

# History of the bourses du travail - Fernand Pelloutier

First published in France in 1901, this seminal classic of revolutionary syndicalism, now available for the first time in English translation, is more than just a history of the *Bourses du Travail*: alternating with some (rather dry) accounts of the internal procedures of the *Bourses*, the book features fascinating glimpses of the living conditions of French sailors, fishermen and agricultural laborers, an extensive report on the ambitious program of the *Bourses* (libraries, “Museums of Labor”, a statistical service, adult education courses, agrarian and maritime propaganda, etc.) and proposals regarding the role of the workers organizations in the future society.

Translated from the Spanish translation, *Historia de las bolsas de trabajo: los orígenes del sindicalismo revolucionario*, available online at: [http://www.antorcha.net/biblioteca\\_virtual/historia/bolsas/indice.html](http://www.antorcha.net/biblioteca_virtual/historia/bolsas/indice.html)

The original French text, *Histoire des Bourses du travail*, originally published in 1901, can be found online at: [http://www.pelloutier.net/dossiers/dossiers.php?id\\_dossier=126](http://www.pelloutier.net/dossiers/dossiers.php?id_dossier=126)

# Chapter 1 - After the Commune

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## Chapter 1 After the Commune

On the day following the defeat of the Commune, the proletariat's situation was as follows: the French section of the International dissolved, the revolutionaries shot, imprisoned or driven into exile; their groups dispersed, meetings prohibited; the few men who escaped the massacre took refuge from the terror in safe-houses.

The bourgeoisie, on the other hand, was euphoric. Industry and commerce were certainly still feeling the effect of the war. Many workshops—whose best operatives, as in the days of the Protestant exodus, had left for London, Brussels or Geneva, bringing with them their technical expertise<sup>1</sup>—were still closed and despite the arrogance which the easy victory of the “forces of order” seemed to have instilled in the business class, there was still a certain apprehension in their glances which were directed towards both Germany and that population which once again had demonstrated the forces it was capable of setting in motion. Nevertheless, the federation of employers' trade unions, known by the name of the “National Union of Commerce and Industry”, spread vigorously and, not encountering any opposing workers power, fixed the value and duration of labor according to its whims.

Then, some of the men who had founded the International but had afterwards desisted from all activity out of fear of the revolution, tried to resume their temporarily disrupted labors. Believing that they had been freed of the revolutionaries, and never ceasing to deplore the horrible repression of 1871, yet privately satisfied that the bourgeois caste had laid the foundations of the road which could lead to the “reconciliation between capital and labor”, they created the building blocks of new institutions in which the workers, refraining from any criticism of the government and the laws, were to dedicate themselves to studying labor's situation in relation to the laws of economic exchange. From this original concept the *Workers Trade Union Circle* was born, “which”, in the opinion of Barbaret, one of its founders, “must solidly unite all the trade unions as a counterweight to the *National Union of Commerce and Industry*.”

This association was certainly not very subversive: its goal was “to achieve by means of study, harmony and justice” the convincing of public opinion concerning “the moderation displayed by the workers in claiming their rights.”

But as moderate as they were, as sensible as they proved themselves to be, the founders of the *Circle* turned out to be too advanced in the judgment of the guardians of moral order. However much they proclaimed themselves republicans, the kind of republicans who address the issues of social economy without causing discord, the politics of DeBroglie<sup>2</sup> could nonetheless become dangerous. For this reason the *Workers Trade Union Circle* was dissolved, and if the government did not take the same action against the local trade union centers, this was due to the fact that these centers, which were not very numerous, whose existence was very precarious, and which had no relations of any kind with the *Circle*, seemed destined to impotence and immanent disappearance.

How did they manage to survive? How did they already have 135 trade union centers in 1875, some of which, above all those located in Roubaix, carried out activities of some significance? After the hecatomb of 1871, it seemed certain that any attempts at proletarian liberation had become impossible and that the people, although they truly had not lost their taste for freedom, which had often slumbered but never completely died out, were at least condemned to suffer a long sentence under the yoke of capital. However, not even four years had passed since the defeat of the insurrection, two years after the final dispersal of all intellectual groups and all workers organizations, and new forces and new energies began to reveal themselves, the mass of workers, held back momentarily, once again embarked on its journey toward emancipation. Is this phenomenon not due to the fact that the people's intuition viewed the class grouping as the only means of social transformation? Might it not be because of the fact that, despite his reconciliatory positions and his apparent political indifference, and partly under the impact of an irrational perspective, the worker perceives in communism his own ideas and interests as well as the instrument to destroy despotism and construct harmony on the terrain of the economy?

In any case, by 1875 there were 135 trade union centers, regulated under Articles 291-294 of the Penal Code, in accordance with the law of April 10, 1834 and the decrees of March 25 and April 2 of 1852. During this whole period of reaction the trade union centers, content with not being dissolved, submitted to the precarious situation of living under the constant threat of being forcefully shut down. But when France allowed some breathing space and one could speak openly of professional associations, labor representation in parliament, and cooperatives, without being suspected of having shot the hostages, the trade union centers demanded their rights, and first demanded the cancellation of the laws and decrees to which they were subject, as well as the legal recognition of their existence. Afterwards, they debated and rejected the legislation proposed by Lockroy, at that time a deputy representing Bouches-du-Rhône, which he had elaborated to regulate the trade union centers, and finally they held a national congress in Paris.

Soon after it was formed on the initiative of the trade union center of the horticultural workers,<sup>3</sup> a labor delegation was sent to the Philadelphia World's Fair. Later, a workers congress was held in Bologna. On June 19, 1876, the *Tribune* published the following piece: "Now that the labor delegation has departed France for Philadelphia, it is necessary to add another point to the agenda of the workers of Paris and the provinces. What would our friends think of holding a workers congress in Paris in August or September, a few weeks after the return of the delegation, in order to discuss the basis for a common socialist program?" "For now we shall be content to spread the idea, which was suggested to us by the Congress of Bologna. It seems to be an excellent idea to us and we are convinced that a workers congress would have considerable influence on the course of the economic emancipation of the whole French proletariat."

This proposal met with a quite understandable enthusiasm, especially when one considers the silence observed over the previous five years. Numerous articles on this topic appeared in the radical press. Large numbers of workers joined the trade union centrals in Paris and the provinces, and after several meetings held by the delegates to the World Exposition at Vienna, by the members of the workers commission sent to the Philadelphia Exposition, by

the trade union representatives, etc., a committee was appointed to organize a congress and prepare its agenda.

This committee was composed of citizens André, di Chabert, A. Corsin, Delion, Deville, Eliézer, Gauttard, Guérin, Guillon, and Vernet. The congress program tackled other issues as well: female labor, the trade union centers, professional apprenticeship and training, the direct representation of the proletariat in parliament, trade associations, pension funds, agricultural associations and the advisability of establishing relations between agricultural and industrial workers.

The congress opened on October 2, 1876 in the Salle des Ecoles, on Arras Street. Among the notable delegates were citizens Chausse, Chambert (at that time involved in mutual aid activities), Isadore Finance, V. Delahaye, Masquin, Simon Soëns, Barbaret, Narcisse Paillot, Aimé Lavy and Feltesse (who was not allowed to address the assembly due to his nationality). The majority of the congress delegates were from cooperatives and mutual aid societies. Some collectivists (both statist and anarchist), however, were also in attendance; they did not hesitate to expound their theories, and staged vigorous protests against the presence of citizen Barbaret.

The report presented at the opening session of the organizing committee clearly indicated the spirit of the congress. "What we want," this report says, "is for the worker to henceforth never lack work, that the price of labor should be truly remunerative, that the worker should have the means to cope with unemployment, illness, old age.... We also want, in accord with the congress, to show our rulers, and to show all our ruling classes that while they are arguing and fighting among themselves over power and to remain in power, that there is an enormous fraction of the country's population which is suffering, and which needs reforms, which have not been sufficiently addressed."

"We want this congress to be exclusively working class, and everyone immediately understands our reasons for this. There is no reason to deny it, *all the systems, all the utopias which have been proposed to the workers, never arose from the workers ranks. They all came from the bourgeoisie, and were undoubtedly well-intentioned, but they sought solutions and remedies for our afflictions on the basis of intricate reasoning, rather than our needs and reality. Had we not decided, as a precautionary measure, that one had to be a worker to speak and to vote at this congress, we would have contributed to a repeat performance of what had already taken place in other times, i.e., the intervention of the defenders of bourgeois systems in order to impose upon the meeting a character which we have rejected.* One thing must be made clear: the intention of the workers is not to improve their condition at the expense of everyone else. They only want the economists, who only care about the products but do not care about man, to give man and product equal consideration. We thus expect from the new economic science all the improvements which will comprise the solution to the social question."

The imprecise formulations in this document give a good idea of the character of the congress—if not of the 360 delegates, or of the entire sponsoring commission, at least of the organizing committee. The members of this committee not only had to take pains to try to assuage the fears which the congress could provoke among the leaders of government and industry, but also, in order to secure capitalist protection, did not hesitate to slander

(confusing them with politicians like Louis Blanc) proletarians of the vanguard such as Varlin, César de Paëpe, Emile Aubray, Albert Richard, Dupont, etc., who had professed and disseminated the doctrine of the International.

However, despite the approval of this report by the congress, its organizers were aware that although many workers were not involved in the movement of the Commune, the propaganda of the International, by responding to the interests of the people, had profoundly affected them. On the first point of the agenda of the Congress (concerning female labor), the Congress upheld the principle of *equal pay for equal work*, and recommended the creation of women's trade unions and the reduction of the working day to eight hours with no decrease in pay. Isadore Finance vigorously opposed the cooperatives movement. After emphasizing the failures, from Buchez forward, of the various forms of cooperative association, he concluded: "In this case, on the basis of money saved at the expense of a poverty-level wage, the small urban or rural proprietor is supposed to take possession of the ownership of the soil, the raw materials and the industrial plant and level the playing field against the influence of a capital which has been accumulated over the expanse of centuries!" But he could have gone on to ask: How many centuries would it take to reach their goal? No one has anything to say about this. If this is what is called being practical, what would utopia be like?

"The Cooperatives movement necessarily sacrifices the independence and free time of the individual required for acquiring an education, to a hope for material betterment, the commercial nature of which, however, renders its attainment uncertain. It tends to deprive the proletariat of its generous aspirations in order to instill it with the concerns proper to the egotistical and business-oriented bourgeoisie. Consequently, the cooperatives movement is the greatest obstacle standing in the way of that intellectual and moral regeneration which, as the advocates of cooperation themselves admit, must precede material improvements in the workers' welfare..." A delegate announced his opposition to any form of charity or dole, because the dole appears to imply that unemployment is a necessary or inevitable fact, when in reality it is the responsibility of the proletariat to make it disappear. Another delegate condemned the mutual aid society for "not contributing any means at all for achieving the *abolition of wage labor*", and for giving its approval to its existence, "asserting to the contrary that what should dominate our thoughts and direct our actions is the practice of seeking our economic emancipation." Finally, delegate Hardy, of the Paris bronze workers, after having accepted the petition of the pension fund societies, on the condition that they should be funded exclusively by deductions from the military budget, exclaimed, without arousing the least protest, and despite the proximity of the defeat of 1870: "It is of little concern to us that France is small and Germany is large." The Congress demanded the establishment of a pension fund whose administration would be independent of State control.

Next came the problem of the local trade union centers. As I have said, the congress had to examine legislation proposed by Lockroy dealing with workers associations. According to Articles 5 and 6 of Lockroy's proposed law, every local trade union center, immediately upon being formed, and on every January 1st thereafter, would have to present to the mayor, the police prefect or the Attorney General of the Republic, in addition to the address of its meeting hall, a declaration including its statutes, the number of its members, and their names and addresses. These requirements, which gave rise to lively discussions in the working class, also caused great agitation among the delegates to the congress.

These regulations would constitute, stated the delegate of the Paris mechanics, “a trap of the same stamp, taking aggravating circumstances into account, as the laws of June 22, 1855 concerning personal documentation; it is a police law of a new kind and we refuse to accept the idea that the trade union councils are guilty of believing they could consent to becoming auxiliaries of the prefect of police and the magistrates.”

The Lockroy legislation, said citizen Daniel, “imposes conditions on the workers associations which would never be demanded of capitalist, religious, or civil groups.”

What, then, did the trade union center mean to the members of the congress of the trade union centers? What were its functions supposed to be, and how was it supposed to be composed?

“The trade union centers,” said Charles Bonne, a delegate from Roubaix, “are actually organizing committees for a different kind of society. They must, to begin with, devote themselves to the question of mutual enlightenment; they must then, of course, proceed to organize popular libraries and consumer associations, to impede the exploitation of the worker by the capitalists. The trade union centers must furthermore strive to create compensation funds to provide for workers’ families.... They must, finally, undertake the reorganization of the councils of trade union syndics or inspectors, whose operations are currently very precarious....”

Bonne concluded as follows: “Various systems have been proposed to create this organization: some want the trade union centers to be operated by just one trade union, but in the provinces this system faces numerous difficulties, since one trade union alone cannot always form a trade union center which could guarantee the provision of services.... I therefore believe that it would be easier to construct trade union centers by uniting different professional groups which have similar interests. Each professional group elects a number of representatives in proportion to their share of the total number of citizens who compose the trade union.... I also believe that the trade union centers, in order to assure their progress, must publish an administrative report on their operations and submit it to an office created for this purpose. This office will be responsible for collecting the various administrative reports from all of France’s trade union centers. This system will keep abreast of every achievement....”

According to Charvet (from Lyon), “the Trade Union Centers must not be mixed bodies; they must respect the interests of the workers, and put an end to the abuses which now affect the corporative groups. After their legalization, they could also establish, with the agreement of the employers, the rules which have the force of law and which will define the range of competence of the municipal inspectors....”

To conclude, Dupire (from Paris) proposed: “The trade union centers are invited to concentrate all their efforts on simultaneously decreasing the length of the normal working day in all trades and on increasing the workers pay. They must bring all their influence to bear on blocking the influx of women and children into the factories, workshops, and offices, as they are used against the men. The trade union centers will also use all their influence to cause these ideas to be impressed on the minds of their members and to make these principles accepted by public opinion.”

These views eloquently expressed the sentiment of the congress: the trade union centers should be freely-constituted study centers. Hence one may deduce the reception accorded to Lockroy's proposed legislation by the congress. The committee's report formulated the following conclusions, which were adopted without debate:

1. Repeal of Articles 291, 292, 293 and 294 of the Penal Code, along with all the other laws whose purpose is to restrict freedom of association and assembly.
2. Retraction of the proposed legislation on trade union centers presented in the Assembly.
3. A Commission should be appointed with the responsibility of informing the Assembly of the congress's deliberations.

Such was the outcome of the first workers congress held in France since the Revolution of March 18, 1871.<sup>4</sup> Its demands were undoubtedly quite timid, and it could even be asserted that its participants, far from taking their stand alongside the heroic workers who fell to the bullets of Versailles, had no other concern than to emphasize their distance from any attempt at social subversion. Nonetheless, this congress did take a stand in favor of resuscitating the professional associations, and creating a new link between the workers in order to oblige them to study the social question, and it is evident that eventually the exploited, after having in good faith sought the reconciliation of capital and labor, would come to understand that such a reconciliation is impossible and that one of the two factors of the official political economy must prevail over the other.

Immediately after the conclusion of the congress, the Paris trade unions appointed a commission of 62 members, which was to be responsible for formulating the issue of the trade union centers in a way which was as favorable as possible for the interests of the workers. This commission immediately set to work on this question and, at first, tried to reconstruct the *Workers Trade Union Circle*. But the government, especially the Ministry of the Interior, was aware of the commission's activities and the Police Prefect opposed this project. The commission then began to elaborate a project to replace Lockroy's legislation. But this was not easily undertaken, since the collectivists opportunely focused attention on the fact that the trade unions should not collaborate with the Ministry and that, furthermore, as the trade unions were being rebuilt despite the absence of any pertinent law, there was no need to modify the *status quo*. It was also felt that the Lockroy legislation was in a tenuous position and that they should therefore postpone any decision and continue their activities along the same lines as before. Their efforts were shortly crowned with success: the project finally approved by the commission of 62 and then amended by the trade unions was adopted by the latter.

The collectivists' perception was indeed accurate. Lockroy's legislation was rejected. The trade unions multiplied and since the propaganda carried out by the most advanced workers was subtle and did not attract the attention of the public, and since political affairs absorbed all the attention of the "official spheres", as they were then called, the socialist idea gained ground every day.

Two years passed under these conditions, and then, in 1878, a second workers congress was held in Lyon. At that time, some men who had been involved in the International, but who had played a very minor role in the Commune,<sup>5</sup> and who had thus managed to escape the repression, tried to organize a socialist party outside the trade union centers. Among these men (Guesde, Lafargue, Chabert, Paulard, and Deynaud), some were related to or acquainted with Marx, Engels, and the

survivors of the 1872 congress at The Hague. Their propaganda was so successful during the months preceding the Paris Exposition that they could announce their proposal of holding an international socialist congress in Paris during the Exposition. This project was still premature, however, and its promoters were persecuted and repressed by the police.

Under such circumstances, and despite the professed aversion of the revolutionary socialists for workers enrolled in the trade unions, they thought they could take advantage of the occasion of the mutualists' congress in Lyon in order to convert the workers to attend their congress.

As it turned out, the small number of their supporters prevented them from modifying the character of the congress, but they nonetheless made declarations of special interest, which we should pause to examine, above all in order to display the theories professed at that time by the collectivists ... and also to shed light on the events which resulted in excavating an unbridgeable abyss between the supporters of legislative action and the conquest of public power and the supporters of economic and corporative action.

With respect to the question of basic principles, Calvinhac, a delegate of the "Democratic Workers Union" of Paris, said: "You will discover the remedy for all social evils and every kind of exploitation in the collectivity, that is, in the institution of industry and collective property." Calvinhac then spoke of the State. During that period all the French collectivists not only advocated the abolition of the State, but also displayed hostility towards any idea which presented the State as favorable to the workers. The revolutionaries, who would, a few years later, be divided between Statists and anarchists, were at that time in complete agreement on this point. Thus, Calvinhac, while speaking of the State, expressed himself in the following terms: "Very well! We shall learn to deal with this element the same way we shall deal with the bourgeoisie, whose position of unconditional support for the government is notorious. It is our enemy and only intervenes in our problems to impose regulations, and it can be taken for granted that these regulations are always crafted for the benefit of the rulers. We only demand complete freedom and we shall successfully realize our dreams when we are fully determined to manage our problems ourselves."

The congress also debated and, of course, approved a resolution already passed at the Paris congress concerning the direct representation of the proletariat in the government electoral bodies. But we should also take a moment to listen to delegate Ballivet, of the Lyon mechanics, who eloquently spoke against the participation of revolutionaries in political elections. "For us," he said, "the question must be posed in the following terms: Is proletarian representation in our legislative assemblies an advantage, or a disadvantage? To such a question, we clearly respond: the proletariat would only obtain illusory advantages and only apparent results from such representation, which would imply very serious disadvantages. Among those socialists who advocate proletarian representation in parliament ... the most deluded expect to legally conquer the majority in our political assembly. Once they get their hands on the government apparatus, they count on making it work on behalf of the workers, even though it has to this day always worked against them."

"Some nourish more modest hopes. They hope to insinuate into the assemblies a minority of deputies strong enough to extract some material improvements in the workers conditions from the bourgeois majority, or some new political rights which would allow them to carry out their work of emancipation with a greater likelihood of success. Those who possess more experience

in the use of such tactics, the German socialists, for example, no longer believe in the conquest of political power by way of the electoral process. The adoption of this tactic (workers candidates) is proposed solely in order to obtain propagandistic and organizational goals. We shall refute, one after another, every argument of the various categories of advocates of the direct representation of the proletariat in parliament....”

“How could it be that, here in France, we allow ourselves to be swayed by the absurd illusion that the bourgeoisie would contemplate, with folded arms, and with the greatest respect for legality, their own expropriation by legal means?... The day that the workers so much as hint at the possibility of touching their privileges, there will be no law that the bourgeoisie will not break, no electoral process they will not manipulate, no prisons they will not fill, no proscriptions they will not organize, no executions they will not carry out.”

“The hope formulated by other socialists of insinuating a minority of deputies into the legislative assembly strong enough to obtain some concessions is equally illusory. This minority, due to the very fact of being a minority, will not be able to do anything on its own. It will be compelled to forge alliances with bourgeois parliamentary fractions.... Nonetheless, you will say, certain political reforms like freedom of association and assembly could hasten our emancipation, and if the deputies we send to parliament achieve only these two reforms, it might be said that it was worth the trouble to send them. Is it really necessary to send some of us to parliament in order to obtain these freedoms? Would not the republican bourgeoisie perhaps have the same interest in conceding these freedoms to us when we demand them?... Such weapons, which are effective in their hands, become completely useless in ours. Freedom of the press! But of what value is the right to do something if you lack the means to do it? Freedom of assembly! So we can listen to orators speaking the fine words authorized for us by the bourgeoisie? Freedom of association! To associate poverty with poverty can only add up to poverty. Such freedoms, citizens, will be the consequence rather than the cause of our emancipation....”

“Some members of the socialist camp are well-enough acquainted with the bourgeoisie to know that no serious reform can be obtained by the legal route, but nonetheless argue that ‘workers participation in the elections would grant us an excellent means of propaganda....’ We maintain that direct representation would not grant the workers a good means of propaganda, and that if it could lead to the formation of a numerous party, it would also lead to the formation of a party without real organization or force. When one speaks of propaganda it is necessary to clarify two things: first, which principles you want to propagate, and then whether the means you have chosen are sufficient to achieve the proposed goal.”

“... Do we not, perhaps, know that the real cause of our present poverty resides in the accumulation of all social wealth in the hands of a few? And do we not, perhaps, want to put an end to this state of affairs by replacing the individual form of appropriation with the collective mode of production?... Do we not also know that what upholds this economic injustice is the centralized political organization, in other words, the State, and that we must therefore proclaim ourselves antiauthoritarian and anti-state?”

“The two principles which must therefore be disseminated by our propaganda are collective property and the complete rejection of the State. Now, during an electoral campaign not a word concerning these topics escapes anyone’s mouth. During a campaign what is of the utmost

importance is getting your candidate elected.... What, therefore, remains in electoral programs? Formal grandiloquence and a basically innocuous radicalism....”

“But, you will say, once elected, the workers delegate will put his program into action by taking advantage of the influence of the French tribune, and his message will be disseminated thousands of times in all the newspapers, thus reaching a vast audience. Another error! The moment a workers deputy shows his face at the tribune, he will be the object of objections, of rude interruptions of every kind.... But the newspapers would reproduce his interventions? Yes, all the newspapers of the bourgeoisie will falsify them and will circulate their caricatures. Only the socialist papers will publish his speeches in full, and in this case, this speech by a deputy whose election cost thousands of francs from the slender wallets of the workers would possess neither greater nor lesser importance than a normal article which could have been composed and printed at less expense and without so many sacrifices.”

“We admit that by making the radicalism of our program as inconspicuous as possible ... we could build in France, as they have in Germany, a large party; but the day we make ourselves dangerous in the eyes of the bourgeoisie ... will see the violent, brutal and illegal intervention of the bourgeoisie, and in that event will this large party also be a strong party, capable of resistance? We think not, and we must say this frankly. When an instrument has been constructed for one end, it is not possible to demand that it fulfill another one. This party constructed for electoral action will only have electoral machinery. Its soldiers will be voters and its leaders will be lawyers. This will allow it to give birth to the heroes and the martyrs who will give their lives for their legal rights. But this completely peaceful and legal army will not possess the organization it will need to resist the violence of the State’s armies....”

The effect produced by this speech was so great that the organizing committee of the congress threatened to deny the right to speak to anyone who would henceforth speak of collectivism. And from that moment on, nothing subversive was said again at the congress until it voted on its final resolutions and rejected a proposal by Dupire and Ballivet calling for the collective appropriation of the soil and of the instruments of production.

Finally, we shall conclude our narrative of the congress of Lyon by adding that while the congress did consider the question of legislation concerning the trade unions, its deliberations had nothing in common with the proposal mentioned above.

- 1.The works concerning the expositions of Lyon (1872), Vienna (1874) and Philadelphia agree in their assessments of the harm inflicted on French industry by the mass expulsion of the participants in the Commune (March 18, 1871).  
“I have spoken,” says M. L. Cambrión, a carriage-maker, “of the various categories of workers who abandoned their country in order to emigrate to the new continent, where they have brought all the industries of which France possessed a global monopoly, some of which were either completely unknown or only slightly known in America at the beginning of the second half of our century. Among these industries we may mention carriage making, which was firmly established there during this period, thanks to the voluntary or compulsory emigration of those who, as a consequence of the December 1851 coup d’état, were able to escape the persecutions unleashed in this latitude. Other wars followed (Crimea, 1854-56; the second Italian war for independence, 1859; then, colonial conquests in Algeria, Senegal,

Syria, the formation of the Indo-Chinese Empire; and then the “Mexican Adventure” of 1863 and, above all, the revolution of 1871). All led to the same results: the consequences have been incalculable from the industrial point of view and for our export trade which, going from bad to worse, especially after the last-mentioned events, have compelled numerous workmen to leave Paris....” (*Labor Delegation to the Philadelphia Universal Exposition*, p. 49).

“... The various political vicissitudes suffered by our country have on various occasions induced many of our compatriots to relocate permanently to the United States. Thus, New York and Newark have had and still have a number of Parisian workmen who have contributed to the improvement of American industry....” (*Ibid.*, Haberdashers Delegation, p. 51).

“... Furthermore, the political persecutions obliged a certain number of citizens to seek asylum in this hospitable land. Restricting our discussion to France, who does not recall the welcome proffered by the foreign industrialists to those who found the Americans ready to accept our colleagues from various trades who were fired after being judged by the military tribunals after our last strike?” (*Ibid.*, Mechanics, p. 119).

“... (U.S.) industry has achieved a noteworthy degree of development, especially after the revolution of 1871, when thousands of Parisian workers, fearing reprisals at the hands of the victorious counterrevolution, felt obliged to go overseas, taking with them the secrets of their industries. All reports confirm that this emigration proved to be a terrible blow to French industry and that the exile of these expatriated workers lasted long enough to allow the capitalists of the New World to create new industries, so to speak, from scratch, and to ship products overseas which are capable of competing with European goods....” (*Ibid.*, General Remarks, p. 131).

“... After a series of preliminary calculations of the costs of their products, they (the Americans) demonstrated that the emigration of 1871 has contributed 285,000,000 dollars (1,425 million francs) to their national wealth....” (*Free Workers Delegation to the Philadelphia Exposition*, p. 185).

- 2. This refers to an episode of the Commune during which 64 hostages, with the Archbishop of Paris at their head, were shot in response to the terror unleashed by Thiers and the Versailles forces against the Communards.

For information on the Commune, see, in particular, the work by Marx and Engels, *The Paris Commune*; Lissagaray, *The Paris Commune*, and the two large-scale collective works: *The Commune*, by Bourgin, Lissagaray, Dolleaux, Reclus and others; as well as *The Paris Commune*, by Jean Bruhat, et al., with hundreds of facsimiles of original documents and proclamations.

- 3. *Florists' Trade Union Center*: this is an association of the workers in the florist, gardening, etc., sectors.
- 4. Date of the beginning of the Paris Commune.
- 5. V. Gustave Lefranc: *Etude sur le mouvement communaliste a Paris en 1871*, reprinted in 1970. This is one of the most interesting books on this topic. The most recent volume published concerning the Paris Commune is *La revolution communaliste de Paris 1871* (history and documents), by Pierre Rimbert, 96 pages, Spartacus, Paris, 1971. [Note from the 1978 Spanish edition]

## Chapter 2 - "Workers parties" and trade unions

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### Chapter Two

#### "Workers Parties" and Trade Unions

We should not allow ourselves to be deceived: at the precise moment that some obscure members of the collectivist faction asserted their revolutionary faith at the "congress of Proudhonian cooperators and mutualists," and showed the trade union centers how displeased they were about the desire of the workers groups to provide proofs of their excessive moderation in their confrontation with the State and capital, the leaders of the newborn socialist party had already modified their own principles and tactics. Inspired by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, they had clandestinely elaborated a new plan of action, and when the third workers congress opened in Marseilles in 1879, all the conditions were in place for a definitive break between socialists and syndicalists, so that the former were able to eliminate from the party all those who continued to reject Marx's theory of the conquest of political power.

The Marseilles congress approved the constitution of the Workers Party with a dual program: political and economic. The political program (the principal object of interest to the Workers Party's founders) involved the following demands: abolition of all laws restricting the press, assembly and association, suppression of the personal police identification pass, suppression of religious privileges and the return to the nation of the so-called "dead hand" [*manus mortua*] properties owned by religious corporations; also, repudiation of the public debt, abolition of the standing army, and the arming of the people; it also sought communal rule over the government administration and the police. The economic program (which was of secondary importance and whose primary goal was to win over the working masses to the overriding objective of "the collective appropriation of the means of production"), contained the following demands: that a law be passed mandating a maximum working week of six days, the *legal* establishment of a minimum wage, a law to prevent business owners from hiring foreign workers at a lower wage than French workers; it also demanded the scientific and professional training of *all children by the State and the Municipalities*, etc. Having just been born, the Party essentially demanded, in political affairs, the purification or, in other words, the moralization of the State; in economic affairs, it demanded the extension of the State's powers to the most extreme limits of individual freedom.

