

LETTERS ON
ASSOCIATED
LABOUR

BY SENEX

PREFACE OF THE BOOTLEG EDITION

The *Letters on Associated Labour* are a good candidate for the first complete work of socialist economic theory, predating Proudhon's *Qu'est-ce que la propriété?* by almost a full decade – and they are notable for their libertarian socialist bent.

They are the product of a little British working-class magazine called *The Pioneer*, an “unstamped” (illegal, samizdat) periodical affiliated with the militant National Union of the Working Classes. The fourteen letters, composing together a short treatise on the nature of capitalist society and how the workers can build an alternative to it, were published one at a time in this underground journal throughout 1834. No one knows who wrote them, really, but the most likely candidates are James Morrison (the *Pioneer's* editor) or J.E. “Shepherd” Smith (the editor of another radical paper called *The Crisis*), or perhaps a collaboration between the two. They are signed “Senex,” an ancient Roman word meaning “old man”; in antiquity this was a title awarded to older males with a good standing in their village, and eventually it came to mean any sort of wise elderly sage. Apparently, to judge from later examples, signing anonymous letters “Senex” would remain a tradition in British newspapers for at least a hundred years after these letters.

Their immediate context was a strike of the silk weavers of Derby, which gained considerable support and led one *Pioneer* writer to declare in a headline, “War! War! War! Labour has declared war against capital.” But really they are the product of years of struggle in the wake of economic depression and the fight for the 1832 Reform Act, and are the encapsulation of economic ideas developed by this emerging social movement: the utopian communism of Robert Owen, and the socialist economics of “anti-Ricardians” such as Thomas Hodgskin and John Gray. Readers interested in this history – and particularly in recovering it from the calumnies of the vulgar Marxists – ought to consult GDH Cole's *History of Socialist Thought*, volume 1; EP Thompson's *The Making of the British Working Class*; and Andy Blunden's *The Origins of Collective Decision Making*.

This edition was typeset, edited, and annotated by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), and was formerly hosted on their website at <http://www.iww.org/culture/senex>. As you can see, this link is now dead due to a switch to a newer website, and the new site no longer hosts the letters. Your humble editor was able to recover the PDFs from tinkering with archived URLs, and rather than leaving such things to the easily distracted whims of the IWW's volunteer bureaucrats, I've decided to take direct action and assemble this elegant little pirate edition. It is best read alongside the historian Noel Thompson's paper “Senex's *Letters on Associated Labour* and *The Pioneer*, 1834: a syndicalist political economy in the making,” collected in the book *Radical Economics and Labor* edited by Fredric S. Lee and Jon Bekken.

– Ed.

LETTER I

To The Union Societies

Brethren, – Scarcely had I written the above word “societies,” than I perceived my error. When there is union, there are not societies, but one great SOCIETY! You are teaching society that there is, in truth, but one interest among mankind, and that that interest is universal welfare! As far as individuals are sensible of this universal interest, they are virtuous and happy; while, exactly in proportion as they do not feel it, and do not act upon it, they are vicious and wretched, and diffuse around them the miseries of selfishness and corruption.

You, brethren, are acting, for the first time, upon earth, upon that broad basis, respecting which moralists have talked, parsons have preached and statesmen have legislated; but their doctrines were absurd, and their laws were impracticable, under a system in which men were necessarily in perpetual conflict with each other; and where a benefit was scarcely ever gained without the infliction of either a direct or an indirect injury.

Look, brethren, look at the deplorable state of the greatest, the most honourable, and the most beneficial of all powers – the power of *productive labour*, as it appeared without a single redeeming feature, before you commenced the struggle you are so spiritedly maintaining.

Productive labour, wherever it acts for the benefit of others than the labourers, is slavery, or something worse. I leave political economists to their jargon. They wrote under a system of evil; they wrote not for the purpose of getting rid of the evil, but to cut down man to the endurance of it. They tried to shape you all to the existing system; strait waistcoats, little food, empty bellies, together with the anti-population process, would, they declared, fit you to compete with any sort of machinery. Could they only have deprived you of brains and nerves, they would have converted you into quiet appendages of the mill, and told the world with delight how peaceful and happy you were. But it would not do; you do not now submit to the process as your unhappy forefathers did of yore. You kicked, you stretched out your limbs to their full extent, you held your heads erect, and you told the proud and perverse capitalists that you were MEN, and that, instead of their cramming you into their narrow system, in which it was impossible for you, as human beings, to exist, you would have a system of your own, made in every respect conformable to your proper dimensions, as men!

Brethren, you are beginning to act upon this enlarged system. It is the system of associated labour. There are three states of labour–

Enslaved, or compulsory labour;

Hireling, or marketable labour;

Free, or associated labour.

In the early and rude state of society, man enslaves his fellow-being, and compels him to assist him in peace, and to fight for him in war. Neither ignorance nor baseness is capable of comprehending those higher qualities by which men, connecting themselves with one another, act in unison, for the benefit of all. The lord and the serf, the satrap and the slave, the planter and the negro, are equally ignorant, and equally base. There are luxury and pride on one side; there are servility and wretchedness, and toil to the utmost extent of human sufferance, on the other. Still there is a partial unity of the means, and, consequently, produce – perhaps even plenty – is the result. But who enjoys the produce? Not the enslaved, but the enslaver. The latter revels and

wastes – the former pines and starves. The produce increases; exchanges are made; the enslavers combine, not for good, but for safety; and the slaves are increased. But in the enlargement of their numbers there is no enlargement of their strength; for their servility and their ignorance, they are employed in repressing the sense of independence, or more frequently the desperate spirit of vengeance, that their wrongs sometimes excite among them. But enough of this.

For some few ages, the condition of absolute slavery has not been known in Britain. It has been changed for the second state of labour. We have been habituated to hireling, or marketable labour; and political economists have bewildered themselves and the world, in endeavouring to prove that hireling labour, at the lowest possible rate of hire, is the proper condition of that vast and overwhelming portion of our race, from whom proceed all the wealth and strength of communities. These writers know nothing of man, of his nature, his rights, and his powers. They write of narrow-minded beings, with money in their pockets, called capitalists; but they know nothing of the intelligent head, the warm heart, and the unwearied hands, that love with mutual love, that think and communicate thought, and act with mutual aid for the comfort and happiness of all. How, indeed, should they know these things? They have hitherto seen hireling labour alone, creating wealth, and repaid by penury; raising palaces, and replenishing those palaces with luxuries and then shrinking, naked and hungry, into hovels. They say, “This is so, and it is the natural order of society; it is good for the government to be rich and strong, and for the labouring people to be poor and weak. Let the hireling be content with his hire; and it is well for him that the capitalists condescend to esteem him worthy of it!”

This is not the place to consider historically the gradual transition by which, in this country, and generally more or less among the civilized portions of mankind, enslaved labour was changed into hireling labour, although, on a future occasion, it will be both curious and useful to show, not only how this mutation was brought about, but the good and the evil that have proceeded from it. As a relief from direct slavery, hireling labour has, morally, had a great, beneficent effect upon the character of society; but to thousands, and tens of thousands, it has been abundant in wretchedness, that it groans, and the depth of its sorrows, have greatly exceeded those of bondage. The poet has justly exclaimed, with honest indignation, against those

“Who drive a loathsome traffic, gauge and span,
And buy the muscles and the bones of man;”

but look at the rigid countenance of the capitalist, who with a proud and pompous insensibility, insists upon sixteen hours’ labour out of the twenty-four, from a band of miserable human beings, at a rate of wages that would not purchase lodging and food for them equal to that which the veriest slave in Jamaica is allowed, and actually enjoys. The slave trade was execrable; and sincerely must every friend of humanity rejoice that it is destroyed, notwithstanding the combined interests that were arrayed in its support. From its downfall and extinction I draw the encouraging belief that that bargaining, haggling, and trafficking for human labour at its lowest market-price, will, by the course on which you, brethren, have entered, be brought, at no very distant period, to a similar termination. This will be effected gradually, without doubt; for it must not be denied that the difficulties before you are formidable. But let the principle of associated labour be once fairly shown to be practicable, and the errors and evils of hireling labour will speedily follow those of enslaved labour, and become mere matters of history, warning the future of the follies and the sufferings of the past.

Brethren, to form a system of associated labour, and to act firmly and steadily, according to the tenor of

it, in the midst of the dangers with which you are beset, is an undertaking of the highest importance. The discovery of another hemisphere by Columbus had not difficulties equal to it; nor were its benefits to the human race to be compared with it. But you have entered upon your enterprise, and you must accomplish it, or fall lower in the scale of hireling labour than you were before. Let the advocates for capital, and its tyranny, acknowledge that the position which you have assumed, opposed as it is apparently to the direct and immediate interests of those who so lately called themselves your masters, and extracted from you the utmost toil, at the lowest wages, is a position which has been forced upon you. You were thrust out upon the very verge of existence; you were insulted by doctrines that place you, in the scale of creation, beneath the condition of the brute animals; you were told that you must be of no sex, but must drag out the days of an isolated existence in vicious ignorance and ill-requited labour; You were startled in horror at this naked and audacious exposition which McCulloch, Mill,¹ and other political economists set before you; and your indignation was roused when they proved to you that that was your actual, your irremediable situation, as long as the system of hireling labour was suffered to prevail. To what, then, were you compelled to have recourse? To what, but to associated labour? To that which can alone save you from that grinding down, that relentless and increasing misery, to which the abominable system of hireling labour has reduced you? No; for the productive classes there is no hope, there is not a shadow of comfort, not a vestige of that existence, which, as men endowed with the high faculties of the mind, and impressed with all the delightful sensations of the heart, you ought, as a duty to your Creator, to look for and to secure, except in ASSOCIATED LABOUR!

It is my intention, in a few short letters, to offer you my opinions upon those points in the present state of society, which to me appear either favourable or inimical to the extension of the system of associated labour. Of the progress of this great and beneficial principle I entertain not the slightest doubt; and if I do not look for its immediate general adoption, it is only because I am convinced that its success is dependent upon knowledge, or rather upon a train of thought, which thousands have not yet attained to, and upon a benevolence of heart, an ardent desire to advance the good of one another, which Christianity inculcates in vain, while the productive classes are crushed under the system either of enslaved or hireling labour!

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¹ The classical economists J.R. McCulloch, 1789-1864 and James Mill, 1773-1836; both particular targets for the anti-capitalist and socialist political economists of the period, who considered they believed that the level of wages necessarily gravitated to a basic subsistence level.

LETTER II

To The Productive Classes

The men of money and the men of political power are quite puzzled. They cannot understand, brethren, what you mean by ASSOCIATED LABOUR. They would, if they could, cover their ignorance and their obtuseness of intellect by an affectation of contempt; but they fear you too much to despise you. *Blackwood's Magazine*¹ for the present month contains nearly twenty pages upon the subject of Trades' Unions. This wretched Tory writer bewilders himself in endeavouring to account for our spirit of union, by suggesting that we have been disappointed by the Whig administration and the monied interest. We have long ceased to expect any good from administrations or from capitalists. The effort making by the productive classes to participate, to the full extent of their rightful claims, in all advantages of the plenty they create, is the natural and irrepresible result of the extension of knowledge, and of the adaptation of machinery to the purposes of production. Blackwood scoffs at our knowledge; but who is now to check its advance or to divert it into narrow or partial channels? The Trades' Unions would have come into being, and would have combined, as they are now combining, into one universal union, if the Whigs had never risen from the abject state in which they lay so long overwhelmed under Tory power, until Tory tyranny had absolutely worn itself out. They have stepped into Tory places, and would be as great as Tories: but ministerial greatness is dead and gone. It was paralyzed with Lord Liverpool,² and after struggling through a few uneasy administrations, expired for ever under the Duke of Wellington.

To us, brethren, it matters little who or what may be the men that direct the crazy machine called the state. We have little to do with them. They are so hampered by the evils of a long course of misrule, that, positively, they can do us no good if they would; and while we act steadily, firmly, and unitedly, they know better than to attempt to do us any harm. As for the capitalists, under whose pride and ignorance we have been so long suffering – we pity them. We are teaching them the best lesson they ever learnt, although they have been paying the political economists to lecture them for these twenty years past. The reformed Parliament is pretty equally divided between them and the land owners. Let them make the best of it. While we adhere to our union, we have nothing to apprehend either from them or their precious legislature.

Brethren, the hopes of your opponents are founded entirely upon notions imbibed by them under the system of hireling labour. They assert that you will be speedily acted upon by the evils of selfishness, jealousy, and disunion. They know nothing of the principle that animates you. Unity is not susceptible of jealousy. It is true you are only at the commencement of your career; and it is possible that there may be some among you who still retain, partially, the habits and feelings of the hireling system. But there exists among you the genuine principle of universal goodwill in an astonishing degree; and its prevalence has not only confounded

1 One of the major nineteenth century British periodicals. For a discussion of the articles on political economy which it contained see Fetter, F. W. 1960, "Economic articles in *Blackwood's Magazine*," *Scottish Journal of Political Economy* 7 (June, November): 85 - 107, 213 - 31.

2 Robert Banks Jenkinson, 1770-1828, second earl of Liverpool British Tory Prime Minister, 1812-27; someone seen here as lacking the stature of earlier Prime Ministers such as William Pitt.

your enemies, but shown the world how congenial that principle is to human nature. Your organization under the influence of this benevolent spirit has been simple and easy. You have constituted yourselves into a great trade or productive power, governed by yourselves in all your trading transactions. Your connexion with the state is not altered. The king, the lords, and the commons, are just the same to you as ever they were. You have worked in pain and want, for society; you have resolved to constitute the society for whom you work: in order to accomplish this object, it is necessary that you should have a trade legislature and a trade executive of your own. You have experienced no favour whatever from the legislature or executive of the state. They have sometimes, and not infrequently, endeavoured to make you fear them. They know you could not love them. You now look at your own numbers, your acquired and increasing knowledge, your immense natural and moral influence, and the important interests attached to your cause; you look at all this, and you feel conscious that no state-power, pretending to act for the welfare of mankind, will presume to interfere with you. We know, indeed, too well the narrow and mistaken interests that preponderate in the state legislature, and we never, for a moment, lose sight of its proceedings; but we are watchful, without being apprehensive. Three years ago we were told by the Whigs that we should have reason to rejoice in the measures of their reformed Parliament. They wanted our support to carry their wonderful bill.³ We gave them our support. In doing this, we made the first open display of a portion of our numerical strength – which was then comparatively small to what it is at present. When the meeting at Birmingham was spoken of in the cabinet, a right honourable member turned pale, and exclaimed “this assistance is too strong for us: the productive classes will know the secret of their own strength – a secret they ought never to know!” – “Nonsense,” replied a noble peer, “They will soon forget it.” – No, brethren, our strength, overwhelming as it is numerically, is a thousand times more powerful morally. We are millions, acting for the good of all. We must be loved by one another, and respected by our opponents. We are strong enough morally to resist violence and we know that we cannot be injured except by being violent ourselves. We are too strong to be injured, and we will injure none. We do not repent of the exertions we made in favour of the Whigs and their pretended Reform. We placed them in a situation in which the specious hollowness of their professions and their ignorant incapacity were conspicuous to all mankind. We put them upon their trial. There were people, who thought they would and could do something, even for the insulted and oppressed productive classes. It was on that account that we thrust them into power. We made them the debtors of the people, we endeavoured to instil into them a sense of gratitude, as well as a deep sense of their real interests. Look at them now, brethren, and say, is there a man in the kingdom who has, or will ever have, any confidence in a state parliament or a state administration? No, no, brethren; these things have had their day, and a dark and gloomy day it was. But enough. We will henceforth have confidence in ourselves, and our days will brighten.

