

# **The Social General Strike**

Arnold Roller

1905

# Contents

<b>PREFACE.</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>THE SOCIAL GENERAL STRIKE: I. THE GENERAL STRIKE AS A WEAPON IN THE SOCIAL BATTLE.</b>	<b>5</b>
1. WHAT IS THE GENERAL STRIKE? . . . . .	5
2. THE COURSE OF THE GENERAL STRIKE. . . . .	7
3. THE GENERAL STRIKE AND THE ARMY. . . . .	10
4. WHAT RISK DOES THE PROLETARIAT RUN? . . . . .	13
5. ECONOMICAL MOVEMENTS. WAGE STRIKES AND THE GENERAL STRIKE. . .	14
6. REVIEW. . . . .	16
<b>II. AFTER THE VICTORY OF THE GENERAL STRIKE: THE CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF THE SOCIAL REORGANIZATION.</b>	<b>18</b>
1. INDUSTRY. . . . .	18
2. AGRICULTURE. . . . .	21
<b>III. HISTORIC SYNOPSIS OF THE GENERAL STRIKE IDEA.</b>	<b>23</b>
1. THE EARLY IDEA OF THE GENERAL STRIKE. . . . .	23
2. THE HISTORY OF THE IDEA. . . . .	23
3. THE GENERAL STRIKES OF LATE YEARS. . . . .	25
4. FINAL REVIEW. . . . .	28

## PREFACE.

THERE were two especial reasons that prompted the publication of this translation of Arnold Roller's pamphlet "The Social General Strike" (written and published in German, it treats the subject from the View of existing European social conditions). It seemed desirable to make the American workingmen acquainted with the methods and aims of the most advanced part of the European working classes. Then the publishers wish and believe, that the views expressed in the essay will lead the American workingmen to think, whether the struggle carried on at present between capital and labor is not entirely out of date, whether it is not totally ineffective and leading astray. The evolution of the methods of the organized American workingmen has not kept pace with the evolution in the camp of the enemy, American capitalism, which is the most greedy and brutal on earth. In order to frustrate the endeavors of the workers for a higher standard of life and freedom, capitalism controls the political institutions of subjugation—government, justice, police, and militia.

Only ignorance or hypocrisy would suggest that there is a harmony established between capital and labor. The brutal means which are employed against organized labor by the mentioned institutions—devoted to money power—illustrates best this "harmony."

The irreconcilable difference between capital and labor reaches its greatest determined expressions in the United States. The shooting down and clubbing of striking workers belong to everyday events and "the black Fridays" of the American working people have steadily increased in number since November 1887. Homestead, Pullman, Cour de Alene, Verden, up to the last strike events in Colorado and Chicago are the bloodmarks of capitalistic terrorism. Up to this day the rich profit-making classes still consider the protest of Gov. Altgeld against the intended butchery of Pullman strikers by federal troops, his greatest crime against the greediness of the profit-makers. They howl: law above all—yet themselves care a snap for it, and drag it into the mire when it stands in the way of brutalizing and enslaving labor. For instance in Colorado for many months no other laws prevailed than the baseness and brutality of the property owners and their tools.

Much less selfconscious and determined are the working people of the United States. On the one hand a pernicious over-estimation of political affairs leads the people again and again astray and makes them dupes of the greedy, corrupt political lackies of the money kings. It is so simple and yet it seems they can't understand that as long as the capitalistic system rules economically, it is evident that legislation and government will remain the servants of the large property owners.

It makes no difference what political label they carry on their foreheads. In all cases political power means nothing more or less than subduing classes for the benefit of other classes.

In the economical field the situation is not more reassuring. A clumsy centralization in connection with a trades' union bureaucracy, whose only tactic is to hold their relatively good positions, checks the progressive movement. The vital power of this trades' union bureaucracy is nourished by the hostilities in the circles of the working classes; it lives on competence and jurisdiction disputes amongst the workers themselves. Such disputes are poison for an effective organization,

but it feeds the bureaucracy of the trades' unions fat, so that they deem themselves the whole purpose of the movement.

It becomes more and more evident in every greater strike, that, for instance, the greatest trades union centralization in the country, the American Federation of Labor, is a useless accompaniment to the struggles of labor. Worse than that, this body more than one time was an impediment, a blockade on the way to the victory of the advanced parts of the working people.

In such a manner of warfare there is more pleasure for the capitalists than for the workers.

A radical change for betterment must start from the thought of the solidarity, the brotherly communication of ALL workingmen. United capitalism can only fall through united labor.

The action which will cause this downfall and lead it to a victorious end is the General Social Strike. Workingmen of the United States, we ask you to think about, and to carefully consider, the views and Opinions laid before you in this pamphlet. Discuss the General Strike and the means to attain it with your fellow-workingmen, so that the thought, when the seed has grown into fruit, may be followed by the liberating deed.

Max B.

# THE SOCIAL GENERAL STRIKE: I. THE GENERAL STRIKE AS A WEAPON IN THE SOCIAL BATTLE.

## 1. WHAT IS THE GENERAL STRIKE?

A new idea, a new weapon of the struggling proletariat, has pushed itself vehemently to the front and stands today on the bulletin of all discussions in the labor movement. This idea, which forces itself everywhere upon the international proletariat, is that of the "General Strike." Until of late the general belief in the success of parliamentarism has been unshaken amongst the workingmen.

The events and the results of the political condition of late years however, made it clear soon to the international proletariat, that nothing could be gained in this way, and it was obliged to look around for a new fighting method. Even where parliamentarian socialism had developed most, and where with every additional election victory and quantitative increase,—in Germany,—its powerlessness was manifested, we hear, even in the reactionary camps of the social democratic party, voices calling for a new tactic.

The idea of the General Strike, which so far has largely been ridiculed and its propagators treated with slander and insult, has to be recognized now; and is being discussed in all national and international labor congresses; and a member of the German social democratic party, Dr. Friedeberg, propagates this idea openly in the party.

The attitude of Social Democracy towards this idea, if it is not directly hostile, is in general however still very ambiguous; and all resolutions passed in its party congresses in regard to it, if they have not been directly hostile towards it, after long debates about the definition of the word, called only for a political "Mass-Strike" for the purpose of gaining certain single demands, but always refused to deal with the General Strike as a means and way to a social revolution.

The name "General Strike" of course admits of misunderstandings, because it is applied to different general acts.

It is often used to designate the strike of all branches in one trade: for instance the General Strike of the miners; when helpers and hoisting engineers, etc. are all out. Then it is used as: General Strike of a city, i. e., "General Strike in Florence", or a General Strike in a whole country or province, for the purpose of gaining political rights, i. e., the right to vote; as in Belgium, or in Sweden.

The profoundest conception of the General Strike, however, the one pointing to a thorough change of the present system: a social revolution of the world; an entire new reorganization; a demolition of the entire old system of all governments—is the one existing amongst the proletarians of the Roman race (Spain and Italy). For them the General Strike is nothing less than an introduction to the social revolution. Therefore we call this the General Strike, to distinguish

it from General Strikes for higher wages, or for political privileges (political mass strikes) “The Social General Strike”. This conception of the General Strike will be dealt with in this treatise.

The General Strike idea has been opposed by the German workingman until now with the same idiotic phrases as the big-bellied bourgeois have used heretofore, by everlastingly re-chewing the tale of dividing all property, thus thinking to have made clear the nonsense of socialism, and at the same time proving only their own ignorance.

The “General Strike is general nonsense”. With this phrase the Social Democrats thought they could kill the General Strike idea.

When a discussion about the General Strike was permitted, the following ideas were always maintained: “The General Strike is an Utopia. It will never be possible to so thoroughly organize the proletariat that all workingmen will go on strike like one man; and if it were so well educated, and imbued with solidarity, and so well organized as to be able to declare a General Strike, then it would not need any General Strike; then it is the power in the country; then it may do anything it sees fit.” ’

Here we want to call attention to the fact, that even with the best organization of the proletariat and the largest majority in the country and in the Parliament, nothing can be done against the will of the Herrenhaus<sup>1</sup> or Bundesrath<sup>2</sup>, nothing against the will of the emperor, who has the whole army to support his will, while the Parliament has nothing but paper scraps to defend itself against the bayonets of the soldiers.

The conduct and the result of the General Strike does not depend upon all workers laying down their tools. It would certainly be worth while to endeavor to educate all classes of workingmen so well, that, on the day on which the General Strike began, the Proletariat of all countries would leave its factories and mines like one man, and through the expression of its united will throw off the chains of slavery. This ideal of propaganda will, however, in spite of its beauty always be a dream.

