



# **Kropotkin on communes and wages**

**Peter Kropotkin**

## Contents

3. Preface, by Graeme Purchase
4. On a proposed communist settlement
8. The wage system

*On a proposed communist settlement* originally published in The Newcastle Daily Chronicle: February 20, 1895.

*The wage system* original publication details uncertain. Probable origin in 1920, printed by Freedom Press.

**This edition V1.0 (February 2014) published by Bastard Press.**

This pamphlet was originally printed as two separate pamphlets by Bastard Press.

A master copy of this work for reprinting and distributing yourself is available for free download at [www.bastardarchive.org](http://www.bastardarchive.org)

## **Preface to *On a proposed communist settlement.***

Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921) was one of the greatest anarchist theoreticians of his time. Although he admired the directly democratic and non-authoritarian practices of the traditional peasant village commune, he was never an advocate of small and isolated communal experimentalism. Many people, upon reading his works, have been inspired to found such communities, both in his own time as well as the hippies of the 1960s (a period when Kropotkin's major works were republished and influential). Kropotkin did not consider such ventures were likely to be successful or useful in achieving wider revolutionary goals. His friend, Elisee Reclus, who had been involved in such a venture in South America in his youth, was even more hostile to small communal experiments. It is a pity that some of the founders of the many hippy communes in the 1960s (nearly all of which faded rather quickly) did not read Kropotkin more carefully. Unfortunately, they made the same mistakes as many anarchists, communists and socialists had made a century before them. In the anarchist press today one still finds adverts for prospective small and isolated anarchist colonies. Also, many commentaries about Kropotkin still misrepresent him as having had a vision of society consisting of unfederated and independent village-like settlements and of advocating small communal experiments as a means of achieving an anarchist society. The following speech and two 'open' letters, which have not been in print for a century, clearly show, that although not emotionally opposed to such ventures, he was highly sceptical about their chances of success and generally believed them to be a drain upon the energies of the anarchist movement. Despite his warnings, these articles also contain much good and practical advice to those who are still tempted to found small experimental communes in the wilderness, or perhaps, those tempted in some future era to colonise space.

- Graeme Purchase, From the Jura Books pamphlet *Small Communal Experiments and Why They Fail*

From *The Newcastle Daily Chronicle* February 20, 1895 (p4).

*A number of Communists resident in the North of England have decided to found a settlement somewhat on the lines of Mr. Herbert Mill's home colony at Starnthwaite, but to be conducted on Communistic principles. The Promoters of the scheme are in negotiation for various parcels of land, but have not yet come to a final decision as to the locality in which their camp shall be pitched. We are, however, informed that, unless unforeseen and unanticipated difficulties present themselves at the eleventh hour, the colony will be established either on Tyneside or Wearside, probably the latter. Prince Kropotkin having been invited to become the treasurer of the fund, has returned the following answer:*

Viola Cottage, Bromley, Kent, Feb. 16, 1895.

Dear Comrade,

Thank you very much for your kind letter and your extremely clear statements of the facts. Thank you still more for your trust in me. But I must say at once that by no means could I act as a treasurer. To this I am the least appropriate person, as I never was able to keep accounts of my own earnings and spendings. Moreover I really have no time.

As to your scheme, I must say that I have little confidence in schemes of communist communities started under the present conditions, and always regret to see men and women going to suffer all sorts of privations in order, in most cases, to find only disappointment at the end: retiring for many years from the work of propaganda of ideas among the great masses, and of aid to the masses in their emancipation, for making an experiment which has many chances for being a failure.

But I must also say that your scheme has several points which undoubtedly give it much more chance of success than most previous experiments were in possession of. For years I have preached that once there are men decided to make such an experiment, it must be made:

[1] Not in distant countries, where they would find, in addition to their own difficulties, all the hardships which a pioneer of culture has to cope with in an uninhabited country (and I only too well know by my own and my friends' experience how great these difficulties are), but in the neighbourhood of large cities. In such cases every member of the community can enjoy the many benefits of civilisation; the struggle for life is easier, on account of the facilities for taking advantage of the mark done by our forefathers and for profiting by the experience of our neighbours; and every member who is discontented with communal life can at any given moment return to the individualist life of the present society. One can, in such case, enjoy the intellectual, scientific, and artistic life of our civilisation without necessarily abandoning the community.

[2] That a new community, instead of imitating the example of our forefathers, and starting with extensive agriculture, with all its hardships, accidents, drawbacks, and amount of hard work required, very often superior to the forces of the colonists, ought to open new ways of production as it opens new ways of consumption. It must, it seems to me, start with intensive agriculture - that is, market gardening culture, aided as much as possible by culture under glass. Besides the advantages of security in the crops, obtained by their variety and the very means of culture, this sort of culture has the advantage of allowing the community to utilise even the weakest forces; and every one knows how weakened most of the town workers are by the homicidal conditions under which most of the industries are now organised.

[3] That the first condition of success, as proved by the anama peasant communities, the Young Icaris, and several others, is to divest communism from its monastical and barrack garments, and to conceive it as the life of independent families, united together by the desire of obtaining material and moral wellbeing by combining their efforts. The theory, according to which family life has to be entirely destroyed in order to obtain some economy in fuel used in the kitchen, or for heating the space of its dining rooms, is utterly false; and it is most certain that the Young Icarians are absolutely correct in introducing as much as possible of family and friendly grouping life, even in the ways they are taking their meals.