But, brethren, we have seen enough of parties and politics. What I have just said appeared me to be unavoidable; but having said it, I take a final leave of the subject, and nothing but absolute necessity shall induce me again to meddle with it. Our business, our duty now, is to consider the position we have taken.

³ The parliamentary reform bill, which was to become the Reform Act of 1832. The Act extended the franchise and made it more uniform on the basis of property qualifications. It also effected a transfer of seats from small boroughs to counties and growing conurbations which had previously been underrepresented. The extension of the franchise was largely to the urban middle classes; something that engendered profound discontent amongst those of the working class who had agitated for parliamentary reform.

In theory, that position is as old as the first principles of morality and religion: the practice to which we are having recourse is, indeed, new; and accordingly attended by difficulties that unavoidably attach to a state of inexperience. We feel that the beneficial results of our Union cannot be too immediate to meet the difficulties of our situation; but we, who have long toiled without hope, will not begin to complain now that hope shines before us. Every hour is an hour of advance towards that social happiness, in which our labour will make one another's labour light, and in which it will be the interest of each other to love his neighbour as himself.

The practical object at which we aim is, the securing to every human being a fair share of the produce of his labour. We know that the operative manufacturer, and, in fact, the labourer of every description, requires sustenance, raw material, and tools. These are derived from the reserved produce of former labour, which is termed capital. The amount of the capital in this country is very great; but, brethren, it was you that gave it existence. What hours out of every twenty-four have you not employed in building it up! And what is it now it is reared? What but a vain pretence, unless you animate it: unless you give it thought and activity, the pyramids of Egypt (those monuments of a dreadful sacrifice of human labour to pride and superstition), are not more useless while they may boast of being more durable. Reflect, though in the reflection, brethren, I know there is much anguish, how many of your fellow-labourers, how many with whom you have communed in friendship, how many connected with you by the respected and the endeared ties of relationship, have sunk in toil and want; pale, sickening, starving; while all the energies of their bodies and of their minds was given to the rearing of this mighty mass, this boasted capital! "It is reserved labour!" cries M'Culloch. "Ay, reserved," shout a hundred bloated capitals over their French and Spanish wines, "reserved for our present and future prosperity!" From whom and out of what was it reserved? From the clothing and food of the wretched – from the refreshment of the weary – from the wages of those who sink exhausted on their hard pallets after sixteen hours of almost ceaseless labour.

Brethren, it is not our fault if this mass of capital, how grievous soever may have been to us the cruel means by which it has been reserved, should become torpid, or should crumble away like a pile of ruins. We are ready to forgive, and to consign to oblivion the many heart-rending injuries that are mingled with it; we are willing to forget that there is upon it the sweat of our brows and the marks of our hands: we say nothing of what share of this reserved labour was our own, and might still have been ours. No, no; on the contrary, we come forward generously and manfully, and invite the holders of this reserved labour, these capitalists, to associate themselves with us; and we propose to them, that in dividing the future associated profits, every two thousand pounds advanced to the association shall receive the same emolument as an associated labourer. Let the holders of reserved labour chew the cud upon this proposition. They may be assured that it will not be made them next year. Before the seasons shall have gone their next annual round, we shall be beginning, at least, to possess reserved labour of our own. Reserved labour, or capital, as they call it, will, with our activity and frugality, accumulate rapidly; and the means of this accumulation will be the subject of my next letter.

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LETTER III

Capital is that on which your enemies, brethren, rely for your overthrow. It is in the name of capital that they are now secretly instigating the administration to interfere with your proceedings. The petty tyrants of Derby⁴ talk big of their capital and of its miraculous powers! These pigmy imps, upon their piles of pence, think they can command your destinies, my friends and brothers, and move you, as they please, from the mill to the workhouse. They, with the greater capitalists near them, have the ignorant impudence to call the partial personal riches, which they have scrapped together out of what ought to have been your fair share of profits, national capital! They speak in lofty terms of the benefits which the NATION (Heaven save the mark!) derives from the fraudulent deductions from your earnings. They are telling Earl Grey⁵ that, unless something is done by his legislature to break up your Unions, they shall be obliged to carry their capital to foreign countries; and by such means to assist – they have the audacity to say – “the rivals of our national greatness!” In God’s name, let them go. To believe them, we must conclude that capital is power; and the knowledge and labour, the creators of capital, are nothing. They mistake, brethren, the fruit for the tree – the produce for the producer!

Let us not be terrified, my friends, by such boasts and threats. Sorry am I to say that there are some few, even among yourselves, who still imagine that the difficulties that must arise from what is termed, *our want of capital*, are insurmountable. Where is there any capital that was not, in the first instance, an emanation from ourselves; the creation of our hands and our ingenuity; the very seed-pods of that fruit that sprung up and was ripened by our toil? For shame, – shall we want that which we can create by our labour, and preserve by our frugality?

Let us not confuse the idea of money with that of capital. We can do great things with very little of the former. Let us produce the plenty; we shall not be without sufficient money to represent it, and, as the representative credit of it, to convey it in exchange to distant producers and consumers. We are, even now, quite able to establish a bank and a circulating medium upon the solid principle of common unity and utility; but there does not exist a more mischievous evil in the old system than that of supposing an abundance of money conducive to the activity of production, or to the equitable distribution of produce. Permanent capital, which consists of mills, machinery, warehouses, &c., is the work of ourselves. Almost all the permanent capital of the kingdom is in possession of the capitalists; and I shall have much to say to you, in the course of these letters, with respect to the power with which we have been taught to consider it to be imbued. Fear it not, brethren. You are the soul and the life of it; and without you, its gigantic members are but the limbs of a mouldering carcass: which will again rise into existence, only when those who now claim the ownership of it shall cordially unite with us in all our consolidated efforts to render the plenty in our power the foundation of general comfort. In the meantime, as mechanists and builders come among us, we shall speedily have permanent capital of our own. With respect to the raw materials requisite for our various fabrics, the supply of them will be secured as our Union extends and embraces within its circle producers and cultivators, both at home and abroad.

4 A reference to the employers who perpetrated the lockout of silk weavers in 1833-34 to compel them to forswear trade union membership.

5 Charles Grey, second Earl Grey, 1764–1845, Whig Prime Minister, 1830-34.

But I am aware that, in the minds of many, a scheme of general trade unity, moving in all its various branches, as manufacturers, mechanics, agriculturists, and traders, to one great end – the general benefit, still appears to be extravagant. The conception say some, is too much in advance of the present era. This, brethren, is a weak and unmanly suggestion, which ought to be received with caution by those who love mankind, and wish sincerely the happiness of the race. Circumstances are far more frequently in the advance of the knowledge and the ideas of man, than men of the most extensive powers of foresight are in advance of the circumstances by which they are surrounded; and it is from the unprepared state of society to meet the constant series of changes to which it is unavoidably subjected, that a great portion of our difficulties and miseries continually proceed. The system of associated labour, into which, brethren, we are now so resolutely entering, is not a scheme or invention of any individual or body of individuals. There is no man can take upon himself to say that he has discovered it by the force of his vision, or that he has promulgated it through the impulse of his particular benevolence. No; the system of associated labour, is the natural and regular off-spring of the times in which we live; it is the unavoidable result of that concourse of circumstances which belong to the present state of civilization. By his particular position, and by his superior opportunities of observation and experiment, that eminent philanthropist, Robert Owen,⁶ has been enabled to announce the crisis of associated labour; but both he and associated labour itself, are the necessary consequences of events over which no powers on earth have any control. The time is arrived. Competition, if continued, must produce sanguinary revolution; it will not be continued, because the majority of the most powerful members of society, the productive classes, have become convinced that the interests of individuals can be secure only in the interests of the whole.

Hireling labour has been upheld upon the narrow principle, that millions of human beings are brought into the world with no other right to eat (with no other ticket to the public dinners of society, says Malthus), except what they can obtain by hiring themselves out for the service of others; in other words, by selling their lives, piecemeal, by the day, the week, the month, or the year. The slave is a human being, sold by one man to another and generally for life. The hireling labourer is compelled by hunger to sell himself, and would scarcely be worse off than he frequently is, could he, indeed, sell himself for life; but the civilized buyers of civilized men know better than to make such bargains; they only buy so much of a man as they can make any profit of; they will have the best joints, the best days of his life; all the rest may be thrown to the dogs, or in a ditch, or a workhouse, just as it may happen.

This purchased or hired labour, produces far more than the purchasers and the purchased can together consume; and yet the former will, even then, scarcely acknowledge that the latter have a clear right to sit down with them to what Mr. Malthus terms the “table of society.” It is well if the unhappy beings, after having given the longest and the hardest labour for their ticket, are allowed the broken meat from the over-loaded board; it is well if the lordly labour-buyers do not turn round upon them, and, pointing to the enormous abundance before them, say, “go away, we don’t want you; there is an over-production; there is a glut; you must go and starve in the outhouses until we want you to produce a fresh quantity.”

Is this image of the wretchedness to which hireling labour is subject too strongly marked? Ask the politi-

⁶ Robert Owen, 1771-1858, was the foremost communitarian socialist in early-nineteenth-century Britain. In the period 1833-34 he engaged with the trade union movement as a means of furthering his own socialist objectives. He was, though, generally antipathetic to the kind of struggles in which the trade unions engaged. Nor did he view favourably the kind of combative rhetoric that characterized the *Letters on Associated Labour*.

cal economists. The political economists, champions as they are for the dreadful system, in the pay of the capitalists, admit every feature of the figure to be correct, they vindicate its evils as matters of necessity, and then, with a compassionate smile, warn the miserable labourer of the folly and unkindness of propagating his species under such circumstances. Reduce yourselves to mere machines, and then you will have some small chance of competing with machinery. Oh, if you had no more life in you than a steam engine, what a happy race you would be!

And what, brethren, is the object of a system so debasing, so opposed to reason, and to religion? Profit, permanent profit; the accumulation of individual riches, and consequently the selfish appropriation of the wealth of the community in partial heaps! But the profits, so long the boast of ignorant and unfeeling avarice, are approaching their termination. The combined forces of ingenuity and industry, of machinery and labour, are creating such plenty, that profits are nearly impossible. The capitalist perceives in the very plenty that flows from his mills into warehouses, an accumulation of goods which he cannot force into the market; and he then turns round and tells the operatives that he must reduce their wages. Hence the cause, brethren, of the array in which we stand; it is, as I have already said, a position which circumstances have forced upon us. The old system, with its rulers, its capitalists, its money brokers, its lords and its princes, would if it could, make laws to repress our efforts, to imprison us, and, upon charges of treason, to bring out their hireling armies to slaughter, us. The government of France has ventured to take the lead in the work of oppression. Let them beware. But this is a subject on which I have much to say. We do not fear force or violence, but we hate it. No force that can be brought against our Unions, the Union of labour, either abroad or at home, can change the course of those events that are the natural results of the present state of civilization; but it will necessarily produce evils that humanity must deplore.

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LETTER IV

The theme on which I am addressing you, my beloved and associated brethren, is itself too important to give place to observations that arise in my mind on the occurrences of the day; but, as some of those occurrences belong to my theme itself, they demand immediate notice. The hostile spirit which the State power has displayed with respect to the unfortunate men of Dorsetshire,⁷ is, I must confess, beyond the worst of the bad deeds which I believed them capable of committing. I understand them now. I had a hope that still clung to them. I endeavoured to persuade myself that they could not fail to see the vantage point in which they might step forward as arbitrators between labour and capital; but it is plain that they have made up their minds to stand by the old system, just as their noble premier once declared that he had made up his mind to stand by his order. The old system of competition, and the old order of aristocracy, are both rotten. They may have had their uses; but they are, neither of them, suited to the present period. The more quietly they make their exit, the better it will be for their still lingering friends, and for the public generally.

The hostility to our cause, as it is shown in the case of the Dorsetshire men is mean and pitiful; but it is not the less rancorous and virulent. I am scarcely correct in calling it pitiful, but I do not use the term with any reference to the circumstances of the victims. Let the clubs of the West-end⁸ – the exclusives and the black-ball clubs – the fashionable free-masons – the Cumberlanders – the orange and conservative bands – let these come forward with their oaths of every party colour – let them show me six men among them all of greater piety, or higher moral rectitude; men more entitled to bind their bond of temporal union with an appeal to eternity. Oaths, public and private, have been in use among mankind ever since the human mind was impressed with an idea of a deity. As pledges of veracity and fidelity, they have been demanded in the most scandalous profusion by the government and by the church of England. At the treasury, the custom-house, at the courts of law, and at the two universities, the Deity is perpetually insulted by the false and contradictory appeals that are made to him. Oaths are, in all these places, taken for the most selfish considerations. Upon a far better principle did these six poor men endeavour to bind themselves to be true to their common interests. If anything could restore sanctity to oaths in the eyes of the public, after the open and infamous abuse of them by the church and the state, it would be the solemn adjuration of a Creator, and by their hopes in a future state, to stand by one another for their right to such remuneration of their labour as may suffice for the food, clothing, and the shelter of themselves and their families! It is nothing to the point, brethren, that many of you may be ready to say with me, “we want no oaths – sound-hearted, sensible men, impressed with a proper sense of the important objects which they have in view, want no oaths to bind them to one another!” This is not the question. I want to know where is the equity, where the common honesty, of transporting men for taking among themselves an oath of this nature, and for so laudable a purpose, while thousands are everyday compelled to take oaths of the most absurd character, and which they can seldom take without injuring their morals, and in-

7 A reference to the six Dorsetshire labourers (the so-called Tolpuddle Martyrs) who were tried, convicted and transported to Australia in 1834 for administering oaths in connection with the an agricultural union of which they were members.

8 Of London.

sulting their God! Am I told that such an honest, such a truly religious and virtuous oath is illegal – that there exists a law upon the statute-book against taking such an oath? Then let the period in which such a law was made be as a warning to us in the annals of our country; and let us lament that there ever could be men among us actuated by such miserably selfish motives as not to understand the beauty and the rectitude of all union, and particularly of the union of the poor, to preserve the worth of their labour!

I ask not whether the execrable law is of Whig or Tory origin. The Whigs have adopted, and have even perverted it from its original intent, in order to make it their instrument of vengeance! But do they really know what they are about? Will they not see, in the spirit with which you, my brethren, have advocated the cause of these victims of injustice, what our opinion is of the transaction? Will they openly tell you that they despise you and your opinions; and that they will not desist from their hostility until they have broken up your Union, and bound you in hireling slavery to the mill wheels of the capitalists? Will their conduct bear any other interpretation? I lament to say that it will not. I grieve from my very soul, brethren: I grieve to perceive that the State power is so blind and so infatuated – so much the tool of the mistaken interests of a mere handful of capitalists, as thus to place themselves at issue with associated labour, and to commence the warfare – (what else but warfare is it?) – with such a deed of cruelty and injustice! Do they expect to check in the smallest degree the progress of the cause of associated labour by any such proceeding? If they have any such idea, it is because they know little of the circumstances of the times – they understand nothing of the crisis which the gigantic powers of knowledge and industry have produced!

