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Karl Marx, *The Belgian Massacre*²⁴

To the workmen of Europe and the United States

There passes hardly a week in England without strikes — and strikes upon a grand scale. If, on such occasions, the government was to let its soldiers loose upon the Working Class, this land of strikes would become a land of massacres. [...] There exists but one country in the civilized world where every strike is eagerly and joyously turned into a pretext for the official massacre of the Working Class. That country of single blessedness is *Belgium!* the model state of continental constitutionalism, the snug, well-hedged, little paradise of the landlord, the capitalist, and the priest. [...]

The Belgian capitalist has won fair fame in the world by his eccentric passion for, what he calls, *the liberty of labour* (*la liberté du travail*). So fond is he of the liberty of his hands to labour for him all the hours of their life, without exemption of age or sex, that he has always indignantly repulsed any factory law encroaching upon that liberty. He shudders at the very idea that a common workman should be wicked enough to claim any higher destiny than that of enriching his master and natural superior. He wants his workman not only to remain a miserable drudge, overworked and underpaid, but, like every other slave-holder, he wants him to be a cringing, servile, broken-hearted, morally prostrate, religiously humble drudge. Hence his frantic fury at strikes. With him, a strike is a blasphemy, a slave's revolt, the signal of a social cataclysm. Put, now, into the hands of such men – cruel from sheer cowardice – the

²⁴ This text, reproduced here in part, was written by Karl Marx (see note 1) after the decision taken by the GC on 20 April 1869 to disseminate as much as possible news about the extreme violence of unprovoked attacks by both cavalry and infantry on unarmed metalworkers striking in Belgium. It was partially published in *The Bee-Hive* on 8 May and printed as a booklet 4 days later. The full version is in the GC, III: 312–18.

undivided, uncontrolled, absolute sway of the state power, as is actually the case in Belgium, and you will no longer wonder to find the sabre, the bayonet, and the musket working in that country as legitimate and normal instruments for keeping wages down and screwing profits up. [...]

It will easily be understood that the *International Working Men's Association* was no welcome guest in Belgium. Excommunicated by the priest, calumniated by the respectable press, it came soon to loggerheads with the government. The latter tried hard to get rid of it by making it responsible for the Charleroi colliery strikes of 1867–68, strikes wound up, after the invariable Belgian rule, by official massacres, followed by the judicial prosecution of the victims. Not only was this cabal baffled, but the Association took active steps, resulting in a verdict of *not guilty* for the Charleroi miners, and, consequently, in a verdict of *guilty* against the Government itself? Fretting at this defeat, the Belgian ministers gave vent to their spleen by fierce denunciations, from the tribune of the Chamber of Deputies, against the *International Working Men's Association*, and pompously declared they should never allow its General Congress to meet at Brussels. [...] [The] culpable complicity [of Belgian government] during the recent events has been proved beyond the possibility of doubt. The emissaries of the Brussels Central Committee for Belgium and some of the Local Committees stand convicted of several flagrant crimes. In the first instance, they have tried hard to calm the excitement of the workmen on strike, and warn them off the government traps. In some localities they have actually prevented the effusion of blood. And last, not least, these ill-boding emissaries observed on the spot, verified by witnesses, noted carefully down and publicly denounced the sanguinary vagaries of the defenders of order. [...]

The General Council of the *International Working Men's Association* hereby calls upon the workmen of Europe and the United States to open monetary subscriptions for alleviating the sufferings of the widows, wives, and children of the Belgian victims, and also for the expenses incident upon the legal defence of the arrested workmen, and the inquiry proposed by the Brussels Committee.