

The Policy of the Council

Mikhail Bakunin

1869

The Council of Action does not ask any worker if he is of a religious or atheistic turn of mind. She does not ask if he belongs to this or that or no political party. She simply says: Are you a worker? If not, do you feel the necessity of devoting yourself wholly to the interests of the working class, and of avoiding all movements that are opposed to it! Do you feel at one with the workers? And have you the strength in you that is requisite if you would be loyal to their cause? Are you aware that the workers-who create all wealth, who have made civilisation end fought for liberty-are doomed to live in misery, ignorance, and slavery! Do you understand that the main root of all the evils that the workers experience, is poverty? And that poverty-which is the common lot of the workers in all parts of the world-is a consequence of the present economic organisation of society, and especially of the enslavement of labour-i. e. the prole tariat-under the yoke of capitalism -i.e. the bourgeoisie.

Do you know that between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie there exists a deadly antagonism which is the logical consequence of the economic positions of the two classes? Do you know that the wealth of the bourgeoisie is incompatible with the comfort and liberty of the workers, because their excessive wealth is, and can only be, built upon the robbing and enslavement of the workers! Do you understand that, for the same reason, the prosperity and dignity of the labouring man inevitably demands the entire abolition of the bourgeoisie! Do you realise that no single worker, however intelligent and energetic he may be, can fight successfully against the excellently organised forces of the bourgeoisie- a force which is upheld mainly by the Organisation of the State- all States?

Do you not see that, in order to become a power, you must unite-not with the bourgeoisie, which would be a folly and a crime, since all the bourgeoisie, so far as they belong to their class, are our deadly enemies?-Nor with such workers as have deserted their own cause and have lowered themselves to beg for the benevolence of the governing class? But with the honest men, who are moving, in all sincerity, towards the same goal as you? Do you understand that, against the powerful combinations, formed by the privileged classes, the capitalists or possessors of the means and instruments of production and distribution, the divided or sectarian associations of labour, can ever triumph? Do you not realise that, in order to fight and to vanquish this capitalist combination, nothing less than the amalgamation, in council and action, of all local, and national labour associations-federating into an international association of the workers of all lands,-is required.

If you know and comprehend all this, come into our camp whatever else your political or religious convictions are. But if you are at one with us, and so long as you are at one with us, you will wish to pledge the whole of your being, by your every action as well as by your words, to the common cause, as a spontaneous and whole-hearted expression of that fervent loyalty that will inevitably take possession of you. You will have to promise:

1. To subordinate your personal and even your family interest, as well as political and religious bias and would be activities, to the highest interest of our association, namely the struggle of labour against Capital, the economic fight of the Proletariat against the Bourgeoisie.
2. Never, in your personal interests, to compromise with the bourgeoisie.
3. Never to attempt to secure a position above your fellow workers, whereby you would become at once a bourgeois and an enemy of the proletariat: for the only difference between capitalists and workers is this: the former seek their welfare outside, and at the expense of, the welfare of the community whilst the welfare of the latter is dependent on the solidarity of those who are robbed on the industrial field.
4. To remain ever and always to this principle of the solidarity of labour: for the smallest betrayal of this principle, the slightest deviation from this solidarity, is, in the eyes of the International, the greatest crime and shame with which a worker can soil himself.

The pioneers of the Councils of Action act wisely in refusing to make philosophic or political principles the basis of their association, and preferring to have the exclusively economic struggle of Labour against Capital as the sole foundation. They are convinced that the moment a worker realises the class struggle, the moment he-trusting to his right and the numerical strength of his class-enters the arena against capitalist robbery: that very moment, the force of circumstances and the evolution of the struggle, will oblige him to recognise all the political, socialistic, and philosophic principles of the class-struggle. These principles are nothing more or less than the real expression of the aims and objects of the working-class. The necessary and inevitable conclusion of these aims, their one underlying and supreme purpose, is the abolition-from the political as well as from the social viewpoint of:-

1. The class-divisions existent in society, especially of those divisions imposed on society by, and in, the economic interests of the bourgeoisie.
2. All Territorial States, Political Fatherlands and Nations, and on the top of the historic ruins of this old world order, the establishment of the great international federation of all local and national productive groups.

From the philosophic point of view, the aims of the working class are nothing less than the realisation of the eternal ideals of humanity, the welfare of man, the reign of equality, justice, and liberty on earth, making unnecessary all belief in heaven and all hopes for a better hereafter.

The great mass of the workers, crushed by their daily toil, live in ignorance and misery. Whatever the political and religious prejudices in which they have been reared individually may be, this man is unconsciously Socialistic; instinctively, and, through the pinch of hunger and their

position, more earnestly and truly Socialistic all the “scientific” and “bourgeois Socialists” put together. The mass are Socialists through all the circumstances reasoning; and, in reality, the necessities of life have a greater influence over those of pure reasoning, because reasoning (or thought) is only the reflex of the continually developing life-force and not its basis.

The workers do not lack reality, the zeal for Socialist endeavour, but only the Socialist idea. Every worker, from the bottom of his heart, is longing for a really human existence, i.e. material comfort and mental development founded on justice, i.e. equality and liberty for each and every man in work. This cannot be realised in the existing political and social Organisation, which is founded on injustice and bare-faced robbery of the labouring masses. Consequently, every reflective worker becomes a revolutionary Socialist, since he is forced to realise that his emancipation can only be accomplished by the complete overthrow of present-day society. Either this organisation of injustice with its entire machine of oppressive laws and privileged institutions, must disappear, or else the proletariat is condemned to eternal slavery.

This is the quintessence of the Socialist idea, whose germs can be found in the instinct of every serious thinking worker. Our object, therefore, is to make him conscious of what he wants, to awaken in him a clear idea that corresponds with instincts: for the moment the class consciousness of the proletariat has lifted itself up to the level of their instinctive feeling, their intention will have developed into determination, and their power will be irresistible.

What prevents the quicker development of this idea, of salvation amongst the Proletariat? Its ignorance; and, to a great extent, the political and religious prejudices with which the governing classes are trying to befog the consciousness and the natural intelligence of the people. How can you disperse this ignorance and destroy these strange prejudices? “The liberation of the Proletariat must be the work of the Proletariat itself,” says the preface to the general statute of the (First) International. And it is a thousand times true! This is the main foundation of our great association. But the working class is still very ignorant. It lacks completely every theory. There is only one way out therefore, namely-Proletarian liberation through action. And what will this action be that will bring the masses to Socialism? It is the economic struggle of the Proletariat against the governing class carried out in solidarity. It is the Industrial Organisation of the workers-the Council of Action.

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