The productive classes in this country are capable of creating, in any given portion of time, a quantity of useful and exchangeable wealth, of which, fifty years ago, no person could have formed the most distant conception. The spring – the prime movement – the quickening impulse of the mighty creative power, was found among the abject, the despised, the labouring poor. The vital flame did not emanate from among the learned or the rich. Arkwright, and Crompton, and Peel, and Watts, and the other inventors and improvers and first employers of the machinery, started from among the people – from among the humblest of the people. The capitalists of their day trembled at the power which they saw coming into competition with them; and, with great reluctance, connected themselves with it; but the immense profits, the more than princely fortunes, with which it recompensed its inventors, and those who aided them with money, encouraged the belief that there is no assignable boundary to the realization of the most extravagant expectations of the most avaricious. The plenty produceable by the ingenuity and industry of man, acting by means of machinery continually improving in creative power, has indeed no assignable limit; but the profit derivable to individual capitalists, in the creation of such plenty, has its limit – a limit at which the capital of the kingdom has long since arrived, and where it is struggling by every sort of temporary manoeuvre to save itself from being crushed and crumbled to atoms.

Plenty is a terrible foe to profit. Every capitalist hates the plenty of another. “Plenty is an evil!” said the late Lord Liverpool, about fifteen years ago. The Dutch annually destroy more than half the produce of their spice islands; and corn-importers have been accused of throwing half their cargoes into the sea. What cries have we heard respecting over production and glutted markets! And what stagnation of trade, what misery, what nakedness, and what hunger have been caused by warehouses chokeful, from the ground floors to the roofs, with corn and clothing! There is an awful lesson in this incontrovertible statement! turn or twist of that

accommodating divinity for which the men of profit build chapels and churches? Can it, I ask, be reconciled to Christianity, by any pretence worthy the name of common sense, that the pious manufacturer, after having heard the gospel on Sunday, shall tell the wretched hundreds that surround his works and his warehouses on the Monday morning, that they have made so much plenty that they must starve? That they have called into existence, by the energy of their minds and the strength of their hands, so much clothing, that nakedness must be their lot? That they have, in fact, created so much wealth, that they must pine in poverty?

No, brethren, the connexion between plenty and misery, which is perpetually recurring, is as contrary to Christianity as it is to nature and to reason; and it proves, in the most plain and direct manner possible, that the system of individual profits and hiring labour is totally at variance with the welfare and improvement of mankind. It proves that our only hope upon earth is in associated labour; and it proves still more – it proves that manufacture, with its increased powers of production, and its daily extending powers of communication, will go in a course of temporary employment, diminished profits, depressed wages, misery, ruin and discontent, until the generous and Christian system of Associated Labour shall be generally adopted, or turbulent revolution overwhelm the civilized world. The struggles between selfish profits and impoverished labour have ruined the finest and most flourishing states on the face of the globe. Wherever plenty has been, there the selfish usurper and monopolizer of that plenty has seen his profits decline, and, in expectation of retaining or improving them, he has crushed and oppressed the producers, until the miserable beings, maddened by constant irritation, have either risen in vengeance or have sunk into abject wretchedness, servility, and vice. The plenty of nature, when seized upon by individuals, and distributed at, what the slang of our political economists calls, a remunerating price, is as replete with misery as the plenty of manufacture; and when we seek for the causes that have made Italy and Sicily the lovely residence of squalid poverty, we shall find them in the precarious profits which are endeavoured to be extracted from the constant munificence of God and nature. But, in the course of these letters, it is my intention to show, from historical and geographical facts, that it is the necessary consequence of improving cultivation and manufacture to render rents and profits impossible – aye, completely unattainable; and that this is a state in which we are, in this country, plunged at present; where we see thousands daily thrust into workhouses, or compelled to emigrate, merely because the usurpers of the plenty we produce keep insisting upon an unattainable profit ere they will permit the distribution of it. The landowners know that, were the Corn Laws⁹ to be repealed, their rents would flit away like the shadows of summer clouds; but the Corn Laws must be repealed, for the rising spirit of Associated Labour will not permit their continuance. At the repeal of these scandalous enactments, the capitalists will at first rejoice; but production, the offspring of intellectual and bodily labour, will again force their temporary profit to its farthest limit, and compel them to acknowledge that in Associated Labour and general union the peace, the strength, the happiness of themselves and their fellow-creature is to be found. Seek you for practical Christianity, brethren? For more than eighteen hundred years Christianity has been preached, but it has no where been practical, and it never can become practical, until the system of Associated Labour shall be established.

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⁹ The Corn Laws, passed in 1815, prevented the importation of foreign wheat until the domestic price rose to 80 shillings a quarter.

LETTER V

Ill health, the usual attendant on old age, has interrupted, and must again, occasionally, interrupt, the series of letters which, brethren, it is one of the highest consolations of my remaining days to address to you. In *Associated Labour*, I anticipate a happy destiny for my fellow-creatures which the energies of man's intellectual powers are preparing for the human race, and I rejoice in the prospect. The selfish tyranny which has implanted and encouraged the separate and petty interests that set men and bands of men in enmity against each other, is giving way before the knowledge we are rapidly acquiring, and before the plenty we are continually producing. Unhappily the interests – the mistaken and perverse interests – of that false greatness, of that personal wealth and of that pompous state authority, which seized upon us and enslaved us in the days of our abject ignorance, are still strong and extensively prevalent. The rich and the proud and the mighty are determined, brethren, to keep you shackled and depressed, struggling upon the very lowest limit of want and misery, while they tear from you the produce of your labour, and waste it in ostentatious luxury. Yes, as much as they can, they would make of the whole human race, whom God made equal, two distinct and separate classes, the enjoyer and the producer, the grower and the feeder, the weaver and the wearer. But they begin to count your numbers; they observe your increasing intelligence; they see your Unity! They feel conscious that concessions must be made to you, and that each concession must lead to further concessions, until the capital and labour of society shall enter into one general consolidated Union, not upon the narrow speculative basis of individual profit, but upon the great and generous plan of general benefit. They will oppose, for some time, this community of interests; they will struggle long to retain their miserable distinctions, they will fight for what they call their property and their privileges; but you, brethren, you will be ultimately successful, for you have knowledge, and numbers, and plenty on your side; and all the wonderful improvements and acquirements which have so justly been the boast of the last fifty years, must be overwhelmed in renovated ignorance, utterly destroyed and buried in oblivion, before your benevolent views can be defeated or you can again be subjected to the toil and starvation of servile labour.

You have seen, brethren, in the newspapers, what has taken place in France, both at Lyons and in Paris;¹⁰ you have also read of the lamentable affair at Oldham, and you have observed the machinations of our adversaries at Exeter. Your eyes are open, brethren: you want no explanatory comments on these occurrences. They speak plainly enough; and you are prepared to meet with unflinching firmness all the consequences of these, and of similar occurrences which weak and selfish men have in preparation against you. You hear their threats, but you know that while you act with unanimity you can at any time paralyze their boasted strength, founded as it is in the brutal force of their armies, and maintained out of that plunder of your industry which it is everyday in your power to render unavailable. They are nothing, absolutely nothing, without you; while you are every thing without them: aye, the fewer you have to maintain by profits, rent, tribute, or taxes, the better. They had their origin in conquest, in robbery, wholesale robbery, in fraud, in the fraudulent abuse of your religious confidence; they sprang into existence in the midst of blood and devastation; they crawled into being from the dust and filth of superstition; they owe their useless or noxious lives to the pride and corrup-

¹⁰ A major outbreak of industrial unrest amongst textile workers occurred in Lyons in this period which was crushed, with loss of life, by the military.

tion of courts, and to the errors of an ill-contrived legislature! Such, my brethren, are your opponents. On the other hand, look at yourselves. You owe your existence to God alone. The energies of mind and labour constitute your strength. You boast not of blood and rapine, nor do you cry out with the proud lords of the land, “The hands of our ancestors were imbued in slaughter and therefore we have a right to maintenance and respect.” Your rights, brethren, are not the rights of the sword: they are not the rights of the sceptre over the weak, or of the crozier over the ignorant, No; your’s are the rights of honest toil; the just, the indisputable rights of the labourer to the bread produced by the sweat of his brow. Their system had its rise in the curse of man against man, and has existed, and will continue to exist only as long as men will suffer themselves to be preyed upon, and, under the lacerating demands of profits, rents, tribute, interest, and taxes, let themselves be devoured to the very bone by the vermin in their own shape whom, in the blindness and carelessness of their ignorance they have permitted to grow and multiply among them. Your system, my brethren, is founded upon the curse – shall I not rather say the blessing? – which God pronounced when, expelling man from Paradise, he condemned him, not to vicious indolence, but to the virtuous and invigorating exertion of labour. It was by those exertions, and by those alone, that the mental and bodily faculties could be called forth; that man could learn his dependence upon man, and after a long unhappy period of error and iniquity, could discover that his welfare upon earth consists in that true Christian charity, that real love of his neighbour, which is nowhere to be found but in Associated Labour!

But it is time to consider the subject in a more practical point of view. Events are crowding thick upon us, and we are called upon by common prudence to take the position which promises us most security from the designs of those who are desirous of interrupting our progress. Our proper position, my brethren, is that of defence – of firm, calm decided, defence. The circumstances and events of the times are all in our favour. It is these circumstances that are stinging our opponents to madness. The energies of industry cannot be retarded; there cannot be profits and rents in a state of increasing and accumulating national plenty, without a frightful enlargement of pauperism and poor rates. When profits and rents are tottering as they do at present, what security is there for the state revenue, including the pay of the army and the interest of that debt for which the Parliamentary landowners in both houses pledged their lives and fortunes? Verily, my brethren, if the fund-owners had in them a few grains of real prudence, they would sell out their stock for what they can get for it, while they can get anything for it, and bring it as capital to our associations. But they will not take this advice; and the less will they do so at the present time, when the plenty which we are creating is making the interest of their stock more and more valuable, and will continue to do so, in spite of the shouts of the landlords and the manufacturing-lords for a tax upon dividends. Tax dividends, indeed! Violate public credit! No, not for the throne of King William; or what is perhaps more precious, not for the order of Earl Grey!

Thus, in a few, in a very few lines, may be pointed out the chief of those circumstances which are fighting for us, brethren, with more certainty of victory than we could do ourselves, were all our mighty numbers drawn out in array with arms in our hands. Formidable, dreadfully formidable, would be the appearance of the labouring bees of this mighty hive, calmly swarming, by the law of nature, for the general turning out of the drones. But no, brethren, we have no such instinctive animosity. Let the drones not insult us; let them array no armies against us; let there be no excitement of policemen; no spies; no plot-instigators; no busy, meddling, and bustling magistrates; no male nor female intriguers and sowers of sedition sent forth by the drones; but let

all go on quietly according to the natural and regular progress of events; let this be the case, and all we aim at, brethren, will be effected in peace. But this will not be. The selfish herd – oh, what a swinish herd it is – have got an army and have got a police; and the police and the army are very desirous, it is said, of “giving proofs of their loyalty!”

In this country, not only will the state power, though strongly urged by the selfish, the foolish, the vicious, and the illiberal, to have recourse to the military, be much more reluctant to such a measure, than the government of Louis Phillippe, but the army itself, in England, differs materially from the army in France in its connexion with the manufacturing operatives. The proportion of the manufacturing productive power to other labourers is, in France, as one to two, while in England it is as two to one. Again, the unity of interests between the manufacturing producers and the agricultural producers is scarcely understood and not at all acted upon in France, while we see it perfectly admitted among us, so as to constitute the ground of our sympathy with the Dorsetshire victims. Hence in France there are four men to one in the army who have no family or social tie of any sort with those on whom they are commanded to fire; while the proportion of men in the army drawn out of our populous manufacturing districts is not only more than the reverse of this, but even those taken from agricultural towns and villages have relatives who are unionists themselves, and who are closely identified in views and interests with the manufacturing unionists. Military discipline and obedience are very powerful in the British army, but the military sentiment has not, thank God, so completely supplanted or been substituted for the sentiment of country of kindred here as it has amongst our neighbours. Besides, the nature of our claims is generally and well understood in the army, and the feelings of a great portion of the soldiery is in our favour, as the Secretary of War is aware. Again, it cannot be proved, by any perversion of our publications or proceedings, that there is the slightest degree of disloyalty in our views or intentions. We have worked with hand and mind. The greatness of the King and the kingdom is the result of our labour, and all that we ask for is, to secure to ourselves and our families for the future a just share of the plenty we produce. No, my brethren, we have little to apprehend from the King or the army; and the ministers will, I am persuaded, be very reluctant to play the game which the French government is so lamentably playing. In our London police and our London and provincial magistracy there is more danger to be apprehended. They are instigated by mistaken and malignant people to urge you to acts of violence, or to find some unconstitutional flaws in your proceedings, but, my brethren, you have been in a state of watchful endurance too long to be likely to fall into their snares.

SENEX.

LETTER VI

Your meeting in Copenhagen-fields, on the 21st inst.,¹¹ and your subsequent march to Whitehall, merits, brethren, and will obtain, whatever your enemies assert, the applause and the gratitude of all who sincerely love their fellow-creatures. That miserable scribbler, the editor of the Times, whose ideas and opinions are wholly dependent upon the breath of his patron, and whose soul, of cork and feather texture, is ever uppermost upon the currents of the partial interests of the day, has been instructed to stigmatize your objects, and to condemn your pacific display. This writer is always in tune with those who constitute the prevailing middle class of society, and would have it believed that he takes the lead in the public concert; but I have observed that though, like a trumpet or a drum, he makes the most noise, he is never anything more than an accompaniment, of the most inferior description. Sometimes I have watched him as I might watch a weather-cock, with a desire to know from which quarter the wind blows. But the situation of the thing, whatever boasts have been made of it, is miserably low; and on every side of it there are old buildings, particularly to the east and westward, through which occasional breezes rush with very partial gusts, so that in every point of view it is really of very little utility. You, brethren, I am well aware, can coolly despise the cool insolence of this editor's remarks. You want not his good word, and can afford to accept the unintentional benefit that results from his bad one.

