Engels

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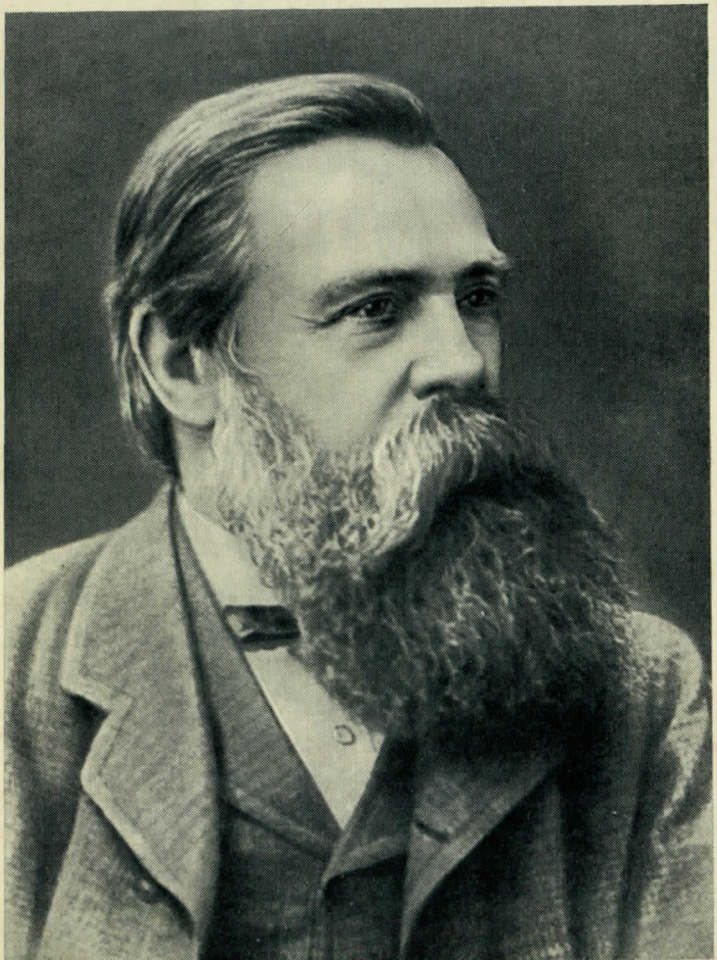

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Workers of All Countries, Unite!

Richard Harrison

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CONTENTS

A FAIR DAY'S WAGES FOR A FAIR DAY'S WORK[1]

This has now been the motto of the English working-class movement for the last fifty years. It did good service in the time of the rising Trades Unions after the repeal of the infamous Combination Laws in 1824[2]; it did still better service in the time of the glorious Chartist movement, when the English workmen marched at the head of the European working class. But times are moving on, and a good many things which were desirable and necessary fifty, and even thirty years ago, are now antiquated and would be completely out of place. Does the old, time-honoured watchword too belong to them?

A fair day's wages for a fair day's work? But what is a fair day's wages, and what is a fair day's work? How are they determined by the laws under which modern society exists and develops itself? For an answer to this we must not apply to the science of morals or of law and equity, nor to any sentimental feeling of humanity, justice, or even charity. What is morally fair, what is even fair in law, may be far from being socially fair. Social fairness or unfairness is decided by one science alone—the science which deals with the material facts of production and exchange, the science of political economy.

Now what does political economy call a fair day's wages and a fair day's work? Simply the rate of wages and the length and intensity of a day's work which are determined by competition of employer and employed in the open market. And what are they, when thus determined?

A fair day's wages, under normal conditions, is the sum required to procure to the labourer the means of existence

necessary, according to the standard of life of his station and country, to keep himself in working order and to propagate his race. The actual rate of wages, with the fluctuations of trade, may be sometimes above, sometimes below this rate; but, under fair conditions, that rate ought to be the average of all oscillations.

A fair day's work is that length of working day and that intensity of actual work which expends one day's full working power of the workman without encroaching upon his capacity for the same amount of work for the next and following days.

The transaction, then, may be thus described–the workman gives to the Capitalist his full day's working power; that is, so much of it as he can give without rendering impossible the continuous repetition of the transaction. In exchange he receives just as much, and no more, of the necessaries of life as is required to keep up the repetition of the same bargain every day. The workman gives as much, the Capitalist gives as little, as the nature of the bargain will admit. This is a very peculiar sort of fairness.

But let us look a little deeper into the matter. As, according to political economists, wages and working days are fixed by competition, fairness seems to require that both sides should have the same fair start on equal terms. But that is not the case. The Capitalist, if he cannot agree with the Labourer, can afford to wait, and live upon his capital. The workman cannot. He has but wages to live upon, and must therefore take work when, where, and at what terms he can get it. The workman has no fair start. He is fearfully handicapped by hunger. Yet, according to the political economy of the Capitalist class, that is the very pink of fairness.

But this is a mere trifle. The application of mechanical power and machinery to new trades, and the extension and improvements of machinery in trades already subjected to it, keep turning out of work more and more "hands"; and they do so at a far quicker rate than that at which these superseded "hands" can be absorbed by, and find employment in, the manufactures of the country. These superseded "hands" form a real industrial army of reserve for the use of Capital. If trade is bad they may starve, beg, steal, or go to the workhouse; if trade is good they are ready at hand to

expand production; and until the very last man, woman, or child of this army of reserve shall have found work–which happens in times of frantic over-production alone–until then will its competition keep down wages, and by its existence alone strengthen the power of Capital in its struggle with Labour. In the race with Capital, Labour is not only handicapped, it has to drag a cannon-ball riveted to its foot. Yet that is fair according to Capitalist political economy.

But let us inquire out of what fund does Capital pay these very fair wages? Out of capital, of course. But capital produces no value. Labour is, besides the earth, the only source of wealth; capital itself is nothing but the stored-up produce of labour. So that the wages of Labour are paid out of labour, and the working man is paid out of his own produce. According to what we may call common fairness, the wages of the labourer ought to consist in the produce of his labour. But that would not be fair according to political economy. On the contrary, the produce of the workman's labour goes to the capitalist, and the workman gets out of it no more than the bare necessaries of life. And thus the end of this uncommonly "fair" race of competition is that the produce of the labour of those who do work, gets unavoidably accumulated in the hands of those that do not work, and becomes in their hands the most powerful means to enslave the very men who produced it.

A fair day's wages for a fair day's work! A good deal might be said about the fair day's work too, the fairness of which is perfectly on a par with that of the wages. But that we must leave for another occasion. From what has been stated it is pretty clear that the old watchword has lived its day, and will hardly hold water nowadays. The fairness of political economy, such as it truly lays down the laws which rule actual society, that fairness is all on one side–on that of Capital. Let, then, the old motto be buried for ever and replaced by another:

POSSESSION OF THE MEANS OF WORK–RAW MATERIAL, FACTORIES, MACHINERY–BY THE WORKING PEOPLE THEMSELVES.

The Labour Standard, May 7th, 1881.

THE WAGES SYSTEM

In a previous article we examined the time-honoured motto, "A fair day's wages for a fair day's work", and came to the conclusion that the fairest day's wages under present social conditions is necessarily tantamount to the very unfairest division of the workman's produce, the greater portion of that produce going into the capitalist's pocket, and the workman having to put up with just as much as will enable him to keep himself in working order and to propagate his race.

This is a law of political economy, or, in other words, a law of the present economical organisation of society, which is more powerful than all the Common and Statute Law of England put together, the Court of Chancery included.[3] While society is divided into two opposing classes—on the one hand, the capitalists, monopolisers of the whole of the means of production, land, raw materials, machinery; on the other hand, labourers, working people deprived of all property in the means of production, owners of nothing but their own working power; while this social organisation exists the law of wages will remain all-powerful, and will every day afresh rivet the chains by which the working man is made the slave of his own produce—monopolised by the capitalist.

The Trades Unions of this country have now for nearly sixty years fought against this law—with what result? Have they succeeded in freeing the working class from the bondage in which capital—the produce of its own hands—holds it? Have they enabled a single section of the working class to rise above the situation of wages-slaves, to become owners of their own means of production, of the raw materials, tools, machinery required in their trade, and thus to become the owners of the produce of their own labour? It is well known that not only they have not done so, but that they never tried.

Far be it from us to say that Trades Unions are of no use because they have not done that. On the contrary, Trades Unions in England, as well as in every other manufacturing country, are a necessity for the working classes in their struggle against capital. The average rate of wages is equal to the sum of necessaries sufficient to keep up the race of workmen in a certain country according to the standard of life habitual in that country. That standard of life may be very different for different classes of workmen. The great merit of Trades Unions, in their struggle to keep up the rate of wages and to reduce working hours, is that they tend to keep up and to raise the standard of life. There are many trades in the East-end of London whose labour is not more skilled and quite as hard as that of bricklayers and bricklayers labourers, yet they hardly earn half the wages of these. Why? Simply because a powerful organisation enables the one set to maintain a comparatively high standard of life as the rule by which their wages are measured; while the other set, disorganised and powerless, have to submit not only to unavoidable but also to arbitrary encroachments of their employers: their standard of life is gradually reduced, they learn how to live on less and less wages, and their wages naturally fall to that level which they themselves have learnt to accept as sufficient.

