

# **The Issues of Tomorrow**

Marie Isidine

July 1919

# Contents

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Part 1: The reasons for our “maximalism” . . . . .    | 3 |
| Part 2: The Dictatorship of the Proletariat . . . . . | 5 |
| Part 3: Some milestones in economy . . . . .          | 8 |

## **Part 1: The reasons for our “maximalism”**

The old issue of maximalism and minimalism takes on nowadays a completely different aspect than the one it had a few years ago. Partly because of a lack of faith in the realisation of the socialist ideal in a conceivable future, partly for tactical reasons, the socialist parties had then elaborated minimum programmes, and had finally made them the only real content of their everyday action. The anarchists rose up against this reformism and this possibilism, convinced that nothing could replace action towards the whole ideal and that any breaking down of this action could only be harmful. And the conflict between those two views filled the whole history of the socialist movement, from the International to our time.

But now the situation has dramatically changed, because of the revolutions which have broken out in European countries which, only a few years ago, were the most backward. The distinctly 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, Austria, and Germany, the movement drags the great masses; it already makes the bourgeoisie shiver in countries which have not yet been contaminated. Once again, the issue of maximalism and minimalism is raised. Among the militants of the socialist and syndicalist movements, some welcome with joy any attempts at economic emancipation and work to make them spread; others stop, hesitatingly, in front of the hugeness of the task at hand and wonder whether they will be equal to the task; they would like to avoid this responsibility, or even choose a favourable time for the mass movement. They think the masses are not ready, and they would like to gain time, if only a couple of years more, to prepare them, and in order to do so, they need to give the movement a quieter course, to give it as an objective some perfecting of workers' rights or simple corporatist demands.

In order to choose between these two opposite views, it is not enough to let ourselves be guided by our revolutionary sentiment, or even by our devotion to our ideal. We must look for the teachings from history, we must rein in our feelings by critique, we must reach back to the fundamental principles of our doctrine.

As we start publishing *Les Temps Nouveaux* again, in these completely new conditions, we must, from the start, from our first issue, give a clear answer to this vital question. On this answer depends our attitude towards future events.

Let's remind ourselves of our conception of the march of great social movements, a conception which is entirely different from the one which inspires the parties which divide their objectives between a final goal and immediate goals.

How did the great emancipatory movement unfurl in the past? The fight against the existing class order first only starts among a small minority whose circumstances made them feel both their oppression and the hope to put an end to it – more than among the great masses. Among the masses, oppression is too heavy for the number of them who manage to free themselves mentally to be, at first, consequent. But the revolutionary minority fights at its own risks, without wondering about whether others are following. Little by little, it starts to grow; it can be seen, if not in facts, at least in spirit. The brave struggle of some diminishes the fear of others; the spirit of revolt grows. We don't always understand clearly what is the goal of people in revolt, but we understand against what they are fighting, and this elicits sympathy for them. Then the moment arrives at last when an event, sometimes insignificant in itself, a flagrant act of violence or arbitrary power, sparks the revolutionary explosion. Events are precipitated, new experience

is had every day, among the intense agitation of minds, ideas develop in leaps and bounds among the masses. The gap between the mass and the revolutionary minority shrinks.

After the revolutionary period – whether the revolution be victorious or crushed – the general mentality has reached such a level which had never been reached by long years of patient propaganda efforts. The revolutionary minority's ideal is not fully realised, but what is realised (either in facts or in people's minds) is getting closer, the more conviction and the less compromise this minority had expressed in its action. What has been realised is part of its programme; what is left will be the inheritance of the new generation, the watchword of the new era opened by the revolution. Because a revolution is not only the conclusion of a preceding evolution, it is also the starting point of the following evolution which will precisely be concerned with the realisation of the ideas which, during the revolution, have not found a wide enough resonance.

