

## STATELESS SOCIALISM

EDWARD ABRAMOWSKI

TRANSLATED BY: WOJCIECH ŁOBODZIŃSKI AND WERONIKA PAZDAN

TRANSLATION REVISED BY: STEVEN CORCORAN AND MIKOŁAJ RATAJCZAK

**Abstract:** “Stateless socialism” is the fourth chapter of Edward Abramowski’s book *Socialism and State. A Contribution to the Critique of Contemporary Socialism*. Abramowski, a Polish political philosopher and social theorist, was also one of the founders of the cooperative movement in Poland. Written at the turn of 1903 and 1904 and published in 1904 (Polish Society of Publishers, Lviv) under the alias “M. A. Czajkowski”, *Socialism and State* is one of Abramowski’s most important works, and is devoted to the philosophical justifications of socialist politics, the subversive character of social facts, and the doctrine of stateless socialism, the realisation of which was, according to Abramowski, the cooperative movement. In opposition to both classical Marxism and the social-democratic trend, which found in the state a tool by which the workers’ movement would free itself from the chains of capitalism, by taking over, democratizing, and at the same time expanding state institutions, Abramowski proposes a vision of a grassroots revolution of specialised associations. Their ideology does not constitute a political doctrine, but is political practice itself, the domain of the common that allows the masses to create an autonomous subjective experience. Thus, the philosopher presents his concept of class struggle, grasped as a creative element of differentiation of forms of socialisation. This understanding also allows him to define class not as a substantial feature of a political subject, but as a kind of condition or action. He perceives the revolution as a transformation of the subject position in relation to the socio-economic conditions that define it, an ethical change that opens new possibilities for community life in the heart of the ancien regime.

**Keywords:** stateless socialism, cooperativism, economic democracy, revolutionary politics.

Stateless socialism does not require any philosophical thesis as the starting point for its politics. The state may be treated as always and ever necessary, in line with an interpretation of individual rights as an economically independent form that always demands some kind of organised repression. Or it can be seen as a historical and transitional form that disappears along with changes in the means of production. Such issues are very interesting for sociologists. They open an extensive field for various hypotheses and theories, even for romantic writers like Bellamy and Morris. However, these issues cannot serve as a backdrop for politics. Politics cannot depend on any thesis or scientific theory attempting to foresee the social future. This is because *politics itself specifies the future* as a matter of contemporary life, as an everyday transformation of people and relations. From the moment that people come together to fight for a new ideal, to fulfill their need for collective life, the new fact disrupts social causality, working to change the previous direction of development. This is something that the history of the future must take into account, even with the most precise theoretical predictions. Therefore, it is not politics that has to adhere to theory, but, to the contrary, the theories of sociologists that have to adhere to politics, consider its forces and developmental tendencies, the relationship between aims and other conditions, and, in accordance with these factors, it has to specify what kind of future awaits the life of societies.

If social movements were to follow the lead of science and only spoke out in accordance with commonly accepted theories, then no social movements would exist, nor would there be any social theories about social life. Politics, strictly following the results of knowledge, would be forced to step back from creating any *novelty*, since the latter hadn't been predicted by and included in extant theories; it would have to castrate life from anything that had no proper place in the systems created by philosophers, or that stood in contradiction to their proven theses. As regards sociological science, while it may exert an influence on the minds of politicians and agitators, we cannot omit the fact that its experimental field is nothing if not politics and social movements. It is unable to be replaced; the truth or falsity of theoretical presumptions and deductions can only be determined when the history of the social movement, borne of this or that presumption, or realized within a specific set of conditions and social forces, has become the witness. The history of political parties plays the undisputable role of the sociological laboratory, in the broadest meaning of this word, and one could confidently think that if politics adhered to scientific theories, that means, if history was formed by itself in the offices of scientists, then we would run out of all of material and criteria of truth for the sociological science itself.