The law of wages, then, is not one which draws a hard and fast line. It is not inexorable with certain limits. There is at every time (great depression excepted) for every trade a certain latitude within which the rate of wages may be modified by the results of the struggle between the two contending parties. Wages in every case are fixed by a bargain, and in a bargain he who resists longest and best has the greatest chance of getting more than his due. If the isolated workman tries to drive his bargain with the capitalist he is easily beaten and has to surrender at discretion; but if a whole trade of workmen form a powerful organisation, collect among themselves a fund to enable them to defy their employers if need be, and thus become enabled to treat with these employers as a power, then, and then only, have they a chance to get even that pittance which according to the economical constitution of present society, may be called a fair day's wages for a fair day's work.

The law of wages is not upset by the struggles of Trades Unions. On the contrary, it is enforced by them. Without the means of resistance of the Trades Unions the labourer does not receive even what is his due according to the rules of the wages system. It is only with the fear of the Trades Union before his eyes that the capitalist can be made to part with the full market value of his labourer's working power. Do you want a proof? Look at the wages paid to the members of the large Trades Unions, and at the wages paid to the numberless small trades in that pool of stagnant misery, the East-end of London.

Thus the Trades Unions do not attack the wages system. But it is not the highness or lowness of wages which constitutes the economical degradation of the working class: this degradation is comprised in the fact that, instead of receiving for its labour the full produce of this labour, the working class has to be satisfied with a portion of its own produce called wages. The capitalist pockets the whole produce (paying the labourer out of it) because he is the owner of the means of labour. And, therefore, there is no real redemption for the working class until it becomes owner of all the means of work–land, raw material, machinery, etc.–and thereby also the owner of THE WHOLE OF THE PRODUCE OF ITS OWN LABOUR.

The Labour Standard, May 21st, 1881.

TRADES UNIONS

I

In our last issue we considered the action of Trades Unions as far as they enforced the economical law of wages against employers. We return to this subject, as it is of the highest importance that the working classes generally should thoroughly understand it.

We suppose no English working man of the present day needs to be taught that it is the interest of the individual capitalist, as well as of the capitalist class generally, to reduce wages as much as possible. The produce of labour, after deducting all expenses, is divided, as David Ricardo had irrefutably proved, into two shares: the one forms the labourer's wages, the other the capitalist's profits. Now, this net produce of labour being, in every individual case, a given quantity, it is clear that the share called profits cannot increase without the share called wages decreasing. To deny that it is the interest of the capitalist to reduce wages, would be tantamount to say that it is not his interest to increase his profits.

We know very well that there are other means of temporarily increasing profits, but they do not alter the general law, and therefore need not trouble us here.

Now, how can the capitalists reduce wages when the rate of wages is governed by a distinct and well-defined law of social economy? The economical law of wages is there, and is irrefutable. But, as we have seen, it is elastic, and it is so in two ways. The rate of wages can be lowered, in a particular trade, either directly, by gradually accustoming the workpeople of that trade to a lower standard of life, or, indirectly,

by increasing the number of working hours per day (or the intensity of work during the same working hours) without increasing the pay.

And the interest of every individual capitalist to increase his profits by reducing the wages of his workpeople receives a fresh stimulus from the competition of capitalists of the same trade amongst each other. Each one of them tries to undersell his competitors, and unless he is to sacrifice his profits he must try and reduce wages. Thus, the pressure upon the rate of wages brought about by the interest of every individual capitalist is increased tenfold by the competition amongst them. What was before a matter of more or less profit, now becomes a matter of necessity.

Against this constant, unceasing pressure unorganised labour has no effective means of resistance. Therefore, in trades without organisation of the workpeople, wages tend constantly to fall and the working hours tend constantly to increase. Slowly, but surely, this process goes on. Times of prosperity may now and then interrupt it, but times of bad trade hasten it on all the more afterwards. The workpeople gradually get accustomed to a lower and lower standard of life. While the length of working day more and more approaches the possible maximum, the wages come nearer and nearer to their absolute minimum–the sum below which it becomes absolutely impossible for the workman to live and to reproduce his race.

There was a temporary exception to this about the beginning of this century. The rapid extension of steam and machinery was not sufficient for the still faster increasing demand for their produce. Wages in these trades, except those of children sold from the workhouse to the manufacturer, were as a rule high; those of such skilled manual labour as could not be done without were very high; what a dyer, a mechanic, a velvet-cutter, a hand-mule spinner, used to receive now sounds fabulous. At the same time the trades superseded by machinery were slowly starved to death. But newly-invented machinery by-and-by superseded these well-paid workmen; machinery was invented which made machinery, and that at such a rate that the supply of machine-made goods not only equalled, but exceeded, the demand. When the general peace, in 1815, re-established regularity of trade, the decennial fluctuations between prosperity, over-production, and com-

mercial panic began. Whatever advantages the workpeople had preserved from old prosperous times, and perhaps even increased during the period of frantic over-production, were now taken from them during the period of bad trade and panic; and soon the manufacturing population of England submitted to the general law that the wages of unorganised labour constantly tend towards the absolute minimum.

But in the meantime the Trades Unions, legalised in 1824, had also stepped in, and high time it was. Capitalists are always organised. They need in most cases no formal union, no rules, officers, etc. Their small number, as compared with that of the workmen, the fact of their forming a separate class, their constant social and commercial intercourse stand them in lieu of that; it is only later on, when a branch of manufacturers has taken possession of a district, such as the cotton trade has of Lancashire, that a formal capitalists' Trades Union becomes necessary. On the other hand, the workpeople from the very beginning cannot do without a strong organisation, well-defined by rules and delegating its authority to officers and committees. The Act of 1824 rendered these organisations legal. From that day Labour became a power in England. The formerly helpless mass, divided against itself, was no longer so. To the strength given by union and common action soon was added the force of a well-filled exchequer–"resistance money", as our French brethren expressively call it. The entire position of things now changed. For the capitalist it became a risky thing to indulge in a reduction of wages or an increase of working hours.

Hence the violent outbursts of the capitalist class of those times against Trades Unions. That class had always considered its long-established practice of grinding down the working class as a vested right and lawful privilege. That was now to be put a stop to. No wonder they cried out lustily and held themselves at least as much injured in their rights and property as Irish landlords do nowadays.[4]

Sixty years' experience of struggle have brought them round to some extent. Trades Unions have now become acknowledged institutions, and their action as one of the regulators of wages is recognised quite as much as the action of the Factories and Workshops Acts as regulators of the hours of work. Nay, the cotton masters in Lancashire have lately even taken a leaf out of the workpeople's book, and now know how

to organise a strike, when it suits them, as well or better than any Trades Union.

Thus it is through the action of Trades Unions that the law of wages is enforced as against the employers, and that the workpeople of any well-organised trade are enabled to obtain, at least approximately, the full value of the working power which they hire to their employer; and that, with the help of State laws, the hours of labour are made at least not to exceed too much that maximum length beyond which the working power is prematurely exhausted. This, however, is the utmost Trades Unions, as at present organised, can hope to obtain, and that by constant struggle only, by an immense waste of strength and money; and then the fluctuations of trade, once every ten years at least, break down for the moment what has been conquered, and the fight has to be fought over again. It is a vicious circle from which there is no issue. The working class remains what it was, and what our Chartist forefathers were not afraid to call it, a class of wages slaves. Is this to be the final result of all this labour, self-sacrifice, and suffering? Is this to remain for ever the highest aim of British workmen? Or is the working class of this country at last to attempt breaking through this vicious circle, and to find an issue out of it in a movement for the ABOLITION OF THE WAGES SYSTEM ALTOGETHER?

Next week we shall examine the part played by Trades Unions as organisers of the working class.

The Labour Standard, May 28th, 1881.

TRADES UNIONS

II

So far we have considered the functions of Trades Unions as far only as they contribute to the regulation of the rate of wages and ensure to the labourer, in his struggle against capital, at least some means of resistance. But that aspect does not exhaust our subject.

