

REVUE SOCIALE

POLITICAL ECONOMY

—

PROLETARIAN DIALOGUES.

(We propose to treat various questions of political economy in the form of dialogues. The essay that we give today has already appeared (under this title: LE PROLÉTAIRE ET LE BOURGEOIS, *dialogue sur la question des salaires*; broch. in-8", chez Perrotin, libraire, place de la Bourse, M. DCCC XL); but we have thought it useful to reproduce it. The question of *the lowering of wages* is one of the facets of the great question of the proletariat. It certainly goes without saying that the object of our writing is not in the least to push the working people down the miserable and bloody road of coalition, but to push them, by lighting it, down the peaceful and moral road of association.)

FIRST DIALOGUE

WHERE WE DEMONSTRATE

THAT THE LOWERING OF WAGES PROFITS NO ONE.

The interior of a workshop office.

The Bourgeois is seated in a chair of green leather, with gilt nails, before a mahogany desk; the Worker is standing, cap in hand.

THE BOURGEOIS.

I tell you, François, this price is my last word: it is for you to take it or leave it, to remain with me or go on your way, to work or to rest.

THE PROLETARIAN.

But, in truth, bourgeois, there is no good sense in diminishing every day in this way the wages of the poor workers! Where will we end up, at this rate! Everyone must still live! Neither my comrades nor myself can work at this price! There is only water to drink, I swear! And our wives, then! And our children! Who will care for them?

THE BOURGEOIS.

I will not go into all these details, François; all that I can say to you is that the price that I have offered you is really the one for the work that there is to do, and that if you and your friends don't want it, others certainly will.

THE PROLETARIAN.

I know that only too well, bourgeois! There are so many ready to sell themselves for the lowest price, poor workers without work who are dying of hunger! But isn't it truly horrifying to speculate, as you do, on the misery of these men! And when you dismiss us this time, what will become of us? Will we, in turn, become the spoilers? And in a few months, perhaps you'll come looking for us, won't you, to reduce the wages of those who are going to replace us today? It won't be this way. I swear it on my word as a Frenchman. We will not work at the price you quote, but others won't work at it either. It is as much in their interest as in ours; for if they want to play the dirty trick on us today by accepting your price and supplanting us, aren't we free tomorrow to return the favor? Let them not play this dishonest game, and we won't play it either!

THE BOURGEOIS.

Very well! your intention, as I see it, is to associate, to support on another, to form a coalition!... But do you know that the law forbids and punishes these sorts of association?

THE PROLETARIAN.

And if I myself do not want to work, does one have the right to force me? I am, perhaps, not a naked slave!

THE BOURGEOIS.

Certainly, no one can force you to work, François; but the law forbids you from associating with another for the purpose of preventing work. Besides, that's not what we're discussing. Do you want the price I'm offering or not?

THE PROLETARIAN.

We don't want it, bourgeois, for the simple reason that it is impossible. And if you, masters, were to have your prices reduced! What wouldn't you say? I can almost hear you exclaiming: *And what about my workers to pay! And the overhead costs of my business! And the rent on my capital! And my wife's upkeep! And mine! And my children's! And their education! Truly, I cannot contribute to this reduction in my profits: I'd rather close up shop and rest.* Well then! We're in the same boat: you won't make us work for such a low price.

THE BOURGEOIS.

But, François, what you're saying is what I would say if my profits were reduced, I'll be forced to say precisely that if you workers don't agree to the price I'm asking. You'll force me to close shop today even. Is it me, is it the employers, who are profiting from what you workers call a reduction of your wages? If you earn two cents less a day, those two cents aren't going into my pocket, believe me. Besides, we employers are just like you, we're not earning anything anymore! For some years now, it's been a well-known fact, our profits have been steadily decreasing.

THE PROLETARIAN.

