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Karl Marx, [*Resolutions of the Geneva Congress (1866)*]³

[...]

Limitation of the working day

A preliminary condition, without which all further attempts at improvement and emancipation must prove abortive, is the *limitation of the working day*.

It is needed to restore the health and physical energies of the working class, that is, the great body of every nation, as well as to secure them the possibility of intellectual development, sociable intercourse, social and political action.

We propose *8 hours work* as the *legal limit* of the working day. This limitation being generally claimed by the workmen of the United States of America, the vote of the Congress will raise it to the common platform of the working classes all over the world.

For the information of continental members, whose experience of factory law is comparatively short-dated, we add that all legal restrictions will fail and be broken through by capital if the *period of the day* during which the 8 working hours must be taken, be not fixed. The length of that period ought to be determined by the 8 working hours and the additional pauses for meals. For instance, if the different interruptions for meals amount to *one hour*, the legal period of the day ought to embrace 9 hours, say from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m.,

³ This selection is excerpted from the *Instructions for the Delegates of the Provisional General Council. The Different Question*. Written by Karl Marx (see note 1) in August 1866, the text was read at the Geneva Congress, during which all the parts here included were approved, except for 'Direct and indirect taxation'. A revised version was published between February and March 1867, in *The Courier International*, and appears also in GC, I: 340–51.

or from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., etc. Nightwork to be but exceptionally permitted, in trades or branches of trades specified by law. The tendency must be to suppress all nightwork [...].

Juvenile and children's labour (both sexes)

We consider the tendency of modern industry to make children and juvenile persons of both sexes co-operate in the great work of social production, as a progressive, sound and legitimate tendency, although under capital it was distorted into an abomination. [...]

It may be desirable to begin elementary school instruction before the age of 9 years; but we deal here only with the most indispensable antidotes against the tendencies of a social system which degrades the working man into a mere instrument for the accumulation of capital, and transforms parents by their necessities into slave-holders, sellers of their own children. The *right* of children and juvenile persons must be vindicated. They are unable to act for themselves. It is, therefore, the duty of society to act on their behalf.

If the middle and higher classes neglect their duties towards their offspring, it is their own fault. Sharing the privileges of these classes, the child is condemned to suffer from their prejudices.

The case of the working class stands quite different. The working man is no free agent. In too many cases, he is even too ignorant to understand the true interest of his child, or the normal conditions of human development. However, the more enlightened part of the working class fully understands that the future of its class, and, therefore, of mankind, altogether depends upon the formation of the rising working generation. They know that, before everything else, the children and juvenile workers must be saved from the crushing effects of the present system. This can only be effected by converting *social reason* into *social force*, and, under given circumstances, there exists no other method of doing so, than through *general laws*, enforced by the power of the state. In enforcing such laws, the working class do not fortify governmental power. On the contrary, they transform that power, now used against them, into their own agency. They effect by a general act what they would vainly attempt by a multitude of isolated individual efforts.

Proceeding from this standpoint, we say that no parent and no employer ought to be allowed to use juvenile labour, except when combined with education. [...]

Cooperative labour

It is the business of the International Working Men's Association to combine and generalize the *spontaneous movements* of the working classes, but not to dictate or impose any doctrinary system whatever. The Congress should, therefore, proclaim no *special system* of cooperation, but limit itself to the enunciation of a few general principles.

- a. We acknowledge the cooperative movement as one of the transforming forces of the present society based upon class antagonism. Its great merit is to practically show, that the present pauperizing and despotic system of the *subordination of labour* to capital can be superseded by the republican and beneficent system of *the association of free and equal producers*.
- b. Restricted, however, to the dwarfish forms into which individual wages slaves can elaborate it by their private efforts, the cooperative system will never transform capitalist society. To convert social production into one large and harmonious system of free and cooperative labour, *general social changes* are wanted, *changes of the general conditions of society*, never to be realized save by the transfer of the organized forces of society, viz., the state power, from capitalists and landlords to the producers themselves.
- c. We recommend to the working men to embark in *cooperative production* rather than in *cooperative stores*. The latter touch but the surface of the present economical system, the former attacks its groundwork.
- d. We recommend to all cooperative societies to convert one part of their joint income into a fund for propagating their principles by example as well as by precept, in other words, by promoting the establishment of new cooperative fabrics, as well as by teaching and preaching.
- e. In order to prevent cooperative societies from degenerating into ordinary middle-class joint stock companies (*sociétés par actions*), all workmen employed, whether shareholders or not, ought to share alike. As a mere temporary expedient, we are willing to allow shareholders a low rate of interest.