It was always the energetic and enthusiastic minority only that revolted against tyranny and Oppression, thereby giving the initiative to the large, indolent masses, who were dissatisfied and complained of their fate, but didn’t have the courage to revolt. It is quite a distance between a complaining dissatisfaction and open rebellion. In every revolution it was the force of the energetic minority that aroused the courage of the timid masses.

The same is observed in a strike. Although the labor unions as a rule represent only a minority of the workingmen, they always cause, organize, and lead the strikes of the unorganized masses. Often in this way a small minority goes on a strike, and during the strike the rest of the masses follows.

Often it happens that just through the strike the related industries and branches join in; spreading the strike over ever increasing territories and amongst ever growing masses of laborers.

The example of the strike is, in fact, suggestive and contagious to the masses,

It is therefore not of such great importance for the propagandists and followers of the general strike theory (as for instance the Spanish and French workers understand it) to get all the workers to lay down their tools at the same time, as it is to completely interrupt production in the whole

---

<sup>1</sup> Herrenhaus—Senat or millionaire club.

<sup>2</sup> Bundesrath—The representation of delegates from the governments of all the different states of Germany, like Prussia, Bavaria, Saxony, etc.

country, and stop communication and consumption for the ruling classes, and that for a time long enough to totally disorganize the capitalistic society; so that after the complete annihilation of the old system, the working people can take possession through its labor unions of all the means of production, mines, houses; the land; in short: of all the economic factors

## **2. THE COURSE OF THE GENERAL STRIKE.**

Considering the reports and observation made from general strikes which have broken out heretofore, we can draw a picture of the course of a SOCIAL GENERAL STRIKE.

After the necessary time of propaganda; after the masses and organizations have been made familiar with the idea; as soon as the circumstances are favorable, so that the general strike could break out, all labor unions (which are certainly the most fit for propagating this idea) declare the general strike in their branches. The non-organized workers are soon carried along (that was observed in Italy) , the movement broadens, and quickly spreads over the whole country, generalizing itself, and becomes the General Strike of the proletariat.

We saw it in April, 1902, in Belgium, when 350,000 men laid down their tools upon the request of the labor unions.

Modern industry, with its extremely specialized labor division and complications, is but poorly adapted to oppose a general strike caused by a minority, for the strike will completely wreck the whole system necessary for the management of production, and vital to the life of modern society.

The most necessary products are often made in such a manner, that they not only go through twenty or thirty hands in the same factory, but often pass from one factory to another in order to be completed. The raw material for the manufacture of these articles often comes from distant places, and railroads, mails and telegraphs are vital to production. Now if it happens that one wheel of this enormous mechanism of society stops, the whole branch of this particular industry is laid idle.

For instance: in the beginning of February, 1904. the following news item was seen in English papers: "On account of the breaking down of a part of the machinery in the Rope Works at Belfast, Ireland, 4,000 workmen had to go idle for one week."

If all the coal miners would go on strike, in a few days all coal yards would be empty, and all railroad transportation would be interrupted. All smelteries and foundries, all steam engines, all factories and electrical works would be forced to lie idle. The gas works, which would be without coal, would have to close down, and with them hundreds of gas motors, and those machines and machine tools operated by them. After sunset an entire city would be dark, because no incandescent lamp and no gas would be attained.

This great success could readily be caused in a few days, or a few weeks at the most, by a strike of the coal miners, who by experience are familiar with mass strikes, and certainly would have to be dealt with in the future struggle. The railroad employees are also an important factor in the labor movement. They would certainly not wait to strike until all the coal was gone, but would join in the beginning of it, if it were a matter of importance. In all plants work is interrupted through the strike of a minority, which forces the rest to lie idle, partly by its hostile attitude towards them, and partly by open threats to injure them.

As soon as the bakers and butchers quit working, the General Strike will be felt much more intensely. and it will probably be the first time that the ruling classes will understand and feel what it means to be hungry. ‘

This is the beginning—the introduction. According to the opinion of the Romanian comrades, as well as according to the experience gained in all previous general strikes, the General Strike will not have such a peaceful conclusion as the beginning indicated.

We saw in Spain that the movement entered a period of conflict as soon as they put before the working class the question how to satisfy its hunger, and saw no other way to do so. but to take food where it could be found; and of course that was in the warehouses where it was piled up.

The proletarians can stop production, but they cannot stop consumption. In this way they would during the transition do the same thing as the ruling classes have done uninterruptedly for thousands of years: that is “consume without producing.” This department of the ruling classes the working class calls exploitation, and if the proletarians do it, the possessing classes call it plundering—and Socialism calls it expropriation.

Hunger forces even the most timid ones to take bread wherever it is. So it has been evident in all revolutions and rebellions, that just the women, who were politically the most reactionary, were now, as it was necessary to satisfy the hunger of their little ones, the most revolutionary and desperate in the storming and plundering of bakeries and butcher shops.

The battle would become still more intense as soon as the working people tried to gain possession of the means of production. In this way the General Strike is not only the introduction of the revolution but is the social revolution itself. It is only the name of the social revolution of the future.

It is, however, not the revolution in the traditional form, such as the Bourgeoise of 1789 and 1848 fought for. The heroic times of the battle on the barricades have gone by. In place of the narrow, winding lanes in which a barricade could be erected quickly, and could be defended easily, we now have in all large cities, broad, long streets, in which the columns of an army can easily operate and take the barricades. Lastly it is impossible to build barricades in a large city, because the material for that is not on hand. Wooden blocks and asphalt have taken the place of the paving stones in the main streets and such material is not fit for building barricades. For this reason it would be foolish for the people to begin a revolution, relying upon such ancient, insufficient means of defense.

Entirely different however is the condition in the General Strike. The immense advantage of the general strike is that it begins entirely lawfully and without any danger for the workers, and for this reason thousands will take part, who never would have thought of taking part in a revolution, but would have stayed home behind the stove, and by that would have weakened the revolution, or even made it impossible.

Those who stay at home today for reasons of cowardice, or for fright of the deeds of the strikers, or partly for fright to be involved in the revolts on the streets in any way, support in the best manner the General Strike by their doing so.

Other large masses of the working people, who never paid any attention to this matter; who never have been aroused by the ballot; and who would never have followed the call of the revolution, because their life never was anything else but a uniform vegetating between obtuse slumber and enervating labor, are now at once put on the street; facing the question; “for or against,” and they would instinctively feel themselves forced to take part in the movement.



It is an undisputed fact, that a brave deed, be it one of a single individual, or of an energetic enthusiastic minority, arouses thousands from their slumber, and with one thrilling shock turns them desperate fighters for the good cause, while tens of years of theoretic agitation could not tear them away from their apathetic condition.

During the general strikes in Barcelona in February, and in Belgium in April, 1903, furthermore in Bilbao in October, 1903, which were in reality only tests of strength and skirmishes of the real great General Strike of the future—like those 300 former revolts preceeding the great French Revolution—there were different collisions between the people and the armed powers. But the picture of these struggles was entirely different from that of all earlier known revolts of the proletarians in the cities.

In spite of the graveness of the situation, the collisions were proportionately insignificant, because the workingmen did not endeavor so much to apply the useless and dangerous mode of fighting in vogue heretofore, to attack the soldiers themselves, and the well defended buildings, but applied their whole energy to prevent all production and communication, which the ruling classes were determined on the other hand to maintain by all possible means.

They applied the most unscrupulous measures: threatening, and hiring strike-breakers; and as all that was in vain, they put the soldiers in the workshops, mines, bakeries, etc. The working people now found themselves forced to give up their waiting position, and apply more energetically their strenuous will to prevent absolutely all production and communication.

It was therefore the first thought of the Belgian workingmen in the year 1893 to cut off all means of communication and transportation, to prevent the passing of information between military and police authorities, as well as the concentration, and the supply of the troops with provisions. In this way it often happened that during the night, telephone and telegraph wires were cut in all arts.

It often happened, that in desolate places the rails were torn away, and the switching apparatuses demolished, or set so that accidents would happen. The glass in switchlights was demolished, so that the conductors were unable to get their signals. Circulation in this manner was often made impossible for whole days.

During the street car strike in Nueremberg, 1902, the strikers drove pieces of iron into the frogs of the rails, and in this way obstructed the line.

In Barcelona and Belgium a few sympathizers of the General Strike forced all workers in factories to give up work by injuring the machinery; secretly throwing emery into the oil boxes of the machines; or by loosening or tightening a screw, thus causing the largest machinery to get out of order, or even to break. In machine shops pieces of iron were thrown in the cog-wheels, which were thus broken.

During the miners' General Strike in the United States and in October 1903 in Bilbao in Spain, the workingmen destroyed the beam supports in the mines, which practically closed them.