Fortunately, or not, things work in a completely different way. A nascent social movement usually has an exact purpose that, from a contemporary scientific point of view, is an absurdity. That is how the revolts of rural communities and peasant uprisings

in medieval times were seen from the viewpoint of the theories of medieval lawyers. These latter uprisings aimed to reintroduce the roots of civil and public right through a complete reorganisation both of feudal relations and of contemporary juridical and social theories. For the science of the economists, the class struggle of the proletariat was also absurd, since it desired to change things viewed as immutable “laws of nature” — or at least until philosophers such as Marx and Lassalle appeared. *Under the pressure of this struggle*, they were able to see hidden economic contradictions and form some initial points of development of the new system of social forces. Of course, if the politics of the working classes had been meant to adhere to contemporary scientific conclusions, the concept of social antagonisms would not have seen the light of day. Neither would the struggle have come to express the specific interests of the proletariat, or even grasp the existence of class struggle and the need to change “capitalist laws.” This possibility could have created a situation in which we would neither have a theory of socialism nor scientific theories that cohere with socialist movements and scientifically *develop* its existence and tendencies.

Thus, one of the most invalid arguments is that any newly created social movement should seek its justification in sociological theories and validate its existence before contemporary knowledge and, under threat of disappearing, try to change its nature in order to make itself totally consistent with the conclusions and theories of this knowledge. Only proposals for social reform or political programs, born in minds of professors or officials and copied from prepared models, are forced to legitimize themselves in this way. As for it, the relationship between a social movement built upon issues that life throws up, and science is completely opposite. In it, it is science that must justify itself to the new fact of social life, strive to adapt its theories and revoke all concepts that appear contrary to these issues.

Understanding this relationship properly, it becomes clear why stateless socialism can treat with complete disregard the theoretical question as to whether the future of societies will necessitate the state form, or, on the contrary, will it create the possibility to get rid of this necessity. The future and direction of historical development depends largely on the way the social movement realises itself and it is the social movement alone that resolves the theoretical issues and dictates the principles to be used by future sociologists, principles that are to serve as the cornerstone of their theories on the state.

What will remain of political programming after the removal of all theory that predicts the social future and imposes patterns of reasoning patterns on it? What will remain of the socialist program after we reject both the hypothesis about the state’s indispensability and the opposing theory of statelessness? What remains is the only real starting point of socialist ideology, namely the fact of class struggle. As a specific conflict between human needs and the conditions of life, this reality exists independently of all theories and serves as a starting point for socialism and its politics. It was on the basis of the theory of class struggle

that socialist theory and its politics could begin. By accepting the hypothesis of the state, and by thinking about its social tasks in deductive fashion, previous socialist politics freely limited both the nature and the innate tendencies of this real fact, with a view to bringing the development of class struggle to an effort of state transformation. And politics, rejecting any doctrine of the future, has to accept the fact of struggle and, without any theoretical restrictions, take it as the basis for a self-generating source of continuous revolution. After that it will grasp the ways of practice and define the aim on this basis alone. Naturalists do not start their surveys by choosing a general, reasoned postulate, but by providing a simple description of a given phenomenon, such that the goal of an experiment is introduced by the phenomenon's natural characteristics. A politics that is to guide life issues should employ the same methods — its guidelines must be found *not in a doctrine but in the fact of class struggle itself*.

Examined independently of other theories, the fact of class struggle contains a huge variety of different life issues and tendencies to reconfigure both the individual, as well as all social life. Class struggle is a fire, the source of incessant series of social transfigurations. Under its pressure old theses and moral habits slowly die off, whole systems of human thought fall apart, and previous institutions of collective life disappear, while new institutions and ideologies are born. Wherever class struggle is more accented, richer, more common, the development of the society takes place faster and the differentiation of economic and mental life appears greater. Wherever class struggle is less developed, we can see social and civilisational stagnation, lazy movement of thought and life. The secret of this subversive and productive power, a component of class struggle, relies on the fact that it affects human minds by providing them with *new needs*, which are the *essence* of social phenomena and a bridge between inner life and socio-material life. The effect of this power is twofold. On the one hand, it reconfigures the moral and intellectual nature of individuals by adapting spiritual systems and, on the other, it naturally aims to realize itself by creating popular gatherings. These gatherings later on transform themselves into new institutions and, due to this, they change an individual's conditions of life. So here the unbroken nexuses of mutual interactions, individual, social, moral and collective configurations take place. These nexuses make for a situation in which society cannot be considered as a stable and finite being, but as a continuous process of *becoming* that connects, by imperceptible changes, basically conflicting types of collective human life and the corresponding types of people's morality.