Trades' Unions: Their past, present and future

(a) Their past

Capital is concentrated social force, while the workman has only to dispose of his working force. The *contract* between capital and labour can therefore never be struck on equitable terms, equitable even in the sense of a society which places the ownership of the material means of life and labour on one side and the vital productive energies on the opposite side. The only social power of the workmen is their number. The force of numbers, however is broken by disunion. The disunion of the workmen is created and perpetuated by their *unavoidable competition among themselves*.

Trades' Unions originally sprang up from the *spontaneous* attempts of workmen at removing or at least checking that competition, in order to conquer such terms of contract as might raise them at least above the condition of mere slaves. The immediate object of Trades' Unions was therefore confined to everyday necessities, to expediences for the obstruction of the incessant encroachments of capital, in one word, to questions of wages and time of labour. This activity of the Trades' Unions is not only legitimate, it is necessary. It cannot be dispensed with so long as the present system of production lasts. On the contrary, it must be generalized by the formation and the combination of Trades' Unions throughout all countries. On the other hand, unconsciously to themselves, the Trades' Unions were forming *centres of organization* of the working class, as the mediaeval municipalities and communes did for the middle class. If the Trades' Unions are required for the guerrilla fights between capital and labour, they are still more important as *organized agencies for superseding the very system of wages labour and capital rule*.

(b) Their present

Too exclusively bent upon the local and immediate struggles with capital, the Trades' Unions have not yet fully understood their power of acting against the system of wage slavery itself. They therefore kept too much aloof from general social and political movements. Of late, however, they seem to awaken to some sense of their great historical mission, as appears, for instance, from

their participation, in England, in the recent political movement, from the enlarged views taken of their function in the United States, and from the following resolution passed at the recent great conference of Trades' delegates at Sheffield:

‘That this Conference, fully appreciating the efforts made by the International Association to unite in one common bond of brotherhood the working men of all countries, most earnestly recommend to the various societies here represented, the advisability of becoming affiliated to that body, believing that it is essential to the progress and prosperity of the entire working community.’

(c) **Their future**

Apart from their original purposes, they must now learn to act deliberately as organizing centres of the working class in the broad interest of its *complete emancipation*. They must aid every social and political movement tending in that direction. Considering themselves and acting as the champions and representatives of the whole working class, they cannot fail to enlist the non-society men into their ranks. They must look carefully after the interests of the worst paid trades, such as the agricultural labourers, rendered powerless by exceptional circumstances. They must convince the world at large⁴ that their efforts, far from being narrow and selfish, aim at the emancipation of the downtrodden millions.

Direct and indirect taxation

- a. No modification of the form of taxation can produce any important change in the relations of labour and capital.
- b. Nevertheless, having to choose between two systems of taxation, we recommend the *total abolition of indirect taxes*, and the *general substitution of direct taxes* because direct taxes are cheaper to collect and do not interfere with production.⁵

⁴ The French and German versions refer instead to ‘the broad masses of workers’.

⁵ The explanation contained in the last part of this sentence is taken from the French and German versions.

Because indirect taxes enhance the prices of commodities – the tradesmen adding to those prices not only the amount of the indirect taxes, but the interest and profit upon the capital advanced in their payment;

Because indirect taxes conceal from an individual what he is paying to the state, whereas a direct tax is undisguised, unsophisticated, and not to be misunderstood by the meanest capacity. Direct taxation prompts therefore every individual to control the governing powers while indirect taxation destroys all tendency to self-government. [...]

Standing armies; their relation to production⁶

- a. The deleterious influence of large standing armies upon *production*, has been sufficiently exposed at middle-class congresses of all denominations, at peace congresses, economical congresses, statistical congresses, philanthropical congresses, sociological congresses. We think it, therefore, quite superfluous to expatiate upon this point.
- b. We propose the general armament of the people and their general instruction in the use of arms. [...]

⁶ In the English text this heading is simply 'Armies'.