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R E P O R T



THE PROCEEDINGS

OF THE

SECOND GENERAL PEACE CONGRESS, <sup>2d, Paris</sup>  
<sub>1849</sub>

HELD IN PARIS,

ON THE 22ND, 23RD AND 24TH OF AUGUST, 1849.

*Compiled from Authentic Documents,*

UNDER THE SUPERINTENDENCE OF THE PEACE CONGRESS COMMITTEE.

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L O N D O N :

CHARLES GILPIN, 5, BISHOPSGATE STREET WITHOUT.

1849.

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But it is not France alone that we hail in this assembly. It is the whole family of nations. Diplomatic unions, unless based on national feelings, are unions of paper. Unions such as these, among the people themselves, are unions of the heart. These will be unions of strength. These will be unions of duration. You know that the motto which our tickets bear is derived from an ode (for it is an ode, rather than a song) of your immortal poet, Béranger. The verse is now European as well as French. It is almost too familiar to your ears for me to quote :—

“Peuples, formez une sainte alliance,  
Et donnez vous la main !”

I will give you a quotation from another poet, a Scotch poet, who seems to have anticipated the thoughts of Béranger. Burns thus concludes a well-known poem, (as I will conclude my speech)—

“Then let us pray, that come it may,  
And come it will, for a' that,  
That man to man, the wide world o'er,  
Shall brothers be, and a' that.”

Let us welcome this strain, whether it proceed from the brilliant civilization of Paris or from the distant mountains of Scotland ; and let us add, in the words of Paul Sarpi, (when speaking of his country) “*Esto perpetua.*”

**M. FREDERIC BASTIAT**, member of the French National Assembly, spoke as follows :—

Gentlemen, our excellent and learned colleague, M. Coquerel, spoke to us a little while since, of a cruel malady with which French society is afflicted, namely, scepticism. This malady is the fruit of our long dissensions, of our revolutions which have failed to bring about the desired end, of our attempts without results, and of that torrent of visionary projects which has recently overflowed our policy. This strange evil will, I hope, be only temporary : at all events, I know of no more efficacious remedy for it, than the extraordinary spectacle which I have now before my eyes, for if I consider the number and the importance of the men who now do me the honour of listening to me, if I consider that many of them do not act in their individual capacity, but in the name of large constituencies, who have delegated them to this Congress, I have no hesitation in saying that the cause of peace unites to-day in this assembly, more religious, intellectual, and moral force, more positive power, than could be brought together for any other imaginable cause, in any other part of the world. Yes, this is a grand and magnificent spectacle, and I do not think that the sun has often shone on one equal to it in interest and importance. Here are men who have traversed the wide Atlantic : others have left vast undertakings in England, and others have come from the disturbed land of Germany, or from the peaceful soil of Belgium or of Holland. Paris is the place of their rendezvous. And what have they come to do ? Are they drawn hither by cupidity, by vanity, or by curiosity, those three motives to which are customarily attributed all the actions of the sons of Adam ? No ; they come, led on by the generous hope of being able to do some good to humanity, without having lost sight of the difficulties of their task, and knowing well that they are working less for themselves, than for the benefit of future generations. Thrice welcome then, ye men of faith, to the land of France. Faith is as contagious as scepticism. France will not fail you. She also will yield her tribute to your generous enterprise. At the present stage of the discussion, I shall only trespass on your time to make a few observations on the subject of disarmament. They have been suggested to me by a passage in the speech of our eloquent President, who said yesterday, that the cause of external peace was also that of internal order. He very reasonably based this assertion on the fact

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that a powerful military state is forced to exact heavy taxes, which engender misery, which in its turn engenders the spirit of turbulence and of revolution. I also wish to speak on the subject of taxes, and I shall consider them with regard to their distribution. That the maintenance of large military and naval forces requires heavy taxes, is a self-evident fact. But I make this additional remark: these heavy taxes, notwithstanding the best intentions on the part of the legislator, are necessarily most unfairly distributed; whence it follows that great armaments present two causes of revolution—misery in the first place, and secondly, the deep feeling that this misery is the result of injustice. The first species of military taxation that I meet with is, that which is called, according to circumstances, conscription or recruitment. The young man who belongs to a wealthy family, escapes by the payment of two or three thousand francs; the son of an artizan or a labourer, is forced to throw away the seven best years of his life. Can we imagine a more dreadful inequality? Do we not know that it caused the people to revolt even under the empire, and do we imagine that it can long survive the revolution of February?

