

The Problems of Tomorrow

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1919–1920

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Part I – The Reasons for our “Maximalism”¹

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The old question of *maximalism* and *minimalism* takes on a completely different aspect today than it did a few years ago. Half is due to a lack of faith in the realization of the socialist ideal in a tangible future, and half is for tactical reasons, the socialist parties having previously elaborated minimalistic compromises in the past making them the only real content of their platforms. Against this reformism, against this compromise, rose the anarchists, convinced that nothing can replace the whole ideal and that any fractionation of this necessarily total action can only harm it. And the conflict between these two points of view has filled the whole history of the socialist movement, from the International to the present.

But the situation has now been completely reversed, due to the revolutions that have broken out in the countries of Europe which, only a few years ago, were considered the least susceptible. The clearly social character of these revolutions indicates that the fall of bourgeois domination is no longer a subject of theoretical propaganda or historical predictions: it is tomorrow's reality. In Russia, in Austria, in Germany, the movement involves the great masses; it already terrifies the bourgeoisie of the countries that this contagion has not yet reached. Once again, the question of maximalism and minimalism arises. Among the militants of the socialist and trade unionist movement, some of them welcome with joy all the attempts at economic emancipation and strive to realize them; others stop, hesitating, in front of the enormity of the task to be accomplished and wonder if they will be up to the task; they would like to run away from this responsibility, preferring to choose some other opportune time for the movement. It seems to them that the masses are not yet ready, and they would like to gain even only a few more years to be better prepared. And for that, they may task themselves with giving the movement a calmer course, so that in the meantime they may work toward improvements of the workers' legislative rights within the existing system or for purely corporative struggles.²

In order to choose between these two conflicting points of view, it is not enough to let ourselves be guided by our revolutionary feelings, nor even by our devotion to the ideal. We have to look back to the lessons of History, we have to mitigate our feelings by criticism, we have to go back to the fundamental principles of our doctrine.

In resuming the publication of *Temps Nouveaux*, in the midst of these entirely changed conditions, we must, from the very outset, from our very first issue, give a clear answer to this vital question.³ Our answer to this question will determine our stance on all future events to come.

¹ Ed: Isidine, M. “Les problèmes de demain – I – Les raisons de notre « maximalisme » [The Problems of Tomorrow – I – The Reasons for our “Maximalism”].” *Les Temps nouveaux* [*The New Times*], July 15, 1919.

² Ed: “Corporative” is a term used to refer to a class-collaborationist economic and social system whereby key societal structures, such as banks, are organized into distinct bodies called “corporations” (not to be confused with the term corporation in modern capitalist society). Well after it was first proposed in the nineteenth century, this system was made popular when Benito Mussolini declared it a core plank of fascism.

³ Ed: After *Les Temps Nouveaux* went out of print at the onset of World War I, the paper resumed printing in 1919 under the guidance of Jean Grave, Marc Pierrot, and Marie Goldsmith, and others.

Let us remember our understanding of the process of all great social movements, a conception which is entirely different than that which inspires the parties who divide their objectives into 'immediate' and 'final' objectives.

How have the great movements of emancipation been carried out in the past? The struggle against the existing class order begins only among a small minority, which has acutely felt the oppression — and hopes to end it — more than others. Oppression weighs too heavily on this small minority to wait until enough of those in other social groups manage to free themselves mentally and enter into the struggle. The number of people from other classes who join the ranks of this first wave will not be considerable at first. But the revolutionary minority fights at its own risk and peril without worrying whether it is supported or followed by other classes. However, little by little, it begins to garner broad support; and this can be seen, if not in action, then at least intellectually in other classes. The courageous actions of some diminishes the fear of others; and so the spirit of revolt grows. We do not always understand well the goal pursued by those who revolt, but we do understand what they are fighting against, and this brings them sympathy. Finally, the moment comes when an event, sometimes insignificant in itself — for example, a determined act of violence or something more arbitrary — provokes a revolutionary explosion. The following events are propulsive, new experience is acquired every day, and in the midst of this intense agitation, the mindset of the public shifts greatly. The abyss between social classes narrows.

At the end of the revolutionary period — and this is true whether the revolution is victorious or defeated — the general mentality of the masses is raised to a level which all of the efforts of long years of patient propaganda had not been able to reach beforehand. The ideal of the revolutionary minority may not have been fully realized, but what has been realized (in deed or in mind) comes closer to it, and this all the more so because this minority had put more conviction and intransigence into its revolutionary activity. Whatever was achieved now becomes a piece of its heritage for future generations; the rest will be the duty of the next generation, new avenues to be conquered by new eras inaugurated by the revolution. A revolution is not only the conclusion of the evolutionary period that preceded it: it is also the starting point of the one that will follow, the one that will be devoted precisely to the realization of the ideas that, in the course of previous revolutions, could not find sufficient public support.