The Spanish and American miners accomplished much by application of fire and dynamite, the latter of which they could easily get, as they used it in their daily work. During the General Strike in Holland it often happened that the strikers sunk a ship crosswise in the river, before a bridge, and stopped all traffic by water.

The strike of the dock workers, who refused to unload the vessels, caused in this way great famines in articles bought in foreign countries. The recent reports from Barcelona show us, how the Bourgeoise increased the number of the strikers, by closing their stores, and laying off their

employees, and how the proletarians forced by hunger, stormed the provision stores, so that the soldiers had to defend them. Universally known is the following amusing detail from Barcelona.

As long as the soldiers protected the provision stores, the rich Bourgeois could still send their servants to the bakeries and butcher shops to buy provisions. In all the side streets and at the entrance of the houses these girls were stopped and their food stuffs taken away from them and brought to the hungry families of the strikers.

The idea to provide the strikers with food and clothing during the strike by the organization of a workingmen's Production and Communication Brotherhood has been abandoned, because it was evident that in such a struggle the ruling classes would pay no sentimental regard to law, and simply seize the provisions of the proletariat for themselves and their army.

### **3. THE GENERAL STRIKE AND THE ARMY.**

From the above it can readily be seen that the military forces could not very easily rehabilitate order in the beginning of the General Strike, as was done in the street revolts heretofore, as in the year 1848, where the soldiers only needed to be drawn together in the center of the large cities, and simply shoot into the masses, which were crowded before the muzzles of their guns. No—the General Strike, as it has been pictured here, entirely changes the situation.

As well as before, it would be the duty of the military forces to-day to protect the government buildings, and the palaces of the wealthy from the hatred of the masses, because all the central stations of government, such as police stations, court houses, prisons, national banks and ministries of finances might be threatened by the masses. Also single persons, prominently hated by the masses, might run the risk of suffering injury to life or limb. Above all the army would try to protect them.

But it would also have to try and keep the railroads running, and for that it would be necessary to not only man the railroad stations with soldiers, not only to make conductors, engineers, brakemen and switchmen of soldiers, but also to protect every train with the proper amount of soldiers; and very likely it would be necessary to station guards all along the line to protect the switches. to keep the track from being torn open, and to save the signal towers and water tanks from destruction; and this again would require a large number of soldiers, as the lines are hundreds of miles long.

It would also be necessary to use soldiers to watch the telegraph and telephone lines, and to keep up the mail distribution. Soldiers would be put in factories, workshops, gas works, bakeries, to produce the necessary provisions. Soldiers would also be needed to protect the scabs from the scorn of the masses. Before every factory, every warehouse, threatened by the mob, they would have to station military guards.

This of course would not only be in large cities; necessarily it would have to be expected that the same thing 'was going on in the centers of industry in the country, in the mines, smelteries, woolen mills, etc. The socialistic agitation has carried the idea of expropriation to the remotest centers of industry, and the workingmen there, having mastered this theory, might begin expropriation of the Bourgeois, by taking possession of the warehouses and means of production without the sanction of the dictators of the labor movement. In the country the success of the General Strike would not be an Utopia merely, because the immense expansion of large farm-

ing enterprises, as many cases in Hungary, Galizia, Russia, Italy and Spain have shown, make it possible to-day to inaugurate immense strikes of farm workers.

Nothing is as contagious and suggestive as rebellion. The farm workers and the poor farmers might imitate the workers of the cities and seize the possessions of great land owners. In recent years it has happened quite frequently that the striking working men marched out into the country, in the villages near the cities, enlightened the farmers and won them by saying to them: "You don't need to pay any more taxes to the state, nor more rents to the landlord, nor more interest to the loan sharks, and to the owners of your mortgages -we just burn up all those papers. Your sons do not need to join the army; they can stay home and help you in the field; those fields, which are the fruits of your labor belong to you. Do not fear the soldiers; they have all they can do in the cities at the railroads, they have no time to help the landlords, they can't harm you." In this way order and the safety of property could also be threatened in the country.

It would be an immense task for the army to prevent all this, and to protect not only the political, but what is far more difficult, the economical power of the ruling classes.

In this way it would be impossible to centralize the soldiers of the whole country, and send 100,000 well armed soldiers against a few thousand rebels; because the soldiers would have to maintain order all over the whole country, even in the most remote villages, as well as in the centers of industry, and along all the railroad lines.

Probably the thought would strike the rulers then to issue a call for the reserve troops? But they would soon find out that they were standing before a terrible dilemma. Because calling in reserve troops would be nothing else but calling the striking workingmen from their comrades to give them guns in their hands!

The governments at least would fear that these reserve troops, newly called in, would carry dissatisfaction into the ranks of the old soldiers. If however, they did not issue this call, they would thus acknowledge their impotence; and the number of soldiers on hand would soon prove to be insufficient.

The best equipped, the largest and most disciplined army cannot protect everything. Only small groups of soldiers can be every-where, isolated amongst the large masses of the people, the numberless proletarians. The army would be dispersed and split up, and immobilized in all directions; and would soon prove to be incapable of suppressing the revolt of the proletariat conducted in this form.

Last but not least there are psychological points to be recognized.

The most elementary experience in mass psychology teaches us that the single person in big masses will allow himself to be pushed to perform deeds of heroism, to let a few, especially such who have an influence over him, lead him to do such deeds, which would otherwise be repulsive to him. This is what they mostly figure on in militarism.

The soldier amongst a large body of troops, excited by the military music, in fear of the officers, whom he thinks to be some superior being, loses his clear senses, his individuality, and obeys, as if hypnotized, the most inhuman, the most barbaric orders. He is then even ready to shoot upon his own father and mother.

Every direct contact with the people is made impossible for the soldiers, as long as they are under continued discipline and in fear of court martial, and of the revolver of the officers, especially when they march in large bodies against the people.

However, when dispersed in small groups before factories, the soldiers easily come in contact with the workingmen, who talk to them, slip manifestos secretly into their hands, and tell them

that in their home village, may be at this very hour, soldiers of other regiments are ordered to shoot their parents, their brothers and sisters. In small troops the soldier has time to think, is torn away from the brutal sanguinary intoxication of large masses of troops, armed to their teeth. He is no more in the contagious contact with the school of murder, he hears no more the exciting war music and war songs of brutalized soldiers. All around him he will hear the songs of revolution against the oppressors and exploiters, which will remind him that he belongs to the people, from Whom he was torn by force, and not on the side of tyranny.

Because the General Strike is the most clear and unveiled expression of the revolution of the working people against their exploiters, the proletarians in soldiers' clothes will now quickly see that they are not fighting for God, emperor and fatherland, their high ideals, but simply for the continuance of the exploitation of their brothers and themselves as soon as they have exchanged uniform for overalls.

Thus standing post before a factory the soldier will soon realize that he is used as his own watch dog, and many a one will be led by his reflection to return to the people. The rest of the scattered small groups of soldiers could easily be disarmed, so that they could not shoot upon the masses. Many of the soldiers who would not have the courage to desert, would let the people disarm them, with inner joy and false show of resistance.

The position of the working people in the Roman countries would be much more favorable, because the labor unions have been for years conducting a very lively anti-military propaganda amongst the recruits and reservists, and even in the army itself.

To obtain such a result, of course it would be necessary to bring forward an indefatigable anti-military propaganda, like the French labor unions present. The nature of their anti-military propaganda has been explained in their report, "Anti-militarism and General Strike," to the trades' unions in Dublin. This report also appeared in the German language in "The Freiheit," in New York, and in other papers. It is of the utmost importance that this especially should be pointed out. For the revolutionizing of the present order of society, anti-militarism and its propaganda is an absolutely necessary supplement to the General Strike.

This is the overwhelming superiority of the social revolution, which started as a peaceful General Strike, and carried the revolution over the whole country. As the spread of the revolution is a vital necessity to its victory, so is the dispersion of the military forces the cause of the army's destruction. In a short time it will be made undisciplined, disarmed, and completely broken up, and by that the whole system, which rests upon the power of the army, be gone. Would it be possible that foreign powers might intervene? No danger!—It is not at all utopian that the General Strike will be international, that it will take place in all countries at the same time.

History shows that nearly all European countries were shaken up by the revolutionary movement of 1848, although these revolutions were all of an entirely national character and often even hostile against the revolutionists of other countries,

Did not the middle ages at the time of the peasant wars, see the revolts of the peasants in Germany, the Jacqueries in France, and the revolt of the "Commeros de Castilla" in Spain, all at the same time? And yet the peasants of the one country had no idea of titillating far distant countries their comrades were fighting for similar ideals.

To-day however the working people of all countries are organized and international, and fraternally shake hands over the borders of the different countries, they mutually support each other in their struggle against capitalism, and regularly consider their methods of battle in their numerous trades unions and party congresses.

