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Karl Marx, [*The Novelty of the International*]⁸¹

Concerning the International, [Marx] said that the great success which had hitherto crowned its efforts was due to circumstances over which the members themselves had no control. The foundation of the International itself was the result of these circumstances, and by no means due to the efforts of the men engaged in it. It was not the work of any set of clever politicians; all the politicians in the world could not have created the situation and circumstances requisite for the success of the International. The International had not put forth any particular creed. Its task was to organize the forces of labour and link the various working men's movements and combine them. The circumstances which had given such a great development to the association were the conditions under which the work-people were more and more oppressed throughout the world, and this was the secret of success. The events of the last few weeks had unmistakably shown that the working class must fight for its emancipation. The persecutions of the governments against the International were like the persecutions of ancient Rome against the primitive Christians. They, too, had been few in numbers at first, but the patricians of Rome had instinctively felt that if the Christians succeeded the Roman empire would be lost. The persecutions of Rome had not saved the empire, and the persecutions of the present day against the International would not save the existing state of things.

What was new in the International was that it was established by the working men themselves and for themselves. Before the foundation of the International all the different organizations had been societies founded

⁸¹ This text is the synopsis of a speech made by Karl Marx (see note 1) shortly after the closing of the London Conference in 1871, to celebrate the seventh year of its foundation. It appeared in an article entitled 'The Reds in Session' in the New York newspaper *The World* on 15 October 1871.

by some radicals among the ruling classes for the working classes, but the International was established by the working men for themselves. The Chartist movement in this country had been started with the consent and assistance of middle-class radicals, though if it had been successful it could only have been for the advantage of the working class. England was the only country where the working class was sufficiently developed and organized to turn universal suffrage to its proper account. He then alluded to the revolution of February [1848] as a movement that had been favoured by a portion of the bourgeoisie against the ruling party. The revolution of February had only given promises to the working classes and had replaced one set of men of the ruling class by another. The insurrection of June had been a revolt against the whole ruling class, including the most radical portion. The working men who had lifted the new men into power in 1848 had instinctively felt that they had only exchanged one set of oppressors for another and that they were betrayed.

The last movement was the Commune, the greatest that had yet been made, and there could not be two opinions about it – the Commune was the conquest of the political power of the working classes. There was much misunderstanding about the Commune. The Commune could not found a new form of class government. In destroying the existing conditions of oppression by transferring all the means of labour to the productive labourer, and thereby compelling every able-bodied individual to work for a living, the only base for class rule and oppression would be removed. But before such a change could be effected a proletarian dictatorship would become necessary, and the first condition of that was a proletarian army. The working classes would have to conquer the right to emancipate themselves on the battlefield. The task of the International was to organize and combine the forces of labour for the coming struggle.