But let the Times deal with us, brethren, as it may think pleasing to its patrons we look for the approbation of a wider and better-informed portion of the public, than those who compose the bulk of his readers. He wants now no proof of the justice, the calm rectitude, and the peaceableness of the motives that govern our conduct. He witnessed them on the memorable twenty-first; though perhaps he as much under-rated them, as he then under-rated our numbers. Still, it would be out of nature to suppose that he or any man, however distorted his feelings may be by party views, could be totally untouched by that sentiment of admiration, which the march of your Army of Peace, brethren, so generally excited. I care not who they are, or to what degree their habitual fondness for the splendour of military array and the glitter of arms may have grown, but I call, unhesitatingly, for the conscientious sentiments of any hundred spectators of your procession, and I cannot permit myself to doubt that seventy out of every hundred will declare that there was a simple grandeur in the display, which awakened a more pleasing sensation in their breasts than anything that they ever beheld at coronations, reviews, or lord-mayors shows. I know the crowd which such exhibitions as those I have just mentioned draw together. I might estimate, as the Times of the 22nd does, with reference to your movement of the preceding day, the loss of time and wages which such useless, or worse than useless parades, occasion to labouring men and their families. I might dwell upon the drunken and disorderly evenings and nights with which the days of such idle display terminate; I might ask, and perhaps calculate, with an accuracy equal to that of the Times, the cost to the labourer of these reviews, coronations, and city pageants, independent of his loss of wages and time; and I might conclude by daring the Times to prove that they compensate to the

11 A large public meeting of members of the Grand National Consolidated Trades' Union which took place in London on 21st April 1834. It was estimated by the *Pioneer* that the number of trade unionists who processed to the fields was of the order of forty to fifty thousand.

working man such cost, by any beneficial moral effect whatever. There have always been occasions in which labouring men have felt gratification, far from reprehensible, in sacrificing a day of toil; and it must be admitted that, on the part of those whose labour, always sold at its lowest marketable value, as their only means of sustenance, the sacrifice of a day is a serious loss. But who is it that reproves us for the sacrifice we made on the twenty-first? Truly those who have boasted of the numbers in which we have assembled on occasions which they are pleased to call loyal; who have extolled us when they saw us in the train of any man in power, whether a Wellington or a Grey; and who, a few years ago, boasted of the multitudes with which we appeared ready to support the Whigs and their most promising of all promising administrations. No, brethren, it is not your loss of time and money which the Times and similar writers commiserate; and had you brought with you an address to the King, approving of the wonderful plans of church reform and the poor-laws, which the Whigs intend to be their master-pieces of legislation this session, the Times would have counted you at not less than half a million, and would have beheld the dignity of national loyalty in all your movements. Lord Melbourne¹² would have walked with Mr. Phillips, and a train of well-paid clerks (who would have lost no wages by so doing), to meet you, as far at least as the statue of Charing-cross; and the sentinels at the horse guards, instead of being boxed up unseen would probably have been ordered out to salute you by presenting arms! But the object of your petition, and even the calm firmness of your demeanour, had nothing courtier-like in them; they were stamped with the severe moral feature of reproof – yes, brethren, mild though severe. The moral of your proceedings on the twenty-first is nothing less than this – the productive class reproofing the executive power for the injustice committed against certain of its members. And the executive power, in the persons of the ministers of the crown, do stand reproofed by you, and will stand reproofed by you in the pages of history to the end of time. I know the sort of sneer that the editor of the Times, and those of his kidney, will endeavour to throw upon this assertion; he is fond of calling both persons and ideas which are above the scope of his narrow intellect, ridiculous! But I hope and I believe that Earl Grey knows better, and in his heart deeply regrets, as a man, that he has incurred your reproof! The reproof, brethren, of the millions who constitute the great productive class of this rich and powerful country! Were history to continue to be written as it has been heretofore, such reproof might be suffered to slide away from pages in which the people were forgotten, and kings and courtiers only named. But we shall be for the future our own historians; and statesmen shall learn to dread the recorded condemnations of the people.

The Times has the folly to say that your object was to intimidate the government; and the silly magistrate Roe had, I perceive, the stupidity to squeak out a sort of echo of terror of this suggestion. The word intimidation was in constant use at all the old women's tea-parties in town on the Sunday evening previous to your procession; and I have been told of a polite white-gloved lecturer, who made it the subject of a discourse from the pulpit. In fact, in the minds of many fools, and in the mouths of many rogues, intimidation and treason actually meant the same thing; and, at the same time, walking unarmed to solicit the King to do a deed of mercy, meant intimidation! These are the wise-acres, brethren, that we are to call our betters, – to whom we are to pull off our hats, - and to whom we are to say “thank'ye” when they give us a bit of work at the lowest possible wages. There is no natural feeling – no blood – in such beings. The only circulation of which they are sensible is the circulation of money; and of that they are always anxious for its return with profit to their heart,

12 William Lamb, second Viscount Melbourne, 1779-1848, Whig Prime Minister, 1834-1841.

which is their pocket. Fie upon such an alarm, which was got up by the Times principally, as the chief tavern and breakfast-parlour newspaper of the day, to injure us, brethren, in the estimation of society!

But let us look a little closer at this word, intimidation! Party has been in the habit of arraying itself against party, and drunken tumultuous mobs have unhappily been the ignorant tools of each; but the Times, and the ministers too, knew well enough, brethren, that we were totally without the factious stimulants by which riotous mobs are created. It was not any apprehension of vicious tumult on our part that caused them any sense of intimidation. They have their spies among us, and they know us too well to entertain the most distant idea of violence on our part. They know that nothing but pure justice is our object, and that peace, goodwill, and good sense are our guides. Intimidation, indeed! It is the ministers, and those whose cause they are at present compelled to espouse, that endeavour to intimidate – not we! Why has a special law been wrested to a general meaning, in order to make it reach the case of the unhappy men at Dorchester? And why has the cruel, the unjustifiable sentence of transportation been carried into effect against inoffensive beings, so blameless as those victims in equity and even in regular law? The answer is plain: it has been done to intimidate us, brethren; and it has been done under the intimidation of capitalists, land-owners, and other men of property, to whom the ministers and the parliament are compelled to be subservient. The present system of government, and the present order of society, cannot be maintained without intimidation on their part. What is their standing army – what is their well-organized police? Are not these instruments of intimidation? And how do they intimidate? Is it not by threats of worse than brutal force? Is it not by a strictly disciplined – a perfected system of murder? Look at the science that they enlisted in the cause of intimidation – listen to the honourable appellations, and view the splendour of apparel, by which their system of intimidating violence is rendered glorious and seductive! When their forces move, blood is shed, and the widow, surrounded by orphans, mourns amid its triumphs. They fill graves, and they boast that they have restored peace. Ours is a very different movement, brethren! Our firm but pacific ranks come forth not to destroy, but to reprove, to enlighten, and to convince! We will not wound the bodies of even our most obstinate enemies; but we will wound and subdue the consciences of those who, proud of the power they at present possess, make the forms of justice a mockery to us, and banish us as felons for the pretended crime of striving, by unity, to maintain the hireling price of our labour. Yes; they who thus, in their cowardly pride of trembling authority, have done this evil – verily, I say unto you, brethren, they must and shall repent! They know it, they feel it; their parliamentary proceedings are sufficient to convince us that the power of doing and maintaining evil is departed from them: they are entangled in their own folly and weakness, and their fall is at hand. In the meantime, brethren, let us be attentive to the means of improving the moral organization of our unions in all our lodges. Useful, practical knowledge is easily attainable. I speak not against learning: – I am sensible that thousands among us, even with their limited hours of study, are pretty well masters of “the little that can be known!” We have all information enough to convince us that we and our fathers have too long revered pretenders to religious knowledge, and been led and plundered by rogues in the name of statesmen. In the meantime, let us lose no opportunity of exhibiting our numbers, our strength of union, and the moral dignity of our cause. The consciences of our opponents may call it intimidation; but such intimidation is good for them. It is our business to prevent them, and their army, and their police, from intimidating us. Let no man that belongs to the Trades’ Union ever enter into the army, or connect himself with the police. We want no oath; not even a verbal pledge

– I know that it is understood in every heart, that all connexion with the army, or with the restrictive force of the men in power, is to be avoided and abhorred. This is already felt in the army itself, where among our brothers and other relatives in blue and scarlet, it has not been without the good effect of sorrow and penitence. You have now acquired knowledge, brethren, and you are sensible that a standing army is a standing insult; it answers no purpose but to vilify and oppress.

SENEX.

LETTER VII

It matters little, brethren, in what terms Lord Brougham¹³ and his colleagues pronounce your Union to be illegal, or what statutes they may devise to establish that illegality. He dare not assert that your Union is unjust – that it is not completely within the limits of the strictest equity. For what was it instituted but for the defence and enforcement of your just rights – your just and indispensable interests – the interests of your only property, your labour? If ever a Union was legal, your Union, brethren, is most pre-eminently so, or else legality is a farce, and the boasted laws were made for rogues against the claims of honest men! The Chancellor knows this well enough, but the master-archy and the profit-mongers are besetting the poor Whigs, and threatening to call in the gallant Duke and the Tories unless something is done to put your Unions down; and so these unfortunate ministers are compelled to get up a case against you, and to put on a very threatening aspect in denouncing even your burial processions. Old Eldon¹⁴ swears that if he were Chancellor he would do terrible things; and accordingly Brougham feels the pride of his station touched, and cannot refrain from declaring that he, too, can, and will be, as severe as his predecessor.

The speech of Brougham, on Monday, April 28th, however, only tends to show, brethren, how just and how justifiable was your procession on the preceding Monday. That and your funeral processions have startled the lordlings; and Newcastle, Londonderry, and Eldon rose up with a cloud of words of no more meaning than there would be found in a cloud of dust from some old aristocratic mansion. The ministers, unhappy beings, were quite blinded and bewildered. Melbourne stammered out a hope that your public display “would die a natural death!” while Brougham was reduced to the necessity of talking big, without in reality meaning anything. He was obliged to acknowledge that public meetings are legal enough; but added that “it was not legal for men to assemble together in vast bodies disproportioned to the necessity of occasion!” This is such absolute nonsense, that it is not worth while to ask by what rule, either moral or political, he would frame a law to adapt the numbers of a public meeting to the importance of the occasion. A public meeting is, even with respect to its numbers, an expression of public sentiment; and who is it that shall venture, in England, to limit, by a penal statute, this silent but eloquent testimony of the feelings of the people, on any occasion whatever, by the hundred or even the thousand?

But I leave the Chancellor to discover the legislative means of adapting public meetings to public occasions, while I turn to another and far more important subject. On the presentation of some Union petitions in behalf of the Dorchester victims, in the House of Commons, your conduct, brethren, underwent the remarks of various members, and you were charged by several, some of whom pretend to be friendly to your principles and motives, with “tyranny over your fellow workmen:” and this charge was seized upon by the Times, and made the topic of violent article against you. Let us investigate this charge.

No one will pretend to deny that, in the present state of society, labour is your property, and that you have a right to get as high a price for it as you can by fair means obtain.

The purchasers of this your only commodity, combine together in order to compel you to dispose of your

13 Henry Peter Brougham, 1778-1868, first Baron Brougham and Vaux, who at this date was Lord Chancellor.

14 John Scott, John, first earl of Eldon, 1751–1838, an early-nineteenth-century Tory Lord Chancellor.

labour at the lowest possible price. You consequently form your Trades' Union, which is a general combination, to keep up the price of labour.

The purchasers are comparatively few: they can meet without any public display, and take their measures against you in secrecy, and with a unity of purpose, which has on every occasion secured to them a victory over you. They have a close instinctive sense of their interest, and even should there be such a refractory member among them, as a man willing to give higher wages than other masters in the same trade, his ruin is certain to be sure and severe, although there would be no noise made about it.

Your Union, Brethren, great as it is, does not possess the completeness of the combination of the master. You do not move as a whole so perfectly as they do. You have, therefore, not so much power to keep up the price of your labour, as they have to depreciate and keep down your wages.

It may be asked, why the unity of the labourers is not so general or so strict as that of the employers? The labourers have undoubtedly all the same interest in keeping up the price of labour at its highest disposable value; but unhappily they have but recently discovered the importance of acting upon the principle of unity; nor is that principle so well understood and reduced to practice among the sellers, as it is among the purchasers of labour. Many circumstances, in the present state of society, have a tendency to impede that consolidation of union, without which the market for labour will always be against the sellers, and in favour of the buyers. Let us consider the subject in detail. These circumstances are,

1. Want of general information relative to the proper position of the labouring class in the scale of society.
2. The absolute necessity of an immediate and constant market for labour.

The position of the labouring class has hitherto been that of the lowest degradation, and it is even now mentioned by the terms, the lower order, or the lower orders. Compelled to sell their time for the purpose of labour, in order to subsist, at the very lowest price they can obtain, they have none left for those mental improvements by which men are principally distinguished from the inferior animals; and thus individuals in our condition, brethren, have been too frequently in the habit of forgetting to respect themselves. Many have lost their own self-esteem, and they sink into an abject course of conduct. I am an earnest advocate for every man's obtaining as much book-knowledge as his time and opportunities will allow him to acquire; but there is a great deal of useful knowledge to be acquired by observation and attention, without the aid books. At the present day, thank God, very few of us can possibly be unable to read and write; and yet there is little use in reading and writing, if a man will not look about him and think. The want of that habit of thinking and of considering the proper means of benefiting his condition, is the chief reason that there are any among the working classes who still refrain from joining our Union. It is certain that, as knowledge extends, the habit of thinking and of acting with the majority of the class to which we belong, extends also in a still greater ratio. When a man has acquired a habit of reflecting, he cannot help perceiving that all those who have secured most certain and permanent benefits for themselves, have acted in concert with others. The churchmen act as a body; the lawyers, however they may occasionally be individually opposed, have their societies, their unions, to act for the general benefit; and a lawyer who should have conscience enough to act against the principles of the legal body, would be persecuted by his brethren, and shortly ruined. It is the same with all professions, they act upon a principle of general interest in the first instance, and they find their personal interests best preserved

by adhering to the interests of the body. We have not a word in our language which accurately expresses this principle of unity, which has hitherto, Brethren, been exerted so constantly and so resolutely against us. The French term it *esprit du corps*, which means the mind of the whole body. As intelligence spreads, this feeling of the necessity of men who have the same interests acting with one mind, spreads also; and we, the beings who stand most in need of this unity of mind, have, through the want of information and from neglecting our natural powers of reflection, been the most without it. We know it now, and many thousands among us are acting upon it. The numbers of those who are sensible that the disposers of labour can secure no permanent benefit, unless they act for the good of the whole, daily increase. Thousands have joined the Union in the course of last week; and I have not the smallest doubt that in a very short time every operative in the kingdom, let his avocation be what it may, will become a Unionist!

That such a unity of the labourers – of the productive class (which in the United Kingdom, comprehending the agricultural labourers, comprises more than three-fourths of the whole population) – must effect a very great change in the community is certain; but it is a change, without which the word “community” has long been to us, Brethren, and must remain, a word of insult. We, the most numerous, the most industrious, and the most productive class, have been thrust beneath the other classes, and our community of interest with them has been denied, because we have till lately been the least intelligent and the least united.

Seeing, then, the absolute necessity of a close and resolute unity among ourselves; looking at the conduct of the buyers of our labour and their dependents; sensible of the importance of our cause, not to ourselves, as individuals, but to each of us in his connection with his fellow-workmen of every description, who is it that dares to accuse us of tyranny, if we say to the operatives who refuse to join our Union, “We will not work with you; and we will take every justifiable means to prevent your injuring us, either by your folly or your servility. We do not wish to injure you; on the contrary, we have convinced ourselves, by the knowledge we have acquired, by the thought we have exercised, and by the benevolent intentions that have determined our conduct, that we can do no good to ourselves without extending that good to you; but you must not, you shall not, for an immediate and temporary subsistence upon the humble wages offered to your necessities, injure both us and yourselves. We have, in most instances, raised funds out of our own humble earnings for the support of those who may, by their adherence to the common cause, be reduced to extreme distress; but you must reflect that our contention against the profit-mongers and capitalists, though a bloodless one, is not without its suffering and its severe deprivations. We are certain of ultimate success; but at this period, when the contention is at its height, we cannot but feel that you, who must benefit with us in our ultimate victory, are acting ignorantly, if not perversely, against us; and although it is with painful reluctance that we look upon you and treat you as foes, it is impossible for us to do otherwise, with regard to the great principle of general benefit, upon which we are most advisedly, and after well considering its result, most determinately acting. We call upon you, most earnestly, most affectionately, not to oppose yourselves to the great brotherhood of labour! We urge you, by everything that is sacred between men that have a common interest, not to be traitors to yourselves and to your children; for in acting as traitors to the great united family of productive labours, what are you but traitors to your own families? And what can you expect but our present enmity, and the future reproach of your own children? Look at your boys; are they to grow up to be the half-paid labour-sellers to insolent and tyrannical profit-mongers? And are your daughters to be the miserable starving drudges of a mill or a work-

shop? For shame! But the advocates of false humanity tax us with tyranny and cruelty, when we reprove you for doing all that lies in your power to prevent our beneficial success! You have a right, they say, to sell your labour at your own price! No; you have no such right; you can not have a right to injure the community to which you inseparably belong. While by your ignorance or your stupid willfulness you depress, as far as in your power, the general interests of the great community to which you, by nature and situation, belong, you are a disease, which tends to weaken the whole body; and it is our duty to take the most effective means of curing such morbid and corrupt members. Common sense, mere instinct, ought to be sufficient to make you, and those gentlemen legislators who talk so sentimentally about our tyranny, sensible that if you continue to be under-workers of the profit-mongers, to our detriment, and to the injury of our important design, we must, in our own defence, treat you not only as enemies, but as the worst enemies! This however, cannot long be necessary! We observe with joy, that weekly, that daily, you are thronging to enter the fraternal bond of Union; that your wives, and your daughters, and your sons, are encouraging your resolution; and that you participate in our anticipation of the success of a cause, which will render the great family of productive labour the rightful enjoyers of their due share of the plenty they produce!

