

José María Aguilar et. al. to Governor of San Luis Potosí, 6 October 1857, in Historical Archive of the State of San Luis Potosí, collection Secretaría General de Gobierno, box 1857.21, unnumbered file.

Document transcribed and (roughly) translated by Timo Schaefer. Note that the text is sometimes ungrammatical, and the meaning sometimes difficult to establish, in the original document. Paragraph breaks added for better flow.

Most excellent Sir. The residents [*vecinos*] and tenants of the settlements that are included in the terrain of the Bocas Hacienda. We appear before Your Excellency with due respect and say, that it has been many years that we live oppressed in the great weariness of unhappiness by the harms that we have been suffering more and more every day from the owners and administrators of this hacienda, of which we will demonstrate a little of the much that we suffer. Considering the happy times, as well as the knowledge that we have a temporal Father who will hear us as his children, and as in all ways needy and helpless.

Your Excellency will not receive this as news, for we have presented ourselves various times, even if it has been in separate groups, according to how things have happened to us: but unfortunate and unhappy, [because] when it has been our lot to present a complaint in proper legal form, thinking we would achieve some remedy, things have gone worse for us, because the hacienda owners being the strong ones, and we being the weak ones, it can be seen how the strong oppresses the weak, and in this way justice has been given to the hacienda owner, for these misters have won over the people with their threats, and before the Authorities their trustworthy witnesses are all their dependents, and we before the aforementioned authorities even when we have had the courage to accuse [the hacienda owners] it has always been enough proof [i.e., the witnesses presented by the hacienda owners were able to convince the authorities that the hacienda owners' version of events was correct].

Today that will not happen, because finally the omnipotent one has made an effort so that the temporal Government would resolve the happiness of man, the glorious triumph of his rights: and the severe punishment of offenders of his sacred laws. We already said that we would show some of what we suffer, well most excellent Sir we are tenants of the neighborhood and area of the Bocas Hacienda, but we aren't treated as such. We all pay five pesos simply for living without being owners [who can] enjoy the fruits of the territory, [we aren't allowed to] take one twig of firewood for the daily use of our homes, without the ungrateful forester informing on us to the administrator of the farm, not one stick as an adornment, not one *aguey* to supply some of the needs of our families in meager years, without being thrown in jail; if to supply some need we transplant *aguey manso* or *nopal manso* [edible kinds of cacti], these plants are taken from us saying that they are products of the earth that he who wants to enjoy them (irritated) may transplant them in his belly button. [We are] repressed [so] that he who lays hands on these plants is denounced unless he buys them, as if they [i.e. picking them] hadn't cost him his corporal labor?

In order to sow, we pay six pesos per year per *fanega* [a measurement unit approximately equal to 1.5 acres] for rent, which in other times used to be three pesos, prices in this place [sic]. Those [fields] we mention are made to produce by us, by our fathers, or by our ancestors. Neither for having invested our corporal labor, nor for paying our rent, are we free to enjoy the fruits or products that [our farms] give us. The señor hacienda owner because he sows so much, obliges

us by force to help him bring in his harvest, which he does in the months of January and February, and all this time our own harvest is exposed in the fields, and the punishment for whoever dares to bring it in without the permission of the hacienda owner is to be robbed of his plot: he is seen with such contempt that even his dwelling is taken from him. Those of us who – in order to avoid that result – hold out, suffer, endure, see the fruit and do not harvest it, because when we are given permission we no longer find it for having been finished by all the animals, for since the time that it is planted it has enemies.

We are tenants because we sow in useless terrains, because we do not even manage to sow one *cuartilla* [a measurement of volume, here used to indicate how much grain (probably corn) the tenants were able to sow on their fields], and because of our personal goods. And sharecroppers because even if by our corporal labor we have cleared a half or a whole *fanega* on good land where there is some irrigation or enough water, [and] the hacienda owner finds out that the tenant does well, then ambition comes in and we are made sharecroppers, violating and attacking all of the rights that we have, simply by saying the hacienda gives the orders and my words must not be made a joke; I have ordered to give you the land by shares, if you want to sow, sow, and if not, leave it. We have consented, because when we used to complain, we weren't heard.