Can we not apprehend under these circumstances that the revolution of the proletariat, the social revolution, that is, the General Strike, will be an international one? Or at least that in the most important countries revolutionary eruptions will take place at the same time? The apprehensive foreign powers will, according to this, have enough to do at home, and will hardly think to come to the rescue of other powers.

#### **4. WHAT RISK DOES THE PROLETARIAT RUN?**

The professional hypnotizers and lullers at the head of the labor movement understood very well at all times, at least in Germany and Austria, how to suffocate the revolutionary spirit by terrible visions of the bloodshed, which they say would be caused amongst the proletarians. With this same ghost they try to scare away the idea of the General Strike.

Although the risk which the proletariat runs during a General Strike, represents only a small fraction of what it has run in earlier revolutions, candidness commands that we do not deceive ourselves about it, that yet in the different small, but nevertheless unavoidable skirmishes, caused by the military forces, there will necessarily be sacrifices on the side of the workers. However should this be reason enough for the proletariat to be discouraged and wait until the year 4000 after Millerand's or Marx's birth, when the order of the capitalistic system collapses of its own accord and makes room for Socialism?

No!—The working people will cast off these cowardly speculations and rove that they have not lost all courage; and will risk everything for freedom. Death, or the loss of limbs in the revolution, with which they always scare the proletarians, is it not hourly around them in this present system at capitalistic exploitation? French statistics show the terrible number of 174,000 killed yearly on an average by accidents and diseases due to social conditions; not counting the innumerable daily injuries and maimings in the workshops and factories, to which little attention is paid.

In this way capitalism kills more proletarians in one year in order to save the expense of proper arrangements to protect workingmen, than all previous revolutions. Death surrounds the workers all day, at every hour. While he works the worker runs the risk to fall from a scaffold any moment, to be buried in a mine, poisoned in a chemical factory, killed by electric current, or to be torn to pieces by boiler explosions.

Death in the most terrible form haunts him, however, when he is without work; in starvation or suicide, he is driven to it by despair. On the other hand, too, workers have to think that at any time they may be called in and mustered to go to war, and kill their innocent brothers; to fight for the interest of their enemies, their oppressors, and be a thousand times surer of death than in any revolution.

In one single battle often more people are killed than in all revolutions put together. In the battle at Leipzig 143,000 were killed. At Waterloo 46,000, at Koenigsgraetz 40,000. During the Napoleonian wars over three million people lost their lives. Also think of the Russo-Japanese war in Manchuria!

The most minute step of progress, the least scientific advancement costs thousands of lives. How many chemists have died, poisoned by the gases evolved in their newly invented chemical processes, or were blown to pieces by the explosion of such gases. How many physicians -have died from the bacilli which they were combating for the benefit of humanity. What numbers

of martyrs did every new truth cost! How many of the greatest men, of the apostles of truth, have met death at the stake, on the gallows, on the wheel, on the guillotine, in the underground prisons, or in the ice of Siberia?

What oceans of blood! What a minute drop of blood is the blood shed in revolutions compared with this? Remarkable!—One does not dissuade the people from the courage to go to war, but from the courage to fight for their own freedom and future, one always tries to advise against it!

In the revolutions for national independence or for political right}; the people stake their lives ever readily and do not fear death.

Is the social revolution, which will finally free all humanity from chains and social misery, not an eternally higher ideal, not far more worthy of man, that one should put at stake his whole personality, and if need be, even his life? Thus the revolution, conducted as a General Strike, threatens less danger for the proletariat; prevents quick concentration of large military forces; makes many collisions with troops unnecessary, even impossible; and thus presents the most chances for success, for a final victory, bought with the least possible sacrifices.

## **5. ECONOMICAL MOVEMENTS. WAGE STRIKES AND THE GENERAL STRIKE.**

Each historical epoch has its particular mode of struggle, its particular economic conditions and technical forms of revolution. The Knights fought clad in steel armour, with sword and spear; the citizen of the communes of the middle ages fought organized in their complots; the peasants in the peasant war, whose banner was the “Bundschuh”, had their particular war tactics; another form of revolution was the “Jacquerie” of the revolutionary peasants at the time of the great French Revolution, and the tactic in the epoch of the revolutionary petit citizens was the battle on the barricades.

The proletariat can no more apply the tactics of bygone epochs; but it creates, as a necessary result of the economic development and the enlargement of its economic organization, the particular conditions and new forms of tactics of its own. At present all incidents point to the General Strike, and so the working class necessarily finds itself forced to seize this weapon everywhere, in spite of the opposition of its leaders, as soon as an important struggle impends. With the continually growing feeling of solidarity in the proletariat with those labor organizations, ever growing in might and number, and particularly as a logical result, the strikes ever growing more numerous and larger, the idea of the General Strike is spontaneously created.

In order to be successful the strikes had to continually acquire a tendency of growing larger, that is, to always draw larger masses of the same branch into the strike.

Labor unions frequently inaugurate General Strikes of the whole branch of industry.

Even more frequently, during a large strike, workers of other industries quit work to support the demands of the strikers.

These are sympathetic strikes (solidary strikes). The bosses themselves partly show to the workers the way by their ever more frequently Operated general lockouts.

In order to defeat the workers of a branch or a factory the united bosses do not hesitate to lock out innocent workingmen, in order to force the strikers to go back to work, and in this manner destroy their organization.

Ever more frequently We see that the boss organizations support each other in order to resist the workingmen. If the labor unions now reply by supporting the strikers through mutual understanding and aid, we then have no more a struggle of a particular workingmen's union against a particular number of capitalists, but the struggle of the whole working class against all the capitalists. In this way, forced by the continually growing feeling of solidarity by the working people, we have the largest and strongest type of the strike and that is the strike in which the whole class of workers finally refuse to work for the whole class of capitalists; that is the social General Strike.

In this way, amongst the labor unions was born from the experience of the strike the whole theory of the General Strike, this new modern tactic, which is best adapted to do away with the capitalistic system.

The General Strike for social reform, in short the social General Strike, differs favorably from any other strike in two vital points, even if it be a general strike of a whole branch, which is after all nothing but a wage strike.

FIRST: While in every wage strike the strikers necessarily need money to hold out, to-day, in the social General Strike no money is necessary, because nothing is produced and all the stores are closed.

SECOND: While every wage strike, even if it be a General Strike of a whole industrial branch, can only figure on success during a favorable business conjunction, the social general strike has the most favorable prospects during a bad business crisis, which, as is very well known, is only the result of relative overproduction, that is the storing away of products which surpass the buying power of the consumers, the masses. Karl Marx taught that every revolution always followed an economic crisis, which increased the misery of the masses and aroused their revolutionary spirit.

During the social General Strike the proletarians will very likely understand the economic needs and will know very well what they have to do when one says to them: "Do you know why you hunger more now than usually?" Because the grain elevators are more full of corn and wheat than usually. "Do you know why you go in rags, and why you and your wife and children are homeless and freezing?" Because the warehouses are packed with clothes, because the building speculators build too many houses."

In this manner the crisis of overproduction is the best guarantee for the success of the social General Strike, because the products on hand permit the satisfaction of all needs, before the complete reorganization: namely, by a general "Help yourself" on the part of the workers.

Is it not the most natural and most radical form of revolt of the slaves, when on the day on which they throw off the yoke of oppression for good, they declare to their masters, loud and distinctly: "No longer will we obey you, no longer will we bear weapons for you, no longer will we work for you. Also: no longer will we respect your title of possession. At last we take possession of all you have robbed from us, of all these riches and treasures which we created, but never were permitted to enjoy."

It is the passive obedience, the submission of the working people, upon which the power of the ruling classes rests. Just as the political power of the ruling classes depends upon the weapons which we forge, and which we carry to protect our exploiters against ourselves. Their whole splendor and their wealth depend upon our work. If our obedience be discontinued, their power will be broken. Let us stop working for them and they will starve in spite of their money; and they must yield.

What else can Percy Bysshe Shelley have thought in his splendid poem “To England’s Men” when he wrote to the

Men of England, wherefore plough,  
For the lords who lay you low?  
Wherefore weave with toil and care  
The rich robes your tyrants wear?  
Wherefore feed, and clothe and save,  
From the cradle to the grave,  
Those ungrateful drones who would  
Drain your sweat—nay, drink your blood?  
Wherefore, bees of England, forge  
Many a weapon, chain and scourge,  
That these stingless drones may spoil  
The forced produce of your soil?  
Have ye leisure, comfort, calm?  
Shelter, food, love’s gentle balm?  
Or what is it ye buy so dear  
With your pain and with your fear?  
The seed ye sow, another reaps;  
The wealth ye find, another keeps;  
The robes ye weave, another wears;  
The arms ye forge, another bears.  
Sow seed—but let no tyrant reap;  
Find wealth—let no imposter heap;  
Weave robes—let not the idle wear;  
Forge arms—in your defense to bear.