Even when a revolution is vanquished, the principles it has put forward never die. Every revolution in the 19<sup>th</sup> century has been defeated, but each one of them has been a step closer to victory. The 1848 revolution, which betrayed workers' hopes, definitely dug, in the Days of June, an abyss between workers and the republican bourgeoisie; it also took away the mystical and religious character of socialism and linked it to the actual social movement. The Paris Commune, drowned in blood, blew away the cult of state centralisation and proclaimed the principles of autonomy and federalism. What about the Russian revolution? Whatever the future holds, it will have proclaimed the fall of capitalist domination and the rights of labour; in a country where the oppression on the masses was more revolting than anywhere else, it proclaimed that it is those masses who must now be master of their lives. And whatever the future, nothing will take away this idea from future struggles: the reign of the owning classes has virtually ended.

These general considerations will dictate the answer to the question: do we meet the conditions for social revolution? Every discussion about knowing whether the mass is "ready" or "not yet ready" is always misguided, whether it is pessimistic or optimistic. We have no way to evaluate every factor which determines that a social group is ready. What do we call "being ready"? Would we wait for most people to have become socialists? But we fully know that is impossible in our present condition. If we could create a radical transformation of concepts, feelings and of the whole mentality among the masses by propaganda and education alone, why want a violent revolution, with all its suffering? At any given time, the mass is never "ready" for the future and will never be: a revolutionary uprising will have happened sooner. Revolutionaries don't have the power to choose their time, to prepare everything and spark the revolution at will, like lighting fireworks.

People who always consider large movements premature usually use the grid of the realisation of some "objective historical conditions": the degree of capitalist development, state of the industry, development of the productive forces, etc. But they do not see these dogmas crumble before their eyes – just like their minimum programmes crumbled – under the pressure of life. The most confident Marxists have to admit that the social revolution started not in a country where capitalism was advanced, but in a mostly agrarian country where it was poorly developed, and that, consequently, there are other factors at stake than the development of productive forces. And if they had wished to study this issue further, they could have drawn this conclusion from Marxism itself, turning it into its opposite: into a theory of active progress, realised by the efforts of individuals. There is, in Marx, a precious quote: "Mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve"<sup>1</sup> In other words, if an ideal is conceived among a community, it is that the necessary conditions to its realisation are there. Following this idea, we will say that from that

moment on, from the moment an ideal is formulated by the vanguard minority, its realisation is only a question of a balance of strength between present forces: the past, which has had its time, and an inescapable future. Gradually, at the cost of hard struggle and innumerable sacrifices, the balance tilts towards the future. At present, after a century-old struggle for economic equality, after a century of socialist propaganda, we are witnessing a large-scale attempt at its realisation. It will still know some setbacks, backtracking, both in its fight against its enemies and in its internal development, and we shouldn't believe that we will find ourselves tomorrow in the anarchist society we wish for. But we can only reach a better life if we try to get it; experiment is the only way which leads to it, and there is no other. Instead of asking: are the conditions ripe? Are the masses ready? We should ask: are we ready? What can we offer as concrete, practical measures "the day after our victory, in order to achieve our socialism, communism, by organising outside and against any state? What are the measures to elaborate, the conditions to study beforehand?" This is where our main preoccupation must lie; what we must do is not be overwhelmed by events, but actively prepare ourselves now, always remembering that an ideal is realisable only insofar as people believe in its realisation and put their energy to it.

## **Part 2: The Dictatorship of the Proletariat**

The realisation of socialism has left the realm of dreams and theoretical propaganda; it has approached, and has even become an urgent matter. And if it is important to answer the question of what methods lead to this realisation, and are the most likely to gain victory, it is even more important to get a clear picture of what we need to do after the victory for the revolution to bring the greatest increase in happiness, with the least suffering possible.