Now, let us take a closer look at those unprompted transfigurations, both individual and social, which develop themselves due to the chief conflict in the history of modern nations – the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie.

At the very beginning of this conflict, a new moral characteristic shows up – the solidarity of workers, which initially takes the form of a simple mutual aid and aims

at defending the common interest. It manifests itself in spontaneous associations, strikes, which break out when exploitation becomes too burdensome. Over time, the struggle transmutes into permanent, stable associations, into *workers' unions* that strive to curb exploitation. They turn out to create true comradeship, full of disinterested help for the disadvantaged. Because of the need for struggle, new institutions engender, fully changing the character of capitalistic economy in their basics, the wage labor. The typical hireling, who sells his labour power individually, by the authority of a free contract and the price that states the ratio of supply and demand, becomes outmoded in countries that have reached a developed stage of class struggle. Trade unions come out as new factor, regulating labor market and creating new norms of working conditions, on which wage labor can exist. They oppose the monopoly of workforce to the monopoly of the means of life, resulting in weakening the latter. A whole number of practices and institutions were shaped of its own accord due to the struggle, which serves those trade unions. This can be clearly seen in the example of English unions. At first, the labour offices of workers' organisations concentrate in their hands statistics and the workforce market. In order to remove damaging competition between those who look for earning and shelter and to prevent the workers from selling their workforce under the threat of starvation, unions keep special-aid funds for currently unemployed people. In the process of hiring workforce, the new institution of collective settlement is set up and it changes the outgoing character of hired labor entirely. The wage contract is not concluded between manufacturer and worker, but between manufacturer and trade union, with its representatives. Trade unions try to keep working conditions on decent level and limit exploitation. Up to three collective settlements are often there to secure the worker's work conditions. The first is one concluded between the central and nationwide management of the trade union and the general union of manufacturers. This settlement determines general conditions of hiring and regulates them equally for the whole country – minimum wage, work time. The second settlement is one concluded between local committee of the trade union and local committee of manufacturers. This one discusses the more specific working conditions. The third is one concluded between the trade union of the exact company and the manufacturer. These settlements cannot be inconsistent with one another. Even workers who do not belong to the trade union have to sign up to the collective settlement and approve only those working conditions that are described in this settlement. At the same time, trade unions force manufacturers not to accept those workers who do not belong to a trade union or break the rules of hiring. This is strictly supervised by delegates who visit and look over the workshops and mines. In cases of a breach of contract, the manufacturer is remembered, listed and watched and sooner or later he will be punished by a boycott. Some institutions, such as “mediation courts,” exist that include representatives of both workers and manufacturers, that clarify those disputed points of the settlement.

Besides standardising the norm of wages and working hours, a collective settlement tries to regulate the sanitary conditions and protect workers from the risk of being fired. Entrepreneurs cannot fire a trade union member without an important reason, one that has to be approved by the trade union itself.

Thus, working class achievements become universally applied law, albeit the state police is not involved. Individual workers with all the characteristics of a hireling, forced to accept exploitation due to poverty, step aside to make way for a more powerful organization that consciously aims to curb exploitation. The more gathered the workforce is throughout the country, the more effective it becomes. Let's assume that this organisation gathers the entire working class in its ranks and by collective settlements it tries to win more and more of the proletariat-articulated demands and to extend its watch over the process of production. In this case, capitalist monopoly and contract labour become completely worthless. The privileges associated with private property and organisational capabilities would be turned into merely meaningless titles. Real power would be executed by the organised proletariat.