[4] It seems to me proved by evidence that, men being neither the angels nor the slaves they are supposed to be by the authoritarian utopians - Anarchist principles are the only ones under which a community has any chances to succeed. In the hundreds of histories of communities which I have had the opportunity to read, I always saw that the introduction of any sort of elected authority has always been, without one single exception, the point which the community stranded upon; while, on the other side, those communities enjoyed a partial and sometimes very substantial success, which accepted no authority besides the unanimous decision of the folkmoot (1) and preferred, as a couple of hundred of millions of Slavonian(2) peasants do, and as the German Communists in America did, to discuss every matter so long as a unanimous decision of the folkmoot could be arrived at. Communists, who are bound to live in a narrow circle of a few individuals, in which circle the petty struggles for dominion are the more acutely felt, ought decidedly to abandon the Utopias of elected committees' management and majority rule; they must bend before the reality of practice which is at work for many hundreds of years in hundreds of thousands of village communities - the folkmoot - and they must remember that in these communities, majority rule and elected government have always been synonymous and concomitant with disintegration - never with consolidation.

To these four points I have come, from what I know of the actual life of Communist communities, such as has been written down by numbers of Russians and West Europeans who had no theoretical conceptions, promoted no theoretical views, but simply put down on paper or verbally told me what they had lived through. Misery, dullness of life, and the consequent growth of the spirit of intrigue for power, have always been the two chief causes of non-success.

Now, as far as I see from your letter, the community which you try to bring into existence takes the above four points as fundamental, and in so doing it has, I believe, as many more chances of success.

To these four points I should also add a fifth, on which you are agreed, of course, beforehand It is to do all possible for reducing household work to the lowest minimum, and to find out for that purpose, and to invent if necessary, all possible arrangements. In most communities this point was awfully neglected. The woman and the girl remained in the new society as they were in the old one - the slaves of the community. Arrangements to reduce as much as possible the incredible amount of work which our women uselessly spend in the rearing up of children, as well as in household work, are, in my opinion, as essential to the success of a community as the proper arrangement of the fields, the greenhouses or the agricultural machinery even more. But while every community dreams of having the most perfect agricultural or industrial machinery, it seldom pays attention to the squandering of the forces of the honest slave, the woman. Some steps in advance have been made in Guise's familistere(3). Others could wisely be found out. But, with all that, a community started within the present society has to cope with many almost fatal difficulties.

The absence of communist spirit is, perhaps, the least of them. While the fundamental features of human character can only be mediated by a very slow evolution, the relative amounts of

individualist and mutual aid spirit are among the most changeable features of man. Both being equally products of an anterior development, their relative amounts are seen to change in individuals and even societies with a rapidity which would strike the sociologist if he only paid attention to the subject, and analysed the corresponding facts.

The chief difficulty is in the smallness itself of the community. In a large community, the asperities<sup>(4)</sup> of everyone's character are smoothed, they are less important and less remarked. In a small group they attain, owing to the very conditions of life, an undue importance. More contact between neighbours than exists nowadays, is absolutely necessary. Men have tried in vain to live in isolation, and to throw upon the government's shoulders all the petty affairs which they are bound to attend to themselves. But in a small community, the contact is too close, and, what is worse, the individual features of character acquire an undue importance, as they bear upon the whole life of the community. The familiar example of 20 prisoners shut up in one room, or of the 20 passengers of a steamboat, who soon begin to hate each other for small defects of individual character, is well worthy of note.

In order to succeed, the Communist experiment, being an experiment in mutual accommodation among humans, ought to be made on a grand scale. A whole city of, at least, 20,000 inhabitants, ought to organise itself for self-managed consumption of the first necessities of life (houses and essential furniture, food and clothing), with a large development of free groupings for the satisfaction of the higher artistic, scientific, and literary needs and hobbies - before it be possible to say anything about the experimentally tested capacities, or incapacities, of our contemporaries for Communist life. (By the way, the experiment is not so unfeasible as it might seem at first sight.)

The next great difficulty is this. We are not indigenous people untouched by civilisation who can begin a tribal life with a hut and a few arrows. Even if no hunting laws did exist, we should care - the majority at least - for some additional comfort and for some better stimulants for higher life than a drop of whisky supplied by the trader in exchange for furs. But in most cases, a Communist community is compelled to start with even less than that, as it is burdened by a debt for the land it is permitted to settle upon, and is looked at as a nuisance by the surrounding land and industry lords. It usually starts with a heavy debt, while it ought to start with its share of the capital which has been produced by the accumulated labour of the precedent generations. Misery and a terrible struggle for the sheer necessities of life is therefore the usual condition for all the Communist colonies which have hitherto been attempted, to say nothing of the above hostility. This is why I could not insist too much upon your wise decision of starting intensive culture under the guidance of experienced gardeners that is, the most remunerative of all modes of agriculture.

And then comes in the difficulty of men being not accustomed to hard agricultural work, navvies' work and building trades work - that is, exactly those sorts of work which are most in request in the young colony.