The "dictatorship of the proletariat" seems attractive to many people these days. It seems to mean that workers would now be masters of social life, masters of their own destiny, without exploiters, nor oppressors above them. It seems to be the direct and immediate realisation of socialism. In France, especially, where the workers' movement has not been penetrated by Marxist theory and terminology, this phrase is the cause of misunderstandings. It holds in itself a contradiction: a dictatorship "is always the unlimited power" of one or of a small group; what could be the dictatorship of a whole class? It is obvious that a class can only hold power through its representatives, by someone who it delegated or who, more simply, believes they can act in its name. In the end, a new power is being established, the power of the socialist party or of its most influential faction, and this power takes charge of managing the fate of the working class. And this is not an abuse or a sophistication of the idea of the "dictatorship of the proletariat", it is its essence itself. It follows from Marxist theory, from the way this theory conceives the evolution of societies. Let's remind ourselves how it goes.

By definition, political power is in every period in the hands of the economically dominant class. The bourgeoisie, after it replaced feudal powers in the economy, also replaced them politically, at least in the most advanced countries in Europe and America. Since then the entire political activity of the bourgeois class aims to safeguard its interests and strengthen its domination. But then during the economic development, proletariat takes the place of the bourgeoisie as the class most apt to develop productive forces; therefore, political power must also be its. The new state, the proletarian state, will then only be preoccupied with the interests of that class, which becomes the dominant class. That is the dictatorship of the proletariat. A natural objec-

tion appears: a dominant class supposes a dominated class; however, economic exploitation being abolished by the crowning of the most exploited class, the existence of classes itself becomes impossible. This contradiction is resolved thanks to the Marxist concept of how a transformation towards socialism can be operated. It starts with the socialist party seizing power; what can the socialist government do then?

Marxist literature is not plentiful when it comes to projections into the future: social-democrats have too much of a phobia of utopia for these. But the few things we know about it are enough to let us know that socialism will have to be realised gradually, over a whole historical period. During this period, classes will not have ceased to exist, and capitalist exploitation will not have ended: it will only have been softened, attenuated in favour of the proletariat. It is now the class which is protected by the state, while the situation for the bourgeoisie is made harder and harder. This is how, at the dawn of Marxism, Marx, in the Communist manifesto, listed the gradual measures that the socialist government should adopt: (...)

Putting this programme into effect will be done peacefully or violently, according to the circumstances, and, in any case, thanks to a strong political power. As it defines political power as “the organised power of a class towards the oppression of another”, Marxism therefore envisions, as an ultimate goal, a society which is only a “human association”, without power. It is a path to anarchy cutting through its opposite: an all-powerful state.

50 years later, Kautzky<sup>2</sup>, in the “Social Revolution”, claims that “the conquest of political power by a class oppressed until then, that is, a political revolution, constitutes the essential aspect of the social revolution.”; he then indicates as series of legislative measures aimed at operating gradually, with or without compensation, the “expropriation of expropriators”: progressive taxes on income and property, anti-unemployment measures, nationalisation of transport and of large estates, etc. What is the possible regime of this “dictatorship of the proletariat”? A stronger state than ever, since it holds in its hands the entire economy of the country; it is master of food distribution and can literally take away bread from any citizen any time it wants. As a way to stifle any opposition, it is very efficient. Workers are employees of this state; it is by the state that they must have their rights recognized. The fight against this gigantic boss becomes very difficult; strikes become political crimes. Maybe some workers’ control can be put in place, but it will only work insofar as the boss-state accepts it. It is possible that workers enjoy, in exchange, other advantages, political ones, such as exclusive voting rights, for example, or privileges in product distribution. But, if we think about it, these advantages are hardly progress, since they bring in their social life no justice, and only serve to feed some hatreds. Instead of abolishing the bourgeoisie as a class and placing each bourgeois in a situation where they could work usefully, they are allowed (be it ‘temporarily’) to live off of others’ work, but they are punished for it by taking away some things they have a right to as human beings.