SENEX.

LETTER VIII

The Representation of the Productive Class in Parliament

While thousands of honest and hard-working labourers of every description are in the lowest state of want, our liberal ministers have been contriving a statute to diminish the relief those unfortunate men may be compelled to claim from the poor's rate;¹⁵ and at the same time these ministers defend the scandalous pensions on the civil list, paid to the paupers of high life, as vested rights. It would be lamentable, brethren, to see the names of men, among those of the defenders of those vested rights, who were chosen to the reformed parliament as friends of the people, did we not well know that such men are totally unworthy of our confidence. He, of DERBY, with his drivelling amendment, was an advocate for the vested rights of the state paupers! Look, at the present condition of the labouring class in that town, and then ask yourselves, brethren, if the interests of productive labour do not demand representatives of very different feelings, and of a very different kind of understanding. There is no need of saying more upon this subject at present. These things are warnings to us. Is property, with all its tyrannies, and with all sympathies towards vested rights, to represent us, to represent labour and the interests of the great productive union, much longer in the legislature? What! after the scene in the House of Commons, on Mr. Harvey's motion, is there one of our whole body that can suppose that those men care half as much about any of us, the labouring class, as they do about the lords and ladies, the baronets and the baronetesses, whom the pay of the pension-list, out of our labour, enables to meet them in general society, and to make their bows and their curtsies in what is called high life? Besides, the wealthy manufacturers, enriched by their enormous profits out of your labour, have some prospects of becoming baronets themselves; and while they blame you for marrying, and endeavouring to bring up a happy family by your unremitted toil, are contriving how they may unite themselves to the aristocracy, and leave their wealth and titles to their eldest son, and stick their younger children upon the pension-list! We know them now; and let every increase of knowledge, brethren, have its due effect upon our future actions.

Our enemies boast among themselves of our want of a well-regulated plan of action, and of a general want of decision. I was in a company of capitalists and their dependants a few days ago, in which the folly of the operative class was matter of frequent observation from a man of influence, a rich man, and a lawyer, who uttered some things that are worth recollecting. He said that you could only make alternate struggles and submissions, until you were reduced into a state worse than slavery, unless you could form large partnership manufactories and trades among yourselves, upon a pure republican principle; but not only would the laws respecting partnerships effectually prevent you from doing so, but also your mistrust of one another, your jealousies, enmities, and God knows what, would keep you from even attempting any thing of the kind. How little, brethren, does such a man know you! How wholly does he estimate you by the characters of the litigating herd which surround him and enrich him out of the plunder of one another! No, we have no mistrust of one another, and we care not a farthing for the law respecting partnerships. We cannot wrong one another, for there is no man in UNION who can imagine a selfish interest. Every unionist feels that he is, as an individual, nothing—worse than nothing—a mere understrapper and tool of some proud profit-monger, who in his Sunday gig, would run

¹⁵ This was the much excoriated Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834.

over him and his children if they happened to cross his way in his drive to his villa ; but he knows, he intimately understands, he feels intensely, that, connected with the UNION, he is part of a mighty body, the producers, and, in some sense (I speak it with reverence) the creators of all that is valuable upon earth. Conscious of this, is it possible that any of the productive class can hesitate to join in the only means that can render their whole body effective? Severally and separately we must, indeed, struggle and starve, and drop into worse than slavery; but we will act in UNION, in one Grand Consolidated UNION,—and we, my beloved, brethren, will enslave none—we will injure none; even our oppressors, who never yet knew what happiness is, shall be happy in the brotherhood which, in Christian charity, we will hold out to them. The way is open before us, and a short time will serve to show that we are able, whatever may be the silly and wicked laws upon the statute-book to restrain the partnerships of honest and beneficent labour, to act together, without jealousies or enmities, in the bond of UNION, good feeling, and general prosperity.

In the meantime, it behoves us, brethren, to look attentively to the state of our representation in the legislature. We perceive that our direct influence in the House of Commons is very small. Our sentiments are never uttered in that assembly in the tone which, ought always to belong to them. We may possibly have as many as half a dozen friends in that place; but there is scarcely one of that half dozen for whose sincerity in our cause I would venture to hold myself responsible. Property regards Labour as a beast of burden; and though there may be some of the property-people more inclined to soothe it, to stroke it and even to feed it, than others, yet they all dread the idea of letting it loose. There is not a man among them, brethren, who does not think, and say, that this beast of burden is actually a wild beast, and that it would, if set at liberty, lay waste and devour all the property in the land! Yes, brethren, upon this very pretence it is that they deny us our share in the legislative representation of the country! They deny this most sacred right, upon the plea, that property is more sacred, that property must be kept aloof from us, that property, and property alone, may be preserved, even at the danger and the certainty of sacrificing, annually, thousands of that great productive class, from whose toil, property, their boasted property, had its birth! What, brethren, what is it that these proud and selfish fools are afraid of? Is it likely that we will destroy that which is our own offspring? No, brethren, we have no madness of that nature in us: we are more likely to increase and to improve it, and to turn it to good account, than to destroy it. We certainly shall instruct the representatives of the great productive, when we have the pleasure of sending such representatives to the national parliament, to look after our darling offspring, property, and to be very watchful that it does not go astray, as it has been sadly doing, for the want of our paternal care and attention. We shall undoubtedly prevent its getting into court corruptions and court intrigues, and we shall warn it against giving ear to the vested rights of state paupers. We shall inquire into its transactions at the Treasury, and balk the foolish fondness it has acquired for playing at soldiers. We shall show it how it must act for the general benefit, and particularly how it must obey the fifth commandment, by honouring its parents, its fathers and mothers, who compose the great productive class of the country; for, unless property does so honour those who gave it existence, it may depend upon it, its days will not be long in the land. And we would advise property to remember, that building workhouses for starving and toiling parents, is not honouring them, and will have no effect in preventing that ruin, which its present pride, injustice, voluptuousness, corruption, hardness of heart, and inveterate selfishness, is bringing upon the land that gave it birth!

Yes, brethren, productive labour must, indispensably, take its seat in the senate. We were formerly told

that we wanted knowledge, and it used to be most learnedly asserted, that some heads were made to think, and some not to think at all. Aye, ye men whose labour has enriched the nation, it was seriously asserted at colleges and in pulpits, that your heads were not intended by the great Creator of the universe for the powers of thought. No, “in the divine order of providence it is determined,” I quote from the book of a bishop, “some shall think and rule, while others shall work and obey.” And we, and our fathers before us, saw the former class of men go on from year to year, thinking, ruling, and robbing, while we of the latter class continued working, and obeying, and starving! Faith, brethren, it is time to let these thinkers know that we can think and rule quite as well as they can, without robbing even them, who have been so long robbing us. This can be only done by demanding admission for the representatives of labour in the legislature.

In case of a dissolution of parliament, we might, by means of our extensive and Consolidated UNION, do something towards rendering the next parliament much more favourable to our cause than the present, which was got up upon mere party principles. The Reform Bill has hitherto been useless, but we have not had time and opportunity to render it subservient to our great purpose of securing to productive labour its due share of the plenty which it produces; yet we were not without great weight and influence in the constituency during the last election; and, indeed, it was chiefly through our misdirected efforts that the Whigs obtained so vast a preponderance. We ought not, as I observed in a former letter, to reproach ourselves for the support we then gave to the framers of a bill, which at least, pretended to have a sort of leaning towards our interests; but we have paid the Whigs for this beneficial seeming of their famous bill; and it is now our business to try, by every means, to render the bill itself of such use to us, as we by our energy may turn it to, on occasion of a new election. The Whig administration is breaking to pieces as fast as it can. In these times, no ministry can hold together upon the old plunder and vested-right system! There must be frequent changes and frequent elections too! Be watchful, brethren; take means, by steadfast adherence to one another, to move firmly on, and at every change, your power will be more and more felt and acknowledged. There are some among you who are, for your sakes, keeping a close watch upon the conduct of those who, through your preponderating influence, obtained their present seats in the reformed parliament. The names of those members are in a note-book, and their deeds, not absolutely to say their faults, are conned by rote!

SENEX.

LETTER IX

On The Real Object of United Labor

Was the UNION of which you, brethren, have lain the foundation, perfectly understood, its success would be secure, and the happiness which is its object would very speedily be attainable. Its strength, however, is necessarily dependant upon its extent, and it can be perfect only when it shall have become universal. Its basis is Christianity, pure Christianity; and he that does not “love his neighbour as himself,” —he who prefers in the slightest degree his own individual gain to the general welfare, is at most a Unionist in name: he is far, very far, from being a Unionist in heart.

In my present letter, brethren, I am about to follow up the design which I commenced in my earlier addresses to you; in which I endeavored to show you that labour is at the present period in its transition state between hireling labour—in which the life of a man is sold piecemeal, by the day or the week, at or below the market price, and associated labour—in which men will, and must, act together for the mutual benefit of the whole body of the association. I showed you that this transition was the inevitable consequence of the plenty which man, by the exercise of his talents and industry, is found capable of producing. Plenty is perpetually passing the limit of profit, by what the wise men of M’Culloch’s school call over-production, and is checked by what we have a right to call the masters’ strike; but which they themselves, with a shake of their empty noddles, and a stroke or two on their full bellies, call a glut. Their remedy, my worthy brethren, for this, to their profit-mongering system, ruinous influx of plenty, is the turning you off for a time, to starve in winter with your families, by the side of a fireless grate; and then, as the surplus produce (what a term the political economists have dared to make use of, amidst a half-naked people who can read!)—as this surplus produce begins to find vent in the market, they gradually recall you to your toil, at the lowest wages, which your long period of suffering amidst your famishing children has induced you to be glad to accept. Oh! These dreadful strikes of the capitalists! I have been a witness of them in various places. In the large manufacturing towns of the north they are truly horrible. The recent slaughter at Lyons presents to the agonized sensibilities of the human heart something more suddenly and instantaneously atrocious. But conceive for a moment the silent yet certain ravages which disease and famine make among thousands who are told that the market for their labour is closed, and that they can no longer sell the weeks and days of their lives for the coarsest food or for the humblest rags for themselves and their children. Some of the master-manufacturers used to advise you to raise funds for your support during these stagnations of your labour; and there were among them a few conscientious persons who were humane enough to subscribe to such funds; but you soon became aware that after every one of these glut-strikes of the capitalists, your wages were reduced lower and lower, while the capitalists themselves, with the cry that the profits would not rise to what they had previously been, insisted upon having you (enslaved by day or week purchase) at a less and less price.

Under such circumstances, the profit-mongering system is continued only by forcing down, by every possible means, the wages of labour; and in effecting this it is again met by an increase of pauperism and the poor’s-rate. Your numbers, brethren, are very great; the majority of you exist upon the extreme brink of want; your sufferings are often severe, and too many of you are ignorant and imprudent ; hence it happens that, not-

withstanding your murmurs and your partial strikes, your wages are easily kept down; and if, in your present important struggle, you had no other object but to get a higher payment by the day or week for your labour, your success would only be in certain trades where the profits of your employers were extraordinarily high, and it would be of very short duration. You may possibly obtain, here and there, a greater share of such profits; but profits of every sort are declining, and the poor's-rate is everywhere increasing, and those among you (I hope there are few such) who are actuated by a selfish desire of sharing with their masters in the luxuries which their present profits obtain for them, must also expect to share in their fate.

The question for the liberal-minded producers of plenty, now, for the first time since Adam, in UNION with one another, is not whether such or such a set of producers shall participate more largely with the capitalists in their profits; but whether, since it is now easily demonstrable, and has been repeatedly demonstrated, that more commodities, conducive to the sustenance, the comfort and luxury of man, can be produced with facility in this country, or brought into it by commerce, than all its inhabitants can consume; the question is, I say, whether there are not means to modify the existing system, so as to approximate at least to that by which the abundance produced shall be more generally and more equally enjoyed?

Shall we, whose heads and hands have made this mighty kingdom what it is,—shall we, who have invented and put into action the inexhaustible powers of production,—shall we sit down hopelessly, and see a government waste the wealth we create, and idle lords and ladies enjoy it, while we are compelled to sell ourselves for the miserable price we can wring out of the fists of the avaricious profit-mongering capitalists? Surely not! What we can produce we can certainly distribute. The obstacles in the way of our effecting this justice to ourselves are indeed monstrous; they are the growth of ages; there are ignorance and tyranny, bloodshed and extortion, in their composition! But only observe what your patience, your un-reposing labour, your astonishing skill and ingenuity, have accomplished for the benefit of others, and then ask yourselves, if, with the same powers of mind, the same exertion of patient perseverance, you cannot remove these disgraceful impediments to your just power over the work of your own hands, over what is more justly your own, and what you have more right to do what you please with, than his grace of Newcastle boasted he possessed over the lands at Newark, which he and his forefathers have long held at a nominal rent of the crown? Yes, brethren, you have an undoubted right to do what you will with your own, and you cannot be long in discovering the means by which you may exercise that right.

The circumstances of the times are in your favour. Those for whom, under the present unnatural and injurious system, you are compelled to labour, are as much puzzled about the division and distribution of their spoil, as you can possibly be respecting the means to obtain your natural power over the division and enjoyment of that which is so indubitably your own. The system of competition extends to those who are in possession of the wealth which you produce; and though they are united to keep you in your hireling state, they are at war with each other. As they have had the government at their own direction, and have looked upon it as a source of power and emolument, they have rendered it the bone of contention among themselves, and the parties into which they are split; have in their turns so much abused its powers, that they dread it while it is in the possession of each other. It was to this dread of one another that we owe the Reform Bill, a bill which, if as yet it has been the means of much deception, and of no real advantage whatever, has at last manifested the weakness, the duplicity, and the folly of its framers. But we must contrive to turn this Reform Bill to some use.

We must have our meetings both public and private to shorten the duration of the present parliament, and to influence the election of the next. The House of Commons must be our own; it must represent the productive interest. The landowners and the capitalists, the rent-mongers and the profit-mongers, are sufficiently represented by the House of Lords. Let the opulent manufacturers, the bankers, and all the men of monied interest find seats in the upper house if they can, either personally or by representation. Perhaps the descendants of the Norman cut-throats and murderers, who came in with Bill the Bastard,¹⁶ may turn up their noses at the idea of the upstarts, as they call the proud profit-gentry, taking their seats in an assembly so dignified ; but they must reconcile themselves to the change. Our business, brethren, is, by every exertion in our power, (and we can do much if we act in union,) to obtain a preponderance in the House of Commons; and when we have done that, force and fraud may have the House of Incurables to themselves, with as many bishops as they may be willing to keep out of their decayed rents and diminished profits, or as they may think serviceable to their most holy cause.