And finally, there is the difficulty with which all such colonies had to contend. The moment they begin to become prosperous, they are inundated by newcomers mostly the unsuccessful ones in the present life, those whose energy is already broken by years of unemployment and a long series of privations, of which so few of the rich ones have the slightest idea. What they ought to have before setting to work would be rest and given good food, and then set to hard work. This difficulty is not a theoretical one; all the Communist colonies in America have experienced it; and unless the colonists throw overboard the very principles of Communism and proclaim themselves individualists - small bourgeois, who have succeeded and will keep for themselves the advantages of their own position - in which case, the communist principle having once been abandoned, the community is doomed to fail under the duality which has crept in; or, they

accept the newcomers with an unfriendly feeling ("they know nothing of the hardships we have had to go through," the old stock say), and gradually they are really inundated by men whose numbers soon exceed the capital to be worked with. For a Communist colony, the very success thus becomes a cause of ultimate failure.

This is why some of the Labour leaders in America and their sympathisers from the Chicago middle classes who intended during the last Chicago strike to retire to some remote state of the Union, and there to start with a socialist territory which they would have defended against aggression from without, had more chances of success than a small Communist colony.

Here is, dear comrade, what I had to say in answer to your letter. By no means should I like to discourage you and your comrades. I simply think that "forewarned means forearmed." The better one sees the difficulties in his way, the better he can cope with them. Once you feel inclined to attempt the experiment, although knowing all its difficulties - there must be no hesitation in making it. Earnest men will always find out in it something to learn themselves and to teach their comrades.

Once your inclinations go this way - certainly go on! You have some more chances of success than many of your forerunners, and I am sure you will find sympathies in your way. Mine will certainly follow you, and if you think that the publication of this letter can bring you sympathisers, publish it as an open letter to comrades intending to start a Communist colony.

Yours fraternally,

P. Kropotkin.

#### Footnotes:

1. *folk moot* is Old English, literally a meeting of people, or, perhaps of *the* people. Kropotkin may mean for it to be a whole community, or just the concerned or interested parties of that community.
2. *Slavonia* is a region of what is today Croatia. Kropotkin may have been referring to it specifically, or in generalisation as *Slavic* is used today.
3. *The Familistere* was an intentional community, founded in 1859 at the Guise commune in France by Jean-Baptiste André Godin.
4. *asperity* is Middle English, meaning a harsh or irritating manner.

## The Wage System

### I. REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT AND WAGES.

In their plan for the reconstruction of society, the Collectivists commit, in our opinion, a double error. Whilst speaking of the abolition of the rule of capital, they wish, nevertheless, to maintain two institutions which form the very basis of that rule, namely, representative government and the wage system.

As for representative government, it remains absolutely incomprehensible to us how intelligent men (and they are not wanting amongst the Collectivists) can continue to be the partisans of national and municipal parliaments, after all the lessons on this subject bestowed on us by history, whether in England or in France, in Germany, Switzerland or the United States. Whilst parliamentary rule is seen to be everywhere falling to pieces; whilst its principles in themselves--and no longer merely their applications--are being criticized in every direction, how can intelligent men calling themselves Revolutionary Socialists, seek to maintain a system already condemned to death?

Representative government is a system which was elaborated by the middle class to make head against royalty and, at the same time, to maintain and augment their domination of the workers. It is the characteristic form of middle-class rule. But even its most ardent admirers have never seriously contended that a parliament or municipal body does actually represent a nation or a city; the more intelligent are aware that this is impossible. By upholding parliamentary rule the middle class have been simply seeking to oppose a dam between themselves and royalty, or between themselves and the territorial aristocracy, without giving liberty to the people. It is moreover plain that, as the people become conscious of their interests, and as the variety of those interests increases, the system becomes unworkable. And this is why the democrats of all countries are seeking for different palliatives or correctives and cannot find them. They are trying the Referendum, and discovering that it is worthless; they prate of proportional representation, of the representation of minorities, and other parliamentary utopias. In a word, they are striving to discover the undiscoverable; that is to say, a method of delegation which shall represent the myriad varied interests of the nation; but they are being forced to recognize that they are upon a false track, and confidence in government by delegation is passing away.

It is only the Social Democrats and Collectivists who are not losing this confidence, who are attempting to maintain so-called national representation; and this is what we cannot understand.

If our Anarchist principles do not suit them, if they think them inapplicable, they ought, at least, as it seems to us, to try to discover what other system of organization could well correspond to a society without capitalists or landlords. But to take the middle class system--a system already in its decadence, a vicious system if ever there was one--and to proclaim this system (with a few innocent corrections, such as the imperative mandate, or the Referendum the uselessness of which has been demonstrated already) good for a society that has passed through the Social Revolution, is what seems to us absolutely incomprehensible, unless under the name of Social Revolution they understand something very different from Revolution, some petty botching of existing, middle-class rule.

The same with regard to the wage system. After having pro-claimed the abolition of private property and the possession in common of the instruments of production, how can they



sanction the maintenance of the wage system under any form? And yet this is what the Collectivists are doing when they praise the efficiency of labor notes.

That the English Socialists of the early part of this century should invent labor notes is comprehensible. They were simply trying to reconcile Capital and Labor. They repudiated all idea of laying violent hands upon the property of the capitalists. They were so little of revolutionaries that they declared themselves ready to submit even to imperial rule, if that rule would favor their co-operative societies. They remained middle class men at bottom, if charitable ones; and this is why (Engels has said so in his preface to the Communist Manifesto of 1848) the Socialists of that period were to be found amongst the middle class, whilst the advanced workmen were Communists.