The bourgeoisie must be put in a situation where they are unable to hurt anyone; it must be deprived of its armed forces and everything which constitutes its economic domination. Repressive measures against individual bourgeois are unnecessary vengeance. It is also a slippery slope: you believe you are doing revolutionary work, while you’re not bringing anything to building a new life. More than that: this civil war against the interior enemy, as an evil which had been removed, leaving the root, makes the prestige of the military grow, of the military group leaders of any kind who are fighting on any side. The fight become solely an issue of military force. Very naturally, the building of tomorrow’s society is pushed back to quieter days. But the moment is gone, the people are tired and the danger of the reaction grows...

That is why, to the method of decrees, we oppose, in order to make socialism a reality, a different method.

The opposition between these two views dates back once again from the International, from the battle between Marx and Bakunin. It is Bakunin who, first, proclaimed in his "Policy of the International" that real socialism differs from "bourgeois socialism" since the first claims that the revolution must be "a direct and immediate application of full social liquidation", while the latter claims that "political transformation must precede economic transformation". The faction which followed the tradition of the federalist International – our faction – developed and detailed in the following years this idea of direct economic revolution. In *Le Révolté* first, then in *La Révolte*, Kropotkin showed through historical examples that human progress is achieved through the spontaneous action of the people and not through the action of the state; at the same time, he developed a programme for a free communism, since the principle of "to each according to their needs" was alone compatible with a society managing itself without a state. He also showed that the economic revolution cannot be realised little by little and partially, that this only leads to disorganising the economy without allowing it to be rebuilt on a new basis; that communist distribution must be, in the interest of the revolution, started straight after victory. He opposed the "conquest of bread" to the "conquest of power" and showed the necessity, for socialists, to find new ways outside of the old forms.

The whole anarchist movement was inspired by these fundamental ideas. Their field of action mostly spread from the moment when the workers' movement in France, which had slowed down after the fall of the Commune, started getting a revolutionary spirit. Under the influence of F. Pelloutier first, then of many anarchists who had joined unions, this great revolutionary syndicalist movement was born which, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, carried within it all the hopes of workers' emancipation. Syndicalism appropriated the idea of immediately taking control of production, and it developed it: the organs which are called to implement it already exist: the trade unions. The general strike, prelude to expropriation, became the final goal of the CGT. Let's remind ourselves that its preparation seemed at some point such an important and urgent task that *La Voix du Peuple* opened (around 1902, if I am not mistaken) a column in which unions were invited to write what each one would do after the victory in order to ensure continuous production in their domain, how they would link up with other unions and consumers etc. This initiative, which didn't get enough feedback, was of great importance; it would be even more important to pick it up again now that we are closer to practical achievements.

That was, from that time until the war, the fundamental character of revolutionary syndicalism. From France, it reached other countries, other workers' movements. Anarcho-syndicalist ideas reached to the writings of sociologists, lawyers, economists; scientists outside the workers' movement started to realise that the renewal of economic life based on a free association of producers was maybe not simply a utopia, that it could be the way to overthrow capitalism and inaugurate a new form of political existence, without the state.

The war put an end to this evolution, and changed the course of events. The state was suddenly strengthened, its reach extended; workers' organisations, on the other hand, were slowed in their action or directed it, because of practical difficulties, towards more immediate achievements. The reformist element became most important.

The revolutionary spirit reappeared throughout the world with the Russian revolution, but under a different form: the form of statist socialism.

The time has not yet come to draw definitive conclusions from the experiment attempted in Russia; there are many things we don't know and it would be hard to evaluate the role of different factors in successes and failures. But we can say this: what we do know cannot change our fundamental ideas. We do not intend to develop here all the arguments which make us think that the government apparatus is inapt to realise a social revolution, which can only be done by workers' groups, once they have become producers' groups. This demonstration has often been made in our literature. However, we deem it useful to repeat their general conclusions.

We believe, as we have always believed, that peasants' and workers' organisations taking control of the land and means of production and managing economic life is more likely to ensure the material well-being of society than decrees from the government.