## 6. REVIEW.

The characteristic main periods of the General Strike idea can be reviewed as follows:

1. The General Strike is the only form of revolution possible under the present conditions, qualified and created by the economic situation of capitalism.
2. The General Strike can disturb society most severely because it attacks its vitality, its main support: production and consumption.
3. The General Strike is the clearest, most direct and unveiled expression of revolt of the proletariat, and only the result of the development of its every day means of battle, “The Strike.”
4. Due to the division of labor, it is sufficient that only a few wheels stop in the complicated mechanism of modern production, to bring whole series of machines, factories, even whole industries to a standstill.
5. The General Strike needs no money support and is more apt to succeed in an unfavorable business crisis than in a favorable one.



6. The General Strike can figure on the largest masses and largest success, because it starts quite lawfully; does not require great heroism; does not expose any one to danger, and is even promoted by the cowardice of those who stay at home.

7. Through the interruption of all-means of transportation and communication it is no more possible to fetch produce and nourishment from districts which remained quiet. The political and military authorities lose the possibilities of quick communication and movement of troops.

8. Through the absolute necessity to protect the large cities and centers of industry, the private property of the exploiters, to watch the numerous railroad tracks (not only to uphold law and order, but also to care for the provisions of their own army) and through the endeavor to continue the most necessary production by aid of soldiers, the dispersion and disorganization of the military forces will soon be effected, and the consequence thereof will be their complete impotence and the "Victory of the proletariat."

## II. AFTER THE VICTORY OF THE GENERAL STRIKE: THE CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF THE SOCIAL REORGANIZATION.

### 1. INDUSTRY.

So far we only considered the General Strike idea as a fighting method; it was only investigated from its negative point of view; from the side destructive to the capitalistic order of society. If however this General Strike idea were concluded with this, if it were no more than a mere fighting method, it certainly would not deserve the name of a final method, certainly not would then thousands of proletarians in France and Spain call themselves “Greve-Generalistes” in France, and “Huelga Generalistas” in Spain; that means “General Striker.”

Again we confront the proof of the fact that no theory creates practice, but vice versa, practice creates theory; or to be more precise, it is not the ideal of the future, the conceptual form of society which causes the struggle, but the future endeavors and ideals are born in this struggle; the ideals of reorganization of society have crystalized from the struggle Spontaneously.

We see this clearly in the theory of Anarchism, which was created by the struggle against the centralistic dictatorship of the general counsel of the “International.” The alliance of the “Social Democracy” (that is what the Bakunistic opposition called themselves at that time,) Opposed the centralistic dictatorship of the Marxists within the “International” by the autonomic federations and free organizations of the federalists and communists. In this manner the theories of both factions developed from their tactics and their inner organizations. The centralists of the “International” are the Social Democrats of to-day, and the Federalists became the Anarchists. Just as from the practice of the strikes resulted the theories and the practice of the General Strike, so there formed itself from the practice of Propaganda, and the diffusion of the General Strike idea, a new view of things, a new organization, a new structure for the day after the victorious General Strike.

Because strikes are mostly caused by trades unionists, it is quite natural that the general strike idea is mostly propagated in trades’ unions. So it is consequently logical that after the victorious general social strike, the trades’ unions already organized, will be, and should be those who take production, as well as the rebuilding of society into their hands.

The fundamental thought was from the beginning that the common people immediately after the victory should go to their meeting halls, workingmen’s exchanges and their economic organizations, in order to seize through them the means of production.

Each trades’ union enters upon production in its particular branch of industry, and in this way production will gradually again come in motion. Different branches of production of course

would have to be given up entirely, for instance the production of weapons, the mint, the production of church fixtures, pluvials, skapuliers, etc.; others, at least for some time; for example, articles of luxury, toys, etc.

The war materials, such as guns, etc.. would have to be remelted and made into useful machinery and tools. If, however, the proletarians of the neighboring countries should not yet have freed themselves, war utensils could be used still better by putting them at the disposal of the fighting proletariat of the still Oppressed nations.

All idle workingmen of the suspended industries, the millions of former unemployed, the thousands of former bank employees, the employees of commission houses, fake bureaus, Board of Trade jobbers, traveling salesmen, clergymen, sheriffs, judges, policemen, officers, livery servants and ministers, the millions of freed soldiers, will have their hands full for years to come tearing down the miserable barracks, the pest and fever dens in which the common people were forced to live, and in building sanitary houses fitted up with modern improvements. For years we will have to work in order that the people can tear off from their body the rags, in which they have been clothed, and replace them with comfortable, beautiful and seasonable garments.

There will be enough to do for years to remove the memories of tyranny, the jails, forts, and the still existing prisons. All the Roman gallows (for the cross is nothing else) will have to be torn from the palaces and churches. According to their artistic value, buildings Will be turned into useful stables, magazines, meeting halls, or museums. All the columns which remind us of victories in war, of the highway robbers of the middle ages, which history politely calls Knight robbers, all the monuments which were erected for the “rei bombas” and “Kartatschenprinz” will have to be smashed to pieces; and monuments of real heroes of humanity, of fighters, alas so frightfully numerous, the martyrs of freedom, of poets and thinkers who have led humanity from darkness and oppression to light and freedom, will have to take their places.

After this period of transition, trades of liberal arts again can and will be taken up, which had to disappear on account of capitalistic industry, which put in their places the much lower production of mere luxuries.

In the architectural creations of the middle ages, the time of the free trades' associations, we admire the richness and variety of sculpture, which are still preserved in the old cathedrals, courts of palaces, universities, etc. Each column has a head differently worked out, every sculpturally decorated part a different design. One sees that here the worker could create freely according to his pleasure and art, not haunted by drivers of capitalistic exploitation; that he has not been reduced to a fraction of an automaton through the specialization of work.

After this period of transition work again will become an art, because it will be executed free from compulsion and restraint, and as art it will, as every art does, give pleasure and satisfaction to the worker, and so will the mere pleasure to produce be the mightiest impulse and surest guarantee for all working artists, and a splendid inspirer, sufficient for all necessities. Since impulses of human occupation, the abilities and notions of men are so vastly different, it will be possible to satisfy the most manifold necessities of humanity.

However before the realization of this ideal, perfectly free communism, needless of regulation, there will likely be a time of transition, the form and organization of which results entirely of its own accord, from the form of the workingmen bound in trades unionism.

One sees this clearest in France, and it was proved best by the organ of the French trades unions “La voix du Peuple” which mainly made the propaganda of the General Strike its task.

The organization in France is characterized on a large scale as follows: —

All members of a trade in a city unite in a local trades union; for example: the local union of the cabinet makers of the city. All other trades of the same city also have their local unions. All these local unions unite in the "Bourse du Travail" (Labor Exchange) of the same city. Here is where they hold their meetings, where they have courses of instruction, entertainments, where they discuss their common affairs. The collective organization of one city is according to this the Labor Exchange. All Labor Exchanges of all cities in the whole country are again united by the Federation of the Labor Exchanges.

Again, every local union besides is a member of the union of all unions of cabinet makers of France. All trades' unions again are united in their industrial union locally and nationally organized; for instance the cabinet makers union in the local union of the woodworkers, the local union of woodworkers in the national union of the woodworkers for all France.

All national industrial and trades' unions of France of all trades are again united by a general organization, the "Confederation Generale du Travail" and the "Federation des Bourses du Travail," whose members, previously united, form a netlike structure, working hand in hand.

Of course, all these trades' unions are autonomous and line up next to each other; not one superior to the other. Here is no "Executive Committee," no "General Assembly"; only a committee of communication and correspondence.

In the months inclusive of June to October 1902 "La voix du Peuple" (voice of the people) had in its columns a public discussion regarding the work of the present organizations—in the future—on the day of the General Strike, and about the form of organization and function which they proposed to give to the newly to be erected society. An immense number of answers which the trades' unions sent in, a highly interesting result in regard to their uniformity, were published. Outside of the general points each trades' union treated in its reply especially the position which itself would take in future, as well as during and directly after the victorious General Strike.

For instance: amongst others, in the name of his union, the secretary of a local union of workers in luxuries replied, that their members were convinced that they would have to give up their trade, probably for a long time, after the General Strike, and that they were determined to divide themselves up in trades where there was a shortage of hands, and by this their union would cease existing as a trades' union, and consequently would be unable to take part as such in the reorganization of society.