The struggle of the labourer against capital, we said. That struggle does exist, whatever the apologists of capital may say to the contrary. It will exist so long as a reduction of wages remains the safest and readiest means of raising profits; nay, so long as the wages system itself shall exist. The very existence of Trades Unions is proof sufficient of the fact; if they are not made to fight against the encroachments of capital what are they made for? There is no use in mincing matters. No milksop words can hide the ugly fact that present society is mainly divided into two great antagonistic classes —into capitalists, the owners of all the means for the employment of labour, on one side; and working men, the owners of nothing but their own working power, on the other. The produce of the labour of the latter class has to be divided between both classes, and it is this division about which the struggle is constantly going on. Each class tries to get as large a share as possible; and it is the most curious aspect of this struggle that the working class, while fighting to obtain a share only of its own produce, is often enough accused of actually robbing the capitalist!

But a struggle between two great classes of society necessarily becomes a political struggle. So did the long battle between the middle or capitalist class and the landed

aristocracy; so also does the fight between the working class and these same capitalists. In every struggle of class against class, the next end fought for is political power; the ruling class defends its political supremacy, that is to say its safe majority in the Legislature; the inferior class fights for, first a share, then the whole of that power, in order to become enabled to change existing laws in conformity with their own interests and requirements. Thus the working class of Great Britain for years fought ardently and even violently for the People's Charter,[5] which was to give it that political power; it was defeated, but the struggle had made such an impression upon the victorious middle class that this class, since then, was only too glad to buy a prolonged armistice at the price of ever-repeated concessions to the working people.

Now, in a political struggle of class against class, organisation is the most important weapon. And in the same measure as the merely political or Chartist Organisation fell to pieces, in the same measure the Trades Unions Organisation grew stronger and stronger, until at present it has reached a degree of strength unequalled by any working-class organisation abroad. A few large Trades Unions, comprising between one and two millions of working men, and backed by the smaller or local Unions, represent a power which has to be taken into account by any Government of the ruling class, be it Whig or Tory.

According to the traditions of their origin and development in this country, these powerful organisations have hitherto limited themselves almost strictly to their function of sharing in the regulation of wages and working hours, and of enforcing the repeal of laws openly hostile to the workmen. As stated before, they have done so with quite as much effect as they had a right to expect. But they have attained more than that—the ruling class, which knows their strength better than they themselves do, has volunteered to them concessions beyond that. Disraeli's Household Suffrage[6] gave the vote to at least the greater portion of the organised working class. Would he have proposed it unless he supposed that these new voters would show a will of their own—would cease to be led by middle-class Liberal politicians? Would he have been able to carry it if the working people, in the management of their colossal Trade Societies, had not proved themselves fit for administrative and political work?

That very measure opened out a new prospect to the working class. It gave them the majority in London and in all manufacturing towns, and thus enabled them to enter into the struggle against capital with new weapons, by sending men of their own class to Parliament. And here, we are sorry to say, the Trades Unions forgot their duty as the advanced guard of the working class. The new weapon has been in their hands for more than ten years, but they scarcely ever unsheathed it. They ought not to forget that they cannot continue to hold the position they now occupy unless they really march in the van of the working class. It is not in the nature of things that the working class of England should possess the power of sending forty or fifty working men to Parliament and yet be satisfied for ever to be represented by capitalists or their clerks, such as lawyers, editors, etc.

More than this, there are plenty of symptoms that the working class of this country is awakening to the consciousness that it has for some time been moving in the wrong groove; that the present movements for higher wages and shorter hours exclusively, keep it in a vicious circle out of which there is no issue; that it is not the lowness of wages which forms the fundamental evil, but the wages system itself. This knowledge once generally spread amongst the working class, the position of Trades Unions must change considerably. They will no longer enjoy the privilege of being the only organisations of the working class. At the side of, or above, the Unions of special trades there must spring up a general Union, a political organisation of the working class as a whole.

Thus there are two points which the organised Trades would do well to consider, firstly, that the time is rapidly approaching when the working class of this country will claim, with a voice not to be mistaken, its full share of representation in Parliament. Secondly, that the time also is rapidly approaching when the working class will have understood that the struggle for high wages and short hours, and the whole action of Trades Unions as now carried on, is not an end in itself, but a means, a very necessary and effective means, but only one of several means towards a higher end: the abolition of the wages system altogether.

For the full representation of labour in Parliament as well as for the preparation of the abolition of the wages system, organisations will become necessary, not of separate Trades, but of the working class as a body. And the sooner this is done the better. There is no power in the world which could for a day resist the British working class organised as a body.

The Labour Standard, June 4th, 1881.

THE FRENCH COMMERCIAL TREATY

On Thursday, June 9, in the House of Commons, Mr. Monck (Gloucester) proposed a resolution to the effect that "no commercial treaty with France will be satisfactory which does not tend to the development of the commercial relations of the two countries by a further reduction of duties". A debate of some length ensued. Sir C. Dilke, on behalf of the Government, offered the mild resistance required by diplomatic etiquette. Mr. J. A. Balfour (Tamworth) would compel foreign nations, by retaliatory duties, to adopt lower tariffs. Mr. Slagg (Manchester) would leave the French to find out the value of our trade to them and of theirs to us, even without any treaty. Mr. Illingworth (Bradford) despaired of reaching free trade through commercial treaties. Mr. MacIver (Birkenhead) declared the present system of free-trade to be only an imposture, inasmuch as it was made up of free imports and restricted exports. The resolution was carried by 77 to 49, a defeat which will hurt neither Mr. Gladstone's feelings nor his position.

This debate is a fair specimen of a long series of ever-recurring complaints about the stubbornness with which the stupid foreigner, and even the quite as stupid colonial subject, refuse to recognise the universal blessings of free-trade and its capability of remedying all economic evils. Never has a prophecy broken down so completely as that of the Manchester School[7]–free-trade, once established in England, would shower such blessings over the country that all other nations must follow the example and throw their ports open to English manufactures. The coaxing voice of free-trade apostles remained the voice of one crying in the wilderness. Not only did the Continent and America, on the whole, increase their

protective duties; even the British colonies, as soon as they had become endowed with self-government, followed suit; and no sooner had India been placed under the Crown[8] than a five per cent duty on cotton goods was introduced even there, acting as an incentive to native manufactures.

Why this should be so is an utter mystery to the Manchester School. Yet it is plain enough.

About the middle of last century England was the principal seat of the cotton manufacture, and therefore the natural place where, with a rapidly rising demand for cotton goods, the machinery was invented which, with the help of the steam engine, revolutionised first the cotton trade, and successively the other textile manufactures. The large and easily accessible coalfields of Great Britain, thanks to steam, became now the basis of the country's prosperity. The extensive deposits of iron ore in close proximity to the coal facilitated the development of the iron trade, which had received a new stimulus by the demand for engines and machinery. Then, in the midst of this revolution of the whole manufacturing system, came the anti-Jacobin and Napoleonic wars, which for some twenty-five years drove the ships of almost all competing nations from the sea, and thus gave to English manufactured goods the practical monopoly of all Transatlantic and some European markets. When in 1815 peace was restored, England stood there with her steam manufactures ready to supply the world, while steam engines were as yet scarcely known in other countries. In manufacturing industry, England was an immense distance in advance of them.

But the restoration of peace soon induced other nations to follow in the track of England. Sheltered by the Chinese Wall of her prohibitive tariff, France introduced production by steam. So also did Germany, although her tariff was at that time far more liberal than any other, that of England not excepted. So did other countries. At the same time the British landed aristocracy, to raise their rents, introduced the Corn Laws,[9] thereby raising the price of bread and with it the money rate of wages. Nevertheless the progress of English manufactures went on at a stupendous rate. By 1830 she had laid herself out to become "the workshop of the world". To make her the workshop of the world in reality was the task undertaken by the Anti-Corn Law League.[10]

There was no secret made, in those times, of what was aimed at by the repeal of the Corn Laws. To reduce the price of bread, and thereby the money rate of wages, would enable British manufacturers to defy all and every competition with which wicked or ignorant foreigners threatened them. What was more natural than that England, with her great advance in machinery, with her immense merchant navy, her coal and iron, should supply all the world with manufactured articles, and that in return the outer world should supply her with agricultural produce, corn, wine, flax, cotton, coffee, tea, etc.? It was a decree of Providence that it should be so, it was sheer rebellion against God's ordinance to set your face against it. At most France might be allowed to supply England and the rest of the world with such articles of taste and fashion as could not be made by machinery, and were altogether beneath the notice of an enlightened millowner. Then, and then alone, would there be peace on earth and goodwill towards men; then all nations would be bound together by the endearing ties of commerce and mutual profit; then the reign of peace and plenty would be for ever established, and to the working class, to their "hands", they said: "There's a good time coming, boys—wait a little longer." Of course the "hands" are waiting still.

