

Ideas on Social Organization

James Guillaume

1876

Contents

I	3
II	4
III	6
IV	7
A. Public works (housing and construction)	7
B. Exchange	8
C. Food Supply	10
D. Statistics	10
E. Hygiene	11
F. Security	11
G. Education	12
V	14
VI	15

I

The ideas outlined in the following pages can be effectively achieved only by means of a revolutionary movement. It takes more than a day for the great flood to break the dyke; the floodwaters mount slowly, imperceptibly. But once the crest of the flood is reached, the collapse is sudden, the dyke is washed away in the winking of an eye. We can distinguish, then, two successive acts, the second being the necessary consequence of the first. At first there is the slow transformation of ideas, of needs, of the motives for action germinating in the womb of society; the second begins when this transformation is sufficiently advanced to pass into action. Then there is a brusque and decisive turning point — the revolution — which is the culmination of a long process of evolution, the sudden manifestation of a change long prepared for and therefore inevitable.

No serious-minded man would venture to predict exactly how the Revolution, the indispensable condition for social renovation, will come about. Revolution is a natural fact, and not the act of a few persons; it does not take place according to a preconceived plan but is produced by uncontrollable circumstances which no individual can command. We do not, therefore, intend to draw up a blueprint for the future revolutionary campaign; we leave this childish task to those who; believe in the possibility and the efficacy of achieving the emancipation of humanity through personal dictatorship. We will confine ourselves, on the contrary, to describing the kind of revolution most attractive to us and the ways it can be freed from past errors.

The character of the revolution must at first be negative, destructive. Instead of modifying certain institutions of the past, or adapting them to a new order, it will do away with them altogether. Therefore, the government will be uprooted, along with the Church, the army, the courts, the schools, the banks, and all their subservient institutions. At the same time the Revolution has a positive goal, that the workers take possession of all capital and the tools of production. Let us explain what is meant by the phrase “taking possession.”

Let us begin with the peasants and problems concerning the land. In many countries, particularly in France, the priests and the bourgeoisie try to frighten the peasants by telling them that the Revolution will take their land away from them. This is an outrageous lie concocted by the enemies of the *people*. The Revolution would take an exactly opposite course: it would take the land from the bourgeoisie, the nobles, and the priests and give it to the landless peasants. If a piece of land belongs to a peasant who cultivates it himself, the Revolution would not touch it. On the contrary, it would guarantee free possession and liquidate all debts arising from the land. This land which once enriched the treasury and was overburdened with taxes and weighed down by mortgages would, like the peasant, be emancipated. No more taxes, no more mortgages; the land becomes free, just like the man!

As to the land owned by the bourgeoisie, the clergy, and the nobles — land hitherto cultivated by landless laborers for the benefit of their masters — the Revolution will return this stolen land to the rightful owners, the agricultural workers.

How will the Revolution take the land from the exploiters and give it to the peasants? Formerly, when the bourgeois made a political revolution, when they staged one of those movements which resulted only in a change of masters dominating the people, they usually printed decrees, proclaiming to the people the will of the new government. These decrees were posted in the communes and the courts, and the mayor, the gendarmes, and the prosecutors enforced them. The real people’s revolution will not follow this model; it will not rule by decrees, it will

not depend on the services of the police or the machinery of government. It is not with *decrees*, with words written on paper, that the Revolution will emancipate the people but with *deeds*.

II

We will now consider how the peasants will go about deriving the greatest possible benefit from their means of production, the land. Immediately after the Revolution the peasants will be faced with a mixed situation. Those who are already small proprietors will keep their plots of land and continue to cultivate it with the help of their families. The others, and they are by far the most numerous, who rented the land from the big landowners or were simply agricultural wage laborers employed by the owners, will take collective possession of the vast tracts of land and work them in common.

Which of these two systems is best?

It is not a matter of what is theoretically desirable but of starting with the facts and seeing what can be immediately achieved. From this point of view, we say first that in this mixed economy the main purpose of the Revolution has been achieved: the land is now the property of those who cultivate it, and the peasants no longer work for the profit of an idle exploiter who lives by their sweat. This great victory gained, the rest is of secondary importance. The peasants can, if they wish, divide the land into individual parcels and give each family a share. Or else, and this would be much better, they can institute common ownership and cooperative cultivation of the land. Although secondary to the main point, i.e., the emancipation of the peasant, this question of how best to work the land and what form of possession is best also warrants careful consideration.

