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Collectivism

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Socialism first presented itself to the laboring classes in the form of different systems, each having its more or less numerous adepts, and each presenting itself as the infallible Gospel which must save society.

These different socialist systems, hatched in the offices of speculative thinkers, have been succeeded by a much more popular socialism, which has been embodied in the International Workingmen's Association.

When we study the different socialist authors, we perceive straightaway that fantasy plays a considerable role in their writings; while the history of the International offers us, on the contrary, the spectacle, not of a preconceived theory, but of a great economic act being produced outside of all sectarian influence: it is the proletariat itself coming to consciousness of it situation, of its needs, and of the future towards which it is drive by unavoidable necessity.

From the preceding, should we conclude that we should attach no importance to the work of those valiant socialist schools that, in the first half of the nineteenth century, breached the walls of the old

social edifice, and so prepared the organization of the proletariat and its advent? Far from it; we owe all these tireless strugglers, for the most part dead in the struggle, a profound gratitude; they are those who prepared the way; and, in marching more united and more firmly towards the realization of the common aim, it is just that we guard the memories of those who guided our first steps.

The fundamental point of the question is the manner of envisioning *property*. Everyone understands it, the adversaries of the emancipation of the laborers as well as their partisans. Property is the bottom of the debate.

That important question has been dealt with in the different Congresses of the International, and the principle of *collective property* emerged, as a historical and economic necessity, from discussions in the last general Congress held in September 1869 at Basel. Before that Congress, the International had only been weakly attacked; but from that era, there was an outburst of attacks such that history presents no example of an association that has had so much hatred raised against it.

For us, to the extent that these attacks came from the bourgeoisie, they are perfectly comprehensible; the International having attacked the very basis of the bourgeois power, it was natural that all those who share in that power revolted, passionately, against the audacious nay-sayer of the privileges of the bourgeoisie. But the ignorance, the economic enslavement of the people also create in the International, in the very heart of the proletariat, numerous enemies, whom it is our duty to illuminate and, if possible, to pull from the midst of our great international organization.

It is precisely the collectivist principle that serves as the basis of the attacks directed against the International, and it is by adulterating this principle, by distorting its application, that they have succeeded in raising so many enemies against it.

Commune and the free federation of communes will be, in the end, the political principle of the proletariat.

After having had to suffer absolute individualism for centuries, we would not have to fear seeing the triumph of the opposite extreme: authoritarian communism.

workshop that, by social necessity, is the personal property of the industrial worker. The financial companies have transformed our economic world, and the great agricultural and industrial exploitations gradually invade and annihilate the little home place of the peasant and the worker-owner; we are at the realization of collective property *in favor of some few;* and, whether we wish it or not, we march towards this dilemma: either collective realized in favor of all, or the world as the exclusive property of a few great financial lords.

We cannot, in these few pages, enter into the details that would allow us to support this brief analysis with facts; we think that it is enough to give a glimpse, to those who are ignorant of it, of the scientific side of collectivism, and we recommend, to those who want to account, by figures, of the movement that carries us toward large-scale property, the reading of the *Manifeste aux paysans*announced on the cover of the past year's almanac.[2]

What becomes more difficult to establish is the practical realization of collectivism. And, without the risk of falling into preconceived and utopian systems, into fantasy, we cannot give absolute rules.

The realization of the collectivist principle depends completely on the march of the revolutionary events that our society is called to endure. If the principle of the State is not swept away in the tempest, we will have an authoritarian communism; if it is the Commune that triumphs, it will be in the commune that the collectivist idea will first be realized. Now, if we study the aspirations of the class that the logic of deeds summons to the helm of the social Revolution, we can deduce from it that the principle of the free

[2] This *Manifesto*, written in German by Joh. Ph. Becker, and translated into French by James Guillaume, had appeared as a brochure at Genève, in the beginning of 1870, under this title: "*Manifeste aux travailleurs des campagnes*, published by the Comité de propagande des sections allemandes de l'Association internationale des travailleurs."

Collectivism would be, according to the different categories of adversaries: l) the destruction of individual liberty; 2) the realization of an equality paralyzing all individual effort; 3) a division of wealth, and, as a result, the gradual destruction, without profit to anyone, of the capital accumulated up to this day; or finally, 4) a social system not resting on any scientific data, and consequently a utopia.