But while the "hands" waited the wicked and ignorant foreigners did not. They did not see the beauty of a system by which the momentary industrial advantages possessed by England should be turned into means to secure to her the monopoly of manufactures all the world over and for ever, and to reduce all other nations to mere agricultural dependencies of England—in other words, to the very enviable condition of Ireland. They knew that no nation can keep up with others in civilisation if deprived of manufactures, and thereby brought down to be a mere agglomeration of clodhoppers. And therefore, subordinating private commercial profit to national exigency, they protected their nascent manufactures by high tariffs, which seemed to them the only means to protect themselves from being brought down to the economical condition enjoyed by Ireland.

We do not mean to say that this was the right thing to do in every case. On the contrary, France would reap immense advantages from a considerable approach towards Free Trade. German manufactures, such as they are, have become what

they are under Free Trade, and Bismarck's new Protection tariff will do harm to nobody but the German manufacturers themselves. But there is one country where a short period of Protection is not only justifiable but a matter of absolute necessity—America.

America is at that point of her development where the introduction of manufactures has become a national necessity. This is best proved by the fact that in the invention of labour-saving machinery it is no longer England which leads, but America. American inventions every day supersede English patents and English machinery. American machines are brought over to England; and this in almost all branches of manufactures. Then America possesses a population the most energetic in the world, coalfields against which those of England appear almost as a vanishing quantity, iron and all other metals in plenty. And is it to be supposed that such a country will expose its young and rising manufactures to a long, protracted, competitive struggle with the old-established industry of England, when, by a short term of some twenty years of protection, she can place them at once on a level with any competitor? But, says the Manchester School, America is but robbing herself by her protective system. So is a man robbing himself who pays extra for the express train instead of taking the old Parliamentary train—fifty miles an hour instead of twelve.

There is no mistake about it, the present generation will see American cotton goods compete with English ones in India and China, and gradually gain ground in those two leading markets; American machinery and hardware compete with the English makes in all parts of the world, England included; and the same implacable necessity which removed Flamish manufactures to Holland, Dutch ones to England, will ere long remove the centre of the world's industry from this country to the United States. And in the restricted field which will then remain to England she will find formidable competitors in several Continental nations.

The fact cannot be longer shirked that England's industrial monopoly is fast on the wane. If the "enlightened" middle class think it their interest to hush it up, let the working class boldly look it in the face, for it interests them more than even their "betters". These may for a long time yet remain the bankers and money-lenders of the world, as the Venetians

and the Dutch in their decay have done before them. But what is to become of the "hands" when England's immense export trade begins to shrink down every year instead of expanding? If the removal of the iron ship-building trade from the Thames to the Clyde was sufficient to reduce the whole East-end of London to chronic pauperism, what will the virtual removal of all the staple trades of England across the Atlantic do for England?

It will do one great thing: it will break the last link which still binds the English working class to the English middle class. This link was their common working of a national monopoly. That monopoly once destroyed, the British working class will be compelled to take in hand its own interests, its own salvation, and to make an end of the wages system. Let us hope it will not wait until then.

The Labour Standard, June 18th, 1881.

TWO MODEL TOWN COUNCILS

We have promised our readers to keep them informed of the working men's movements abroad as well as at home. We have now and then been enabled to give some news from America, and today we are in a position to communicate some facts from France–facts of such importance that they well deserve being discussed in our leading columns.

In France they do not know the numerous systems of public voting which are still in use in this country. Instead of having one kind of suffrage and mode of voting for Parliamentary elections, another for municipal, a third for vestry elections and so forth, plain Universal Suffrage and vote by ballot are the rule everywhere. When the Socialist Working Men's Party was formed in France, it was resolved to nominate working men's candidates not only for Parliament, but also for all municipal elections; and, indeed, at the last renewal of Town Councils for France, which took place on January 9 last, the young party was victorious in a great number of manufacturing towns and rural, especially mining, communes. They not only carried individual candidates, they managed in some places to obtain the majority in the council, and one council, at least, as we shall see, was composed of none but working men.

Shortly before the establishment of the *Labour Standard*, there was a strike of factory operatives in the town of Roubaix, close on the Belgian frontier. The Government at once sent troops to occupy the town, and thereby, under the pretext of maintaining order (which was never menaced) tried to provoke the people on strike to such acts as might serve as a pretext for the interference of the troops. But the people remained quiet, and one of the principal causes which made

them resist all provocations was the action of the Town Council. This was composed, in its majority, of working men. The subject of the strike was brought before it, and amply discussed. The result was that the Council not only declared the men on strike to be in the right, but also actually *voted the sum of 50,000 francs, or £2,000, in support of the strikers.* That subsidy could not be paid, as according to French law the prefect of the department has the right to annul any resolutions of Town Councils which he may consider as exceeding their powers. But nevertheless the strong moral support thus given to the strike by the official representation of the township was of the greatest value to the workmen.

On June 8 the Mining Company of Commentry, in the centre of France (Department Allier), discharged 152 men who refused to submit to new and more unfavourable terms. This being part of a system employed for some time for the gradual introduction of worse terms of work, the whole of the miners, about 1,600, struck. The Government at once sent the usual troops to overawe or provoke the strikers. But the Town Council here, too, at once took up the cause of the men. In their meeting of June 12 (a Sunday to boot) they passed resolutions to the following effect:

1. Whereas it is the duty of society to ensure the existence of those who, by their work, permit the existence of all; and whereas if the State refuses to fulfil this duty the communes are bound to fulfil it, this Council resolves to take up a loan of 25,000 francs (£1,000) with the consent of the highest rated inhabitants, which sum is to be devoted for the benefit of the miners whom the unjustifiable discharge of 152 of their body has compelled to strike work.

Carried unanimously, against the veto of the Mayor alone.

2. Whereas the State, in selling the valuable national property of the mines of Commentry to a joint-stock company has thereby handed over the workmen there employed to the tender mercies of the said company; and whereas, consequently, the State is bound to see that the oppression exercised by the company upon the miners is not carried to a degree threatening their very existence; whereas, however, the State, by placing troops at the disposal of the company during the present strike, has not even preserved its neutrality, but taken sides with the company,

This Council, in the name of the working-class interests which it is its duty to protect, calls upon the sub-prefect of the district–

1. To recall at once the troops whose presence, entirely uncalled for, is a mere provocation; and

2. To intervene with the manager of the company and induce him to revoke the measure which has caused the strike.

Carried unanimously.

In a third resolution, also carried unanimously, the Council, fearing that the poverty of the commune will frustrate the loan voted above, opens a public subscription in aid of the strikers, and appeals to all the other municipal councils of France to send subsidies for the same object.

Here, then, we have a striking proof of the presence of working men, not only in Parliament, but also in municipal and all other local bodies. How differently would many a strike in England terminate if the men had the Town Council of the locality to back them! The English Town Councils and Local Boards, elected to a great extent by working men, consist at present almost exclusively of employers, their direct and indirect agents (lawyers, etc.), and at the best, of shopkeepers. No sooner does a strike or lock-out occur than all the moral and material power of the local authorities is employed in favour of the masters and against the men; even the police, paid out of the pockets of the men, are employed exactly as in France the troops are used, to provoke them into illegal acts and hunt them down. The Poor Law authorities in most cases refuse relief to men who, in their opinion, might work if they liked. And naturally so. In the eyes of this class of men, whom the working people suffer to form the local authorities, a strike is an open rebellion against social order, an outrage against the sacred rights of property. And therefore, in every strike or lock-out all the enormous moral and physical weight of the local authorities is placed in the masters' scale so long as the working class consent to elect masters and masters' representatives to local elective bodies.

We hope that the action of the two French Town Councils will open the eyes of many. Shall it be for ever said, and of the English working men too, that "they manage these things better in France"? The English working class, with its old and powerful organisation, its immemorial political liberties, its long experience of political action, has immense advantages over those of any continental country. Yet the Germans could carry twelve working-class representatives for Parliament, and they as well as the French have the majority in numerous Town Councils. True, the suffrage in England is restricted; but even now the working class has a majority in all large towns and manufacturing districts. They have only to will it, and that potential majority becomes at once an effective one,

a power in the State, a power in all localities where working people are concentrated. And if you once have working men in Parliament, in the Town Councils and Local Boards of Guardians, etc., how long will it be ere you will have also working men magistrates, capable of putting a spoke in the wheels of those Dogberries who now so often ride roughshod over the people?

The Labour Standard, June 25th, 1881.