In a region which had been populated before the Revolution by peasants owning small farms, where the nature of the soil is not very suitable for extensive, large-scale cultivation, where agriculture has been conducted in the same way for ages, where machinery is unknown or rarely used — in such a region the peasants will naturally conserve the form of ownership to which they are accustomed. Each peasant will continue to cultivate the land as he did in the past, with this single difference: his former hired hands, if he had any, will become his partners and share with him the products which their common labor extracts from the land.

It is possible that in a short time those peasants who remain small proprietors will find it advantageous to modify their traditional system of labor and production. If so, they will first associate to create a communal agency to sell or exchange their products; this first associated venture will encourage them to try others of a similar nature. They would then, in common, acquire various machines to facilitate their work; they would take turns to help each other perform certain laborious tasks which are better accomplished when they are done rapidly by a large team; and they would no doubt finally imitate their brothers, the industrial workers, and those working on big farms, and decide to pool their land and form an agricultural association. But even if they linger for some years on the same old routine, even if a whole generation should elapse before the peasants in some communes adopt the system of collective property, it would still not constitute a serious hindrance to the Revolution. The great achievements of the Revolution will not be affected; the Revolution will have abolished agricultural wage slavery and peonage and the agricultural proletariat will consist only of free workers living in peace and plenty, even in the midst of the few remaining backward areas.

On the other hand, in large-scale agricultural operations, where a great number of workers are needed to farm vast areas, where coordination and cooperation are absolutely essential, collective labor will naturally lead to collective property. An agricultural collective may embrace an entire commune [autonomous regional unit] and, if economically necessary for efficiency and greater production, many communes.

In these vast communities of agricultural workers, the land will not be worked as it is today, by small peasant owners trying without success to raise many different crops on tiny parcels of unsuitable land. There will not be growing side by side on one acre a little square of wheat, a little square of potatoes, another of grapes, another of fodder, another of fruit, etc. Each bit of land tends, by virtue of its physical properties, its location, its chemical composition, to be most suitable for the successful cultivation of certain specific crops. Wheat will not be planted on soil suitable for grapes, nor potatoes on soil that could best be used for pasture. The agricultural community, if it has only one type of soil, will confine itself to the cultivation of crops which can be produced in quantity and quality with less labor, and the community will prefer to exchange its products for those it lacks instead of trying to grow them in small quantity and poor quality on unsuitable land.

The internal organization of these agricultural communities need not necessarily be identical; organizational forms and procedures will vary greatly according to the preferences of the associated workers. So long as they conform to the principles of justice and equality, the administration of the community, elected by all the members, could be entrusted either to an individual or to a commission of many members. It will even be possible to separate the different administrative functions, assigning each function to a special commission. The hours of labor will be fixed not by a general law applicable to an entire country, but by the decision of the community itself; but as the community contracts relations with all the other agricultural workers of the region, an agreement covering uniform working hours will probably be reached. Whatever items are produced by collective labor will belong to the community, and each member will receive remuneration for his labor either in the form of commodities (subsistence, supplies, clothing, etc.) or in currency. In some communities remuneration will be in proportion to hours worked; in others payment will be measured by both the hours of work and the kind of work performed; still other systems will be experimented with to see how they work out.

The problem of property having been resolved, and there being no capitalists placing a tax on the labor of the masses, the question of types of distribution and remuneration become secondary. We should to the greatest possible extent institute and be guided by the principle *From each according to his ability, to each according to his need*. When, thanks to the progress of scientific industry and agriculture, production comes to outstrip consumption, and this will be attained some years after the Revolution, it will no longer be necessary to stingily dole out each worker's share of goods. Everyone will draw what he needs from the abundant social reserve of commodities, without fear of depletion; and the moral sentiment which will be more highly developed among free and equal workers will prevent, or greatly reduce, abuse and waste. In the meantime, each community will decide for itself during the transition period the method they deem best for the distribution of the products of associated labor.

III

We must distinguish different types of industrial workers, just as we distinguished different kinds of peasants. There are, first of all, those crafts in which the tools are simple, where the division of labor is almost nonexistent, and where the isolated worker could produce as much alone as he would by associated labor. These include, for example, tailors, shoemakers, barbers, upholsterers, and photographers. It must, however, be remarked that even in these trades, large-scale mass production can be applied to save time and labor. What we say, therefore, applies primarily to the transitional period.