We believe that this mode of transformation is better equipped to disarm conflicts and avoid civil war (because it allows for more freedom and more variety in forms of organisation) than introducing by authority one reform across the board.

We believe that the direct participation of the people in building the new economic forms makes the victories of the revolution more stable and ensures better their defence.

We believe, finally, that this allows us to prepare, on top of economic and political victories, a higher stage of civilisation, both intellectually and morally.

French workers' communities have inherited enough ideas and experience of struggles to follow the path which leads more directly to complete emancipation. To proclaim the fall of capitalism and the reign of socialism is a great thing, and for that we can thank the Russian socialist government. But we also wish for socialism to be put in practice, for a new era for humankind to dawn and for no weapon to be offered the reaction by the socialists' faults. For that, we who work on French soil, we must use effectively the time we have to study what workers' organisations can and should do directly after the revolution.

We consider as something of the greatest importance to have the most serious and most complete discussion possible about the issues of the economy once the workers have conquered it. This is not a debate, or propaganda, but a study. We can no longer just say that something is desirable, nor even try to prove it: we must show practical measures which can be immediately put into practice with the means we have at our disposal.

This is the task we call for our comrades to accomplish.

### **Part 3: Some milestones in economy**

The forms which production and distribution will take are at the front of all our visions of the future: on them will depend the entire character of the society which replaces the capitalist regime. The question is not new, but the answer becomes urgent; also, the experience of the Russian revolution gives us precious information confirming or contradicting concepts formulated previously in a purely theoretical fashion.

To resolve these issues concretely, that is, to organise an economic organisation plan for "the day after", to indicate the frameworks and the institutions which must be created to put it into practice, is a task which goes way beyond the abilities not only of the author of this article, but in general of such a publication as *Les Temps Nouveaux*. It is the work of specialists: workers, technicians of all trades, directly preoccupied by production; only their professional organisations and groups can discuss what measures to take, now and in the future, intelligently. But any



socialist, any group of propagandists can and should establish for themselves and their comrades a general view, to think about the experience happening in front of their eyes, and to draw some general lines along which they would want to see the more competent thoughts of specialists work. Such considerations make up this article.

Among current ideas on the mode of production and organisation of a socialist society, nationalisation is the most common and accessible. The society's take-over of the means of production is conceived in the programmes of all the state socialist parties as the state taking over, since society is, by definition, represented by the state. Whatever forms the state takes, be it parliamentary, soviet, or other: it is always the organisation holding political power which is also the owner of natural resources, means of production and organs of product distribution.

We can see how much the state is strengthened. As well as political power, it holds every source of life. The dependence of its subjects reaches its maximum. The boss-state is a very authoritarian boss, as they all are. He wants to be master in his own business and does not tolerate workers' meddling if he can avoid it. Where the economy is concerned, the state does not even want to be a constitutional monarch: it always tends to be an autocrat. Jaurès's idea: gradual democratisation, through the state, of the economy, comparable to the political democratisation operated in the past, appears to be only a utopia now more than ever. Under capitalism, state employees and workers are the most dependent of all, and at the other end of the spectrum of social organisation, in the bolsheviks' collectivist regime, it is still the case: workers gradually lose both their rights of control and their factory committees, even their best means of struggle: their right to strike. And, on top of all that, they are submitted to mobilisation at work, to workers' "armies" ruled with military discipline. And this is a fatal flaw: no power restricts itself if nothing forces it to, and when people in power follow an idea, when they are convinced it can only be realised through coercion, they will behave even more unflinchingly, even more absolutely in their right to dispose of the citizens' lives.