Even when a revolution is defeated, the principles it proclaims never perish. Each revolution of the nineteenth century was defeated, but each was a step forward toward a broader victory. The revolution of 1848, which disappointed the hopes of the workers, definitively dug, in the days of June, an abyss between the workers and the republican bourgeoisie; it also stripped socialism of its mystical and religious character and attributed to it a realistic social movement.⁴ The Paris Commune, drowned in blood, undermined the cult of statist centralization and proclaimed the universal principles of autonomy and federalism. And the Russian revolution? Whatever its future destiny, it will have proclaimed the fall of capitalist domination and championed the rights of labor; in a country where the state of oppression of the masses was more conducive to revolt than anywhere else, it proclaimed that it is these very masses who must henceforth be masters

⁴ Ed: The Revolutions of 1848 were a widespread set of European uprisings against monarchies. These revolutions popularized liberal and socialist ideas across the continent.

of their own lives. And whatever the future may hold, nothing can take this idea away from any future struggles: the reign of the contemporary owner classes is virtually over.

It is these general considerations that will dictate the answer to the question: are the conditions ready yet for social revolution?

All debates on the question of whether the masses are “ready” or “not ready” are always tainted with error, whether they are pessimistic or optimistic. We have no way of ascertaining which factors could make a social milieu ready. And besides, how do we define “being ready”? Will we wait until the majority of the population has become socialist? But we know perfectly well that this is impossible under present conditions. If one could bring about by propaganda, by education alone, a radical transformation of the mind, of feelings and sentiments, of the whole mentality of humanity, why should one want a violent revolution, with all its sufferings? At whatever moment in history that one considers it, the mass is never “ready” for the future and it will never become so: a revolutionary event must occur beforehand. It is not in the power of revolutionaries to choose their moment beforehand, to prepare everything and to make the revolution explode according to their will, like fireworks.

Those who always consider the great movements premature generally support the point of view that the certain “objective historical conditions” are essential: i.e., the degree of capitalist evolution, the state of industry, the development of productive forms, etc... But they do not see that these dogmas evaporate before their eyes — as have their minimum programs — under the pressure of real life. The most convinced Marxists are now obliged to recognize the fact that the social revolution has begun, not in a country of advanced capitalism, but in a country that was very backward from this point of view and that is especially agricultural, and that, consequently, there are other factors at play for revolution than the development of productive forces. Moreover, if they really wanted to penetrate a little further into the substance of the question, they could have drawn this conclusion from Marxism itself, thus transforming it into its opposite: into a theory of active progression, achieved by the efforts of individual members of society. To corroborate this, we can find, in Marx, a precious sentence: “Humanity only ever asks itself riddles that it can solve.”⁵ In other words, if an ideal is conceived within a community, it is only because the necessary conditions for its realization are present. Continuing this train of thought, we will say that from this moment, from the moment when an ideal is formulated by the minority of the vanguard, its realization is only a question of the relationship between the forces at play: the past, which has achieved its task, and the inevitable future. Gradually, at the price of painful struggles and of innumerable sacrifices, the scale leans toward the future.

At present, after a centuries-long secular struggle for economic equality, after centuries-long secular propaganda of socialist ideas, we are now witnessing a bold attempt to achieve it. Our progress will still have its setbacks both in its struggle against the enemies and within our inner evolution, and we should not think that we will find ourselves tomorrow in an anarchist society such as we conceive it. However, we cannot achieve a better life without actively trying to reach it; experience is the only way forward, there is no other way. Instead of asking ourselves: are the

⁵ Ed: This partial quote comes from the preface of Karl Marx’s *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859). The full quote concludes “...since closer examination will always show that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution are already present or at least in the course of formation.”

conditions ripe? Are the masses ready? We should rather ask: *are we ready ourselves?* What practical measures can we propose in the aftermath of victory, for the realization of *our* socialism, of communism organizing itself without the help of, and against, any State interference? What are the measures that should be developed, and under what conditions should be studied beforehand and implemented?" This should be our greatest preoccupation; what we must do is not to fear being overtaken by events, but to actively prepare ourselves for them now, always remembering the truth that an ideal is realizable only to the extent that people believe in its possibility and devote their energy to it.

Part II – The Dictatorship of the Proletariat^{1,2}

November 15, 1919

The realization of socialism has left the realm of dreams and theoretical propaganda; it has become nearer to us, it has become an urgent problem. And if it is important to answer the question of the methods that lead to this realization, and that are the most suitable to assure its victory, it is even more important to have a clear idea of what must be done immediately *after* victory so that the revolution brings the greatest amount of happiness with the least amount of suffering possible.