Yes, brethren, we ought frequently to meet and discuss together such measures as may be necessary to disseminate the truths on which our Union and its expectations are founded, and to devise the means of founding manufactories, cultivating land, building ships, establishing trades, opening communications from the Unionists of one part of the kingdom with another, and transacting business, by exchanging produce for produce, on our own account with the industrious and skilful people of other countries. These are at first sight great plans, some of you will say. The greater they are, the more important is it that we should take them into our own hands, and place the management of them with those only who may be wholly responsible to ourselves. Are we less competent to such tasks than those whom we now see bustling, intriguing, and committing all the vicious follies that disgrace the land? Is it more difficult to act simply and honestly, as we in union shall and must do, than to act with greedy duplicity and cunning? No, brethren, we only want a beginning, and the world will soon find that it is actually more easy to make men happy, than it is to render them miserable. Do not the oppressors complain as well as the oppressed? Has not the impious cry gone forth, that it is the lot of man, ordained by the great good God himself, to be wretched, hopelessly wretched? It is indeed, a law of nature that the selfish shall share the unhappiness they create; but it is equally a law of nature that benevolent union shall at once create happiness and enjoy it.

It is not possible, at first, to render our designs so extensive as our wishes, but we are able to make commencements of no very limited importance. We must begin with founding manufactories and trades; we must open shops, and deal entirely with one another; and we shall afterwards proceed to the building of ships, and to both the cultivation and importation of corn. I do not say that Unions for keeping up wages are not at present highly necessary, but they do not tend to the ultimate views of the unionist. They are temporary preventives or alleviations of evils; they will not cure the great disease under which so many thousands of the most honest, the most industrious, the most wealth-creating of the human species are yearly, monthly, aye, sometimes daily, perishing!

SENEX.

¹⁶ A reference to William the Conqueror and the Norman conquest of England in 1066. This event was often used by radical writers to construct a myth of a nascent Saxon democracy overthrown by foreign invasion and the subsequent oppression of the indigenous population.

LABOUR LETTER X

On The Pretended Ignorance of the Labouring Classes

THERE is a most discouraging opinion, brethren, frequently in the mouths of our oppressors and their tools, which is sometimes received and countenanced by some among ourselves, and this I must examine, and call upon you to examine with me, before we proceed further respecting the leading object of our Union. I have heard it repeatedly asserted, and very lately by a person who advocates the justice of your cause, that the majority of you are too ignorant to conduct your own affairs. This is a very old accusation, and has served as a wonderfully convincing reason to prove that one part of mankind should be the drudges of the other, ever since society had any sort of existence. And from whom, brethren, does this accusation, at this period, proceed and by whom is it countenanced? Replies to these queries crowd upon me; but we must pause, and put them a little into order. The subject is an important one; but I think the more it is considered the more simple it will appear; and I despair not of being able, in a very few paragraphs, to put down the accusation and the accusers, and to give more mental strength and self-confidence to such of ourselves, who, it seems, have been somewhat cowed and disheartened by it,

First, as to our ignorance and incapacity. Those who wish us to be blind, who have done, and still do all they can to put out our mental eyesight, are, it must be allowed, extremely kind. In the old-fashioned mills, where horses were used, they were frequently bandaged or blinded, to prevent the poor animals becoming giddy, and because in that state, as I have been told, they would work harder. Our task-masters, upon the same principle, blind us as much as they can; and when they find that they cannot altogether put out our eyes, they endeavour to persuade us either that we cannot see, or that we are giddy and deluded. Kind and considerate souls! How much we are obliged to them! They lay a heavy tax upon the windows of intellect; they do all they can to cover every pane of mental glass with obscure and distorted figures, like the chalk and water dauberries in the kitchen windows at the west end of London, and then they tell us we are too blind to manage our own concerns, while we must be thankful to them for managing our affairs for us. Under this pretence, they rob us, and almost work us to death; and yet these are persons who really mean well to us, crying out, ah, this is but too true! The majority of the people are not sufficiently instructed to be entrusted with power: we must illuminate their minds before we can venture to advocate their elevation in the scale of society!

Brethren, there is an immensity of benefit in what is called education; but do not suffer yourselves to be tricked and bamboozled out of your rights under the notion that you must have education before you are fit to have justice. Education is a very good thing; but men and children must live as well as learn; besides, there is such a thing as education without knowledge, and there is also such a thing as knowledge without education; and of these two things the last is much better than the first. Perhaps, after all that can be done in the business of education, the common sense of mankind will remain pretty nearly at the same level. There are many learned men who are very great fools, and there are men who do not know “a B from a bull’s-foot,” and yet are very sensible and intelligent members of society. All useful knowledge consists in the acquirement of ideas concerning our condition in life; and there are few men of common observation who do not get into their minds, whether they can read and write or not, the ideas that are most serviceable to them. The position

of a man in society, with its obligations and interests, forces ideas upon him which all the theory of education would not have impressed upon him as long as he was not called upon practically to make use of them.

It is thus that those who have no political rights never think of the manner in which such rights may be rendered beneficial to themselves, their families, and their neighbours. But, bestow on them those rights, and there is no doubt but they will soon learn how to turn them to account. Where a man must do nothing but labour hard and long, with very short intervals of rest and relaxation, it is useless to pretend to implant upon his mind ideas that belong to a different condition of life; and it is the very height of cruelty to say that his condition shall not be improved until his ideas are more numerous and more enlarged. Alter his position; connect him, not merely in practical labour, but in practical rights and duties, with his fellow men, and you will be apt to wonder at the ease with which he will adapt himself to his new situation. Upon an average, brethren, in our class of society, measured or weighed with equal numbers in the other classes, we are as good husbands, as good fathers, as good neighbours, as other men. We have our follies and our vices, and so have they. They have more opportunities of concealment than we have: they have cloaks for their shame, which we cannot afford. They have more of the decencies of life, but we have quite as much of the virtues. Our indulgences are short, and they are, therefore, apt to be violent; and, as we too often want the art and means to disguise the consequences of them, they shock the delicacy and hypocrisy of those who call themselves our betters. There are some among these betters of ours, who will not hesitate to class the common thieves and harlots along with brethren, as making a part of what they are pleased to term the lower orders. Let them look to themselves—let them look to the gamblers and the swindlers, the demireps and the prostitutes, the intrigues and the corruptions of polished society; and then, even with all the strumpets and pickpockets which they insolently reckon among us, we should still be the most virtuous and best conducted class of society. But we, brethren, who constitute the laborious productive class, do not deserve the stigma. We may venture to say, that not only do our ingenuity and toil provide all the comforts, the conveniences, and luxuries of life, but the firmness of our minds strengthens the texture of society; and as, sometimes, talented men spring up from among ourselves, and, by dint of industry and frugal exertions, get into what is called the higher classes, such men repay the duplicity and avarice they imbibe from our superiors, with the resolution and perseverance which they learnt among us. No, brethren, it is not ignorance, it is not vice, “that unfits us for the conduct of our own affairs; it is nothing but a deep sense, a full consciousness that our own affairs are really our own! We have been so long deprived of our own, that we can hardly persuade ourselves that our own is actually our own. We do not think sufficiently about it. We have been so accustomed to regard ourselves and all that actually and naturally belongs to us, in a false point of view, that we find it difficult to see these things as we ought to see them. This is not because we are ignorant, but because we have been accustomed to error. We want no new knowledge, no new powers of mind, no new doctrines of any sort; all that we want is confidence in ourselves and an exertion of common sense, a resolute determination to look straight forward.

Even in point of book-knowledge or literature, of which, so much is thought at the present day, the barons and the first representatives of the commons, five hundred years ago, were far more ignorant than the majority of ourselves, brethren, are at present; but they depended upon their perception, their common sense, and the rights which they acquired and exercised with unshaken firmness, and with, much discretion. They took every advantage of the expensive ambition of Edward I, and of Edward III. At every demand of the

sovereign, they strengthened the foundation of that power of property which it was long the fashion to call liberty; though to you who compose the great productive power, in which that power of property had its birth, it has been, indeed, the very reverse of liberty. But they, the barons and the wealthy commons, who, under a nominal monarchy, actually ruled the land, had their wants also; and your forefathers, your untaught, brutalized, enslaved forefathers, had sense enough to rise from the state of serfs, from the state of feudal bondage, of hereditary labour, fixed and bound to land on which they had their birth, by means of the wants of their enslavers, into a more liberal condition; and they attained the right, not previously known generally, or even extensively to any part of the globe, of selling their labour by the year, the month, or the day, to any master or employer they might choose. Talk of ignorance, indeed! They effected this gradually in a condition the most humiliating, and under circumstances more oppressive than you, under the most abject of your distresses, can possibly conceive! But, good heaven! This is not to be the term in the career of the emancipation of the great productive power of labour. They advanced themselves and you, their descendants, one degree in the scale of society; but it is for you, by their example, and with far greater advantages, to advance yourselves and your immediate posterity the next degree. But the subject is too important to be entered into as it ought to be in one letter, and I must resume it in the next.

SENEX.

LETTER XI

On The Information of the Working Classes

In my last letter I urged, brethren, upon your attention the cruelty and injustice of those who would withhold from you your rights, under the pretence that you do not possess the information to use them without injury to yourselves and the community. My proposition is that men very speedily adapt themselves to their position in society; and that their position itself instils into their minds the ideas belonging to it and induces the desire for those acquirements that are demanded by its duties. There are, consequently, no rights claimable by men, in a free country, that ought, upon any pretence of incompetence through ignorance, to be denied to us, brethren, at the present period: but with respect to us, this country, great and wealthy as it is by our ingenuity and labour, is not free, and our position in it is far from being political. The bishop who said that we had nothing to do with the laws but to obey them, uttered, with shameless audacity, a scandalous truth. But let us consider with what we have to do; that is our present concern. Our position is that of abject and complete dependence upon capitalists, who buy us piece-meal by the week, in order to gain a profit by our labour. This is our position in society, and it is abundant in evils, of which one of the greatest is that it contracts our thoughts, debars us from the means of general information, and forces us, without allowing us time for reflection, into those vicious habits of society which are fanned and encouraged by those who live upon the produce of our labour. The invention of machinery, the consequent influx of production, and the diminution of profits, together with the increasing facilities of communication, and the spread of general information, have, within the last few years, roused us to look more attentively to our actual situation in society than was probably ever done before by the producers of wealth in any other part of the world. We have acquired the inestimable arts of reading and writing, those astonishing faculties of receiving, retaining and imparting ideas; and, although the press is yet but very partially our ally, our means of arriving at a knowledge of our true interests are greatly enlarged. The truths that immediately belong to our circumstances are not numerous or intricate; and some of the severest of those truths speak feelingly to us, through the wants and sufferings of our multitudes. It is thus that our position in society forces, of its own accord, instruction upon us; and we cannot perceive the evils that are daily overwhelming thousands of us in wretchedness, and are threatening ourselves with the same fate, without, in some degree, becoming acquainted with their causes, and desiring, at least, to discover some remedies for them.

Your first and most natural step, under the circumstances that oppressed you, was your strikes, which were chiefly intended to prevent your employers from forcing down the rate of your wages. These strikes were very painful, and, though sometimes they were attended with temporary success, they were, upon the whole, very inefficient. In fact, the object of these strikes is to keep up wages, while profits themselves cannot be supported on the part of the masters or capitalists but by those precarious expedients on their part, which, in a former letter, I have termed their glut strikes. You have now had sufficient experience with respect to this mode of proceeding, and you must be convinced that you obtain no advantage in conflicts where your sufferings and those of your families are certain to be great. The profit-mongers can live while all are starving round them; and though their capital could not fail of being sensible of the injuries which your strikes might inflict

upon it, yet the contest would be found, as, indeed, it already has been found, to be unequal; and in all your strikes under your present circumstances, you waste that strength which might have accomplished great benefits had it been exerted with better judgment.

Your position in society, brethren, is one of great difficulty, and there is nothing in the history of past times parallel with the struggle you are called upon to make; for at no times, nor in any country, did the great productive power of labour stand forward to demand its full remuneration as it does at present in this country. The diminution of the merchant's and the dealer's profits by the influx of plenty, has, at various periods, affected very materially the revenues of states, and has been followed by tumultuous factions in various commercial nations. Malthus has brought forward instances of this character, in order to exemplify his notion of a superabundant population. There is no real limit either to population or to production; but, under the system of dependent labour, as we know by our sufferings, the limits to both are very circumscribed. We have, in this country, past both these limits at present; and the contest now going on apparently between profits and wages, is actually a contest against ruin on the part of the capitalists, as much as it is a contest against direct starvation on the part of the working class. The editor of the Times insists that the powers of production are still, and ever must be, beneath the wants of the community, and that you, brethren of the working classes, get more than your share of the whole produce. Will nothing teach this man the plain principles of common sense? Are these pretences, by which the avarice of the few is too satisfied at the expense of the many, refuted as they have been repeatedly, to be on all occasions, when the capitalists wish to give what they consider to be an argumentative crush to their suffering opponents, thrust out against us? If enough is not produced to clothe and feed every man, woman, and child in the United Kingdom, why is not more produced? Why do we ever hear the cry of glut and over-production? Why did that drivelling, official statesman, the late Lord Liverpool, utter his miserable lamentation on the subject of superabundance? Why, because capital is, under the present unnatural system, set at enmity with labour; and swaggering Profit, with his greasy chin and swollen belly, is taught to ill-treat his poor, miserable father, Labour, and give him as many kicks as half pence for his wages. There are two interests in the state where there ought to be but one; and the base editor of the Times is fomenting the differences between them. If these differences are to be continued unaccommodated much longer, there can be no security for the peace of the country.

What then, Brethren, does the information which we have recently acquired direct us to do? The labourers, the producers of the plenty and wealth of the nation, are nothing, absolutely nothing, in the social or the political scale of the nation, until they are independent. Offer them Universal Suffrage tomorrow! They would refuse it. "What!" they would exclaim, "do we want with a suffrage, which could not, on our own parts, be exercised for the benefit of our own cause! Why should we be marched up to the hustings to vote according to the direction of an employer, who has probably sold our votes, either for meal or for malt, to some one with whom we have no common interest or feeling? No, we must secure our independence; let who will make the laws. We want no laws to step in between capital and labour, between profits and wages. All we ask for is non interference on the part of state power. Let there be no more meddling between capital and labour than in the matrimonial quarrels between husband and wife. Capital, a proud sort of dame, is very fond of the aristocracy, imitates their vices, and follows their fashions; while her honest husband, hard-handed and heavy-browed Labour, must, it seems, provide for her extravagant whims, and then starve at home! But leave them alone.

Honest Labour, who was for a long time dull and ill at his ease, is now roused to a sense of his condition, and he will set his house to rights, since he has in earnest set about it, without any appeals to parliament!”

Our business, brethren, is gradually, by our unity, and by contributions entirely within ourselves, to elevate ourselves into the rank which belongs to us, by producing for ourselves; by maintaining a full power over our produce; and by taking care that, in its distribution, it is equally beneficial to all. To effect this we must be both firm and frugal. We must encourage the growth of capital among ourselves, and we must establish works of all sorts, particularly those that are subservient to the convenience and comfort, rather than the excess and luxury, of human beings of sensibility and rational faculties. No government would ever be mad enough to interfere with the regulations we must make in order to promote our own welfare, and to give strength and stability to that prosperity, which, as it is the result of our labour, ought undoubtedly to be conducive to our happiness. Undoubtedly our unity, and its consequence to society at large, must ultimately, and at no very distant period, produce a very material effect upon the government itself. Associated labour must necessarily give liberty and independence to those who are now enslaved; and at length the political importance of the great productive body, in its state of freedom, will become paramount to that of any other class in the state. But we do not look to political influence as the means of any change in our condition. That change must be, on our parts, completely social. Its results, in both a moral and a political point of view, will undoubtedly be immense; but our immediate purpose is to settle the differences existing between Capital and Labour, between profits and wages; and in this settlement, as I have already observed, we must have no legislative interference.