Let us respond briefly to these various reproaches.

1) Individual liberty has no worse enemies today than those who pretend to defend it. Faced with the social movement that is always intensifying, the bourgeoisie cries loudly against the harm that socialism would do to individual liberty, and appoints itself the passionate protector of liberty. But as words are not always the expression of the fact that they are supposed to represent, there is room to investigate.

It is an axiom accepted by everyone that each must have the liberty to enjoy the fruits of their labor; and that axiom is certainly for the bourgeois the most essential part of what they call individual liberty: they use and abuse it such that this liberty is no longer a right of each human being, but only the privilege of those who, by skill, ruse, fraud, or accident of birth, are able to monopolize all human pleasures. In fact, by observing what occurs in society, we note that far from respecting the right of each individual to dispose of the fruits of their labor, the bourgeoisie tends to accumulate, for its own profit, the greatest sum drawn from the products of the labor of the people; what it calls individual liberty, so it is for it only the absolute liberty to exploit, without pity or mercy, the working people.

With regard to that entirely bourgeois liberty, we can deduce from the collectivist principle the true liberty of which each human being would have he full enjoyment. What constitutes the basis of individual liberty is the guarantee of existence, which has its source in labor; in order that individuals be free, the instruments

of labor must be guaranteed to each worker; now, it is primarily the mission of collective property, while individual property only leads to the concentration of the instruments of labor in a small number of hands, on which the disinherited are from then on completely dependent.

2) The reproach that collectivism is only the realization of an equality paralyzing every individual effort has no more basis than the one according to which it would be the destruction of individual liberty. In this reproach, as in the previous one, there is, on the part of the bourgeois, a dreadful confusion of words. What they call "individual effort" is only the power that a few privileged individuals have to exercise of all their aptitudes and individual abilities, but especially to skillfully exploit the many.

The goal of collectivism is to put an end to all these privileges, by giving *to each*, first by a rational education, then by putting at their disposal all the necessary elements, the possibility of exercising all their aptitudes and abilities. That equality of the point of departure, then of the conditions, will permit all the individual strengths to be exerted; it is true that rivalry will no longer produce these monsters of ambition who, arriving at the summit, devour all the other individualities; on the contrary, each individuality being limited by the development given to all individuals, competition will no longer be a bloody gamble in which the weakest perish, but a salutary game where each produces what they capable of, without harm to others.

3) The accusation leveled against the International of tending to a division of wealth is certainly the most absurd. It proves first of all the absolute stupidity of the bourgeoisie: how do they not perceive that accusing a society of wanting to *divide*, because it proclaims the principle of *collective property* is to level a contradictory accusation? In fact, if the International wanted to make a division it is obvious that it would maintain the principle of individual property by widening it; while, if it declares in favor of collective property,

it declares itself by this the enemy of the division of the land, and of the instruments of labor.

In the *Almanach pour 1871*, we have shown who the true "*partageux*" were; we do not have to return to the question; the same vampires still exist, and the wealth created by collective labor continues to swell the pockets of the capitalists and their henchmen, while the people always suffer the same miseries.

If the International accepts as the basis of the social organ the collective property in land and the instruments of labor, so that they are guaranteed to each laborer, it still recognizes the absolute liberty of individuals and groups to organize as they see fit, it will immediately be up to them to determine the manner of the division of the fruits of collective labor in each association. Thus, far from tending to authoritarian communism, collectivism perfectly assures to individuals, and to groups, the right to the product of travail.

4) It remains for us to examine the last reproach addressed to collectivism, that of having no scientific basis, of being a utopia.

Before affirming the principle of collective property, the International, by means of its Congresses, analyzed the different principles by which philosophy, jurisprudence, and political economy have sought to justify individual property. after than rigorous analysis, only one principle remained standing, it is that individual property had been a social necessity, since it had been the foundation of the social order until our times. But does that social order still exist?

In order to respond to that question, if was necessary to examine contemporary economic facts. Everywhere we noted a great and great concentration, in the hands of a minority, of all capitals[1] in general. That powerful concentration is itself a transformation of property: it is no longer the modest field that, by social necessity, is the personal property of the small cultivator; it is no longer the

[1] By the term "capitals" the author also means property in land, as one can see.