The idea of the “dictatorship of the proletariat” currently has a great influence on people’s minds. It appears to mean that the workers are now masters of social life, masters of their own destiny, without any exploiters or oppressors above them. It seems to be the direct and immediate realization of socialism. In France especially, where the labor movement has not yet been penetrated by Marxist theory and jargon, this formula leads to misunderstanding. It contains, within itself, a contradiction: a dictatorship “is always the unlimited power” of a single or small group; what can the dictatorship of a class be? It is obvious that a class cannot exercise its authority but through its representatives, through someone it has specifically delegated, or, more simply stated, someone that it believes has the right to act in its interest. In short, a new power is established, the power of the socialist party or of its most influential factions, and this power then takes charge of regulating and legislating the destiny of the working class. And this is not an abuse or a re-interpretation of the concept of a “dictatorship of the proletariat”; it is in fact its very essence. It is completely derived from Marxist theory, from the way that this theory conceives the evolution of society. Let us summarize it in a few words.

By definition, political power lies in the hands of the economically dominant class. The bourgeoisie, after having replaced the feudalists economically, have also taken their place politically, at least in the most industrialized countries of Europe and America. Since then, the entire political activity of the bourgeois class has been aimed at safeguarding its interests and consolidating its domination. But now, in the course of economic evolution, the proletariat is taking the place of the bourgeoisie as the class most capable of assuring the development of productive forces; from this point of view alone, political power must also be returned to them. This new State, the State of the proletariat, will henceforth be concerned only with the interests of this specific class, which will in turn become the dominant class. This is the *dictatorship of the proletariat*. A natural objection therefore arises: the dominated class supersedes the dominant class; now, the economic exploitation abolished by elevating the previously most exploited classes brings into existence more strife. Thereafter, new class struggles emerge since previously conceived classes become a thing of the past – and so the cycle continues endlessly. This cyclical contradiction is solved partly thanks to the Marxist conception of the way in which a socialist transformation can

¹ See the first issue.

² Ed: Isidine, M. “Les problèmes de demain – II – La Dictature du Proletariat [The Problems of Tomorrow – II – The Dictatorship of the Proletariat].” *Les Temps nouveaux* [*The New Times*], November 15, 1919.

be carried out. It begins with the seizure of power by a socialist party; but what does a socialist government do next?

Marxist literature does not abound in future projects: social democrats are too utopia-phobic for that. But the little we know about them is enough for us to understand that socialism will have to be realized gradually, during entire historical epochs. During this period, classes will not have ceased to exist, and capitalist exploitation will not have ended: it will only be attenuated and softened with regard *to the needs of the proletariat*. They then become the class protected by the State, while the circumstances of the bourgeoisie are made increasingly more difficult. And so now here we are, at the dawn of Marxism, and Marx himself, where the *Communist Manifesto* enumerates these gradual measures that the socialist government will have to adopt:

1. Expropriation of landed property and confiscation of land rent for the benefit of the state.
2. Highly progressive taxation.
3. Abolition of inheritance.
4. Confiscation of the property of all emigrants and rebels.
5. Centralization of credit in the hands of the State by means of a national bank with State capital with exclusive monopoly.
6. Centralization, in the hands of the State, of all the means of transportation.
7. Increase of the national factories and of the instruments of production, clearing of the uncultivated lands and improvement of cultivated lands.
8. Compulsory work for all, organization of industrial armies, particularly for agriculture.
9. Combination of agricultural and industrial work.
10. Free public education for all children, abolition of child labor in factories.

The application of this program will be done in a peaceful or violent way, according to the circumstances, but in any case it will be done with the help of strong political power. Defining political power as “the organized power of one class for the oppression of another,” Marxism thus envisages, as its ultimate goal, a society that is only an “association of men” without any power. It is indeed a march toward anarchy, but by way of its opposite, an all-powerful State.

Fifty years later, Kautsky, in *The Social Revolution*, proclaims that “the conquest of political power by a hitherto oppressed class, that is to say, the *political revolution*, constitutes the essential nature of the *social revolution*.”³ He then indicates a series of legislative measures intended to operate little by little, with or without financial compensation, the “expropriation of the expropriators”: progressive taxation on large incomes and fortunes, measures against unemployment, the nationalization of transportation and of large landed property, etc.

³ Ed: Karl Kautsky (1854 – 1938) was a leading orthodox Marxist philosopher and politician who was a steadfast proponent of social democracy. He spent most of his life in Germany and was a friend of Friedrich Engels. Kautsky opposed the Bolshevik revolution in Russia which rendered him a rhetorical target of figures such as Vladimir Lenin (The Editors, “Karl Kautsky”).

What is the possible regime of this “dictatorship of the proletariat”? A State stronger than it ever was, because it holds in its hands the whole economic life of the country; it is the master of everything and can literally deprive every citizen of their livelihood at any given moment. As a means of fighting any opposition, it is very effective. The workers are the employees of the State; and it is therefore against it that they must assert their rights. The struggle against this gigantic employer becomes very intense; strikes quickly turn into political crimes. A workers’ control council could be created, but it will only be exercised to the extent that the employing State will allow it. It is however possible that the workers could enjoy other advantages of a political nature from this situation, such as the exclusive right to vote, for example, or in being privileged in the distribution of products. But, if we reflect carefully on it, these advantages do not constitute any progress because they do not bring any justice into society and only serve to give rise to more hatred. Instead of abolishing the bourgeoisie *as a class* and placing each member of the bourgeoisie in a situation where they could and should provide useful work, they are allowed (even if only “temporarily”) to live off the work of others, but are also furthermore punished by being deprived of certain things to which they are entitled as human beings.