The times are favourable to our efforts. The Whig government is too distracted with the conservative principle of the church and its court patrons,—while the progressive spirit of Radicalism insists upon an unremitting course of reform—that it has neither time nor inclination to interfere between us and the capitalists. Let ministers and the parliament settle the church question as they please, we have no concern in it. The plenty produceable by our efforts, the quantity of comfort which must be consequent upon the proper distribution of that plenty, the strength, moral and political, which must be the natural result of such a state of things,—these, brethren, these are subjects to which the intrigues of courts, and the insolent effrontery of church property, with the agitations and prevarications of puzzled ministers of state, are ridiculous farces. It is lamentable indeed that political power should be in the hands of such beings; but so divided are the poor creatures called statesmen upon the affair of church plunder, as well as upon questions relative to the other plunder to which they pretend to have vested rights, that there is, in fact, very little efficient political power at present to be found among them. The time is open for us to take our measures, in peace and with resolution, without much danger of being disturbed in our proceedings by ministerial or legislative enactments. In the mean time the capitalists, particularly the small ones, will begin to perceive the wisdom of coalescing with us, and of bringing their funds into partnership with our labour, upon those terms which I mentioned in one of my earliest letters, namely, that every 2,000 L. should be reckoned equivalent to the labour of one man. The diminution of profit, with the continual demands of wages on the one hand, and of the poors’ rate (notwithstanding the new-bill) on the other, will either bring the smaller capitalists very shortly to their senses, or to their ruin. It is their interest to give over the extravagant hopes of making fortunes by profits! Oh! the horrors of fortune-making, where the success of one is surrounded by the misery of thousands; while competition, more merciless than war, stalks through populous streets, in which starving multitudes exist only by excess

of toil. The men of small capital are eager to follow the unfeeling minister; but as they follow, how many of them sink exhausted amidst the perishing crowds that beset its way! Will they not be warned? Will they never seek their own happiness in the happiness of their fellow-creatures? Will they not join the CONSOLIDATED UNIONS OF ASSOCIATED LABOUR?

SENEX

LETTER XII

Universal Suffrage As A Principle Of Union

Circumstances, of which, brethren, you must all be pretty-well aware, have recently drawn my attention to the subject of UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE; a subject on which I have written and spoken at various periods, during a life which has now counted more than three score years ; a subject which has at times awakened the most enlivening emotions of patriotism that I ever felt; a subject which, from the earliest days of my manhood, has never been entirely, for twenty-four hours together, out of my thoughts; a subject which, I promise you, brethren, I will never lose sight of, until death consigns me to the grave. The basis of that representation, on which the branch of the legislature, falsely and ridiculously called the “House of Commons,” is constituted, is property. The men who have got possession of property are entitled, it seems, to make laws for the preservation of it in their own hands; while those who create that property, or are endeavouring by labour and by prudence to get hold of a part of it, though they are numerous, active, and, in a very considerable degree, intelligent, are denied their right to interfere in making the laws they are compelled to obey. This is manifestly unjust; it manifestly makes two separate orders in society; it places the consumers, the capitalists, and the profit mongers in a high degree above the producers; it regards the workman as a slave, and it rivets his chains. No wonder, then, that the cry for universal suffrage has been at times loud and fearful. I have heard its deep, hollow mutterings, like thunder over the waves previous to a storm; and I have felt myself impelled by a resistless impulse of all the best feelings within me, to respond to the tone. Yet, as I looked at the condition of my fellow beings; as I looked closely into the state of dependence in which myself, and men dependent, like me, for their daily bread on the sale they can obtain for their weekly labour in a market of which the profit-mongering capitalists have the control, and of which their House of Commons is the market-clerk, I have paused, and exclaimed, “No; not yet! Social liberty must precede political liberty. While we are in a state of social slavery, our rights would be exercised for our tyrannic employers, and not for our own benefit, and we should be made subservient to their purposes, or, what is worse, to their parties, who, with our aid, would rush into revolutionary conflicts with one another. No; before the horse is turned out to enjoy his freedom in the green meadow, he must be unharnessed from the shafts of the waggon: the galling rein that holds back his neck to the collar must be loosened, the bit must be taken from his mouth, and the collar itself from his shoulder; nor will he go forth in the valley rejoicing in his strength, while the lumber of the seer hangs over his loins and encumbers his feet.

To say, indeed, that we never shall be free, until we have universal suffrage, is saying nothing more than we never shall be free until we are free. We must, consequently, have universal suffrage; and, in the meantime, we must prepare ourselves to hold it, and to enjoy it; but we must not be so weak as to imagine that the possessors of property will grant it as a boon to those who possess nothing but their labour. We may be assured that we shall never be admitted into the legislature until our weight in society is fully felt and acknowledged; and, even could we creep in under any enlargement of the Reform Bill, it would be in some very partial and circumscribed manner. We should be mocked as the ten-pound householders¹⁷ are mocked, with the mere

¹⁷ Those owning property with a rateable value of £10 p.a. or more who became eligible to vote with the passage of the

shadow of enfranchisement, which, in many places, is in no degree a benefit, but rather a grievance, acting injuriously to a man's interest, dependent as such men for the most part are on the capitalists and landlords above them. The franchise of labouring men must be universal, and accompanied by the ballot. But where, and how, brethren, shall we obtain it with the safeguards of short parliaments and the ballot by the side of it? I witnessed, last election, when reform was in every man's mouth, and when thousands actually believed that we had accomplished a great work of liberty, the most disgusting exertions of party influence on the behalf of the Whigs, in a county where there was no necessity to disgrace their wonderful new bill by any interference with the ten-pound voters, who possessed tenements rated at that value. Voters in that situation were made to feel their bondage to capital, and many of them declared that, although on that occasion they had no objection to vote for the Whig candidates, yet they would rather not exercise the franchise at all, than feel as they could not help doing; that they were expected to exercise it, under the painful coercion of dictation. I saw plainly enough, and I said then as I have repeatedly asserted since, that "our position, brethren, is not political, and that it cannot become political with any benefit to ourselves, until we have found means to obtain a greater independent weight in society." This must be the result of UNION.

The characters of society as it at present exists, in what we usually term the civilized portion of the globe, are dependence and competition; and government is a mere party concern, with a long train of the proud and the avaricious clinging to the tail of the party in power. Our interests, brethren, are wholly opposite to theirs. We want nothing from such a government. We cannot be among, its hangers-on; if we could, we should soon perceive the spirit of competition arising among ourselves, and destroying that UNION" on which alone we can ever expect to found that popular influence which is necessary to our social importance. The apple of discord would be speedily thrown among our lodges, and fictitious interests would be raised among us ; and when set at variance with one another, we should be compelled to assist in dirtier work with our boasted franchise than we have yet been put to in our mills or workshops. We are not free, we cannot be free, until we have universal suffrage; but in the spirit and practice of union, we must make it our own, and use it advantageously to ourselves, and to the nation at large. Nor can this be difficult, if we act with integrity and firmness. While we are new-modelling our social condition, we must never lose sight of our want of a political position in this great and powerful country, in which we constitute the great productive class. We are not free, and though we do not bear the opprobrious name of slaves, yet our condition is actually but a very slight and unsettled remove from that of slavery. In such a situation, universal suffrage, were our condescending Whig ministers to bestow it upon us to-morrow, would be worse than useless.

Receive, then, brethren, the principle of universal suffrage as that which ought to be the chief point and direction of all your political thoughts; for, degraded as you are, your thoughts cannot help sometimes taking a political tendency, — and, though your social position is so far from being political, that it absolutely incapacitates you from the exercise of those political rights which, in equity, belong to you as men, you cannot but be sensible that you are naturally upon a level with your oppressors; or, indeed, if any superiority can morally and religiously be imagined among the common descendants of Adam, the superiority must necessarily belong to the class whose ingenuity and labour feeds and clothes, and in every way provides for the conveniency and comforts of the rest. Receive, then, universal suffrage as a principle next in importance, in the treasured ex-

pectations of your souls, to the principle of religion; but do not expect practically to enjoy the freedom which it is to confirm and secure, as long as you want energy and unity to elevate your social condition into a state of independence. Then all the strength and weight of your influence in society will be felt and acknowledged. You will not be merely permitted by the government and the aristocracy, to enter, by your representatives, into the legislature; the legislature must itself necessarily be your own, and, among one of its earliest resolutions must be the declaration that “labour, the CREATOR of property, is superior in its rights to property, which is nothing more than its CREATURE and the work of its hands!”

Legislators, aristocrats, governments, and sovereigns have a sort of instinctive notion that, whenever you have universal suffrage, in a state of social independence, with knowledge and unity to act upon it, the natural result must be your elevation to the very heart of society; and they shudder at the idea of your entering into parliament. Still, it is very possible, as we see by the Reform Bill, that some future petty extensions of the franchise may be offered you, to quiet your clamour; but at the same time means will always be taken by those who make the offer, to render such a boon, like in the bill I have just mentioned, perfectly unserviceable to your interests, and, indeed a mockery rather than a favour. I do not exactly advise you to refuse such boons—I do not advise you even to desist from demanding them, or even from clamouring for them ; but let such demands be secondary to your endeavours to elevate yourselves in your social condition—look upon such boons as nothing in comparison with your social independence! Your present object must be to change your wages into a fair share of profits of the productive concern in which you are employed. This is the object of Trades’ Unions, if they have any rational object at all—and I do not see why it is not at once openly avowed. I would banish the word wages from the, language, and consign it, with the word slavery, to histories and dictionaries. Wages is a term of purchase; it means the piece-meal purchase of your blood, and bones, and brains, at weekly payments; it is the present name for the Saturday’s market price of man, woman, and child! It is as great a stigma to this country as the price of negroes was to the slave mart in our colonies, and it must follow the fate of that infamous and now execrated demand. But this cannot be brought about by a universal suffrage, which, in our present condition, we could not use; but universal suffrage, with all its blessings, must be the immediate result of our enforcing upon the capitalists incessantly, in one form or other, our demands that wages shall be changed into a fair share of the profits resulting from our labour; or, in other words, a fair share of the goods we create; allowing, as I have before suggested, that 2,000 L. in capital shall be entitled to one share in labour. Our means to effect this must be a continual agitation of society until these, our just demands, are admitted. If we are firm, it will not be long before some considerable concessions will be made to us; and as to the smaller capitalists, they must very shortly perceive that, unless they join us, and aid us in commencing works and factories of our own, upon a common-wealth, that is, a common-profit principle, they will be ruined.

SENEX

LETTER XIII

On The Folly of Looking To Government for Social Aid

It seems natural that the people should look to those who have been appointed to direct the affairs of the state for some alleviation of their grievances—that the poor should fly to the government for protection from the hard-hearted avarice of the rich; and that the oppressed should, under the wings of government, seek shelter from the proud man and the oppressor. We are instructed in our youth from the pulpit, that our rulers are appointed by God, and that, next to the Divine Being, we owe obedience to the king and his counsellors. “Love God and honour the king,” is set at the head of our primers; and we are taught to lisp loyalty almost as soon as we can call our wretched and laborious mothers by the first endearing epithet of infant want and affection. Before our reason is mature, we are overwhelmed and astounded by the exalted appellations and attributes which are bestowed upon monarchs, and courts, and lords, and parliaments. We are seized upon in the state of helpless ignorance, and then, not only bowed down to obedience, but, impelled by all the natural respect which, in our state of humble dependence, we cannot refrain from bearing to the friends and instructors around us, to believe that love and adherence to the government under which we are born is our most important duty; and that, in return for such adherence, we shall meet with protection and a regard for the interests of the class to which we belong. Good heavens! how dreadfully are we abused! how scandalously is our understanding perverted, under the plea: of morals and religion! How vilely and hypocritically do those who pretend to expound the equalizing doctrines of Christianity to us betray “the Son of Man” and make even him the pander to the arts of our oppressors!

Blinded by a system which has for its object the depriving of the laborious classes of the eyes of reason, thousands among us, brethren, enter their manhood with an absolute fear and hatred of the powers of thinking. We feel that we are in the midst of miseries, the sources of which, we cannot understand; and, from the early prepossessions that have been so forcibly impressed upon our minds, we have some sort of indistinct idea that it is the business of the government to remove, or at least to mitigate, the causes of our sufferings. We have no notion of asking ourselves what government actually is. And, indeed, were we to ask ourselves this perplexing question, how few are there among us who have time or knowledge to investigate it, or to form any sort of rational reply to it! Many of us labour twelve or fourteen hours in the day, and then fly to the short and stupefying relaxation of the porter-pot, the gin-glass, and the pipe. We have no time to attempt to think, or to restore those natural powers of thought which have been distorted and crippled by the prejudices of the society with which we are surrounded. Instead, therefore, of enquiring what government is, or what it is able or may be willing to do for us, we confide ourselves to its care, and sometimes are foolish enough to be surprised that we obtain no relief whatsoever from it. Even those writers who are friendly to our interests, and have closely considered our situation—who have even participated in our wants, and have sometimes sprung from our own unhappy ranks—have generally imbibed and promulgated the idea, that government would and could do much for the labouring class, if that class were admitted into the representative portion of it. Ah, well-a-day, these writers, much as I respect their principles and views, have looked at government only on one side: they see only what it might DO, they do not perceive how much it must UNDO, before any thing can be

done effectually to benefit the class, brethren, to which we belong, and in which it is our doom continually either to struggle or to starve; and frequently both to struggle and to starve at the same time.