AMERICAN FOOD AND THE LAND QUESTION

Since autumn 1837 we have been quite accustomed to see money panics and commercial crises imported from New York into England. At least one out of every two of the decennial revulsions of industry broke out in America. But that America should also upset the time-honoured relations of British agriculture, revolutionise the immemorial feudal relations between landlord and tenant at will, smash up English rents, and lay waste English farms, was a sight deserved for the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

And yet so it is. The virgin soil of the Western prairie–which is now coming into cultivation, not by piecemeal but in thousands of square miles–is now beginning to rule the price of wheat, and, consequently, the rent of wheat land. And no old soil can compete with it. It is a wonderful land, level, or slightly undulating, undisturbed by violent upheavals, in exactly the same condition in which it was slowly deposited at the bottom of a Tertiary ocean; free from stones, rocks, trees; fit for immediate cultivation without any preparatory labour. No clearing or draining is required; you pass the plough over it and it is fit to receive the seed, and will bear twenty to thirty crops of wheat in succession and without manuring. It is a soil fit for agriculture on the grandest scale, and on the grandest scale it is worked. The British agriculturist used to pride himself of his large farms as opposed to the small farms of Continental peasant proprietors; but what are the largest farms in the United Kingdom compared to the farms of the American prairie, farms of 40,000 acres and more, worked by regular armies of men, horses, and implements, drilled, commanded, and organised like soldiers?

This American revolution in farming, together with the revolutionised means of transport as invented by the Americans, sends over to Europe wheat at such low prices that no European farmer can compete with it–at least not while he is expected to pay rent. Look at the year 1879, when this was first felt. The crop was bad in all Western Europe; it was a failure in England. Yet, thanks to American corn, prices remained almost stationary. For the first time the British farmer had a bad crop and low prices of wheat at the same time. Then the farmers began to stir, the landlords felt alarmed. Next year, with a better crop, prices went lower still. The price of corn is now determined by the cost of production in America, plus the cost of transport. And this will be the case more and more every year, in proportion as new prairie-land is put under the plough. The agricultural armies required for that operation–we find them ourselves in Europe by sending over emigrants.

Now, formerly there was this consolation for the farmer and the landlord, that if corn did not pay meat would. The plough-land was turned into grass-land, and everything was pleasant again. But now that resource is cut off too. American meat and American cattle are sent over in ever-increasing quantities. And not only that. There are at least two great cattle-producing countries which are on the alert for methods permitting them to send over to Europe, and especially to England, their immense excess of meat, now wasted. With the present state of science and the rapid progress made in its application, we may be sure that in a very few years–at the very latest–Australian and South American beef and mutton will be brought over in a perfect state of preservation and in enormous quantities. What is then to become of the prosperity of the British farmer, of the long rent-roll of the British landlord? It is all very well to grow goose-berries, strawberries, and so forth–that market is well enough supplied as it is. No doubt the British workman could consume a deal more of these delicacies–but then first raise his wages.

It is scarcely needful to say that the effect of this new American agricultural competition is felt on the Continent too. The small peasant proprietor–mostly mortgaged over head and ears–and paying interest and law expenses where the English and Irish farmer pays rent, he feels it quite as much. It is a peculiar effect of this American competition that it

renders not only large landed property, but also small landed property useless, by rendering both unprofitable.

It may be said that this system of land exhaustion, as now practised in the Far West, cannot go on for ever, and things must come right again. Of course, it cannot last for ever; but there is plenty of unexhausted land yet to carry on the process for another century. Moreover, there are other countries offering similar advantages. There is the whole South Russian steppe, where indeed, commercial men have bought land and done the same thing. There are the vast pampas of the Argentine Republic, there are others still; all lands equally fit for this modern system of giant farming and cheap production. So that before this thing is exhausted it will have lived long enough to kill all the landlords of Europe, great and small, at least twice over.

Well, and the upshot of all this? The upshot will and must be that it will force upon us the nationalisation of the land and its cultivation by co-operative societies under national control. Then, and then alone, it will again pay both the cultivators and the nation to work it, whatever the price of American or any other corn and meat may be. And if the landlords in the meantime, as they seem to be half inclined to do, actually do go to America, we wish them a pleasant journey.

The Labour Standard, July 2nd, 1881.

THE WAGES THEORY OF THE ANTI-CORN LAW LEAGUE

In another column we publish a letter from Mr. J. Noble finding fault with some of our remarks in a leading article of the *Labour Standard* of June 18.* Although we cannot, of course, make our leading columns the vehicle of polemics on the subject of historical facts or economical theories, we will yet, for once, reply to a man who, though in an official party position, is evidently sincere.

To our assertion that what was aimed at by the repeal of the Corn Laws was to "reduce the price of bread and thereby the money rate of wages", Mr. Noble replies that this was a "Protectionist fallacy" persistently combated by the League, and gives some quotations from Richard Cobden's speeches and an address of the Council of the League to prove it.

The writer of the article in question was living at the time in Manchester–a manufacturer amongst manufacturers. He is, of course, perfectly well aware of what the official doctrine of the League was. To reduce it to its shortest and most generally recognised expression (for there are many varieties) it ran thus:–The repeal of the duty on corn will increase our trade with foreign countries, will directly increase our imports, in exchange for which foreign customers will buy our manufactures, thus increasing the demand for our manufactured goods; thus the demand for the labour of our industrial working population will increase, and therefore wages must rise. And by dint of repeating this theory day after day and year after year the official representatives of the League, shallow economists as they were, could at last

* See pp. 19-23 of this edition.–*Ed.*

come out with the astounding assertion that wages rose and fell in inverse ratio, not with profits, but with the price of food; that dear bread meant low wages and cheap bread high wages. Thus, the decennial revulsions of trade which have existed before and after the repeal of the Corn duties were, by the mouthpieces of the League, declared to be the simple effects of the Corn Laws, bound to disappear as soon as those hateful laws were removed; that the Corn Laws were the only great obstacle standing between the British manufacturer and the poor foreigners longing for that manufacturer's produce, unclad and shivering for want of British cloth. And thus Cobden could actually advance in the passage quoted by Mr. Noble, that the depression of trade and the fall in wages from 1839 to 1842 was the consequence of the very high price of corn during these years, when it was nothing else but one of the regular phases of depression of trade, recurring with the greatest regularity, up to now, every ten years; a phase certainly prolonged and aggravated by bad crops and the stupid interference of greedy landlord legislation.

Well, this was the official theory of Cobden, who with all his cleverness as an agitator was a poor business man and a shallow economist; he no doubt believed it as faithfully as Mr. Noble believes it to this day. But the bulk of the League was formed of practical men of business, more attentive to business and generally more successful in it than Cobden. And with these matters were quite different. Of course, before strangers and in public meetings, especially before their "hands", the official theory was generally considered "the thing". But business men, when intent upon business, do not generally speak their mind to their customers, and if Mr. Noble should be of a different opinion, he had better *keep off* the Manchester Exchange. A very little pressing as to what was meant by the way in which wages must rise in consequence of free trade in corn, was sufficient to bring it out that this rise was supposed to affect wages as expressed in commodities, and that it might be quite possible that the money rate of wages would not rise—but was not that substantially a rise of wages? And when you pressed the subject further it usually came out that the money rates of wages might even fall while the comforts supplied for this reduced sum of money to the working man would still be superior to

what he enjoyed at the time. And if you asked a few more close questions as to the way, how the expected immense extension of trade was to be brought about, you would very soon hear that it was this last contingency upon which they mainly relied: a reduction in the money rate of wages combined with a fall in the price of bread, etc., more than compensating for this fall. Moreover, there were plenty to be met who did not even try to disguise their opinion that cheap bread was wanted simply to bring down the money rate of wages, and thus knock foreign competition on the head. And that this, in reality, was the end and aim of the bulk of the manufacturers and merchants forming the great body of the League, it was not so very difficult to make out for any one in the habit of dealing with commercial men, and therefore in the habit of not always taking their word for gospel. This is what we said and we repeat it. Of the official doctrine of the League we did not say a word. It was economically a "fallacy", and practically a mere cloak for interested purposes, though some of the leaders may have repeated it often enough to believe it finally themselves.

Very amusing is Mr. Noble's quotation of Cobden's words about the working classes "rubbing their hands with satisfaction" at the prospect of corn at 25s. a quarter. The working classes at that time did not disdain cheap bread; but they were so full of "satisfaction" at the proceedings of Cobden and Co. that for several years past they had made it impossible for the League in the whole of the North, to hold a single really public meeting. The writer had the "satisfaction" of being present, in 1843, at the last attempt of the League to hold such a meeting in Salford Town Hall, and of seeing it very nearly broken up by the mere putting of an amendment in favour of the People's Charter. Since then the rule at all League meetings was "admission by ticket", which was far from being accessible to everyone. From that moment "Chartist obstruction" ceased. The working masses had attained their end—to prove that the League did *not*, as it pretended, represent them.