New forms of struggle present major developments in forging new relations between social forces. By using boycotts, this new form of proletarian-created revolution with "crossed arms", trade unions can put constant pressure on the development of present social life, applying this pressure not only to economic matters, but also to political and moral ones. What often happens is that when trade unions are in conflict with a capitalist, the entire organization of workers does not need to be summoned, but, using their monopoly on labor power, they just go on partial strike. They summon the workers to stop work and simultaneously prevent any replacement of this labour power from taking place. For a trade union, the costs are often small, but a capitalist finds them sufficient motivation to give up. All personal issues, injuries, abuses, exploitation, expulsions, and also the limiting of workers' political freedom, find their resolutions in an organized resolve to boycott, even if oppressed people are unable to directly lead the struggle themselves. The history of strikes increasingly shows us a type of class struggle that is based not on carrying out individual interests, but that is done for the common justice for others. The boycott comes to replace the state courts, police or legal supervision. Its new form is being developed now in United States – the *leagues of consumers*, which start by informing clients about conditions of production of each product. They also boycott the company that owns the factory in which exploitation is excessive, or worker demands are not taken into account or some other mishaps occur. The agitation undertaken by the consumer association has the effect of reducing the number of products of this or that company, narrowing the groups of people who buy from it. Faced with this situation, the company enters a peculiar fight. Its opponents, by forcing it to respect the demands and interests of the working class, are not the workers as producers.

Its opponents are an unnamed and undefined mass of proletarians as consumers and people from all sorts of social strata able to sympathise with a given fight slogan. The market becomes smaller, not due to economic factors, but because of being under the influence of a previously unknown power, which emerges only in order to stamp out injustice. The entrepreneur is not attacked at the site of production, but at the site of selling the goods. And this can result in even worse outcomes than a tidal break in production would. If the manufacturer wants to avoid such moral punishment, which totally hit profit margins, the demands of public opinion must be adhered to. The same action of defending working people against exploitation can be carried out by stable associations of consumers, cooperatives, with an even better outcome, as they control wider part of the market. Often at issue are not only finished products, but also the market of raw materials. In the interests of the workers fighting alongside them, these associations are able to permanently push and influence entrepreneurs.

*Consumer cooperatives* emerge from class struggle as a separate kind of an institution. As every person is a consumer, these cooperatives do not bear the mark of a specific economic class (as trade unions, for example, do). However, the economic character and factors that give rise to their creation often make them very proletarian in their personal composition and in the tendencies they manifest. They are usually formed by a group of workers that is looking for practical means to improve their living conditions and culture. This group desires to gain some sort of economic independence, to establish some kind of protection against the insecurity of being hired workers, i.e. those who are dependent on crises and market liquidity and are unable to save money. Sometimes these associations form out of strikes, as a way to counter shopkeepers' refusal of credit. Rooted in these common, daily-life issues, a new slogan emerges of "saving through spending" and of disengaging from the broking of shopkeepers by cooperatively buying directly from the producer. This way of organizing in itself excludes the petit bourgeoisie from belonging to consumer cooperatives. The petit bourgeoisie gets its money from small trade and is thereby forced to maintain a class position that is hostile and adversarial towards the cooperative. The haute bourgeoisie and the bunch of scammers gathered around them, can neither find their interest in joining a consumer's cooperative, which, because of the democratic spirit it contains, makes gathering all stock in one hand impossible, but also because its economic and cultural aims can be of interest only to the working class.

For all these reasons, the consumer cooperative, while seeming to be a trans-class institution, is essentially an institution of the working class. Its specific, proletarian character is clearly notable in its further unprompted development and in the revolutionary tendencies that it manifests. The primary rule of the cooperative is extremely simple. A certain type of joint-stock association is established, though it differs significantly from the capitalist one.

Concentrating shares in one hand is forbidden. Every single participant is permitted to own a single share or the same amount of shares. The value of this share is determined by the purchasing power of the typical worker so that it can be bought without doing harm to the household budget. It can also be partly discharged and repaid. With capital raised, the association gets the ability to buy good at wholesale prices and sell them to participants at higher retail prices. In this way, the trading profit is generated and shared between members. The method is one of “saving by spending”. The more one consumes, the bigger the profit. The consumer gathers this surplus, which is nothing more than the capitalist’s income. That’s why all the negative aspects of broking, such as largely falsified goods and artificially generated high costs, are negated. In addition, the association that owns a private grocery warehouse, frees the worker from store debts and the truck system.

