

Letter to Jeanne Deroin

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

August 4, 1848

Madame.

You have understood me perfectly: what I pursue under the name of the abolition of usury and of property, is the restoration of the family, it is the advent of the man-king, and of the woman-queen.

Until this great reform is accomplished, men and women will not love one another: cupidity will infect their union, and behind cupidity comes brutality of the senses. Libertinism replaces love, and murder, finally, takes its place at the domestic hearth, and chases off devotion, sanctity and decency. I say nothing to you of my religious opinions: that is too grueling and difficult a text. But what does that matter to you, if I want everything that is, according to you, desired by the Divinity?

But it is not enough, Madame, to discuss these things: it is necessary to put them into practice, and do what will not be done by the men on whom the destinies of France, at this moment, depend.

Poverty increases, winter approaches and if we do not bring about a quick and efficacious remedy for the growing pauperism, the industrial and financial disorder, we run the risk, in a few months, of finding ourselves like the castaways of the Medusa, obliged to commandeer everything, put ourselves on rations and live in community until we decide to live in liberty, equality and fraternity, under the law of labor and devotion.

Thus it is appropriate that the citizens, both male and female, who take to heart the interests of the People and the Revolution, seek to put themselves in a position to oppose these calamitous times, to which I still do not see an end several months from now and which will inevitable worsen

We must, in a word, organize, if not labor, at least aid and charity.

Let women sustain one another, let them create relief funds; in addition, let them continue to labor, even at a reduced price, for it will be better to gain five cents than to do nothing; let them solicit the return of work by this decline; finally, let them engage in a sort of mutual and *fraternelle* association until we escape from poverty.

Let us not remain spectators to the fire that consumes us: let us work at the pumps, and try to extinguish the flames. Let us resign ourselves for awhile to a sort of division of goods; but at the same time let us strive to use our time, and, since one part of our brethren must be fed by the

other, let us occupy the first with something, make it labor, even if that labor must be given for nothing.

It is with this thought, Madame, that I would pray you to welcome the visit that I have enlisted a poor widow, Mme Gueyffier, to make you: being absolutely unable to occupy myself with private distresses, in this moment when I have to uphold the question of the general poverty, and to defend myself against the enemies of the Republic and their cowardly auxiliaries.

I am, Madame, your very humble servant.

P.-J. PROUDHON.

P. S. – Madame, I would receive with pleasures any communications that you would make to me in the name of the meeting where you preside regarding the organization of mutual aid that I have proposed to you. It is by organization, by labor, that we will vanquish the enemy. To date, we have spoken too much, but we have done nothing.

Mme Jeanne Dervin,
Rue Miromesnil, 4.

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A letter, apparently not included in the *Correspondence*, from Proudhon to Jeanne Deroin. The date is uncertain. Working translation by Shawn P. Wilbur.

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