If later Proudhon took up this same idea, that again is easy to understand. What was he seeking in his Mutualist system, if not to render capital less offensive, despite the maintenance of private property, which he detested to the bottom of his heart, but which he believed necessary to guarantee the individual against the state? Further, if economists, belonging more or less to the middle class, also admit labor notes, it is not surprising. It matters little to them whether the worker be paid in labor notes or in coin stamped with the effigy of king or republic. They want to save, in the coming overthrow, private property in inhabited houses, the soil, the mills; or, at least, in inhabited houses and the capital necessary for the production of manufactures. And to maintain this property, labor notes will answer very well.

If the labor note can be exchanged for jewels and carriages, the owner of house property will willingly accept it as rent. And as long as the inhabited house, the field and the mill belong to individual owners, so long will it be requisite to pay them in some way before they will allow you to work in their fields or their mills, or to lodge in their houses. And it will also be requisite to pay wages to the worker, either in gold or in paper money or in labor notes exchangeable for all sorts of commodities.

But how can this new form of wages, the labor note, be sanctioned by those who admit that houses, fields, mills are no longer private property, that they belong to the commune or the nation?

## II. THE COLLECTIVIST WAGE SYSTEM.

Let us examine more closely this system for the remuneration of labor, as set forth by the English, French, German and Italian Collectivists.<sup>1</sup>

It comes very much to this: Every one works, be it in fields, in factories, in schools, in hospitals or what not. The working day is regulated by the state, to which belong the soil, factories, means of communication and all the rest. Each worker, having done a day's work, receives a labor note, stamped, let us say, with these words: eight hours of labor. With this note he can procure any sort of goods in the shops of the state or the various corporations. The note is divisible in such a way that one hour's worth of meat, ten minutes' worth of matches, or half-an-hour's worth of tobacco can be purchased. Instead of saying: "two pennyworth of soap," after the Collectivist Revolution they will say: " five minutes' worth of soap."

Most Collectivists, faithful to the distinction established by the middle-class economists (and Marx also) between qualified (skilled) and simple (unskilled) labor, tell us that qualified or professional toil should be paid a certain number of times more than simple toil. Thus, one hour of the doctor's work should be considered as equivalent to two or three hours of the work of

---

1

the nurse, or three hours of that of the navy. "Professional or qualified labor will be a multiple of simple labor," says the Collectivist Grönlund, because this sort of labor demands a longer or shorter apprenticeship.

Other Collectivists, the French Marxists for example, do not make this distinction. They proclaim "equality of wages." The doctor, the schoolmaster and the professor will be paid (in labor notes) at the same rate as the navy. Eight hours spent in walking the hospitals will be worth the same as eight hours spent in navvies' work or in the mine or the factory.

Some make a further concession; they admit that disagreeable, or unhealthy labor, such as that in the sewers, should be paid at a higher rate than work which is agreeable. One hour of service in the sewers may count, they say, for two hours of the labor of the professor. Let us add that certain Collectivists advocate the wholesale remuneration of trade societies. Thus, one society may say: "Here are a hundred tons of steel. To produce them one hundred workers of our society have taken ten days; as our day consisted of eight hours, that makes eight thousand hours of labor for one hundred tons of steel; eighty hours a ton." Upon which the State will pay them eight thousand labor notes of one hour each, and these eight thousand notes will be distributed amongst the fellow-workers in the foundry as seems best to themselves.

Or again, if one hundred miners have spent twenty days inhewing eight thousand tons of coal, the coal will be worth two hours a ton, and the sixteen thousand labor notes for one hour each received by the miners' union will be divided amongst them as they think fair.

If there be disputes: if the miners protest and say that a ton of steel ought to cost six hours of labor instead of eight; or if the professor rate his day twice as high as the nurse; then the State must step in and regulate their differences.

Such, in a few words, is the organization which the Collectivists desire to see arising from the Social Revolution. As we have seen, their principles are: collective property in the instruments of labor and remuneration of each worker according to the time spent in productive toil, taking into account the productiveness of his work. As for their political system, it would be parliamentary rule, ameliorated by the change of men in power, the imperative mandate, and the referendum--i.e., the general vote of Yes or No upon questions submitted to the popular decision.

Now, we must at once say that this system seems to us absolutely incapable of realization.

The Collectivists begin by proclaiming a revolutionary principle--the abolition of private property--and, as soon as proclaimed, they deny it, by maintaining an organization of production and consumption springing from private property.

They proclaim a revolutionary principle and ignore the consequences it must necessarily bring about. They forget that the very fact of abolishing individual property in the instruments of production (land, factories, means of communication, capital) must cause society to set out in a new direction; that it must change production from top to bottom, change not only its methods but its ends; that all the everyday relations between individuals must be modified as soon as land, machinery and the rest are considered as common possessions.

They say: "No private property"; and immediately they hasten to maintain private property in its everyday forms. "For productive purposes you are a commune," they say; "the fields, the tools, the machinery, all that has been made up to this day--manufactures, railways, wharves, mines to all of you in common. Not the slightest distinction will be made concerning the share of each one in this collective property.