The bourgeoisie must be put into a situation where it is impossible for them to harm; the class must be deprived of its armed forces and of everything that constitutes its economic domination. Repressive measures which target only individual members of the bourgeoisie are a useless means of revenge. It is also a dangerous slope: we think that we are doing revolutionary work, but instead, we are contributing nothing toward the construction of a new life. Furthermore: this civil war against the internal enemy, against an evil that we have neglected to entirely uproot, increases the prestige of the militaristic elements of society, of the leaders of military brigades of all factions that dominate both sides. The struggle therefore becomes uniquely a question of military strength. And in all evidence, any and all construction of our future finds itself postponed to calmer times. But we are missing the opportunity, the people are getting tired, and the danger of reaction increases...

That is why, regarding the method of implementation, we propose a different method in opposition to this view towards the realization of socialism.

The opposition between these two points of view dates from the early days of the International, from the dispute between Marx and Bakunin. It was Bakunin who first proclaimed in his “The Policy of the International” that true socialism differs from “bourgeois socialism” in that the former affirms that the revolution must be an “immediate and direct implementation concerning the entirety of all aspects of social life,” while the latter affirms that “the political transformation must precede the economic transformation.”⁴ The tendency that continued the tradition of the first Federalist International — our tendency — developed and clarified this idea of a direct economic revolution in the years that were to follow. First in *Le Révolté*, then in *La Révolte*, Kropotkin showed by historical examples that the progress of humanity is due to the spontaneous activity of the people and not because of the action of the State; and, at the same time, he developed the program of free communism, the principle “to each according to his needs,” which is the only one

⁴ Ed: This article was published in the newspaper *L'Égalité* in 1869.

that is compatible with a stateless society.⁵ He also showed that the economic revolution cannot be realized *little by little* and by fragments, and that one would thus only end up disrupting the economic life without allowing space to rebuild it on new foundations; that the communist distribution must be, in the interest of the revolution, inaugurated immediately after a victory. He juxtaposed his “Conquest of Bread” against the other idea of “Complete Power” and showed the necessity, for the socialists, to actively look for new avenues outside the tired old formulas.

The anarchist movement as a whole was inspired by these fundamental ideas. Their field of action was especially expanded from the moment when the workers’ movement in France, slowed down after the fall of the Commune, started to breathe the revolutionary spirit once again. First, under the influence of F. Pelloutier, and then consequently with the numerous anarchists who entered the unions, was born the great movement of revolutionary syndicalism, which, during the first ten years of the twentieth century, carried within it the seeds of all of the hopes for workers’ emancipation.⁶ Syndicalism has already accepted the idea of the immediate takeover of the means of production, and, even more, has made it more precise: the means by which they are to be realized already exist, they are the unions. The general strike, the prelude of revolutionary expropriation, became the final goal. Let us recall that in this respect its preparation seemed at a given moment a work so important and so urgent that the *Voix du Peuple* opened (around 1902, if I am not mistaken) a specific section in which the unions were invited to indicate what each one of them could do in the immediate days after victory to assure the continuity of the production in their respective fields, to establish relationships with other unions and consumers, etc., etc. This initiative, which did not seem to have found sufficient popularity, was nonetheless very important; even more important would be the task of taking it up again now that we are closer to practical achievements.

Thus was, from that time until the war, the fundamental character of revolutionary syndicalism. From France, it spread to other countries, to other international workers’ movements. Anarcho-syndicalist ideas penetrated into the writings of sociologists, jurists, economists; even scholars foreign to the labor movement began to find that the renovation of economic life with, as its foundation, a free association of producers, is perhaps not utopian, that it is perhaps in this way that capitalism will be overthrown and that a new form of political existence will be inaugurated in the State.

The war stopped this evolution and made the course of things deviate toward another direction. The State suddenly became stronger, its competence expanded; the workers’ organizations, on the contrary, slowed down their struggles or directed them, because of practical difficulties, toward more immediate achievements. The reformist tendency became preponderant.

The revolutionary spirit reappeared in the world with the Russian revolution, but in a different form: that of State Socialism.

The time has not yet come to draw definitive conclusions from the communist experiment tried in Russia; we do not know many things and it is difficult for us to evaluate the role of the

⁵ Ed: “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.” This slogan (and variations thereof) has been closely associated with socialism and communism since the first half of the nineteenth century. Although it rose to prominence following Karl Marx’s use of the phrase in the 1870s, its connection to the socialist movement is much broader and more historical.