Unanimously, however, all other trades' unions wrote that they were well aware of what they had to do, as to their mission after the victory, and that they would seize the means of production in their trade and continue production. In all other questions it is sufficient to mention the results of the answers of all trades' unions.

It will be the calling of the industrial organizations to supply raw materials to the different unions of production in the different trades, which belong to this industrial union.

It would be the calling of the labor exchanges to attend to the moral and intellectual part of life; the education, the lectures, the entertainments, and especially the statistics of the necessities of their region and neighborhood.

The sum of the statistics of necessities, put up by the labor exchanges of the different localities, would make it possible for the general labor unions and the general union of labor exchanges of the whole country to easily send these products and raw materials, which are abundant in one region, into those regions where they are needed. Everybody will take from the public warehouses, in which products and provisions are piled up, to his heart's content, as he will need it,

because production will proceed according to the public needs. In this manner the organization of the future results by itself from the organization of the present.

The surplus effort of the comrades who, no more exploited by overwork, but jolly and fresh, look to other fields of occupation instead of throwing themselves exhausted upon their beds immediately after work, will express itself in numerous organizations which correspond with their taste and notions.

In this manner one will spend his leisure time in organizations of science and art, another in sanitary organizations, still others in clubs of instruction and enlightenment; and so harmoniously works this immense net of groups and organizations, without the need of any central or executive body.

## **2. AGRICULTURE.**

As soon as there is no more ruling power, after the victory of the working people in the cities, the most reactionary peasants, who always voted for the clergy and who could never be aroused to vote for socialism, will be immediately ready to expropriate the big landlords. The traditions of the original village community, communism will be instrumental, so that the people will take back from the big land owners the forests and common fields.

The inferior production of the still generally used primitive system of agriculture will soon be improved by large farming machinery, which the productive trades' unions will send to the country and which will be put up and attended by city workingmen. The big steam plows and harvesting machines, and the continual contact of the workingman with the farmer soon will make the fences disappear from the small farms.

In this way the country will also necessarily come to village communism, to the organization which corresponds best with the productive trades' unions of the workers in the cities and industrial centers; until all differences between city and country, peasant and workingman have completely disappeared.

In the beginning of this part it was amply illustrated how, through the demolition of the capitalistic society, millions of workers would be left idle. They could from now on employ themselves in useful capacities. While one part of them would be occupied erecting modern houses, the biggest part would turn to agriculture and the production of provisions.

Systematically and effectively they will try to make use of the immense riches of the oceans and seas, availing themselves of the vast amount of living organisms in them, and beginning the systematic cultivation of sea animal life.

So far most advancement in modern science and technics has been used for the benefit of other industries; while in most countries agriculture stands no higher than it did 4,000 years ago. Now thousands of intelligent people would turn to this field to combine industry with agriculture and apply the latest conceptions of science and chemistry.

As there will be no more reason to practice superficial robbery for the benefit of a few, there will be a tendency for a thorough intensive cultivation of the land.

No more will there be lying idle whole sections of land to serve as hunting grounds for the large landlords. No more will land be lying unfertile; it will be cultivated and even rocks pulverized in order to produce artificial soil. By irrigation, by drainage, by careful vegetable gardening, general uses of hot-houses, artificial fertilizing, etc., the productivity of the land can be multiplied

tenfold, even one hundredfold, and by this means solve the problem of nourishment, because of which previous big revolutions have perished; and in this way produce prosperity for all.

Working on the field a few hours in the day during a few weeks, facilitated by machinery, will be far from being a burden and will be considered a recreation by city folks. In Kropotkin's great Work "Fields, Factories and Workshops" this question is thoroughly dealt with, and by particular reports and statistics it is proved that even in those countries which have to import a large part of their supplies at present there is room enough to produce supply for all the people, if intensive and thorough cultivation of the ground were but practiced.

This does away with the apprehension that eventually the country in which the proletariat was victorious could be starved out by cutting off the supply of provisions from foreign countries. We now see how the idea and organization of the General Strike not only possesses destroying negative power, but in itself bears the elements for the reorganization of society, and for that reason alone already deserves the name of a "Weltanschauung" (a final conception

### III. HISTORIC SYNOPSIS OF THE GENERAL STRIKE IDEA.

#### 1. THE EARLY IDEA OF THE GENERAL STRIKE.

As in other great ideas, so in the General Strike we find analogies in history, the unconscious forebodings of great poets and thinkers.

Already in old Rome 494 years before Christ, there took place (“*Secessio in montem sacrum*”) the marching-out of the Plebeians to the holy mountains, when they demanded equalization from the Patricians. This first General Strike in history, the strike of the Plebeians, was crowned with complete victory. However, let us return to the present. As one of the first, undoubtedly unconscious apostles of the General Strike, we can consider Mirabeau, when he in 1789, in the national Convention of the Privileged, thundered towards them: “Look out! Do not enrage the common people who produce everything; who only need to fold their arms to terrify you!”

Fifty years later Max Stirner wrote in his book “*Der Einzige und sein Eigenthum*” (“The Only One and His Property”) the words: “The workingmen have the most terrible power in their hands; and if once they would be aware of it and use it, nothing could resist them; all they would need to do would be to quit work and consider what they produced to be their own, and enjoy the benefit of it.” This is the sense of the strikes and riots uprising here and there.

The well known stanza of George Herwegh says:

Man of work, alight  
And know your might.  
All wheels stand still,  
If your strong arm it will!”

Could not this serve as an issue for the General Strike? The great English poet, William Morris, tells us in his beautiful dream of a happy and free society. “News from Nowhere,” how the old society broke down through the shocks of several successive revolutionary General Strikes and made room for the new free society.

#### 2. THE HISTORY OF THE IDEA.

Already in the congress of the “International” in Geneva in the year 1866 the thought was expressed that Special strikes never could produce lasting effects, therefore it would be necessary to organize large international strikes, which would be conducted by the “International.” Principally, however, this idea was considered as a means to prevent war—to refuse service in case of war—also as a military strike, and the discontinuance of production of war necessities. This idea was proposed by the Frenchman Charles Longuet and the Belgian Caesar de Paepe and adopted

in the following congress of the "International" in 1868. Later on, this conception of the General Strike, in fact the completion of the General Strike by the military strike, was defended by the Dutch delegate Domela Nieuwenhuis.

In all international workingmen's congresses held since the congress in Paris 1889, also in Brussels in 1891, Zurich 1893, London 1896, Paris 1900, and now Amsterdam 1904, the General Strike idea was proposed as a weapon for the emancipation of the proletariat by different revolutionary parties, previously by the Dutch through Domela Nieuwenhuis, and later by Frenchmen, and by the Allemanists through Allemane and Aristide Briant, a Jauresist; but was always defeated by the German Social Democrats and their followers; as can be seen thus by the countries with the most insignificant labor movement.

A great debate took place in the congress of Brussels in 1891, regarding a resolution against war. Nieuwenhuis proposed a resolution, supported by the Dutch, English and French, which contained at the end of it a declaration, that the Socialists of all countries should answer a declaration of war with a general call upon the people to strike.

In the later congress they contented themselves with sneering at the long speeches of the French agitators for the General Strike, with a few fiat expressions like "General Nonsense!" But in the congress of Amsterdam, 1904, the German Social Democrats could not prevent a debate about the General Strike, since amongst their own ranks voices were heard (Dr. Friedberg for one) in favor of the General Strike idea. The resolution which was adopted at last was a striking evidence of the duplicity of the social democratic leaders, who evidently fear the idea of the social General Strike and only justified eventual mass strikes for the purpose of gaining political rights.

In France this idea was proposed the first time in the congress of the national federation of trades' unions and co-Operative groups in Bordeaux 1888. It was adopted by an overwhelming majority in the trades' union congress of Marseilles 1892, Paris 1893, Nantes 1894, Limoges 1895, Tours 1896, Toulouse 1897, Rennes 1898, Paris 1900, Lyons 1901, Montpellier 1902, and Bourges 1904.

This idea was discussed in the political congresses in France in Bordeaux 1888, Tours 1891, Saint Quintin 1892, Dijon 1894, Paris 1896, Paris 1897, and accepted in Paris in the Congress in the Gymnasium, January 1899.

The Allemanists (P. O. S. R.) always propagated the General Strike; the Guesdists (P. O. F.) always were against it; a part of the Jauresists, with Briant at the head, is for it, and the Blanquists (T. S. R.) are also for it. In the congress of the Blanquists and Guesdists of Lille 1904 the idea of the General Strike had to be adopted, because they declared that they would otherwise lose the support of the workingmen completely.

In Madrid in Spain in October 1900 there was a congress held in which 213 delegates of the trades' unions and workingmen's groups participated, representing 52,000 workmen. Here they unanimously adopted the General Strike idea as the aim of the labor unions, and the means to free the proletariat.