Next in order are the trades requiring the collective labor of numerous workers using small hand-operated machinery and generally employed in workshops and foundries, printing plants, woodworking plants, brickworks, etc.

Finally, there is the third category of industries where the division of labor is much greater, where production is on a massive scale necessitating complicated and expensive machinery and the investment of considerable capital; for example, textile mills, steel mills, metallurgical plants, etc.

For workers operating within the first category of industry, collective work is not a necessity; and in many cases the tailor or the cobbler may prefer to work alone in his own small shop. It is quite natural that in every commune there will be one or perhaps several workers employed in each of these trades. Without, however, wishing to underestimate in any way the importance of individual independence, we think that wherever practical, collective labor is best; in a society of equals, emulation stimulates the worker to produce more and heightens morale; further, work in common permits each worker to learn from the experience and skill of the others and this redounds to the benefit of the unit as a whole.

As to the workers in the remaining two categories, it is evident that collective labor is imposed by the very nature of the work and, since the tools of labor are no longer simple individual tools but machines that must be tended by many workers, the machines must also be collectively owned.

Each workshop, each factory, will organize itself into an association of workers who will be free to administer production and organize their work as they think best, provided that the rights of each worker are safeguarded and the principles of equality and justice are observed. In the preceding chapter, while discussing the associations or communities of agricultural workers, we dealt with management, hours of labor, remuneration, and distribution of products. The same observations apply also to industrial labor, and it is therefore unnecessary to repeat them here. We have just said that particularly where an industry requires complicated machinery and collective labor, the ownership of the machinery of production should also be collective. But one point remains to be clarified. Will these tools belong to all the workers in each factory, or will they belong to the corporation comprising all the workers in each particular industry? [Corporation here is equivalent to industrial union.]

Our opinion is that the second of these alternatives is preferable. When, for example, on the day of the Revolution, the typographical workers of Rome take possession of all the print shops of Rome, they will call a general meeting and proclaim that all the printing plants in Rome are the property of the Roman printers. Since it will be entirely possible and necessary, they will go a step further and unite in a pact of solidarity with all the printing workers in every city of Italy. The result of this pact will be the organization of all the printing plants of Italy as the collective

property of the typographical federation of Italy. In this way the Italian printers will be able to work in any city in their country and have full rights and full use of tools and facilities.

But when we say that ownership of the tools of production, including the factory itself, should revert to the corporation, we do not mean that the workers in the individual workshops will be ruled by any kind of industrial government having the power to do what it pleases with the tools of production. No, the workers in the various factories have not the slightest intention of handing over their hard-won control of the tools of production to a superior power calling itself the "corporation." What they will do is, under certain specified conditions, to guarantee reciprocal use of their tools of production and accord to their fellow workers in other factories the right to share their facilities, receiving in exchange the same right to share the facilities of the fellow workers with whom they have contracted the pact of solidarity.

IV

The commune consists of all the workers living in the same locality. Disregarding very few exceptions, the typical commune can be defined as the local federation of groups of producers. This local federation or commune is organized to provide certain services which are not within the exclusive jurisdiction or capacity of any particular corporation [industrial union] but which concerns all of them, and which for this reason are called *public services*. The communal public services can be enumerated as follows:

A. Public works (housing and construction)

All houses are the property of the commune. The Revolution made, everyone continues for the time being to live in the same quarters occupied by him before the Revolution, except for families which had been forced to live in very dilapidated or overcrowded dwellings. Such families will be immediately relocated at the expense of the commune in vacant apartments formerly occupied or owned by the rich.

The construction of new houses containing healthy, spacious rooms replacing the miserable slums of the old ghettos will be one of the first needs of the new society. The commune will immediately begin this construction in a way that will not only furnish work for the corporations of masons, carpenters, ironworkers, tilers, roofers, etc., but will also provide useful work for the mass of people who, having no trade, lived in idleness before the revolution. They would be employed as laborers in the immense construction and road-building and paving projects which will then be initiated everywhere, especially in the cities.

The new housing will be constructed at the expense of the commune, which means that in exchange for the work done by the various building corporations these corporations will receive from the commune vouchers enabling them to acquire all commodities necessary for the decent maintenance and well-being of their members. And since the new housing has been constructed at public expense, this system will enable and require free housing to be available for all.