Look at the present Whig ministry, brethren Look at the principles they formerly advocated, and to which they owed that short-lived popularity which they have themselves blasted, because they could not act upon the truths they so forcibly upheld. Do you think that these Whigs, weak, confused, and nugatory as their measures have been, would not at least do something in accordance with the truths with which, theoretically, they showed themselves to be so conversant, if they could? Their consistency as statesmen, their integrity as men, depends upon this; then, why do they not at least attempt to do something? The answer is plain. They know that before they can DO a little, they must UNDO a great deal. This work of UNDOING IS the very-devil to the Whigs; it makes Earl Grey tremble in front of the noble lords, whom he regrets to see arrayed in opposition to him, and it converts Brougham himself into a blustering buffoon, showing his dexterity at shuffling and sliding off the woosack! Without it, without the arduous labour of undoing, all legislation is so much lost time, and reform is mere patchwork. The Tories are daring the presumptuous Whigs to the task; and the Whigs are manifestly undone themselves, whether they attempt that task or not. They are not the men for any such undertaking this their political opponents know well ENOUGH and this we, brethren who have no political position in society, know also. Let these two great parties, who have so long alternately been plundering the people, laugh at each other. There are obstacles in the ruinous nuisances which encumber the political ground for which they are ever disputing; and which each party desires to call his own, that must be removed; but which neither of them dares to touch. Session after session may pass away; reform may succeed reform; the church, Irish or English, may cry out "murder" and frighten the Bishops; legal reform may startle all the attorneys in the land, and the poor laws' consolidated act may threaten to convert all our manufactories into work-houses. All this, brethren, may take place, but while the things that ought to be done remain still to be undone, nothing can possibly be done that ought to be done. But I have a notion brethren, that the ungracious task of undoing, like all unpleasant labours, which lords and ladies are afraid would soil their delicate hands, and which the clergy think unbecoming their sacred calling, will be turned to us at last. We really wish most sincerely to have nothing to do with the dangerous and dirty job. We are fully inclined to leave them to remove their rubbish entirely their own way, by their own people, with their own machines, and in a manner most conformable to their own views of what ought to be done with it. But there they stand, unable to do any thing either for themselves or for us, because it completely obstructs them in all movements; and yet, as if they were apprehensive that some tremendous monster was beneath it, who would be liberated by its removal and devour them all, they stand trembling, and dare scarcely stretch out their hands towards it, or even look at it for ten minutes together. The king walks past it, surrounded by a dozen heads of the church, and her gracious majesty tells her chamberlain that she cannot bear to think of it. The lords in waiting consider it very ancient and ornamental, while the maids of honour have invented a number of pet names for it. The Whigs in public do speak of the propriety of removing it gradually in as cautious a manner as possible; but being informed by the Tories and the leading bishops, at an accidental collision in the drawing-room, that the odour of this rubbish, which some had vulgarly called "a stench" was considered very salubrious by the king, the duke of Cumberland, the young princess, and the court physicians; they are about to bring in a bill for the extraction of its essence for the benefit of the Brunswick family. There is no doubt but that this bill, like all other Whig

bills, would lose its essence in committee. For our part, brethren, we may be assured that, until this rubbish is removed, there is no use in our expecting any measure from either government or parliament in the slightest degree beneficial to our interests.

But, setting aside all metaphor, it is plain to any man who thinks upon the subject, and reads the debates in the newspaper reports for one week together, that government, as it is at present circumstanced, is reduced to a mere stand still. The Whigs can never have the same monstrous power of doing wrong that the Tories so long enjoyed, not at the expense of this nation alone, but at the expense of mankind generally. It is impossible that the Whigs can outrage all human rights in so barefaced and so unblushing a manner. Even the Tories had arrived at the end of their profligate career: even they, with the hypocrisy of an Eldon, the plausibility of a Wharncliffe,¹⁸ and determination of a Wellington at their head, could do no more evil; and felt, upon their attempt to do good, that it was abhorrent to their nature, and detrimental to their existence. They repealed the civil disabilities of Dissenters and Catholics; and they saw that were they to proceed any farther in a liberal road, so unknown and so dangerous to conservatives, they would be soon be buried under the rubbish of oppression and corruption, which they had ventured to disturb. They were every way blocked up and jammed in by the ruins of all the best interests of the land; and, less apparently, but not less effectually, by the condition in which our interests, brethren, the interests of the great productive class, were placed. “Something must be done,” was shouted from public meeting to public meeting, while tithe-proctors, tax-gatherers, and overseers of the poor, responded, in a variety of tones, “Something must be done.” But the gallant duke, then at the head of the Tory ministry, though he is always as brazen, was then as motionless, as the statue of Achilles in Hyde-park. It was then that the overgrown capitalists and profit-mongers began to leave off praying the military political duke. They began to think that King Stork was become a mere King Log. They wanted something to be done,—and they, too, had an idea, a very vague and indistinct idea, that nothing could be done until something was undone,—so even they, with much reluctance, joined the moderate reformers, and, hoping that no harm would come of it, shouted, “Reform!”

The Whigs came in; they brought forward their first and their second Reform Bills; and the Whigs are as completely fixed—as entirely incapable of doing any thing of importance for the good, or indeed for the further injury of the country, as the Tories were observed to be before the reform was proposed by their opponents to the king in cabinet council, or brought by them, as ministers of the crown, before parliament. The reason is that the rubbish they removed, the rotten boroughs¹⁹ they set aside, had done all the mischief they could do, had done to the country all the wrongs it could sustain, long before. The rotten boroughs could have done the country no more harm; for another injury would ruin it outright, or instigate it to revolutionary madness. It is no benefit to tell a man who is bleeding from wounds in all his limbs, that you have wrested the weapon out of the hands of his assassin, and thrown it into the sea. No, we must seek for remedies; we must stop the flow of blood; we must close the wounds; we must bandage the members; we must calm the fever; we must strengthen the vital powers, and renovate those energies which are both the causes and the consequences of life. This would indeed be undoing the evil that has been committed; but these, brethren, neither Whigs nor

18 Possibly John Stuart-Wortley, second Baron Wharncliffe, 1801-55, a Tory politician of the period.

19 Boroughs with few electors under the control of local magnates who in effect determined who they would return to Parliament.

Tories are capable of effecting. It is a task of labour and of love; a task of strong feeling, and of pure patriotism; a task that can only be effected by men in UNION; a task which will ere long be thrown into our hands, and which we must prepare ourselves to undertake, if we would save our country from the results of that selfish ambition and avarice which always arise in political parties during the anarchy of a tumultuous revolution. We desire not at present to be political: our turn is coming, but it is not yet arrived. We will, in the meantime, by every means in our power, acquire that weight and preponderance in society which productive labour has a right to demand, and which the Association of Productive Labour is certain to secure. By so doing, we cannot be dragged into the vortex of that REVOLUTION, which is even now in progress, and which we must govern as Unionists, or under which we must be ignorantly and viciously sunk as slaves.

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LETTER XIV

On Revolution as It Regards the Working Classes

The word revolution has a very terrible sound, particularly since that which happened in France nearly half a century ago, and frightened all the lords of the king's making in this mighty realm of ours. These same lords, at least many of them, and their immediate forefathers, thought very differently of the glorious revolution of 1688, which happened just a century before the great French revolution. Neither of these revolutions was of the least service to the real interests of the labouring classes, in either France or England; and were one of these government revolutions to take place at the present period, among ourselves or our neighbours, the producers would not, in the slightest degree, be benefited by it. Our position, as I have repeatedly said, is not political; and whether this party holds the helm of power, or that party with large promises of attention to the interests of the people, endeavours by our assistance to seize upon the management of the same helm, we must continue as we were before—the ill-paid servants, the hard-working slaves of the consuming and non-productive classes of the state. Revolutions are party concerns; and we, brethren, are in reality of no party. It is enough for us to be for ourselves—to be entirely of our own party; and it is actually for want of understanding our position, and acting in the spirit of unity for our own common cause, that we are now not only of no party, but that we are not the top and preponderate party in the state. It is because we do not stand as we ought to stand—as the commanding party, or rather the commanding influence in the nation, that any parties whatever have arisen, and that those whom we feed, and ought to command, are so perpetually at variance with one another. What is the origin of their disputes? Truly nothing more than the division of the spoil of which they have robbed us, and which, were we united, would never be their's to quarrel about. The Whigs who are in, and the Tories who are out, are struggling which shall have the direction of the wealth which we create; and at the same time, Lord Althorp,²⁰ kind and considerate soul! has a bill in parliament for building workhouses for the poor and helpless of those thus robbed, and for placing a distinct despotism over us, a government for our poor, quite independent of parliament! In every way, they draw a line between us and themselves. They would if possible enact a law, declaring that labourers are not human beings. They pray that we might be born with black skins like negroes; and if they dared, they would bring in a bill declaring that every child likely to become a labourer, should be dyed negro-colour on the day of its birth. They seem determined that we should have nothing in common with them. What have they in common with us, for the support and sustenance of which, brethren, they are not indebted to our labour? Let them think on that. It will be too late WHEN OUR TURN COMES!

The revolutions that have hitherto taken place, and have more or less stained the annals of history with mean vices and with bloodshed, have arisen among statesmen; sometimes to put in a king, in order to govern and plunder in his name, and sometimes to support one sort of priesthood against another, in order to patro-

²⁰ John Charles Spencer, Viscount Althorp and third Earl Spencer, 1782–1845, was the leader of the House of Commons and Chancellor of the Exchequer during Grey's Whig ministry of 1830–34. Althorp was involved in drafting the Poor Law Amendment Bill; something popularly recognized when the poor houses that were an integral part of the legislation came to be referred to as “Althorp's Bastilles.”

nise and share their ecclesiastical income: these were both the main causes of our glorious revolution of 1688. The French revolution had for its direct object the entire destruction of the priesthood and the aristocracy ; the evil of both was felt, it was become unbearable; but the middle rank of society, which rushed instantly to the helm, of affairs, was, like the middle class elsewhere, vain, ambitious, and vicious. They have the mischievous tyranny of the upper orders in them, unsoftened by instruction. The working classes knew no union—knew not their position or their rights—were instigated to the work of slaughter—and remained more wretched than they were before. The French revolution was, nevertheless, a great event, and many an important lesson, of immense benefit to mankind, has sprung out of it. It has weakened the aristocracy and the priesthood in every country; and although it did harm rather than good, as to its immediate consequences to the productive classes, by giving the middle class of capitalists more direct power over them, yet it has led to other and wider views of the real condition of mankind, and has shown that the highest position in society, does not belong to prescription, but to merit. Those who feed and clothe mankind are not to be the slaves of those who owe their honours to murder and rapine, or their wealth to treachery and deceit.

A movement of any extraordinary character cannot take place in public concerns, but what hundreds are ready to shout “revolution!” and some are ready to rejoice in some such event. We want no revolution, nor will we participate in any. There is a revolution silently going on, which is preparing us to take our turn, by and by, in the affairs of the world; and we are watching its progress, ready to seize upon every advantage it may offer us. Let it proceed quietly,—we are not impatient,—we know our turn is coming, and must come;—we will use it wisely. Can the Whigs prevent the coming of that turn? Impossible! Those who call themselves the liberal statesman of the present day, must go progressively with the people; but in the word PEOPLE (a word very much misunderstood) they must, brethren, include us, the productive labourers, for what are the people without us? And yet, brethren, while we work not for ourselves, but for the capitalists and the profit-mongers, we can hardly rank with the PEOPLE. The people have a political position, but we have none that we can make any use of with benefit to ourselves. As associated labourers, working in the bond of unity for the reciprocal advantages of each other, we should be the PEOPLE—the head of the people; but what are we as hireling servants—as slaves of the greedy, purse-proud lordlings who look at us as the Norman lords of yore looked at their serfs?

Do we wait until some great political occurrence should aid us to remove the great evil that attaches itself to our social condition? Do not deceive yourselves, brethren; none but yourselves can be your liberators. Althorp, the most liberal of the Whigs—the minister who is particularly called the “good-hearted man” can do nothing for you, but build workhouses to receive you in the wretchedness of your old age. They can do nothing for you. If you yourselves had the appointment of an administration, you could not name men capable of doing any thing for your relief. You must help yourselves; and it is sometimes the best position that a man or body of men can find themselves in, to be thus thrown so entirely upon their own exertions. Every thought is summoned up, every energy is upon the stretch ; when a man is obliged to be his own friend, nothing is left undone; he is a true friend to himself—and such, brethren, we must be to ourselves.

State revolutions are, in fact, of no concern whatever to us, brethren, as long as we are shackled with social dependence, as long as we are obliged to sell ourselves by the week, instead of sharing in the products of our toil. You remember the old fable of the beast of burden and his driver. “Make haste, you lazy, heavy-heeled

brute,” exclaimed the stupid clown, beating his poor ass over the head at the same time; “make haste, or we shall fall into the hands of our enemies of the opposite party.” ‘Twas at the time of one of those revolutionary freaks called civil wars, which are always so full of high public spirit and bloodshed. “What are your parties to me?” said the wretched ass, shaking his ears that felt as well as heard the impatience of his alarmed driver. “What shall either I or you, you servile lout, be the worse or the better, whether we belong to this party of state plunderers or the other? We cannot labour more than twenty hours in the twenty-four for either party; and I must have provender, and you must have bread of some sort; and that of the opposite party, as you call them, can’t well be coarser or less in quantity than what we get now. Don’t be such a fool, beating me for nothing, and putting yourself in a sweat, merely because one set of state robbers are at logger-heads with another. If you had half the sense in that thick skull of thine as I have in my heels, you’d take advantage of their dissensions; fill the panniers on your own account, and lead me quietly off to a snug retreat, where you might contentedly enjoy what you could get independently of parties that don’t concern you, and leave me to enjoy a bunch of clover, with the relish of a thistle or two, at my leisure!” ‘O, the villainous ass he talks treason! and has no respect for property!’ exclaimed Balaam Blunderhead, and would have belaboured the poor beast again, but the knowing neddy lifted up his hind heels with a spring, and floored the capitalist; then, braying aloud, he started off with the empty panniers to a distant meadow; while the miserable and stupid slave of property was taken prisoner, and made to work, just as he had worked before, for the adverse party of consumers. All revolutions, brethren, are revolutions of this sort; and the small capitalist, and the workman, are always in the condition of the ass and his driver. These little capitalists are, under the circumstances of the present period, more stupid than the stupidest of asses. They scrape together, by rigid saving, or their fathers and friends before them contrived, by severe toil and penurious frugality, to get together a few hundreds, or perhaps a thousand or two pounds. What do they do with it? With a servility to the consuming wretches of the basest description, they set up business, as they term it, against each other. They undersell each other; they catch the customers from each other by dint of low, profitless prices; they are obliged to force down wages to the lowest starving pitch; and these very men, who have it in their power to be of use to themselves and to the community of workmen, from among whom they are hardly emerged, are, by their conduct, ruining one another, and, more than any other set of individuals in the realm, are depreciating the rate of wages and doubling the wretchedness of the productive labourers. But I shall very shortly consider the position of the small capitalist more closely, and endeavour to prove to them that their real interest is UNION.

With revolution, brethren, I repeat, we have no concern; and yet it is to us that all the factious state revolutionists turn their attention: and when they want to make what the French call “un coup d’essai” a grand stroke of policy, they always begin to work upon our prejudices and those of the petty capitalists, who, as tradesmen and small manufacturers, constitute the skirts of the middle class of society. The Tory church party, with Peel, Wellington, Wetherell, Sugden, and others of that stamp, particularly silly Winchilsea, vain Wharncliffe, and slobbering Wynford, want to get up the revolutionary cry of the “Church in danger”—they do not exactly intend to bring about a revolution; but I believe they care little what happens, so long as they can keep the church properly under aristocratic patronage. They do love that lump of rubbish dearly. You have seen a dunghill cock and his brood of hens and their chicks upon a heap of muck in a stable-yard. You have observed how they scratch and scratch and scratch, and pick and pick. They are in a state of voluptuous ecstasy. There

is not much clacking or crowing among them; they have no time for any thing but scratching and picking, except that now and then the overgrown Dorking dunghill, in the pride of his heart, beats his wings against his sides, stretches out his neck, and crows aloud with delight, while all the little cock adooos, and the hens and the broodies, chuckle, and twaddle, and cackle in chorus; and should a stray terrier cur, with a Whig-gish-looking snout, like the nose of the Lord Chancellor, happen to run in among them, the clamour becomes absolutely revolutionary, as they all at once rush upon him to drive him off their sacred territory. This is a correct picture of the gallant Chancellor of the University of Oxford, with the Tory statesmen, and the Tory peers, and the Tory parsons, and the Tory gownsmen of all sorts, just now at Oxford and at Apsley House. They would get up just so much of a revolution as might startle Earl Grey. Let them take care what they are about. Revolution of some sort cannot be very distant; it is, in fact, now quietly progressing; a small matter might rouse it into tumult; but remember, brethren, our social rights must be first gained before we are roused by a church and king cry, or any other loyal or disloyal cry: till then with revolutions we have no concern!

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