With regard to taxes, there is one principle universally admitted in France, namely, that they ought to be proportional to the resources and capabilities of the citizens. This principle was not only proclaimed by our last constitution, but will be found in the charter of 1830, as well as in that of 1814. Now, after having given my almost undivided attention to these matters, I affirm that in order that a tax may be proportional, it must be very moderate, and if the state is under the necessity of taking a very large part of the revenues of its citizens, it can only be done by means of an indirect contribution, which is utterly at variance with proportionality, that is to say, with justice. And this is a grave matter, gentlemen. The correctness of my statement may be doubted, but if it be correct, we cannot shut our eyes to the consequences which it entails, without being guilty of the greatest folly. I only know of one country in the world where all the public expenses, with very slight exceptions, are covered by a direct and proportional taxation. I refer to the State of Massachusetts. But there also, precisely, because the taxation is direct, and every body knows what he has to pay, the public expenditure is as limited as possible. The citizens prefer acting by themselves in a multitude of cases, in which elsewhere the intervention of the state would be required. If the government of France would be contented with asking of us five, six, or even ten per cent of our income, we should consider the tax a direct and proportional one. In such a case, the tax might be levied according to the declaration of the tax-payers, care being taken that these declarations were correct, although, even if some of them were false, no very serious consequences would ensue. But suppose that the treasury had need of 1,500 or 1,800 millions of money. Does it come directly to us and ask us for a quarter, a third, or a half of our incomes? No: that would be impracticable; and consequently, to arrive at the desired end, it has recourse to a trick, and gets our money from us without our perceiving it, by subjecting us to an indirect tax laid on food. And this is why the Minister of Finance, when he proposed to renew the tax on drinks, said that this tax had one great recommendation, that it was so entirely mixed up with the price of the article, that the tax-payer, as it were, paid without knowing it. This certainly is a recommendation of taxes on articles of consumption: but they have this bad characteristic, they are unequal and unjust, and are levied just in inverse proportion to the capabilities of the tax-payer. For, whoever has studied these matters, even very superficially, knows well that these taxes are productive and valuable only when laid upon articles of universal consumption, such as salt, wine, tobacco, sugar and such like; and when we speak of universal consumption, we necessarily speak of those things on which the labouring classes spend the whole of their small incomes. From this it follows, that these classes do not make a single purchase which is not increased to a great extent by taxation, while such is not the case with the rich.

Gentlemen, I venture to call your close attention to these facts. Large armaments necessarily entail heavy taxes : heavy taxes force governments to have recourse to indirect taxation . Indirect taxation cannot possibly be proportionate, and the want of proportion in taxation is a crying injustice inflicted upon the poor to the advantage of the rich. This question, then, alone remains to be considered : Are not injustice and misery, combined together, an always imminent cause of revolutions ? Gentlemen, it is no use to be wilfully blind. At this moment, in France, the need which is most imperious and most universally felt, is doubtless that of order, and of security. Rich and poor, labourers and proprietors, all are disposed to make great sacrifices to secure such precious benefits, even to abandon their political affections and convictions, and, as we have seen, their liberty. But, in fine, can we reasonably hope, by the aid of this sentiment, to perpetuate, to systematize, injustice in this country ? Is it not certain that injustice will, sooner or later, engender disaffection ? disaffection all the more dangerous because it is legitimate, because its complaints are well-founded, because it has reason on its side, because it is supported by all men of upright minds and generous hearts, and, at the same time, is cleverly managed by persons whose intentions are less pure, and who seek to make it an instrument for the execution of their ambitious designs. We talk about reconciling the peoples. Ah ! let us pursue this object with all the more ardour, because at the same time we seek to reconcile the classes of society. In France because, in consequence of our ancient electoral laws, the wealthy class had the management of public business, the people think that the inequality of the taxes is the fruit of a systematic cupidity. On the contrary, it is the necessary consequence of their exaggeration. I am convinced that if the wealthy class could, by a single blow, assess the taxes in a more equitable manner, they would do so instantly. And in doing so, they would be actuated more by motives of justice than by motives of prudence. They do not do it, because they cannot, and if those who complain were the governors of the country, they would not be able to do it any more than those now in power ; for I repeat, the very nature of things has placed a radical incompatibility between the exaggeration and the equal distribution of taxes. There is, then, only one means of diverting from this country the calamities which menace it, and that is, to equalize taxation ; to equalize it, we must reduce it ; to reduce it, we must diminish our military force. For this reason, amongst others, I support with all my heart the resolution in favour of a simultaneous disarmament.