⁶ Ed: Fernand Pelloutier (1867 – 1901) was a French Marxist labor organizer who turned to anarchism in the 1890s. According to the anarchist Marc Pierrot, Goldsmith’s radical student group, the ESRI, was friendly with Pelloutier (Pierrot, “Marie Goldsmith”).

different factors in its successes and failures. But what we can say is this: what we know does not affect our fundamental point of view. We do not intend to develop here all the arguments that make us believe that the governmental apparatus is unfit to carry out a social revolution, that only the action of the workers' groups, which have become in turn producer groups, are solely able to accomplish such tasks. This demonstration has been made in our literature many times. But we believe it useful to recall the general conclusions.

We think, as we have always thought, that immediately taking possession of the land and the instruments of production and the management of the economic life by peasant and worker organizations is more likely to assure the material well-being of Society than will State decrees.

We think that this mode of social and political transformation is better suited to mitigate conflict and avoid civil war because it includes greater freedom and greater varieties of organization than the simple introduction by authority of some unitary reform.

We think that the direct participation of the population in the construction of new economic forms makes the victories of the revolution more stable and better ensures their endurance.

We think, finally, that in addition to economic and political conquests, a higher stage of civilization has been prepared from both the intellectual and moral perspectives.

The French workers possess a sufficient heritage of ideas and experience of struggle to find the path that leads most directly toward total emancipation. To proclaim the fall of capitalism and the reign of socialism is a great thing, and we give credit for this to the socialist government of Russia. But we also want socialism to be put into practice, we want a new era to open up before humanity, and we want no weapons to be provided to the reactionaries through the faults of the socialists. For this reason, we who work in France must take advantage of the moment when there is still time *to prepare* ourselves by studying what the workers' organizations can and must do "the day after" the revolution.

We consider of the utmost importance the most serious and complete discussion of all questions concerning the reorganization of the economy toward the moment when the workers will finally be able to make themselves masters of their own destinies. This is not a mere question of debate, nor even of propaganda; it is rather a question of careful study. It is no longer enough to say that such and such an order of things is desirable, nor even to demonstrate it: it is now necessary to indicate the practical measures which are *immediately* realizable with the means we presently have at our disposal.

It is to this undertaking to which we now call upon our comrades.

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Part III – Some Economic Milestones^{1,2}

April 15, 1920

The future forms that the production and distribution of products will take are of the utmost significance concerning our future projections: upon these will be founded the entire nature of the society that replaces the capitalist regime. This question did not suddenly appear yesterday, but its solution has become urgent; and furthermore, the experience of the Russian revolution provides us with useful indications, sometimes confirming, sometimes reversing certain conceptions that were formulated in the past in a completely theoretical way.

To solve these questions in a concrete form, that is to say, to elaborate a *plan* of economic organization for “tomorrow,” to indicate the frameworks and institutions to be created for its realization, is a task that goes far beyond the competence not only of the author of this article, but also of a publication like *Les Temps Nouveaux*. This is the work of specialists: workers, technicians of all kinds, directly involved in production; only their professional organizations and their colleagues can discuss, in full knowledge of the facts, the concrete measures to be taken in the present as in the future.

But every socialist, and every group of propagandists, has not only the right, but the duty to establish for themselves and for their comrades an idea toward a general point of view, to reflect on the experience that is unfolding before our eyes, and to draw certain general lines according to which they would like to see the more competent thought of the specialists work. It is considerations of this kind that will be dealt with in the present article.

Of the existing conceptions of the mode of organization of production in socialist societies, *nationalization* is the most accessible and widely accepted. The passage of the means of production to an egalitarian society is conceived in the programs of all the Statist socialist parties as their handing-over to the State, because society is, by their definition, represented by the State. No matter what form it takes, whether parliamentary, Soviet, or in other forms, it is always this centralized organization that holds political power that is also the master of natural resources, the means of production, and the means of product distribution.

We can clearly see to what degree the State finds itself strengthened by all of this. In addition to political power, it now controls every facet of life. The dependence of each citizen upon it reaches its zenith. The boss-State is a particularly authoritarian boss: and like any boss, it wants to be a complete master of its business and tolerates the interference of workers only when it is absolutely impossible to avoid it. In the economic domain, the State won't even tolerate the idea of being a constitutional monarchy: it will always tend toward autocracy. The concept of Jaurès: that

¹ See issues 1 and 5.

² Ed: Isidine, M. “Les problèmes de demain – III – Quelques jalons d'ordre économique [The Problems of Tomorrow – III – Some Economic Milestones].” *Les Temps nouveaux* [*The New Times*], April 15, 1920.

of the gradual democratization, by means of the State, of the economic regime, analogous to the political democratization accomplished in the past, now more than ever appears to be a utopia.³ In the capitalist regime, the workers and employees of the State are the most dependent of all, and on the opposite pole of the social organization, in the collectivist regime of the Bolsheviks, it is the same: the workers lose little by little both the right of control and their factory Committees and even their great means of struggle: the right to strike. And as a crowning achievement, it is the mobilization of labor, “armies” of workers governed by a militaristic discipline. And this is fatal: no power ever restricts itself if nothing forces it to do so; and when the people in power pursue an idea, when they are convinced that it can only be achieved by coercion, they will show themselves to be even more intractable, more absolute in their right to dispose of the existence of its citizens.

