

# The Organization of Work

Joseph Déjacque

1860

Civilization and, before it, Barbarism, [Patriarchy], Savagery have always considered work as a punishment. The ancient and modern idea has made it a punishment; the priests, the oracles of the altar and the temple, in the name of the thundering God and the formidable Church; the males, the fathers, the warriors, the legislators, all the heads of couples, families, hordes, nations, vagabonds as well as sedentary people, in the name of the society of which they were the sovereign, that is to say the strongest, most feared member.

At the cradle of Humanity, when the bosom of the Earth began to dry up and Man was driven out by famine and hunger from the primitive community; at the end of this anarchic Eden which had first welcomed with caresses his first movements, and where afterwards the fruits no longer fell ripe from the branch of the tree into his hand, like mother's milk into the mouth of the child; at this painful moment of early weaning and while human intelligence was still wailing in its coarse envelope and groping for its destiny in the blindness of ignorance, one can understand that the first organization of work, a reaction of the idea of individual conservation on the idea of fraternal communion, was fatally an authoritarian organization, the slavery of the weakest or least developed for the benefit of the strongest or most experienced. As man had chained animals, man chained man; he made a cattle of human heads as he had made a domestic herd of horned or [snout] heads and beasts of burden. His inexperienced understanding, dominated by the wrath of nature, which gave him the perilous spectacle of the elements in struggle, tearing and crushing each other; his understanding thus deprived of the materials, of the knowledge that we possess today, could only understand the teachings of brute force; he imitated in his species and from man to man the violence that he saw practiced between different species, from wolf to sheep, for example, and from sheep to blade of grass.

This original stain, the organization of work has preserved it to our days. Currently still, work is organized slavery.

However, the Idea marches; it no longer turns its gaze backwards, towards a pre-industrial age, which could well have been the delicious Eden of Humanity in childhood, but which would be today nothing more than a sorrowful abode for Humanity made Man. The anarchic Eden towards which we are marching is now before us and no longer behind; it is not populated with stupefying idleness, but with seductive activities. The horror of work has been succeeded by the thought of attractive work. Yes! The contemporary idea, the negation of the ancient and modern idea, not only no longer considers work as a pain or a punishment, but it also affirms that it is a

pleasure and that there is no pleasure except through it. Right to work! say the proletarians of the present time; and they fight to produce, — on the condition, however, that this work is not forced labor but free labor, and that the free distribution of products replaces the arbitrary speculation of the exploiter. To work according to the formula of the past was to suffer; to work, according to the formula of today, is to enjoy: the ancient world is overthrown! The day when the finger of the idea, flaming at the feast of brutes of bourgeois society, traced in printed characters and before the eyes of the civilized this paradoxical inscription: attractive work! that day the revolution of work was decreed in principle; it is contained in this germ as the oak is contained in the acorn: the principle posed will produce its consequences.

If Fourier, that great man, had not been so petty; if he had not wanted so much to caress the goat and the cabbage, the exploited and the exploiter, Authority and Liberty; if he had not wanted to marry God with the Devil, the rich with the poor, the wolf with the lamb; if he had understood that good does not fuse with evil, that truth does not fuse with error, that there is incompatibility and subversibility between them; if rather than speculating almost exclusively on the vices of the rich, on their bad inclinations, on their deviations from the ways of nature, and of building thrones in his phalanstery for all these little potentates, he had been a little more concerned with the mass of the people, with their passionate force, their mental properties or virtues, their intellectual inclinations, their revolutionary instincts; If he had been more fraternitarian, more egalitarian, more libertarian, and if, instead of crowning kings in all his groups and in all his series, he had decapitated them by reasoning, this decapitation, far from preventing harmony, would have been, on the contrary, the only way to make it born and develop, by suppressing all discord. But no, possessor of a great idea, he had recourse to small means to make it accepted by the vulgar. There is no kind of silly cajoling, no ridiculous advances that he has not made to heartless capitalists, to brainless artists and poets, to all the unproductive talents of the so-called liberal professions. The rich and their valets, the debauched of the arts and letters, the equivocal talents, all those satisfied with the civilizational banquet have not let themselves be caught in the glue of the innovator; and the poor, all those who produce and do not consume, the disinherited of the pleasures of this world, the bohemians of work, the outlaws, the proletarians reduced to bowing their heads before the omnipotence of a thousand and one monarchs, to holding out their hands, like beggars, to receive from the idle or needy boss a degrading salary, the poor finally, living paving stones, trampled and crushed by the heel of honors and the wheel of fortune, having seen, in this hierarchical staging, in this intrigue capital-labor-talent, nothing but a change of slavery, have let their heads fall back on their chests while waiting for a more direct call the Revolution.