Although it was the work of intelligent and educated men, this program, as one can see, displayed an uncommon simplicity; it also manifests a noteworthy degree of archaism, since the majority of its points had already been adopted by various republican fractions which, at one time or another, especially after 1848, had their sights set on taking power. On the other hand, it did possess the dual advantage of relieving its supporters of the necessity of any mental efforts and of placing the onus for any responsibility for defeat squarely on their shoulders. Strictly speaking, these goals were subordinated to the conquest of political power. But what had to be done to consummate this taking of power? *The proletariat must be organized in a distinct political party*, that is, a sufficient number of voters must be rallied to socialism in order to obtain an absolute majority in parliament. The activity required to achieve this goal (which could take many years) must henceforth be limited to carrying on a discussion, in party journals and publications and electoral rallies, on the 17 articles of the program, and to facilitate this task it was enough to “put at the disposal of all the party’s militants an arsenal for their everyday struggle against the prevailing system, so they can learn the program article by article, sentence by sentence, and demonstrate its correctness from both the scientific and tactical points of view.”

As for the economic education of the proletariat, the molding of its spirit of initiative, its adaptation to the purposes of a socialist institution—all of that was mere stupidity!

“Social emancipation subordinated to the collective appropriation of the means of production; and this appropriation subordinated to the revolutionary action of the proletariat organized in a distinct socialist party.” This is what matters. “It is our duty, as Filippo Turati says, to be the guide which follows the development of the bedrock foundations of the class struggle.”

Despite its simplicity, this program encountered an unforeseen obstacle. Not requiring the least reflection or any study, promising anyone who would take up this easy message a success like that of street-corner snake oil salesmen, it provided an easy opening to any ambition and attracted every sort of mediocrity. Every one of the men at the highest levels of the Party therefore aspired to sole leadership of its collective activity. And on the pretext that a division of forces was the precondition for the growth of the Party, it was not long before some of them separated from the Party, bringing with them their faithful followers so as to construct tiny unprincipled sects.

What happened? For one thing, the propagandists, worried more about electoral numbers than about the actual value of such numbers, and believing (perhaps in all good faith) that the election of an important candidate would be enough to define, in the absence of principles, electoral success, did not hesitate to attenuate the Party’s transitional program, deleting one or another article according to the place or circumstance. Also, the masses, ignorant of real socialist principles, only see the candidates of the new party as a new category of aspiring politicians, not unlike the radicals and lacking the prestige, at that time undeniable, of the deputies of the extreme left. Furthermore, the main body of voters, for whom the word “socialism” was nothing new, abstained from entrusting their votes to a handful of unknowns, thus placing the Party in the position of being incapable of delivering any of its promised benefits.

Even if the legislature were to pass “social” legislation, this could not prevent the parliamentarism advocated by the party from being completely discredited. The paths of

experience had convinced the people not only of the insufficiency or inapplicability of such laws, but also that any other outcome was impossible as long as men and money were placed above the law, with all powers subordinated to them, legal as well as political and (also through a lack of such prerogatives), which granted them the possibility of influencing the class which produces the burdens of the laws. This was demonstrated by, for example, the case of the law of May 19, 1874 on child and adolescent labor, as well as the law of July 12, 1880, which abolished the prohibition mandated by the law of November 18, 1874, for certain times of year; also in reference to the law of February 1883, which reasserted the law of September 9, 1848, concerning the length of the working day and which was never enforced; or the law of December 19, 1889, which provided for exceptions to Article 1 of the law of September 1848; the decree of the Council of State dated March 21, 1890, on municipal labor; the law of July 8, 1890, concerning protection for minors; and finally, the law of November 2, 1892, on female and underage labor.

None of these laws were enforced due to the hypocrisy and the vivid imagination of the capitalists (who were always ready to replace any prohibited methods of exploitation with other methods which were even more oppressive) and they contributed to the enlightenment of the men who were members of the diverse fractions of the Party concerning the value of parliamentary action. Gradually, but continuously, key elements became conscious of these facts, the members of the more moderate groups established contacts with the more revolutionary groups, and, once they were enlightened, they devoted themselves wholeheartedly to economic action, and slowly came to reject any kind of legislative action. They were later replaced by petit bourgeois elements eager to prosper at the expense of the masses and to shine in the game of politics.

In short, within the process of the rebirth of the world of labor, two conceptions of the mode of organization and struggle for the socialist movement were presented as alternatives. One of them, professing man to be ignorant and a creature of routine (despite its understanding of the economic domain), and inspired solely by visible facts, considered the State to be the indispensable instrument for social advancement and therefore demonstrated its support for increasing its authority, adding to its current prerogatives authority over the production and distribution of the public wealth.

The other alternative was supported by men whose intuition made up for their lack of economic science and who based themselves (along the lines of Proudhon) on the idea that social functions should be and must be limited to the satisfaction of human needs of every kind and that the State's sole reason for existence is exclusively the protection of superfluous or harmful interests. For this reason they concluded by seeking the replacement of the State with the free association of producers. The first concept called for the systematic, yet legal, conquest of every electoral post and the replacement of capitalist political personalities by socialist political personalities, thus bringing about the transformation of the economic system. The second concept spoke of mutualism, cooperation, credit and association, and asserted that the proletariat possesses in itself the instrument of its own emancipation.

One could undoubtedly have reproached the trade unions for being too lukewarm. They denied that they were capable of advocating socialism and very nearly celebrated the sudden defeat of the revolutionaries in May 1871. They openly sought the means to "reconcile capital

and labor” and attempted to do so by appealing to the good sense of both parties and by moderating wage levels so as to always be adjusted to the cost of living. They also tried to use labor’s own funds to obtain sufficient protection against unemployment, accidents, illness and old age. The trade unions, which had always rejected any kind of society of resistance, limited their ambition to the institution of arbitration committees responsible for resolving professional questions in cooperation with the employers, and organizing comprehensive technical training which would allow the workers to become technical specialists and to master all the secrets of their trades. This was intended to offer the nation’s industry a competitive advantage which would, with the increase in sales prices, lead also to an increase in wages. The principal goal of the Association of consumers cooperatives was reducing the prices of necessities; the Association of production cooperatives sought to raise small groups of workers into the ranks of the owners; the mutual benefits society, funds for strikes, for travel, etc.; all that was sought was to obtain some protection for the worker, to provide a safeguard for him which he had to create by his own efforts and the members of these societies went down on their knees in gratitude whenever an employer was compelled to proclaim his personal concern in his relations with the workers.

But just as the authors of the socialist program, despite their economic erudition, proved to be inept economists in their work by dealing arrogantly with the workers associations, they also underestimated them without totally ignoring them in the confrontations which arose as a result of the normal tendency of humanity to renew its ideas and opinions, the outcome of progress. Those who asserted that, within the capitalist regime, any kind of reconciliation between capital and labor was impossible, the same people who proclaimed that the class struggle was unavoidable, did not take into account the fact that it was the course of events itself which would take care of modifying the moderate resolutions approved by the workers associations, and that this would permit them to be won over to socialism after a certain period of time. Nor did they notice that the members of the workers associations had a preference for practical and personal experience as against the formulas of the parties, and it was perhaps advisable from the political point of view to treat them with kid gloves, so that, once the day of their adherence to socialism had arrived, the party could reinforce its political organization (should the workers associations join the party) by the use of its administrative organization.

As a consequence of these errors the administrative differences between the Party and the workers associations became more profound. Now and then some socialists sought to bring about an understanding, but the failure of this policy became more evident every day and the dissensions introduced into the trade union milieu by the debates concerning electoral action dissuaded the trade unionists from joining a partnership in which they confusedly perceived themselves to be victims. The Party’s leaders were trying to subject the trade unions to their will and they asserted that economic emancipation would not be the cause, but the consequence, of political emancipation. The efforts of the two forms of proletarian struggle would therefore remain separate, and would later become openly antagonistic.

### **Chapter 3 - The birth of the bourses du travail**

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## Chapter 3

### The Birth of the *Bourses du Travail*

While the various socialist factions went their separate ways after the 1882 Saint-Etienne Congress, and were later condemned to pursue a course of increasingly attenuated and limited demands, which highlighted the impotence of the reformist trends in proletarian action, the workers organizations began to recognize just how chimerical their projects for a reconciliation between the producers and the owners actually were. What results were attained by those committees that had stirred up so many hopes? Nothing was achieved. The owners refused to even discuss working conditions. Furthermore, the strike weapon, which certain trade unions had rejected because of their loyalty to French industry, without thereby conferring any benefits upon the workers, was recognized as a necessary weapon and it was declared to be not only permitted but indispensable, because otherwise the workers would be threatened by wage reductions. The divorce between the corporate bodies of the working class and the public powers, already highlighted by the refusal of the Parisian workers to accept a 100,000-franc subsidy on the occasion of the Philadelphia exposition, definitively consummated the break between the “Barberetist”<sup>1</sup> trade unions and the socialists. It was then that, no longer led by the illusion that they could possibly get any results from an agreement with the owners, the trade unions embarked upon the second stage of their evolution. Believing that the complete failure of the socialist school was due to the inadequacy of its tactics, they proposed a policy of action by the trade unions themselves, based on shop-floor organization, mutual aid societies, etc., and decided to exercise the function of legislator and to present in Parliament, by way of distinguished deputies subject to their control, projects for economic reform which they had themselves elaborated.

What were their demands? They included the reduction of the working day to a maximum of eight hours, with the establishment of a minimum wage determined by the price of consumer goods in each region; also a compulsory weekly day of rest, and the implementation of the legislative decree of March 2, 1848, which forbade “the exploitation of the worker by means of piece-work”; they also sought the suppression of the private employment agencies, the suppression of labor contracts involving either the reduction of wages or illegal profits and their replacement with labor paid at the prevailing rates; the acknowledgement of the business owner’s responsibility in workplace accidents, the replacement of private insurance schemes by funds financed by the business owners and administered by the municipality; appointment of labor inspectors by the trade unions, the suppression of prison, monastery and sweatshop labor (addressing the issue of labor carried out in monasteries or charitable institutions) as well as giving assurances to this effect to all wage workers; and finally, the adoption by the trade union commissions of health standards for job-sites and workshops.

Does this mean that their program explicitly or implicitly adhered to the propaganda and methods recommended by the party? Not at all. Besides the fact that the revolutionary trade unions persisted in their belief that social salvation, far from consisting in the seizure of political power by way of parliament, was to be found in the violent destruction of the State, there were also the following two basic differences between the economic programs of the Party and the workers associations: one was considered to be accessory and the other was the exclusive goal. While the workers party sought to achieve its goals solely by way of building a parliamentary majority, the trade unions, on the other hand, making further distinctions, left

to the “vigilance and solicitude of the public powers” only those questions which they thought they were themselves incapable of directly addressing. As for other matters, they showed their intention of making themselves respected on the strength of their own efforts, since they had only a limited amount of confidence in the zeal of the public administration.

In addition, the sort of reforms advocated by the trade unions, unlike the reforms promoted by the workers Party, were inspired not by a theoretical and therefore Platonic separation of society into classes, but by a real division, created by everyday material and moral sufferings and which were consequently particularly suited for exacerbating the social conflict. Finally, and this should not need to be repeated, the trade unions did not for the most part believe, like the workers Party, that the special propaganda needed to win the eight hour day or a weekly day of rest would exempt them from carrying out any other kinds of activity. They did not cease their efforts to perfect the marvelous network of mutualist institutions which allowed them to defend themselves against capitalist exploitation, even while they hoped for problematic government protection.

Such was the situation in 1886. That was when some men who were members of both the workers associations and the *Parti ouvrier français*, who thought that the new program of the trade unions proved that the workers associations had been definitively won over to parliamentary socialism, and who also understood that the trade unions constituted a force which would be childish to discount, conceived of a plan to unite all the trade unions in a national association.

A general combination of the trade unions was indeed necessary, as it was true that the various institutions created by the trade unions had to some extent disappointed the hopes of their founders. As it turned out, ignorance of the organizational form and operation of these institutions, which varied in accordance with their location and the results they obtained, and even of their very existence, prevented the trade unions from deriving the fullest advantage from their experiences, and led to the creation of useless or counterproductive services, or interfered with the provision of other services acknowledged to be excellent. In short, a considerable dispersion of forces arose, and the trade unions, although still convinced that their own efforts benefited the socialist goal even more than did the efforts of the workers Party, proved to be incapable of acquiring the powerful unity which was indispensable for multiplying the force of their energies. Guided by the general idea of free association and individual initiative, they ignored the results obtained and found themselves threatened with remaining stalemated on the path they had already traveled. Only unification in a federation could lead them to recover their original ardor.

The new federation, however, did not realize the hopes of either the workers or its founders. Why not? Because, instead of being a corporative association it was from the beginning a war machine put at the disposal of the *Parti ouvrier français* in order to facilitate the success of the electoral action which the Party had been so insistently advocating. Conceived and led by men whose intention was not to patiently and quietly establish a series of socialist economic institutions so as to progressively eliminate the corresponding capitalist institutions, but rather for providing the declining political movement with an important revenue source, the new federation publicly announced a basic program:

“The goal of the Federation”, states its Declaration of Principles,<sup>2</sup> “is to achieve the liberation of all those who work, to carry out in the most effective manner the struggle between the

interests of the owners and of the workers and to reanimate the energies of the latter by opening up a wider front of resistance”. This declaration was quite vague, but this defect was the result of the economic ignorance of the Federation’s administrators (who should have been at least capable of paraphrasing the economic part of the program of the *Parti ouvrier*), rather than their scorn for corporative action or their exclusive desire to enroll the actual working class masses by way of the back door of the “party”.

The Federation’s functions were not made more precise. Of the three commissions which the national council was supposed to create, one, the propaganda commission, responsible for “everything that should be known about the Federation and its mission”, never functioned at all. The task of the second commission was to publish a monthly bulletin: this bulletin never provided any statistics, nor did it present any plans for organization or action. The third commission, the statistics commission, was responsible for collecting all useful documents on French and foreign production, the cost of raw materials, and the sales prices of manufactured goods, and for calculating, taking the production prices into account, the profits obtained by capital; it also was supposed to conduct a comparative calculation for each locality with regard to wages and consumer goods prices, and to publicize the gap between the wages received and the really necessary wage. What tasks did this commission assume? Which ones did it put into effect? At this point we must confess our ignorance, but the fact is that, as we said above, the Federation’s bulletin, the principal instrument of publicity at the disposal of the federal council, never provided the trade unions with any economic information at all. Ultimately, as far as objectives are concerned, the statutes say that the member organizations are responsible for establishing their own objectives, and they are only obliged to inform the national council concerning their decisions, in which case, depending on whether “finances will allow it”, the national council could undertake the necessary measures to assure the success of the actions in question. But the finances never allowed it.

*La Fédération des Syndicats et groupes corporatifs de France* not only lacked a program. It also lacked, throughout its brief existence, a mode of organization which would have been capable of compensating for its structural defects. It was never able to create local or regional links among its member trade unions, links which, in direct contact with the trade unions which were in a good position to know and to formulate what was necessary in the matter of needs and resources for the livelihood of the local working class, would have enabled it to accomplish some of the objectives which had been entrusted to it by the Congress of Lyon. The Federation was consequently always disarmed before any major tasks, as well as before the reality of a weak central administrative office, which attempted to administer a nation without the help of any intermediary bodies or assemblies.

Finally, not even their congresses could ever contribute the least impulse for progress to the corporative organizations. On the one hand, each trade union body, due to its isolation and its lack of information about the services instituted by the other trade union bodies, was condemned, without thereby deserving the least reproach, to constantly reproducing the same demands and to constantly calling for the study of problems which had already been solved a hundred times. On the other hand, the members of the national councils (who, being in a position to obtain information concerning economic trends from correspondence received from the trade unions, should have been able to impress an impulse for renovation upon the corporative congresses and to make them receptive to the idea of development along associative lines), these same council members, we maintain, not having any confidence in

the efficacy of trade union action, never bothered for even one minute to study the question of how to go about strengthening the trade unions. Finally, the Federation's congresses, which were always held at the same location and at the same time as the political congresses of the *Parti ouvrier français*, and were, furthermore, presided over by the same leaders, had no other purpose than increasing the Party's fame by giving the impression that the trade unions represented at the congresses were affiliated with the Party. Hence the fact that these annual confederal meetings were almost exclusively concerned with topics which figured in the program of the workers party as well as the fact that they limited their activities to confirming the simple resolutions which had been adopted by the party.

This was why the *Fédération des Syndicats* was condemned to dissolution. Two circumstances hastened its demise.

In the same year that the Federation was formed, the *Bourse du Travail de Paris* was also born.

The name, *Bourse du Travail* (literally, "labor exchange"), clearly reveals the character of this new institution. The Municipal Council had declared:<sup>3</sup> "The trade union centers will always lead a precarious existence because their self-imposed limits will always keep them distant from most workers. This is why we need to have locals and offices which anyone can visit without the fear of having to make a sacrifice of time and money which they cannot afford. The permanent openness and availability of the meeting halls will allow the workers to carry on a more mature and precise discussion of the many questions involving industrial issues which bear upon their wages. The workers will have at their disposal all the means of information and correspondence, as well as all the elements contributed by statistics, an economic, industrial and commercial library, for orientation and clarification concerning the production trends in each industry, not only in France but in the whole world."

In this way the *Bourse du Travail*, a meeting center for the workers organizations, obtained its first result by forging solid and permanent bonds between them, bonds whose absence had until then constituted an insuperable obstacle for their growth and effectiveness. Thanks to the *Bourse du Travail*, the trade unions were able to unite, first on the basis of similar trades in order to preserve and defend their professional interests, to study the specific resources of their industries, the length of the working day and the wage situation (should the working day be too long and the wages derisory), and to investigate the degree to which a reduction in the length of the working day would increase the value of its productive force. The new situation also allowed the trade unions to federate without regard to trade distinctions, to reveal the fundamental data of the problem of economics, to study the exchange mechanism, in short, to seek within the current social system the elements of a new system while at the same time avoiding the incoherent efforts which had previously been made and which had resulted in rendering the workers defenseless before the political, financial, and moral powers of capital. The *Bourse du Travail* therefore conferred legitimacy upon the most brilliant hopes and no one could doubt that it had brought about an authentic revolution in the field of trade union economics, but what ambitions would not be buoyed by the appearance of *Bourses du Travail* in Beziers, Montpellier, Sette, Lyon, Marseilles, Saint-Etienne, Nîmes, Toulouse, Bordeaux, Toulon and Cholet?

Besides assuming responsibility for the fundamental service of job placement, all these *Bourses du Travail* established libraries, organized technical, scientific, economic and vocational classes, and provided aid to comrades who had to relocate to other towns. Their founding allowed the suppression of redundant services provided by the individual trade

unions because of their isolation, which became superfluous with the appearance of joint administration and services. The *Bourses* helped coordinate the demands of the corporative groups, demands which had previously almost always been incoherent and at times perhaps also contradictory, and which had been put forward by those groups on the basis of flawed economic data. Within less than six years, every *Bourse* had assumed, within its locale, a mission whose scope, importance and very possibility had somehow escaped the attention of the *Fédération des Syndicats*.

The idea of federating these *Bourses du Travail* was inevitable. Actually, we must admit that it was more of a political than an economic initiative. It was the work of some members of the Paris *Bourse du Travail* who were also members of socialist groups which were opposed to the French Workers Party, who demonstrated their discontent over the fact that the trade union federation was in the hands of that Party and called for the creation of a competing organization which, based in Paris, could be used for their own purposes. The Paris *Bourse du Travail* sponsored the idea, presented it before the Saint-Etienne Congress on February 7, 1892, and carried the motion to create the Federation of the *Bourses du Travail* in France. From that moment on, two central corporative organizations existed. But the differences in regard to their resources and their means of action were considerable. Recall that the Trade Union Federation suffered from two defects: first, it did not offer either a program or a federalist organization whose content could interest the trade unions; and second, it was a political machine, that is, it aspired to perform a function which would exclude from the corporative bodies the immense majority of the manual workers; furthermore, the trade unions, which attended the Federation's congresses because they were the only congresses being held, seemed to completely forget about the existence of the Federation the rest of the year.

The Federation of the *Bourses du Travail* possessed all the elements needed for success. It involved local associations that combined the attraction of novelty, and the advantage of responding to a need which remained unsatisfied and which was addressed in a personal and direct way, with the strengthening of the trade unions and the promotion of economic study. As a consequence, these associations were not only able to rely on the support of the individual trade unions, because the Federal Committee was confident in having discovered in the local associations a fertile and renewable source of collaboration. In addition, each *Bourse du Travail*, by having at its disposal resources superior to those available to the local councils of the Trade Union Federation, and by prohibiting all political action, was obliged to carry out some initiatives on the economic terrain, however modest. For its part, the Federal Committee, in order to justify its own existence, had to share with all the trade union centers the results obtained by each. From that moment and as a result of emulation, the trade union associations which belonged to the new federation made obvious progress. In a situation like this, how could the Trade Union Federation avoid dissolution, unless it was to undergo a profound transformation?

Such a dissolution was inevitable: an even more serious factor than the rivalry discussed above delivered the deathblow. Convinced of the fact that after ten years they had not obtained the respect of the employers for either their rights or their interests, and skeptical of ever seeing their economic programs implemented by Parliament, the workers associations, upon reaching the limit of their development, tirelessly sought a means of action which, furnished with specifically economic characteristics, would confer a dynamic impulse to the

whole range of workers efforts. Liberated, so to speak, from the politicians and invigorated by important institutions created by their own initiative, they aspired to become the agents of their own emancipation. The means that had been so stubbornly pursued suddenly appeared<sup>4</sup> in September 1892 on the agenda of the Marseilles Congress of the Trade Union Federation.

A few days earlier (on September 4), the *Bourses du Travail* of Saint-Nazaire and Nantes had already successfully carried a motion at a congress in Tours, passing a resolution<sup>5</sup> which proclaimed the necessity of the general strike as a means of revolutionary action, that is, a work stoppage in the greatest possible number of industries, and above all in the industries which are essential for society's existence. It was conceived as a purely economic method, which excluded any collaboration with the parliamentary socialists, and which only made use of the efforts carried out on the trade union plane, and this was why the general strike necessarily corresponded with the secret desire of the corporative groups.

Citizen Briand discussed the Tours resolution at the Marseilles Congress and explained the incomparable advantages which the idea of the general strike offered, from the perspective of rejuvenating individual energies as well as organizational development. Seduced, as it were, the workers associations enthusiastically acclaimed a means of action which was adapted to their own principles.

The resolution constituted the most serious public display of the growing divergence between the tactics of the Workers Party and the tactics of the trade unions. Nonetheless, the French Workers Party, whose congress, as we mentioned above, took place wherever the Trade Union Federation's Congress was held, did not grant it too much importance. Not being capable of admitting—although less than a year later they would be compelled to speak bitterly of the road taken by the trade unions—that the proletariat had judged that in the future any appeal to the public powers would be useless, and convinced that an *ex cathedra* warning would be sufficient to bring the temporarily strayed workers back into the fold, the Party limited itself to the pure and simple declaration that the idea of the general strike was utopian. Both the political groups as well as the other corporative associations, however, avoided the question of how such an essential disagreement could have arisen in the first place. If, as the members of the French Workers Party maintained, the workers associations and the Trade Union Federation accepted not only their own corporative character, but also the political spirit of the Party, there would not have been the least doubt that, at the next congress (set for 1894 in Nantes), “the error committed at Marseilles will be admitted” and that means of action contrary to the principles of the “Party” would be abandoned. If, however, on the other hand, it was true that the Federation was animated by a new spirit, the Federation would hold to its resolution and then separate its destiny from that of the Party, or the Party would withdraw from the Federation. In any event, the association of the French workers had arrived at a decisive turning point in its career.

At approximately the same time, the *Bourses du Travail* meeting in Toulouse voted to organize a general congress of trade unions to be held in Paris in June of 1893. Delayed for several weeks by a conflict which had arisen between the government and those Parisian trade unions which refused to recognize the validity of the law of March 21, 1884, the congress did not open until the day after the Paris *Bourse du Travail* was shut down. The congress was cognizant of the importance and the exceptional seriousness of this act of force and the trade unions' irritation with the government was so great that an enthusiasm even more extensive

than that of the previous year welcomed the proposal that the general strike be included in the Congress's agenda, and 24 delegates called for an immediate strike declaration.

Did this constitute definitive proof of the trade unions' new course? Not entirely, because the congress's vote could be considered to be a mere symptom of momentary rage, just as demonstrations could be the product of a temporary fever for revolt. This interpretation of the vote became all the more plausible when a contemporary manifesto calling on all Parisian trade unions to stage a mass walkout was signed even by the leading figures of the French Workers Party, who were nonetheless theoretically opposed to a general work stoppage.

Immediately after its adjournment, the Congress assigned the Federation of the *Bourses du Travail* the task of preparing a new congress for the following year. Since the Trade Union Federation had approved an identical resolution the year before, the deliberations of the two upcoming congresses could provide the proletariat with precise information concerning both the relative numerical significance of the two rival federations as well as the morale of the trade unions. The organizing process for these congresses itself allowed a kind of advance sounding-out of the trade unions. The Nantes *Bourse du Travail*, which considered two congresses completely superfluous and assessed the general sentiment as favorable to the idea of a unitary assembly, asked both federations for authorization to unite all the trade unions. The Federation of the *Bourses du Travail* granted their authorization without any difficulties, but, as expected, the Trade Union Federation obstinately rejected the proposal, formulating bitter recriminations against the "inevitable attempts underway to destroy the Federation", even going so far as to accuse the Nantes committee of treason at the same time that it was trying to get the Saint-Nazaire *Bourse du Travail* to organize the Trade Union Federation's Congress (which Saint-Nazaire refused to do). The Nantes *Bourse du Travail* remained committed to its proposal and took the bull by the horns and canvassed the trade unions. Since the latter approved of the project, the Trade Union Federation finally had to give its blessings to the initiative and accepted the "Sixth National Congress of French Trade Unions". It was a bitter setback, which presaged yet more difficult tests. The French Workers Party was well aware of this and this time it held its own congress prior to that of the corporative groups and repeated the views it had held on the subject of the general strike for the previous two years, hoping in this manner to influence the delegates to the corporative congress. It was a vain hope! Despite the bitter struggles waged for three days by the general staff of the Trade Union Federation, despite the councils of war held after every session by Guesde and Lafargue, on the one hand, and Delcluze, Fouilland, Salambier, Jean Coulet, Raymond Lavigne, etc., on the other, the latter representing the working class elements of the Workers Party at the corporative congress, despite the unspeakable denunciation of an anarchist delegate by Guesde and Lafargue, the politicians suffered an irremediable defeat. The congress made a clean break, rejecting the Trade Union Federation, the leadership of the Workers Party and parliamentary demands. The rupture with the political theory of emancipation was categorical, one could almost say brutal, with the result that the leaders of the Trade Union Federation did not take part in the final deliberations of the Congress ... their sixth congress. They disappeared, taking with them a name worthy of a better fate, but now consigned to the annals of history. The Federation of *Bourses du Travail* survived as the sole representative organization.

- [1.](#) Followers of J. Barberet, a sociologist who published *Le Travail en France* in seven volumes, each a monograph on separate professions, between 1886 and 1890.

- [2.](#) See *Les Congrès ouvriers*, by León de Serilhac.
- [3.](#) On November 5, 1886, according to Mesureur.
- [4.](#) We insist on using these terms because, although the idea of the general strike was generally quite well known for some time, it had not been seriously propagandized among the working class, and the debates which took place in 1892 in Tours and Marseilles represented an authentic revelation for the trade union groups.
- [5.](#) This resolution took the following form:

“Whereas:

“The powerful social organization at the disposal of the ruling class renders all attempts at total emancipation undertaken by the amicable means practiced by the social democracy over the last half century vain and impotent;

“There is an opposition of interests between capital and wage labor which current legislation, which pretends to be liberal, has not been able to overcome;

“After having issued numerous useless appeals to the public powers to obtain its right to exist, the socialist party has arrived at the certain conclusion that only a revolution will give us the economic freedom and the material well being which conform to the most basic principles of natural law;

“The people have not conquered a single advantage through bloody revolutions, which have only benefited the agitators and the bourgeoisie;

“In the presence, furthermore, of the military power put at the service of capital, an armed insurrection would merely offer the ruling classes a new opportunity to drown the workers’ demands in blood;

“Among the peaceful and legal methods adopted without any consideration by the Workers Party for the achievement of its illegitimate aspirations, not even one of them seems to be capable of securing the economic transformation and assuring, without any possible reaction, the victory of the Fourth Estate;

“The required method is the universal and simultaneous interruption of labor power, that is, the general strike, which, although limited to a relatively short period, would inevitably lead the Workers Party to achieve the victory of the demands formulated in its program;

“Therefore, the Regional Workers Congress of the West, meeting in Tours on September 3-5, 1892, takes cognizance of the proposal concerning the general strike presented by citizen Fernand Pelloutier and declares that it is appropriate to send a delegation to a special organization of the French Workers Party, for the purpose of bringing before the International Congress in Zurich in 1893 a complete project for a universal strike.”