What you're telling me, bourgeois, isn't new to me; for other colleagues of yours have already told me the same thing, and a hundred times over. But, in truth, try as I might, I can understand nothing from it. If it is not you, masters, who are profiting from the reduction of our wages, then who is? If it is not you who are profiting, why do you not prevent this reduction from taking place? By what right, far from preventing it, do you, on the contrary, provoke it? Someone, whose name I do not know, wants our wages reduced; and it is you, masters, whom this reduction leaves indifferent, who take it upon yourselves to inform us! But abandon this shamefully dubious role, and let the one or those who stand to benefit from the reduction of our wages approach us! Let them come, so that we may explain ourselves! We cannot, we must not deal with you, but with them. By persisting in acting as intermediaries, you make yourselves guilty! A man could order me to kill you. Tell me, should I obey him? And if, out of weakness or cowardice, I obeyed him, would I be any less guilty, and would my name not be *murderer, assassin*? You argue that your profits have fallen; you say they are far from what they used to be!... But, do us justice! Did we workers cooperate in any way whatsoever in this? No. So it is you who have stripped yourselves bare! It is you who, faced with the threat, or its mere shadow, yielded like cowards, without warning us, without calling on us for help! Well, I grant you that you had the right to do so; but this sacrifice of your interests does not in the least give you the right to force us to sacrifice our own! Masters, you could, it must be believed, reduce your profits; we workers, we cannot reduce our wages.

THE BOURGEOIS.

You can, François, you can; for your wages have already diminished greatly.

THE PROLETARIAN.

Precisely, bourgeois, there must be limits to everything. You know, the pitcher goes to the well so often that it eventually breaks.

THE BOURGEOIS.

Well, François, we're not there yet: keep going.

THE PROLETARIAN.

As for me, bourgeois, and some of my comrades, we're there, I assure you, and can go no further.

THE BOURGEOIS.

What does that mean?

THE PROLETARIAN.

It means, bourgeois, that it is clear as day to us that all our suffering, as workers, comes solely from you masters, who, when sales slow down or don't go as you wish, scheme to force them. Now, why do you need to force them? Is it wise to make a donkey drink when it's not thirsty?

THE BOURGEOIS.

But, François, you can't be serious! When sales slow down, isn't it our duty to make them pick up again? You yourselves have a great interest in it; for, in the end, when business is bad, you suffer more than we do. We stop earning, but you stop working: which means nothing else but that we are in trouble and you are starving.

THE PROLETARIAN.

You're mistaken, bourgeois; you are mistaken. Certainly, it is a great misfortune for us when business is bad, when nothing is sold, when there's no more work; but are all remedies equally effective for such a misfortune, and can't you imagine that instead of curing it, one might exacerbate it? Your horse is tired, it drags itself along rather than going; however, instead of putting it in the stable, you feed it, and there it is, regaining some strength! Applaud yourselves for this effect! Clap your hands! Continue this regimen! Don't you realize, then, that fever is consuming your horse, and that this vigor you spoke of isn't vigor at all, but sickness! You didn't want to stop at inns for the night; you'll be forced to stop there both night and day: good for you!

THE BOURGEOIS.

According to you, François, the merchant has no choice but to fold his arms, close shop, and keep quiet until a customer decides to come in and buy. His markets are full, they're closing, and he won't be allowed to look for others, to create new ones! Sales are slowing down, business isn't booming: it's an evil, but a necessary one, and no merchant should do anything to destroy it! These are some peculiar maxims of political economy, François! Are they approved?

THE PROLETARIAN.

I don't know what you mean, bourgeois; but I suspect you're confusing two very distinct, separate questions here. When business is bad, people have questions to ask themselves. It's quite simple. They have to ask themselves: *What should be done?* But they also have to ask themselves: *What shouldn't be done?* Now, pay attention to this

latter problem, which alone holds and should hold our attention at this moment: we are only concerned with it. I have nothing to tell you, for the moment, about the first; but I have everything to tell you about what you, the masters, have done, and what *you should not have done*.

In order to force sales, you first agreed to a reduction in your profits; then you went so far as to demand a reduction in our wages from us, poor workers! Well, should you have acted this way? That's the question. You say *yes*, and it seems quite simple to you. My colleagues and I say *no*, and this conduct strikes us as both immoral and crude.

Let us reason, please, and reason fairly. There are two distinct facts here: the decrease in your profits and the decrease in our wages. Do you believe these two decreases produce the same effect? You are mistaken if you do. There are two causes; therefore, there will be two effects.

