PAUL DELESALLE

ÉMILE POUGET'S LIFE AS AN ACTIVIST[1]

YOUTH

Émile Pouget was born in 1860 near Rodez in the department of the Aveyron. His notary father died young. His mother re-married and in this way his life was, in a sense, unbalanced. Nonetheless, his stepfather, a good republican in his day, and a fighter like his stepson, quickly lost his post as a petty official over something he wrote in a little campaigning journal which he had founded.

It was at the high school in Rodez, where he began his studies, that his passion for journalism was conceived. At the age of fifteen, he launched his first newspaper, *Le Lycéen républicain*. I need not say what sort of reception this little sheet received from his teachers.

In 1875, his stepfather died. Émile was obliged to leave the high school to earn his living. Paris attracted him (...) Working in a novelty store, he began, after work, to frequent public meetings and progressive groups and quickly became wholly committed to revolutionary propaganda.

But even then, merely speculative, idealist anarchism left his pronounced social sensibilities unsatisfied and, as early as 1879, he was involved in the foundation in Paris of the first shop assistants' union. Such was Pouget's single-mindedness as an activist that he soon got his trade union to publish the earliest of anti-militarist pamphlets. Needless to say, it had been penned by our syndicalist, and let me add that it would be unpublishable today on account both of the vehemence of his text and of the advice with which it was punctuated.

In and around 1882–1883, unemployment was pretty bad in Paris, so much so that on March 8, 1883 the cabinet-makers' chamber of trade invited the unemployed to an open-air meeting scheduled to be held on the Esplanade des Invalides.

Naturally, the meeting was quickly broken up by the police, but two sizable groups of demonstrators formed: one set off for the Elysee palace, only to be dispersed quickly; the other, which included Louise Michel[2] and Pouget, raced towards the Boulevard Saint-Germain. A bakery in the Rue du Four was pretty well stripped bare.

Nevertheless, the demonstration carried on and it was only on arrival in the Place Maubert that it confronted a significant force of police. When the police rushed forward to arrest Louise Michel, Pouget did what he could to free her: he, in turn, was arrested and marched off to the station.

A few days later, he was brought before the assizes on the incorrect charge of armed robbery. Louise was sentenced to twelve years in prison, and Pouget to eight years, a sentence he was to serve in the criminal prison in Melun. He remained there for fully three years and an amnesty granted after pressure from Rochefort[3] ensured that he was then released. Prison, however, had not cowed the militant.

LE PÈRE PEINARD

February 24, 1889 saw the publication of the very first edition of *Le Père Peinard* in small pamphlet form, reminiscent of Rochefort's *La Lanterne* and written in the picturesque style of Hébert's *Père Duchêne*, but in a more proletarian style.

(...) Pouget's little pamphlets were met with a success difficult to appreciate today. During the life-span of *Le Père Peinard*—and then *La Sociale*—there was real proletarian agitation in certain workers' centers and I could name ten or twenty workers' districts, like Trélazé or Fourchambault, where the whole movement dwindled to nothing once the pamphlets stopped coming out.

In Paris in particular, among the cabinet-makers in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, the trade union movement lasted just as long as *Le Père Peinard* did. In the years 1891–1893, a little campaigning sheet called *Le Pot-à-Colle* was published there, imitating the style.

(...) Pouget's anarchism is above all primarily proletarian. Right from the earliest issues of *Le Père Peinard*, he was praising strike movements and the May 1st editions were wholly given over to encouragement to the "lads" to get involved: "May 1st is an occasion that can be put to good use. All that is required is that our brothers, the troopers, should disobey their orders as they did in February 1848 and March 18, 1871 and that would be that."

He was one of the first to grasp the potential of the idea of the general strike, and as early as 1889, he was writing:

> Yes, by God, there is nothing else for it today, but the general strike!
>
> Look what would happen if the coal was to run out in a fortnight. Factories would grind to a halt, the big towns would run out of gas and the railways would be at a stand-still.

All of a sudden, virtually the whole population would be idle. Which would give it time to reflect; it would realize that it is being robbed blind by the employers and yes, it might shake them up in double quick order!

And again:

So once the miners are all out and the strike would be all but general, by God, let them set to beavering away on their own account: the mine is theirs, stolen from them by the moneybags: let them snatch back what is theirs, double-quick. Come the day when they've had enough arsing about, there'll be a crop of good guys who will raise a storm like this and then! by Père Peinard, we'll have the beginning of the end!