Free housing might well cause serious disputes because people living in bad housing will compete with each other for the new accommodations. But we think that it would be a mistake to fear serious friction, and for the following reasons: First we must concede that the desire for new and better housing is a legitimate and just demand; and this just demand will stimulate the building workers to make even greater efforts to speed construction of good housing.

But while awaiting new construction people will have to be patient and do the best they can with the existing facilities. The commune will, as we have said, attend to the most pressing needs of the poorest families, relocating them in the vast palaces of the rich; and as to the rest of the people, we believe that revolutionary enthusiasm will stimulate and inspire them with the spirit of generosity and self-sacrifice, and that they will be glad to endure for a little longer the discomforts of poor housing; nor will they be inclined to quarrel with a neighbor who happens to have gotten a new apartment a little sooner. In a reasonably short time, thanks to the prodigious efforts of the building workers powerfully stimulated by the demand for new housing, there will be plenty of housing for all and everyone will be sure to find satisfactory accommodations.

All this may seem fantastic to those whose vision goes no further than the horizon of bourgeois society; these measures are, on the contrary, so simple and practical that it will be humanly impossible for things to go otherwise. Will the legions of masons and other building workers be permanently and incessantly occupied with the construction of new housing worthy of a civilized society? Will it take many years of incessant labor to supply everyone with good housing? No, it will take a short time. And when they will have finished the main work, will they then fold their arms and do nothing? No, they will continue to work at a slower pace, remodeling existing housing; and little by little the old somber quarters, the crooked filthy streets, the miserable houses and alleys that now infest our cities will disappear and be replaced by mansions where the workers can live like human beings.

B. Exchange

In the new society there will no longer be *communes in the sense that this word is understood today*, as mere political-geographical entities. Every commune will establish a *Bank of Exchange* whose mechanics we will explain as clearly as possible.

The workers' association, as well as the individual producers (in the remaining privately owned portions of production), will deposit their unconsumed commodities in the facilities provided by the Bank of Exchange, the value of the commodities having been established in advance by a contractual agreement between the regional cooperative federations and the various communes, who will also furnish statistics to the Banks of Exchange. The Bank of Exchange will remit to the producers negotiable *vouchers* representing the value of their products; these vouchers will be accepted throughout the territory included in the federation of communes.

Goods of prime necessity, i.e., those essential to life and health, will be transported to the various communal markets which, pending new construction, will use the old stores and warehouses of the former merchants. Some of the markets will distribute foodstuffs, others clothes, others household goods, etc.

Goods destined for export will remain in the general warehouses until called for by the communes.

Among the commodities deposited in the facilities of the Bank of Exchange will be goods for consumption by the commune itself, such as food, lumber, clothes, etc., and goods to be exchanged for those produced by other communes.

At this point we anticipate an objection. We will probably be asked: "the Bank of Exchange in each commune will remit to the producers, by means of vouchers, the value of their products, before being sure that they are in demand; and if these products are not in demand, and pile up

unused, what will be the position of the Bank of Exchange? Will it not risk losses, or even ruin, and in this kind of operation is there not always the risk that the vouchers will be overdrawn?"

We reply that each Bank of Exchange makes sure in advance that these products are in demand and, therefore, risks nothing by immediately issuing payment vouchers to the producers.

There will be, of course, certain categories of workers engaged in the construction or manufacture of immovable goods, goods which cannot be transported to the repositories of the Bank of Exchange, for example, buildings. In such cases the Bank of Exchange will serve as the intermediary; the workers will register the property with the Bank of Exchange. The value of the property will be agreed upon in advance, and the bank will deliver this value in exchange vouchers. The same procedure will be followed in dealing with the various workers employed by the administrative services of the communes; their work resulting not in manufactured products but in services rendered. These services will have to be priced in advance, and the Bank of Exchange will pay their value in vouchers.

The Bank of Exchange will not only receive products belonging to the workers of the commune; it will correspond with other communes and arrange to procure goods which the commune is obliged to get from outside sources, such as certain foodstuffs, fuels, manufactured products, etc. These outside products will be featured side by side with local goods. The consumers will pay for the commodities in the various markets with vouchers of different denominations, and all goods will be uniformly priced.

It is evident from our description that the operations of the Bank of Exchange do not differ essentially from the usual commercial procedures. These operations are in effect nothing but buying and selling; the bank buys from the producers and sells to the consumers. But we think that after a certain length of time the functions of the Banks of Exchange will be reduced without inconvenience and that a new system will gradually replace the old system: exchange in the traditional sense will give way to *distribution*, pure and simple. What do we mean by this?