The decrease in your profits forces sales!... In what way? By lowering the price of products, by attracting to the consumption of these products people whom their high prices had previously deterred. Has the purchasing power of these products increased, through some singular virtue of the very decrease in their prices? Not in the least. But to the ordinary consumers of these products have been added new ones, born of the people, drawn from the people. At the same time, yet another effect has resulted from this decrease in your profits; this is a decrease in the interest rate, in the rate of returns. Income has fallen; interest has fallen: the capitalists have therefore become less wealthy. If you will take this minor incident into account, we must summarize this series of effects due to the decline in your profits as follows: 1. decrease in revenue, corresponding increase in wages; 2. decrease in the consumption of the wealthy classes, corresponding increase in the consumption of the poor classes; 3. decline of the trade in expensive and luxurious goods, prosperity of the trade in goods that meet the needs of the people..

Certainly, gentlemen of the lords, it would be very noble of you, and you would deserve the name of *benefactors of the people*, if, taking advantage of your intermediate position between us workers and the capitalists, you had constantly striven to achieve this result, and had actually obtained it in its purest form. But this has not been the case. And wanting, still and always, to force sales, you have constantly attacked our wages. But this leads us precisely to the other side of the coin! For look! By lowering wages, you are, on the one hand, depriving the poor of the money they have: which is tantamount to saying that you are depriving the trade of *common and useful goods* of their consumers, their markets; and on the other hand, you are correspondingly increasing the rent, the interest on money: which is tantamount to saying that you are giving back to the trade of *expensive and luxurious goods* their markets, their consumers. So here we are, climbing back up the slope we descended. The people and their commerce were favored: this return, this new ascent, completely sacrifices them. But why descend if we were going to climb back up? And why climb back up if we are going to have to descend? The reason, the only reason to give, is that you masters are incessantly tormented by the desire to sell. Like Perrin Dandin, who always wanted to

judge, you always want to *sell*. Are your practices saturated, and you seek new ones? You have sacrificed the former for these; you return to the former, and immediately sacrifice the latter to them.

But, bourgeois, is this reason truly sound, is it legitimate? Do you, masters, really have the right to instill such feverish agitation in the nation? Do you have the right to create, in turn, the poor and the rich? To attack both? To alternately weigh on the wage scale and the revenue scale? To favor the people at the expense of the capitalists and the capitalists at the expense of the people? By doing so, no doubt, you think you are giving commerce new vigor, you believe you are expanding it, you believe you are opening new markets! All this is a mistake; you are doing nothing more, once again, than sliding down a slope only to climb it again immediately.

One cannot force sales or exchange. The natural extent of these sales is determined by the amount of revenue added to the amount of wages. You merchants have no other outlets for your products than this figure of wages and this figure of revenue, no other consumers than rentiers and wage earners, capitalists and proletarians, the rich and the poor, the people and the aristocracy. By lowering your profits, by lowering our wages, you can therefore easily effect an internal movement in the respective figures of wages and rent; you can increase or decrease the figure of rent or the figure of wages; but you cannot prevent the decrease in the figure of rent from always being equal to the increase in the figure of wages, and, conversely, the decrease in the figure of wages from being equal to the increase in the figure of rent: so that the total figure of wages and rent is invariably always found to be the same, and the sole measure of the extent of sales.

I do not believe I am being fooled by an illusion here, in appreciating in this way the respective effects of the decline in your profits, the decline in our wages, and your furious passion to force the sale when it slows down or does not go according to your desires. Let us conclude, then, that by blindly indulging in this furious passion, by simultaneously reducing your profits and our wages, you have not only failed to resolve the first question suggested by the stagnation of trade: *What must be done?* but you have not even resolved the second question: *What must not be done?* (For it is obvious to me, and it must be obvious to you, to everyone, that the primary question being: *What must be done to prevent sales from slowing down, to ensure the expansion of trade?* it is counterproductive to compensate for a mere change in the consumer base. The rich buy less, the poor buy more! From a goldsmith, you have become a clog peddler! There is a perfect balance between the increased spending of some and the decreased spending of others!... And you call this prosperity of trade! Creation of new markets! Importation of new industries! But you are not even considering it! It's the *status quo* within the *status quo* itself, which is to say, the most dangerous and least well-founded thing there is!

THE BOURGEOIS.

François, my friend François, what should we do when business is bad?

THE PROLETARIAN.

