

The Red Association

Mikhail Bakunin

1870

Political Freedom without economic equality is a pretense, a fraud, a lie; and the workers want no lying.

The workers necessarily strive after a fundamental transformation of society, the result of which must be the abolition of classes, equally in economic as in political respects: after a system of society in which all men will enter the world under special conditions, will be able to unfold and develop themselves, work and enjoy the good things of life. These are the demands of justice.

But how can we from the abyss of ignorance, of misery and slavery, in which the workers on the land and in the cities are sunk, arrive at that paradise, the realization of justice and manhood? For this the workers have one means: the Association of Councils.

Through the Association they brace themselves up, they mutually improve each other and, through their own efforts, make an end of that dangerous ignorance which is the main support of their slavery. By means of the Association, they learn to help, and mutually support one another. Thereby they will recall, finally, a power which will prove more powerful than all confederated bourgeois capital and political powers put together.

The Council must become *the* Association in the mind of every worker. It must become the password of every political and agitation organization of the workers, the password of every group, in every industry throughout all lands. Undoubtedly the Council; is the weightiest and most hopeful sign of the proletarian struggle an infallible omen of the coming complete emancipation of the workers.

Experience has proved that the isolated associations are not more powerful than are the isolated workers. Even the Association of all Workers' Associations of a single country would not be sufficiently powerful to stand up in conflict with the International combination of all profit making world capital. Economic science establishes the fact that the emancipation of the worker is no national question. No country, no matter how wealthy, mighty, and well-served it may be, can undertake—without ruining itself and surrendering its inhabitants to misery—a fundamental alteration in the relations between capital and labor, if this alteration is not accomplished, at the same time, at least, in the greatest part of the industrial countries of the world. Consequently, the question of the emancipation of the worker from the yoke of capital and its representatives, the bourgeois capitalists, is, above all, an International question. Its solution, therefore, is only possible through an International Movement.

Is this International Movement a secret idea, a conspiracy? Not in the least. The International Movement, the Council Association, does not dictate from above or prescribe in secret. It federates from below and will from a thousand quarters. It speaks in every group of workers and embraces the combined decision of all factions. The Council is living democracy: and whenever the Association formulates plans, it does it openly, and speaks to all who will listen. Its word is the voice of labor recruiting its energies for the overthrow of capitalist oppression.

What does the Council say? What is the demand it makes through every association of these who toil and think, in every factory, in every country? What does it request? Justice! The strictest justice and the rights of humanity: the right of manhood, womanhood, childhood, irrespective of all distinctions of birth, race, or creed. The right to live and the obligation to work to maintain that right. Service from each to all and from all to each. If this idea appears appalling and prodigious to the existent bourgeois society, so much the worse for this Society. Is the Council of Action a revolutionary enterprise? Yes and no.

The Council of Action is revolutionary in the sense that it will replace a society based upon injustice, exploitation, privilege, laziness, and authority, by one which is founded upon justice and freedom for all mankind. In a word, it wills an economic, political, and social organization, in which each person, without prejudice to his natural and personal idiosyncrasies, will find it equally possible to develop himself, to learn, to think, to work, to be active, and to enjoy life honorably. Yes, this it desires; and we repeat, once more, if this is incompatible with the existing organization of society, so much the worse for this society.

Is the Council of Action revolutionary in the sense of barricades and of violent uprising or demonstration? No; the Council concerns itself but little with this kind of politics; or, rather, one should say that the Council takes no part in it whatever. The bourgeois revolutionaries, anxious for some change of power, and police agents finding occupation in passing explosions of sound and fury, are annoyed greatly with the Council of Action on account of the Council's indifference towards their activities and schemes of provocation.

The Council of Action, the Red Association of these who want and toil, comprehended, long since, that each bourgeois politic—no matter how red and revolutionary it might appear—served not the emancipation of the workers, but the tightening of their slavery. Even if the Council had not comprehended this fact, the miserable game, which, at times, the bourgeois republican and even the bourgeois Socialist plays, would have opened the workers' eyes.

The Council of Action, ever evolving more completely into the International Workers' Movement, holds itself severely aloof from the dismal political intrigues, and knows to-day only one policy: to each group and to each worker: his propaganda, its extension and organization into struggle and action. On the day when the great proportion of the world's workers have associated themselves through Council of Actions, and so firmly organized through Council of Actions, and so firmly organized through their divisions into one common solidarity of movement, no revolution, in the sense of violent insurrection, will be necessary. From this it will be seen that anarchists do not stand for abortive violence which its enemies attribute to it. Without violence, justice will triumph. Oppression will be liquidated by the direct power of the workers through association. And if that day, there are impatient pleads, and some suffering, this will be the guilt of the bourgeoisie refusing to recognize what has happened, through their machination. To the triumph of the social revolution itself violence will be unnecessary.

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