"But from tomorrow you are minutely to discuss the part that each one of you is to take in making the new machines, digging the new mines. From tomorrow you are to endeavor to weigh exactly the portion which will accrue to each one from the new produce. You are to count your minutes of work, you are to be on the watch lest one moment of your neighbor's toil may purchase more than yours.

"You are to calculate your hours and your minutes of labor, and since the hour measures nothing,--since in one factory a workman can watch four looms at once, whilst in another he only watches two, you are to weigh the muscular force, the energy of brain, the energy of nerve expended. You are scrupulously to count up the years of apprenticeship, that you may value precisely the share of each one amongst you in the production of the future. And all this, after you have declared that you leave entirely out of your reckoning the share he has taken in the past."

Well, it is evident to us that a society cannot organize itself upon two absolutely opposing principles, two principles which contradict one another at every step. And the nation or the commune which should give to itself such an organization would be forced either to return to private property or else to transform itself immediately into a communist society.

### **III.--UNEQUAL REMUNERATION.**

We have said that most Collectivist writers demand that in Socialist society remuneration should be based upon a distinction between qualified or professional labor and simple labor. They assert that an hour of the engineer's, the architect's or the doctor's work should be counted as two or three hours' work from the blacksmith, the mason or the nurse. And the same distinction, say they, ought to be established between workers whose trades require a longer or shorter apprenticeship and those who are mere day laborers.

Yes, but to establish this distinction is to maintain all the inequalities of our existing society. It is to trace out beforehand a demarcation between the worker and those who claim to rule him. It is still to divide society into two clearly defined classes: an aristocracy of knowledge above, a horny-handed democracy below; one class devoted to the service of the other; one class toiling with its hands to nourish and clothe the other, whilst that other profits by its leisure to learn how to dominate those who toil for it.

This is to take the distinctive features of middle-class society and sanction them by a social revolution. It is to erect into a principle an abuse which to-day is condemned in the society that is breaking up.

We know very well what will be said in answer. We shall be told about "Scientific Socialism." The middle-class economists, and Marx, too, will be cited to prove that there is a good reason for a scale of wages, for the "labor force" of the engineer costs society more than the "labor force" of the navvy. And, indeed, have not the economists striven to prove that, if the engineer is paid twenty times more than the navvy, it is because the cost necessary to produce an engineer is more considerable than that necessary to produce a navvy? And has not Marx maintained that the like distinction between various sorts of manual labor is of equal logical necessity? He could come to no other conclusion, since he took up Ricardo's theory of value(2) and insisted that products exchange in proportion to the quantity of the work socially necessary to produce them.

But we know also how much of all this to believe. We know that if the engineer, the scientist and the doctor are paid today ten or a hundred times more than the laborer, and the weaver

earns three times as much as the toiler in the fields and ten times as much as a match girl, it is not because what they receive is in proportion to their various costs of production. Rather it is in proportion to the extent of monopoly in education and in industry. The engineer, the scientist and the doctor simply draw their profits from their own sort of capital--their degree, their certificates--just as the manufacturer draws a profit from a mill, or as a nobleman used to do from his birth and title.

When the employer pays the engineer twenty times more than the workman, he makes this very simple calculation: if an engineer can save him £4,000 a year in cost of production, he will pay him £800 a year to do it. And if he sees a foreman is a clever sweater and can save him £400 in handicraft, he at once offers him £80 or £90 a year. He expends £100 where he counts upon gaining £1,000; that is the essence of the capitalist system. And the like holds good of the differences in various trades.

Where then is the sense of talking of the cost of production of labor force, and saying that a student who passes a merry youth at the University, has a right to ten times higher wages than the son of a miner who has pined in a pit since he was eleven? Or that a weaver has a right to wages three or four times higher than those of an agricultural laborer? The expenditure needed to produce a weaver is not four times as great as the necessary cost of producing a field worker. The weaver simply benefits by the advantageous position which industry enjoys in Europe as compared with parts of the world where at present there is no industrial development.

No one has ever estimated the real cost of production of labor force. And if an idler costs society much more than an honest workman, it still remains to be known if, when all is told (infant mortality amongst the workers, the ravages of anemia, the premature deaths) a sturdy day laborer does not cost society more than an artisan.

Are we to be told that, for example, the 1s. a day of a London workwoman and the 3d. a day of the Auvergne peasant who blinds herself over lace-making, represent the cost of production of these women? We are perfectly aware that they often work for even less, but we know also that they do it entirely because, thanks to to our splendid social organization, they would die of hunger without these ridiculous wages.

The existing scale of wages seems to us a highly complex product of taxation, government interference, monopoly and capitalistic greed--in a word, of the State and the capitalist system. In our opinion all the theories made by economists about the scale of wages have been invented after the event to justify existing injustices. It is needless to regard them.

We are, however, certain to be informed that the Collectivist wage scale will, at all events, be an improvement. "You must admit," we shall be told, "that it will, at least, be better to have a class of workers paid at twice or three times the ordinary rate than to have Rothschilds, who put into their pockets in one day more than a workman can in a year. It will be a step towards equality."