The author of this proposal believes that it is useful to note that in 1894, that is, two years after the Tours Congress, some of its points were modified and that today certain paragraphs have been rejected.

## Chapter 4 - Chronicle of the bourses du travail

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### Chapter 4

#### Chronicle of the *Bourses du Travail*

Although they were formed only quite recently the *Bourses du Travail* of the working class constitute the most advanced and definitive application of the council groups idea and the solidarity which the International had given the proletariat thirty years earlier.

The political idea of the *Bourses du Travail* is over a century old, dating to March 2, 1790, when a report by DeCorcelles (which is now impossible to find) promoted such a program. Submitted for examination by the department of public works, his proposal disappeared, as usual, into the national archives, where so many excellent projects lie buried. For fifty years the phrase *Bourse du Travail* disappeared from our vocabulary. In 1845, De Molinari, the editor-in-chief of the *Journal des Economistes*, rediscovered—or perhaps reconceived—the idea of a working class *Bourse du Travail*, based on the model outlined by DeCorcelles, and further elaborated it in his famous work<sup>1</sup> that brought it to the attention of the Parisian popular associations and employers. Why did neither accept his idea? Perhaps, in the eyes of the employers, it seemed to be capable of endangering the business owner's right to unilaterally and exclusively establish wage levels? And, for their part, did the popular associations believe the *Bourse du Travail* to be irreconcilable with the development of producers' cooperatives, to which they had dedicated almost all their efforts? In any case, De Molinari, who met with indifference here and with open hostility elsewhere, was compelled to first postpone and then abandon the project (seven years later he would try to publish a journal called the *Bulletin de la Bourse du Travail*).

It was during this period, however, that the question of a working class *Bourse* was debated in the Paris municipal council as well as the legislative assembly. Decoux, at that time the prefect of police, presented (in 1848) a very detailed proposal. On February 3, 1851, this same Decoux, having become a representative of the people, advocated the following in the Assembly, referring to the “*Bourse*” of the Stock Exchange: “Their agitators don't have to stroll about in sumptuous palaces. We must grant the workers some modest refuge, a meeting place.” A vain request! Neither on that day nor the next was Decoux to obtain the institution that he sought.<sup>2</sup>

It took twenty-four more years for this question, after first having been addressed by the Paris Municipal Council, to be brought up again. On February 24, 1875, two questions were submitted for debate, “one relating to the construction in the Avenue Laundière of a spacious many-windowed rotunda; the other, to the creation on the Rue de Flandre of a *Bourse du Travail*, or at least of a private place with a roof and a door, as a place of sanctuary for the numerous groups of workers which gather there every morning for assignments to dock work and other casual labor.” These two proposals, in the end, as had occurred in another time with the attempt by DeCorcelles, fell into the oblivion of Committees, and there they were to be joined in the next few years by others of the same stamp. Eleven more years had to pass before the following report authored by Mesureur crossed the desks of the office of the municipal council (November 5, 1886):

“The Council, in consideration of the resolutions concerning the formation of a *Bourse du Travail*, proposes:

The Prefect of the Seine is to immediately negotiate, with public assistance, for the lease or purchase of the aforementioned Redoute real estate and to submit the results of his negotiations to the Council along with the budgetary estimates for acquiring said real estate, for the purpose of building a branch of the *Bourse du Travail*.

Also, from the perspective of the terrain of freedom as stipulated in contract law, said Mesureur, you have the right, if not the duty, to allow the workers the means to fight with equal and legal weapons on a level playing field against capital. Without a *Bourse du Travail*, the trade union locals will always have only a precarious existence, because the results they obtain will always be far from representative of those obtained by the vast majority of workers. It is therefore necessary for us to have enough offices and meeting halls where everyone can go without having to fear being confronted by sacrifices of time and money beyond their means. The free use and permanent availability of meeting halls will allow the workers to carry on a more mature and precise debate on the various questions which affect them and their industries and have an impact on their wage levels. This will make available, for information and research, all the means of information and correspondence, the elements provided by statistics, and an industrial or commercial library, for understanding the trends in production in every industry, not just in France, but in the whole world. Perhaps then we shall see the real representation of labor....”

This time the cause of the *Bourse du Travail* finally prevailed and on February 3, 1887, the municipal council solemnly conveyed into the hands of the Parisian trade unions the real estate at the Rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau, which would later (1892) be joined by the building at Rue Château-d’Eau.

Such was the apparent origin of the *Bourses du Travail*, although it must be admitted that the *initiative* of the Paris Municipal Council was not imitated anywhere else, and the trade unions in the provinces had to at first organize as free *Bourses de Travail*, before they could obtain a minimum of communal favor. The *Bourses du Travail*, as they exist today, preceded, except in name, the inauguration of the meeting hall on the Rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The equivalents of the *Bourses du Travail* can be found in the two or three workers federations created by the International and in most of the local or regional trade union bodies created after the French Workers Congress held in Paris in 1876. When the socialist trade unions finally definitively evicted various mutualist trade unions from their ranks, and in 1886 tried (at the Congress of Lyon) to mount one last effort to regain the leadership of the workers movement, some trade unions established new local or district meeting-places, which, with job placement services, unemployment and strike relief, study committees, etc., prefigured the *Bourses du Travail*.

We have explained the reasons which prevented the National Federation of Trade Unions and the corporative workers groups from uniting their forces around the goal for which the Lyon Congress was convened. Among the most important reasons was the inexplicable error of calling for direct affiliation to a national federation which obviously needed, in order to properly look after its own interests, to keep the federations as restricted as possible: on regional, departmental and even local scales. Hence the impossibility, as a result of this error, for the national council of the federation to offer the least services to the hundreds of workers groups dispersed throughout the country.

Finally, and most importantly, it was the Council’s obvious intention of making the Federation, instead of an instrument of economic emancipation obtained exclusively by

means of the corporative movement, into a nursery for Guesdist militants, interested primarily in parliamentary action, the “conquest of public power”, and ready to take the leadership of the whole working class. The trade union groupings whose members had not totally rejected electoral propaganda, but who thought that it should not be allowed in the trade unions, where that issue gave rise to disputes and discord, but should be confined to “political study circles”, therefore carried on their economic labors free of the tutelage of any “school” and joined with those elements who had animated the *Bourses du Travail* of Lyon, Nîmes and another twenty cities.

In 1892 there were fourteen *Bourses du Travail*. The elite cadres who administered them underwent a period of testing during times when, lacking any unifying bonds between them, their material and moral development proceeded much too slowly. Indeed, in their isolation, they were unable to make any use of their cumulative experiences and were therefore condemned to either waste precious time on projects later considered to be unrealizable or flawed, or to rule out initiatives which might have led to excellent results. It did not take long for the idea of a national federation of *Bourses du Travail* to make headway, and the federation was born at the February 1892 Congress (Saint-Etienne) of the *Bourses du Travail*. At that time, as well, deliberations took place concerning the confederal pact which, two years later (at the Congress of Nantes in 1894<sup>3</sup>), would sanction the final and definitive break between the *political* socialist party and the economic socialist organization. The *Bourses du Travail* declared their firm resolve (a declaration which was by no means merely Platonic) to reject any form of interference in their affairs on the part of the national and local government authorities.

Soon thereafter, the number and importance of the *Bourses du Travail* grew at a remarkable rate. In June of 1895 the federations reported<sup>4</sup> 34 *Bourses du Travail* and 606 member trade unions, and in 1896, 46 *Bourses* and 862 trade unions. This growth even seemed disturbing to the federal committee, because it felt that the *Bourses du Travail* were being created without a sufficient trade union base, which exposed them to dissolution or to the disorder caused by dangerous strikes, and also because it feared that temporary problems in the *Bourses du Travail* of Rouen, Cholet and Bordeaux would prove contagious and spread to the majority of the *Bourses* with fatal results. The committee therefore judged it prudent, if not to moderate the organizational ardor of the militants, at least to bring to their attention the usefulness of extending their propaganda activities, which had until then been restricted to local neighborhoods, to the level of city districts (*arrondissements*) and even an entire department. “Two or three *Bourses* in each department,” the Committee stated correctly at that time, “will more rapidly enroll the workers than would the lesser efforts of seven or eight insufficiently utilized and necessarily weak *Bourses*.”

This advice was heeded and, in the following years, while another eleven new *Bourses du Travail* were created, the federal Committee learned that Rouen had annexed most of the trade unions of the lower Seine, which extended from Dijon in the North and to Montceau-les-Mines, while Amiens nourished the ambition of federating all the trade unions of the Somme and Nîmes, all those of Gard and, above all, the agricultural workers trade unions, among others.

On the opening day of the Seventh Congress, held by the Federation on September 21, 1898 in Rennes, the Committee announced that fifty-one *Bourses du Travail*, with a total of 947 trade unions, had attended the Congress. In 1899 another three *Bourses du Travail* with a total of 34 trade unions made an especially valuable contribution to the confederal association,

because one of them primarily covered maritime interests (which were at that time still under-represented among the corporative groups) and also because the other two *Bourses* were in different regions which had until then remained hostile to the federation.

In all, up to June 31, 1900, that is, until the eve of the opening of the Eighth Congress (Paris, September 5-8), there were a total of fifty-seven *Bourses du Travail* with 1,065 trade unions, which comprised 48% of all the industrial trade unions throughout France. Of these fifty-seven *Bourses du Travail*, forty-eight were members of the Federation and included 870 trade unions.

- 1. *Les Bourses du Travail*.
- 2. This proposal “for the facilitation of relations between owners, bosses and workers” was presented on June 12, 1851 and was conceived in the following way:

“Article 1. In all localities with a population of at least 3,000 residents information offices will be created for owners and businessmen who need workers, and for workers seeking jobs. Similar offices will be created in localities with less than 3,000 residents if their municipal councils judge that this would be of use for the agriculture and working classes of their areas.

“Article 2. These offices will be formed under the supervision of special commissions nominated by the municipal councils, with representation from the fields of trade, industry and agriculture.

“Article 3. These commissions will likewise see to it that the localities will set up registries in which they will be able to verify, on the basis of professional categories, the demand for labor, the names and addresses of the workers, the names and addresses of the bosses and business owners, as well as the type of job available.

“Article 4. In cities with over 20,000 residents, one or more employees (depending on the city’s importance) will be designated to attend to the registries, which will be audited by one of them. These employees will be paid by the municipality.

“Article 5. In cities with over 20,000 residents, trade union secretaries will manage the registries, with the assistance and cooperation of the members of the Special Commission on duty.

“Article 6. In cities that have municipal councils, the members of these councils will have a right to be members of the Special Commissions.

“Article 7. In Paris, a Commission will be formed for each district and special offices will be formed for important industries.

“A summary report of the number of registrations received will be sent five times a year by the trade unions to the Prefect of the Seine, so that it can be published in the interest of industry and the working class.

“Article 8. The regulations established by the Special Commissions and adopted by the municipal councils in cities with a population of 100,000 or more will be submitted for review to the Interior Ministry.

“Article 9. A public administrative ruling will determine the mode of correspondence between the information offices.”

- [3](#). See the article by Félix Roussel: *Revue politique et parlementaire*, November 1898.
- [4](#). Declarations issued by the Seine Prefecture, Registry No. 2.012.

## Chapter 5 - How to create a bourse du travail

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### Chapter 5

#### How to Create a *Bourse du Travail*

As we said above, forty-eight percent of the working class trade unions were affiliated with *Bourses du Travail*. Although already of great significance, this figure can only be fully appreciated if we also point out that, since the opening of a *Bourse du Travail* requires the existence of sympathetic local trade unions, and that at least one-fourth of them must be enrolled on the trade union charter, the mandatory requirements for establishing a *Bourse du Travail* were not satisfied for quite some time. We should also add that where such trade unions did exist, the formation of *Bourses du Travail* also depended on the prior form of association of the trade unions. We mention these points in order to highlight the fact that, after 1895, the membership of the *Bourses du Travail* continued to increase and that the formation of new *Bourses du Travail* should be understood as being preceded by the creation of new trade unions or by the extension, sometimes exaggerated, of the “jurisdiction” of some already-existing *Bourses*. Some idea of the brilliant future awaiting these centers for the association of trade union cadres can be gleaned from the fact that, alongside the 250,000

industrial workers currently federated, another 100,000 (nearly all the remaining French trade unionists) are only awaiting the opportunity to create their own *Bourses du Travail* or else are waiting to affiliate with neighboring *Bourses du Travail*.

The method employed in creating a *Bourse du Travail* varies depending on whether the local trade unions are isolated from one another or have already formed a federation.

In the first case, the secretary of one of the trade unions, or any other trade union member, would convoke an assembly of the trade unions, or at least of their administrative councils, in order to point out the usefulness of a *Bourse du Travail*. In today's society, the *Bourse du Travail* must first of all be an association of "resistance". It must resist pay cuts, the excessive prolongation of the working day, and the increase or (taking into account the fact that the workings of the price mechanism make such increases inevitable) the exaggerated increase in the price of consumer goods. The *immediate* function of the *Bourses du Travail* is to maintain *as far as possible* the equilibrium of the price of labor and the price of consumer goods. If the assembly after deliberation assents to this proposition, it then proceeds to nominate a commission composed of at least one representative from every group in attendance, which is delegated the task of implementing this proposal.

The first topic these commissions must study is the expenses that would be incurred in forming a *Bourse du Travail*, and the resources at the disposal of the future *Bourse du Travail*.

The essential services of a *Bourse du Travail* are: an office, a treasury, archives and library, the formation and maintenance of a general registry of the unemployed, and, eventually, a building for providing food and lodging for itinerant workers and also for professional training. Obviously, the number and respective importance of these services are subject to considerations relating to the resources available to each institution. Some *Bourses* have all of them, some only a few. Here we must take into account the possibility that finances may be limited and that a *Bourse du Travail* may not receive any municipal or State subsidies and may have to operate solely on the basis of the dues levied by its federated trade unions. Among the indispensable expenses, we note the preeminence of renting a building. The building must include, at the very least: a room for an office, the meetings of the general committee and the executive commission, a room for the library and the archives and two or three for simultaneous meetings of trade unions. This expense can be generally expected to amount to about 800 francs per year.

Heat and light account for about 300 francs. Then comes the pay for the officers of the *Bourse du Travail*: Secretary and Treasurer. Some *Bourses du Travail* do not have a paid staff, and set aside two or three hours each evening for everyday business, correspondence, receipt of trade union dues and managing the library. Other *Bourses du Travail* which employ officers during evening hours grant them a stipend, depending on the work performed, which is sometimes a fixed sum and sometimes is based on an hourly rate. In the latter case the total stipend amounts to approximately 300 francs per year for the Secretary and 200 francs per year for the Treasurer. Finally, the wealthiest *Bourses du Travail* have permanent Secretaries and employ Treasurers for three hours each day. The usual pay scale averages one franc per hour. The number of hours of work required of the Secretary varies in accordance with the importance of the task; in any event, the monthly wage expenditures were never less than 200 francs in cities with a population of 20,000 to 30,000 (except in a few isolated cities in the south), and never less than 250 francs in cities with up to 100,000 residents, and eight francs

per day in cities with more than 100,000 residents. The average yearly wage thus varied from 1800 to 2700 francs for Secretaries and from 900 to 950 francs for Treasurers. The duties of the Permanent Secretary are: handling correspondence, setting the agenda of meetings of the general committee (which the Secretaries attend as non-voting members), keeping the records of the registry of the unemployed, preparing the registry of the supply of and demand for jobs, and, lastly, supervising the library.

Other expenses include the office supplies, which often amount to anywhere from 200 to 500 francs, and the acquisition of books, which is generally provided for by a fixed monthly allowance. *Bourses du Travail* can be divided into four categories, depending on the importance of their locations and their essential expenditures (excluding training courses): 1620, 2300, 5350 and 8700 francs, respectively.

At first, the *Bourses du Travail* could only rely on their own resources to meet their expenses, that is, on trade union contributions. A *Bourse du Travail* whose budget is approximately 1600 francs, and which has between 700 and 900 members in fifteen trade unions, could fix monthly dues of each member at between 20 and 30 centimes, that is, an average of 10 francs for each trade union, and could thus preserve complete independence in its relations with the public authorities and the private employers. However, as the increasing number of conflicts between capital and labor exhausts the reserves of the trade unions, the *Bourses du Travail* are almost constantly compelled to petition the local and regional authorities for subsidies, which we shall now address.

Some *Bourses* are granted subsidies in the form of cash by the municipal general committee or the municipal finance commission. Others receive subsidies partly in the form of cash and partly in the form of various goods and services. In renting buildings, any one of three procedures can be followed. Sometimes the lease is signed by the *Bourse du Travail* and the whole rent is paid by the municipal tax office, or by the municipal administration itself. Or, the *Bourse du Travail* is often installed in a building owned by the municipality. Some municipalities pay their heating, lighting and maintenance costs, on the basis of a bill presented monthly by the administrative council of the *Bourse du Travail*. Finally, together with the subsidies granted for administrative functions, most municipalities also allow for special credits for job placement services, library acquisitions, materials for training courses, etc.

The average monetary value of such subsidies in both money and goods and services granted to the four categories of *Bourses du Travail* mentioned above, varies from 900 to 20,000 francs, the total being dependent not so much upon the numerical strength as upon the importance of the local trade union movement and, above all, the nature of the local municipalities' views concerning the *Bourses du Travail*. Generally, the *Bourses* managed to succeed in getting the subsidies approved each year and they were disbursed every four months rather than monthly.

At this point, the building having been rented, the commission sets about composing a rough draft of the statutes. Once this is done, the plenary assembly of member trade unions is again convened and the results of the commission's work are presented. If these preliminary plans and statutes are approved, the assembly elects a general committee or administrative council, composed of a fixed number of delegates from each trade union.

At this time the original commission's task is accomplished. The general committee nominates an executive commission from its own ranks to replace the original commission,

and assigns it the mandate of implementing the *Bourse*'s program and electing its officers. After concluding this business and after requesting the subsidy needed for its operations all that remains for the newly-created association is to abide by the formalities provided for by the law of March 12, 1884.

As we pointed out above, the process involved in creating a *Bourse* is different if a local trade union federation already exists. In this case the preparatory work is simplified or even eliminated. These local associations effectively possess, besides statutes, a dynamic, local meeting-places, councils, and officers. What, then, remains to be done? Merely to call themselves *Bourses du Travail*, and obtain the municipal aid which they could not previously hope for, which once again demonstrates the complacency of the trade unions with regard to the institution of the *Bourse du Travail*. We must nonetheless point out that when a local trade union federation is subsidized and is transformed into a true Trade Union Center, its statutes and its officers are not the same as the statutes and the officers of a *Bourse du Travail*. Because the two institutions have two distinct views regarding their interests, it could happen that trade unions may be ready to join a *Bourse du Travail* but may not want to enter the Federation, or that trade unions may prefer to withdraw from the Federation without leaving the *Bourse du Travail*. This latter case can only take place where the administration of the *Bourse du Travail* is different from the administration which remains faithful to the Federation.

## Chapter 6 - The activities of the bourses du travail

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### Chapter Six

#### The Activities of the *Bourses du Travail*

The services provided by the *Bourses du Travail* can be subdivided into four categories:

1. *Mutual aid services*, which include job placement, unemployment benefits, relocation aid, and aid for those injured on the job;
2. *Educational services*, which include the library and the information office, the social museum, professional courses and general education classes;
3. *Propaganda services*, which include the statistical and preparatory economics services, the organization of industrial, agricultural and maritime trade unions, the establishment of sailors' homes and cooperative societies, and promoting the formation of trade union councils or inspectorates; and
4. "*Resistance*" services, which involve the organization of strikes and agitation against state legislation concerning economic action.

What is most important about this list is the variety of services and the multitude of requirements they fulfill. Where do the *Bourses du Travail* find the men possessing the

specific abilities necessary for establishing a mutual aid fund, or the educational experience needed to oversee training courses, or the administrative and organizational skills which are indispensable for propaganda? They find them among their own ranks, among the manual workers (but workers who are thirsting for knowledge and who will spare no effort and no sacrifice in the interest of the triumph of their ideas and their enterprises) who hold their administrative positions. Their general committees usually have two or three such staff members, representatives of their particular trade unions. But what does this insignificant number represent in relation to the other twenty, thirty or forty workers who form the rest of the committee? Furthermore (and acknowledging exceptional cases) what help could these most competent men provide to the Trade Union Center, men who are devoted to discovering, beyond the secrets of the account books, the means to liberate their bosses from the competition of street vendors? On occasion one may also detect, although rarely, the presence of hybrid personalities, without any particular trade, who are attracted to the corporative organization by the seduction exercised upon any individual with an interest in social psychology by a movement which so obviously undermines the old public and economic superstructure. But such exceptions do not invalidate the general rule.

This is because no person who is not a member of a trade union can serve as an administrative officer of a *Bourse du Travail* nor can any person join a trade union without actually working in the pertinent trade. These, then, are the workers (elite workers, educated by their reading and also by means of their frequent involvement in controversies about the most varied problems) who administer the *Bourses du Travail*, teach the courses, and supervise the library, form associations and organize resistance against economic reversals.

What results have been obtained? Before taking a look at the interesting details, we shall, with the help of the statutes of a real existing *Bourse du Travail*, provide a general idea of these institutions.

“The *Bourse du Travail*” (in this case the Saint-Etienne *Bourse*) “is administered by a delegates’ committee composed of two members from each trade union. The meetings attended by all these delegates are known by the name of the General Administration. This General Administration is then subdivided into as many sub-committees as are required by the needs of the services rendered by the *Bourse*. At this time there are five such sub-committees, responsible for the following services:

1. Administrative Subcommittee, responsible for the executive functions;
2. Statistical and Financial Comptroller’s Subcommittee, responsible for auditing the accounts of the *Bourse*, collecting annual statistical data, and compiling information relating to the job placement service;
3. Subcommittee for the Oversight of Professional Training Courses. This committee is responsible for oversight of students attending professional training courses and for guaranteeing that the courses are properly conducted and meet as scheduled;
4. Propaganda Subcommittee. This committee is responsible for collecting all information useful to the workers in their efforts to organize trade unions and for helping them in any and all circumstances to succeed in their actions. This information is at the disposal of interested parties, including corporative groups, upon request;
5. Press and Library Subcommittee. This committee is responsible for editing the *Bourse*’s official journal. Its mission is to catalogue the official documents and articles published by

the *Bourse*. It receives the correspondence and handles the subscriptions to the journal. It is also responsible for the acquisition and circulation of library books. When the general administration judges that it is necessary, it appoints extra-administrative subcommittees ... but these committees disband as soon as their mandate is terminated....”

Having provided this general information, we can now outline the internal operations of a few of the services offered by the *Bourse du Travail*.

#### 1. *Mutual Aid Services.*

a) *Job Placement:* The *Bourses du Travail* devote special attention to finding work for their members. The job placement office effectively constitutes the first and most important benefit which a federative association can offer the workers, and represents a powerful inducement for new recruits. Due to the lack of job security, private job placement offices, which must be paid, soon became such a heavy burden that many workers, frustrated by the prospect of continuous future wage deductions from their already considerably reduced wages, decided to themselves go in search of the work which would allow them to survive. It is also known (and the parliamentary tribune has provided us with irrefutable proofs to this effect) that it is the customary practice of employers to post the most precarious jobs, so that the visits the worker is obliged to make to the job placement offices are multiplied. One can therefore understand the solicitude with which the unfortunate worker approaches the *Bourse du Travail*, which offers him the job he is looking for without charging him anything, so that men who had been cut off from the trade unions, by ignorance or indifference, found work through the *Bourse*, as well as a kind of information whose usefulness and interest they had been unaware of only a short while before.

Many business owners, shopkeepers, and industrialists, however, remain unaware of or prefer to ignore the road which leads to the trade union job placement offices. Parliament, meanwhile, for unknown reasons, hesitates before the prospect of making the private job placement offices disappear. The *Bourses du Travail* then took up the search for means to render all job placement offices outside their control superfluous.

If it were only a matter of suppressing the private job placement offices, the task would have been relatively simple. It would have been enough to demand the creation, if not in every jurisdiction, then at least in the areas with active movements, of municipal job placement offices. Yet this tactic itself presented a two-pronged danger. First, it was possible that this might result in a fearsome overabundance of applicants, so that any business owner who was having problems with trade unions might cease to frequent the offices of the *Bourse du Travail* and instead seek the manpower he wanted from the municipalities. The *Bourses du Travail*, meanwhile, which, as we shall see below, aspired, consciously or not, to create a state within the State, were trying to monopolize all services pertaining to the improvement of the lot of the working class. On the basis of this consideration the *Bourses* therefore fought against the municipal job placement offices with the same ardor they employed against the private offices. Furthermore, the extension of job placement offices could finally endanger the existence of the existing *Bourses du Travail*, or at least prevent the creation of new ones. In effect, whether the management of the municipal offices for job placement is entrusted to city employees or, as was the case in some places, to trade unionists, the successful operation of such offices provided the municipalities with a pretext to forbid the creation of new *Bourses du Travail*, on the basis of the municipalities' view that the purpose of the *Bourses* was job placement. What did the *Bourses du Travail* do then? Some (those located in isolated enclaves) attempted to organize job placement services by correspondence. Either directly, or

through their member trade unions in neighboring localities, they put interested workers and employers in touch with one another. This was how the Nîmes *Bourse du Travail* operated, which exempted its worker correspondents from the requirement to pay for postage. Others forged contacts with isolated trade unions and encouraged them to form their own job placement services, in order to deprive their municipalities of any pretext for opening offices of that kind. Finally, job placement was not just a matter of study for *Bourses du Travail* situated a considerable distance from one another,<sup>1</sup> such as Nantes and Angers or Tours, or Tours and Paris, but other *Bourses du Travail* sought, after 1897, to coordinate all the job placement offices through a central service entrusted to the Federal Committee. This system of generalized job placement, encompassing all of France, was later created by the Ministry of Trade in coordination with the Federal Committee of the Trade Union Centers.

The *National Office for Labor Statistics and Job Placement* (the name of the most important of the mutual aid services instituted by the *Bourses du Travail*) will be subjected to extensive treatment after we examine the *viaticum*[relocation allowance and aid service—translator's note] from which it was derived and for which it constitutes the indispensable complement. b.) *Unemployment benefits*, after having enjoyed twenty years of popularity, momentarily fell into disrepute, as a result of the inconveniences they imposed upon the trade unions, and then after the formation of the *Bourses du Travail*, began to re-assume their privileged role. But they would no longer be offered, as in the past, for the exclusive purpose of mutual aid. The *Bourses du Travail* rejected the humiliating as well as ineffective mutualism of the trade unions of 1875 and adopted Proudhonian mutualism instead. Unemployment benefits are viewed as payments of a debt of solidarity contracted among the trade unions and, above all, as the means to withdraw the unemployed from the ranks of those willing to work for less than the prevailing wages.

The unemployment relief funds of the *Bourses du Travail* are raised by means of special levies or by discounts subsidized in the usual way, or else by trade union dues or donations collected during banquets or corporative meetings. It must be pointed out, however, that relief for this purpose was rare and that the municipalities had a tendency to ban it ... undoubtedly because they saw it as a vehicle of political propaganda which they wanted to reserve for their own use. In 1896, for example, the Angers *Bourse du Travail* received a municipal subsidy of 2,000 francs, primarily earmarked for relief for jobless workers. This amount, later increased by the proceeds gathered at several banquets, allowed the *Bourse* to distribute 152 vouchers for 5, 10, 15, and even 20 francs. Later it made distributions from its own resources. ... Brest created a mutual aid society which had close to 300 members in September 1898 and has distributed 1,190.20 francs in aid and subsidies since May 1, 1896 (the date it was founded). During the same period its income amounted to 1,231.50 francs. Grants, subsidies and dues together brought in 19,445.90 francs. It had 1,881.70 francs in its Savings Bank account. The Brest association admitted honorary members who were not, however, allowed to take part in the mutual aid society's operations or provision of services—only trade union members (one fact of cardinal importance is that in order to be a member of the mutual aid society one must belong to a federated trade union) have the right to avail themselves of the benefits of the association.

c.) The *viaticum*, or relocation assistance. What is the *viaticum*? It is a subsidy which enables a worker who is looking for a job to stay in a city long enough to make the rounds of the factories or offices of his profession and (should he not be hired) to travel to another city. This grant for temporary relocation has the sole purpose of combating vagabondage and provides moral and material support for those workers—who were still quite numerous and would later be even more numerous in proportion to the degree that machinery has supplanted manual labor—who are compelled to go from city to city in search of work. As such, the *viaticum*, like unemployment relief, was an application of the strict mutualism discussed above. Only two professional societies, *The General Association of Hatters* and the *Federation of Printing Workers*, in organizing their relocation aid services, have made efforts to protect their employed members against the competition of an overabundant and consequently devalued pool of labor power, as well as against the temptation of some of their unemployed members to work for substandard wages. The other *Bourses du Travail*, animated by the same sentiment, and in view of the fact that they were hosting increasing numbers of job-seekers, since they represented visible landmarks for traveling job-seekers from every point of the compass, were obliged, given their stated goals, to come to the aid of the itinerant unemployed and to look for resources and remedies with which to address this problem.