In conclusion, a few words about the wages theory of the League. The average price of a commodity is equal to its cost of production; the action of supply and demand consists in bringing it back to that standard around which it oscillates. If this be true of all commodities, it is true also of

the commodity Labour (or more strictly speaking, Labour-force). Then the rate of wages is determined by the price of those commodities which enter into the habitual and necessary consumption of the labourer. In other words, all other things remaining unchanged, wages rise and fall with the price of the necessaries of life. This is a law of political economy against which all the Perronet Thompsons, Cobdens, and Brights will ever be impotent. But all other things do not always remain unchanged, and therefore the action of this law in practice becomes modified by the concurrent action of other economical laws; it appears darkened, and sometimes to such a degree that you must take some trouble to trace it. This served as a pretext to the vulgarising and vulgar economists dating from the Anti-Corn Law League to pretend, first, that Labour, and then all other commodities, had no real determinable value, but only a fluctuating price, regulated by supply and demand more or less without regard to cost of production, and that to raise prices, and therefore wages, you had nothing to do but increase the demand. And thus you got rid of the unpleasant connection of the rate of wages with the price of food, and could boldly proclaim that in this crude, ridiculous doctrine that dear bread meant low wages and cheap bread high wages.

Perhaps Mr. Noble will ask whether wages are not generally as high, or even higher, with today's cheap bread than with the dear taxed bread before 1847. That would take a long inquiry to answer. But so much is certain: where a branch of industry has prospered and at the same time the workmen have been strongly organised for defence, their wages have generally not fallen, and sometimes perhaps risen. This merely proves that the people were underpaid before. Where a branch of industry has decayed, or where the workpeople have not been strongly organised in Trades Unions, these wages have invariably fallen, and often to starvation level. Go to the East-end of London and see for yourselves!

The Labour Standard, July 9th, 1881.

A WORKING MEN'S PARTY

How often have we not been warned by friends and sympathisers, "Keep aloof from party politics!" And they were perfectly right, as far as present English party politics are concerned. A labour organ must be neither Whig nor Tory, neither Conservative nor Liberal, or even Radical, in the actual party sense of that word. Conservatives, Liberals, Radicals, all of them represent but the interests of the ruling classes, and various shades of opinion predominating amongst landlords, capitalists, and retail tradesmen. If they do represent the working class, they most decidedly misrepresent it. The working class has interests of its own, political as well as social. How it has stood up for what it considers its social interests, the history of the Trades Unions and the Short Time movement shows. But its political interests it leaves almost entirely in the hands of Tories, Whigs, and Radicals, men of the upper class, and for nearly a quarter of a century the working class of England has contended itself with forming, as it were, the tail of the "Great Liberal Party".

This is a political position unworthy of the best organised working class of Europe. In other countries the working men have been far more active. Germany has had for more than ten years a Working Men's party (the Social-Democrats), which owns ten seats in Parliament, and whose growth has frightened Bismarck into those infamous measures of repression of which we give an account in another column.* Yet in spite of Bismarck, the Working Men's party progresses steadily; only last week it carried sixteen elections for the Mannheim Town Council and one for the Saxon Parliament. In Belgium, Hol-

* See pp. 38-40 of this edition.—*Ed.*

land, and Italy the example of the Germans has been imitated; in every one of these countries a Working Men's party exists, though the voter's qualification there is too high to give them a chance of sending members to the Legislature at present. In France the Working Men's Party is just now in full process of organisation; it has obtained the majority in several Municipal Councils at the last elections, and will undoubtedly carry several seats at the general election for the Chamber next October. Even in America where the passage of the working class to that of farmer, trader, or capitalist, is still comparatively easy, the working men find it necessary to organise themselves as an independent party. Everywhere the labourer struggles for political power, for direct representation of his class in the Legislature–everywhere but in Great Britain.

And yet there never was a more widespread feeling in England than now, that the old parties are doomed, that the old shibboleths have become meaningless, that the old watchwords are exploded, that the old panaceas will not act any longer. Thinking men of all classes begin to see that a new line must be struck out, and that this line can only be in the direction of democracy. But in England, where the industrial and agricultural working class forms the immense majority of the people, democracy means the dominion of the working class, neither more nor less. Let, then, that working class prepare itself for the task in store for it,–the ruling of this great empire; let them understand the responsibilities which inevitably will fall to their share. And the best way to do this is to use the power already in their hands, the actual majority they possess in every large town in the kingdom, to send to Parliament men of their own order. With the present household suffrage, forty or fifty working men might easily be sent to St. Stephen's, where such an infusion of entirely new blood is very much wanted indeed. With only that number of working men in Parliament, it would be impossible to let the Irish Land Bill[11] become, as is the case at present, more and more an Irish Land Bull, namely, an Irish Landlords' Compensation Act; it would be impossible to resist the demand for a redistribution of seats, for making bribery really punishable, for throwing election expenses, as is the case everywhere but in England, on the public purse, etc.

Moreover, in England a real democratic party is impossible unless it be a working men's party. Enlightened men of

other classes (where they are not so plentiful as people would make us believe) might join that party and even represent it in Parliament after having given pledges of their sincerity. Such is the case everywhere. In Germany, for instance, the working-men representatives are not in every case actual working men. But no democratic party in England, as well as elsewhere, will be effectively successful unless it has a distinct working-class character. Abandon that, and you have nothing but sects and shams.

And this is even truer in England than abroad. Of Radical shams there has been unfortunately enough since the break-up of the first working men's party which the world ever produced–the Chartist party. Yes, but the Chartists were broken up and attained nothing. Did they, indeed? Of the six points of the People's Charter, two, vote by ballot and no property qualification, are now the law of the land. A third, universal suffrage, is at least approximately carried in the shape of household suffrage; a fourth, equal electoral districts, is distinctly in sight, a promised reform of the present Government. So that the break-down of the Chartist movement has resulted in the realisation of fully one-half of the Chartist programme. And if the mere recollection of a past political organisation of the working class could effect these political reforms, and a series of social reforms besides, what will the actual presence of a working men's political party do, backed by forty or fifty representatives in Parliament?

We live in a world where everybody is bound to take care of himself. Yet the English working class allows the landlord, capitalist, and retail trading classes, with their tail of lawyers, newspaper writers, etc., to take care of its interests. No wonder reforms in the interest of the workman come so slow and in such miserable dribbles. The workpeople of England have but to will, and they are the masters to carry every reform, social and political, which their situation requires. Then why not make that effort?

The Labour Standard, July 23rd, 1881.

BISMARCK AND THE GERMAN WORKING MEN'S PARTY

The English middle class Press has lately been very silent about the atrocities committed by Bismarck and his understrappers against the members of the Social Democratic Working Men's Party in Germany. The only exception, to some extent, has been the *Daily News*. Formerly, when despotic Governments abroad indulged in such vagaries at the expense of their subjects, the outcry was great indeed in the English dailies and weeklies. But here the oppressed parties are working men, and proud of the name, and the Press representatives of "Society", of the "Upper Ten", suppress the facts and almost seem, by the obstinacy of their silence, to approve of them. What business, indeed, have working men with politics? Leave that to their "betters"! And then there is this other reason for the silence of the English Press: It is very hard to attack Bismarck's Coercion Act and the way he carries it out, and in the same breath to defend Mr. Forster's[12] coercion proceedings in Ireland. This is a very sore point, and must not be touched. The middle-class Press can scarcely be expected to point out itself how much the moral position of England in Europe and America has been lowered by the present Government's action in Ireland.

At every general election the German Working Men's party turned up with rapidly-increasing numbers; at the last but one above 500,000; at the last one more than 600,000 votes fell to their candidates. Berlin elected two, Elberfeld-Barmen, one; Breslau, Dresden, one each; ten seats were conquered in the face of the coalition of the Government with the whole of the Liberal, Conservative, and Catholic parties, in the face of the outcry created by the two attempts at shooting the Emperor, which all other parties agreed to make the Working Men's party responsible for. Then Bismarck succeeded in passing an Act by which Social-Democracy was outlawed. The working men's newspapers, more than fifty, were suppressed, their societies and clubs broken up, their funds seized, their meetings dissolved by the police, and, to crown all, it was enacted that whole towns and districts might be "proclaimed", just as in Ireland. But what even English Coercion Bills have never ventured upon in Ireland[13] Bismarck did in Germany. In every "proclaimed" district the police received the right to expel any man whom it might "reasonably suspect" of Socialistic propaganda. Berlin was, of course, at once proclaimed, and hundreds (with their families, thousands) of people were expelled. For the Prussian police always expel men with families; the young unmarried men are generally let alone; to them expulsion would be no great punishment, but to the heads of families it means, in most cases, a long career of misery if not absolute ruin. Then Hamburg elected a working man member of Parliament, and was immediately proclaimed. The first batch of men expelled from Hamburg was about a hundred, with families amounting, besides, to more than three hundred. The Working Men's party, within two days, found the means to provide for their travelling expenses and other immediate wants. Now Leipzig has also been proclaimed, and without any other pretext but that otherwise the Government cannot break up the organisation of the party. The expulsions of the very first day number thirty-three, mostly married men with families. Three members of the German Parliament head the list; perhaps Mr. Dillon will send them a letter of congratulation, considering that they are not yet quite so badly off as himself.