I have already told you, bourgeois, that this is not the question that is currently being debated and should be being debated between us. Does it follow that because I have a task to perform, that I must run, I will be right if I sit down or lie down? It is not enough to do something; one must do what is necessary. You have a sore arm; I treat your leg: am I right, and do you owe me great thanks? Let us begin, then, by agreeing that the remedy for the stagnation of trade lies neither in the frenzy to sell that grips all of you, you masters, nor in the decrease in your profits, nor in the decrease in our wages; that therefore, 1. as wise men, you should have focused above all on protecting yourselves from the fatal passion for selling; 2. as honest men, you should have refrained from reducing your profits, a reduction which is, after all, merely an incentive bonus granted by yourselves to the gambling that consumes you; 3. finally, as moral men, you should have rejected the shameful role of forcing us, the proletarians, by the most infamous means, to consent to a reduction in our wages.

THE BOURGEOIS.

Your words are sharp, François, and profoundly unjust. First, I see nothing shameful in the fact of this proposition: *Here is some work, do you want to do it or not at this price?* I do not see, secondly, that a man's probity is called into question because this man agrees to earn less; and finally, I do not see that it is wise for a man to resist the very conditions of his existence. The merchant is a man; he sells, selling constitutes him. If he doesn't sell, he ceases to be a merchant; selling is his business, his work, his only means of living. Yet, when sales don't go well, you deny him the right to strive to make them go well; you go further, you accuse him of a crime! But, François, if the merchant doesn't sell, he ceases to be a merchant, he ceases to work; he ceases, consequently, to be able to provide for his family's needs, for his own; he is condemned to die of hunger. Does anyone, in this situation, come to his aid? No: he must therefore provide for himself! It is a right that he has. It is even more; it is a duty. To fail in this duty, to not exercise this right, is to be immoral, it is to commit suicide, it is to endanger the lives of those who make up his family. I fully understand that, to achieve this goal — *to provide for his family's needs, his own needs*, in other words, *to sell* — the merchant shouldn't use just any means, that his maxim shouldn't be that of the Jesuits: *The end justifies the means*. But in what way is the voluntary reduction of his profits truly a bad means? Who does this means harm? Is it others? Is it the one who uses it? Certainly not others, who buy at lower prices; and not the merchant, since this very fact allows him to sell. He earns less, but he sells three times as much: he therefore earns more in the end, and no one here has anything to say against it. Could it be in this proposition: *Here is some work, do you want to do it or not at this price, which is all right?* But this is only a perfectly legitimate proposition: it is up to you, workers, to accept or refuse it. Is the merchant within his rights, yes or no? Is he absolutely compelled to ask you this question? That is the problem, which is not really a problem at all; for it is certain that this is indeed the necessity in which he finds himself.

Therefore, blame this necessity, not him; and consent or refuse, according to your own interest, to the reduction of your wages. You are not being forced in the least; you are free, but so is the merchant. If, faced with slow sales, this merchant could not make you this offer, he would be a slave; and you are free precisely because you are being given the option to accept or refuse it.

THE PROLETARIAN.

Bourgeois, please take it. (He extends his hand.) We shall come to an understanding, since you take it this way. I never told you that it was in the merchant's interest not to sell, and that he should consider himself fortunate when business is slow! This man's interest is to sell, and to sell a great deal, certainly. But is this man alone on earth? And the capitalist from whom he borrows capital, the worker from whom he borrows labor—are they not men like him? Now, if he harms these men in their interests, as a result of his love for his own self-interest, is he acting honestly? No. Well then! By reducing his profit, he lowers the rate of money, which is not in the capitalist's interest; and by reducing our wages, he lowers the rate of labor, which is not in our interest. We are free, you say, to accept or refuse this reduction in our wages! Well, you know perfectly well that we are not. A hungry belly has no more intelligence or freedom than it has ears. Do I think of my other needs when I am the prey of hunger?

If, therefore, you invoke the merchant's interest and freedom to approve both his passion for selling and the means he employs to satisfy that passion, I, in turn, will invoke the capitalist's interest and freedom, the worker's interest and freedom, to duly condemn this conduct of the merchant.

