We spoke last month of the overwhelming importance of spontaneity as an element in human existence, and of the necessity for meeting it with full recognition. Perhaps it seemed to some of our readers that such inquiries were of interest but to students and dreamers; too curious for the needs of common life.

Well, the Belgian Workman’s Party left all such merely philosophical considerations out of their reckoning when their Executive Council decided that a general strike must be started "to order," at a time when the leaders should have made up their mind that all was ready. And so, when the spontaneous impulse came to the miners and metalworkers to free themselves this summer from their intolerable slavery, the leaders and wire-pullers of the Workman’s Party, the politicians and cooperators, found nothing better to do than to preach peace and submission, and to throw cold water over the strike in the name of universal suffrage and cooperation, until for the time being they had effectually managed to swamp the revolutionary movement.

Here is what a special communication from some members of the party to the *Sozial Demokrat* has to say about it: "First
we saw partial strikes. . . . They spread rapidly and seemed to
gain cohesion. In the center the Anarchists took possession of
the active part of the movement for several days, until certain
of their orators, were arrested. Still the movement continued.
It spread over the Liege basin. . . . Numerous indications of
strikes were to be seen elsewhere, especially at Brussels. The
Council of the Workman's Party continue with all their might
against the movement. They seemed resolved to nip it in the
bud, especially at Brussels and Ghent. . . . The chiefs of the
party left the different trades to themselves, they gave them no
word of encouragement."

In fact the organizers stifled the rising enthusiasm of what
might have become an important revolutionary outbreak on
the plea--our machinery is not ready; and so the healthy im-
pulse of revolt was wasted and lost, and the forces of reaction
in Belgium have gained the confidence which is strength.

A little more than fifteen years ago the citizens of Paris were
passing through a sharper crisis than our Belgian comrades. It
was the first week after the Commune had been proclaimed by
the spontaneous action of the people. The bourgeois world had
lost its head. It was paralyzed by that helpless confusion among
the authorities which always follows a sudden outbreak of en-
ergetic revolutionary action. The impulse of the people was to
march at once upon the disorganized army and terrified gov-
ernment at Versailles. "But wait," insisted certain well-meaning
leaders, "we must first elect a popular government in due demo-
ocratic form."

And "Paris sent her devoted sons to the Hotel de Ville. There
disbanded from active service, up to the eyes in musty parch-
ments forced to govern when their instincts impelled them to
be and act with the people; forced to discuss when it was time
to do, and losing the inspiration that comes from continual
contact with the masses, they saw themselves reduced to im-
potence. Paralyzed by their distance from the well-spring of
revolution, the people, they themselves paralyzed the popular
initiative" (Les Paroles d'un Revolte). And so the general en-
thusiasm died down, and the Commune was lost.

But it is not in grave social crises only that the spontaneous
outleap of energy is the all-important factor of effectual action.
It is the same in everyday conduct and everyday relations. Ask
a man who has labored to keep together a political club worthy
the name in a district where people have learned from bitter
experience that parliamentary talk is no benefit to the workers,
and where as yet they are not ardently inspired by the idea of
Socialism. Such a man will tell you that, for all his pains, he has
been whipping a dead donkey along the road. And yet whilst
the hope was fresh in men's hearts that the ballot-box could
brim, them deliverance from their misery, there was no lack of
cohesion and energy in the political clubs with which England
was honeycombed. Any shed or garret was attractive enough
then for a meeting-place wherein to exchange eager thoughts
and plan common action; whereas now, in localities where the
old idea is dead, men can only be drawn into sham fellowship
by an endless round of amusements.

We might multiply instances in social and individual life
by the thousand to illustrate a fact which, once recognized
seems self-evident, yet a fact more persistently ignored than
any other of equal importance. But perhaps enough has been
said to show why we--and especially those of us who are awak-
ening to the inevitable necessity of great social changes--must,
on reflection, come to consciously realize the enormous influ-
ence of spontaneity in human life, whether it be for good or ill.
Next month we will return to the subject.