But this is not all. The Working Men's party once being outlawed in due form, and deprived of all those political rights which other Germans are supposed to enjoy, the police can do with the individual members of that party just as they like. Under the pretext of searching for forbidden publications, their wives and daughters are subjected to the most indecent and brutal treatment. They themselves are arrested whenever it pleases the police, are remanded from week to week, and discharged only after having passed some months in prison. New offences, unknown to the criminal code, are invented by the police, and that code stretched beyond all

possibility. And often enough the police finds magistrates and judges corrupt or fanatical enough to aid and abet them; promotion is at this price! What this all comes to the following astounding figures will show. In the year from October, 1879, to October, 1880, there were in Prussia alone imprisoned for high treason, treason felony, insulting the Emperor, etc., not less than 1,108 persons; and for political libels, insulting Bismarck, or defiling the Government, etc., not less than 10,094 persons. Eleven thousand two hundred and two political prisoners, that beats even Mr. Forster's Irish exploits!

And what has Bismarck attained with all his coercion? Just as much as Mr. Forster in Ireland. The Social-Democratic party is in as blooming a condition, and possesses as firm an organisation, as the Irish Land League.[14] A few days ago there were elections for the Town Council of Mannheim. The working-class party nominated sixteen candidates, and carried them all by a majority of nearly three to one. Again, Bebel, member of the German Parliament for Dresden, stood for the representation of the Leipzig district in the Saxon Parliament. Bebel is himself a working man (a turner), and one of the best, if not the best speaker in Germany. To frustrate his being elected, the Government expelled all his committee. What was the result? That even with a limited suffrage, Bebel was carried by a strong majority. Thus, Bismarck's coercion avails him nothing; on the contrary, it exasperates the people. Those to whom all legal means of asserting themselves are cut off, will one fine morning take to illegal ones, and no one can blame them. How often have Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Forster proclaimed that doctrine? And how do they act now in Ireland?

The Labour Standard, July 23rd, 1881.

COTTON AND IRON

Cotton and iron are the two most important raw materials of our time. Whichever nation is the leading one in the manufacture of cotton and iron articles, that nation heads the list of manufacturing nations generally. And because and as long as this is the case with England, therefore and so long will England be the first manufacturing nation of the world.

It might, then, be expected that the workers in cotton and iron should be remarkably well off in England; that, as England commands in the market, trade in these articles should be always good, and that at least in these two branches of industry the millennium of plenty, promised at the time of the Free Trade agitation, should be realised. Alas! we all know that this is far from being the case, and that here, as in other trades, if the condition of the workpeople has not become worse, and in some instances even better, it is due exclusively to their own efforts—to strong organisation and hard-fought strikes. We know that after a few short years of prosperity about and after 1874 there was a complete collapse of the cotton and iron trades; factories were closed, furnaces blown out, and where production was continued short time was the rule. Such periods of collapse had been known before; they recur, on an average, once in every ten years; they last their time, to be relieved by a new period of prosperity, and so on.

But what distinguishes the present period of depression especially in cotton and iron is this, that it has now for some years outlasted its usual duration. There have been several attempts at a revival, several spurts; but in vain. If the epoch of actual collapse has been overcome, trade remains in a

languid state, and the markets continue incapable to absorb the whole production.

The cause of this is that with our present system of using machinery to produce not only manufactured goods, but machines themselves, production can be increased with incredible rapidity. There would be no difficulty, if manufacturers were so minded, during one single period of prosperity to increase the plant for spinning and weaving, bleaching and printing cotton, so as to be able to produce fifty per cent more goods, and to double the whole production of pig-iron and iron articles of every description. The actual increase has not come up to that. But still it has been out of all proportion to what it was in former periods of expansion, and the consequence is—chronic over-production, chronic depression of trade. The masters can afford to look on, at least for a considerable time, but the workpeople have to suffer, for to them it means chronic misery and a constant prospect of the workhouse.

This, then, is the outcome of the glorious system of unlimited competition, this the realisation of the millennium promised by the Cobdens, Brights, and Co.! This is what the workpeople have to go through if, as they have done for the last twenty-five years, they leave the management of the economical policy of the empire to their "natural leaders", to those "captains of industry" who, according to Thomas Carlyle, were called upon to command the industrial army of the country. Captains of industry indeed! Louis Napoleon's generals in 1870 were geniuses compared to them. Everyone of these pretended captains of industry fights against every other, acts entirely on his own account, increases his plant irrespective of what his neighbours do, and then at the end they all find, to their great surprise, that overtrading has been the result. They cannot unite to regulate production; they can unite for one purpose only: *to keep down the wages of their workpeople.* And thus, by recklessly expanding the productive power of the country far beyond the power of absorption of the markets, they rob their workpeople of the comparative ease which a period of moderate prosperity would give them, and which they are entitled to after the long period of collapse, in order to bring up their incomes to the average standard. Will it not yet be understood that the manufacturers, as a class, have become incapable any longer to direct the great

economical interests of the country, nay, even the process of production itself? And is it not an absurdity—though a fact—that the greatest enemy to the working people of England is the ever-increasing productivity of their own hands?

But there is another fact to be taken into consideration. It is not the English manufacturers alone who increase their productive powers. The same takes place in other countries. Statistics will not allow us to compare separately the cotton and iron industries of the various leading countries. But, taking the whole of the textile, mining, and metal-working industries, we can draw up a comparative table with the materials furnished by the chief of the Prussian Statistical Bureau, Dr. Engel, in his book, *Das Zeitalter des Dampfs (The Age of Steam,* Berlin, 1881). According to his computation, there are employed in the above industries in the countries stated below steam-engines of the following total horse-power (one horse-power equal to a force lifting 75 kilograms to the height of one metre in one second), viz.:

	Textile industries	*Mining and metal works*
England, 1871	515,800	1,077,000 h.p.
Germany, 1875	128,125	456,436 „
France	about 100,000	185,000 „
United States	about 93,000	370,000 „

Thus we see that the total steam power employed by the three nations who are England's chief competitors amounts to three-fifths of the English steam power in the textile manufactures, and nearly equals it in mines and metal work. And as their manufactures progress at a far more rapid rate than those of this country, there can be scarcely a doubt that the combined produce of the former will soon surpass that of the latter.

Look, again, at this table, giving the steam horse-power employed in production, exclusive of locomotives and ships' engines:—

	Horse-power
Great Britain	about 2,000,000
United States	about 1,987,000
Germany	about 1,321,000
France	about 492,000

This still more clearly shows how little there is left of the monopoly of England in steam manufactures, and how little

Free Trade has succeeded in securing England's industrial superiority. And let it not be said that this progress of foreign industry is artificial, is due to protection. The whole of the immense expansion of the German manufactures has been accomplished under a most liberal Free Trade *régime*, and if America, owing to an absurd system of internal excise more than anything else, is compelled to have recourse to a protection more apparent than real, the repeal of these excise laws would be sufficient to allow her to compete in the open market.

This, then, is the position in which twenty-five years of an almost absolute reign of Manchester School doctrines have left the country. We think these results are such as to call for a speedy abdication of the Manchester and Birmingham gentlemen, so as to give the working classes a turn for the next twenty-five years. Surely they could not manage worse.

The Labour Standard, July 30th, 1881.

SOCIAL CLASSES—NECESSARY AND SUPERFLUOUS

The question has often been asked, in what degree are the different classes of society useful or even necessary? And the answer was naturally a different one for every different epoch of history considered. There was undoubtedly a time when a territorial aristocracy was an unavoidable and necessary element of society. That, however is very, very long ago. Then there was a time when a capitalist middle class, a *bourgeoisie* as the French call it, arose with equally unavoidable necessity, struggled against the territorial aristocracy, broke its political power, and in its turn became economically and politically predominant. But, since classes arose, there never was a time when society could do without a working class. The name, the social status of that class has changed; the serf took the place of the slave, to be in his turn relieved by the free working man—free from servitude but also free from any earthly possessions save his own labour force. But it is plain: whatever changes took place in the upper, non-producing ranks of society, society could not live without a class of producers. This class, then, is necessary under all circumstances—though the time must come, when it will no longer be a class, when it will comprise all society.

Now, what necessity is there at present for the existence of each of these three classes?

The landed aristocracy is, to say the least, economically useless in England, while in Ireland and Scotland it has become a positive nuisance by its depopulating tendencies. To send the people across the ocean or into starvation, and to replace them by sheep or deer—that is all the merit that the

Irish and Scotch landlords can lay claim to. Let the competition of American vegetable and animal food develop a little further, and the English landed aristocracy will do the same, at least those that can afford it, having large town estates to fall back upon. Of the rest, American food competition will soon free us. And good riddance–for their political action, both in the Lords and Commons is a perfect national nuisance.