I know full well that by speaking thus I am not resolving the question of commerce in the least; but again, bourgeois, that is not the question we are discussing right now. My aim is to show you that you masters haven't resolved it either, and that what you have done, what you do every day, is not in the least founded on reason or justice. You have no right to always want to sell, and, for this profoundly selfish purpose, to first sacrifice a portion of your own profits, and then to come and demand from us, the proletarians, the sacrifice of some part of our wages.

THE BOURGEOIS.

We must have this right, since we exercise it.

THE PROLETARIAN.

You exercise this right, bourgeois, because we proletarians, with our heads bowed in ignorance, have until now allowed it. But now that our heads are raised, this right no longer belongs to you; it falls, it is broken; cease to exercise it.

You just posed the question in these terms: The merchant is a man who sells; selling is his work, selling is his livelihood. When sales are poor, no one comes to the aid of the merchant in distress; therefore, this merchant, reduced to his own strength, has the right to use it: he has the right to reduce his profits in order to sell; he has the right to

pose this terrible dilemma to the workers: *Work at this price, or starve to death!* Well then, bourgeois, I seize upon the very terms of this question, and I tell you in turn: The worker is a man who labors; working is his livelihood, working is his livelihood. When work yields no profit, no one in the world comes to the aid of the worker's distress, his profound misery. Therefore, reduced to his own strength, this worker has the right to use it for the legitimate purpose of avoiding suicide and providing for his family.

You cannot dispute either this definition of the worker or the consequence I draw from it, especially within the scope I immediately define. For, bourgeois, this scope is, in truth, very limited; I confine it to this: Should the worker accept the price reductions offered by the employer? Well, within this very scope I answer: No, the worker cannot accept a decrease in his wages.

For, note this well! The worker's wages are not linked to the employer's profits. When the worker's wages decrease, that says it all: his consumption must also decrease. Whereas a decrease in the master's profits does not lead to a decrease in his consumption; quite the opposite, in fact, most often occurs. It is to become richer, in short, that the master agrees to earn less; when the proletarian agrees to earn less, he certainly becomes poorer.

This difference is immense, and sufficient on its own to establish that the duty and the right of the proletarian is to suffer anything rather than resort to this pernicious means of obtaining work, which is to agree to any reduction in his wages. If he earns less on the one hand, and on the other if he works longer hours, what does this mean, if not that he will spend less and that current demands will be met sooner? So sooner or later, for these two reasons combined, the work will again slip from his grasp, leaving him without pay. Therefore, let that day be better today without a pay cut than tomorrow with one: that is the real interest of the proletarian, his only interest.

But I am speaking of an impossible thing; the unjust work is complete! Half the workers labor, the other half rest; and the wages of those who work, reduced to paltry sums, are still being eroded every day! How long will this continue, great gods! How much longer will we see the working class victims of its own ignorance! In its profound distress, it cries out: *Work! Work at any price!* And even this lowly work will be denied it; it will not have as much as it wants!!

THE BOURGEOIS.

What can you expect, my dear François? It is the force of circumstances that wills it so: we must resign ourselves to it.

THE PROLETARIAN.

One does not resign oneself, bourgeois, to seeing one's wife and children starve to death! And besides, no force of circumstances can withstand this very simple reasoning: From the fact that sales are languishing, from the fact that trade is not doing well, it does not follow in the least that the remedy is, on the one hand, a decrease in the profits of the masters, and on the other, a decrease in the wages of the workers.

THE BOURGEOIS.

Do you then know, François, the effective remedy for the languishing of sales, for the stagnation of trade?

THE PROLETARIAN.

Perhaps, bourgeois! But it is certainly clear to me that the decline in the profits of the masters and the decline in the wages of the workers only make this remedy more urgent. We workers can't take it anymore; and you bourgeois, this life is hard for you!

THE BOURGEOIS.

Very hard indeed, François; but if you know how to make it easier, why don't you say so at once!

THE PROLETARIAN.

What good would it do! You wouldn't use it.

THE BOURGEOIS.

How so?

THE PROLETARIAN.

You wouldn't use it, bourgeois, I tell you. You wouldn't have the courage or the strength; and here, as everywhere, it is we, the people, who must begin to set the example.

THE BOURGEOIS.

You greatly pique my curiosity, François. Explain yourself, I beg you... Unless there's some secret here.