We must nonetheless point out that, in order to prevent abuses, the *viaticum* was always dispensed partly by means of money and partly in kind. Angers provided 1.5 francs to the unionized and 1.25 francs to the unorganized workers, on condition that the latter promise to register with the trade union within six months of receiving the relocation assistance. Should any worker not abide by this commitment, he would henceforth be refused all assistance. Furthermore, a traveling job-seeker was not allowed to apply again for aid at the same *Bourse* until six months had passed. One part of the aid was granted in the form of vouchers for food and lodging, valid at a hotel with which the *Bourse* had previously established an agreement. In 1896 the Angers *Bourse du Travail* distributed 186 vouchers which entitled the bearers to one meal, a place to sleep and a monetary grant, each voucher amounting to a total value of 1.25 francs.

Saint-Etienne obtained a grant of 400 francs from its municipal government which it converted into vouchers for food and lodging. Dijon distributed two francs to each traveling job-seeker and also put him in contact with the secretary of the pertinent trade union. Nice allotted two vouchers for meals whose cost was paid for by a monthly 1.25 franc membership subscription.

This was the form generally adopted by the *Bourses du Travail* for the operation of their travelers aid services and, as we have said, nearly all of them contracted with a local innkeeper for the travelers' room and board. However, an increasing number of *Bourses* sought to avail themselves of the travelers' sojourns in their cities by telling them about the principles of economic solidarity and the power needed to bring about social transformation. For this purpose they proceeded to host the itinerant workers at the trade union centers, transforming the meeting halls into dormitories by installing hammocks. This was how the *Bourse du Travail* of Nantes operated. One *Bourse*, that of Béziers, went even further in this respect: not only did it provide lodging for travelers, women as well as men, providing two separate special halls for them, but it even put at the disposal of those women

who preferred not to eat at the popular *La Fraternelle* restaurant a fully-equipped kitchen so they could prepare their own meals.

Despite the excellent way all these services were organized, a series of obstacles did not fail to present themselves, which become apparent after a little reflection. First, the differences between the various *Bourses du Travail* often led professional vagabonds—who, we must confess, appeared among the workers—to voice unjust recriminations, especially against the secretaries. They complained about trade union egoism, and at times came to blows. In any event, the accusations directed against the *Bourses du Travail*, whose restricted resources limited them to offering modest subsidies, had unpleasant consequences. There was, however, no way to control the number of transients who were applying for relief. What happened then? A situation characterized by a large number of *Bourses du Travail* and trade unions dispensing relief along with the ease of acquiring their addresses, allowed the unscrupulous nomads to “keep dancing” along the roads from April to October of every year. Finally, the aid granted to those who chose not to join trade unions (and this was nearly all of the non-unionized workers, since few people, even among those with no particular trade, faced serious obstacles to joining a trade union) diverted resources away from production, in whose transformative process these people never made and would never make the least contribution. All of these facts led the Federal Committee of the *Bourses du Travail* to resolve upon replacing the various aid programs administered by each *Bourse du Travail* with a collective *viaticum*, reserved for trade union members, controlled by those who were directly involved and which largely, although not totally, overcame the problems of the previous system.

The economics of this *viaticum* were, in reality, not at all original, since we had assumed a service provision model similar to those which already existed. In order to be eligible for travelers aid, applicants must have been dues-paying trade union members for three months (except in cases of unemployment, a certified disabling illness, or military service); and they must not have abandoned their home towns except as a result of a lack of work or for having carried out acts of solidarity in the course of trade union activities. If a jobless person were to have done without the services of a *Bourse du Travail*, it was presumed that he was not without resources, and the subsidy was granted to such people only for travel expenses to the nearest *Bourse du Travail*. Thus, the traveler who arrives in Angers from Paris receives only the amount of assistance needed to travel from Tours to Angers. Upon his arrival in a city and after having been given the addresses of workshops and factories by the secretary of his trade union, the traveler must make the rounds and his visits must be confirmed by one of the trade union members working at each job site who is specially designated for this purpose or, in the absence of union workers, by other means which can be arranged. And it is always understood that any transient worker found guilty of having accepted work at a price below the trade union rate or in a workshop blacklisted by a trade union, will lose his right to the *viaticum*.

As for the amount of the travel subsidy, it started at 2 francs for the first forty kilometers on the road from one *Bourse* to another, and then 75 centimes for each additional twenty kilometers. The maximum distance paid for in this manner was 200 kilometers. Upon receiving 150 francs, the worker’s right to assistance was suspended for a period of eighteen months, except in the unlikely event that, during the period of time required to receive such a sum, the traveler was unable to find any work.

Each *Bourse* administered its local relief program and levied a monthly 10 centime dues quota which was compulsory for every trade union member. Every four months the Federation Committee carried out an accounting of the amounts disbursed in this program and established, in the interests of a fair distribution of its expenses, the corresponding contribution of each *Bourse du Travail*.

This is the basic structure of the proposal submitted to the *Bourses du Travail* for deliberation in 1898, and which is still under consideration. As we said above, in its general outlines it merely represents a combination of similar services provided by the *Union des Travailleurs du Tour de France* and by *La Federation des Travailleurs du Livre*. The experiences of these two organizations, however, due to their small size (3,000 for the former and 6,000 for the latter) in comparison with the *Bourses du Travail* (250,000 members), could not provide models for the amount of dues to be levied on the members of the *Bourses du Travail* or of the subsidies and assistance to be contributed by the affiliated trade unions. Even if these amounts were to turn out to be nearly the same in all three cases, the amounts required for the proposal we are currently studying can only be established following a survey and study carried out by the Federal Committee of the *Bourses du Travail*. This inquiry consists in obtaining membership figures from the *Bourses du Travail* for each affiliated trade union as well as the annual unemployment rates for every corporative organization. The results for France as a whole (excepting Algeria, whose special situation is characterized by the movements of itinerant workers) showed that an average of 15% of the trade union membership was unemployed for at least 90 days each year. Therefore, 15 unemployed workers who each receive over the course of three months 2 francs in assistance each month would not exhaust the funds accounted for by the statutory dues of one hundred workers; out of every ten centimes taken in only nine would be disbursed. This result was later confirmed, first by the data of the Federation of Printing Workers, whose monthly rate of expenditure never rose above .85 francs per month from each trade union member. As for the travelers aid granted by the *Bourses du Travail*, its average rate was .87 francs.

Is it still necessary to point out the benefits offered by the *viaticum*? First, there is the opportunity for the *Bourses du Travail* to guide the itinerary of each traveler. This allows the *Bourse du Travail* to publish a bulletin (which we shall discuss below) on the outlook for jobs within its jurisdiction which gives the travelers some indication as to where to look for work, since the travel subsidy is only granted if the traveler *never retraces his steps* (unless he has a job offer). Second, it assures a serious control mechanism thanks to which the *Bourses du Travail* can deter voluntary drifters. In this manner the worker's journey ceases to be an occasion for alms or an opportunity for proletarian mutual exploitation and is transformed into assistance obtained by the efforts of all those who join a trade union and contribute to the travel relief funds, which have proven strong enough to resist the influence of the employers. Finally, the non-unionized workers' assurance of getting real help from the corporative societies in case of unemployment will soon lead them to join the trade unions, so that the *Bourses* will reap incalculable benefits as a result of this program. If the experiences witnessed up till now have actually justified the hopes of the Federation, then perhaps a future international congress of *Bourses du Travail* could extend the travelers aid program beyond France.

d.) *The National Office of Labor Statistics and Job Placement*. The basic assumptions underlying this center for employment and statistics can be found in the following two

proposals adopted on September 15, 1897 by the Sixth Congress held in Toulouse (Official Report, p. 39):

“1. Narbonne and Carcassonne propose that the Federal Committee should seek means to establish an aid service to assist trade union members in moving from one city to another in search of work;

“2. Nevers proposes that a statistical service should be created which shall register the fluctuations of employment in each *Bourse du Travail*, and that this information should be sent to the Federal Committee, which will publicize the results for the benefit of all the *Bourses*.”

During the course of this same session of the congress, Saint-Etienne had already expressed the desire that, first, a general service for employment statistics should be established, so that each *Bourse du Travail* would be able to fill the available job offers in its jurisdiction as they became known; and also that any trade union member, by presenting himself at a *Bourse du Travail* as a person in search of employment, should be able to get immediate assistance.

“Would it not therefore be a good idea,” declared a delegate, “to forge links between the *Bourses du Travail*, so that the Federal Committee would be able to send some of the surplus workers of one locality to another place which is in need of labor...?”

The congress, unexpectedly having to consider the issue, did not have a clear idea of how to meet the needs expressed by the related proposals of Narbonne and Nevers. It therefore limited its actions to approving the two proposals put forth by these *Bourses du Travail*, and the vague character of its approval was proof enough of the delegates’ indecision.

It did not, however, endorse the principle of creating an Office of Statistics and Job Placement, and if the next congress (the Eighth Congress at Rennes in 1898) was not to discuss any such project, this was because no one wanted to unnecessarily complicate the difficult mission of the delegates or hinder the efforts to resolve the problem of the *viaticum*. But the best proof that the Federal Committee did intend to implement this project at the Toulouse Congress, and that it was thus intimately related with the travel subsidy issue, is that it presented the project in one of the articles of the statutes for the *viaticum*, conceived as follows:

“All *Bourses du Travail*, in accordance with standards to be established by the Federal Committee, should submit weekly statistical reports for each trade union.... An abstract of these reports, communicated within 40 hours to all of the *Bourses du Travail*, will allow the latter to direct displaced workers towards those places where they have a chance of getting jobs and to warn them not to go to areas suffering from unemployment.”

This article, despite the imprecision of its terms, contains the essentials of all that would later be put into effect with the National Office of Statistics and Job Placement which would be created two years later by the Federal Committee, and which would begin to function in accordance with its specific mandate in 1898.

The first difficulty to arise concerned the character which the travel subsidy or the *viaticum* should assume in order to have the greatest possible effect. Should it assume the form of a simple act of philanthropy? Should it be a kind of alms-giving (albeit of a fraternal variety) contributed by those professions unaffected by unemployment and by those trade unions enjoying stable conditions to those unfortunates whose trades, lack of skill, age, and a thousand other causes condemn them to a periodic search for work? If the answer to this question were to be affirmative, then all that would remain for the Federal Committee of

the *Bourses du Travail* to do would be to adapt the statutes concerning the viaticum which had already been implemented by the *French Federation of Printing Workers* and the *General Association of Hatters* to the organizations represented at the congress.

Furthermore, besides the insurance such a program offers its participants against temporary unemployment, could it also be a means to attenuate the fratricidal competition which, under the pressure of necessity, breaks out among the unemployed? Could it also contribute to some extent to the regulation of the economic market in such a way as to allow an almost instantaneous convergence of supply and demand, in order to prevent a labor shortage, a situation which could indeed momentarily serve the interests of some people, but on the other hand harms the interests of the hungry multitudes; it was also necessary to ask whether it could help prevent the kind of oversupply of labor which contributed to the growing disproportion between the price of labor and the price of commodities after 1860.

Such were the two concepts of the *viaticum* which were the subject of deliberation at the congresses of Toulouse and Rennes, respectively.

If it were not for the fact that the *Bourses du Travail* had hundreds of thousands of members, there could be no doubt but that the Federal Committee would have adopted the first, quite elementary system, tried and true, which had for many years helped hundreds of people to resist the temptation to become vagabonds, to avoid having to fight against such a precarious and miserable existence. But the *Bourses du Travail* were composed of over one thousand trade unions, with a total membership of approximately 250,000 workers, or 65% of organized labor in France. With such an impressive number of workers, the Federal Committee was consequently obliged to obtain the maximum benefit from the proposed service program. Thus, by pronouncing in favor of the second system of assistance, it held that the travelers' aid should be complemented by a labor statistics service which would inform the workers about cities where labor was scarce and those where, due to a surplus of labor, there were few opportunities for work. Towards this end the *Bourses du Travail* were requested to submit monthly reports on the number of *job openings* for each employer enrolled in their job placement programs. This data would then be consolidated and summarized in a report for the Federal Committee, and a copy of this list would be sent within 24 hours to each *Bourse du Travail* for local distribution.

The program had just been started, yet already it aroused a fundamental objection: while some well-organized institutions might be able to provide precise monthly reports on market conditions, it was hardly possible to expect that the data for these reports could be collected four times each month. The Committee demonstrated sufficient prudence not to commit itself to attaining such a goal. It only expressed its hope for a successful resolution of this problem by placing special emphasis on the fact that the *Bourses du Travail* had instilled in the people the taste for economic and statistical studies, which were unknown and therefore despised prior to the appearance of the *Bourses*. It judged that the perseverance devoted to the implementation of its project had resulted in an emerging wish among men who were already fired with enthusiasm by the desire to understand their real condition to compose their history statistically, that is, to make it palpable for themselves and for the rest of humanity. Finally, considering that the trade unions and the *Bourses du Travail* had a by no means merely limited and historical interest in consulting these statistics, which had previously been so little known, once published somewhere they would, with the precision of the statistics published by the Federation, stimulate a three-pronged interest in the labor organizations:

1. By preventing, through the regulation of the “travels” of the unemployed, the squandering of the funds devoted to their assistance;
2. By preventing gluts in the supply of labor, which could lead to a reduction in wage levels;
3. By obtaining through the workers’ own efforts sufficiently precise data, which would enable those trade union members who want to relocate to do so without “having to hit the road” unless they had full awareness of the reason for doing so.

As it would seem, the Committee had more than sufficient reasons to have faith in the success of its endeavors. Moreover, not one day passed without various *Bourses* having to consult with one another concerning the labor situation in one industry or another. It was just such a relation which the Committee wanted to make permanent. A statistical service would obviate the need to go looking here or there for information by providing the convenience of knowing in advance where workers were needed.

Once this problem had been resolved, there still remained the question of how to collect information concerning the particulars of each job. First of all, in order to achieve the project’s stated goal, it was necessary to make the information provided by the *Bourses du Travail* as exact as possible, so that a worker in a small workshop, for example, would know whether the job listed under his trade involved surgical or optical instruments; it was also necessary to make the job classifications themselves as precise as possible in order to avoid regrettable mix-ups, especially when one job was called by different names in different localities, or when the job itself had many sub-categories, such as stucco-painter, tin-plater or zinc specialist, etc. Another difficulty to be overcome was the challenge of offering an up-to-date list of trades represented in the *Bourses du Travail*, and since the number of these trades as well as of the *Bourses* themselves was increasing each day, it is clear that the first problem to resolve had to consist in drawing up a complete nomenclature of trades, providing all the *Bourses du Travail* with a template along with the recommendation that they should always use this nomenclature to precisely designate the jobs they intend to list as available. Secondly, by then there were 57 *Bourses du Travail* and the question arose concerning how the Committee could summarize all this information on the situation as a whole and send 57 copies of this report to the *Bourses du Travail* within 24 hours.

Faithful to its principles, and convinced that before asking for help a man should marshal all the means at his disposal, the Committee tried to launch its program by availing itself of its own personal resources, for the purpose of trying to ensure that, despite the flood of information transmitted by the *Bourses du Travail*, with so many trade unions, the overall picture would not be too overwhelming. It consequently decided that each registered trade should be designated by a number, and that instead of displaying all the jobs in their particular descriptions, the numbers would only be indicated on a general chart, which could be immediately translated by referring to a list posted in the public hall of each *Bourse du Travail*.

Notices of the following kind would be posted:

57 78 148 312 522

Lyon

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9 59 17 3 24

On this chart the upper figure represents the job code while the lower figure is the number of available positions.

Once the various lists of job openings arrived, the Committee had to decide upon a procedure for making and distributing the charts. Although this operation could not be handled by just one person, it was not beyond human capabilities, nor would shipping the copies of the charts to the *Bourses du Travail* demand much extra work. In short, the problem which remained to be solved was the question of how to make these fifty-seven copies.

The Federation's financial resources were modest and it did not have a separate printing fund. The question therefore was reduced to whether or not using only his own handwriting skills, one man could prepare 57 copies of the job chart in just a few hours. At this point the Committee was obliged to admit its powerlessness. In vain it examined the problem from every angle, it imagined numerous other approaches, but it was unable to resolve this difficulty and it was forced to acknowledge that it was only by means of printing that the indispensable copies could be produced within the desired timeframe. The Committee could not, however, have the chart printed because it lacked the funds to do so.

The Committee thus found itself facing the alternative of either having to abandon its project, or to resort to State aid. Confident of the usefulness of its enterprise, it did not hesitate to adopt the second alternative and on November 17, 1899 it decided to submit a request to the State for an annual subsidy of 10,000 francs.

Just when this request was submitted, an unforeseen event made it possible to extend the scope of the Committee's primitive program and to open the Office of Statistics and Job Placement long before it was thought possible to do so.

Preoccupied with the problem of getting jobs for thousands of unemployed workers, the government, immediately after the end of the Universal Exposition, carried out an investigation of public workshops and enterprises which were open or were scheduled to open throughout the country in 1900, inquiring concerning working conditions and wages of the personnel these enterprises recruited. How could the government connect the unemployed with these enterprises? For this task it needed an intermediary. The Ministry of Public Works offered this role to the Federation of *Bourses du Travail*. The latter, viewing this as an opportunity to implement its own Office of Statistics and Job Placement, accepted the government's offer, but not without first getting the government to agree that workers would only be sent where labor was really in short supply and also that the wages and the length of the working day must be at least equal to those accepted by the region's trade unions.

This concern led the Committee to send the following circular to the *Bourses du Travail*:

“Comrades:

“Attached is a copy of the Report published by the Ministry of Public Works on the workshops which are currently accepting applications now that the Exposition workshops have closed.

“In this matter we have taken the precaution of setting out to discover whether the pay scales indicated in this Report are at least *equal* to the wage levels prevailing in each locality

referred to, as well as whether it is indeed true that the localities in question actually suffer from a labor shortage that calls for an influx of workers.

“We must also inform you that, by means of the Office of Statistics which we shall soon open, we shall inform you as soon as possible of the normal wage level of the workers in each one of your trade unions. This will allow us to establish an informational resource for the workers in each city and to confirm, when requested by our members, whether an offered pay rate is the customary rate among trade union members.”

Once the wage levels are verified, the job placement process begins for the unemployed workers.

The process begins with the workers filling out job applications which are received by the Federation and approved by the local business owners, and then are forwarded to the Ministry of Public Works, which returns them along with coupons entitling each applicant to half-price train fare to his chosen destination.

Unfortunately, the workers have to wait at least two days for the Ministry’s letter. This delay in obtaining the authorized subsidy caused a good number of unemployed workers to undertake their journeys at their own expense rather than remain two or three days in Paris, where the cost of room and board is not compensated for by the 50% reduction in rail fare.

To complete the picture, we must also mention that, with the approach of the month of July, many workers were unable to afford all their travel expenses. The Federal Committee felt that this was an opportune moment to call attention to the words spoken by the President of the Cabinet before the Chamber of Deputies and to demand that the government attend to the situation of these workers as well as that of the Office of Statistics and Job Placement, requesting that they be granted various subsidies totaling 1,400 francs.

Just when this auxiliary aid service went into effect, the Labor Bureau, a department of the Ministry of Trade, invited the Federal Committee to specify, in the form of a list of regulations, how the Office of Statistics and Job Placement was supposed to function. It was on this occasion that the Committee drew up the statutes<sup>2</sup> which were published in the Montpellier *Le Travailleur syndiqué* (June 1900) and which, after indicating the formalities required every week of every *Bourse du Travail* for compiling and transmitting the general report, specified the three conditions the government established for granting its assistance. Finally, on July 5, as a result of the declarations made on June 1 in the Chamber of Deputies by the Ministry of Trade,<sup>3</sup> the government agreed to grant a subsidy of 5,000 francs to the Federation of the *Bourses du Travail* for the second half of 1900.<sup>4</sup>

The Federal Committee immediately informed the *Bourses* of the detailed proposals for the new service in the following terms:

“Comrades:

“The rules for the Office of Statistics and Job Placement, published in *Le Travailleur syndiqué* (June 1900), the organ of the Montpellier *Bourse du Travail*, outline how this new service of the Federation of the *Bourses du Travail* will function.

“You know that the mission of this Office is to produce weekly statistical reports of job openings in the jurisdictions of the *Bourses du Travail*, the phrase *job openings* being

understood to refer to those positions which for one reason or another could not be filled by the unemployed workers in the immediate locality, or involve trades for which no qualified workers are available.

“These statistics are to be produced in the following manner: every *Wednesday*, all the *Bourses du Travail* are to fill out and send to the Office a form indicating the number of known job vacancies in each one of their federated trades, adding, whenever possible, the wage rate for each job. In order to avoid too much paperwork, all the *Bourses* are to indicate on this form not the name of the trade, but the numerical code for the trade assigned on the key, an example of which is attached to this letter. For example, assume the following jobs are available: one stock clerk, with a pay rate of 3 francs; three masons, one at 3 francs and two at 3.5 francs; and finally one metalworker at 5 francs. The Secretary of each *Bourse du Travail* will prepare his report in the prescribed manner.

“In the diagram below, the upper numbers represent the number of available positions, while the lower numbers are numerical job codes.

1 (4 fr.)/3 (1 @ 3 fr., 2 @ 3.5 fr.)/1 (5 fr.)  
27 380 273

“When the chart showing the results of all the individual reports is posted at the *Bourses du Travail* together with the job code key, the unemployed workers, in order to know what trades are signified by the numbers on the bottom row (as shown in the example above), need only consult the job code key.

“We must especially emphasize one point: the figures provided for job openings, in order to be useful, must be as up-to-date as possible. For this reason it is necessary for the Secretaries of the *Bourses du Travail* to make a special effort to acquire information from the trade union secretaries at the last possible moment, that is, on *Wednesday*, or at the earliest on *Tuesday* evening; also, the list should be sent to the Office with the *Wednesday* evening mail so that it will be ready to be used to compile the general chart and then to be sent to the printer during the day on *Thursday*. Therefore, comrade Secretaries, we request that you send us your first data abstracts *next Wednesday*, and to continue to do so every following *Wednesday*.

“To conclude, we must also call the attention of the *Bourses du Travail* to the importance of precision in compiling these permanent statistics. The government, the Chamber of Deputies and the press all have a full understanding of the project. The high expectations engendered by this project and the financial assistance which has been disbursed to the Federation oblige all of us, the Secretaries of the *Bourses du Travail* and the members of the Federal Committee, to do our utmost to prove that the *Bourses du Travail* are capable of creating a national market for labor.”

Finally, on *August 9* the *Bourses du Travail* received the first installment of the general job openings chart, which has been appearing regularly since that date.<sup>5</sup>

We should add that, in order to extend the reach of its data, as well as to facilitate the task of the *Bourses*, the Office shortly thereafter asked the local prefects and trade unions to provide information to the business owners and industrialists within their jurisdictions “concerning the number of workers necessary for each trade, the amount of their wages, the length of the working day and at what hours the latter begins and ends” and also requested that the business owners and industrialists inform their local trade unions and prefectures of “how many workers they need, as well as the approximate length of time for which they are needed.”

“The responses to these inquiries,” the Secretary of the Office wrote to the *Bourses du Travail*, “will be transmitted to the *Bourses du Travail* or to the most directly interested workers organizations, so that if a request arrives from any locale for a certain number of workers, we will immediately dispatch a notice to the *Bourse du Travail* or the organizations closest to the locality in question, concerning the details of the request along with an order to the *Bourses* or other organizations to do everything necessary to fulfill the request or to tell us to pass along the notice to other *Bourses du Travail*.”

This was the mission entrusted to the Federal Committee, as mandated at the Paris Congress in September 1900.

Before concluding this section, we shall provide some figures which illustrate the none-too-brilliant current state of the Office of Statistics and Job Placement.

The chart below depicts the preliminary estimates made by the Federal Committee, as they appear in the preliminary draft budget presented at the Congress. Of all these budgetary forecasts, so painstakingly developed by the Federal Committee, which put its trust in the promises of various kinds of assistance and intended to grant an annual indemnification to the Secretaries of the *Bourses du Travail* for the extra work they would have to do in order to compile weekly registries of all the job openings in their jurisdictions, of all these forecasts, we say, prior to the opening of the Congress only one came true: the State subsidy.

Furthermore, even this subsidy was actually less than the 10,000 francs which had been considered as indispensable for the exercise of the Office’s wide-ranging new tasks, and the Federal Committee was forced to engage in an energetic campaign in defense of an operation whose fundamental usefulness was not sufficiently grasped intellectually.

[Chart Omitted]

The Committee, however—and here we come to our conclusion—had a precise idea of the present and future functions of the Office of Statistics and Job Placement; its proposed goal was quite ambitious (and also required a great deal of energy and many sacrifices from each and every member) and should have been capable of implementation. Of this there can be no doubt. The economic crisis was throwing thousands of men out into the streets every day and the country’s ignorance concerning the oscillations of supply and demand condemned these men to remain where they were (but with what resources?) and to await the end of the crisis or to venture upon the road without any particular destination in search of a distant and hypothetical job. The workers organizations were helpless before the crisis: only the economic transformation could prevent its recurrence. Its effects could nonetheless be attenuated by finally bringing about what all the social economists and democratic governments have proposed since the Revolution: the creation of a labor market. And now is the time for the local markets formed by the trade unions and the *Bourses du Travail* to be completed by a national market, so that the workers from Marseilles who live in Toulouse or in Nantes will be able to know when and under what conditions they could obtain jobs in workshops or factories in their native city. Is anyone more qualified than the *Bourses du Travail* to carry out this mission?

Nor is that all. All kinds of statistics, compiled periodically or otherwise, which are published by the government or the Institute of Political Economy, are only of interest to the economist, who, thanks to them, formulates the principles which are useful to his own interests, or to the legislator, who, should he be inspired by them (however superficially), acts in such a manner

as to disguise the injustice of the proposed laws submitted to him for examination. The ongoing statistical service of the Office for Statistics and Job Placement, on the other hand, will possess a practical and direct interest: that of publicizing, first to any unemployed worker or any worker who wants to get another job, information concerning jobs suited to their talents and paid at standard rates;<sup>6</sup> also by immediately standardizing the available labor power in conformance with the demands of the workers; and finally, by offering a chance for success to striking workers, by steering unemployed workers away from the battle zones.<sup>7</sup>

e.) *Miscellaneous Services.*

To complete our list of the mutual aid services created by the *Bourses du Travail*, it will suffice to mention a few aid services for those who have fallen on hard times or become ill, and the attempt made by the “tailors and pattern-cutters trade union” of Nîmes to create a pension fund.

Special mention must be made concerning the “*Caisse de Solidarité*” (Solidarity Fund) recently created by certain trade unions affiliated with the “Association of the Trade Unions of the Seine”. This fund, unlike the traditional mutual aid funds, does not impose any age limits or health requirements on its subscribers, and does not accept honorary members. It imposes no age limits or health requirements because its founders take into account the fact that it is precisely when they reach the extremes of age or when a congenital or acquired disability diminishes their labor power that the workers are most in need of assistance. It was clear that they had to increase the dues subscription, above that of the mutual aid societies. But it is only fair for the strong to provide to the weak the same assistance that they will themselves receive when it is their turn to grow old or become ill. Furthermore, it does not appear, contrary to the opinion taught at the Sorbonne, that young people are hesitating at the prospect of joining this fund. Usefulness is the foundation of the solidarity which exists among us.

The benefits offered by the “Solidarity Fund” are as follows: assistance in case of illness, quarterly disbursements for soldiers (testimony to an unprecedented kind of solidarity upon which the association is relying in order to help prevent those of its members who join the army from renouncing their ties to the workshop and to work), aid for reservists and territorial troops, aid for the widows of deceased members, and for pregnant women (we must add that no distinction is made between “legitimate” and “illegitimate” pregnancies) and finally interest-free loans, guaranteed solely by the trade union of which the applicant is a member. The enrolment fee is set at 2 francs, and the monthly dues at 1.5 francs: the sick pay is 2 francs per day for a maximum of 30 days, provided only that the illness lasts more than six days and that the worker is completely unable to work. Pregnant women have the right to a special daily grant of 1.5 francs, *in addition to the compensation in the amount of 2 francs they already receive for sick pay*; the widow, or in her absence the children, the parents, the brothers or the sisters, or the legal heir(s) of a member of the Solidarity Fund, receives 30 francs; the soldier on active duty, 5 francs every four months; the reservist or territorial, 1.5 francs per day; loans are for 31 francs, payable without interest in minimum monthly payments of 3 francs.

What distinguishes the mutual aid services of the *Bourses du Travail* from the services of the mutual aid societies pure and simple is, first of all, the suppression of any age or health requirements, since we consider these services not as a means of self-protection against the accidents of life, but as a means of resistance, as we believe we have already said, against the effects of economic depressions, which are translated into long working days and low wages.

Furthermore, its limitation to trade union members, a consequence of the motive mentioned above and of a luminous dedication—because it was not easy to expect it from mutualist legislation—to the principle of class division, is today acknowledged and scrupulously applied by all “organized” fractions of the proletariat.

