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Aimé Grinand, *[Cooperative and Workers' Emancipation]*³⁶

[...] In the last few years, workers got the idea that something could be done to mitigate the terrible plague of pauperism that has been eating away at them. No longer counting on the rulers and saviours of humanity, they tried to find their own solution to these economic questions and did not take long to raise their cry of 'war on capital'.

But they lacked experience at first and gave in to appetites for gain and pleasure, which are always in the human heart when not offset by a sense of law and justice. Production and consumption cooperatives were created in which workers, while protesting against the constrictions of capital, attempted to create capital of their own and to collect the profits. Constitution of capital in their hands, collection of a dividend from consumers, conservative sentiments and an appetite for pleasures, purchase of annuities: these were the thoughts and desires that such a conception of cooperatives developed, thereby justifying all the accusations that workers direct daily against the holders of capital. Such practices soon end up creating an entrenched fourth class, a bourgeois class which, on the day of reckoning, will join the ranks of reaction and again beat back the unfortunate ones who have not been able to put any money aside.

The associations contained in the principles of the International have no other aim than to wrest the instruments of production from the capitalists and to put them in the hands of their rightful owners, the worker-producers.

The International seeks to wage war on the stranglehold of capitalist interests; the old society is founded on an antagonism of interests; it is war, so

³⁶ This text corresponds to a report prepared by the committee on cooperation, submitted on 13 September 1868 to the Brussels Congress. Its rapporteur was Aimé Grinand [1842-unk.] of the Lyon section. Published in B1868, the full version is also found in PI, I: 407–8.

okay, we shall wage war! We shall unite our forces, and from these collective efforts will perhaps emerge a humanity less pitiful than the one whose long procession of woes has been unfolding in our times. We shall wrest away the machines, those instruments of death, and turn them into instruments of life; we shall smash those institutions from which an annuity, a fortune, a whole life of idleness emerges out of an inert metal. To live free and work free, that is our right; to let others live free and work free, that is our duty. The International shall not fail in its task; the workers shall organize.

How will these associations take shape without kindling in men the desire to own things without work? The answer is that they will be created in such a way that money interest can never be paid out. Since any price demanded above the cost price of the labour is a form of theft, any interest charged must return to labour, to the consumer. What is a cooperative association? It is an association in which all the members sell and trade only among themselves. It is necessary to widen the circle, to sell to everyone, but without ever charging compensation other than a payment for the labour supplied. Otherwise, if all the profits that such transactions give to capitalists are drawn from the market, there will be nothing to distinguish the association of small worker-capitalists from the associations of entrepreneurs, directors and tricksters in today's enterprises.

Let the workers collect the scraps remaining to them, let them group together and create at once these consumer associations that do not require a lot of capital; later it will be possible to create productive associations, and then we will have in our hands all the resources of human wealth.

The commission on cooperative association proposes the following resolutions:

Any society based upon democratic principles rejects all levies on behalf of capital, whatever the form in which they present themselves – rents, interest, profit – and therefore leaves to labour its full entitlement, its just remuneration.

Through the reduction in working hours, through just remuneration of the fruits of his efforts, through the education that a secure life will permit him to acquire, through the disappearance of those heartless vampires who were choking the life out of him, the free worker will alone have changed the face of the old world.