It is generally through the need to increase production that suppressing all workers' individual and collective rights is justified. This is how the bolshevik power explains the compulsory work armies. However, outside any judgement on principle, the issue of the expenditure, in labour and in money, demanded by a large bureaucracy – a necessary condition for the extension of state power – shows that this calculation is misguided. In Russia, bureaucratic management of the factories absorbs most of their revenue, not counting the number of people it keeps away from useful work. And the results they wished for is far from being obtained. The boss-state is ill equipped to fight this decrease in productivity in labour which necessarily follows great catastrophes such as war, starvation, lack of resources, etc. Also, the socialist government of the bolsheviks has not found any other solutions to fight these problems than well-known measures, which have long been fought by socialists and workers of all countries: piecework, bonus pay system, Taylorism, etc. This is how across the board, hourly wages become piecework, 12-hour days replace 8-hour days, the age of compulsory work has decreased from 16 to 14. And, lastly, this mobilisation of labour (a measure which, a few years ago, we would have thought any socialist party incapable of) which reminds us of the time of serfdom.

If socialists, who certainly do not aim to degrade workers and only take such measures with a heavy heart, find themselves forced to go so far against all their ideas, it is because in their field of action, which is exclusively framed by the state and can only use the state, there are no other solutions. And yet here is a fact, a small fact in itself, but meaningful. During the harsh

struggle led by the soviet government against disorder in the industry, only one measure was taken which was efficient. It was voluntary work on Saturdays.

“The Communist Party made it compulsory for its members to join the Saturday voluntary work scheme... Every Saturday, in different regions of the Soviet republic, barks and carriages of fuel are unloaded, rail tracks repaired, wheat, fuel and other commodities destined to the people and to the front are loaded, carriages and locomotives are repaired, etc. Slowly the great mass of workers starts to join the “Saturday workers”, to help the Soviet government, to contribute through voluntary work to fight the cold, hunger and general economic disorder.”<sup>4</sup> From other sources we learnt that productivity in voluntary work far exceeds the productivity of paid work in factories. There is no need to point out how instructive this example is. Among all the measures by which workers were either attracted by high wages, according to the principles of classic capitalism, or submitted to military discipline, only one proved efficient: the call for free and conscious work of people who know they are doing something useful. This is a striking example of the truth that the most “utopian” solutions are also the most practical, and that if we want to obtain “results” nowadays, the surest way is still to start from the final goal.

But these considerations proceed from a state of mind foreign to the idea of the state and of compulsory work in its service.

Here is another formula, at first sight more attractive. It is the companies being taken over by their workers or their corresponding industrial organisations. It is the system which, in France, is expressed by the phrase “the mine to the miners”. During the first year of the Russian revolution, before even the bolsheviks gained power, there were a number of examples of this take-over of factories by workers. It was easy, since the bosses, at that time, wanted nothing better than leave their companies. Later, bolsheviks introduced “workers’ control” in every factory, but this control was only a half measure without practical effect: where the workers were weak and badly organised, it didn’t have any effect; where they were conscious of their rights, they claimed – very logically – that they had no need to leave them to their former owners. And they took them over, claiming them as property of the people working there. But it was still the ownership of a group of people replacing the ownership of a single bourgeois person. This could lead, at most, to a cooperative of production. The collective owner was only preoccupied – like the bourgeois owner used to be – about their own interests; like the other, they tried to get orders from the state, etc. Selfishness and greed, although they were now shared among a group, were still no less strong.

Another consideration, a practical one this time, makes impossible the extension of such a system to the entire society. There are some companies which make a lot of profit: those which produce widely consumed goods, or transport companies; the workers there who become owners are, in this sense, privileged. But there are many others which make no profit at all, although they demand continuous spending: schools, hospitals, road repairs, street cleaning, etc. What would be the situation of people employed in those branches? What would they live off if those companies became their property? What means would they use to keep them working and who would pay their wages? Obviously, the principle of workers’ ownership must be modified for them. We can imagine, it’s true, that consumers would pay; but this would be a step back instead of progress, since one of the best results of economic development is the fact that some conquests of civilisation are free: hospitals, schools, bridges, water pipes, wells, and a few other things. Making them a paid-for service would be adding a few new privileges to the owners and taking away from the non-owners ways to fulfil most essential needs.