THE PROLETARIAN.

There is no secret, bourgeois, and the matter is quite clear. The habit has been formed; the practice of lowering profits and lowering wages has been going on for a long time: well then, we must dedicate ourselves; we must undertake the difficult task of breaking this habit; we must, in short, oppose the practice of this double reduction of profits and wages. For my part, I swear, as a worker, I will not work below current prices; and wherever my comrades will not work because of prices, I will not work. I will beg for my bread and that of my children, if necessary, rather than break this oath.

THE BOURGEOIS.

You risk dooming yourself all alone, François! This is pure chivalry, pure self-sacrifice, believe me! You will not be supported by your comrades in this endeavor. And you must not be, after all. For where does that lead us? To making work impossible where it could still be done. Thus, I suppose, for example, that you will not agree to the

price we are currently discussing amongst ourselves, what will happen? I will be forced to send the work back; and if none of my colleagues can also get it done, this work will not be completed; it will necessarily be postponed. So, through your fault, a *calence*, a shortage of work is arising. Do you think this shortage of work will do you any good? It is less money for the people; therefore, it is a corresponding increase in the degree of intensity of their present misery.

THE PROLETARIAN.

I told you, bourgeois, that it was useless to speak to you further on this subject! You either don't want to understand me, or you cannot. Is the question simply about having work at any price? We proletarians have moved beyond that: it's too low. We are willing to work, but to work in order to live, not to live in order to work. It is the slave who lives to work, the free man who works to live. Yet, having established this principle, you masters profess the opposite, reducing your own profits on the one hand, and exploiting our ignorance and divisions, we proletarians, on the other, in order to drive down our wages! What are we to do, I ask you? Follow you onto your ground! But that would be to abandon our own; it would be to fail in our human dignity, in our principles; it would degrade us, it would plunge us even deeper into the abyss of ever-deeper misery! What we must do, what we owe, what we can do immediately, is to remind you, masters, of your decency; to refuse to accept your prices; to suffer, without working, physical pains that will inevitably end, rather than to work while suffering endless moral and physical pain; to unite for this legitimate purpose; to extinguish among us, proletarians, all hatred, all division; to help and teach each other in this holy and peaceful crusade against this tide of habit that too often sweeps us, proletarians, that always sweeps you, inhabitants, away — a terrible tide! An immense tide! Behind each of us is an enormous mass rolling and rushing toward a bottomless abyss. You readily agree. So what is there to do? Resist. But we are alone? What does it matter! We will inevitably be crushed? What does it matter! The mass will not crush us without experiencing, at least in its downward movement, a helpful slowing. And our children will be all the stronger for it, able to stop it completely one day.

THE BOURGEOIS.

And when the masses are brought to a standstill, François; when the masters no longer present the workers with this dilemma: *Work at this price or starve to death!* When they also cease trying to sell by lowering their own profits, will all be said and done?

THE PROLETARIAN.

Yes, undoubtedly, bourgeois; for the problem of commerce, which we have reserved in this discussion, will thereby be *on the path to a true solution*.

THE BOURGEOIS.

God grant it to be so, François! But to return to the matter for which I summoned you, your intention is thus quite fixed. Can you not accept the price I propose?

THE PROLETARIAN.

No.

THE BOURGEOIS.

So you begin the resistance! And you sacrifice yourself!

THE PROLETARIAN.

One must begin somewhere. And as for sacrifice, I deny that there will be any on my part. I prefer to suffer physical pain and retain my sense of moral dignity than to live like a fattened pig or a slave fed just enough to be available when needed. Besides, it's a simple arithmetic calculation, one you masters taught us through your own practice! In business terms, suffering isn't suffering, losing isn't losing; it is delaying to enjoy more, losing to gain more. So, you want to start a business, say, public transportation: you immediately lower the prices. The passenger's seat costs you 40 francs, before taxes; you tax it 20 francs: that's 20 francs plus the interest on your money that you lose! But what does it matter! We proletarians didn't understand at first, and we thought you were fools! But after losing a million in this way, your skill and wisdom were revealed to us. No more competition for you! You were left alone; and so you raised prices, and you recouped your losses, and those losses turned out to have been immense profits. You can well imagine that such examples cannot help but bear fruit. You must sow to reap, a proverb as old as the world. Well! We proletarians, by refusing any wage cuts from now on, are sowing to reap. In the moment, the inevitable effect of such a measure is to prevent certain jobs from being done: we know that; but when the plowman throws a sack of wheat into the furrows, it is a sack irrevocably lost to the baker; we must wait for the harvest! We will wait for the harvest!