At this first stage, the cooperative is basically akin to a common warehouse operation, but here some revolutionary tendencies also become visible. First, the workers start to take control over the retail market as an association, acting consciously and according to a plan, an association that, taking into account its further development, may become a great weapon for boycotting industrialists. Secondly, they learn about both collective and individual economics. They learn about the complex mechanics of the vast present-day global economy, acquiring knowledge that is indispensable in the process of creating an industrial democracy able to replace capitalists as the organisers of labor and production. Next, they emancipate from the tradesmen and, due to this and the level of agricultural technology, merchants appear as an already defunct class and they are supposed to be gradually reduced from this mechanism. As the consumer associations develop, changes that could not take place without undermining the essential ideas of capitalism, appear possible. Finally, owing to the selection and affordability of goods and the process of “saving by spending”, worker’s living standards rise. Swiss cooperatives, for example, have by and large *consciously* set themselves the following goals:

- 1) Allow workers to buy good quality but cheaper basic necessities and, thereby, bring about an improvement in their standard of living, even if they continue to earn the same amount of money.
- 2) Habituate workers to using cash in order to emancipate them from debt and credit. This will allow them to win greater independence and teach them how to rationally budget for the future.
- 3) Widen the area in which one can take up actions. Teach workers about the administration and management of economic matters.

However, the cooperative's development cannot stop there for long. The tendency for the merchant class to be eradicated clearly follows the economic nature of the cooperative, and it creates the basics of a planned, consciously regulated market that supersedes the chaotic and blind capitalist one, which itself produces manifold crises and standstills. Assuming that the cooperatives progress only until they take over the retail market (providing that the retail market complies with the basic necessities of the proletariat and current data show that cooperatives are developing in this direction) we have to ask — what impact would it have on the capitalist economy?

Capitalist enterprises would be made totally dependent on the *organized market*, which itself would be consciously led by proletarian democratic associations. This exact market would impose its requirements and both qualitative and quantitative requisitions on the enterprises. Production then would have to strictly adjust to the sizes of the wholesale directives set by the cooperatives. These directives would then match consumers' actual needs, leading to a reduced risk of possible financial crisis and capacity to flood the market with redundant products. We would thus end up with the same result as that of state collectivism. Organized, scheduled, adjusted production. Apart from this, other important results, ones crucial to class struggle, that would curb the monopolies of capitalists can easily be foreseen. With a decline in the possibility of crisis and industrial standstills, workers come away with more autonomy to fight for more and cement their gains. Industrial crisis is the important factor, as it greatly inhibits the current struggle against industrialists and forces a return towards the state in order to gain factory lawmaking. The workforce being expelled from time to time and the industrialist's convenience to lower production in timely fashion in order to endure the standstill often prevents the strikes. This, then, gives the industrialist the upper hand, allowing him even to defeat previous workers gains. So, with these conditions in mind, the only safeguard can involve providing an executory, legal, state validity to workers' conquests. This is precisely why trade unions come to be more tied to state policy. This development is behind the popularity of the slogan "without a state there is no salvation." As we can see, cooperatives may furnish another solution, worked by workers' associations taking control over the market. The importance of this struggle against exploitation is twofold. Not only is it able to become a bulwark against crisis, allowing workers to develop unfettered actions, but, as aforementioned, it also creates a new weapon in the class struggle — *consumer boycotts*, available to the proletariat not as united workers, but as *associated consumers*. Indeed, cooperatives that manage a huge market for consumer goods are able to make a difference from time to time in the struggle between industrialists and workers by simply refusing to buy the products of any exploitative and power-abusing company.

Those hidden or partly-conscious concerns push cooperatives forward. A generic, commonly known incentive — getting a larger dividend from a grocery warehouse —