All the considerations – and a few others – make such a system not very desirable. In the Russian practice – to which we must always look as the only socialist experiment made at present – the disadvantages of this system, introduced from the start of the bolshevik era, pushed the soviet government to adopt, as the only solution, nationalisation.

A third way should have been sought, by going along a very different path; but bolsheviks were too infused with social-democratic and statist ideas for that, which only pointed to the well-known system of nationalisation. And this is what they chose.

Let's try, for our part, to look for this third way: a regime which would give the workers the management of economic life, but without the disadvantages of industrial ownership. And, first of all, let's get back to our fundamental principle: our communism, real communism and not this 1848 communism, already outdated, which bolsheviks recently rediscovered and which they adopted as a name for their party to dispose of the name "social-democrat", which was too dishonoured by compromises. Let's try, in the light of this principle, to examine a bit more clearly the issues at hand.

If we do not recognise the nationalisation in the hands of the state nor the formula "the mine to the miners", what form can this take-over of the means of production by the workers' organisations (unions, soviets, factory committees or others) take?

First of all, the means of production cannot become the property of these organisations: they must only have the use of them. The wind or the water which make the blades or the wheel of a mill turn are no-one's property; they are only used for work. In the same way, land must be no-one's property; the people who cultivate it use it, but it belongs to the collectivity, that is, no-one in particular. In the same way, work instruments built by human hands: they are common property, or collective wealth, used by those who use them at some given time. How, this being accepted, can we envision first the organisation of production, then the organisation of distribution?

Obviously, only the sum of concerned industrial organisations can manage a branch of production; these professional organisations will group indiscriminately the workers themselves and more knowledgeable specialists – engineers, scientists, etc. Each branch of production is closely linked on the one hand with the branches which give it raw materials, and on the other with the organisations or the public who consume its products. And, since, in these relationships, the most important role is to know the needs and possibilities, there must be some groups, committees who will concentrate the necessary statistical teachings. Their role must be strictly limited to that of purveyors of statistical data; the use which will then be made of this data does not concern them. They cannot emit any decree; the decisions belong solely to the professional organisations. The advice of these statistical committees is no more coercive than the information given by an architect, the advice of a dietician, a teacher, etc. As for the different branches of production, the modes of organisation can be very varied depending on the technical peculiarities of each one: some can admit a complete autonomy of particular groups, others can demand a perfectly coordinated action of all. All that is desired is that there is, in each speciality, not just one central organisation managing everything, but a large number of specialised organisations, with clearly delimited tasks. We cannot, obviously, predict the different modalities that this organisation of work might offer. Adapting it to current needs might not be an exceedingly difficult task.

But there are more difficult questions, which demand continuous innovation, since nothing similar has ever been attempted. Who would be the owner of these means of production, which will be managed by the workers' organisations, and of the objects produced, that is, of all col-

lective wealth? If it is neither the state nor the industrial branches, then who? What does the sentence “the means of production belong to the collectivity” represent concretely? Who will represent this collectivity? Who will dispose of the products and on what ground? Who will gain profit from their sale? Who will pay wages?

This is when we must have our communist idea in mind, our great principle “from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs”, and draw all the conclusions from it.

“Who will dispose of the produce of labour?” These products must constitute collective wealth offered for everyone to consume, if they are immediately consumable goods, or offered for the workers’ organisation to use (if they are raw materials or tools). Individuals or organisations will draw from these stocks as they need them, and, in case of insufficient quantities, after an agreement with other consumers and interested organisations. No-one truly owns these products, except the workers in distribution who will try to satisfy orders.