A GREAT PROLETARIAN PAMPHLETEER

But while the labor movement occupies a prime position, Pouget subjects every other aspect of the social question to the fine scrutiny of his implacable censure: he overlooks none of the blights of bourgeois society: one huge bank, the Comptoir d'Escompte, had just gone bust: it is worth quoting his article "The gabbers" in its entirety:

Those in government, cake-guzzlers and financiers, blackguards and side-kicks they are! Take today: it has been decided that there will be an inquiry. Let me have the system of '89, which was better. Thus, in July '89, Berthier de Sauvigny was strung up on a street lamp and another of his cronies, Foullon,[3] was massacred. When are we going to get around to reviving that system for popping the clogs of the whole Rothschild and Schneider clique?

The excitement on the streets never left him cold.

Thus: "At home with our pals next door;" "In addition to the lads from Germany who are strutting around with bravado, the Macaronis are socking it to their big landlords and the Serbian and Bulgarian peasants, whom our hack journalists describe as brigands, are pitching into the bigwigs. And even the Brits, for all their phlegm and namy-pamby airs, have had their little strike."

Next came the "military nincompoops," criticism directed at the army, the "dirty work in the barracks" and an all-out assault—and how!—against the army and militarism.

"In the Palace of Injustice" takes on the bench and class justice and all I can say is that it too gets the treatment it deserves.

But that is not all. Every murmur of public opinion triggered an article, a special edition, for Pouget, above all else, had a real talent for propaganda and what needed to be said to the crowd.

The drawing of lots was one good excuse, as were the anniversaries of the Commune or of July 14, and the relevant issue of *Le Père Peinard* often carried a pull-out poster.[4] Nothing that roused public opinion, however trivial, left him indifferent. Because Pouget was, above all, a born reporter.

But where his polemics took a more personal turn—which was not exclusive to him, for it was typical of all the anarchists of the day—was in his criticisms of parliamentarism and the whole machinery of State.

What Pouget and the anarchists of his day were reviving, in fact, were the old tussles of the First International, between libertarian socialism on the one hand, represented by Bakunin, and Marx's authoritarian socialism on the other.

Guesde, the best of the representatives of the authoritarian socialism of the day, Pouget's *bête noire*, who gave as good as he got, used to go around everywhere shouting: "You working class! Send half of the deputies to Parliament plus one and the Revolution will not be far off a *fait accompli*." To which Pouget and his friends retorted: "Band together into your trades societies, into your unions and take over the workshops."

Two approaches which then and now pitted libertarian and authoritarian socialists one against the other, sometimes violently.

And when Pouget turned to illustrating his argument, the polemics were mordant. Judge for yourself: "These blessed elections are scheduled for Sunday! Naturally there is no shortage of candidates—there is something for every taste and in every hue; a sow could not pick out her own farrow. But, by God, while the candidates' colors and labels may alter, one thing never changes: The patter! Reactionaries, republicans, Boulangists, socialists, etc.—they all promise the people that they'll work themselves to death!"

And there was a virulent poster to expand upon this line of argument.

REPRESSION

But such propaganda, conducted with so much vigor, was certainly not without drawbacks. Prosecutions came hot and heavy and while his editors might escape, Pouget too served his time in Saint-Pelagie, the prison of the day, not that that stopped *Le Père Peinard* from appearing, as his colleagues took it in turns to collect his copy from inside prison itself.

A period of such intense agitation—and, it must be said, not just that—had driven a number of individuals over the edge; a series of *attentats* followed, culminating in the assassination of President Carnot[5] in Lyons.

Whipped up by its servile press, the bourgeoisie was so spooked that it could see no way of salvation other than the passing by Parliament of a series of repressive laws quite properly described, once the panic had subsided, as Les Scélérates[6] (blackguardly laws).

Arrests followed the hundreds of house searches carried out across the country and a great trial, known as the "Trial of the Thirty" was mounted.

Pouget and quite a few other comrades put some distance between themselves and their would-be judges. For him, it was the start of his exile, and February 21, 1894 saw the publication of the 253rd and final edition of the first run of *Le Père Peinard*.