As long as a product is in short supply it will to a certain extent have to be rationed. And the easiest way to do this would be to sell these scarce products at a price so high that only people who really need them would be willing to buy them. But when the prodigious growth of production, which will not fail to take place when work is rationally organized, produces an oversupply of this or that product, it will not be necessary to ration consumption. The practice of selling, which was adopted as a sort of deterrent to immoderate consumption, will be abolished; the communal banks will no longer sell commodities, they will distribute them in accordance with the needs of the consumers.

The replacement of exchange by distribution will first, and in a comparatively short time, be applied to articles of prime necessity, for the workers will concentrate all their efforts to produce these necessities in abundance. Other commodities, formerly scarce and today considered luxuries, will in a reasonable length of time be produced in great quantity and will no longer be rationed. On the other hand, rare and useless baubles, such as pearls, diamonds, certain precious metals, etc., will cease to have the value attributed to them by public opinion and will be used for research by scientific associations, as components of certain tools, e.g., industrial diamonds, or displayed as curios in museums of natural history.

C. Food Supply

The question of food supply is a sort of postscript to our discussion of exchange. What we said about the organization of the Bank of Exchange applies in general to all products, including foodstuffs. However, we think it useful to add in a special section a more detailed account of the measures dealing with distribution of the principal food products.

At present the bakeshops, meat stores, wine and liquor shops, imported food stores, etc., are all surrendered to private industry and to speculators and these, by all kinds of fraud, enrich themselves at the expense of the consumers. The new society must immediately try to correct this situation by placing under communal public service the distribution of all the most essential foodstuffs.

This must be borne in mind: we do not mean to imply that the commune will take possession of certain branches of *production*. No. Production in the true sense of the term will remain in the hands of the associations of producers. But, for example, what is involved in the production of bread? Nothing beyond the growing of wheat. The farmer sows and reaps the grain and transports it to the warehouses of the Bank of Exchange; his function as producer ends at this point. Grinding grain into flour or changing flour into bread is not production; it is work similar to that performed by various employees in the communal markets, work designed to put a food product, bread, at the disposal of the consumer. The same goes for meat, etc.

Thus viewed, it is only logical that the processing and distribution of foodstuffs — baking, slaughtering, winemaking, etc. — should be performed by the commune. Thus, wheat from the warehouses of the commune will be ground into flour in the communal flour mill (which will be shared with several communes); the flour will be transformed into bread in the communal bakeries and delivered to the consumers in the communal markets. It will be the same for meats: the animals will be slaughtered in the communal slaughterhouse and cut up in the communal butcher shops. Wines will be preserved in the communal wine cellars and bottled and distributed by special employees. Finally, all the other perishable food commodities will be kept fresh in communal warehouses and kept in glass enclosures in the communal markets.

Above all, immediate efforts must be made to institute the free distribution of certain essential foods, such as bread, meat, wine, dairy products, etc. When abundant food is available and free for all, civilization in general will have taken a giant step forward.

D. Statistics

The main function of the Communal Statistical Commission will be to gather and classify all statistical information pertaining to the commune. The various corporations or associations of production will constantly keep up-to-date records of membership and changes in personnel so that it will be possible to know instantly the number of employees in the various branches of production.

The Bank of Exchange will provide the Statistical Commission with the most complete figures and all other relevant facts on the production and consumption of goods. By means of statistics gathered from all the communes in a region, it will be possible to scientifically balance production and consumption. In line with these statistics, it will also be possible to add more help in industries where production is insufficient and reduce the number of men where there is a surplus of production. Statistics will also make it easy to fit working hours to the productive needs of soci-

ety. It will be equally possible to estimate, not perfectly, but enough for practical purposes, the relative value of the labor time involved in the various products, which will serve as the criteria for the prices of the Banks of Exchange.

But this is not all. The Statistical Commission will be able to perform some of the functions that are today exercised by the civil state, for example, recording births and deaths. We do not include marriage because in a free society, the voluntary union of a man and a woman will no longer be an official but a purely personal matter, not subject to, or requiring, public sanction.

There are many other uses for statistics: in relation to diseases, weather phenomena, in short, all facts which regularly gathered and classified can serve as a guide to the development of science and learning in general.