But how about the capitalist middle class, that enlightened and liberal class which founded the British colonial empire and which established British liberty? The class that reformed Parliament in 1831,[15] repealed the Corn Laws, and reduced tax after tax? The class that created and still directs the giant manufactures, and the immense merchant navy, the ever spreading railway system of England? Surely that class must be at least as necessary as the working class which it directs and leads on from progress to progress.

Now the economical function of the capitalist middle class has been, indeed, to create the modern system of steam manufactures and steam communications, and to crush every economical and political obstacle which delayed or hindered the development of that system. No doubt, as long as the capitalist middle class performed this function it was, under the circumstances, a necessary class. But is it still so? Does it continue to fulfil its essential function as the manager and expander of social production for the benefit of society at large? Let us see.

To begin with the means of communication, we find the telegraphs in the hands of the Government. The railways and a large part of the sea-going steamships are owned, not by individual capitalists who manage their own business, but by joint-stock companies whose business is managed for them by *paid employees*, by servants whose position is to all intents and purposes that of superior, better paid workpeople. As to the directors and shareholders, they both know that the less the former interfere with the management, and the latter with the supervision, the better for the concern. A lax and mostly perfunctory supervision is, indeed, the only function left to the owners of the business. Thus we see that in reality the capitalist owners of these immense establishments have no other action left with regard to them, but to cash the half-yearly dividend warrants. The social function of the capitalist here has been transferred to servants paid by wages; but

he continues to pocket, in his dividends, the pay for those functions though he has ceased to perform them.

But another function is still left to the capitalist, whom the extent of the large undertakings in question has compelled to "retire" from their management. And this function is to speculate with his shares on the Stock Exchange. For want of something better to do, our "retired" or in reality superseded capitalists, gamble to their hearts' content in this temple of mammon. They go there with the deliberate intention to pocket money which they were pretending to earn; though they say, the origin of all property is labour and saving–the origin perhaps, but certainly not the end. What hypocrisy to forcibly close petty gambling houses, when our capitalist society cannot do without an immense gambling house, where millions after millions are lost and won, for its very centre! Here, indeed, the existence of the "retired" shareholding capitalist becomes not only superfluous, but a perfect nuisance.

What is true for railways and steam shipping is becoming more and more true every day for all large manufacturing and trading establishments. "Floating"–transforming large private concerns into limited companies–has been the order of the day for the last ten years and more. From the large Manchester warehouses of the City to the ironworks and coalpits of Wales and the North and the factories of Lancashire, everything has been, or is being, floated. In all Oldham there is scarcely a cotton mill left in private hands; nay, even the retail tradesman is more and more superseded by "co-operative stores", the great majority of which are co-operative in name only–but of that another time. Thus we see that by the very development of the system of capitalist's production the capitalist is superseded quite as much as the handloom-weaver. With this difference, though, that the handloom-weaver is doomed to slow starvation, and the superseded capitalist to slow death from overfeeding. In this they generally are both alike, that neither knows what to do with himself.

This, then, is the result: the economical development of our actual society tends more and more to concentrate, to socialise production into immense establishments which cannot any longer be managed by single capitalists. All the trash of "the eye of the master", and the wonders it does, turns into

sheer nonsense as soon as an undertaking reaches a certain size. Imagine "the eye of the master" of the London and North Western Railway! But what the master cannot do the workman, the wages-paid servants of the Company, *can* do, and do it successfully.

Thus the capitalist can no longer lay claim to his profits as "wages of supervision", as he supervises nothing. Let us remember that when the defenders of capital drum that hollow phrase into our ears.

But we have attempted to show, in our last week's issue,* that the capitalist class had also become unable to manage the immense productive system of this country; that they on the one hand expanded production so as to periodically flood all the markets with produce, and on the other became more and more incapable of holding their own against foreign competition. Thus we find that, not only can we manage very well without the interference of the capitalist class in the great industries of the country, but that their interference is becoming more and more a nuisance.

Again we say to them, "Stand back! Give the working class the chance of a turn."

The Labour Standard, August 6th, 1881.

* See pp. 41-44 of this edition.—*Ed.*

NOTES

[1] This was the first of a series of articles that Engels wrote for *The Labour Standard*, a publication to which he contributed from May to August 1881. The articles were unsigned and appeared almost weekly as editorials. Engels had to cease collaboration with the weekly because of its general opportunist trend.

The Labour Standard—a British trade union weekly published in London from 1881 to 1885, edited by J. Shipton. p. 5.

[2] Reference is to the abolition of the *Combination Laws*, which prohibited the formation and activities of every type of working-class organisation. But the law on working-class associations adopted a year later again greatly curtailed the activities of the trade unions. p. 5.

[3] *The Court of Chancery* is one of the higher British courts; since the reform of 1873 it has been a division of the High Court. p. 8.

[4] Landlords in Ireland were indignant at the attempts to curtail their lawlessness in respect of their tenants made by Gladstone's government in order to divert the attention of the Irish peasantry from the revolutionary struggle then developing in Ireland. The Land Bill of 1881 limited the rights of the landlords to turn tenants off the land if they paid their rent at the proper time; the amount of rent was fixed in advance for 15 years. Despite the fact that the landlords could sell their land to the crown at a profit and the rent was fixed at a very high figure, English landowners opposed the Bill in an effort to retain their uncurtailed domination in Ireland. p. 13.

[5] *The People's Charter*, from which the Chartist Movement took its name, was published on May 8, 1838, in the form of a parliamentary bill; it contained six points—universal suffrage (for men over 21), annual parliamentary elections, secret ballot, equal constituencies, abolition of property qualifications for parliamentary candidates, salaries for M.P.s. Chartist petitions demanding the acceptance of the Charter were rejected by Parliament in 1839, 1842 and 1849. p. 16.

[6] *Disraeli's Household Suffrage* was an electoral reform adopted in 1867 by the Conservatives under pressure from the people. p. 16.

[7] *The Manchester* or *Free Trade School* was a trend in economics that reflected the interests of the industrial bourgeoisie; its supporters championed free trade and the non-intervention of the state in economic life. The Free Traders, with their centre in Manchester, were headed by two cotton manufacturers, Cobden and Bright. The Free Traders formed a special political group in the 40s and 50s and later joined forces with the Liberal Party. p. 19.

[8] In 1858 India came directly under the rule of the British Crown, following the liquidation of the British East India Company. p. 20.

[9] *The Corn Laws* envisaged the curtailment of prohibition of the import of grain in the interests of the big landlords. The struggle between the industrial bourgeoisie and the big landlords ended in Parliament accepting a bill abolishing the Corn Laws in 1846. The slight lowering of prices resulting from this measure eventually led to wage reductions and increased profits for the bourgeoisie. p. 20.

[10] *The Anti-Corn Law League* was founded in 1838 by the Manchester manufacturers Cobden and Bright. The League demanded complete freedom of trade and the abolition of the Corn Laws in order to effect wage reductions and at the same time weaken the economic and political position of the landed aristocracy. The slogan of Free Trade was widely used by the League in its demagogic propaganda of the unity of workers and employers. The League went out of existence after the abolition of the Corn Laws. p. 20.

[11] See Note 4. p. 36.

[12] The introduction of the Land Bill which became law in August 1881 was fiercely opposed by the Irish tenant farmers. Forster, the Secretary of State for Ireland, adopted special measures, sending troops to evict tenants who refused to pay their rent. p. 38.

[13] *The Coercion Bills* were enforced by the British Parliament several times in the course of the nineteenth century to suppress the revolutionary and national liberation movements in Ireland. The bills gave the English authorities special powers and allowed for martial law to be declared anywhere in Ireland. p. 39.

[14] *The Irish Land League* was a mass organisation founded in 1879 by Michael Davitt, a petty-bourgeois democrat. The Land League embraced large sections of the Irish peasantry and the urban poor and was supported by progressives among the Irish bourgeoisie. The League's agrarian demands reflected the violent protests of the Irish people against the oppression of the landlords and against national oppression. The leaders of the League, however, adopted a wavering position which the bourgeois nationals (Parnell and others) took advantage of trying to reduce the activities of the League to the struggle for Home Rule, i.e., for limited Irish autonomy within the British Empire. The League was prohibited in 1881 but actually continued functioning up to the end of the eighties. p. 40.

[15] This refers to the election reform adopted by the British House of Commons in 1831 and confirmed by the House of Lords in June 1832. The reform was directed against the political monopoly of the landed and financial aristocracy and opened up parliament to the industrial bourgeoisie. The proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie, the main forces in the struggle for the reform, were deceived by the liberal bourgeoisie and did not receive the vote. p. 46.

NAME INDEX

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Ф. ЭНГЕЛЬС

СТАТЬИ ИЗ ГАЗЕТЫ THE LABOUR STANDARD

На английском языке