To us it seems a step away from it. To introduce into a Socialist society the distinction between ordinary and professional labor would be to sanction by the Revolution and erect into a principle a brutal fact, to which we merely submit today, considering it all the while as unjust. It would be acting after the manner of those gentlemen of the Fourth of August, 1789, who proclaimed, in high sounding phraseology, the abolition of feudal rights, and on the Eight of August sanctioned those very rights by imposing upon the peasants the dues by which they were to be redeemed from the nobles. Or again, like the Russian government at the time of the emancipation of the serfs when it proclaimed that the land henceforth belonged to the nobility,

whereas previously it was considered an abuse that the land which belonged to the peasants should be bought and sold by private persons.

Or, to take a better known example, when the Commune of 1871 decided to pay the members of the Communal Council 12s. 6d. a day, whilst the National Guards on the rampart had only 1s. 3d., certain persons applauded this decision as an act of grand democratic equality. But, in reality, the Commune did nothing thereby but sanction the ancient inequality between officials and soldiers, governors and governed. For an Opportunist parliament such a decision might have seemed splendid, but for the Commune it was a negation of its own principles. The Commune was false to its own revolutionary principle, and by that very fact condemned it.

In the present state of society when we see Cabinet Ministers paying themselves thousands a year, whilst the workman has to content himself with less than a hundred; when we see the foreman paid twice or three times as much as the ordinary hand, and when amongst workers themselves there are all sorts of gradations from 7s. or 8s. a day down to the 3d. of the sempstress(2), we disapprove the large salary of the minister, and also the difference between the artisans eight-shillings and the sempstress' three-pence. And we say, "Let us have done with privileges of education as well as of birth." We are Anarchists just because such privileges disgust us.

How can we then raise these privileges into a principle? How can we proclaim that privileges of education are to be the basis of an equal society, without striking a blow at that very Society. What is submitted today, will be submitted to no longer in society based on equality. The general above the soldier, the rich engineer above the workman, the doctor above the nurse, already disgust us. Can we suffer them in a society which starts by proclaiming equality?

Evidently not. The popular conscience, inspired by the idea of equality, will revolt against such an injustice, it will not tolerate it. It is not worth while to make the attempt.

That is why certain Collectivists, understanding the impossibility of maintaining a scale of wages in a society inspired by the influences the Revolution, zealously advocate equality in wages. But they only stumble against fresh difficulties, and their equality of wages becomes a Utopia as incapable of realization as the wage scale of the others. A society that has seized upon all social wealth, and has plainly announced that all have a right to this wealth, whatever may be the part they have taken in creating it in the past, will be obliged to give up all idea of wages, either in money or in labor notes.

#### **IV. EQUAL WAGES versus COMMUNISM.**

"To each according to his deeds," say the Collectivists, or rather according to his share of service rendered to society. And this is the principle they recommend as the basis of economic organization, after the Revolution shall have made all the instruments of labor and all that is necessary for production common property!

Well, if the Social Revolution should be so unfortunate as to proclaim this principle, it would be stemming the tide of human progress, it would be leaving unsolved the huge social problem cast by past centuries upon our shoulders.

It is true that in such a society as ours, where the more a man works the less he is paid, this principle may seem, at first sight, all aspiration towards justice. But at bottom it is but the consecration of past injustice. It is with this principle that the wage system started, to end where it is today, in crying inequalities and all the abominations of the present state of things. And it has ended thus because, from the day on which society began to value services in the

money or any other sort of wages, from the day on which it was said that each should have only what he could succeed in getting paid for his work, the whole history of Capitalism (the State aiding therein) was written beforehand; its germ was enclosed in this principle.

Must we then return to our point of departure and pass once more through the same process of capitalist evolution? These theorists seem to desire it; but happily it is impossible; the Revolution will be Communistic; or it will be drowned in blood, and must be begun all over again.

Service rendered to society, be it labor in factory or field, or moral service, cannot be valued in monetary units. There cannot be an exact measure of its value, either of what has been improperly called its "value in exchange" or of its value in use. If we see two individuals, both working for years, for five hours daily, for the community, at two different occupations equally pleasing to them, we can say that, taken all in all, their labors are roughly equivalent. But their work could not be broken up into fractions, so that the product of each day, each hour or each minute of the labor of one should be worth the produce of each minute and each hour of that of the other.

Broadly speaking, we can say that a man who during his whole life deprives himself of leisure for ten hours daily has given much more to society than he who has deprived himself of but five hours a day, or has not deprived himself of any leisure at all. But we cannot take what one man has done during any two hours and say that this produce is worth exactly twice as much as the produce of one hour's work from another individual, and reward each proportionately. To do this would be to ignore all that is complex in the industry, the agriculture, the entire life of society as it is; it would be to ignore the extent to which all individual work is the outcome of the former and present labors of society as a whole. It would be to fancy oneself in the Stone Age, when we are living in the Age of Steel.

Go into a coal mine and see that man stationed at the huge machine that hoists and lowers the cage. In his hand he holds a lever whereby to check or reverse the action of the machinery. He lowers the handle, and in a second the cage changes the direction of its giddy rush up or down the shaft. His eyes are attentively fixed upon an indicator in front of him which shows exactly the point the cage has reached; no sooner does it touch the given level than at his gentlest pressure it stops dead short, not a foot above or below the required place. And scarcely are the full trucks discharged or the empties loaded before, at a touch to the handle, the cage is again swinging up or down the shaft.