E. Hygiene

Under the general heading Hygiene, we have assembled the various public services which are indispensable to the maintenance of public health. First, of course, are medical services, which will be free of charge to all the inhabitants of the commune. The doctors will not be like capitalists, trying to extract the greatest possible profits from their unfortunate patients. They will be employed by the commune and expected to treat all who need their services. But medical treatment is only the curative side of the science of health care; it is not enough to treat the sick, it is also necessary to prevent disease. This is the true function of hygiene...

F. Security

This service embraces the necessary measures to guarantee to all inhabitants of the commune the security of their person and the protection of their homes, their possessions, etc., against deprivation and accident (fire, floods, etc.).

There will probably be very little brigandage and robbery in a society where each lives in full freedom to enjoy the fruits of his labor and where almost all his needs will be abundantly fulfilled. Material well-being, as well as the intellectual and moral progress which are the products of a truly humane education, available to all, will almost eliminate crimes due to perversion, brutality, and other infirmities. It will nevertheless still be necessary to take precautions for the security of persons. This service, which can be called (if the phrase has not too bad a connotation) the Communal Police, will not be entrusted, as it is today, to a special, official body; all able-bodied inhabitants will be called upon to take turns in the security measures instituted by the commune.

It will doubtless be asked how those committing murder and other violent crimes will be treated in the new equalization society. Obviously society cannot, on the pretext of *respect* for individual rights — and the negation of authority, permit a murderer to run loose, or wait for a friend of the victim to avenge him. The murderer will have to be deprived of his liberty and confined to a special house until he can without danger be returned to society. How is the criminal to be treated during his confinement? And according to what principles should his term be fixed? These are delicate questions on which opinions vary widely. We must learn from experience, but this much we already know: that thanks to the beneficent effects of education (see below) crimes will be rare. Criminals being an exception, they will be treated like the sick and the deranged; the problem of crime which today gives so many jobs to judges, jailers, and police will lose its social importance and become simply a chapter in medical history.

G. Education

The first point to be considered is the question of child support (food, clothes, toys, etc.). Today parents not only support their children but also supervise their education. This is a custom based on a false principle, a principle that regards the child as the personal property of the parents. The child belongs to no one, he belongs only to himself; and during the period when he is unable to protect himself and is thereby exposed to exploitation, it is society that must protect him and guarantee his free development. It is also society that must support him and supervise his education. In supporting him and paying for his education, society is only making an advance “loan” which the child will repay when he becomes an adult producer.

It is society and not the parents who will be responsible for the upkeep of the child. This principle once established, we believe that we should abstain from specifying the exact manner in which this principle should be applied: to do otherwise would risk trying to achieve a Utopia. Therefore the application must be left to free experimentation and we must await the lessons of practical experience. We say only that vis-à-vis the child, society is represented by the commune, and that each commune will have to determine what would be best for the upbringing of the child; here they would have life in common, there they would leave children in care of the mother, at least up to a certain age, etc.

But this is only one aspect of the problem. The commune feeds, clothes, and lodges the children, but who will teach them, who will develop their best characteristics and train them as producers? According to what plan and principles will their education be conducted?

To these questions we reply: the education of children must be integrated; that is, it must at the same time develop both the physical and mental faculties and make the child into a whole man. This education must not be entrusted solely to a specialized caste of teachers; all those who know a science, an art, or a craft can and should be called upon to teach.

We must distinguish two stages in the education of children: the first stage, where the child of five or six is not yet old enough to study science, and where the emphasis is on the development of the physical faculties; and a second stage, where children twelve to sixteen years of age would be introduced to the various divisions of human knowledge while at the same time learning one or more crafts or trades through practice.

The first stage, as just mentioned, will be devoted to development of the physical faculties, to strengthening the body and exercising the senses. Today the powers of hearing, seeing, and manual dexterity are incompletely and haphazardly developed: a rational education, on the contrary, will by special systematic exercises develop these faculties to the highest possible degree. And as to hands, instead of making children only right-handed, attempts will be made to render children equally proficient in the use of the left hand.

And while the senses are developed and bodily vigor is enhanced by intelligent gymnastic exercises, the culture of the mind will begin, but in a spontaneous manner; the child will naturally and unconsciously absorb a store of scientific knowledge. Personal observation, practical experience, conversations between children, or with persons charged with teaching — these will be the only form of instruction children will receive during this first period.

No longer will there be schools, arbitrarily governed by a pedagogue, where the children wait impatiently for the moment of their deliverance when they can enjoy a little freedom outside.

