; at the same date there were stated to be 1,832,000 farm servants.

The French Government in 1912 caused an enquiry to be made into the condition of the French rural labourer. It was then found that wages had been rising steadily for a generation in spite of the decline in the profits from agriculture in the latter part of the nineteenth century. In one southern Department wages had risen 70 per cent. between 1892 and 1910. In Morbihan in Brittany wages of farm servants had risen 93 per cent. between 1896 and 1910. In the Hautes-Pyrénées wages of male farm servants had risen from 191 francs per year in 1892 to 317 francs in 1910. Possibly the greatest rise had been in the more remote districts; the earlier rate is low. It is true that prices were also rising during this time, but as a set-off to this it is fair to keep in view that the day labourer usually has some kind of an allotment from which he derives part of the subsistence of his family, while the farm servant is mostly boarded and therefore does not pay for his food.

In spite of this general rise in wages there has been a great exodus in the rural districts of France of all labourers who are not in permanent regular employment on the farm. The enquiry made by the French Government in 1909 into the economic conditions of peasant holdings brought out that in Department after Department scarcity of labour was one of the most important conditions favouring the survival of very small holdings, as the owners of larger holdings requiring hired labour had to give them up and throw them into the market, where they were eagerly bought in lots by the day labourer. In fact, the day labourer finding his position intolerable and worsened by the decay of domestic industries, has either migrated into the towns, or else starved out the large peasant landholder into surrendering his land, just as the Russian peasant dealt with his large landowners. This process would seem to show that a system of agriculture dependent on casual day labour, even though the employer is only a superior peasant, is in an unstable equilibrium. So acute is the situation that attempts are being made to make up the labour supply by encouraging the immigration of alien workers, such as Belgians, Poles, Slovaks, Piedmontese, and Spaniards.

In these circumstances it does not seem likely that the French day labourer will force his way towards better conditions. His position remains one of relative immobility, unless he becomes absorbed either into the towns or into the ranks of the landholding peasantry. In this respect at least he is in a position superior to those groups of labourers in southern Europe who are perpetually migrating over small or larger areas, and in the former case taking their families with them. The most stable element of the rural labouring population in France is to be found among the whole-time farm servants on the larger farms in the north, where farming is more industrialised, and such crops as sugar beet are grown. In fact, the recent enquiries mentioned go to show that there is in France a growing dissimilarity between the positions of the whole-time farm servants and the agricultural day labourers. The progress of the former towards social amelioration must lie on the same lines as those of the farm worker in countries of northern Europe and be achieved through collective bargaining, whether the terms demanded by the associated labourer be enforced through state action or otherwise. The difficulty of so enforcing them may be the greater if it is not easy to draw the line between the farm servant and the day labourer, and if any attempt to bring in the latter excites the opposition of the great body of peasant landholders who employ the former. Further, as the day labourer himself sees his future most clearly as a landholder, he may not be attracted by measures primarily applicable to those whose permanent position is recognised as that of labourers. It looks therefore as if the French agricultural farm servant was in an unusually isolated position and would have to form his own trade union if he wished to get better terms from the large farmer. The most

hopeful sign of any such tendency is to be seen in the standard labour contracts which have been adopted in some districts in the north of France.

In Germany the peasant proprietor also predominates west of the Elbe and south of the Main. It is very difficult, however, to draw any real parallel between Germany and France. Taking Prussia alone, according to the agricultural census of 1907 it would be impossible to classify that state as either a peasant-holding area or the reverse. The number of hired workers was small on all holdings up to 20 hectares, but much larger (nearly two-thirds of the whole number) on the two classes of large holdings extending from 100 to 200 hectares and above 200 hectares. On these larger estates there were nearly two million hired labourers as against half a million landholders and their dependants. Yet of the total number of persons engaged in agricultural pursuits throughout Prussia only one-third was made up of hired labour. Prussia, in fact, has two quite distinct systems of agricultural organisation — the small holding and the large estate system (east of the Elbe). It is far less homogeneous than France. The agricultural hired labourer is found in a more sharply defined area. As, further, he lives in a more industrial country, if he forms associations, as he has done, the methods by which he will seek to improve his conditions will fall into a line with those adopted by the general labour movement and his trade unions will work with the industrial trade unions.