Does this perhaps mean that mutual aid must discover, or more properly, rediscover, in the confrontations of the trade unions, the approval that the trade unions had denied it for so many years? There are two reasons why this may be possible: first, because the trade unions, which had for so long been called mutual aid societies (a form whose estimable character was celebrated not long ago by Léopold Mabileau), believe that now they have a sufficient understanding of the defects to be avoided and second, that they are beginning to comprehend, some vaguely, others more clearly (by way of an increasingly expansive application of the principle of class struggle and by virtue of the socialist tendency to progressively eliminate all currently-existing institutions), they are beginning to comprehend, we say, the need to themselves construct the services which are today necessary for the men who are condemned to survive due to their daily search for increasingly precarious and underpaid jobs.

## 2. *Educational Services*

a.) *Library*. The *Bourse du Travail*, as the general statutes of all these associations say, “has the purpose of cooperating for the moral and material progress of workers of both sexes.” What means are better suited for this end than initiating the workers into the discoveries of the human spirit? It is in regard to education that one should be most pleased with the formation of the *Bourses du Travail*, from the moment when it became clear that only they were capable of undertaking the marvelous efforts which have led Edouard Petit, inspector-general of education, to say: “They are becoming the universities of the workers”. The poor, weak and isolated illiterates, and the political circles which scorned economic studies, were equally incapable (logically enough) not only of organizing professional and remedial training courses, concerning which we shall briefly touch upon below, but even of setting up libraries of any kind. On the other hand, there was a time when the scarce trade union libraries had to compensate for the severity of their books on science and technology with literary works that still to this day adorn the trade union halls. It is not necessary to point out that workers of all ages, whose ignorance of social events and of the laws which determine them limited their horizon, considered themselves captives, they and the generations to follow, of the search for starvation wages and degrading jobs; in addition, they were isolated and consequently could not carry out lively, intense discussions suited for honing the faculties of observation and critical thought, which is why they preferred, instead of elevated themes, the picturesque or stimulating narratives of popular story-tellers.

Only when they joined together, when they federated and concerned themselves every day with the improvement of the conditions of labor, and the trade union members were obliged to reflect upon the economic question, and to acquire suitably clear notions concerning social science, did they begin to take pleasure in the works placed at their disposal. Then they began to look at the world around them and discovered an authentic literary treasure trove, which was of use in alleviating their sorrows, until the time when the opportunity to eliminate them arises.

At this time, all *Bourses du Travail* have libraries and all of them are making serious efforts to add to their collections. Some have only 400 or 500 volumes, others have 1,200, and the

Paris *Bourse du Travail*, which clearly enjoys a privileged position and has at its disposal a reading room covering 72 square meters, has more than 2,700 books. Furthermore, quality prevails over quantity at all of these libraries. Almost instinctively, the *Bourses du Travail* have chosen works dedicated to refining the tastes, to elevating the sentiments, and to extending the knowledge of the working class: the most conscientious studies of social critique, the most essential and valuable, the most sublime works of the imagination. Such was the nourishment offered to appetites which were so robust that they remain unsatisfied to this day. In the catalogues of these libraries we find, alongside the technology section composed of up-to-date and quite noteworthy treatises on scientific and technical discoveries in the fields of physics, chemistry and engineering, the masters of political economy, from Adam Smith to Marx. In literature, we find examples ranging from the prose and poetry of the 17th and 18th centuries to Emile Zola and Anatole France; in social critique, from Saint-Simon to Kropotkin; in the natural sciences, from Haeckel and Darwin to Reclus and the most eminent contemporary anthropologists.

On the other hand, the *Bourses du Travail* demonstrate a discriminating eclecticism, and one may browse on the shelves of their libraries through the highest achievements of genius, works such as *Le Génie du Christianisme* (The Genius of Christianity) and *La Justice dans la révolution et dans l'église* (Justice in the Revolution and in the Church, by Proudhon), *The Pope*, by de Maistre, as well as *L'esquisse d'une morale sans obligation ni sanction*, by Guyau (Essay on a Morality without Obligation or Punishment), *L'Essai sur l'indifférence*, by Lamannais, and *Les Ruines de Palmire*, by Volney (The Ruins of Palmyra), or *L'Origine de tous les cultes*, by Dupuis (The Origin of All Forms of Worship). Would we be so bold as to say that all these books were read often? Of course not, but there are workers who have the curiosity which leads them to open these books and to become interested in the virulence of the great catholic polemicists and the poetic wealth of a Chateaubriand. As for the others, and here I am referring to those who need to have their interest artificially stimulated, this will be achieved when they become interested in reading the novels of contemporary authors who address the social question.

b.) *The Museum of Labor.*

The *Bourses du Travail* were not content with just offering their members exemplary libraries. With an always alert imagination, they wanted to create a museum of labor, whose plan we set forth not long ago in the *Bourses'* official publication, *L'Ouvrier des Deux-Mondes*. We never get tired of repeating that the products which cost the worker so much, generate scandalous profits for the capitalists; that from one year to another the purchasing power of the masses diminishes, while that of the privileged increases. Wealth is constantly growing and poverty is becoming more horrible every day. Economic conditions can be expected which will, over time, increase the oppression of the worker and which will render his peaceful efforts to protect his existence ever more powerless. It is also said that.... But all of this is nothing but so many assertions. We need to do more.

It would be interesting to offer people the means to observe social phenomena for themselves and to extract all their meaning. What more convincing means exist than placing before their eyes the very essence of social science: products and their histories?

Here are some examples of the threads used in the textiles of Amiens. We know how much the workers who spin them are paid, as well as how much the spinners of other regions are paid. But what do these figures represent to us? Almost nothing, because we are unaware of

almost all the other accessory circumstances, those which confer all their value upon these products. This is the case in regard to the cost of the raw materials in the producing countries and their cost of being admitted into the manufacturing process, that is, the increasing costs as the material is subjected to change of ownership, customs duties, salesmen's commissions, and the requirements of feeding, housing and maintaining the workers; one must know all of this in order to really know the value of the worker's wage; nor does one know how much the worker makes unless one knows whether the declared wage is for each day actually worked or for each day of the year; similarly, one needs to know where and in what quantities the factory owner sells his products, and what the products' retail price is for the consumers, etc. What, therefore, are the foundations upon which the economic principles empirically deduced from elementary and perhaps uncertain statistics may be securely based?

Such are the concerns of numerous *Bourses du Travail*. How can they be satisfied? Quite simply: by creating a museum subdivided into as many sections as there are trade unions, which would contain displays of each manufactured product with its whole history. The workers would thus have the chance to encompass within a few minutes the origin of the fabric right before their eyes, the various places it is manufactured, its cost of production, the number of workers needed for its production process, as well as their wages and their cost of living; they will also know the sales price of the fabric, both wholesale and retail; and the number, the characteristics and the productivity of the machines which have woven the fabric. All this data will be kept up-to-date, constantly registering the relations between the capitalist and the worker, between the producer and the consumer, so that the truth about these matters will rapidly emerge before the eyes of the workers in the textile industry. At the same time, a balance sheet will be kept concerning strikes, mutual aid societies, legislation regarding unemployment, the labor laws and everything else which is incapable of putting an end to pauperization, just as a dike made of sand cannot contain the fury of the sea. We must make it clear that these informational efforts shall have neither the purpose nor the effect of reducing the importance of the economic institutions inspired not only by the current need for defense, but also and above all by the intention of providing the working class with the means of production, distribution and consumption which will be necessary after the social transformation. These projects will serve only to show the people, in a new and eloquent way, the impossibility of a peaceful transformation.

Imagine a book laid out before our eyes covering all the products of human industry; for the minerals extracted from the depths of the Urals, the coal of Westphalia or Gard, and the delicate wicker-work of the Palatinate; and for the glassware of Bohemia and the plate glass of Pennsylvania or Tarn; for the diamonds of India and the tapestries of the Gobelins, the pottery of Aubagne and the marvelous ceramics of Sèvres; in short, for everything which procures a few pleasures for misers, a voluptuous lifestyle for artists or the mean-spirited satisfactions of the vain, and which cost others so much misfortune and so much suffering patiently endured and silently absorbed. Let us imagine, finally, these living testimonials of the inexplicable economic inequality, displayed simultaneously and constantly in every large city, which will incessantly remind the miner, the glassmaker, the baker, the potter, the ceramist, and the pattern-maker, that these labors, issuing from their hands and for which they earn barely enough to survive are finally destined to ornament the homes of other men. So, would these mute lessons not perhaps be more eloquent than the vain revolutionary lamentations that leave the café orators breathless?

Furthermore, there is no lack of material in the *Bourses du Travail* for such projects. They have, for purposes of assessment, the origin and the history of each product, from the entry of the raw materials into the factory to the final sale of the manufactured object, the trade federations of all countries, the reports of the consular agents of all nations, the trade unions of salesmen and accountants; for the mechanical conditions in which the product is manufactured, specialized treatises and the accounts of the workers; for the economic conditions, the declarations of the respective trade unions.

The future will tell what fate awaits this project, whose least merit will be to confer upon the curators of the museum's fifty sections an understanding of economic science that many eminent economists would envy.

c.) *Information Offices*. The ambition of the workers associations was not limited to creating Museums of Labor. As we pointed out above, the principle benefit of the *Bourses du Travail* was that of promoting the progress of all of them, and subsequently that of steering them away from practices recognized as sterile and suggesting more fertile ideas. Yet, quite understandably, each *Bourse du Travail* and even the Federal Committee itself could forget where various innovations had been elaborated most appropriately and with the most satisfactory results. Hence the need, if one does not want to burden each *Bourse du Travail* with the task, to create a central office, or, ideally, a vast number of local offices of economic information.

The initiative for this project came from *Solidarité des Travailleurs* of Bagnères-de-Bigorre. "The groups," according to *Solidarité des Travailleurs*,<sup>8</sup> "are formed only in the big cities, where an intrepid spirit makes the proposal and only gets a response when his idea is already being implemented. And although even then the project proceeds in the darkness, the groups multiply, with few or with many members, whose inspiration is found in their founding charters. In Marseilles, for example, a new initiative is attempted, some feelers are sent out, perhaps nothing is achieved, while in Lille, on the other hand, a similar project has already been implemented and functions regularly. The experiences of the North are of no avail at all for the South. By a precise assessment of this situation, we arrive at the idea of a social library. We asked ourselves: Will we not perhaps have to complement our education? Would it not be possible to measure the efforts made by our education to aspire to a better social condition? All the soldiers in our great army have felt some satisfaction at seeing so many results, despite the unfavorable environment in which the workers act. At the same time, they have witnessed and recognized the sterility of isolated efforts that do not spread to all the cities and the countryside. These recorded facts will result in infusing all the workers with a greater confidence in the future. When victory seems to be certain an army is invincible." Based on these observations, *Solidarité des Travailleurs* proposes the first social library, the first information office, and that "all existing and even disbanded groups (trade unions, trade union centers, mutual aid societies, and producers', consumers', credit and insurance cooperatives, should send us their statutes and documentation concerning the resources at their disposal and the results they have obtained. *Solidarité des Travailleurs* will assume responsibility for centralizing and organizing all this information. Each group will form a special section, and each group's secretary will be responsible for cataloging the material sent to him, for studying as carefully as possible and with the most attention to detail all the information he receives, for producing his own section's report, for investigating the seminal aspects which gave rise to the prosperity of certain groups and the cause of the demise of

groups which no longer exist.... Our library is also composed of books which address the social question ... which, by means of the organization of a circulating library, we will loan to those groups that wish to consult them.”

One may note the economy of time and effort that has allowed the *Bourses du Travail* to create a certain number of offices of this kind. We would also like to point out that this project is easy to carry out and that it will soon be completed by the reading material and the educational subsidies now made available to their members by the *Bourses du Travail*.

d.) *The corporative press*. Some *Bourses du Travail* publish monthly bulletins containing the minutes of their meetings and various statistics concerning their training courses, the trade union movement, etc. They also include the minutes of the meetings of the Federal Committee, since the latter no longer has its own publication after the discontinuance, in 1899, of the journal of social economy, *Le Monde Ouvrier*.

We must confess, however, that most of these publications, for which we entertain such high hopes, do not really understand or know how to carry out their functions. At most, two or three of them, the bulletins of Nîmes and Tours, and *L'Ouvrier du Finistère*, are to various degrees making efforts to contribute to the elucidation of economic and social problems. The others do not even have enough information about how the *Bourses du Travail* that publish them function.

The task confronting the secretaries of the *Bourses du Travail* is undoubtedly beyond their capacities, if not their good will, and we ultimately consider it to be fairer to emphasize the tasks they have fulfilled before pointing out their errors. The responsibility for their failures in relation to journalism, however, is altogether theirs, because it depends entirely upon them whether the bulletins are useful and interesting ... without any great personal effort on their part. All they have to do is publish the perhaps overly-documented reports of their study committees, or to recruit from among the members of their *Bourses du Travail* those valuable collaborators whom we have ourselves encountered and who have brought to light not just the living conditions of the workers, but also the vicissitudes of the trade unions, exposing their weak points and contrasting them with their strong points. Such people have enumerated their successes and carried out investigations of their defeats, in short, introducing those with little or no knowledge of the subject to trade union activity.

Villemessant revealed himself to be a psychologist on the day that he proclaimed that any man is capable of writing at least one excellent article. We have ourselves proven the veracity of this conclusive assertion by obtaining from workers who were at first thought to be incapable of such work, interesting monographs on groups and even studies on questions that arouse the enthusiasm of the proletariat. How many times have we published articles on the *Bourses du Travail*, whose first print run was reserved by the *Bourses* themselves, or copies of which the *Bourses* ordered later! That the corporative newspapers are not read is actually a completely understandable setback, since no one can be compelled to read publications that are without interest. It is up to the *Bourses du Travail* which publish them to give them adequate publicity: they effectively contain within themselves all the elements needed to create journals which would have no cause to envy the English or American corporative magazines. They should therefore begin the task of uniting all of these potential resources and thus adding to all the instruments of emancipation already at their disposal, the essential instrument *par excellence*: the newspaper, in which man, with his longings for a full life, is reflected.

e.) *Education*. The corporative groups' concern regarding a professional education provided on their own initiative is not a recent phenomenon. Without going back further than 1872 we can already ascertain that this was the goal of the founders of the "Workers Trade Union Circle" and that all the trade unions of that time enthusiastically endorsed this project. "If we go back to the origins," says the Report of the delegation of the Paris marble workers to the Lyon Universal Exposition (1872), "we note that since the beginning a central trade union school for professional design was considered to be necessary by a workers group. Other courses, considered to be useful for all trades, should be organized later, in accordance with the circle's resources."

"The first meeting concerning this objective was due to the initiative of citizen Ottin, a sculptor, who presented his proposal to the woodcarvers. Since the sketch of the design is of essential utility in this trade, the question was confronted with determination. Then the trade union center of the upholstery workers offered the use of their own local headquarters for holding the preliminary meeting for the planned school. ... In this way," the report continues, "the trade union centers which reciprocally borrowed the support of ideas and practical knowledge from one another, learned to recognize within their own ranks those individuals worthy of representing them and thereby made specific knowledge accessible to all by favoring the inclination of the more gifted as opposed to the less gifted."

As a result, however, of the scanty means at the disposal of the trade unions for organizing technical training, nothing much was achieved in this field prior to the creation of the *Bourses du Travail*. Almost immediately after the latter institutions were founded they began to make up for lost time and over the course of the last fifteen years, they have achieved veritable prodigies in regard to the matter of organizing and operating their adult training courses. We have already mentioned the opinion of Edouard Petit, who judged that the *Bourses du Travail* that offered such courses were deserving of the title of workers universities. Whoever has read the book published by Marius Vachon on industrial education in France will understand the justice of such praise.

Under the rubric of education, the *Bourses du Travail* can be divided into two categories: those which restrict themselves to professional, theoretical and practical training, and those which, more ambitiously (taking the lead in strictness over all the other *Bourses*), added an eclectic educational program, applied to diverse fields of knowledge.

We are not in a position to explain, or even to summarize, everything which has been done all over France to react, according to the expression of a member of the Toulouse *Bourse du Travail*,<sup>9</sup> against the dominant tendency of modern industry to transform the apprentice into a tool, an accessory to the machine, instead of an intelligent collaborator. Vachon devoted a large part of his work to this theme, and yet has not exhausted the topic. We shall limit ourselves here to mentioning some of the topics addressed by various *Bourses du Travail* and their views concerning the functions they aspire to fulfill in the field of education.

Among the *Bourses du Travail* of the first category we find those of Saint-Etienne, Marseilles and Toulouse. Marseilles created new courses: carpentry and cabinet making, metallurgy, shoemaking, tailoring, typography and lithography. Saint-Etienne, in addition to the latter two courses, introduced the following: geometry and architectural design, drawing for boiler-makers, tin-platers and lathe operators, and a school of design for carpenters; apprenticeship for weavers; sewing, home economy, and arithmetic; metal working, spinning, surveying and masonry. The most recent general statistics, from the 1899-1900 academic

year, indicate that for the period spanning October to July, 597 lessons of two hours each were taught. The average number of students was 426. All of these programs conclude by awarding prizes to the best students in each course offered by the *Bourse du Travail*, followed by a party (concert and dancing) whose financial proceeds are devoted to the acquisition of educational material for needy students, or for the children of the members of the *Bourse du Travail*.<sup>10</sup>

Montpellier organized five courses: shoemaking, sculpture, cabinet making, hairdressing and cooking. Toulouse, which enjoyed a considerable annual subsidy, offered twenty courses as well as a magnificent typographical training laboratory. The General Council of Haute Garonne budgeted 300 francs each year for awards to the best students, whose distribution was to be preceded by an exposition displaying the results of the work accomplished in the classes during the course of each year. The courses, which were also attended by soldiers, were inspected daily by the program's administrators. Furthermore, the courses were so successful that the *Bourse du Travail* planned to have their students enter the competitions held by the Ministry of Trade for the staffing of overseas exchanges.

Among the *Bourses du Travail* of the second category, we find Paris and Nîmes. In Paris, some of the trade unions affiliated with the *Seine Federation* organized, in association with the Polytechnic Institute—which contributed the teachers—courses on electric power, commercial accounting, stenography, drafting, applied chemistry and mechanics, algebra and practical geometry, commercial and industrial law, automobile manufacture and, finally, German and English. It would be superfluous to talk about the quality of these courses, the Polytechnic Institute having, in the way of educational materials, provided very valuable examples. What is doubtful is whether the students were capable of making much progress, and this was due to reasons attributable to the organization of the Paris *Bourse du Travail* itself.

In the *Bourses du Travail* of the provinces the courses were attended assiduously by the same people all the time, because these Bourses, unlike the Paris *Bourse*,<sup>11</sup> which was provided with large buildings within which the members could only relate to one another with difficulty and were separated from one another by large spaces, were small but stimulating focal points of trade union activity, in which the members could more easily and completely come into contact with one another, making it possible to offer the courses as if it were a real *school*, which the students were obliged, so to speak, to attend. In Paris, on the other hand, the trade union members, being after a fashion isolated from the administration of the *Bourse du Travail*, were unable to regularly attend their courses, which as a result resembled a sort of open lecture series. For this reason, the number of students is quite variable, their attendance sporadic and the results obtained less optimal than was desired. Elsewhere in Paris, the courses are exclusively theoretical. The excessive number of trade unions concentrated on the Rue du Château-d'Eau and on the Rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau (where almost every office is occupied by two organizations) precludes any thought of creating practical courses. For this reason many trade unions, particularly those of the Parisian typographers, mechanics, body shop workers, rope makers, carpenters, etc., decided to organize outside of the *Bourse du Travail* a notable vocational training program. The Nîmes *Bourse du Travail* is the one which has done the most in regards to the simultaneous development of both vocational training as well as a complementary educational program embracing various fields of human knowledge.

Its technical training includes arithmetic, geometry, mechanics, mechanical drawing, accounting, commercial geography, legislation, and the science of commercial products. The complementary educational program includes Spanish, medicine, and practical surgery. In addition, the *Bourse* plans to offer courses on political and social economy, hygiene, sociology and philosophy.

We conclude this brief summary of the training programs offered by the *Bourses du Travail* by recalling that Clermont-Ferrand, prevented until now from organizing professional courses due to a lack of resources, offers its members during every winter season lectures given by professors from the local university, which are very well-attended.

The results obtained by these various modes of the dissemination of useful knowledge can be inferred and we shall not attempt to provide evidence for them. What, however, were the outcomes of the results of these programs? What economic consequences did they have? This is what the *Bourses du Travail* were asked at the Rennes Congress. If on the one hand a general education, under any circumstances, can effectively refine man's sensibilities, technical improvement, on the other hand, amidst the conditions of struggle created by the hardships of existence, could only serve to reinforce man's own inclination, however understandable, to egoism; and in this case the *Bourses du Travail* had a contradictory function: by finally becoming workshop foremen or small entrepreneurs, the old students of the Bourses could end up as adversaries of the *Bourses'* own interests.

Furthermore, a very similar case had already arisen in some cities in respect to a proposal for training apprentices; and before the Rennes Congress had passed a motion establishing the principle that training in the *Bourses du Travail* should be for the purpose of improving the skills of adult workers and those youths *who had already entered the laboratories and workshops*, instead of training apprentices, the Toulouse *Bourse du Travail* was obliged to temporarily close its typography laboratory because the apprentices who had received their training there had, thanks to the wage differentials, replaced the adult workers in the typography shops of the city.

These observations help us to understand why the 1900 Congress later felt obliged to determine the facts concerning the following situations:

1. Whether, within the jurisdiction of each *Bourse du Travail*, the professional training courses have contributed to an increase in wages;
2. Whether they have increased the technical abilities of the workers in general;
3. Whether the workers who have benefited from such programs have remained workers and still stand in a principled community with their comrades in labor, or have instead gone on to form a reserve contingent of foremen, managers, labor supervisors, etc.<sup>12</sup>

The Congress responded in the affirmative to these three questions, and recognized that, far from hindering the efforts undertaken by the working class in favor of the collective and simultaneous emancipation of the workers, the professional training programs initiated by the *Bourses du Travail* produce beneficial moral and material results.

But our ambition did not stop at that point, and the high standards achieved by the training given in the *Bourses du Travail* gave birth to our desire to slowly but surely bring it about that all the *Bourses du Travail* should have schools which would provide courses situated between grammar school and the "modern" or "special" instruction received in secondary schools and institutes.

Do these proposals perhaps surprise our readers? Your surprise will be all the greater when we tell you that the greatest problem presented by this idea is not the length of the daily sessions (Demolis has convincingly claimed that the four hours in the classroom and the six hours of “study” imposed in some of the schools we know, are two-thirds superfluous), or even recruiting teachers, but the acquisition of the indispensable financial resources. Nonetheless, and without relying too much on problematic municipal subsidies, we may perhaps find these resources in the formation of educational cooperatives. It is unnecessary to add that, in case this project is successful, the *Bourses du Travail* will become classic libraries inspired by socialist principles.

Otherwise, as far as education is concerned, any audacity is legitimate. The courses taught by the *Bourses du Travail* have not only resulted in the production of “good workers”. They also provide the opportunity to distribute prizes, as was pointed out in 1889 by the administrator of the Saint-Etienne *Bourse du Travail* responsible for their distribution. The awards have the benefit of providing a stimulus for those who attend the courses.

“They are aware of the difficulties inherent in the initiation into any kind of skill and they understand the importance of these hours of study, which prepare them for the struggle which intelligence must prosecute against brute matter: the man who knows this has more self-respect ... and to the extent that he is conscious of its value, this ennobles rather than brutalizes his labor....”

“The more knowledge we possess,” adds an editor of the newspaper *L’Ouvrier en voitures*, “especially concerning the manifestations of social life, the more power for resistance and attack we shall have to oppose to our oppressors ... and I believe that by teaching as much as possible we bring ourselves closer to the ideal towards which we strive, which is the total emancipation of the individual.”

### 3. *The Propaganda Service.*

What are the different forms of propaganda conducted by the *Bourses du Travail*? And in what domains are these forms of propaganda employed? These are the two questions we pose at the beginning of this section. But in order to provide an adequate answer to these questions it is first necessary to identify and then to illustrate the workings of the two facets of workers trade union activity.

“The working class,” we have said elsewhere,<sup>13</sup> “pursues a dual objective: first, protecting itself against immediate exploitation, shortening the working day and fighting against the ‘starvation wages’ to which it is reduced by an economic system in which the constant and progressive cheapening of the products of labor does not hinder capital in the ever more zealous pursuit of its own growth; secondly, laying the building blocks for a social state in which, whether by means of the scientific and impartial determination of the ‘value’ of things (the collectivist theory) or by way of the suppression of all ‘values’ (the communist theory), all men will be counted upon to contribute to production and where, as a result, the collective effort will make it possible for each to contribute in accordance with his individual potential, assuring everybody’s existence and rendering the administrative and political machinery instituted to impose respect for privilege superfluous. This dual objective necessitates a dual activity and a dual form of workers association.”

“For the direct exploitation of which the proletariat is the victim there are but three possible *palliatives*: the resort to centralized power—whose interest lies, in order to preserve itself, in attenuating rather than abolishing economic crises—which will necessarily be

obliged to intervene on behalf of justice, whenever an attempt at oppression is brought to its attention or is denounced; the strike, or, which is the same thing, the refusal on the part of the workers to offer the use of their arms or their minds in conditions which they consider disadvantageous; and violence, which is, ultimately, the only thing which can put a stop to violence.”

“But due to capitalist exploitation, which is translated into an excessively long working day, in wage reductions, in the replacement of hand labor by machine labor, etc., in the context of professions which all have their own particular situations and characteristics, it is not easy for the workers to themselves minutely examine, each of them on his own (despite the interconnection of all social phenomena), to what extent and with what means they can effectively combat their oppression.”

“For example, in relation to the development of machinery in their own industry, they must study to determine what the length of their working day and the amount of their wages should be; they should calculate how far their demands can go without risking the closure of their factory. In short, the workers will have to assess as precisely as possible the reality of their immediate interests and the need to preserve the instruments of their own existence. These considerations gave rise to the first form of corporative association: the regional, and then the national and international federations of the workers in the same trade or that of workers in different trades brought together for the conquest of bread.”

“At first glance, the national trade union or trade federation, whose objective is the economic improvement of the workers’ conditions, the perfecting of the social order, and the extension to all of an equality which is only theoretically universal, seem to provide an answer for all these needs and seem to be in a position to exclude any other kind of association. Why, then, do the workers strive to complement them with organizations of another kind? Because they understand not only that labor unity can never be too strong and that it must be sought by every available means, but also that exploitation will definitively and always dominate the social domain until the moment that the stake is fatally driven into its heart. It is therefore not enough to attempt to restrain its repressed instincts. It is necessary to overcome them by abolishing exploitation itself.”

“Just as exploitation only exists by virtue of the commodity character conferred upon exchange, it will disappear if the fruits of labor, instead of being commodities, are exchanged solely in accordance with the needs of consumption. The workers—some unaware, others acting on the basis of social conditions—at the same time that they organize to put up fragile defenses against an inevitably increasing oppression, must also organize to reflect upon their own condition, to understand the elements of the economic question, to grow stronger culturally and materially and to make themselves capable, in a word, of the emancipation to which they are entitled....”

So it was that, as opposed to the trade federation, the federation of the whole array of trade unions was formed. The workers grouped by trade for the defense of their immediate professional interests thus occupied a broader terrain, in order to avoid the incoherent or “particularistic” efforts of purely corporative action.

The functions of the trade associations and the national trade unions therefore consisted primarily of identifying the problems in each trade and studying the necessary means to defend the worker against wage reductions, lengthening of the working day, the economic slump caused by new legislation, and the introduction of machinery, etc. Among these means, the most important is to get as many members of the local trade groups (“corporations”) to join the trade unions, since the significance of this number lies in the assurance it provides the trade unions in their efforts to make their demands heeded. Then came the problem of the strike, which the trade federations tend to regulate and generalize, recognizing the impotence of partial strikes or strikes called without due consideration.

As for the federations of trade unions, i.e., the *Bourses du Travail*, their mission includes research into the working conditions in the entire area of their jurisdiction and studying the means to improve them, as well as the establishment of mutual aid services and job placement offices, the dissemination of professional and economic information, collecting statistics on production and consumption, and, finally, the adaptation of those institutions which are susceptible of joining them, especially the corporative societies, both as regards the character of their members as well as the socialist goals they advocate.

a.) *Industrial Propaganda*. We will dispense with an explanation of what we mean by the industrial propaganda of the *Bourses du Travail*, as we have dealt with it already above. In brief, it comprises all the services we enumerated above: mutual aid services and educational services, besides the effective participation of the trade federations in certain strikes and the search for methods of carrying out agrarian and maritime propaganda, concerning which we shall speak momentarily. The number of *Bourses du Travail* as well as the number of trade unions which are members of the *Bourses*, along with the number of workers federated in these organizations, testifies to the success achieved on this terrain.

b.) *Agrarian Propaganda*. The idea of carrying out agrarian propaganda occurred to the Federal Committee in 1896, when the Committee was already busy, as we said above, with the consolidation of the existing *Bourses du Travail*, prior to an attempt to create new ones. A campaign to extend the urban workers movement beyond the confines of the cities was then considered. Having become enthusiastically convinced of the need to undertake such a project, two questions were submitted to various socialist personalities who were long-time advocates of agrarian propaganda:

1. What were the reasons for the mediocre results obtained from the organizational efforts undertaken until now among the agricultural laborers?