In their gatherings the children will be entirely free. They will organize their own games, their talks, systematize their own work, arbitrate disputes, etc. They will then easily become accus-

tomed to public life, to responsibility, to mutual trust and aid. The teacher whom they have themselves chosen to give them lessons will no longer be a detested tyrant but a friend to whom they will listen with pleasure.

During the second stage, the children, being ages twelve to sixteen, will successively study in a methodical manner the principal branches of human knowledge. They will not be taught by professional teachers but by lay teachers of this or that science, who are also part-time manual workers; and each branch of knowledge will be taught not by one but by many men, all from the commune, who have both the knowledge and the desire to teach. In addition, good books on the subject studied will be read together, and intelligent discussion will follow, thereby lessening the importance attached to the personality of the teacher.

While the child is developing his body and learning the sciences, he will begin apprenticeship as a producer. In the first stage of his education, the need to repair or modify toys will introduce the child to the use of simple tools. During the second stage, he will visit different factories and, stimulated by his liking for one or more trades, will soon finally choose the trade in which he will specialize. The apprentices will be taught by men who are themselves working in the factories, and this practical education will be supplemented by lessons dealing with theory.

In this way, by the time a young man reaches the age of sixteen or seventeen he will have been introduced to the range of human knowledge, learned a trade, and chosen the discipline he likes best. Thus he will be in a position to reimburse society for the expenses involved in his education, not in money but by useful work and respect for the rights of his fellow human beings.

In conclusion, we should make a few remarks on the relationship between the child and his family. There are people who assert that the program of placing the child in the custody of society means "the destruction of the family." This doctrine is devoid of sense. As long as the concurrence of two individuals of different sexes is necessary for procreation, as long as there are fathers and mothers, the natural connection between the parents and the child can never be obliterated by social relations.

Only the character of this connection will be modified. In antiquity the father was the absolute master of the child. He had the power of life and death over him. In modern times paternal authority has been subject to certain restrictions. What, then, could be more natural, than that a free egalitarian society should obliterate what still remains of this authority and replace it with relations of simple affection?

We do not claim that the child should be treated as an adult, that all his caprices should be respected, that when his childish will stubbornly flouts the elementary rules of science and common sense we should avoid making him feel that he is wrong. We say, on the contrary, that the child must be trained and guided, but that the direction of his first years must not be exclusively exercised by his parents, who are all too often incompetent and who generally abuse their authority. The aim of education is to develop the latent capacities of the child to the fullest possible extent and enable him to take care of himself as quickly as possible. It is painfully evident that authoritarianism is incompatible with an enlightened system of education. If the relations of father to son are no longer those of master to slave but those of teacher to student, of an older to a much younger friend, do you think that the reciprocal affection of parents and children would thereby be impaired? On the contrary, when intimate relations of these sorts cease, do not the discords so characteristic of modern families begin? Is not the family disintegrating into bitter frictions largely because of the tyranny exercised by parents over their children?

No one can therefore justly claim that a free and regenerated society will destroy the family. In such a society the father, the mother, and the children will learn to love each other and to respect their mutual rights; at the same time their love will be enriched as it transcends the narrow limits of family affection, thereby achieving a wider and nobler love: the love of the great human family.

V

Social organization cannot be restricted to the local commune or the local federation of producers' groups. We will see how social organization is expanded and completed, on the one hand by the establishment of *regional corporative federations* comprising all the groups of workers in the same industry; and on the other by the establishment of a federation of communes.

We have already indicated in Section III what a corporative federation is. Such organizations in a rudimentary form exist in present society. All workers in a given trade or craft belong to the same organization, for example, the federation of typographical workers. But these organizations are a very crude sketch of what they will become in the new society. The corporative federations will unite all workers in the same industry; they will no longer unite to protect their wages and working conditions against the onslaughts of their employers, but primarily to guarantee the mutual use of the tools of production which are the property of each of these groups and which will by a reciprocal contract become the collective property of the whole corporative federation. In this way, the federation of groups will be able to exercise constant control over production, and regulate the rate of production to meet the fluctuating consumer needs of society.

The corporative federation will operate in a very simple fashion. On the morrow of the revolution, the producers' groups [local unions] belonging to the same industry will find it necessary to send delegates from city to city to exchange information and learn from each other's experience. These partial conferences will prepare the way for a general congress of the corporative federation to be held at some central point. This congress will formulate a federative contract which will be submitted for the correction and approval of all the groups of the corporative federation. A permanent bureau, elected by the congress and responsible to it, will serve as the intermediary link between the groups of the federation and between the federation and all the other corporative federations.