In Germany the first article which treated of the General Strike idea appeared in the anarchistic press of 1890 ("Socialist" and "Neues Leben"). However, first in the years 1902 and 1903, and again through the publication in anarchistic papers, there was a regular propaganda for the General Strike, also through a pamphlet published in London.

The social democratic party tried to kill this propaganda, partly through misrepresentation, partly through non-recognition. When, however, in 1903 Dr. Friedberg carried this idea into their own ranks, and numerous labor union meetings accepted it: it had to be discussed in earnest, and



an effort was made to dispose of it in a scientific manner in articles written by the most luminous socialists in the "Neue Zeit" and the socialistic monthlies. In spite of this we find in all papers, at the end of 1903 and the beginning of 1904, discussions and topics of the General Strike. Pamphlets and papers in all languages spring up everywhere which have the sole purpose of propagating the General Strike idea and explaining and making clear its invincibility.

Hundreds of songs in the languages of the Latin countries, which praise the General Strike as the coming liberation, go from mouth to mouth, inspiring new enthusiasm and confidence in victory.

### **3. THE GENERAL STRIKES OF LATE YEARS.**

Like every grand idea, the general strike was baptized in blood, and has already has its first skirmishes, of which it needs not be ashamed. The first General Strike fought in modern times started in Alcoy (Province Alicante, Spain), July 8<sup>th</sup>, 1874, and was conducted by the Spanish branch of the "International." Its object was not an increase in wages, but the social reconstruction; the construction of the free society, preliminary in this free community. It was an easy task for the minority of the members of the International (about 3,000) to make all workingmen, more than 10,000, go on strike and in this manner to produce a general tie-up. In the struggle with the police and armed Bourgeoisie the workingmen were victorious, they took possession of the archive and civil registers containing the titles of property. The accomplishment of the reconstruction, however, was prevented by the troops, which were sent by the government to reconquer the city.

When the American workingmen in the year 1886 prepared to gain an eight-hour work day, they didn't think of gaining it through the roundabout way of parliamentarism, but they decided to gain it directly through the General Strike, which was calculated to start May 1<sup>st</sup>, all over the United States. 260,000 men throughout the whole United States, 40,000 of which were in Chicago, laid down their tools.

However, after the brutal and murderous attack of the Chicago police upon a peaceful procession of workingmen on May 4<sup>th</sup>, and later, upon a meeting of the workingmen on the Haymarket where a bomb was the answer to the pistol shots of the police, the signal was given for the arrest of several speakers and propagandists of the General Strike, who were delivered to the gallows after a miserable comedy of justice.

In this manner, the Chicago martyrs Parsons, Spies and their comrades suffered death on the gallows for the propagation of the General Strike idea. The Bourgeoisie at once recognized the powerful portent of the General Strike and used all means of corruption and intimidation to defeat it.

What is the international demonstration of the first of May? Is it not the daughter of the great General Strike, which broke out May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1886, in order to gain an eight-hour work day? In regard to it the proposition was accepted with enthusiasm at the international socialist congress at Paris, 1889, to let work rest in all countries May 1<sup>st</sup>, in order to demonstrate for the eight hour work day. Was this resolution not a symbolization of the General Strike? Did not the Belgian workingmen gain the right to vote, even if it was a limited one, under the call and through the aid of the General Strike in the year 1893?

When in the year 1897 it was attempted to gain the right to vote in Austria, was it not then that all the workingmen shouted in the streets: "Let us do what they did in Belgium?"

In February, 1902, the proletariat of Barcelona rose under the call of the General Strike and was able to resist for a whole week the police and the army. Pablo Iglesias, the leader of the Spanish social democracy, requested his followers everywhere to act as strike breakers and denunciators of the propagators of the General Strike. In some districts the Social Democrats even went so far as to send during the General Strike struggle deputations to the Government to announce their loyalty and to assure them that they as law-abiding citizens had nothing to do with the "revolt."

After the severe attacks which followed upon this conduct in the whole socialistic press of the foreign countries against Iglesias, he answered through a proclamation in a proud manner "that the General Strike would have been victorious if the Social Democrats had also participated in it, but that he prevented them because the people were not ripe for emancipation". The comrades of Barcelona finally were defeated, nevertheless they proved the invincibility of the General Strike. As Barcelona struck alone, the troops from whole Spain could be sent there, because the other parts of the country were quiet.

Nevertheless it was decided to call out the reserves, and all papers Spoke of that "strike in Barcelona." Would it have been possible to defeat the General Strike if it had started all over Spain? In April of the same year again 350,000 proletarians laid down their tools in Belgium in order to follow the call of the General Strike to fight for the universal right to vote. The struggle which had such a promising beginning was lost, but only thanks to the treachery of the social democratic leaders. The party organ "Le peuple" gave as premiums revolvers costing six francs, expressly mentioned in: the advertisement as "for the General Strike." When however the situation became dangerous, when there were dead and wounded, the leaders Vandervelde, Anseele, etc., at once gave the signal for retreat, because they were afraid of being made responsible if something serious should occur, and because they didn't want to lose the votes of liberals, who demanded that the strike be ended, and who controlled quite a number of social democratic credentials.

The same people who gave out the revolvers, who declared that they wanted to fight to the finish if all peaceable means were of no avail, these same people called afterwards those to whom they gave the revolvers, "loafers and agent provocateurs" and even advised the workingmen to arrest them.

Vandervelde declared in a mass meeting: "We socialists must respect the commandment, Thou shalt not kill." At least it is peculiar that these gentlemen cry to those who are shot upon. "Thou shalt not kill" and in this way fall in the back of those who defend themselves.

In the same year (1902) there took place a General Strike in Geneva, which was declared in sympathy with the striking street car employees, and directed by the anarchistic leaders. Here it also came to conflicts with the militia, which was sent against the strikers by the socialistic minister, Thiebaut, who at that time took the place of the minister of war, in his absence. At the end of the strike several comrades who conducted the strike were sentenced to terms in prison, amongst others, Bertoni, for one year.

In the month of May, 1902, the workingmen of Sweden came out ahead, when they supported the request for a general right to vote with a General Strike.

Also Holland stood in the first part of the year, 1903, entirely in favor of the General Strike. When in January of the same year the Dock workers of the city Amsterdam went on strike, soon after all railroad employees of that country quit work, in order to support the demands of their brethren. A brilliant victory, the granting of all demands, was the result of this act of solidarity.

Frightened by this success, the government proposed in Parliament a hang-dog-law against the railroad employees, according to which the mere act of striking should be punished with six months imprisonment and the instigators should get four years. It can be plainly seen that the workingmen could not stand for that, and after a short consideration all trades' unions of the country declared the General Strike. The Social democrats stuck to them in the beginning (at least to keep up the pretense of being workingmens' friends their leader Troelstra said later on in the social democratic party congress word for word: "Our existence as a Labor party was at stake"), but when the struggle began earnestly, "Het Volk" warned all against "the anarchistic adventures." On the day when the struggle had to begin along the whole line, the attitude of the social democrats changed into one of open treachery; they posted proclamations Which declared the strike oil, and circulated falsified reports with unfavorable news from the inner part of the country, and in this way caused great confusion amongst the workingmen. Through this the strike was really prevented from spreading over the whole country and becoming general, and consequently was lost.

The intention which governed the social democrats in this shameful behavior was evidently to prove by the failure of this General Strike to the workingmen, that it was not the proper medium and that all hope lay in the election of the candidates of their party. They even stated so quite openly and cynically in an article in the "Neue Zeit," in which they first blamed the anarchists for the failure of the strike, and furtheron declared that the defeat also had one good side to be looked upon: "that it had weakened the belief in the General Strike"—and ruined confidence in the "Anarchistic trouble-makers." Think of it, the Grand Old Man Nieuwenhuis, the father of the labor movement in Holland, "a troublemaker!"

Lastly, there is no reason for being surprised about this, because for all those for whom the labor movement is nothing but a means to become prominent in politics, to gain wealth and power (a fitting name for them is "Social parasites") always were against revolutionary movements by which their political position was but in danger, or by which they could be personally injured.

In October, 1903, the revolutionary general strike in Bilbao again commanded general attention: 25,000 miners were on strike in order to do away with the truck system and to gain sanitary improvements in the mines. When, after the period of two weeks, the prospects still seemed to be in favor of the strikers, the mine owners began to evict the strikers from their houses, 65,000 workingmen of other trades declared a sympathetic strike and the General Strike with this attained a real revolutionary character. The workingmen took provisions from the warehouses and destroyed the railroad tracks by the use of dynamite and gun cotton. Even the mines were greatly damaged. When, after the third day, other cities joined in the strike and the miners began to completely demolish the mines, the mine owners became frightened and quickly gave in and consented to all demands in question. This strike had a double value, because Bilbao was the only city in Spain where the social democrats had a strong influence and where they so far had assured the miners that the truck system only could be removed by a decision of parliament, and that for this reason they should elect as many socialistic candidates as possible, and they would attend to the matter for them.