2. How should one go about organizing these workers into corporative groups? The following response, provided by an ardent propagandist, summarizes the points made by the other respondents, contributes a solution to the problem and finally makes possible an attempt to cultivate activities in the rural field whose application has until now been limited (understandably enough) to the industrial field.

“The (socialist) agricultural trade unions,” declared Arcès-Sacré, “were hardly formed when they were dissolved because the founders of these groups, with the happy results obtained by the urban industrial trade unions before their eyes, believed that they must use them as models.” This was an error. In order to reach their goal it was necessary to take into account the particular working conditions of agricultural labor and to also keep in mind the way these conditions varied from place to place, depending on whether the farms in each vicinity were

dominated by large estates or were instead divided into many smaller parcels owned by the majority of the population.

Those who worked on the large estates—carters, herdsmen, shepherds, employees of the ranches or farmhouses, mowers, and beet harvesters—all work, depending on the season, between ten and fourteen hours each day. Most of them eat and sleep on the farms. At eight p.m. the doors of their dormitories are closed and no one is allowed to enter or leave. Sunday is their only holiday. Those who look after the cattle and the horses also get a little freedom on the job.

As for the wage laborers of the small and medium-sized farms, their servitude is similar to that of their counterparts on the large estates. But mixed with these wage laborers, we also find the former landowners who still have their villas and a few plots of land. This category, once numerous, is today declining at a surprising rate because it can only survive by paying such low wages and providing such miserable living conditions to its laborers that would be rejected today by a city worker. As a result, the children of these farmers nourish no other ambition than to learn a trade that would allow them to get an industrial job, or to join the army, or else to secure a place among those thousands of low-level and blue-collar employees the State maintains on the rolls of the civil service. Today, however, more than a few of these farmers have started to think: socialism—which was not so long ago considered to be a social crime—today appears in their eyes as a lifeboat. There can be no doubt that the peasant class will be the first to enter our ranks.

We must, however, add that one indispensable matter remains to be settled in order to assure success in the plan to create agricultural trade unions: that is, that these trade unions must not be composed solely of agricultural laborers, but also of independent craftsmen. The agricultural trade unions must above all admit into their collectives the workers of the various trades who work with the farm workers, who are needed for the farms' operations and who constitute anywhere from one-fourth to one-third of the rural population. This is why the trade unions should assume the title of *unified trade unions of agricultural and industrial workers*. The laws governing trade union membership permit this combination and there is considerable interest among our supporters in their creation. We have effectively proven that the industrial workers in the agricultural field include: millers, carters, blacksmiths, shoemakers, and even wine salesmen, who generally comprise the most important categories among the socialist contingents in the rural districts. They are almost always the *most resourceful* and the most active. Candidates for political office are well aware of this, as it is precisely among these categories that they recruit the personnel for their electoral committees. We shall make use of their abilities for a higher purpose....

Having said this, we see how the agricultural trade unions can function in the districts dominated by large farms employing many wage laborers. Here it is not necessary to require the members to attend weekly meetings: the migrant farm laborers could not participate in weekly meetings. For this reason, meetings will have to be held monthly.

Along with the problems posed by itinerant farm labor, it will always be impossible to get a large number of members to attend meetings. Many fear that their ideas will come to the attention of their employers and that they will be fired. The only way to provide them with a sense of security and to at least get them to participate to some degree in the socialist

movement, may be the following: in any village where the membership encounters obstacles which prevent them from attending meetings—or believe such obstacles to exist—they will nominate a secretary as their delegate, who does not have any direct connection with the trades of the membership. This delegate would be responsible in particular for consulting the trade union members about the issues scheduled to be discussed on the meeting's agenda and representing all the members who are unable to attend. However imperfect this system may be, we see it as the only practical solution. This delegate will recruit new members in his district; he will be responsible for the distribution of propaganda and circulars, and also for correspondence and newspapers tailored to the needs of the membership.

The trade unions of each federation will be united in a federal committee composed of special delegates from the trade unions. This federal committee, which will have its own seat in the regional *Bourse du Travail*, will have the mission, among other tasks, of maintaining contacts with the other federal committees of the various *Bourses du Travail*, so that the serious issues agitating the socialist world will quickly be brought to the attention of all the workers.... With such a plan the objective of the federal committee was facilitated; all that remained was to note the new developments as they arose, adding the indispensable observations which make it possible to materially distinguish the socialist trade unions from the other kinds and to prevent them from occasionally contradicting the purpose for which they were created.

First of all, the Committee eliminated from the list of those eligible for membership all owners of property consisting of more than 16 hectares of mixed crops, plus one hectare of grapes, because these owners, even if they have the same problems as their colleagues, and may even live in more impoverished conditions than the sharecroppers or the tenant farmers, too often repudiated any kind of solidarity of interests in confrontations with the small landowners, and otherwise lacked the motivations of the tenant farmers to sustain a corporative struggle. Under these circumstances, the Committee preventatively issued a dual program for the trade unions: economic action and socialist propaganda. "The trade union," it stated, "will concern itself with the conditions of labor and will strive not just to maintain but to raise the wage level by all possible means; it will intervene in the debates and the conflicts that will arise between the employers and the workers, and will try to obtain the best conditions from the employers, it will strive to get jobs for its members, so as to achieve the gradual *reduction* and then the *disappearance* of public *hiring*; to spare its members the payment of court costs, it will demand of the arbitration committees responsible for the amicable resolution of disputes between the workers and the employers, that they not be the exclusive judges of such conflicts."

"Concerning the conditions of the sharecropping parcels and the rented farm plots, it will compile all possible data on the prices of land in the region in question, the total amount of the rents and the net yield of the land; with this data it will create rent tables and, in general, will provide the tenant farmers, sharecroppers and leaseholders all the information of a statistical and legal nature which will allow them to enter into disputes with the landowners on equal terms; it will demand of the smallholders that they not employ, where necessary, operatives, day laborers or domestics unless they *accept their rules in advance, establishing by mutual agreement the wages to be paid.*"

"It will organize and encourage collective labor contracts: transporting to neighboring markets the greatest amount of produce with the smallest possible number of animals, carts and personnel; collective grazing on communal lands and fields; the formation of

cooperatives for manufacturing butter, cheese, etc.; organizing the use of threshing equipment. In a word, it will proceed to encourage as many collective organizations as possible to help lower the cost of equipment and tools, of transportation and land, and to raise the awareness of all the members on the subject of the collective acquisition of implements, seeds and fertilizers, as well as locating the purchasers of agricultural products in order to put them into contact with its members.”

“It will support the interests of its members in the matter of wages, before the arbitration boards, and in case of accidents which result in disability, fraud, etc., and it will assume responsibility for enforcing the judgments pronounced; it will grant money advances to those of its members who cannot wait for the execution of a judgment passed in their favor; it will make all necessary efforts, not only to prevent its alienation but to see to it that the communal legacy is augmented.”

In this section, which concerns trade union action properly speaking and which reflects the dual desire to offer the agricultural workers all the advantages of association as well as to familiarize them with communist practice, the Committee adds the following article, which yet more clearly emphasizes the latter concern: “In order to advance the moral development of its members, the trade union will create a library. It will also organize periodic conferences whose purposes shall be to:

“1. Point out the advantages of the trade union from the point of view of the immediate improvement of the conditions of the workers;

“2. Explain why this improvement can only be temporary and why it is subordinated to the worsening of the fate of other groups of individuals, and thus showing that the goal of all producers associations is the suppression of individual property;

“3. Explain how the economy works in society and show that at the same time that the new production methods increase the general wealth, the number of those who possess less than is necessary is growing considerably;

“4. Demonstrate the advantages of association and of labor in common with the aid of machinery, both in relation to the increase of production and the reduction of costs.”

Finally, in a Preamble attached to the statutes, the Committee, investigating the reasons why “income from the land is constantly diminishing”, insists once again on the communist goal of the trade union. Given the permanent decrease in the value of the products, each year reducing the level of income yielded by each hectare, “the financial situation of the cultivators cannot be maintained except in conjunction with a continual proportional extension of their property. But this extension is only within the reach of those farmers who have the necessary capital.... Then the economic crisis makes it necessary for the lands in production to yield more crops in inverse relation to the decrease in the prices of the crops, with the consequence that those farmers for whom this increased yield is impossible are ruined, because of a lack of capital, and also restricts the number of small tenant farmers who accept living under the conditions imposed upon them. Can the small farmers avoid this necessary outcome? No, the Committee concludes, because on the day that all the important agricultural estates affected

by the association of the poor peasants “are threatened with a reduction in the incomes of the rich landowners, the latter will get organized, as is happening in Belgium and Germany” and in this struggle based on financial means, the estates with the least capital will succumb. So, what good will the efforts proposed by the Committee actually do? To demonstrate by experience “the advantages to be gained from work in common” and (once it has been proved that the capitalist system prevents any enduring improvements in the fate of the human collectivity) to make the workers of the countryside lose “their blind as well as senseless love of small-scale private property.”

How, then, is this method to be applied? The city workers know little of the country workers, and in addition profess a certain scorn for them, as if work on the land was not the very source of life. For this reason, if the *Bourses du Travail* want to introduce socialism into the rural areas, they will have to begin by training specialized propagandists well-acquainted with the conditions of existence of rural life and the economic problems affecting agricultural production; then it is necessary not to put these propagandists directly into close contact with the farm workers, which might engender a certain amount of distrust, but with the workers in the satellite trades of agriculture who, since they live in the rural areas, have the trust of the farm workers.

They should therefore form study commissions which, without ignoring the economic problems originating in industrial production, will pay particular attention to agricultural issues; the reports produced by these commissions should be discussed in periodic meetings of the full membership, with the reservation that, in order to prevent these discussions from assuming a superficial character, they should only take place during the next meeting after the reports are presented. This would make the *Bourses du Travail* propaganda schools of incomparable power, and they would therefore be in a position to henceforth match the influence exercised over the rural population by the landowners. As was pointed out at Toulouse (1897), the farm worker may possess the spirit of communist cooperation in a greater degree than the city worker: this spirit resides, by dint of his arduous labor, in his fervent desire to replace a precarious property with a stable one, and numerous and quite curious proofs of this have been provided, especially in Belgium and Germany. Thus, if the *Bourses du Travail*, patiently and skillfully, without wanting to force the course of events, make contacts with the farm workers, they will attract new soldiers to the proletarian army, soldiers who will be hard to convince—this is true—but who are gifted, once they have decided, with a tenacity and a valor that will withstand every trial, as was in other times demonstrated by the Vendée.

The methods whose guidelines we have just outlined above, among others, were immediately seized upon by several *Bourses du Travail* and put into practice. The *Bourses* of Narbonne, Carcassonne and Montpellier formed trade unions of agricultural workers. The *Bourse du Travail* of Nîmes tried to win over the agricultural trade unions of Gard and also undertook the technical and theoretical training of special propagandists. Afterwards, it made an effort to federate the agricultural trade unions won over to its cause in the cantonal *Bourses du Travail* and thus succeeded in bringing about the compact and definitive association of the rural workers with those of the workshops and factories.

Finally, who has not heard of the admirable propaganda campaign carried out by the Nantes *Bourse du Travail*, in conjunction with that of Brunelliere, to organize the vineyard workers of the lower Loire? Have not the socialists of Nantes provided obvious proof that, far

from signifying the satisfaction of base instinct, socialism is an inevitable stage of evolution, because it has found a receptive audience and enrolls members even in the fields of Brittany, which is reputed to be hostile to all innovators?

c.) *Maritime Propaganda*. The agricultural workers are not the only ones who must yet be won over to the cause of the workers. There are still the sailors and the fishermen to be addressed.

When one speaks of sailors, one also evokes the image of the *flesh merchant*. But what does *flesh merchant* mean?

“Walking through the crowded streets of Bordeaux or Marseilles,” writes Edouard Conte, “you will see, painted on a shop window: ‘*Tizio, maritime business*’. You enter the tavern. Inside it looks no different than any other tavern, except that parrots and other exotic birds are chattering and singing in cages, and on the walls are paintings of sailing ships. The owner of the tavern appears as soon as you enter. She is a woman of about 50 or 60 years of age, most often horribly ugly. She has a snub nose, or is missing an eye, besides having one shoulder higher than the other. All over her body there are tufts of hair which, in the dim light, appear to be white or grayish. In short, she looks like an old prostitute from a third-rate whorehouse.” “Through a door which opens upon another hole, girls come and go, laughing or singing, carrying plates and jugs. They are the hotel’s waitresses. The only male member of the staff is a young man of cheerful aspect, 30 to 35 years old, the old woman’s lover, who is quick with his hands, especially when a quarrel breaks out.”

“Such is the joy with which the sailor is welcomed practically even before his feet touch land. In fact, the parasite, the man-hunter, or *pisteur*, as he is called, jumps aboard the ship to get at his quarry and immediately approaches his man, loads his belongings in a wheelbarrow and nets him like a fish.”

“The sailor tells him: ‘I don’t have any money. All my savings are gone. The ship-owner will not pay me again for three days.’” The *pisteur* knows this and responds that his business has faith in honest men. Everything is settled. From that moment on, no one is more pampered than the sailor. The old woman calls him ‘my boy’ and speaks to him in the most affectionate terms. The man who is good with his fists offers him cigarettes. The waitresses welcome the recent arrival with such abysses of love that only a sailor could fill.”

“Are you thirsty? The whole kitchen is at your disposal. The chocolate that one of the women brings you in the morning to dispel the effects of her nightly ministrations is really extraordinary. The bill is there to prove it. They present it to him at the end of eight days and it takes more or less all the money in his wallet. More or less, because it would be too humiliating if he did not have to pay. Then, charitably, they loan him 10 or 15 francs.”

“‘Ah!’ says the sailor, waking up, ‘it is time to seek another ship’. ‘Another ship?’ asks the horrible old woman, whose smiles and doting solicitude suddenly disappear, while the waitresses swear to everyone that they have all been virtuous and well-behaved—‘You are going to sign on again? Here is the man who will take care of that,’ she says, pointing to the arrogant thug who does everything for her. In effect, he is also a job placement agent, that is, when his client is ruined he intervenes to get him back on his feet. But this will not happen without his obtaining another bit of profit: that is, at the very moment when the re-enlisted sailor receives his advance pay. Then he will have to pay the requisite commission as well as the advances so generously conceded by the hotel to the shortsighted and naïve sailor. ‘These

boys,' says the old woman, 'if you don't push them out the door into the street, they would spend their whole life here!'"

"The sailor is a good boy, naïve, resigned and fatalistic. He pays and boards another ship.... Nonetheless, he understands that he has been cheated on the bill and intimidated by the bouncer at the inn. Then he submits a complaint to the police. It is well known that the latter are on the side of those who fleece the sailors, since their fruitful connivance does not go unrewarded. If the victim persists in his efforts, they throw him in jail for having violated the local traditions!"

Such is the exploitation to which the sailor is subjected, who is a man when judged by his muscle-power and his physical endurance, but is still a child in his reasoning power.

Alongside the sailor one finds the fisherman, who suffers the same experiences as his comrade and who is treated very badly by the cannery owners and ship-owners. The latter made the deep sea fishermen (who fish the seas off Iceland, Newfoundland and the North Sea) believe that it would be better to be paid by the month instead of when they set sail, and after they lured the fishermen from their ships with an agreement to pay them 150 francs per month, and after having taken the fishermen's hemp nets, acquired at the cost of great sacrifices, and replaced them with cotton ones, owned by the ship-owners, the fishermen are gradually reduced to receiving salaries of 80, 70 and even 50 francs per month. As for those fishermen who wanted to go into business for themselves, how could they succeed, when fish is selling at such ridiculous prices and also taking into account the fact that the fish must be salted and iced to be sold, and that the means needed for salting and icing the fish require a considerable amount of capital? This is why these fishermen are obliged, unless they want to throw these products of such difficult and dangerous labors into the sea, to hand them over at any price to the ship-owners, who are often also the cannery owners.

As for the sardine fishermen, the strikes they have conducted during the last few years have made their poverty a matter of public knowledge, and it was necessary for them to reach the point where it is practically impossible for them to survive in order to get them to stir from their customary resignation and passivity. Since 1895, in particular, there has been much agitation among the Atlantic Coast fishermen. Since then a certain number of them participated in the strike movement among the cannery workers that has raised the already old question of the suppression of the old systems of canning and the introduction of canning machines in some factories. This exceptional situation led the fishermen to carry out other actions on their own behalf as well.

And the time was certainly ripe. In addition to deep poverty, made worse every year by an absolute scarcity or an excessive overabundance of fish, both equally disastrous, the fishermen were also plagued by the maneuvers of the cannery owners and ship-owners to halt the decline of the fishing industry. Among these maneuvers there are several which deserve further comment in order to provide a demonstration of the ineluctable antagonism which exists between the producer and the middleman.

Some of the successes achieved in 1895 by several recently-formed fishermen's trade unions led to the formation of corporative associations throughout the coastal regions and inspired

the idea of using them to ration the supply of fish. For this purpose the fishermen decided: some would go out to sea only once a day and would remain ashore on Sundays; others would go to sea every other day; others, finally, would throw their surplus fish into the sea. Various other procedures were to be utilized in conjunction with the methods outlined above in order to increase the price of fish. But the cannery owners thought of means of defense against these tactics, among others the “Signature”; that is, the signed commitment on the part of the fishermen and the cannery workers to under no circumstances join a trade union, and also the organization of cartels in suitable locations, above all at the wharves of Port Louis, notifying all the local industries of the price charged for fish. Finally, steam-powered ships were used to insulate the industries from the pressure applied by the sailors’ associations.

The fishermen’s efforts to paralyze production were still not defeated. In 1896 the struggle continued with more determination. Could one say that it obtained favorable results? No, and this by virtue of the quantity of fish caught, since a series of fortunate hauls could be followed by numerous completely insignificant catches. It also seems that the efforts of the fishermen were doomed to fail because their coalition is always forced to yield to the combination of the retailers and fish dealers. As for the fishermen, steam-powered vessels are increasing in number and will eventually ruin the coastal population, if the fishermen do not find a way to free themselves from the power of the ship-owners. In reality, many fishermen, impelled by their deepening poverty and seeing with each passing year that the fish are tending to be located farther offshore, want to scuttle their sailing ships and enlist with a steamship. The pay is another inducement, which is relatively higher than that previously paid to such crews: the sailor receives about 72 francs, plus two percent of the proceeds of the sale of the fish, along with other profits, amounting to a total of about 120 francs per month. But as the number of steamships and, consequently, their capacity, increases, not only does the wage level decrease, but this development also renders the fishermen who still have sailing ships absolutely incapable of freely setting the price of their fish.

Despite this situation, the Federal Committee of the *Bourses du Travail* would have deferred any kind of propaganda in favor of the sailors if two facts were not brought to its attention: the first was the creation in Marseilles, Bordeaux, Nantes and Boulogne-sur-Mer of “Sailors Homes”, quite well-financed by the municipal councils, the chambers of commerce and the ship-owners of these various cities, but which sold their hospitality at the same price as was charged for the same services in other localities; some were closed to foreign sailors, some had sparse accommodations, and were uninviting in appearance. It must be asked: What is the meaning of these “Sailors Homes” if they are not institutions that could become part of either the *Bourses du Travail* or the corporative societies? And one must also ask: Why shouldn’t the *Bourses du Travail* consider using their capacity for organization and propaganda by contributing their administrative experience to the corporative societies for the purpose of uniting the industrial workers and the workers of the sea?<sup>14</sup>

The “Sailors Homes” under government administration impose serious inconveniences upon the sailors. Certain perhaps vulgar habits must be curtailed, the sailors must submit to interrogations by people who must be treated with respect and, in short, these places assume in their guests an overall demeanor that only a liberal education can produce. Yet if the workers had offered them a place of refuge with the most expensive food and lodging, where they could come and go as they please and where they would be treated with sincerity and frankness, that relations with the workers would thus be facilitated, then perhaps the sailors,

feeling that they were in a fraternal environment, living among not censors but indulgent friends, would frequent such rooming houses.

This was the first fact that caused the Federal Committee to set in motion a propaganda campaign among the seafarers. The second fact was the attempt to form, in several fishing districts, an association whose purpose would be “to create, in all the fishing districts, cooperative warehouses devoted to distributing at cost price the foodstuffs and tools which are necessary in the fishing industry; to cooperatively sell the produce of the catch to the consumers or their principal merchandise without intermediaries, at local auctions; also, to build new model ships, providing the members with the means to successfully contend with foreign production; also, to equip any fishermen’s district with steamships. And in connection with this, shouldn’t the *Bourses du Travail* perhaps intervene among the fishermen, provoking the creation of cooperatives which, acting in conjunction with the *Bourse of the workers consumers societies of Paris*, would assure the direct sale in the “General Markets” of the products of the catch?

Such were the proposals approved at the Fifth Congress of the *Bourses du Travail*, held in September, 1897 in Toulouse.

The proposals were sympathetically received, according to the Committee’s report. Nantes, Saint-Nazaire and Le Havre were in favor of them. The effort required, however, was too great, especially taking previous failures into account. Seamen had already tried to organize in the past. Unfortunately, this category of workers was from time immemorial most concerned with spending its time ashore in a release of its surplus energy accumulated during its voyages and it was therefore hard to pin them down. Until now, at least, it has not been possible to get them to participate in socialist labor activities. The “Sailors Homes” themselves confess in their recent reports that “they have not recruited as many clients among the sailors as they had hoped.” We have also been told that the corporative society has enough on its hands with its struggle against the commercial coalitions without also further dispersing its energies in other projects.

The Federal Committee of the *Bourses du Travail* has not, therefore, obtained in relation to the organizations of the sailors and the fishermen, the satisfying results which have been obtained by the propaganda carried on among the peasants, but it is not dismayed, because it knows that time is the best teacher and because the fishermen, who had not foreseen their predicament, seem to have figured out for themselves the benefits which the sort of associations the committee thought of providing for them were capable of delivering. The region of Le Croisic has for the last two or three years had a cooperative society that is now thriving. Others were in the process of being formed throughout the other coastal regions. The most recent maritime strike in Nantes has provided an impetus for the organization of the sailors and fishermen of the villages between Nantes and Saint-Nazaire. Bordeaux has three maritime trade unions. The mission of the *Bourses du Travail* was thus simplified and no one doubted that this contagious example will help the cause of corporative association, which embraced a large number of industrial workers, and which already has affected numerous peasants, and will soon finally attract their comrades in labor and in struggle, the sailors, thus completing the general organization of the proletariat.

d.) *Cooperatives*. Propaganda among the sailors, as we said above, requires the collaboration of the *Bourses du Travail* and the cooperative societies. If the *Bourses* must effectively contribute exceptional means of propaganda, education and job placement in the formation

and operation of the “Sailors Homes”, the cooperatives can only offer their indispensable commercial and administrative know-how. Now, it must be recalled how scornfully the trade unions treated the cooperatives for so many years; this is why we shall be asked how is it possible that those same trade unions can today reach an agreement for joint action with yesterday’s enemies.

The fact is, that at the same time that the cooperative societies, having experienced the general evolution of the workers associations, broke more or less openly with the mean-spirited practices which had caused them to censure first the socialists and then the positivists, the trade unions perceived the necessity of completing their day-to-day struggle by means of an intervention in the economic field, and not to just work for protecting wage levels, but also for the elimination of the causes of the weakness of the wage’s purchasing power. This simultaneous evolution of the cooperatives and the trade unions thus necessarily led them to reach an agreement.

Something that accelerated this process was undoubtedly the founding of the “Workers Glassworks”, where cooperators and trade unionists are found side-by-side, to the great surprise of Jaurès, which led to the expression of serious reservations in the meetings of the *parliamentary* socialist movement. From then on the cooperative societies have not ceased to express their sympathy for the trade unions, and the latter for their part have devoted themselves to the spread of the cooperative societies, in production as well as in consumption. Do we need to provide examples of the sudden moral transformations in the *workers* cooperative society, managed exclusively by workers? Here are some, which we quote from the survey of producers cooperatives published in 1897 by the Ministry of Trade. First, a comparison is drawn between the *numerical* strength of these associations in 1885 and in 1895. We are informed as follows:

“The year 1885 marked the high point of the old cooperative movement; the year 1895, on the other hand, marks the full ascendancy of the new cooperative movement and, although we must resist the temptation to pretend to be able to predict the future, we should recall that, in comparison with the figures from 1881, we get an even more favorable impression.”

The associations no longer limited workers, properly speaking, to collaboration with the management, but opened up to the workers all the positions at every level, who thus ceased to be mere workers. This included, for example, accountants and “technical advisors, trained by their studies for the performance of diverse industrial and commercial functions.” Hence the meaning of the new term: integral association....

As for the matter of working conditions, many associations applied and even surpassed the decisions approved by the corporative congress. The cooperative society of the Paris upholsterers implemented the eight hour day and paid nine francs. It took a stand against piecework, except in the case where a worker did not contribute a normal amount of production in a day’s work.

The cooperative society of ice-cutters of Paris acquired and distributed, free of charge, in the neighborhoods near their “workshops”, all the products necessary for feeding their staff. They also worked eight hour days, like the upholsterers.

The advisory chamber of the producers' society did not need office space. It issued the declaration that it "managed in an anarchist way".

The mining enterprise at Monthieux established an eight hour day, and abolished piecework.

As for wages, the survey arrived at a precise statement. The average wage of the *associates*, it states, is as high as 1,410 francs per person; that of *auxiliaries* as much as 1,160 francs. This difference in pay only results from the entry into the consortium of a limited number of large associations, "the majority of which," states the survey, "pay equal wages for equal work." The cooperatives, at the end of each fiscal year, divide up only a relatively insignificant part of their profits among themselves; the rest is usually left in the cooperatives' accounts for mutual aid services or pensions.

In 21% of the cooperatives, their members are *obliged* to join the trade union of their profession. 36% were established for the purpose of paying rates already determined by a "chart", or trade union rates.

Of 215 societies, 110 have prohibited piecework; 10 share out their profits without distinction among associates and auxiliaries, and in proportion not to the amount of work done *but to the hours or days worked*. It is unnecessary to add that these ten societies reckon all work on a daily basis.

We must finally note that the consumers cooperative of the Seine department, in imitation—although in a more generous spirit—of the example set by the producers societies, formed an association called the *Bourse du Travail of the workers consumers society*, whose operations and tendencies were similar to those of the *Bourses du Travail*.

As the permanent liaison between the trade unions affiliated with the *Bourses du Travail*, and then called upon to guide them in the formation of cooperative societies with outdated statutes, which are therefore dangerous for the neophytes of cooperation, the Federal Committee was obliged to sooner or later propose to the *Bourses du Travail* that a study should be undertaken for the purpose of the requested reformulation of the statutes. In 1898, the Rennes Congress examined and accepted the following modifications:

"1. Abolition of all piecework.

"2. Replacing the proportionate wage with the egalitarian distribution that then prevailed in most typographers' societies' partnerships.

"3. To put an end to the different treatment of associates and auxiliaries.

"4. That the producers' cooperatives should seek their clients among the consumers' cooperatives."

Do we need to comment on these reforms? In regard to piecework it is obvious that, since it was condemned by all workers congresses, the *Bourses du Travail* had to begin by forbidding it in the cooperatives which they funded and sponsored. As for the organization of what the typographers call egalitarian partnership, this consists of dividing the price of each product by the number of partners who have collaborated in its production, so that all of them receive equal returns per hour of work.... The group in the partnership, which could include *all* the

workers in a workshop or factory, for the purpose of assuming the egalitarian distribution of the proceeds of bad as well as of good work, is freely formed and administered; they are themselves responsible for the division of labor, which for the most part does not entitle anyone to any supplementary pay, and also prescribes the minimum amount of production (always calculated on the basis of the ability of the average worker) which must be accomplished within a given time period by each member of the partnership.

This procedure, as we see, is essentially communist and was invented, in our judgment, by the disciples of Proudhon. The skilled worker who in a ten hour day produced what the average worker produced in eleven or twelve hours is entitled to no more than the worker who has produced less. And even if it may appear that under these conditions there is no incentive to produce more, in reality such overproduction was advantageous for all because it increased their hourly pay. With this system the newest partners, or the oldest, benefit from the general effort without the more vigorous or more skilful workers being able to put forth arguments for reducing their own work rates.