We are tenants or sharecroppers because the hacienda owner gives or rents out given areas, in those we are tenants because we pay excessive rents, ground rent for houses and goods, and [we are] sharecroppers [*medieros*] because we sow for half the crop [*a medias*, meaning that instead of paying money rent, they would have to hand over half of their harvests to the landowner]. What does it mean to say sharecropper of an hacienda or tenant! An honorable contract with no kind of authorization except by him [the hacienda owner]: we are obliged to render as many services as the owner wants. Without any compensation, we are required not only to give personal services but [do] anything the hacienda owner wants, be it with the plowing, with the tenant or sharecropper with a team and the farmhand in the saddle, and also in irrigation ditches, in the fallow fields, in the planting, in threshing, or in the [cattle] runs that are customary. And this not one day or two but as long as he wants or until what is called the need by the hacienda is finished. In that way there have been people who, as a result of giving these services, find themselves taken by *jaina* [meaning unclear, possibly a transcription error] dying of hunger, as happened in the year fifty-four and fifty-five with various of us, forced and dangerous demands, and who doesn't follow them need not ask for the motive why he is robbed of his field or house.

Because then he who doesn't comply, or he who tells it, is being told, leave him, I will not let him out of my sight. Those who end up complying in the interest of not suffering, when the administrator or the foreman comes to visit our fields and doesn't find them to his liking. And there is another motive for taking it from him, the next year he no longer has a field. Those fields which we mention, most of us live in them, they need to be fenced to avoid damages, the hacienda puts up winemaking workshops, the builder destroys the fences without caring that he leaves the poor fields in danger, even if they are being sharecropped with the hacienda; a just protest, because the tenant or sharecropper has to build fences year after year with regrettable labor. Because not even to build fences may one take the resources of the countryside.

We will stop molesting the attention of Your Excellency because Your Excellency doesn't need proof of things that are well known that happen not only on this hacienda, but on all others; we will only say that when the señor owner will see our extensive complaint he will be surprised and he will say that he doesn't order such things, and that he isn't to blame because he has his

authority, rights, and actions extended to various persons, and that these dependents of his hacienda [i.e. foremen or administrators] do it, and not he as the owner. We, most excellent sir, blame him, because if he ruled his hacienda himself perhaps he would have some charity and we would achieve something. But when in his name (that is to say) the owner orders it, there is no hope to gain any favor [the meaning seems to be, when orders are given by underlings in the name of the owner, rather than by the owner himself, there is no hope to gain any reprieve]. The current señor administrator will say something else, that he came with a good heart only to carry out what had been decided by other, previous administrators; that is enough, for he resolves nothing without adding first, [that] it is true that he has good intentions. But we will say, as say many sacred scriptures, that as long as the root isn't torn out, the soul will not be purified.

And so, most excellent sir, we are wounded by an evil that only you with your respective commissions will heal, dictating an agrarian law that will shock these innumerable abuses that we have manifested and are proving. Considering that in terms of the excessive rents and other damages in the terrain that we have occupied, it cannot be any more valuable [this seems to refer to the purchasing price the tenants will have to pay for the territory on which they want to erect their town – see below], which we will prove with our receipts in hand.

We therefore ask Your Excellency that with the agreement of the Honorable Congress of the State, and in use of the authority that the Basic Statute of the same gives you. And the Law of 8 February 1856. The settlements to which we belong be declared a *pueblo* [i.e. a municipal township with its own town council etc.]. Paying in annual payments what we may lack [i.e. to the landlord in order to purchase the land on which the town would be created]: according to the laws in effect. And if this isn't granted, we ask we repeat the consideration according to the well-established reputation of Your Excellency. That the fields that are being cultivated by sharecropping be rented out by an amount that is judged convenient. The freedom to enjoy the fruits and not to be threatened by any owner nor minion of the farm, complying with our rights. Just demands: because only that way will the disputes stop and we will have Liberty and Peace.

Also in order not to molest the attention of Your Excellency so much, because the number of inhabitants comprising the settlements where we are residents is so excessive, may it be accepted that we implore that by request of this population (that is to say) for those who do not know how to sign, the señores auxiliary magistrates and sub-officers of the neighborhoods to which we belong may sign, equally the honorable [here probably meaning literate or educated] citizens. This not being done by those of whom it is known that they do not honor the name of God Our Master by the oath that was demanded of them to receive the duty to serve on the council. And furthermore those are part of the hacienda and may be among the same who do us harm in the name of their own authority or that of the owner, because of those señores some are employed by the authorities. We hope that this our appeal may have its fulfillment.

Rancharias de la Comprencon de la Hacienda de Bocas, 6 October 1857, José Maria Aguilar
[followed by about 250 further signatures]