I have just uttered the word "disarmament." This subject occupies the thoughts and the wishes of all ; and nevertheless, by one of those inexplicable contradictions of the human heart, there are some persons, both in France and England, who, I am sure, would be sorry to see it carried into effect. What will become, they will say, of our preponderance ? Shall we allow the influence which, as a great and powerful nation, we possess, to depart from us ? Oh, fatal illusion ! Oh, strange misconception of the meaning of a word ! What ! can great nations exert an influence only by means of cannon and bayonets ? Does the influence of England consist not in her industry, her commerce, her wealth, and the exercise of her free and ancient institutions ? Does it not consist, above all, in those gigantic efforts, which we have seen made there, with so much perseverance and sagacity, for obtaining the triumph of some great principle, such as the liberty of the press, the extension of the electoral franchise, Catholic emancipation, the abolition of slavery, and free-trade. And as I have alluded to this last and glorious triumph of public opinion in England, as we have amongst us many valiant champions of commercial liberty, who, adopting the motto of Cæsar,—

" Nil actum reputans, dum quid superesset agendum,"

have no sooner gained one great victory than they hasten to another still greater, let me be permitted to say for how immense a moral influence England is indebted to them, less on

account of the object, all glorious as it was, which they attained, than on account of the means which they employed for obtaining it, and which they thus made known to all nations. Yes ! from this school the peoples may learn to ally moral force with reason ; there we ought to study the strategy of those pacific agitations which possess the double advantage of rendering every dangerous innovation impossible, and every useful reform irresistible.

By such examples as these, I venture to say, Great Britain will exercise that species of influence which brings no disasters, no hatreds, no reprisals in its train, but, on the contrary, awakens no feelings but those of admiration and of gratitude. And with regard to my own country, I am proud to say, it possesses other and purer sources of influence than that of arms. But even this last might be contested, if the question were pressed, and influence measured by results. But that which cannot be taken away from us, nor be contested for a moment, is the universality of our language, the incomparable brilliancy of our literature, the genius of our poets, of our philosophers, of our historians, of our novelists, and even of our *feuilletonistes*, and, last though not least, the devotedness of our patriots. France owes her true influence to that almost unbroken chain of great men which, beginning with Montaigne, Descartes, and Pascal, and passing on by Bossuet, Voltaire, Montesquieu and Rousseau, has not, thanks to heaven, come to an end in the tomb of Chateaubriand. Ah ! let my country fear nothing for her influence, so long as her soil is not unable to produce that noble fruit which is called Genius, and which is ever to be seen on the side of liberty and democracy. And, at this moment, my brethren, you who were born in other lands, and who speak another language, do you not behold all the illustrious men of my country uniting with you to secure the triumph of universal peace ? Are we not presided over by that great and noble poet, whose glory and privilege it has been to introduce a whole generation into the path of a renovated literature ? Do we not deplore the absence of that other poet-orator, of powerful intellect and noble heart, who, I am sure, will as much regret his inability to raise his voice amongst us, as you will regret not to have heard it ? Have we not borrowed from the songs of our national bard the touching device,—

“Peuples, formez une sainte alliance,  
Et donnez vous la main !”

Do we not number in our ranks that indefatigable and courageous journalist, who did not wait for your arrival to place at the service of absolute non-intervention the immense publicity, and the immense influence which he has at his command ? And have we not amongst us, as fellow-labourers, ministers of nearly all Christian religions ? Amidst this illustrious galaxy, permit me to claim a humble place for my brethren, the political economists ; for, gentlemen, I sincerely believe that no science will bring a more valorous contingent to serve under the standard of peace than political economy. Religion and morality do not endeavour to discover whether the interests of men are antagonistic or harmonious. They say to them : Live in peace, no matter whether it be profitable or hurtful to you, for it is your duty to do so. Political economy steps in and adds : Live in peace, for the interests of men are harmonious, and the apparent antagonism which leads them to take up arms is only a gross error. Doubtless, it would be a noble sight to behold men realize peace at the expense of their material interests ; but for those who know the weakness of human nature, it is consoling to think that duty and interest are not here two hostile forces, and the heart rests with confidence upon this maxim : “Seek first after righteousness, and all things shall be added unto you.”

RICHARD COBDEN, ESQ. M.P., next came forward, and was received with the most enthusiastic cheering, which lasted a considerable time. He expressed his intention to speak in French, first, because such a mark of