transforms (in the proletarian environment) into something completely different, something that goes beyond the cooperative's initial mission. To increase their income, the cooperatives have to expand their business activities, and to expand their activities they have to expand their trading capital and centralise their markets. That's why, on the one hand, the broadest mass of people possible are encouraged to join the cooperative by setting the minimum share as low as possible and by providing an option to pay it gradually and thus to limit the share rate. From this, as in Belgian cooperatives, income is not divided between participants, but gathered as a collective capital and withdrawn in the form of vouchers. On the other hand, cooperatives aim to create a *federation*. They associate in one, overarching association with a joint central management and periodical representative conventions. This type of organization can conduct and lead large economic operations. It has enough power to buy from the manufacturer themselves, transport materials on its own and, thereby, it is able to increase its income even further. A federation of cooperatives is able to win not only profits from groceries, but also the profit of mass trade. In this regard, by owning a huge retail market and capitals, the federation can make a step forward. Just as in the beginning it aspired, owing to its economic nature, to collect the profit of merchants, now, as master of both the market and capital, it aspires to gain the profits of businessmen – to become an individual, independent, and self-sufficient economic organism. An organism that produces on its own and consumes on its own, the cooperative becomes *consuming-producing*. The struggle between cooperatives and merchants (sometimes including the producers, as occurred on a large-scale in Scotland in 1896) may only serve as an incentive to this change. However, this incentive is occasional, incidental, causing only a precipitation in implementing the natural and stable tendency, that has to appear in association which administrates the collective capital and the regulated market. Even and especially the most important product for the lives of the working masses – bread – cannot be emancipated other than by creating cooperative bakeries.

The tendency of workers' cooperatives to transform into a self-reliant and self-sufficient economic system is explicitly present today in the English and Belgian cooperatives. Large English and Scottish "Cooperative warehouses" (English Wholesale Cooperative Society and Scottish Cooperative Wholesale), federations, encompassing over two thousand consumers' associations and one and a half a million member-families, not only own a system of small stores and information offices for smaller groups scattered across England, Europe, and America, but also run an extensive production. These federations own and run huge arable farms on which they produce wheat, vegetables, fruit, meat, poultry and dairy. In addition, they own factories that produce candies, preserves, footwear, soap, textiles, lingerie, clothes, furniture, pottery and other goods. The development and viability of the English cooperative's production can be described by comparing two figures that express

the difference in this production's worth within a span of three years (quoting Bernstein): in 1894 it amounted to 4,850,000 pounds sterling and in 1897, to 9,350,000 pounds sterling. Two-thirds of this production came from consumer associations, the rest from producing associations. The reason for this development is the ensured, constantly expanding market inside the cooperatives, as well as inside the great capital administrated by the federation. This capital makes it possible to improve the technologies used in the production. Cooperative factories are designed in accordance with all the sanitary rules; the workers' salary is governed by the highest norm the trade union has set for each kind of job; the number of working hours is lower than usual for the same job in the same city — in some workshops it totals only 8 hours. When it comes to working conditions, cooperatives maintain a clear advantage over the capitalist workshop. They have already resolved all concerns regarding sanitation and consumption that the proletariat is still striving to find solution for by legal means. Bakeries provide a clear example of this. Seldom has any industry developed as complex a set of state laws and regulations as the English baking industry. Even despite the law attempting to provide cheap and healthy bread, the weight and quality of the bread continued to be falsified. In England, between 1878 and 1995, the full set of regulations (Factory and Workshops Act) obliging local authorities to regulate sanitary conditions in bakeries were observable. In actual fact, however, these conditions did not improve at all; however, the cooperative bakeries stand out here, with their perfect machines and ideal sanitary conditions. The work itself, whether moving the sacks or mixing the dough, is mostly mechanized. The workers have the access to their own kitchens and dining rooms, bathrooms and restrooms, while in most of private bakeries they eat even in the bakery itself. The salaries are also higher thanks to the trade unions. The weekly amount of hours worked is 51, while in private bakeries it ranges from 70 to 80. (FR. Rockell 'Le boulangeries cooperatives en Angleterre,' Rev. d'Econ. pol. 1899).

Let's look more closely at the most interesting issue and find out who the owner of this production is, who gains the profit and who rules it all? The co-owners of the business are shareholders. The shareholders are the consumers' associations and trade unions – they are the beneficiaries. This means that each and every worker of the cooperative workshop, after becoming a member of the consumers' association, becomes an equal co-owner of the workshop and participates in the general profit. The same is true of trade union membership, which acquires its own stocks in cooperative workshops. Apart from this, some dividends are still offered to workers independently of their affiliation to any union or association, but there is no general rule on this score. English "Wholesale" does not allow workers to share the profit if they do not belong to an organization, whereas many of the Scottish cooperatives and even the 'Wholesale' in Glasgow do. In the first half of 1896, the cooperative factory in Kettering paid 40% of their dividend to the workers. In 1891,

a cooperative bakery in Glasgow issued “vouchers” that serve as a special fund and allow the bakery’s workers to buy shares in the cooperatives.