For eight or ten hours at a time he thus concentrates his attention. Let his brain relax but for an instant, and the cage would fly up and shatter the wheels, break the rope, crush the men, bring all the work of the mine to a stand-still. Let him lose three seconds upon each reverse of the lever and, in a mine with all the modern improvements, the output will be reduced by from twenty to fifty tons a day.

Well, is it he who renders the greatest service in the mine? Or is it, perhaps, that boy who rings from below the signal for the mounting of the cage? Or is it the miner who risks his life every moment in the depths of the mine and will end one day by being killed by fire-damp? Or, again, the engineer who would lose the coal seam and set men hewing bare rock, if he merely made a mistake in the addition of his calculations? Or, finally, is it the owner, who has put all his patrimony into the concern, and who perhaps has said, in opposition to all previous anticipations: "Dig there, you will find excellent coal"?

All the workers engaged in the mine contribute to the raising of coal in proportion to their strength, their energy, their knowledge their intelligence and their skill. And we can say that all

have the right to live, to satisfy their needs, and even gratify their whims, after the more imperious needs of every one are satisfied. But how can we exactly value what they have each done?

Further, is the coal that they have extracted entirely the result of their work? Is it not also the outcome of the work of the men who constructed the railway leading to the mine, and the roads branching off on all sides from the stations? And what of the work of those who have tilled and sown the fields which supply the miners with food, smelted the iron, cut the wood in the forest, made the machines which will consume the coal, and so on?

No hard and fast line can be drawn between the work of one and the work of another. To measure them by results leads to absurdity. To divide them into fractions and measure them by hours of labor leads to absurdity also. One course remains: not to measure them at all, but to recognize the right of all who take part in productive labor first of all to live, and then to enjoy the comforts of life.

Take any other branch of human activity, take our existence as a whole, and say which of us can claim the highest reward for his deeds ?

The doctor who has divined the disease or the nurse who has assured its cure by her sanitary cares? The inventor of the first steam engine or the boy who one day, tired of pulling the cord which formerly served to open the valve admitting the steam beneath the piston, tied his cord to the lever of the machine, and went to play with his companions, without imagining that he had invented the mechanism essential to all modern machinery--the automatic valve? The inventor of the locomotive or that Newcastle workman who suggested that wooden sleepers should take the place of the stones which were formerly put under the rails and threw trains off the line by their want of elasticity? The driver of the locomotive or the signalman who stops the train or opens the way for it? To whom do we owe the trans-Atlantic cable? To the engineer who persisted in declaring that the cable would transmit telegrams, whilst the learned electricians declared that it was impossible? To Maury, the scientist, who advised the disuse of thick cables and the substitution of one no bigger than a walking stick? Or, after all, is it to those volunteers, from no one knows where, who spent day and night on the deck of the Great Eastern, minutely examining every yard of cable and taking out the nails that the shareholders of the maritime companies had stupidly caused to be driven through the isolating coat of the cable to render it useless?

And, in a still wider field, the vast tract of human life, with its joys, its sorrows, and its varied incidents, cannot each of us mention some one who during his life has rendered him some service so great, so important, that if it were proposed to value it in money he would be filled with indignation? This service may have been a word, nothing but a word in season, or it may have been months or years of devotion. Are you going to estimate these, the most important of all services, in labor notes? "The deeds of each"! But human societies could not live for two successive generations, they would disappear in fifty years, if each one did not give infinitely more than will be returned to him in money, in "notes" or in civic rewards. It would be the extinction of the race if the mother did not expend her life to preserve her children, if every man did not give some things without counting the cost, if human beings did not give most where they look for no reward.

If middle-class society is going to ruin; if we are today in a blind alley from which there is no escape without applying axe and torch to the institutions of the past, that is just because we have calculated too much. It is just because we have allowed ourselves to be drawn into giving that we may receive; because we have desired to make society into a commercial company based upon debit and credit.

Moreover, the Collectivists know it. They vaguely comprehend that a society cannot exist if it logically carries out the principle, "To each according to his deeds." They suspect that the needs (we are not speaking of the whims) of the individual do not always correspond to his deeds. Accordingly, De Paepe tells us:

"This eminently individualistic principle will be tempered by social intervention for the purpose of the education of children and young people (including their maintenance and nurture) and by social organizations for the assistance of the sick and infirm, asylums for aged workers, etc."

Even Collectivists suspect that a man of forty, the father of three children, has greater needs than a youth of twenty. They suspect that a woman who is suckling her child and spends sleepless nights by its cot, cannot get through so much work as a man who has enjoyed tranquil slumber.

They seem to understand that a man or woman worn out by having perhaps, worked over hard for society in general may find themselves incapable of performing so many "deeds" as those who take their hours of labor quietly and pocket their "notes" in the privileged offices of State statisticians.

And they hasten to temper their principle. Oh, certainly, they say, society will feed and bring up its children. Oh, certainly it will assist the old and infirm. Oh, certainly needs not deeds will be the measure of the cost which society will impose on itself to temper the principle of deeds.

What, Charity? Yes, our old friend, "Christian Charity," organized by the State.

