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September 4, 1869

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What should be the character and what will be the means of the economic agitation and of the laborers of the International, before that social revolution that alone could emancipate them in a complete and definitive manner? The experience of recent years indicates two ways, one negative, the other positive: *the strike funds* and*cooperation.*

Under this general word *cooperation*, we mean all the known systems of *consumptions of mutual credit or of credit to labor or production.*

In the application of all these systems and even in the theory that they take for basis, there are two contrary currents that we must clearly distinguish: the bourgeois current and the purely socialist current.

Thus in the societies for consumption, credit and production, founded or recommended by some bourgeois socialists, we find all the elements of bourgeois political economy: interest on capital, dividends and premiums.

Which of these two systems is the good, the true?

The first, that of the bourgeois socialists, is most generally accepted by those in the sections of the International who love to call themselves *practical* men. In fact, they are practical in

appearance, but only in appearance, very practical, since all their thought comes down to continuing in the heart of the workers' world the rich practice of the bourgeois: *the exploitation of labor by capital.*

When one association, founded on bourgeois bases, is undertaken by some dozens or hundreds of workers, what can its result be? Either it does not succeed, it goes bankrupt, and then it plunges these workers into an even greater poverty than that from which they had attempted to escape by founding it, or else it succeeds, and then, without improving the general condition of the working class, it can only lead to creating some dozens or hundreds of bourgeois, this is what the Congress of Lausanne expressed very well in the following resolution:

"The Congress thinks that the efforts attempted today by the workers' associations (if those are generalized, preserving their present form), tend to create a fourth estate [class*], having below it a fifth estate more miserable still."*

That fourth estate would be forted by a limited number of workers constituting among them a sort of bourgeois limited partnership, which necessarily excludes from within it the fifth estate, the great mass of the workers not associated in that cooperation, but, on the contrary, exploited by it.

Such is the cooperative system that the bourgeois socialists not only preach, but attempt to realize within the International, some knowing well, and others ignorant that this system if the negation of the principle and aim of that association?

What is the aim of the International? Isn't it to emancipate the working class by the united action of the workers of all countries? And what is the aim of the bourgeois cooperation? It is to wrest a limited number of workers from the common poverty, in order to make them bourgeois, to the detriment of the majority of the workers. Aren't we right to tell you that this practice that is so often recommended by the *practical men* of the International is an entirely bourgeois practice, and that as such it must be excluded from the International!

Suppose that a thousand mean are exploited and oppressed by ten.

What would you think, if among these thousand men, there are found twenty, thirty or more who would say: We are tired of being victims, but as on the other hand it is ridiculous to hope for the salvation of everyone, as the prosperity of the few absolutely demands the sacrifice of the many, let us abandon our comrades to their fate, and think only of ourselves, in order to be fortunate enough to become bourgeois in our turn, fortunate exploiter.

That would be treason, wouldn't it?

And yet isn't that precisely what our practical men advise? In theory as well as in practice, in cooperation as well as in administration, they are consequently exploiters and enemies of the working class. – They want to conduct their business, not that of the International; but in order to better conduct their own business, they want to use the International.

What we must note incidentally is that they earn that name of *practical men* that they give themselves, much more by their individual, bourgeois intentions than by their success.

There are many among them who are not of very good faith, who are not misled, but misleading. Not knowing, never having imagined any practice but the bourgeois practice, many among them think that it would be only fair to have recourse to that same practice in order to fight the bourgeoisie. They have the naïveté to believe that what kills labor can emancipate it, and that they could use as well as the bourgeoisie itself, against it, the weapon by means of which the bourgeoisie crushes it.

It is a great error. These naïve men do not account for the immense superiority that the monopoly of wealth, of science, and of an age-old practice, as well as the overt or masked, but always active support of the States, and all the organization of the present society, give the bourgeoisie over the proletariat. So this would be a very unequal struggle for one to reasonably hope for success. In these conditions, the bourgeois weapons,

which moreover being nothing but unbridled competition, the war of each against all, prosperity gained on the ruin of others, these weapons, these means can only serve the bourgeoisie, and would necessarily destroy solidarity, that single power of the proletariat.

The bourgeoisie knew it well. Can we see it too?

While they continue to relentlessly combat the *strike funds* and *Trades Unions*, which are the sole means of truly effective war that the workers could employ against them, they have suddenly reconciled themselves, after a certain hesitation it is true, but which has not been of long duration, with the system of bourgeois cooperation.

All the bourgeois economists and publicists, even the most conservative, sing the beauty of that system in every way, and the partisans—alas, still as numerous as the bourgeoisie in the International—strive to lead the whole worker association in this sense. In this regard, Mr. Coullery and the *Journal de Genève*, Mr. Henri Dupasquier, the conservative-bigot de Neuchâtel, et Professor Dameth, that apostate of socialism converted by the bigots of Genève, are in agreement.

All shout themselves hoarse, crying out to us:

"Worker, cooperate!"

Yes! Engage in good bourgeois cooperation, so that it demoralizes and ruins you for the profit of a few fortunate businessmen, who will use you as footboards, so that in their turn they can become bourgeois. Engage in bourgeois cooperation, it will lull you to sleep, and after having exhausted all your means, it will make you incapable of organizing your international power, that power without which you could never assert your right and make it triumph against the bourgeoisie.

We also want cooperation; we are even convinced that cooperation in all the branches of labor and science will be the preponderant form of social organization in the future. But, at the same time, we know that it could only prosper, develop itself full and freely, and embrace all human industry when it

is founded on equality, when all capital, all the instruments of labor, including the soil, is given, as collective property, to labor.

So we consider that demand above all, and the organization of the international power of the laborers of all countries as the principal aim of our great Association.

This, once accepted, far from being the adversaries of the cooperative enterprises in the present, we find them necessary in many respects. First, and this is even their primary advantage for the moment, they accustom the workers to organize, to conduct, to direct their affairs by themselves, without any intervention of bourgeois capital or bourgeois direction.

It is desirable that when the hour of the social liquidation sounds, it finds in every country, in every locality many cooperative associations, which, if they are well organized, and above all founded on the principles of solidarity and collectivity, not on bourgeois exclusivism, will make society pass from its present state to that of equality and justice without too great tremors.

But in order for them to be able to fulfill that mission, the International Association must only protect the cooperative associations based on these principles.

In the articles to follow, we will speak of cooperation according to the principles of the International, and already today we publish an draft that appears to us to make a rather important step in the realization of these principles.