In the same way, the question “who would get the profit from the sale?” is answered. There will be no profit, because there would be no sale, because products are not commodities, but only consumable goods, equally accessible to all. Communism does not recognise the distinction between consumable goods – private property – and the means of production – collective property. It doesn’t even recognise between those any difference in nature; coal, for example, which is it? It is an indispensable element in production, and it also is one of the most needed objects of individual consumption. The aim in communism is to make everything free. Everyone will recognize that housing, food, necessary clothes, heating, etc. must be available to all in the same way as medical care or street lighting, which are even offered in capitalist society. Any human being is entitled to these first necessity objects by the mere fact of their existence, and no-one can deprive them of those. The individual part in social consumption can be determined by many individual and social factors: first, by the needs of each person for everything that is abundant; alas! in modern Europe, instead of an abundance of products, there are shortages, and this will have to be noted. A necessary minimum (calculated as much as possible on average consumption in normal times) will have to be established and rationing put in place, of a common accord. Rations can and must be different according to categories of people. These categories should be based in the difference in needs; age would have to be taken into account, as well as health, endurance, etc. Many considerations will have to be envisioned, also, in the distribution of products: the needs of the community, the need to make reserves for the future and to keep some for exchanges with other communities, etc. There is only one factor we refuse to take into account in these calculations: it is the amount of work expended by each individual.

We can hear some protests. The spectacle of today’s society, where those who produce less consume more, revolts our sense of justice and makes us say first of all: everything to labour and to each proportionally to the work done.

But, despite this natural tendency, we think that it is not along this principle – as legitimate as it appears compared to the obvious injustice of our time – that must be founded the future society. Vengeance exercised by the people against their oppressors at the time of the revolution is fair, too, but it is not on this vengeance that the reign of the people can be based after the victory, but on human solidarity. The same goes for issues of distribution. And let no-one tell us that we first need to repress the bourgeoisie and that the victory of the working class must first lead to a mode of distribution which puts labour in the place it deserves. The class struggle ends with the workers’ victory and the distinction between workers and parasites no longer exists.

The possibility of free work in a free society is given to all, and the number of people who refuse it will be so small that it will not be sufficient to create a new class of parasites under the form of a large caste of bureaucrats, and in the next generation the traces of the old parasitism will have disappeared.

To give to each proportionally to their work is, if you wish, a fair principle; but it is a lower type of justice, like the idea of rewarding merit or punishing vice. We won't go into details about all the philosophical reasons which make us reject this. What would we be adding to the arguments which P. Kropotkin gave when he laid the foundation of anarchist communism? Let's just say that – for the comrades you wouldn't know this – at the other end of socialist thought, Marx accepted the same views when he said that only when retribution for work will have been replaced by distribution according to everyone's needs “can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety”<sup>5</sup>. We precisely want to go beyond bourgeois rights and bourgeois-inspired justice. Every one is entitled to their existence simply in virtue of being human. Then, and also because they are human, a living being living in a society, they will apply themselves to do their share of work for the common good. This is the only possible guarantee against a new form of exploitation and endless conflicts.

We reject therefore the idea itself of a wage; we dissociate the two issues of production and of consumption, leaving between them only the link which results from the fact that the total quantity of produced goods must be indexed on the consumption needs. This is the only order of things compatible with a regime in which workers' organisations manage production without being the owners of the means of production. It is also the only one compatible with a free society, freed from the coercive power of a state.

We do not hope, obviously, that, as soon as the next day after the revolution, everything will fall into place nicely without conflict, without a mixture of bourgeois elements from the past. We know that it is very unlikely that this communism, complete and pure, could be realised in one fell swoop. But we also know that it is to the extent that the builders of the future will be inspired by it that their work will be fruitful. That is why it appears so important, so infinitely desirable, that this is the spirit in which the milestones of the future are laid.

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)  
Anti-Copyright



Marie Isidine  
The Issues of Tomorrow  
July 1919

Retrieved on 10<sup>th</sup> September 2021 from [forgottenanarchism.wordpress.com](https://forgottenanarchism.wordpress.com)  
Published in *Les Temps Nouveaux*.

[usa.anarchistlibraries.net](https://usa.anarchistlibraries.net)