He fled to London, where he found Louise Michel.[7] It would be a mistake to believe that our comrade was about to stop, and in September that very same year, the first issue of the London run of *Le Père Peinard* appeared. Eight issues appeared, the last in January 1895. But exile was no solution. The bourgeoisie was feeling a little more reassured and Pouget went home to face the music, and was acquitted, as were all of his co-accused in the "Trial of the Thirty."

None of these adventures had changed the militant's fervor one iota; on May 11 the same year, *Le Père Peinard*'s successor, *La Sociale*, came out. For a number of reasons, its founder was unable for the time being to resurrect the former title (which reappeared only in October 1896).

What are we to say of Pouget's two newborn creations, except that in terms of the intensity of their propaganda they were the match of their older brother? There was the same courage, more than courage indeed, for the "blackguardly laws" made difficulties even worse, and there was the same effrontery. It is from this period that the celebrated *Almanachs du Père Peinard* date, as do numerous propaganda pamphlets, one of which, *Les Variations Guesdistes* (Guesdist Zig-zagging), under Pouget's own signature, created something of a sensation in socialist political circles.

Come the Dreyfus Affair, Pouget again could not help commenting. He threw himself into the fray, but his goal was to demand justice also for anarchists deported for penal servitude and perishing on Devil's Island, which was a destination specially reserved for them. Through his many articles and the pamphlet *Les Lois scélérates* (co-written with Francis de Pressense), he

successfully captured the attention of the masses, and the government of the day was obliged to release some of the survivors of a supposed revolt adroitly staged in advance by the prison administration.

"LA VOIX DU PEUPLE"

We come now to the year 1898. The General Confederation of Labor (CGT) was growing and growing and assuming an ever greater significance in society.

At Pouget's instigation, the Toulouse Congress (1897) had adopted a significant report on *Boycotting and Sabotage* offering the working class a novel weapon of struggle.

Finally, and this was his most cherished idea, he had dreamt of equipping the working class with a fighting journal written entirely by interested parties. An initial commitment to this had been forthcoming at the Toulouse Congress, and had been reiterated by the Rennes Congress. What the comrades had in mind at that point was a daily newspaper, a project which they were later forced to abandon in the light of all sorts of financial difficulties.

No matter. The idea had been floated and we would do well to remember here that it was also thanks to Pouget's tenacity that the first edition of *La Voix du Peuple* appeared on December 1, 1900.

Pouget, who had been appointed assistant secretary of the CGT, Federations branch, was in charge of getting the newspaper out each week. Thanks to his dogged efforts and with the aid of Fernand Pelloutier, the working class for the first time ever had a newspaper all of its very own.

(...) It would be an easy matter for me, with the aid of a complete run of *La Voix du Peuple* to rehearse, one by one, the campaigns of all sorts, the struggle against the placement offices, the campaign for a weekly rest day, the eight-hour day and the battles against all manner of iniquities, in which the name of Émile Pouget continually crops up in the forefront of the battle.

The entire working class fought through his pen.

However, I have to recall those splendid and unforgettable special editions on "Drawing lots" or "May the first," conceived and presented in such a way that it is no exaggeration to say that such intensity of propaganda has never been outdone.

Let me recall, too, the campaign for the eight-hour working day, culminating in May 1, 1906: One has to have lived through those times alongside Pouget to appreciate what propagandistic science—and no, that does not

strike me as too strong a word for it—he deployed then. With the aid of his alter ego Victor Griffuelhes,[8] over a period of nearly two years, he was able to come up with something new every time to hold spellbound a mass of workers occasionally overly inclined to self-doubt. So, there is no exaggeration in saying that, wherever it was able to enforce its will entirely, the working class enjoyed the eight-hour day and owes that, in no small part, to Émile Pouget.

One need only review the succession of CGT congresses between 1896 and 1907 to get the measure of the profound influence that he wielded over those labor gatherings. His reports, his speeches and above all his effective work on working parties are still the most reliable index of syndicalism's debt to him. Might I recall that in Amiens he wielded the pen and that the motion which to this day remains the charter of authentic syndicalism is partly his handiwork?[9]

Apart from the many brochures written by him, we ought also to remember his contributions to many little labor newspapers as well as his great articles in Hubert Lagardelle's *Le Mouvement socialiste*,[10] studies so substantial that they cannot be ignored in any future examination of the origins and methods of the syndicalist movement in France that may wish to probe beneath the surface.