48 has come. There has been talk of social economy, of association. The Proletariat has been moved; it certainly had the desire to free itself, but it did not have the science; and the workers' associations, which arose at that time, were only a carbon copy of the bourgeois associations, of the shopkeepers' or industrial societies of the bosses: they agitated the workers, they did not revolutionize Work.

Considered separately, Proudhon and Fourier are wrong; the organization of work that they each brought to light is the error. Together, and by pruning from their two conceptions all the reminiscences of the past, by cutting, trimming a lot on one side, even more on the other, and by adding a little, that is to say by grafting the whole with a homogeneous and regenerative idea, it would then be possible to make of these still savage systems an organization of work more in the destiny of man, to change the horrible bitterness of the virgin fruit into the sweet flavor of the cultivated fruit.

Proudhon's system tends to suppress all authority, all artificial supremacy, to level all workers, equal but diverse, under the radiation of free and fertile anarchy. Each is his legislator and his God; he exchanges with whom he pleases and in the way he pleases his products, agriculture, industry, arts, sciences, love, friendship, philosophy, in short everything that comes from his heart, his brain, his hand. This is the tendency, I said, and it is certainly good. But the tendency is not enough; all the details must converge towards the goal, the letter must be the corollary of the spirit. And the details describe curves in opposite directions, and the letter is very often in contradiction with elementary thought, so that, in reality, it is rather the restoration than the destruction of the old order of things. The revolutions of Society are preservations of Society, but not preservations of Civilization, which they have the mission to annihilate, under penalty of not being revolutions. Proudhon is as much a conservative, in the bad sense of the word, as a revolutionary in the good sense.

Fourier's system tends to remove the obstacles to production, to raise the workers to the highest degree of wealth, to initiate them into new and innumerable pleasures, to found the era of productive pleasure, of attractive work, to abolish the small and humanicidal family and to make of all Humanity a single and humanitarian family. But this too is only a tendency. Alongside the vivifying spirit is the letter that kills; in Fourier as in Proudhon, the reactionary idea rubs shoulders with the revolutionary idea; the old man is still half in the new man. Saint-Simon, the initiator, had considered the law of human Attraction from the point of view of a great lord; if he had formulated the theory, he would willingly have made of it a monarchy by divine right, a universal theocracy. Fourier, the initiate, saw the thing as a bourgeois, and he made of it a constitutional monarchy, a Voltairean oligarchy. Both of them approached this great discovery only with their authoritarian prejudices, as a great lord and a bourgeois, as I said, and not as a proletarian, so they did not understand it, Fourier announces Harmony; he thunders loudly against Civilization; it even seems that he picks to pulverize it; however he revolutionizes it, that is to say he PRESERVES it; but, alas! He does not REVOLUTIONIZE society. Taken literally, the phalanstery is always bourgeois feudalism, the government of the many by the few, the exploitation of man by man, Civilization, all of Civilization, and nothing but Civilization.

At the present time, Capital is dying and nothing can save it; it can no longer be anything other than nothing. Labor wants to be everything, and it will be. Labor is man; he who works lives, he who idles dies. To labor all rights, and to labor alone all rights. — But what does this third term of the phalansterian trinity want from us, this intruder of the end as Capital is the intruder of the beginning, Talent? If it is Labor, why this mask? and if it is not labor, what is it then? a thief? Does the artist or worker, the painter, the sculptor, who makes a painting, a statue not work? can he show talent without work? — Does the worker or artist, the carpenter, the locksmith who makes a door or ironwork not have talent? can he work without showing talent? — What then does this arbitrary distinction between talent and labor mean? I do not know; unless by Talent we mean, as in Civilization, the work of exploiting without producing, and by Work, the talent of producing while exploited. No more exploitation! No more parasitic mouths! No more sterile arms! Any talent that does not produce is unworthy of living: Make way for Work!

However, we would be very mistaken if we believed that in society as it is organized, it is enough to make the boss disappear for the worker to draw from his work a much greater sum of well-being. By limiting ourselves to this suppression we would only end up with an insignificant improvement. The profits enjoyed by the boss, a large total for a single person, would amount to very little, divided among all, and would hardly change the position of the worker in material

terms; it would still be physical misery. — If tomorrow the black slave frees himself from the planter, will he be free? Alas! no; he will fall back, as a proletarian, under a new whip and a new master; he will have changed his chains for others a little less heavy, that's all. It would be the same for the white slave if he freed himself from the Boss without socializing work; he would only have lengthened his chain a little. — The improvement would be more noticeable in moral terms: the worker would not yet be free, but he would be his master; his social love would not be satisfied, but his hatred would be. The throne of bourgeois exploitation thus burned, would always remain the public thing of work to be organized, the Revolution of Work to be accomplished. Burned thrones are restored when one demolishes only the emblems of royalty, and not the institutions.

Proletariat, it is there, at the organization of work, that the reaction-monster awaits you, to devour you again, and without ceasing, if you do not know how to decipher the enigma.

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