The suppression of any distinctions between the associates and the auxiliaries will have the effect of equalizing the profits obtained by each worker for both the members of the society and the temporary employees. This equal pay already exists in most producers cooperatives. Finally, this fourth reform has the purpose of protecting the producers' cooperatives from the reduction of sales prices (which is the source of wage reductions) to which they are subject, especially at the beginning of their existence, as a result of the attempt to secure a stable customer base. This reform was inspired by the example of the *La Conciliation* association of shoemakers of Limoges, which was founded after having reached an agreement with the *L'Union* consumers cooperative (700 members), which agreed to "accept the entire product line, imaginatively and spiritedly produced, at retail price, minus an 11% discount."<sup>15</sup>

Finally, we shall add, by way of general information, that the *Bourses du Travail*, desiring that the instruments of production should be social property (indivisibly and inalienably) and not the property of groups of workers (even if these workers comprise the totality of the workers of any particular trade), tried to create, in regard to cooperative production, not a form of alienable capital, which some workers would sooner or later divide among themselves, but a capital which would gradually return to labor, considered as a moral person, the whole public wealth.<sup>16</sup>

These are the foundations upon which the *Bourses du Travail* will henceforth form cooperative societies. If one takes into account the considerable number of federated workers, the significant number of isolated trade unions which aspire to join the Federation, and all those people who will sooner or later join cooperatives, one can conclude that within ten years the French cooperative movement will be totally transformed.

- <sup>1</sup>The *Bourses du Travail* found jobs for half the job applicants and filled four-fifths of the available positions. One *Bourse du Travail*, Marseilles, found jobs for almost 21,000 workers in one year (1895), and half of them acquired steady work.
- <sup>2</sup>Documents in Appendix not included in the Spanish language edition of the book.
- <sup>3</sup>The government promised to permanently and methodically conduct studies on the job openings for State employment from the departments and communes, that is, it promised to assure that when a workshop closed, another one would open, so that the workers who lost their jobs in the former, instead of being compelled to enter into competition with their

comrades in private industry, would quickly find another job. Among other things, this would permit the “most rapid possible allocation of credit which the departments and communes believe would be suitable for devoting to the completion of their public works.” If this promise is not kept the problem of unemployment will certainly not be resolved, and only particular crises will be attenuated.

- 4.To the credit account assigned to the producers cooperatives (Note by Maurice Pelloutier).
- 5.It would be interesting to know the number of workmen placed by the office, but such information cannot be obtained. In France, the *Bourses du Travail* provide the worker with a form which he sends to a business owner, who, by returning a section of the form to the director of job placement, is supposed to report whether the worker and the business owner have reached an agreement. But the directors of job placement only receive these forms sporadically.

It may be objected that the worker or the owner is deterred from complying with these aspects of the employment report because of the five-centime expense of buying a postage stamp. But the *Bourses du Travail* in Belgium have the same problem, even though in that country the report only consists of a pre-stamped postcard with the following words: YES/NO. (Note by Maurice Pelloutier).

- 6.One should not, however, think that the number of job openings would increase at the rate that might be expected at first glance. In reality, what the Office of Statistics actually registers is not the total number of vacancies in every city, but the number of jobs which local labor cannot fill.

It must also be pointed out that the number of job openings decreases as winter approaches, which can easily be explained: on the one hand, by the temporary desire on the part of some workers, who were migrant workers a few months before and will be migrant workers again in the spring, for stable employment; on the other hand, by the increase in the number of unemployed workers. (Note of Maurice Pelloutier).

- 7.And this was done in such a way that the Office was able, in June of 1900, to help the workers of Le Havre, by delaying the receipt of appeals for labor made by that city.
- 8.The *Plan de bibliothèque*, by Suberbie, secretary, in *L'Ouvrier des Deux-Mondes*, No. 19, p. 298.
- 9.Raynaud: *Etude sur l'enseignement professionnel*.
- 10.Report read at the Congress of 1900.
- 11.Let us recall, in regard to this issue, that originally the Paris municipal council included, under the nominal aegis of the Labor Center, not only a central labor center, but also a certain number of satellite institutions, spread throughout the capital. This was the best system.
- 12.Concerning this last point, it was feared that the investigation approved at the Rennes Congress (1898) would prove to be difficult, and even fruitless, because the *Bourses du Travail* were not in the habit of enrolling their own students in the first place; yet if it also had the result of showing the usefulness of that practice, and thereby allowing all the *Bourses du Travail* to know and to follow the experts of various professions in their vicissitudes, the investigation would have provided an excellent result.
- 13.*Les Syndicats ouvriers en France*, Paris, 1898.

- [14.](#)Fifteen years ago we ourselves, in collaboration with a fireman with the “General Transatlantic Company” by the name of Provost and a commander named Servan, advocated the creation in France of Sailors Homes in Saint-Nazaire.
- [15.](#)*Les Associations ouvrières du production*, Vol. 1 of 8, published by “L’Office du Travail”, 1898.
- [16.](#)For example: The Workers Glassworks. But the system at the Workers Glassworks was still plagued by inconveniences: first of all, the producers cooperatives were kept *autonomous* and this is unfortunate because, regardless of what was done, the producers society, due to the fact that it was always at a disadvantage compared to the purely capitalist system of exploitation, could never realize the cooperative socialist concept; in addition, this system made it difficult *in practice* to determine the use to which the factory’s eventual profits should be put. What then should be done to both abolish the producers cooperatives while at the same time preserving cooperative production and rapidly fulfilling the destiny of cooperative labor, granted its usefulness? A very talented young writer, A.D. Bancel, seems to have found the solution to the problem by proposing that all socialist efforts should from now on be devoted to the development of cooperative *consumers* societies, so that the latter will rapidly be obliged to produce for themselves in their own cooperative establishments, as much as possible, if not all of the products we need. In this way the economic antagonism, the fruit of competition, which exists between corporative associations as well as private firms, will disappear and a normal circulation can be established between production and consumption. Later, we can move towards the progressive replacement of cooperative producers societies, created without thought, without plan and without specifications, with a precarious existence and so many barriers to entry, with cooperative establishments that would be both *the property and the work* of always-open consumers collectives. This theory, derived from a study of the English cooperative movement, deserves careful consideration, which shall be carried out in Bancel’s next book.

## Chapter 7 - The federal committee of the bourses du travail

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### Chapter Seven

### **The Federal Committee of the *Bourses du Travail***

The Federation of the *Bourses du Travail* is represented by a Committee whose office is located in Paris, which is composed of one delegate from each affiliated *Bourse du Travail*. To qualify as a delegate of a *Bourse du Travail* one must be a member of a trade union, have the means and the free time necessary for the punctual execution of one's mandate, and have demonstrated an interest in the development of the *Bourses du Travail*.

At first glance, it may seem surprising that one can be a member of the Committee or, which is the same thing, one can be called upon to administer the general interests of the *Bourses du Travail*, without actually being a member of a *Bourse du Travail*. This anomaly is explained by the fact that the Committee's office is in Paris and that the European corporative organization functions excellently.

The Federation declares that there is no *Bourse du Travail* in Paris. According to the Federation, a *Bourse du Travail* can only be the general association of the trade unions of a city, which freely administers the funds and the properties placed at its disposal by the municipality. *There is not, nor can there legally be*, in the properties at the Rue du Château-d'Eau and the Rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau, any kind of trade union association which enjoys prerogatives of that kind. These properties are administered by, and the municipal subsidy<sup>1</sup> is under the control of, the prefect of the Seine; furthermore, the association of trade unions formed when these properties were opened (1896) renounced the right to assume the name of the Paris *Bourse du Travail*.

These groups, known by the name of the "Trade Union Association of the Department of the Seine", were, of course, admitted into the Paris Federation of *Bourses du Travail*, but there are two reasons that militated against the *automatic* designation of members of the "Seine Association" as delegates to the Committee. The first (since eliminated) was that the Association had its headquarters on the Rue du Château-d'Eau, and that the Parisian trade unions dissatisfied with having to refuse the expected hospitality, no longer wanted to be part of a group that had accepted it. The second reason is that the Association rejected all the illegally-formed trade unions and the Federation could not prevent excellent trade unions from participating in its labors, trade unions which were guilty only of holding a particular point of view on the laws of March 21, 1884.

This is why, the Committee having established its headquarters in Paris, it was enough for a person to have exhibited conduct which was clearly devoted to the development and activity of the *Bourses du Travail*.

Apparently, there were no rules concerning the recruitment of members of the Committee. Each delegate designated the trade union militants of his acquaintance who could represent a *Bourse du Travail*, and the secretary published a list of the names he had been given, which was sent to all the *Bourses du Travail* which did not have a representative or had just joined the Federation. As a result of certain accusations it was agreed at the Congress that it should be the secretary who should draw up, to the greatest extent of his abilities, the list of the candidates for delegates on the basis of their political affiliations, so that the *Bourses du Travail*, if they thought it would be appropriate, could elect representatives whose opinions matched those of the *Bourses du Travail*.

This, however, only ratified a very old tradition. Since certain members of the local Parisian council of the *Federation of Trade Unions and Corporative Groups* had tried, in 1894, with more or less legitimate methods, to take over a committee which was thought to be very important, the secretary, nominated in 1894, always strove to maintain a proportional

representation of the various socialist views professed in the Committee and also tried to guarantee that each *Bourse du Travail* should have a representative who would reflect its point of view, so that the Committee would reflect as faithfully as possible the Federated *Bourses du Travail* which it represented.

Forty-eight *Bourses* joined the Federation.<sup>2</sup> Most rejected any political affiliations and it is among their representatives that one must seek the authentic libertarians in the *Bourses du Travail* who, despite the reproaches of many socialist schools, have quietly made decisive contributions during the years covered by this history towards reigniting individual initiative and to the growth of the trade unions.

Three *Bourses du Travail*, whose members were to various degrees affiliated with the (Blanquist) revolutionary socialist party, are represented on the Federal Committee by members of the revolutionary socialist central committee.

Finally, a dozen *Bourses du Travail*, of the “Alemannist” tendency,<sup>3</sup> are represented on the Federal Committee by members of the revolutionary socialist workers party.

No *Bourse du Travail* professes the theory held by the (Broussist) Federation of Socialist Workers. As for the five *Bourses du Travail* which are to one extent or another influenced by the policies of the “French Workers Party”, on the day that they realize that the headquarters of the Federal Committee will never be transferred to the provinces and that it will never therefore be subjected to their influence, they will abandon the Federation.

The Committee does not have its own office nor does it even have a president for its headquarters. A secretary handles any questions pending (this secretary is paid 1,200 francs per year),<sup>4</sup> with the help of an adjunct secretary and an official treasurer. All its sessions begin with a reading of the previous session’s minutes as well as any correspondence; it then proceeds with a discussion of the problems raised in the correspondence or brought up on the agenda proposed by the delegates. No votes are held, except in the rare case when insoluble differences of opinion arise. The meetings are held twice a month and last from 9:00 p.m. to midnight.<sup>5</sup>

The abolition of the role of president and of the useless votes was adopted only after the libertarian delegates joined the Committee. Experience soon convinced the members that, among serious and objective men, there was no need for constant external discipline and surveillance, since everyone made it a question of honor to respect the principle of free debate and also (without for this reason abandoning any principles) maintaining the debates on a high level.

Between 1894 and 1896, the *Bourses du Travail* of Lyon, Grenoble and Toulon made every effort to denounce this “anarchistic” tendency and to get every Federal Congress to transfer the Committee, either to a city in the Provinces, or to the site of each year’s Congress. What Homeric debates we held with our adversaries at the Congresses of Nîmes (1895) and Tours (1896) to prevent their proposals from being adopted! What delicacy we had to employ to save an already-threatened association, so as not to shatter a harmonious diplomacy!

“You cannot think about moving the Federal Committee to the provinces,” we stated, “because you will find that, no matter what provincial city you propose, it will be impossible to recruit the delegates needed to form it; it is not right, while the State concentrates its own means of defense, to disperse our forces, because it will always happen that, just when the outgoing members of your committee have mastered skills which are difficult to acquire, it

will be necessary to find successors for them, who will have to undertake administrative training from the beginning.”

“We are,” we concluded, “undoubtedly federalists; undoubtedly, we must not cease to demand communal autonomy, the separation of powers, the reduction of central authority. So, should we also apply these demands to ourselves? Evidently not, unless we want to make ourselves the victims of our own errors. Joint efforts to weaken the exploiting class, to wrest from the central power some of its authority today, some of its jurisdiction tomorrow, a particular prerogative some other day: this is effectively our mission; but at the same time that we are working to weaken our enemy, to bring about the disintegration of governmental centralization, the proletariat must also work to concentrate its own force to continuously increase its chances of victory and to hasten the advent of the social transformation. Once the revolution is complete there will be no more State and centralization will therefore disappear.”

The supporters of transferring the headquarters of the Federal Committee responded that by participating in the administration of the affairs of the Federation the small cities would acquire the administrative abilities which they unfortunately lack, and that such a transfer of operations would free Paris from the accusation of keeping to itself all those who had gone there; and besides, they argued, the provinces had a certain number of flourishing Committees of trades federations, and that, finally, the decentralizers had the duty to experience, at least for one year, the organizational capabilities of the provinces.

The *Bourses du Travail* did not at all welcome these objections, first of all because they noticed that they were hardly sincere and were instead inspired by political passions, and also because they held ideas about the problem of centralization and federalism which were more practical than sentimental.

In effect, the *Bourses du Travail* are profoundly federalist, and would have certainly denounced the pact of federation had the Committee attempted to dictate what they had to do, or had imposed top-down solutions by attributing itself with legal powers, transforming itself, in a word, from the information and correspondence office that it was, into a ruling committee.

The *Bourses du Travail* have not only never authorized the Committee to do anything but carry out a preliminary study of issues of common interest (studies and issues in relation to which they reserved the ultimate right to accept or to reject the Committee’s conclusions) but they likewise considered their congresses only as centers where the instruments of discussion and work were forged. We could also cite cases where the *Bourses du Travail* rejected certain deliberations. Nonetheless, it will be understood that, in order to be of use, the Committee had to have its headquarters in Paris, and to keep it there so that this would not signify any kind of adherence to a centralizing policy but would be the result of the need to prevent the Committee from falling into the hands of a new political sect every year (which would definitely have taken place if the Committee had been transferred to the provinces), as well as to keep it in direct contact with the life of society, to keep the door open for it in respect to economic events, and to fortify it with the strength of the other corporative groups in Paris; in short, it has to be located where it can inform itself rapidly and accurately concerning all public events of any interest.

This is why the *Bourses du Travail*, when directly consulted on this question in 1897, vehemently reconfirmed the decision previously accepted at the Congresses of Tours and Nîmes. Since then, an annual debate on whether or not to transfer the Committee has no longer played any role in the agendas of the Federal Congresses. Has the Committee taken unfair advantage of its victory? Its working methods can tell us.

All the Federal meetings, as we said above, are devoted to:

1. Questions posed by correspondence;
2. Proposals put forth by the Committee;
3. Proposals from the *Bourses du Travail*.

The questions posed by correspondence generally concern administrative procedures and are of minor importance, and it is rare for the Committee to purely and simply limit itself to approving what the secretary has elaborated.

But it sometimes happens that thorny questions of trade union doctrine as well as socialist principle will emerge from this source. For example: should itinerant peddlers or people who only occasionally work for wages, be accepted into a *Bourse du Travail*? Should someone who, for whatever reason, has left the trade union of their profession be admitted into another trade union on the pretext that there are workers from both trades in the same workshop, or, in other words, that the two trades work together in the manufacture of the same product? Should a militant whose profession does not have enough members to form a trade union nonetheless be allowed to be the secretary of a *Bourse du Travail*? Can a trade union devote a portion of its funds to the creation of a mutual aid service, despite the protest of a certain number of its members? One can observe how, on the one hand, such questions involve the principle of the class struggle, considered not as a dogma (the corporative organizations are not infected with theory and their empiricism, expressed in a few words, is equal to that of any other system and, furthermore, is as long-lasting and as precise as an almanac), but as a means of self-defense against the invasions of the *petit-bourgeois* socialists; finally, such questions are adopted to the structure of the trade union organization.

Of course, these problems were, as always, resolved in the most libertarian manner and the resolutions were distributed to the *Bourses du Travail* under the aegis of a purely informational mailing, leaving it to the judgment of each *Bourse du Travail* whether or not to implement the Committee's resolutions, in the light of whether the arguments put forth by the latter seemed coherent or not.

The proposals of the other two categories are more important and demand not just assiduous study, but also on certain occasions extensive surveys. We saw, for example, how the Committee went about preparing to implement a project like the travelers aid service.

At the Congress of Tours (1897) a *Bourse du Travail* proposed that the Federal Committee be responsible for establishing a common travelers aid service for the federated *Bourses du Travail*, so that an unemployed worker from any trade would be able to find in every *Bourse du Travail* the moral and material accommodation which would protect the workers from the self-interested influences of the capitalist.

In order to bring its efforts to a good conclusion, the Committee began by investigating the bases upon which this travelers aid service was established and operated by the “*Union compagnonnique du Tour-de-France*”, “*La Fédération française des Travailleurs du Livre*” and the “*Société générale des Chapeliers*”. Then the Committee proceeded to compose a draft proposal which was submitted in 1898 to the Congress of Rennes. Despite arduous debate, the Congress, fearing the consequences of coming to a decision under great pressure, returned the proposal to the Committee for the purpose of printing it and immediately sending it to the *Bourses du Travail*. Today, the *Bourses du Travail* have made their wishes known: almost all of them accept the proposal, some would like to modify it, and only a few have resolutely declared that it would be impossible for them, due to a lack of resources, to take on the burden of a travelers aid service. It does not matter. Unlike what happens in other places, all the *Bourses du Travail* which accept the proposal are themselves responsible for establishing the ways and means of implementing it. And as for those which do not want to or cannot undertake immediate steps in that direction, no majority will violate their autonomy. Example alone, following the traditions of the Federation of the *Bourses du Travail*, leads them to develop their functions so as to join their predecessors on the terrain of solidarity, or to understand the usefulness of the *viaticum*.

The absence of collective despotism which characterizes the Federation is yet more vividly manifested in the projects established at the initiative of the Federal Committee.

Once the Federal Committee considered that the moment had arrived for undertaking special propaganda in the countryside, it sought to provide the *Bourses du Travail* with a kind of guide for forming agricultural trade unions which could be adapted to every particular locality. It therefore consulted the propagandists familiar with the life and customs of the peasants, in order to obtain from them the exact guidelines we have outlined above and to compose the model-statutes shown in the appendix [not included in the Spanish edition—Translator’s Note].

What meaning, then, do these statutes possess? Do they constitute a code for rural propaganda? In a sense, they do. They merely constitute, although at a highly advanced degree of elaboration, guidelines which the *Bourses du Travail* are authorized to use insofar as the circumstances of time and place allow.

Thus, the *Bourses du Travail* among themselves, and the Committee in its relations with the *Bourses du Travail*, are nothing but intermediaries that reciprocally offer one another the theoretical and practical means for their mutual development. The *Bourses du Travail* which are faltering or which are suddenly deprived of receiving their subsidies are assured of receiving the necessary grants to enable them to securely construct their own independent existence. The *Bourse du Travail* that needs to know the procedures employed and the results obtained in any field of propaganda or on any particular information pertaining to a certain region, receives the most complete satisfaction from the other *Bourses du Travail* or from the Federal Committee.

But it must be repeated that no information or guidelines contributed by the Committee or by the annual Congress have ever been considered to be obligatory. And it is undoubtedly to this freedom of inquiry and choice, to this kind of method, to this faculty exercised on the part of each *Bourse du Travail* in adapting to its environment, that the extraordinarily rapid growth of these institutions is due.

Despite what we have just said, and despite its efforts to collaborate in the spread of the *Bourses du Travail*, the Committee is in no position to render all the services which it may seem to be able to offer. On the one hand it lacks the resources needed to publish a newspaper, equipped with the corresponding editorial committee, which the Federation could of course expect; it also lacks the means to create a Museum of Social Economics, in which all the *Bourses du Travail* could be inspired to form their own sections and depict their professional training; and, finally, it lacks the means required to organize a circulating library with information on training, legislation and methods of propaganda.

Not having these various services at its disposal, the Federal Committee is currently only a slow and defective correspondence office, whose actual usefulness, perhaps, does not justify its expense. But it does have a future ahead of it and the labors it has carried out in the past allow us a glimpse of those which it might realize tomorrow.

- 1. When it was still in effect, which is no longer the case at the time of this book's publication, because the 110,000 francs credit granted to the *Bourse du Travail* was cancelled by the newly-elected majority of the municipal council (at the meeting held on December 29, 1900)—or, which is more precise and amounts to the same thing—the allocation was withdrawn from the administrative committee of the *Bourse du Travail* (Note added by Maurice Pelloutier).
- 2. At the present time there are sixty-five. (Note added by Maurice Pelloutier).
- 3. Named after Jean Allemane, the socialist deputy. At that time the socialists were divided into various currents, one of which was composed of the supporters of Allemane. Among the others were the Blanquists (supporters of Blanqui), the followers of Jules Guesde, and the Possibilists or "Broussists" (followers of Henri Brousse). (Note from the Italian edition). But let us refer to the following text for clarification:  
"These two groups (Allemanists and Blanquists), and especially the former, dominated the Paris *Bourse du Travail* after a brief period characterized by the supremacy of the moderate fraction of socialism, represented by the *Federation of Socialist Workers*, currently known as the "Possibilists" or the "Broussists". It was this latter group which had been responsible for gradually leading an important group of workers who subscribed to the socialist ideology to the trade union ideology. The 1890 split, led by Allemane, was the origin of the formation of the *Revolutionary Socialist Workers Party*. It is thus not so strange to see this man fervently advocating the general strike, the supremacy of trade unionism, and, in general, associating himself with a workerist ideology."  
"In 1895, even before the opening of the Congress of Limoges, Fernand Pelloutier published the first of a series of articles in *Les Temps Nouveaux*, edited by Jean Grave, the official spokesperson of anarchism, devoted to an appeal to the anarchists to join the trade unions.... In the first article, which appeared on July 6, 1895 under the title *The Current Situation of Socialism*, Pelloutier maintained that the situation was characterized by progressive clarification and that very soon there would be only two socialist parties, the first Marxist and parliamentary, which would be composed of the Broussists, Guesdists and Blanquists, and the second revolutionary, composed of the Allemanists, the syndicalists, and the libertarian communists." (Jacques Juillard, *Fernand Pelloutier et les origines du syndicalisme d'action directe*, pp. 120, 132; Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1971).

- 4.After March 22, 1901, the date that Fernand Pelloutier was replaced, a permanent service was instituted in the *Bourse du Travail* central committee, whose officer, comrade Georges Yvetot, receives a daily salary of eight francs. (Note added by Maurice Pelloutier).
- 5.After the Congress of Nice (September 17-21, 1901), the meetings were held only once a month, on the second Thursday of each month. (Note added by Maurice Pelloutier).

## Chapter 8 - Conjectures on the future of the bourses du travail

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### Chapter Eight

#### Conjectures on the Future of the Bourses du Travail

##### Conclusions

Since 1894, the Federation of the *Bourses du Travail* has retained its character as the only vigorous French organization. If it was true that during the previous era, that is, the period between 1887 and 1894, the *Bourses du Travail*, reflecting the “excited condition” of the workers groups which they in turn influenced, had given form, via a series of brilliant institutions, to the secret desire of the workers to reject any kind of tutelage and to nonetheless achieve in their own ranks the elements of emancipation, they were however incapable due to a lack of a sufficient knowledge of the other *Bourses du Travail*, to get a glimpse of the full importance of their own mission, the total scope of their initiative, and to accurately measure the perspectives which were open to their activity. This consciousness could only be infused into them by the Federation.

It has, on the other hand, often been asserted by the parliamentary experts that any social transformation is subordinated to the conquest of political power; and by the revolutionary experts, that no socialist initiative would be possible before the purifying catastrophe, so that the needs of the present have always been neglected: hence the incoherence of their institutions.

But when, during the period between 1894 and 1896, the *Bourses du Travail* considerably expanded the scope of their initiatives and their services, firmly establishing their own job-placement offices, unemployment assistance projects, subsidies for the unemployed, the sick and those injured on the job, and resistance funds for strikes, and began to provide themselves

with a complete array of technical training services and a well-stocked science library; when their study commissions succeeded in opening up to the trade unions previously unsuspected horizons, the *Bourses du Travail*, instead of working blindly and responding to circumstances with this or that improvisation, devoted their attention to the task of giving their propaganda a rational and systematic character. They surmised that all of their structures were connected by a mysterious bond. They confirmed that their initiatives—which they had themselves been unaware of—had spread to the greater part of the manifestations of social life and that, to various extents, this initiative had not only everywhere exercised a moral influence on the direction of the socialist movement, and more generally upon all social classes, but above all had brought to bear a material influence on working conditions.

The *Bourses du Travail* had themselves noticed that they exhibited surprising “faculties of adaptation to a higher social order”;<sup>1</sup> they understood that they were henceforth capable of elaborating the elements of a new society, and the idea, which had already been circulating for some time, that economic transformations must be the work of the exploited themselves, was combined with the aspiration to construct within the bourgeois State an authentic socialist (economic and anarchist) State, and to gradually eliminate the capitalist forms of association, production and consumption and replace them with the corresponding communist forms.

The following question was raised on the agenda of the Fifth Congress of the *Bourses du Travail*, held in Tours in 1896: *The function of the Bourses du Travail in the future society.*

“Should we perhaps start with the question of production, exchange and consumption in the future society,” the *Bourse du Travail* of Nîmes asked with respect to this question, “in order to inspire a new plan, and create a new doctrine? Or maybe, taking into account the important functions in which the *Bourses du Travail* are currently involved, if their resources permit a complete development of the *Bourses du Travail* everywhere, are we ready to place these organizations, at the culminating point of their complete development, in control of the social transformation? It seems to us that, for the moment, it would be preferable to contemplate the question within this framework.... It is advisable now to define, with as much precision as possible, the present and future functions assigned to the *Bourses du Travail*, which some consider to be most useful as intermediaries between the supply and demand of labor, while others consider them to be the seething vortex of the revolution....”

This is how the report written under the auspices of the Nîmes *Bourse du Travail*, presented by the comrades Claude Gignoux and Victorien Brugnier, would resolve the question as it was presented. What are the attributes of the *Bourses du Travail*, their presentation asked. First of all, one must know at all times, with precision and for each trade, the number of unemployed workers, in light of the various everyday causes of disturbance in the workers’ living and working conditions; then one must obtain through statistics, that new science called upon to assume an increasingly more important position in the life of society, “the living expenses of each separate individual, in comparison with their respective wages; the number of trades, and the number of workers in each trade, the quantities of the products manufactured, extracted or harvested in each, as well as the total number of products necessary for the feeding and upkeep of the populations in all the regions covered by the *Bourses du Travail*.”

“Let us assume for now,” the presentation continues, “that the *Bourses du Travail* have suitably discharged these functions and have conducted social and corporative action to a social transformation; what will they do?” And the presentation responds, “All the trades are organized in trade unions. All of the latter nominate a council, which we can call the workers

trade council. These trade unions are in turn also federated according to trade, nationally and internationally.”

“Property is no longer individually owned: the land, the mines, the means of transport, housing, etc., have become social property. Social property! Take note, this is not the exclusive and inalienable property of the workers<sup>2</sup> who operate it, because otherwise we would witness the emergence of conflicts within the corporative societies that would mirror those which are now carried out among the capitalists, and society would thus again be the victim of the competition of the corporative collectivity, rather than of individualist and capitalist competition....”

“Society needs a certain quantity of grain, and of clothing; the farmers and the tailors receive from society, either in the form of money while the latter still exists, or in the form of products in exchange, the means to consume or utilize the products manufactured by the other workers. These are the foundations upon which society must be organized in order for it to really be egalitarian....”

“The *Bourses du Travail*, knowing the quantity of products which they must manufacture, will inform the workers trade councils of each corporative society of this quantity, which will then employ all the members of each trade in the manufacture of the necessary products.... By means of their statistics the *Bourses du Travail* will be aware of deficits and surpluses within their zones; they will determine, in the light of these statistics, the exchange of products between territories that are especially responsible for each type of production. Thus, for example, Creuzot in metallurgy, Limoges in porcelain, Elbeuf for high-quality fabrics, Roubaix for ordinary textiles, various zones of our countryside for wines; objects will be produced through which each area’s population will be able to provide themselves with as much as is necessary for their physical upkeep and intellectual development....”

“Since the technical means are being improved, due to the fact that science is today making new conquests, the workers will then have a great immediate interest in following and intensifying the march of progress, enabling society to valorize the wealth and natural forces which our capitalist society is obliged to abandon: the social wealth will therefore be significantly increased. The same thing will happen with consumption, because no one will be obliged to go without food, clothing, furniture, or luxuries and art, those two essential factors in taste and intelligence....”

Finally, with a certain prudence mixed with a certain audacity, the Nîmes *Bourse du Travail* concluded as follows: “This all-too-brief summary can only give the members of the corporative movement an idea of the functions which the *Bourses du Travail* currently fulfill and those which they will exercise.... Hasty decisions will do no good. It is sufficient to methodically pursue the development of the institutions in order to reach the goal and to avoid many defections and a return to the past.... To us, who inherit the knowledge and the science of all those who preceded us, falls the task of ensuring that the many riches and benefits accruing to us from their genius do not end up by generating poverty and injustice, but the harmony of interests through equal rights and solidarity among all human beings.”