Nevertheless, a general distinction of agricultural systems might be made according as to whether they are mainly dependent on the permanently employed "servant" on a farm, or the casual day labourer. Socially the groups are distinguishable up to a point by the difference of living on a farm or in a village. The day labourer in Hungary, France, Italy, Sicily, and Spain lives in a village, while the farm servant in north Germany, largely in northern France, Sweden, and to a certain extent in the Netherlands and Denmark, lives on the farm. In Great Britain he does so normally north of the Humber, while in the south of England he lives in the village. Between these two classes of workers there is very much the difference which exists between skilled and unskilled labour in other industries. The preponderance of one or other of the two types of labourer is thus an indication of the stage which the agriculture of a region has reached. The modern rural day labourer is liable to times of unemployment and even when he is at work can only earn his wages by long hours ; one way or another he cannot earn enough to keep a family, and this means that his wife and children are dragged into the work, so that it is the family earnings and not those of the adult male which support the family. It is the gradual industrialisation of farming with the introduction of machinery which tends to concentrate work in the hands of the adult male labourer.

A concrete view of the whole problem of labour conditions in agriculture at once leads to the question : how can there be any

uniformity in the ways of satisfying the demands of labour as between the northern countries on the one hand, and such regions as the Alföld of Hungary or the plains of northern Italy on the other — to take only two contrasting examples of variant agricultural systems in Europe? In the northern countries, as already described, arable farming is associated with stock-raising, which again inclines more and more to intensively conducted dairying with pig-keeping, and cereal crops alternate with forage crops, roots, potatoes, and sugar beet. More machinery is used, work is skilled and specialised, harvests are later and much ploughing has to be done in late autum and quite early in the year, so there is even on these grounds a greater distribution of employment over the year for permanent staff. In Lombardy and Piedmont and the Alföld in Hungary cropping is distinct from stock-raising. The main crops are of a cereal nature, work is concentrated in spring and summer, and employment is excessively seasonal. Land is held and worked in large units by capitalist landowners. In north Italy this is so largely because everything depends on elaborate irrigation, and in the past permanent works of this nature have been beyond the capacity of peasants. The Hungarian magnates have not, of course, organised irrigation as it has been done in north Italy, but on other historical grounds they are the chief landowners and exploiters of the soil. Hence labour has to be hired from a mainly landless class. Thus, while it may be possible to regulate hours of labour over the more uniform systems of northern Europe, it is difficult to do so in north italy and Hungary, where during the harvests labourers must work long, both on account of the nature of the work and because they are then making most of their year's earnings.

To attempt to deal with this single problem of seasonal unemployment alone presents great difficulty. Schemes of insurance against agricultural unemployment in Europe do exist, but only in a few countries of northern Europe, not where they are most needed. Again, the statutory regulation of hours of labour would seem purely to depend on the question whether a capitalised system of agriculture has given rise to a class of land workers who have succeeded in attaining some degree of organisation among themselves, as, for instance, in Germany, Spain, Czechoslovakia, and north Italy (only in the rice fields); but such regulation is often wholly lacking just where it seems most required. Or yet again, protection by insurance against accidents is apparently a benefit enjoyed most securely by those agricultural workers who happen to live in an industrialised country; the advantages of the industrial system have been extended to such agricultural workers, while in a non-industrialised country they may have to go without them.

The one device which may be said to be common to most European countries for the stabilising or improvement of agricultural labour conditions in Europe is land settlement. There are few countries in which there is no state machinery for

providing landless peasants with land. As has already been stated, in peasant countries where the services of the hired labourer are normally only wanted for special seasonal work, there is an almost universal tendency for this class to have a smallholding on which they can fall back. In countries where large numbers of such labourers are also employed by capitalist agriculturalists there should be a similar provision, so that the worker's total resources from land and labour should be such as to make it unnecessary for the whole family to take part in field work and migrate from home for a season for that purpose. So far as possible, such seasonal work should be undertaken by adult males, preferably at an unmarried age.

The redistribution of land among the landless rural workers is frequently resisted from the side of the employer-owner by merely ameliorating existing conditions. But one may doubt whether such a policy will satisfy a rural proletariat such as is to be found in Hungary and in parts of Italy and Spain. The skilled permanently employed worker in northern Europe may be content to improve his lot on the basis of being a wage-earner by collective bargaining, a method which implies solidarity among the workers as such. The Italian workman may successfully become a member of corporations exploiting the soil on a collective basis if the rural economy is such that large areas of land are in the hands of owners who are not anxious to manage them directly ; but for the casual unskilled day labourer class in middle and southern Europe it is a serious question whether or not remedial measures can be more than palliatives, if they are to be substituted for a radical change in the rural economy of these regions.