When all the branches [industries], including the agricultural organizations, have been organized in this manner, they will constitute a vast federative network spanning the whole country and embracing all the producers, and therefore all the consumers. The statistics of production, coordinated by the statistical bureaus of every corporative federation, will permit the determination in a rational manner of the hours of labor, the cost price of products and their exchange value, and the quantities in which these products should be produced to meet the needs of the consumers.

People impressed by the hollow declamations of the so-called democrats will perhaps demand that all these details should be settled by a direct vote of all the members of the corporative federations. And when we reply in the negative they will accuse us of despotism; they will protest against what they consider to be the *authority* of the bureaus, arguing that the bureaus should not be invested with the exclusive power to deal with such grave problems and to make decisions of the greatest importance. Our answer will be that the tasks performed by the permanent bureaus do not involve the exercise of any authority whatsoever. They concern only the gathering

and classification of information furnished by the producers' groups. Once this information is combined and *made public*, it will be used to help fix prices and costs, the hours of labor, etc.

Such operations involve simple mathematical calculations which can yield only one correct result, verifiable by all who have access to the figures. The permanent bureau is simply charged to ascertain and make the facts known to everyone. Even now, for example, the postal service performs a somewhat similar service to that which the bureaus of the corporative federations will render in the future; and we know of no person who complains that the post office abuses its authority because it collects, classifies, and delivers the mail without submitting every operation to universal suffrage.

Furthermore, the producers' groups forming the federation will intervene in the acts of the bureau in a far more effective and direct manner than simply by voting. For it is they who will furnish all the information and supply the statistics, which the bureau only coordinates. The bureau is merely the passive intermediary through which the groups communicate and publicly ascertain the results of their own activities. The vote is a device for settling questions which cannot be resolved by means of scientific data, problems which must be left to the arbitrary decision of numbers. But in questions susceptible to a precise scientific solution there is no need to vote. The truth cannot be decided by vote; it verifies and imposes itself by the mighty power of its own evidence.

But we have only dealt with one half of the extracommunal organization; the federative corporations will be paralleled by the establishment of the Federation of Communes.

VI

The revolution cannot be confined to a single country: it is obliged under pain of annihilation to spread, if not to the whole world, at least to a considerable number of civilized countries. In fact, no country today can be self-sufficient; international links and transactions are necessary for production and cannot be cut off. If a revolutionary country is blockaded by neighboring states the Revolution, remaining isolated, would be doomed. Just as we base ourselves on the hypothesis of the triumph of the Revolution in a given country, we must also assume that most other European countries will make their revolutions at the same time.

In countries where the proletariat has managed to free itself from the domination of the bourgeoisie, the newly initiated social organizations do not have to conform to a set pattern and may differ in many respects. To this day there are many disagreements between the socialists of the Germanic nations (Germany and England) and those of the Latin and Slavic countries (Italy, Spain, France, and Russia). Hence, it is probable that the social organization adopted by the German revolutionists, for example, will differ on some or many points from what is introduced by the Italian or French revolutionaries. But these differences are not important insofar as international relations are concerned; the fundamental principles of the Revolution (see Sections I and II above) being the same, friendly relations and solidarity will no doubt be established between the emancipated peoples of the various countries.

It goes without saying that artificial frontiers created by the present governments will be swept away by the Revolution. The communes will freely unite and organize themselves in accordance with their economic interests, their language affinities, and their geographic circumstances. And in certain countries like Italy and Spain, too vast for a single agglomeration of communes and

divided by nature into many distinct regions, there will probably be established not one but many federations of communes. This will not be a rupture of unity, a return to the old fragmentation of petty, isolated, and warring political states. These diverse federations of communes, while maintaining their identity, will not be isolated. United by their intertwining interests, they will conclude a pact of solidarity, and this voluntary unity founded on common aims and common needs, on a constant exchange of informal, friendly contacts, will be much more intimate and much stronger than the artificial political centralization imposed by violence and having no other motive than the exploitation of peoples for the profit of privileged classes.

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



James Guillaume
Ideas on Social Organization
1876

Retrieved on 23 April 2011 from www.marxists.org
Written: August 1874;
Source: *Bakunin on Anarchy*, translated and edited by Sam Dolgoff, 1971.

theanarchistlibrary.org