"LA REVOLUTION," VILLENEUVE-SAINT-GEORGES AND RETIREMENT

(...) Pouget had a life-long obsession with a daily newspaper, but it had to be a proletarian newspaper reflecting the aspirations of the working class only. This is what he had in mind when, with other comrades, he launched *La Révolution*. Griffuelhes had a hand in it, as did Monatte.[11] Unfortunately, it takes a lot of money to keep a daily newspaper afloat and the anticipated help was not forthcoming. After a few months, *La Révolution* was forced to shut down. It was one of the greatest disappointments he had in his life, watching the foundering of a creation for which he had yearned so fervently.

I might stop at this point, but I have to recall the Draveil-Villeneuve-Saint-Georges affair. Indeed, with hindsight, it really does appear that this miserable and dismal episode was desired by Clemenceau.[12] That moreover was Griffuelhes's view, as well as Pouget's. Prosecutions were mounted against a number of militants, of whom Pouget, of course, was one. But after more than two months spent in Corbeil prison, the charges had to be dropped and

there is no exaggeration in saying that had it come to trial, the stigma would doubtless not have attached itself to those in the dock.

But even then the health of Pouget, who is a good ten years older than us, was beginning to leave something to be desired.

In the long run, the struggle—as he understood the term—consumed the man to some extent. For him, rest consisted of starting back to working for a living, and right up until the day when illness laid him low, he never stopped working, despite his seventy-one years.[13]

ÉMILE POUGET

WHAT IS THE TRADE UNION?[1]

Property and authority are merely differing manifestations and expressions of one and the same "principle" which boils down to the enforcement and enshrinement of the servitude of man. Consequently, the only difference between them is one of vantage point: viewed from one angle, slavery appears as a PROPERTY CRIME, whereas, viewed from a different angle, it constitutes an AUTHORITY CRIME.

In life, these "principles" whereby the peoples are muzzled are erected into oppressive institutions of which only the façade had changed over the ages. At present and in spite of all the tinkering carried out on the ownership system and the adjustments made to the exercise of authority, quite superficial tinkerings and adjustments, submission, constraint, forced labor, hunger, etc. are the lot of the laboring classes.

This is why the Hell of Wage-Slavery is a lightless Gehenna: the vast majority of human beings languish there, bereft of well-being and liberty. And in that Gehenna, for all its cosmetic trappings of democracy, a rich harvest of misery and grief grows.

ESSENTIAL ASSOCIATION

The trade association is, in fact, the only focal point which, in its very composition, reflects the aspirations by which the wage slave is driven: being the sole agglomeration of human beings that grows out of an absolute identity of interests, in that it derives its *raison d'être* from the form of production, upon which it models itself and of which it is merely the extension.

What in fact is the trade union? An association of workers bound together by corporative ties. Depending on the setting, this corporative combination may assume the form of the narrower trade connection or, in the context of the massive industrialization of the 19th century, may embrace proletarians drawn from several trades but whose efforts contribute towards a common endeavor.

However, whatever the format preferred by its members or imposed by circumstance, whether the trade union combination is restricted to the "trade" or

encompasses the "industry," there is still the very same objective. To wit:

1. The offering of constant resistance to the exploiter: forcing him to honor the improvements won; deterring any attempt to revert to past practice; and also seeking to minimize the exploitation through pressure for partial improvements such as reduction of working hours, increased pay, improved hygiene etc., changes which, although they may reside in the details, are nonetheless effective trespasses against capitalist privileges and attenuation of them.

2. The trade union aims to cultivate increasing coordination of relations of solidarity, in such a way as to facilitate, within the shortest time possible, the expropriation of capital, that being the sole basis which could possibly mark the commencement of a thoroughgoing transformation of society. Only once that legitimate social restitution has been made can any possibility of parasitism be excluded. Only then, when no one is any longer obliged to work for someone else, wage-slavery having been done away with, can production become social in terms of its destination as well as of its provenance: at which time, economic life being a genuine sum of reciprocal efforts, all exploitation can be, not just abolished, but rendered impossible.