It is generally the need to increase production that justifies the suppression of all individual and collective rights of the workers. This is how the Bolshevik power explains the creation of its compulsory labor armies. However, apart from any question of principle, the mere consideration of just the expenses — both in terms of human forces and in money — that any such massive bureaucracy requires, which is a necessary condition of such a vast extension of the power of the State, shows that this calculation is erroneous. In Russia, bureaucratic administration of factories absorbs most of their income, not to mention the number of workers it takes away from other more useful work. And the desired result is far from being achieved. The boss-State is ill-equipped to fight against this decrease in labor productivity which necessarily follows great catastrophes, such as war, famine, lack of necessities, etc., etc. Additionally, the socialist powers of the Bolsheviks are not able to find other means to fight against this issue other than with measures that have always been known, and against which workers and socialists of all countries have always resisted: piecework wages, the bonus system, the Taylor system, etc...⁴ Thus everywhere hourly work is replaced by piecework, the twelve-hour day replaces the eight-hour day, the age of compulsory work is lowered from sixteen to fourteen. And, finally, this mobilization of work (a measure of which a few years ago, no socialist party would have been believed capable of implementing) which reminds us well of the times of serfdom...

If socialists, who certainly do not aim at the degradation of workers’ personality and take such measures only as a last resort, are obliged to go so far against all their ideals, it should only be because within the limits of their choices, which has for framework and for a tool exclusively the benefit of the State, no other way out exists. And yet here is a fact, small in itself, but significant. In the course of the very opinionated struggle of the Soviet government against the disorganization of industry, only one measure was taken which proved to be effective. It is *voluntary work on Saturdays*.

“The Communist Party has made voluntary Saturday work mandatory for its members ... Every Saturday, in various regions of the Soviet Republic, barges and fuel wagons are unloaded, railroads repaired, wheat, fuel, and other goods for the population and the war front are loaded, wagons and locomotives repaired, etc. Gradually the great mass of workers and peasants began

³ Ed: Jean Jaurès (1859 – 1914) was a French social democrat and anti-militarist who was known as a significant thinker and orator. He was assassinated in 1914 because his anti-war position was seen as capitulation to the Germans.

⁴ Ed: “Scientific management,” also known as Taylorism, is the system proposed by the engineer Frederick Winslow Taylor in 1909 in his book, *The Principles of Scientific Management*. This system was meant to bureaucratize the workplace to promote efficiency and to “control alienated labor” (Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, 62).

to join the ‘Saturday workers,’ to help the Soviet power, to contribute with their voluntary work to fight the cold, hunger and general economic disorganization.”⁵ From other sources we learn that the productivity of voluntary work far exceeds that of paid factory work. There is no need to say how instructive this example is. In the midst of all the measures by which workers were sometimes attracted by high wages, according to the traditional principle of the capitalist regime, and sometimes subjected to military discipline, only one has proved effective: it is the call to work — free and conscious work by people who know that they are doing something useful. This is a striking example in support of the truth that the most “utopian” solutions are at the same time the most practical, and that if we want to obtain “realizations” today, the surest way is still to start from the final goal.

But these considerations proceed from a mindset foreign to the idea of the State and obligatory work in its service.

Here is another formula, at first sight more seductive. It is the transfer of businesses into the hands of the workers or of their corresponding professional organizations. This is the system which, in France, is expressed by the formula “the mines to the miners.” During the first year of the Russian revolution, even before the Bolsheviks came to power, there were a number of such examples of the workers taking over their factories. This was easy for them (the workers), because the bosses, during that time, wanted nothing better than to abandon their businesses. Later, the Bolsheviks introduced “workers’ control” in all factories; but this control was only momentary and had no practical effect: where the workers were weak and poorly organized, it remained an unrespected moot point; and where the workers were aware of their rights, they said to themselves — quite logically — that if they already had control of the factories, they had no further need to leave them to their former owners. And so they took it over, declaring it the property of those who work there. But it was always the property of a group of people who merely replaced the original bourgeois owner. This could only result in a production cooperative in the best of circumstances. The collective owners were concerned — like the previous ones — solely with their own interests; like the others, they competed against one another in order to attract contracts from the State, etc. Egoism and the thirst for gain, to be the characteristic of any of these groups, new or old, were no less strong.