Improve the foundling hospital, organize insurance against age and sickness, and the principle of deeds will be "tempered." "Wound that they may heal," they can get no further.

Thus, then, after having forsworn Communism, after having sneered at their ease at the formula, "To each according to his needs," is it not obvious that they, the great economists, also perceive that they have forgotten something, i.e., the needs of the producers? And thereupon they hasten to recognize these needs. Only it is to be the State by which they are to be estimated, it is to be the State which will undertake to find out if needs are disproportionate to deeds.

It is to be the State that will give alms to him who is willing to recognize his inferiority. From thence to the Poor Law and the Workhouse is but a stone's throw.

There is but a stone's throw for even this step-mother of a society against which we are in revolt, has found it necessary to temper its individualistic principle. It too has had to make concessions in a Communistic sense, and in this same form of charity.

It also distributes halfpenny dinners to prevent the pillage of its shops. It also builds hospitals, often bad enough, but sometimes splendid, to prevent the ravages of contagious disease. It also after having paid for nothing but the hours of labor, receives the children of those whom it has itself reduced to the extremity of distress. It also takes account of needs--as a charity.

Poverty, the existence of the poor, was the first cause of riches. This it was which created the earliest capitalist. For, before the surplus value, about which people are so fond of talking, could begin to be accumulated it was necessary that there should be poverty-stricken wretches who would consent to sell their labor force rather than die of hunger. It is poverty that has made the rich. And if poverty had advanced by such rapid strides by the end of the Middle Ages,



it was chiefly because the invasions and wars, the creation of States and the development of their authority, the wealth gained by exploitation in the East and many other causes of a like nature, broke the bonds which once united agrarian and urban communities, and led them, in place of the solidarity which they once practised, to adopt the principle of the wage-system. Is this principle to be the outcome of the Revolution? Dare we dignify by the name of a Social Revolution that name so dear to the hungry, the suffering and the oppressed--the triumph of such a principle as this?

It cannot be so. For, on the day when ancient institutions splinter into fragments before the axe of the proletariat, voices will be heard shouting: Bread for all! Lodging for all! Right for all to the comforts of life!

And these voices will be heeded. The people will say to themselves: Let us begin by satisfying our thirst for the life, the joy the liberty we have never known. And when all have tasted happiness, we will set to work; the work of demolishing the last vestiges of middle-class rule, with its account-book morality, its philosophy of debit and credit, its institutions of mine and shine. "While we throw down we shall be building," as Proudhon said; we shall build in the name of Communism and of Anarchy.

#### Footnotes:

1. The authors own footnote from the original edition: *The Spanish Anarchists, who continue to call themselves Collectivists, understand by this term common possession of the instruments of labor and "liberty for each group to share the produce of labor as they think fit"; on Communist principles or in any other way.*
2. David Ricardo's (a nineteenth century English economist) theory of value in a nutshell: "The value of a commodity, or the quantity of any other commodity for which it will exchange, depends on the relative quantity of labour which is necessary for its production, and not as the greater or less compensation which is paid for that labour".
3. *sempstress* - a seamstress or dressmaker



### **Other titles by Bastard Press:**

#### **The Utopian Communard Project Primer** by Asger Strod

The *UCP Primer* is a tool to start discussion for us to start thinking about starting a revolutionary, everyday life solution to the moribund world around us. The Utopian Commune is a synthesis of Anarchist-Communism and Permaculture, designed not to be isolated from the society around it, but to integrate with it and change and interact with it on a daily, organic basis.

#### ***Ekmek, adalet, özgürlük! Anarchism in Istanbul today*** by David Kimball

Two interviews with anarchists working in Istanbul, each discussing the goals and aims of their projects and how an anarchist navigates Turkey's political, social and cultural landscape. The first interview explores the five year (and counting) Kolektif 26A project, an anarchist commune located in the suburbs of Istanbul, working and living together to socialise anarchism. The second is with an anarchist woman talking about the struggles of the intense patriarchy of Turkish culture and the capitalist culture created by the nation's entry into neo-liberalism.

Peter Kropotkin was one of Russia's foremost anarchists and one of the first advocates of what he called "anarchist communism": the model of society he advocated for most of his life was that of a communalist society free from central government.

In *On a proposed Communist settlement*, he warns a group of communists about the dangers isolated communes face in the real world. With clear and precise insight developed by his early work as a geographer, he outlines the risks such communities face when starting, the problems existing social and economic models have in small numbers and the difficulties faced by the isolation and separation from day-to-day life and the literal invasion faced by those who do manage to achieve success. This edition also features a preface by Sydney anarchist and ecologist Graham Purchase.

In *The Wage System* he argues against collectivist use of alternative currencies, such as the 'labour note' and exchange currencies (such as Ithaca Hours and LETS) by systematically investigating the problems with assessing the worth of labour and the valuing of one kind of labour against another - the basis of wages and the economic systems of both capitalism and socialism. Over a century after it was written, *The Wage System* continues to offer a concise and skilled insight into the fundamental problems of wages, work and labour.

Together these two texts are a useful primer on Kropotkin's anarchist communism.

The front cover illustration shows a communal terrace house, illustrated by Clifford Harper. It was used without permission.

**Bastard Press**  
**[www.bastardarchive.org](http://www.bastardarchive.org)**  
**Est. Queensland, Australia 2005**