THE BOURGEOIS.

And if the harvest is long overdue?

THE PROLETARIAN.

All is not lost when we die; on the contrary, all continues.

THE BOURGEOIS.

Very well; but I, who am a master, what am I to do today, on your behalf?

THE PROLETARIAN.

What must you do, bourgeois? Unite with us, resist the devastating torrent, which, without this, will engulf us all, you as well as us! You must boldly refuse all new conditions of labor!...

THE BOURGEOIS.

That is to say, inevitably rush to my doom, to my ruin!

THE PROLETARIAN.

One does not ruin oneself with the people, one saves oneself.

EPILOGUE.

Thank God, the impetus has been given! Throughout France, the question of wages is stirring, and stirring as it should! Honor to the workers, if they persist in the path they have chosen, the path of peaceful resistance to wage cuts!

This is not enough, I grant you, if we consider the collective duty of all citizens, the duty and the right of society as a whole. But it is the first step; and as for the workers, it is the only one that, in the current situation, they are truly able to take without guilt or remorse. By refusing to work at any price lower than that for which they still work, they assert their individuality in opposition to that of their employers, they exercise their rights, they defend within themselves the outraged justice, they secure a better future for their children. Furthermore, they force employers to reflect on their own practices and seek a solution to the problem of sales and commerce other than the one they are accustomed to accepting.

The employers thus inevitably become complicit with the workers! And the problem is attacked comprehensively, that is to say, resolved.

Just as the weakness of fathers and their extreme indulgence produce vicious children, so too does the weakness of the people produce tyrants, and so too does the weakness of the worker produce culpable conduct on the part of employers.

If the worker is willing to work at any cost, why should the employer, preoccupied with his own interests, reject this convenient way of conducting business, which presents itself to him? Why should he rack his brains to solve a problem that, for him, is thus resolved?

Proletarians! Walk boldly on the path you are on. It is the path of liberation and social regeneration. Let no effort cost you, let no suffering deter you! Justice and right are with you.

Do not fear the ignoble cry of *coalition* that your masters will surely raise at the sight of your noble efforts: in the pure and simple refusal to work at a price you do not accept, there is no coalition.

But are you forced to associate?... — Well then! Associate. — But that very fact will lead to a coalition!... — No. A coalition would be the violence you would inflict upon one another. Recognize in your heart that whoever works, works only with the tacit consent of those who do not; and not only will you have recognized in this a tangible and living truth (since it is certain that the worker who does not work has the right, as well as the power, to take away, if he so desires, through competition, the work and wages of the worker who does work), but you will have given your association such a foundation that even the masters themselves would be ashamed to call it a *coalition*.

Therefore, let the worker among you, in his cold selfishness, no longer say: *Times are hard; let us thank God for the work he gives me, let us use my wages for my own needs; and as for those who do not work, let us wish that they would have to work as soon as possible!* For falsehood is not only on the lips of this selfish person, but in his heart: he is a wicked man who flees from the light.

But, on the contrary, let the worker among you now raise his head and go boldly to the worker, to receive the reward for his labor. For in this age, this age of iron! This age of bronze! He who works only works through the will or honesty of he who does not!

And let not the tailor reject the printer, saying: I don't know you! You print books, I sew clothes; what do you and I have in common? For the working class is one family; and it is in vain that the tailor or the printer would try to save themselves through isolation! One is the cause of all working classes, one is the means of winning that cause! We have finished with individual salvation; collective salvation begins: let us make use of it, it is the only true salvation.

Likewise: Let not the working class reject the master whose heart is repentant. For the master is nothing other than a misguided working class.

And let it be so until at last the reign of holy liberty, equality, and fraternity is established among us on earth.

JULES LEROUX.

Jules Leroux, "Dialogues prolétaires," *Revue Sociale* 1 no. 1 (Octobre 1845): 6-10.

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