Thus, thanks to the trade union, the social question looms with such clarity and starkness as to force itself upon the attention of even the least clear-sighted persons; without possibility of error, the trade association marks out a dividing line between wage slaves and masters. Thanks to which society stands exposed as it truly is: on one side, the workers, the robbed; on the other, the exploiters, the robbers.

TRADE UNION AUTONOMY

However superior the trade union may be to every other form of association, it does not follow that it has any intrinsic existence, independent of that breathed into it by its membership. Which is why the latter, if they are to conduct themselves as conscious union members, owe it to themselves to participate in the work of the trade union. And, for their part, they would have no conception of what constitutes the strength of this association, were they to imagine that they come to it as perfect union members, simply by doing their duty by the union financially.

Of course, it is a good thing to pay one's dues on a regular basis, but that is only the merest fragment of the duty a loyal member owes to himself, and thus to his trade union; indeed, he ought to be aware that the union's value

resides, not so much in the sum of their monetary contributions as in multiplication of its members' coherent endeavors.

The constituent part of the trade union is the individual. Except that the union member is spared the depressing phenomenon manifest in democratic circles where, thanks to the veneration of universal suffrage, the trend is towards the crushing and diminution of the human personality. In a democratic setting, the elector can avail of his will only in order to perform an act of abdication: his role is to "award" his "vote" to the candidate whom he wishes to have as his "representative."

Affiliation to the trade union has no such implications and even the greatest stickler could not discover the slightest trespass against the human personality in it: after, as well as before, the union member is what he used to be. Autonomous he was and autonomous he remains.

In joining the union, the worker merely enters into a contract—which he may at any time abjure—with comrades who are his equals in will and potential, and at no time will any of the views he may be induced to utter or actions in which he may happen to participate, imply any of the suspension or abdication of personality which is the distinguishing characteristic and badge of the ballot paper.

In the union, say, should it come to the appointment of a trade union council to take charge of administrative matters, such "selection" is not to be compared with "election": the form of voting customarily employed in such circumstances is merely a means whereby the labor can be divided and is not accompanied by any delegation of authority. The strictly prescribed duties of the trade union council are merely administrative. The council performs the task entrusted to it, without ever overruling its principals, without supplanting them or acting in their place.

The same might be said of all decisions reached in the union: all are restricted to a definite and specific act, whereas in democracy, election implies that the elected candidate has been issued by his elector with a *carte blanche* empowering him to decide and do as he pleases, in and on everything, without even the hindrance of the quite possibly contrary wishes of his principals, whose opposition, in any case, no matter how pronounced, is of no consequence until such time as the elected candidate's mandate has run its course.

So there cannot be any possible parallels, let alone confusion, between trade union activity and participation in the disappointing chores of politics.

THE TRADE UNION AS SCHOOL FOR THE WILL

Socrates' dictum "Know thyself!" is, in the trade union context, complemented by the maxim: "Shift for yourself!"

Thus, the trade union offers itself as a school for the will: its preponderant role is the result of its members' wishes, and, if it is the highest form of association, the reason is that it is the condensation of workers' strengths made effective through their direct action, the sublime form of the deliberate enactment of the wishes of the proletarian class.

The bourgeoisie has contrived to preach resignation and patience to the people by holding out the hope that progress might be achieved miraculously and without effort on their part, through the State's intervention from without. This is nothing more than an extension, in less inane form, of millenarian and crude religious beliefs. Now, while the leaders were trying to substitute this disappointing illusion for the no less disappointing religious mirage, the workers, toiling in the shadows, with indomitable and unfailing tenacity, were building the organ of liberation to which the trade union amounts.

That organ, a veritable school for the will, was formed and developed over the 19th century. It is thanks to it, thanks to its economic character that the workers have been able to survive inoculation with the virus of politics and defy every attempt to divide them.

It was in the first half of the 19th century that trades associations were established, in spite of the interdicts placed upon them. The persecution of those who had the effrontery to unionize was ruthless, so it took ingenuity to give repression the slip. So, in order to band together without undue danger, the workers disguised their resistance associations behind anodyne exteriors, such as mutual societies.

The bourgeoisie has never taken umbrage with charitable bodies, knowing very well that, being mere palliatives, they cannot ever offer a remedy for the curse of poverty. The placing of hope in charity is a soporific good only for preventing the exploited from reflecting upon their dismal lot and searching for a solution to it. This is why mutual associations have always been tolerated, if not, encouraged, by those in charge.

