"Pierre Fluse, [*The Effect of Machinery on the Wages and Situation of Workers*]."
Workers Unite!: The International 150 Years Later. Ed. Marcello Musto. New York:
Bloomsbury Academic, 2014. 110–112. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781501302367.0018>>.

Downloaded from Bloomsbury Collections, www.bloomsburycollections.com, 26 April 2023,
06:06 UTC.

Copyright © Marcello Musto, 2014. You may share this work for non-commercial purposes only,
provided you give attribution to the copyright holder and the publisher, and provide a link to the
Creative Commons licence.

Pierre Fluse, [*The Effect of Machinery on the Wages and Situation of Workers*]¹⁴

Society, considered in its totality, stands to gain from the introduction of machinery, as it permits the production of a greater output with the same number of hands and in the same frame of time.

But this phenomenon is taking place in a society composed of two groups in a state of perpetual antagonism: one, *the exploited*, quite significant in size, the other, *the exploiters*, relatively small but all-powerful, and both engaged in competition.

The introduction of machinery in an industrial centre always results in the dismissal of a certain number of workers, who, in finding themselves without resources, are forced to change their social status, which is rather distressing at a certain age, to live on public charity or to die of hunger and the illnesses it begets.

Moreover, even if they all managed to find new employment immediately, this would only create a labour surplus, which is always the cause of a lowering of wages for the other workers owing to competition.

It could be objected that, as competition leads to products being sold at a better rate, workers are the first to benefit from the introduction of machinery.

It is easy to refute this argument; labourers without bread can hardly benefit from a drop in prices, which is always by the smallest possible amount and never equivalent to the reduction of their wages. In addition, the goods produced are usually those that the labourer never consumes.

¹⁴ This text is a report from the Liege section presented at the same session referred to in note 13. Probably a collective work, it was read by Pierre Fluse [unk.]. He was a Belgian weaver, first a Proudhonian and later close to Bakunin. He also participated in the London Conference of 1871 and The Hague Congress (1872). It may be found in PI, I: 294–6.

The working class gains nothing from this price drop, since they alone shoulder its costs while the greater part of its profits are returned to their exploiters.

If, as economists affirm, workers always profited from this decline in the price of products, it would necessarily happen that, by everywhere replacing a certain ratio of workers by machinery, they would stand to gain considerably from it. Yet, we see, to the contrary, that in this case, all the replaced labourers would run the great risk of dying of hunger or would, at the very least, witness their destitution mount.

It is true that a certain time after the price drop, demand tends generally to increase, but this phenomenon is produced bit by bit and its real effects are felt only long afterwards.

The laid-off workers would, thus, often have to wait years before finding a new employment and, without means of existence, would naturally be delivered over to the deepest destitution.

If the introduction of machinery causes a significant laying-off of workers, it is understandable that the expectation of profiting from the additional output becomes entirely preposterous, for the destitution of a great number of consumers would prevent production from realizing its full potential.

To sum up, the introduction of machinery brings about, for the *exploiters*, the retention of a portion of wages acquired by laying-off workers and increasing competition among them, the lowering of the prices of products that they can buy, an increase in profits resulting from an increase in demand; for the *exploited*, the loss of a part of their wages through lay-offs and the competition of their companions, a partial enjoyment in the lowering of the prices of products, a partial compensation by the growth in demand over time, delayed by the destitution of the masses.

We can therefore conclude that, in current society, the introduction of machinery is harmful to the great many and favourable to the exploitation of workers.

In a society composed of federated and solidary associations, where capital representing accumulated labour would not be a source of exploitation, but simply an auxiliary of exchange, machinery, far from breeding destitution, would increase the well-being of all.

No longer used in the interests of exploitation, machinery would represent, like any other labour, a value that the inventor would receive in selling it to the federated associations of workers.

These would draw from it an immense profit that would be translated into less hours to earn their day's labour and the capacity to produce much more.

The introduction of new machinery and inventions would become the interest of all engineers, who, far from being detested by their comrades, would be encouraged everywhere and by everyone.

The man deprived of his bread, rewarded for his toil by an expulsion from the workshop, was wrong to curse machinery, for his hatred and his anger must be directed higher up.

Social anarchy is the cause of evil; justice in social relations is its remedy.

Let us, therefore, overturn the old world, let us put an end to the exploitation of man by man.

The future belongs to the principles of solidarity and fraternity, to the workers' International.