Another consideration, a practical one, makes it impossible to extend such a system to the entirety of society. There are businesses which receive large profits: those which produce widely spread goods, or are in the business of transporting said goods; the workers who are employed in them and who become their owners are, in this context, privileged. But there are many sectors of the economy which give no profit at all, requiring instead continuous expenditures: schools, hospitals, road maintenance, street cleaning, etc., etc. What will be the yields of those who are employed in these fields of work? How will they be able to live if these businesses become the source of their livelihood? With what means will they be able to operate them and who will pay their wages? Obviously, the principle of cooperative ownership must be modified as far as they are concerned. We can imagine, it is true that it will be the consumers who will pay; but this would be a step backwards instead of being considered a progress, because one of the best results of economic evolution is the free access to certain historical conquests of civilization: hospitals, schools, bridges, roads, water pipes, water wells, among others. To ask people to pay for them

⁵ Official organ of the Bolshevik Government *Economitches kaïa Jiza* (Vie économique), no. 213 (cited in *Pour la Russie*, no. 10, article by Kerensky).

would be to add some new privileges to those that are already well possessed, and to take away the means of meeting the most essential needs from everyone else.

All these considerations — and many others — make such a system undesirable. In the current context — to which we are always obliged to refer to as if it were the only socialist experience that has ever been created so far — the disadvantages of this system, introduced at the beginning of the Bolshevik period, have led the Soviet government to adopt, as the only possible remedy, nationalization.

We should have, it is true, explored for a third solution: a system that could give workers direct control of their economic lives, without the inconveniences of cooperative property. The Bolsheviks, however, were too imbued with social democratic and statist ideas which suggested to them only the well-known system of nationalization. And it is there that they ended their revolution.

Let us try then, for our part, to find this third way out: a system which would give the workers the management of economic life, but without the disadvantages of corporate ownership. And, first of all, let's go back to our fundamental principles: our communism, true communism, and not that already outdated communism of 1848 that the Bolsheviks have recently rediscovered and adopted as the name of their party to replace the other name, too dishonored by compromises, of "social democrats."⁶ Let us try then, in the light of these principles, to orient ourselves a little in the questions that arise.

If we recognize neither nationalization in the hands of the State, nor the formula "the mines to the miners," what alternate forms can the transfer of the means of production to the hands of workers' organizations (unions, summits, factory committees, or such others) take?

First of all, the means of production cannot become the *property* of these organizations: they must only have the *functional use* of them. The wind or the water that turns the wings or the wheels of a mill are not the property of anyone; they are simply harnessed for the purposes of production. In the same vein, the earth should not be the property of anyone; one who cultivates it *uses it*, but it belongs to the whole community — that is, to no one in particular. Likewise, the instruments of labor made by the hands of workers: they are a collective wealth, a common property, *used* by those who need to use them at any given moment for any given task. This being accepted, how can we then imagine: first, the future organization of production, and then that of distribution?

It is obvious that only the whole of the professional organizations concerning any branch of production can plan their production; these professional organizations will include both the workers themselves and the more learned specialists — engineers, chemists, etc. Each branch of production is closely linked, on the one hand, with those who supply it with raw materials, and on the other hand, with the organizations or the public who consume its products. And since in these types of relationships the most critical role is the understanding of all needs and

⁶ Ed: Goldsmith alludes to the fact that the Bolsheviks, once a part of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, rebranded themselves as the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1918.

possibilities, there must be groups or Committees that will be able to concentrate, compile, and manage all the necessary statistical information. Their role must be strictly limited to that of suppliers of statistical input; the subsequent use of this material would no longer be their concern in the future. They would not be able to issue any decree; those decisions belong exclusively to the larger professional associations. The opinions of these statistical Committees would be of no more coercive a nature than the indications given by an architect, the advice of a hygienist, or that of a pedagogue, etc.

As for the various branches of production, their modes of organization can vary greatly according to the technical particularities of each association: some can accept complete autonomy of their constituent groups, while others can exact perfectly coordinated action. All that is to be desired is that there should be, in each specialty, not just one central organization that governs *everything*, but a large number of *specialized* organizations, each with well-defined tasks. We cannot, of course, foresee the various ways in which this style of organizing work may be envisioned in future contexts. However, adapting it to the needs of the moment may not be an excessively difficult task.

But there are much thornier questions which require continuous innovation because nothing like this has ever been attempted before. Who will be the *owner* of these means of production, which the professional organizations will manage, and of the objects produced — that is to say, of all collective wealth? If not the State, if not the corporations, then who? What does the sentence: “The means of production belong to the community” *concretely* represent? Who will represent these communities? Who and by what right will they dispose of the products? To whom will the profits of these sales be given? Who will pay the wages?

It is in these questions that it is necessary to fully develop our communist idea, our great principle “from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs,” and to draw all its subsequent consequences.

Who will dispose of the products of these works? These products must constitute a common wealth available to each person for his or her own consumption, either if they are objects of immediate consumption, or if they belong to the professional organizations that use these products (if they are raw materials or instruments of work). Individuals or organizations can draw upon these stocks to the extent of their needs and, in the case of insufficient quantities, after reaching a fair agreement with other interested consumers or organizations. No one *actually* owns these products other than the workers themselves who will be responsible for fulfilling any orders.