Workers were able to profit from the tolerance shown these groups: under the pretext of helping one another in the event of illness, of setting up retirement homes, etc., they were able to get together, but in pursuit of a more manly objective: they were preoccupied with bettering their living conditions and aimed to resist the employers' demands. Their tactics were not always

successful in escaping the attentions of the authorities which, having been alerted by complaints from employers, often kept these dubious mutual aid societies under surveillance.

Later, by which time the workers, by dint of experience and acting for themselves, felt strong enough to defy the law, they discarded the mutualist disguise and boldly called their associations resistance societies.

A splendid name! expressive and plain. A program of action in itself. It is proof of the extent to which workers, even though their trades associations were still in the very early stages, sensed that they had no need to trot along behind the politicians nor amalgamate their interests with the interests of the bourgeoisie, but instead should be taking a stand against and in opposition to the bourgeoisie.

Here we had an instinctive incipient class struggle which the International Working Men's Association was to provide with a clear and definitive formulation, with its announcement that "the emancipation of the workers must be the workers' own doing."

That formula, a dazzling affirmation of workers' strength, purged of all remnants of democratism, was to furnish the entire proletarian movement with its key-note idea. It was, moreover, merely an open and categorical affirmation of tendencies germinating among the people. This is abundantly demonstrated by the theoretical and tactical concordance between the hitherto vague, underground "trade unionist" movement and the International's opening declaration.

After stating as a principle that the workers should rely upon their own unaided efforts, the International's declaration married the assertion of the necessity of the proletariat's enjoying autonomy to an indication that it is only through direct action that it can obtain tangible results: and it went on to say:

> Given,
>
> That the economic subjection of the worker to those who hold the means of labor, which is to say, the wherewithal of life, is the prime cause of political, moral and material servitude;
>
> The economic emancipation of workers is, consequently, the great goal towards which every political movement should be striving (...)

Thus, the International did not confine itself to plain proclamation of workers' autonomy, but married that to the assertion that political agitations and adjustments to the form of the government ought not to make such an impression upon workers as to make them lose sight of the economic realities.

The current trade unionist movement is only a logical sequel to the movement of the International—there is absolute identity between them and it is on the same plane that we carry on the endeavors of our predecessors.

Except that when the International was setting out its premises, the workers' will was still much too clouded and the proletariat's class consciousness too under-developed for the economic approach to prevail without the possibility of deviation.

The working class had to contend with the distracting influence of seedy politicians who, regarding the people merely as a stepping-stone, flatter it, hypnotize it and betray it. Moreover, the people also let itself be carried away by loyal, disinterested men who, being imbued with democratism, placed too great a store by a redundant State.

It is thanks to the dual action of these elements that, in recent times (beginning with the hecatomb of 1871), the trade union movement vegetated for a long time, being torn in several directions at once. On the one hand, the crooked politicians strove to bridle the unions so as to tie them to the government's apron strings: on the other, the socialists of various schools beavered away at ensuring that their faction would prevail. Thus, one and all intended to turn the trade unions into "interest groups" and "affinity groups."

The trade union movement had roots too vigorous, and too ineluctable a need for such divergent efforts to be able to stunt its development. Today, it carries on the work of the International, the work of the pioneers of "resistance societies" and of the earliest combinations. To be sure, tendencies have come to the surface and theories have been clarified, but there is an absolute concordance between the 19th century trade union movement and that of the 20th century: the one being an outgrowth of the other. In this there is a logical extension, a climb towards an ever more conscious will and a display of the increasingly coordinated strength of the proletariat, blossoming into a growing unity of aspirations and action.

THE TASK IN HAND

Trade union endeavor has a double aim: with tireless persistence, it must pursue betterment of the working class's current conditions. But, without letting

themselves become obsessed with this passing concern, the workers should take care to make possible and imminent the essential act of comprehensive emancipation: the expropriation of capital.

At present, trade union action is designed to win partial and gradual improvements which, far from constituting a goal, can only be considered as a means of stepping up demands and wresting further improvements from capitalism.

The trade union offers employers a degree of resistance in geometric proportion with the resistance put up by its members: it is a brake upon the appetites of the exploiter: it enforces his respect for less draconian working conditions than those entailed by the individual bargaining of the wage slave operating in isolation. For one-sided bargaining between the employer with his breast-plate of capital, and the defenseless proletarian, it substitutes collective bargaining.