For its part, the Federal Committee of the *Bourses du Travail*, in its report on the same topic, stated:

“... the social revolution must therefore have as its goal the abolition of exchange value, of the capital that it generates and of the institutions that capital creates. We start from this principle: that the purpose of the revolution must be man’s liberation, not just from all

authority, but also from any institution which does not have as its essential goal the development of production. Consequently, we cannot imagine the future society in any way except as ‘the free and voluntary association of the producers’. What, then, is the function of these associations...?”

“Each one of them is responsible for one sector of production... They must inform one another, first of all, concerning their consumption needs and then of the resources available for their satisfaction. How much granite will have to be mined each day? How much grain will have to be milled and how many entertainments will have to be organized for a population of a given size? How many workers and artists will be necessary? How much material and how many producers will be necessary? How should the respective tasks be allocated? How much material and how many producers will be needed from neighboring associations? How should the warehouses be organized? How, once they are made, should scientific discoveries be used?”

“Knowing, first of all, the relation between production and consumption, the workers associations will utilize the materials produced or extracted by their members. Also knowing the quantity of the products of which there is a shortage or a surplus, they will canvass other regions, to seek what they need or what nature has not provided their regions....”

“The consequence of this new state of affairs, of this suppression of useless social institutions, of this simplification of necessary mechanisms, is that man’s production will be of improved quality, of greater quantity, and more efficient, so that he will thus be able to devote more time to his intellectual development.”

In this manner the ideal of the *Bourses du Travail* became even more noble, without which an ambition of this kind would seem rash, to judge by the initiatives which have already been implemented. In general, the sociologists, nourished more on reading than on observation, totally ignore what they have achieved and, consequently, what they could become—especially those which, becoming more numerous, exist independently of the “socialist parties” and have been freed from governmental fetishism. In a recent work, the socialist theoretician Bernstein, speaking of the “trade unions”, for which the English “Unions” undoubtedly appear to be the prototypes, as being most impregnated with the old unionist spirit, attributes to them an immediate mission and powers which no such association has ever entertained, and whose chimerical nature depicts all economic facts, even while he denies it, under the influence of the error or the narrow collectivist consciousness, by admitting their future role which was already eloquently defined by Bakunin who spoke of the federalist society of the future.

In Bernstein’s view, the trade union can and must be victorious over industrial profit in favor of wages. This can only be relatively true, within the limitations of the “laws of wages” which have been created by the capitalist mode of production and exchange. The power of the trade union is in any case neutralized long before the industrial profit no longer suffices for the capitalist to continue exploiting his business and, more understandably, long before this profit is reduced to the value of a worker’s wage. The cost of raw materials, the number of factories, the needs of the consumer, the need for available hands and a thousand other less tangible and less obvious, but equally important causes, prevent the trade union from exercising the influence it would like to exercise over wage levels.

At the same time, the trade union, contrary to Bernstein's views, cannot, and in fact it is not unaware of this fact, influence the situation of labor power over the market except within the limits established by the innumerable unforeseen and "unforeseeable" circumstances which make the market overflow with hands, tools or products in quantities above the needs of consumption. Nor, in this case, can the trade union do anything but periodically collect statistics on the demand for labor in the various regions, and thanks to these statistics, intelligently guide the workers in their search for jobs and avoid the undesirable concentrations of the unemployed in this or that locality, which cause the price of labor to decline. But to carry out a compensatory operation, that is, to thin out the ranks of labor in this or that place in order to raise the wage level, cannot be done by the trade unions due to the limitations imposed upon the workers by their poverty—even affecting the highest-paid workers—which lead them to take the first job they can get in order to survive.

Finally, no trade union is unaware of the fact that, by "acting on the technology of production", in other words, preventing the introduction of new machinery in certain workshops, or increasing the professional qualifications of the worker, merely constitutes a mediocre, temporary and naïve sort of attack on the normal economic situation. As for the machines, the trade union knows quite well that even if it manages to outlaw them, this would not redound to the advantage of the working class, but would be a reactionary development. The trade union now only carries out a defensive struggle. It also knows that any measure which has the effect of reducing the volume of production, except, of course, in the case of an interruption of supply, would be equivalent to a criminal conspiracy between the trade union and the capitalist against the consumer, and even in that case it would do so only under the pressure of circumstances and in self-defense.

On the other hand, however, how many trade unions still use such primitive means of defense? For example, do the typographers perhaps attempt to block the use of typesetting machines in France, the United States, Austria or Germany? Not at all; they limit themselves to requesting, as in Vienna, that in those businesses where such machines have been introduced, only typographers who have finished four years of apprenticeship in the same enterprise be employed, and that the typesetting be carried out in accordance with the so-called "conscious" system; that the working day should be eight hours long and that overtime be voluntary, etc.;<sup>3</sup> in short, they request that the machine should not reduce what in England is called the *standard of living*.

Why is it that we are interpreted in such an erroneous way—Bernstein's only merit being that he has provided yet more emphasis on the errors which are committed in relation to the trade unions—in regard to the nature and the level of economic knowledge of contemporary labor associations? Is this not due to the fact that, with an ignorance which would otherwise be comprehensible, the object of investigation and analysis is always taken to be the English "Unions", the only such organizations which in particular no longer deserve the attention of the economist and the sociologist, as a result of the alleged backwardness of some of them and the advocacy on the part of so many others for the concept of State Socialism? Because, and this must be pointed out, the *trade unions* possess robust resources, resources which are, so to speak, incalculable, for sustaining the struggle of hundreds of thousands of men; but these resources and this struggle are in proportion to the wealth and the audacity of the English capitalists as well as to the standard of living of the workers, while a French "Union" like that of the mechanics is victorious partly as a result of the stubbornness and partly as a

result of the violence of the capitalist coalition formed against the trade unions, the English “Union” has been so soundly beaten that it today renounces the wage struggle in favor of experiments in parliamentary battles.... Not only is it impossible for the English “Unions”, despite their impressive financial power, to use their money to defeat their employers, who are even richer than they are and are no less energetic, but their vast membership, the importance of their economic fund and their ingenious organization serve only to instill the trade unions with an ambiguous atmosphere composed of pride and the instinct for self-preservation, similar to that which animates the tens of thousands of persons, enjoying an illusory freedom, who attend demonstrations in Trafalgar Square or Hyde Park, and for whom it is enough to defend themselves against spontaneous acts of violence.

No, the English “Unions” no longer respond, and perhaps never will again, to the needs of the international proletariat, and we have the proof of this in the fact which is still unnoticed by so many who have written about the workers movement: in every country, with the exception of precisely England, the unions embracing one trade or even similar trades are inferior in strength and numbers to the unions which include diverse trades: *Bourses du Travail*, cartels, etc. What are the names of the well-known national labor associations? In Germany, the General Commission of Workers Societies; in Austria, the Central Union of Trade Unions; in Denmark, the General Assembly of the Workers Society; in the United States, the American Federation of Labor; in Australia, the Labor Federation of Queensland and the Labor Federation of New South Wales (the Australian workers propose, among other things, the formation of a labor federation of the British colonies); in France, the Federation of the *Bourses du Travail*.... So, perhaps England itself will attempt to create a general federation of *trade unions*? Not likely, and yet nowhere else are the unions of each trade as numerous or as well-organized, and France, in this respect, is also palpably behind the American “Unions”. Today, we base ourselves less on purely professional activity, of an individualist tendency, of which the old English unionism offers a perfect example, than on the organized activity of the various professions. And this is due to the fact that the trade unions, which are today more knowledgeable than they were before about the play of economic forces, have become aware of the fact that the situation of each industry, and consequently the situation of each trade union, does not really depend, as was believed for centuries, on particular circumstances for which no specific remedies exist, but is subordinated to the general economic situation, so that only the general activity of all trades would be capable of bringing about a greater effect in the social order, rather than provisional, minor and haphazard transformations.

If this is the case, then why, instead of expecting the workers associations—and by this expression we mean the cooperative as well as the trade union and the other institutions derived from these two basic groups—to provide what the social system refuses to offer, because money dominates all other forces—why do we not demand that they do what they are by their very nature necessarily destined to produce in the context of the future society? It is true that men who believe in the providential State, and for whom “scientific” collectivism consists of the master-State, want to interpret any forerunner of these free associations of men in such a manner, where the managed will more frequently discuss what is considered to be appropriate for the tranquility of their managers. Now, we should ask, how is it possible that so many love freedom, so many reject the centralizing system because its drawbacks outweigh its benefits, benefits which can on the other hand be just as well obtained by freely-

united human groupings, how is it possible, I say, that they should not come to understand that the corporative groups are the cells of the federalist society of the future?

If it is true, as all free spirits feel, that “authority is in permanent decline and freedom in continuous ascent”, that the peoples are becoming increasingly accustomed to living and acting outside the boundaries of the State, the consequence could not be more obvious: the current authoritarian system must give way to a system “in which the governing hierarchy, instead of being situated at the summit, will be clearly installed at the base...”<sup>4</sup> So, how is this system necessarily constituted? In the formation, upon the basis of the law of the separation of powers, intermediary groups, respectively sovereign and united, in such a manner and for as long as they are considered to be useful, by means of the freely-accepted federative pact.

What, consequently, are the conditions assumed by the trade union and cooperative associations? “They separate all powers which can be separated, restrict everything which can be restricted, allocate among the institutions and officials all which can be separated and restricted, and grant their administration all the preconditions for publicity and control”.<sup>5</sup> They are suitable by virtue of their professional training, not so imposing by virtue of their numbers for a member to complain about his voice not being heard, and open enough for a discontented member to pack up and leave in order to form a new association with other people, for well-determined reasons, to apply the federative principle as it was formulated by Proudhon and Bakunin.

These are the conclusions of our study. Now we know the origins of the *Bourses du Travail*, how they were formed, the services they provide as well as those which they propose to provide in the future, the functions—in a word—which they intend to fulfill in the political and economic organization of the present day. In light of all this, will anyone be surprised to learn that “they do not consider themselves to be only instruments of struggle against capital”, or as humble job-placement offices, but that they aspire to a higher role in the formation of the future social state? It is true, of course, that we must not be more optimistic than is warranted by the facts, and we confess that, in most workers, economic instruction, the sole sure guide for the workers associations, has hardly even begun. But have we not perhaps found in the intellectual communion which the *Bourses du Travail* alone can facilitate the key to the organic system of society, upon the basis of which everything else will have to be built, taking into account the time which will be needed to replace capital’s influence on the administration of human interests, thus establishing the only justifiable sovereignty: that of labor?

We have enumerated the results obtained by the workers groups in regard to education and have reviewed the program of the courses offered by the trade unions and the *Bourses du Travail*, a program from which nothing has been omitted which contributes to a complete, dignified and satisfactory moral life; we have observed the authorities who figure in the workers libraries; we have been impressed by this trade union and cooperative organization which is growing larger every day and embracing new categories of producers, an amalgamation of all proletarian forces into one solid network of trade unions, of cooperative societies, of norms of resistance. We shall see its interventions multiply daily in various social manifestations, this examination of the methods of production and the distribution of wealth, and we shall declare whether this organization, this program, if this tendency directed towards

the useful and the beautiful, if such an aspiration to the perfect flourishing of the individual, we say, does not justify all the pride which the *Bourses du Travail* feel. If it is true that the future belongs to the “free associations of the producers”, as foreseen by Bakunin, as announced by all the great events of this century, and also as proclaimed by the most skilled defenders of the current political regime, it will undoubtedly be in these *Bourses du Travail* or in similar institutions, open, however, to all those who think and act, where men will be found who will together seek the means of disciplining the forces of nature and putting them at the service of humanity.

- [1.](#) Claude Gignoux and Victorien Brugnier, *Du Rôle des Bourses du Travail dans la société future*.
- [2.](#) The term “inalienable” was evidently used in error, because it is not necessary to say that property which cannot be the object of speculation ceases to be property, that is, an arbitrary right, and becomes a simple usufruct. We also prefer “social property” to “inalienable property” because the latter implies the existence of a power responsible for preserving the social character of property, while the former can establish and guarantee the respect for social property by means of agreements between groups of producers, and particularly by means of the replacement of monetary exchange by the free exchange of products.
- [3.](#) *La Typographie française*, No. 428, August 1, 1899.
- [4.](#) *Du principe fédératif*, p. 81. Dentu, 1863.
- [5.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 83.

## Appendix - The bourses du travail: their creation and day-to-day operations

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### Appendix

#### **The *Bourses du Travail*: Their Creation and Day-to-Day Operations**

It would be superfluous to fully explain the role played by the *Bourses du Travail* in today’s economic relations, and that which they will be called upon to play in the future social organization. The rapid growth of these institutions, from nine *Bourses du Travail* in 1892 to

forty-three in 1895, clearly indicates that they constituted the link which has been vaguely sought after by the proletariat in order to confer upon the action of the trade unions in each city the unity needed for the work of the social revolution.

Isolated efforts are not only incapable of producing good results, but can actually cause disaster. This is why there is no use in organizing the majority of the workers by trade, if one cannot bring the various corporative groups together and get them to associate with one another and know one another and, upon this foundation, come to the conclusion that all social activities are interconnected, and that the most basic political and economic changes have, besides their visible effects—in accordance with the words of Frédéric Bastiat—other effects which only an in-depth examination will allow one to conclude that no trade can improve its own condition without damaging that of the other trades, and that proletarian emancipation is subordinated to the *simultaneous effort of all the workers* or, as it was asserted in the International, that the “social transformation will only be capable of exercising a radical or definitive effect by utilizing methods which would affect *society as a whole*.”

The *Bourse du Travail* has been such a school for social economy. It is undoubtedly due to the exchange of ideas within it that a profound development has taken place during the last few years in the spirit of the workers organizations. The controversies which the latter have engaged in have reinforced the conviction that the social question is exclusively economic, because, at the root of all misery, moral as well as material, we discover the lack of money and, at the origin of all oppression, the power of capital. They have also taught the futility of political promises and revolutions which have resulted in a change of regime, because such regimes only value what men in general value, since they have a deplorable tendency towards despotism. The *Bourses du Travail* have, so to speak, and in an incalculable way, hastened the hour of social transformation. It is therefore necessary to multiply the *Bourses du Travail*, and this memoir is intended to provide the means to achieve this end.

The method used for creating a *Bourse du Travail* varies, depending on whether the trade unions of a locality are isolated or are already associated in federative coalitions. We shall examine each case.

### **1. *Isolated Trade Unions***

In this case, the trade union secretary or any other citizen who is a member of the trade union convokes a plenary assembly of the trade unions, or at least of their administrative councils, and explains the usefulness of the *Bourse du Travail*.

In today's society the *Bourse du Travail* must be a society of resistance. A society of resistance against wage reductions, against the excessive prolongation of the working day, and also (without which the other benefits would be ineffective) against the increase, or more accurately, since the commercial mechanism renders such an increase inevitable, against the *exaggerated* increase in the price of consumer goods. Preserving, *to the greatest possible extent*, the equilibrium between the price at which labor power is sold and the price at which consumer products are sold, constitutes the *present* function of the *Bourses du Travail* and, in order to assume this function, it is necessary to wage war on capital, a war which will only come to an end with the disappearance of the current political and economic system.

If the assembly assents to the principle of forming a *Bourse du Travail*, it nominates a committee composed where possible of one representative from each corporative body in attendance, which is made responsible for carrying out the proposal.

The first matter which this committee must attend to is, on the one hand, the absolutely necessary expenses for the project, and, on the other hand, the resources upon which the future *Bourse du Travail* can rely.

**Expenses.** The services of a *Bourse du Travail* are: the Office of the Secretary, the Treasury, the Archives and the Library, the Job Placement Office, the General Registry of the Unemployed (where there is no unemployment relief fund) and, eventually, a travelers' aid fund, as well as the establishment of a professional training course. It is obvious, however, that the number of these services and their respective importance are subordinated to the resources at the disposal of each institution. Some *Bourses du Travail* have all of these services, but others have only organized some of them. Here we shall set forth the most basic balance sheet, assuming that the future *Bourse du Travail* will not be able to rely on external support.

1. Among indispensable expenses, we encounter the most important one, renting real estate. This rent must cover, at least: an office for the Secretary, and for the meetings of the General Committee and the Executive Committee; a room for the library and the archives, and two or three other rooms for *adjunct* meetings of member trade unions; the total rent for this workers center could be estimated at around 800 francs per year.

2. The costs of lighting and heat, calculated on the basis of two hours daily over three hundred days, taking into account summer evenings, Sundays and holidays, and the length and number of days the offices will be closed. This cost can be calculated to be approximately 1 franc per day, or a total of 300 francs.

3. The salaries of the officers of the *Bourses du Travail*: secretary and treasurer.

Some *Bourses du Travail* do not pay full-time salaries and, in this case, compensate their officers for only two or three hours in the evening for the purpose of addressing everyday questions, keeping correspondence up-to-date, maintaining the minutes, receipt of trade union dues and managing the library. Other *Bourses du Travail*, whose officers work similar hours, pay their officers an amount proportionate to the importance of the job, which is sometimes a fixed sum, and sometimes an hourly wage. In this second case the total pay generally approaches 300 francs per year for the secretary and 200 francs per year for the treasurer. Finally, the wealthiest *Bourses du Travail* have a *permanent secretary* and employ an accountant-treasurer for three hours each day. The usual pay rate is in this case one franc per hour. The number of hours required of the secretary varies depending on the importance of the task, but setting this question aside, the monthly expenses for the secretary's assignments cannot be less than 150 francs in cities with between 20,000 and 30,000 residents, 200 francs in cities with up to 100,000 residents, and eight francs per day in cities with more than 100,000 residents.

The maximum stipend therefore varies from 1,800 to 2,700 francs (an average of 2,250 francs) for the secretary, and from 900 to 950 francs for the treasurer. The permanent secretary's functions involve handling correspondence, recording the minutes of the General Committee (which the secretary attends in an official capacity, but without voting rights), keeping the registry of the unemployed, assessing the relation between supply and demand for jobs, and, lastly, administering the library (unless there is a comrade who would volunteer to do this without pay on evenings and on Sunday).

4. Pay for the building superintendent (a position which may be established at the discretion of each *Bourse du Travail*).

5. Office expenses, which may be estimated at 200 francs for the small *Bourses du Travail*, and 500 for the others (an average figure), per year.

6. Acquisitions for the library, an expense which is generally covered by a fixed monthly allocation.

7. Lastly, the expenses incurred by the professional training courses (acquisition of instructional materials and pay for the teachers). This service exists only in the most important *Bourses du Travail* and we shall not deal with it here. Nîmes, Saint-Etienne, Béziers, Toulouse, Marseilles, etc., can provide precise details concerning this matter. The chart below summarizes the average annual expenses for all categories of *Bourses du Travail*: [Chart Omitted]

**Sources of Income.** Generally speaking, in order to satisfy their needs, the *Bourses du Travail* must rely upon their own resources, that is, on the dues contributions from the trade unions. A *Bourse du Travail* with expenses of up to 1,600 francs, and which has from 700 to 900 members in 15 or 20 trade unions, could fix the monthly dues at 20 or 30 centimes per member, that is, an average of 10 francs per trade union. It is only in this way that the *Bourses du Travail* can maintain a high degree of independence in their relations with the public authorities and the private capitalists. We shall, however, briefly examine the subsidies which the *Bourses du Travail* should request and which they might receive.

Some *Bourses du Travail* receive a subsidy which is awarded in full in the form of cash and is deposited in the accounts of the General Committee itself or the Municipal Finance Commission. It is not our purpose to examine these aspects. Others receive their subsidies partly in the form of cash, and partly in other forms.

1. As for real estate, three procedures have been adopted. Sometimes the property is rented by the administration of the *Bourses du Travail* and the rent is paid by the municipal administrative office; or the property is rented by the municipal administration itself, when it is not actually owned by the municipality, and the rent is paid by the municipality or the *Bourse du Travail*; or it is sometimes the case that the *Bourse du Travail* will occupy one of the buildings in the municipal office complex itself.

The Saint-Nazaire *Bourse du Travail*, for example, makes its own choice of a building and the municipality pays the rent; the Boulogne-sur-Seine *Bourse du Travail* occupies an old school building owned by the municipality; other *Bourses du Travail*, such as Nîmes, possess buildings constructed for them by the local administration. Other *Bourses*, such as those in Le Puy, Narbonne, Saint-Chamond, Issy-les-Moulineaux, etc., have offices located in the municipal building itself.

2. Some municipalities pay for heating, lighting and office rent on the basis of accounts presented monthly by the administrative councils of the *Bourses du Travail*. This system, which avoids calculation errors and misunderstandings, is of great benefit for *Bourses du Travail* of modest means.

3. Besides the subsidies granted for the administrative operations of the *Bourses du Travail* (secretary, treasurer, rent, heat, light), the municipality may also grant extraordinary credits for job-placement services, for the acquisition of books and tools for vocational training, etc.

The following are the average subsidies<sup>1</sup> granted in the form of money or various materials to the *Bourses du Travail* of each of the categories defined above:

1st category—from 900 to 1200 francs;

2nd category—approximately 2000 francs;

3rd category—from 4000 to 8000 francs;

4th category—from 10,000 to 20,000 francs.

The first category includes the *Bourses du Travail* in towns with fewer than 30,000 residents; the second, those in cities with between 30,000 and 50,000 residents; the third, cities with between 50,000 and 80,000 residents; in the fourth, those *Bourses* located in cities with a population of over 80,000. Among the latter we must except Paris, Bordeaux, Lyon and Nantes, whose subsidies have been either withdrawn or reduced. The other categories also have their exceptions, which are determined by the importance—of greater or lesser magnitude—of their working class populations, which in turn determine the importance of the *Bourses du Travail* themselves and, above all, the viewpoints of the various municipalities.

Regardless of the size of the subsidy, in order to avoid the disagreeable consequences which would usually issue from the always-possible event of a conflict with the municipal administration, the *Bourses du Travail* should take the precaution of setting aside from their incomes a reserve account, maintained by a dues subscription of between 2 and 5 francs per trade union per month. In addition, the administrative councils of new *Bourses du Travail* are well advised to make every effort to assure that the subsidy is granted annually, or at least every six months, and also that it is given *in advance*.

#### **The Constitution of the *Bourse du Travail***

Having calculated the budget and rented the building, the Commission then draws up a preliminary draft of the statutes.<sup>2</sup> Once this is done, it again convokes the plenary assembly of the member trade unions and submits the results of its deliberations. If its budget and its statutes are approved, the assembly elects a general committee composed of a certain number of delegates from each trade union (two or three, if the *Bourse du Travail* is composed of less than ten trade unions).

At this juncture the role of the Commission is terminated. The general committee or the administrative council appoints in its place, and from among its members, an executive committee, responsible for supervising the implementation of its deliberations and choosing the officers: the secretary, the treasurer, the librarian (where such an office exists) and their assistants. Then all that remains to be done is to deposit with the prefect's office (or with the department heads in the municipalities) two copies of the list of the Council membership, and of the member trade unions, and also the Statutes of the *Bourse du Travail*.

#### **Trade Union Federations**

We said above that the methods used to form a *Bourse du Travail* differ according to whether the trade unions are isolated or federated. Obviously, if a federation of trade unions already exists, the preparatory tasks are simplified and, one might say, already accomplished. These federations, in effect, already have statutes, budgets, offices, councils, and officers. What remains to be done? To obtain the trade unions' agreement to authorize the *addition* of the name of *Bourse du Travail* to that of their federation, that is, to subsume the *Bourse du Travail* to their federation.

The advantages of this simple *addition of names* are considerable:

First of all, the Federation will obtain from the municipality, under its new name (which, let us repeat, does not exclude the use of the old name), the aid which it had never previously received, not having been accustomed to it, under the name of the federation of trade unions.

Secondly, under its new name it can be admitted into the Federation of the *Bourses du Travail*<sup>3</sup> and thereby obtain the moral and pecuniary benefits offered by that Federation to all its members, which the *Bourse du Travail* of Cholet, for example, took full advantage of when it lost its municipal subsidy.

Furthermore, as a result of the decisions implicitly adopted in 1895 by the national trade union congress held in Limoges and by the national congress of the *Bourses du Travail* held in Nimes, which rule that future congresses should be held in cities which have a *Bourse du Travail*, the local trade union federations which adopt the name of *Bourse du Travail* will have the right to submit requests for hosting the confederal congresses.

Finally, any transformation of trade union federations into *Bourses du Travail* would constitute a step towards the unification of the corporative organizations, whose multitude of separate groups contributes to the spiritual confusion of the workers.

One essential point, however, must be emphasized: on the day that the trade union federations, with their subsidies, become *Bourses du Travail*, not only in name, but in fact, in that they possess one or more services characteristic of a *Bourse du Travail*, their statutes and their officers must also as far as possible, become the statutes and the officers of the *Bourses du Travail*. There are many examples of trade unions which are ready to join the *Bourses du Travail* without wanting to join the federations, and of trade unions which want to withdraw from the federations without leaving the *Bourses du Travail*. In neither case could they do so were the administration of the federations identical to that of the *Bourses du Travail*. The federations will therefore become an association with its own particular character within the broader association, which, on the other hand, will not prevent them from embracing, in one way or another, all the trade unions which are members of the *Bourses du Travail*.<sup>4</sup>

#### **Operational Guidelines for the *Bourses du Travail***

It is understood that we cannot provide an extensive explanation of the life of the *Bourses du Travail* here. If the *Bourse du Travail* offers a limited number of services, its operation is a simple affair and any explanation would be superfluous. If, on the other hand, a *Bourse* runs an important job-placement service, deals with an extensive flow of unemployed workers and administers training courses, it would be necessary to plunge into a detailed explanation which, however exhaustively examined, would still remain obscure. The best way for the new *Bourses du Travail* to familiarize themselves with their future services, and to ascertain how many general assemblies they should hold, etc., is to carefully read the official bulletins of the *Bourses du Travail*, and the Annual Report published in 1892 by the Paris *Bourse du Travail*, which the committee of the federations of the *Bourses* courteously placed at its disposal. There, one can find the finest details, and the most interesting and indispensable documents concerning their work. In addition, the new *Bourses du Travail* should request that the federation send them the statutes of the *viaticum* or travelers' aid, and the guidelines and statutes required for the formation of agricultural and maritime trade unions.

#### **The Federations of the *Bourses du Travail***

Beyond the particular committees of each *Bourse du Travail*, we are currently interested in the *Bourses* in their entirety, but such a study cannot be undertaken without a voluminous correspondence and a considerable loss of time. This mission, entrusted to a committee

located in Paris which is composed of one delegate from each *Bourse du Travail*, constitutes the intermediary between all of them. From the moment when a *Bourse du Travail* is formed, the *Bourse* sends its membership roster and its statutes to the federation. It also proceeds to elect, from among its fellow trade unionists who live in Paris or, in the absence of such persons, from a list of candidates drawn up by the federal committee, a representative to the committee who is responsible both for defending the proposals in its collective interest which require the assistance of the other *Bourses du Travail*, as well as examining the proposals put forth by the other *Bourses*.

The following questions and fields of concern are therefore the responsibility of the federal committee: notifying all the *Bourses du Travail* concerning any discoveries or achievements attained by each *Bourse*; applying the confederal *viaticum*, reviewing inquiries on legal issues and statistical problems, etc.; examining and then approving or disapproving the appeals of various *Bourses du Travail*, whether or not they are members of the federation, for solidarity actions by the other *Bourses*, drafting proposals for the formation of (agricultural and maritime) trade unions, for vocational training courses, for museums of labor, etc.; and, finally, organizing the annual national congresses, to which only the federated *Bourses du Travail* will be admitted.

The federation dues, payable every four months, are fixed at 35 centimes monthly for each member, with a minimum of 1.75 francs per month for *Bourses du Travail* with less than five trade unions.

Paris, October 1895

On behalf of the *Federation of the Bourses du Travail of France and the Colonies*,  
*The Secretary*,  
Fernand Pelloutier

Translated from the Spanish translation, *Historia de las bolsas de trabajo: los orígenes del sindicalismo revolucionario*, available online

at: [http://www.antorcha.net/biblioteca\\_virtual/historia/bolsas/indice.html](http://www.antorcha.net/biblioteca_virtual/historia/bolsas/indice.html)

The original French text, *Histoire des Bourses du travail*, originally published in 1901, can be found online at: [http://www.pelloutier.net/dossiers/dossiers.php?id\\_dossier=126](http://www.pelloutier.net/dossiers/dossiers.php?id_dossier=126)

- 1. The Annual Report of the professional trade unions published by the Ministry of Trade lists the subsidies received by each *Bourse du Travail*, from both the municipal as well as the General Councils.
- 2. In order to facilitate this task of the Commissions, the Federations of the *Bourses du Travail* provide them with examples of the statutes of existing *Bourses du Travail*, asking in turn only that the newly formed *Bourses du Travail* should return copies of their statutes to the Federations.
- 3. This is no longer true, insofar as the Federations currently admit trade union associations and *Bourses du Travail* under the same conditions.
- 4. The need for this dual constitution has been understood by all the city's labor federations because, taking into account the considerable number of trade unions, respect for each one's autonomy is the guarantee for the unity of all of them. This is what took place in Paris, Marseilles, Toulouse, Bordeaux, Lyon, etc. This is the way to neutralize the effects of the inevitable centrifugal trends with a single organization and unified administration.

End of Translation