In the same way, the question arises: who will profit from the sales? There is no issue here, because there is actually no sale, because the products are not commodities, but simply objects of consumption, equally accessible to all. Communism does not recognize the distinction between objects of consumption — *private* property and the means of production — and *collective* property. It does not even recognize a difference in configuration between them; coal, for example, where would it be classified? It is an indispensable element of production, and yet it is also one of the most necessary objects of individual consumption. The tendency of communism is to make all objects free. Everyone will agree that housing, food, necessary clothing, heating, etc., must be made available to everyone in the same way as medical aid or street lighting, which even today’s capitalist society provides. Every human being has the right to these basic necessities by the mere

fact of their existence, and no one has the right to deprive them. The individual's share of this social consumption can be determined by many factors, individual and/or social: first of all, by the needs of each person, and for everything that is in excess of that: alas!

In today's Europe, instead of an abundance of products, there is rather a scarcity, and this will force us to be better prepared for future needs. A necessary minimum (calculated as much as possible on some kind of average consumption), will be to establish and to organize fair distribution of needs based on common agreement. Rations can and should be different for different categories of people. To establish these categories, it is again on the differences of needs that there must be discretion; there will be taken into account: the age, the state of health, their ability to defend themselves, etc... Many considerations will have to be taken into account, moreover and especially in the distribution of the products: the needs of the community, the need to make reserves for the future and to keep a certain quantity of products for any potential exchanges with other communities, etc., etc. There is only one factor that we refuse to introduce into these calculations: it is the sum of work spent by each individual.

Here we can foresee the protests coming. The spectacle of *today's* society, where those who produce the least consume the most, revolts our sense of justice and makes us declare immediately: to each person the fruits of their labor and to each proportionally according to the labor provided.

But, in spite of this seemingly natural progression of thinking, we think that it is not on this principle — however legitimate it may seem in contrast to the flagrant injustices of our time — that the society of the future must be founded. The revenge that the people may exercise against their oppressors at the time of the revolution is perhaps historically just, but it is not upon this revenge that the future reign of the people can be founded after victory: it is rather on the principle of human solidarity. Likewise in questions of land and resource distribution.

And we should not be told that the bourgeoisie must first be repressed and that the victory of the working class must first lead to a mode of distribution that places labor at the proper position it deserves. The class struggle *ends* with the workers' victory and the distinction between workers and parasites no longer exists. With the possibility of free work in a free society being provided to everyone, the number of those who refuse it will be so small that it will not justify the creation of a new class of parasites in the form of an invasive bureaucracy, and in the next generation the traces of this old parasitism will have disappeared.

To give to each one in proportion to their work is, if you like, a just principle; but it is a justice of a lower order, such as, for instance, the idea of rewarding merit and punishing vice. We shall not dwell upon all the philosophical and practical reasons which lead us to reject this stance. What could we possibly add, moreover, to the arguments that Kropotkin provided when he laid the foundations of communist anarchism?⁷ Let us only say — for those comrades who are unaware of it — that at the other edge of socialist thought, Marx agreed with him, saying that “the narrow horizon of bourgeois law will only be overcome” when the remuneration of work has given way to the distribution of the tiller according to the needs of each individual.⁸ We want to go beyond bourgeois law and bourgeois justice. Every human has a right to existence by the mere fact that they are human. Then, and also because they are human beings living in society,

⁷ Ed: For further elaboration from Marie Goldsmith on Kropotkin's ideas of anarchist communism, see “Kropotkin's Communism,” translated in *Black Flag* Vol. 2 No. 3 (2022).

⁸ K. Marx, “Critique of the Gotha Program.”

they will apply themselves to bring their share of work to the common treasure. This is the only possible guarantee against any further exploitation and against endless conflicts.

We therefore reject the very idea of a *wage* lifestyle; we differentiate the two questions: that of production and that of consumption, leaving between them only the link which results from the fact that the total quantity of manufactured products must be regulated according to the needs of consumption. This is the only order of things compatible with a system in which professional organizations can *manage* production without needing to *own* the instruments of labor. It is also the only one compatible with a free society, free from the coercive power of a State.

We do not believe, of course, that the very day after the next revolution, all of this will work out so well: without conflicts, without mixing with our past bourgeois elements. We know that it is highly unlikely that this complete and pure communism can be achieved at once. But we also know that that is only by being inspired that any future advancements can be made. And that is why it seems so important to us, so infinitely desirable, that it is in this spirit that the milestones of the future are laid.

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Marie Goldsmith Project

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Ed: Marie Goldsmith frequently wrote under pseudonyms. M. Isidine, or sometimes simply Isidine, was a common choice for the French anarchist press, along with M. Korn or M. Corn.

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