So, in opposition to the employer there stands the trade union, which mitigates the despicable "labor market" and labor supply, by relieving, to some extent, the irksome consequences of a pool of unemployed workers: exacting from the employer respect for workers and also, to a degree proportionate with its strength, the union requires of him that he desist from offering privileges as bribes.

This question of partial improvements served as the pretext for attempts to sow discord in the trades associations. Politicians, who can only make a living out of a confusion of ideas and who are irritated by the unions' growing distaste for their persons and their dangerous interference, have tried to carry into economic circles the semantic squabbling with which they gull the electors. They have striven to stir up ill-feeling and to split the unions into two camps, by categorizing workers as reformists and as revolutionaries. The better to discredit the latter, they have dubbed them "the advocates of all or nothing" and they have falsely represented them as supposed adversaries of improvements achievable right now.

The most that can be said about such nonsense is that it is witless. There is not a worker, whatever his mentality or his aspirations, who, on grounds of principle or for reasons of tactics, would insist upon working ten hours for an employer instead of eight hours, while earning six francs instead of seven. It is, however, by peddling such inane twaddle that politicians hope to alienate the working class from its economic movement and dissuade it from shifting for itself and endeavoring to secure ever greater well-being and liberty.

They are counting upon the poison in such calumnies to break up the trade unions by reviving inside them the pointless and divisive squabbles which have evaporated ever since politics was banished from them.

What appears to afford some credence to such chicanery is the fact that the unions, cured by the cruel lessons of experience from all hope in government intervention, are justifiably mistrustful of it. They know that the State, whose function is to act as capital's gendarme, is, by its very nature, inclined to tip the scales in favor of the employer side. So, whenever a reform is brought about by legal avenues, they do not fall upon it with the relish of a frog devouring the red rag that conceals the hook, they greet it with all due caution, especially as this reform is made effective only if the workers are organized to insist forcefully upon its implementation.

The trade unions are even more wary of gifts from the government because they have often found these to be poison gifts. Thus, they have a very poor opinion of "gifts" like the Higher Labor Council and the labor councils, agencies devised for the sole purpose of counter-balancing and frustrating the work of the trades associations. Similarly, they have not waxed enthusiastic about mandatory arbitration and regulation of strikes, the plainest consequence of which would be to exhaust the workers' capacity for resistance. Likewise, the legal and commercial status granted to the workers' organizations have nothing worthwhile to offer them, for they see in these a desire to get them to desert the terrain of social struggle, in order to lure them on to the capitalist terrain where the antagonism of the social struggle would give way to wrangling over money.

But, given that the trade unions look askance at the government's benevolence towards them, it follows that they are loath to go after partial improvements. Wanting real improvements only. This is why, instead of waiting until the government is generous enough to bestow them, they wrest them in open battle, through direct action.

If, as sometimes is the case, the improvement they seek is subject to the law, the trade unions strive to obtain it through outside pressure brought to bear upon the authorities and not by trying to return specially mandated deputies to Parliament, a puerile pursuit that might drag on for centuries before there was a majority in favor of the yearned-for reform.

When the desired improvement is to be wrested directly from the capitalist, the trades associations resort to vigorous pressure to convey their wishes. Their methods may well vary, although the direct action principle underlies

them all: depending on the circumstances, they may use the strike, sabotage, the boycott, or the union label.

But, whatever the improvement won, it must always represent a reduction in capitalist privileges and be a partial expropriation. So, whenever one is not satisfied with the politician's bombast, whenever one analyzes the methods and the value of trade union action, the fine distinction between "reformist" and "revolutionary" evaporates and one is led to the conclusion that the only really reformist workers are the revolutionary syndicalists.

BUILDING THE FUTURE

Aside from day to day defense, the task of the trade unions is to lay the groundwork for the future. The producer group should be the cell of the new society. Social transformation on any other basis is inconceivable. So, it is essential that the producers make preparations for the task of assuming possession and of reorganization which ought to fall to them and which they alone are equipped to carry out. It is a social revolution and not a political revolution that we aim to make. They are two distinct phenomena and the tactics leading to the one are a diversion away from the other.