In April, 1904, occurred a General Strike of the railroad employees of Hungary, which surprised the world through its unexpected outbreak. Without any organization whatever 50,000 employees quit work at the same time. At 12 o'clock, midnight, sharp all trains stopped on the road, and all station masters, of whom a large number were officers of the reserve troops, took part like a man. The government, however, could help itself by calling in the reserves, of whom

11,000 were amongst the strikers, and they succeeded in forcing them in this manner to perform their duties as soldiers. This again proves that the propaganda of the General Strike must be supplemented by anti-military propaganda.

In September, 1904, there occurred a General Strike in Italy. Inside of two days the General Strike broke out in one hundred cities to protest against the use of soldiers and firearms in labor troubles. Again without any organization, against the will of the social democratic leaders, propagated and managed by the anarchists, the General Strike was declared in Milan, and later on all larger cities and industrial centers joined in with unanimous enthusiasm.

Everything was obtained they wished to gain, for on the third or fourth day of the strike Gioletti, the president of the ministry, announced through all telegraph bureaus and newspaper, as well as in the parliament, that from now on it would be forbidden forever that the soldiers use firearms against the strikers in riots and street revolts during a strike. All these General Strikes really were only skirmishes, but also they furnish a schooling for the ultimate final General Strike of the future; like 300 smaller peasant revolts (Jaqueries) preceded the great victorious French revolution.

Thus we see how the proletariat everywhere seizes instinctively this weapon against the will of its leaders, even though it be at present only for the purpose of gaining political rights.

Soon the working people will recognize the unnecessary round-about ways of parliamentarism, when they can obtain their demands without the aid of political leaders, directly through the social General Strike.

#### **4. FINAL REVIEW.**

So far the General Strike idea was treated:

1. As a weapon.
2. As a creative source for the reorganization.
3. Its history.

Now a few more words about its philosophy.

Philosophy,—certainly. The General Strike has its philosophy as well as Marxism and the Social Democracy. The philosophy of the General Strike, that is the logical system of which this idea is built up, however, is very much more simple, much less complicated than the Marxian and more easily comprehensible to every normal mind.

The Marxist teachings are based upon deductive logic and especially upon the dialectic method. The deductive logic which concludes all the rest from single fundamental principles, which, starting from one principle carries it over all the other fields, though it is the method of poets, and creating fantasia, always was and always will be the logic of autocracy and theology. Modern science is inductive, from the sum of single views it concludes the principle, from experiences and events in practice it builds its theory.

The Marxist dialectic is a mode of deductive logic and through its “ingenious” jumping back and forth and many turns it comes to nothing. It is characteristic of the dialectic system, the theory that the commonwealth will be born of its own accord from the completed misery of the people; that evil is the cause of good!

In order to destroy the existing state, according to the Marxian theory, it is necessary first to conquer the power of the state. It opposes the present state, but at the same time raves about state monopoly; a condition in which the workingmen would be still more oppressed and exploited than by private capitalism.

The struggle of the Marxists and the form of their politics entirely corresponds with the deductive dialectic system of their theory. The incorporation of the means of production shall not come out of the people and be operated by the people; no, the power of the state must first be conquered! In their hands it shall be concentrated and afterwards they want to rain prosperity down upon the common people like heavenly manna. The original idea of all political revolution has been deductive— that power should be seized by single individuals, that they might hand down from above liberty to all the people.

The General Strike idea, however, is in its negative as well as positive part consistent all the way through; it builds itself entirely upon the logic of modern science. The General Strike makes no dialectic roundabout ways, does not jump back and forth in logic chopping; and leads to the goal organically and direct, without the aid of political agents.

For this reason this mode of struggle is offered contrarily to political mode, which tries to get there by roundabout ways, in conquering the political power, and is the direct action of the working people. As we have seen, the General Strike is the natural consequence of many smaller strikes. It will be the expression of the ever-growing feeling of proletarian solidarity and its strongest expression.

The organization of the trades' unions and the preparation for the General Strike bears in itself the vital elements of the future reorganization without conquering political power.

In the same manner the General Strike in itself contains the demand for the direct seizure of the means of production by the trades' unions, a common teaching, created by and born from the people, while the teachings of the conquering of political power are {created by those who want to conquer this power for themselves, dis/ho venture personally for the dictatorship, and which by the way they certainly exercised unlimitedly in the old "International."

We see how the whole system of reorganization develops from below upwards, out of the daily struggle of the trades' unions, out of the organizations already in existence in an inductive way. In this manner inductive logic speaks for the theory of the General Strike, the most modern and only scientific method of investigation and study. Every new political condition corresponds with a new economic phase. In just the same manner absolute monarchy corresponds with economic feudalism, and serfdom and parliamentarism with capitalism and wage slavery.

With a free society without class rule and exploitation, a society of free co-operation, we have that which corresponds with the absence of government, "Anarchism."

Well known is the passage of Friedrich Engel's book: "Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State": "They (the classes) will fall as inevitably as the state. The society which organizes production on a free and equal base and equal association of the producers will transport the state machinery to a place where it belongs: into the museum of antiquities next to the spinning wheel and the bronze axe." This condition of socialism without the state is "Anarchist Communism." In the same way results the form of every revolution from the existing economic conditions.

The economic conditions which command the form of the Jacobinic revolution are not in existence anymore, it cannot be believed that parliamentarism can be the result of the economic contrasts, and will give capitalism its death blow.

On the other hand, the General Strike is nothing else but the result of the economic contrasts and of social development; a form of revolution corresponding with the present tendencies and conditions.

The General Strike idea is the best reflection of the growth of the economic contrasts, and the most modern, clearest and finally most unveiled expression of the revolt of the proletariat.

The General Strike will be the result of the continually more frequent, larger strikes, and therefore only the product of large industry itself; it is the weapon which capitalism forged against itself; and it will bring sure death to it.

Even after the most triumphant victory in a wage strike the workingman still remains a wage slave. The modern worker of course is not any more the slave of an individual capitalist, but he stays his whole life long the slave of the whole capitalistic class, from whose hands he cannot free himself in the present society.

A much more extensive result will the trades' unions have made their object, when they no more are satisfied to reduce the Oppression of capitalism, but will use their organizations as a weapon to do away with oppression entirely, when they write upon their banner the complete emancipation of the Working people from wage slavery. But it will also be the calling of the trades' unions in future to take production into their hands, and by this they are to be not only the element of education and the battle of the social future, but also the embryos of production and reorganization after the death of capitalism. This great aim will undoubtedly lead thousands of new vigorous and enthusiastic workers to join the organizations in their good work.

The General Strike idea once taken up by the working people is, as even Jaures himself admitted, in itself already a power, because it is a continuous terrible dread. The threatening ghost of the General Strike alone could at times be sufficient to prevent the ruling classes from holding the reins too tight. At present this threat is not made, so far as the German proletariat is concerned, it has no weapon outside of the ballot, and for that reason the ruling classes can do as they please, because they do not need to be afraid of the people.

The absence of an answer, of a distinct answer to the ever dark question: How?—(How can, in a reasonably short time, the authority of the nobility and the capitalists be extinguished?) This ever unanswered question it is, which gnaws at the confidence and the hopes of the people like a deadly consumption.

The General Strike idea puts an efficient and sure remedy in place of the craving for the "Mother of Freedom Revolution" in place of fruitless social democratic declamations about evolution in distant futures in which no one dares to believe, which seem to us like veiled ideals, suspended far distant, and which, at one time or another, after a long wait, we are told, will come to us "over the mountains"; a remedy which will remove capitalism and bring freedom and welfare for all.

Besides that the General Strike makes it impossible for the traitors and politicians who aim at dictatorship to carry out their plans, it destroys every power once and forever, instead of trusting it into the hands of a tyrant. It accomplishes expropriation and communalizes the means of production. radically from the root up, and in this way also makes counter revolutions once and forever impossible.

The social General Strike is consequently the final emancipation of the proletariat.

THE END.

The Anarchist Library  
Anti-Copyright



Arnold Roller  
The Social General Strike  
1905

Retrieved 03/07/2023 from books.google.com  
Preface by Max Baginski.  
Translated from the German by F. K.  
Published by the Debating Club No. I  
Chicago, June 1905.  
Arnold Roller is the pseudonym for Stephen Naft

**theanarchistlibrary.org**