This way of *governing* the cooperative evolved under the influence of two kinds of practical needs. On one hand, the autonomy of associations had to be linked up with united common action so that the system of federations could lead this huge economic organism. On the other, the administration had to be provided with the proficiency, elasticity and ability to perform actions, as the indispensable condition for such a developed and complex workshop as the cooperative. At the same time, the administration had to put under control and the general leadership of the whole members’ association as the only owner and governor. For these reasons, in cooperatives a formation of democratic, federal republic, with its representatives and parliament, exists. And, interestingly, after many long years of fluctuation and conflict, the same kind of formation also developed within the trade unions. The federation’s main matters are directed by the representative delegates’ meetings. Each consumer’s association may send one delegate for every 500 members (as with the English federation) or in accordance with the purchases it makes (as in the Scottish federation). This chosen delegate represents the associations in general and in specialised meetings has a voice in directing and setting the main issues. The appointment and selection of officials to the central and local committees is carried out through a voting system whereby ballot papers are sent to each association to be filled in. The federal committee issues a paper and a monthly report, in which it informs the other members in detail of the needs and issues of managing the cooperative. In some of the cooperatives businesses, such as the bakery in Glasgow, the workers send their special representatives (one for every twelve people) to conduct debates in their name. The general feature of the cooperative administration can be described as a democracy that involve the working class’s participation and leadership on various economic issues, which, thanks to the federal system, also provides a simple way of adapting those issues to the concerns of each group.

This form of democratic republic also allowed cooperatives to develop into clearly proletarian institutions and take spirited action in both the moral and mental emancipation of workers including their struggle with industrialists. Most characteristic is the way that the cooperatives spent their income. Examining this allows us to fully observe the social source of this income. In capitalist or petty bourgeois stock companies, profit goes directly to shareholders or becomes a flashpoint for some future financial affair. Here though, what is brought to the forefront are the common goals of protecting living conditions and mutual help in reaching higher culture and emancipation levels. The contract worker does not display any kind of “devotion” or “inborn idealism”, but instead the natural need to widen one’s strength and horizons. The inability to do such in any other way rather than by organizing is the main attribute of the proletariat. This is why the consuming-producing organism of

the cooperative becomes the nucleus for all constantly growing working-class institutions that aim to satisfy moral and intellectual needs, defend individuals and shelter their existence. Such could not be achieved with the one-hundred-franc income usually offered to cooperative members. We can observe also libraries, museums, schools and parks being created alongside the British and Belgian cooperatives. We can also observe the process of shaping individual educational institutions responsible for educating children and youths in the spirit of a new society, one based on commonality. To this end, some political institutions were created to protect and defend the cooperative's interests within labor organizations. Moreover, there are loan facilities (the cooperative does not allow goods to be bought on account, but those strapped for cash can get an interest-free loan), unemployment benefits (protecting the unemployed from economic constraint), health care (including free medical care) and other measures designed to both those in old age and children. Independently, cases are known of cooperatives financially supporting strikes, such as the English "Wholesale" that provided 125 thousand francs to help maintain the Yorkshire miners' strike, or the Leeds cooperative, which also supported miners' strikes.

The cooperative's struggle, taken up to embrace all human needs, this strange, inner vitality, which transforms the small group of workers, itself held together by the modest slogan of "saving through spending", in fact gradually transforms the whole social world. This can be exemplified by the famous "Vooruit" from Gadawa — this association, established in 1883 by a few weavers, who managed to gather 30 members. Each person saved 50 cents a week. After 10 weeks, the association commanded a budget of 150 francs and with this capital it proceeded to establish a cooperative bakery called "Libres Boulangers". Weaver's syndicate lent them two thousand francs, which were paid back within the space of a year. In 1884, the cooperative reached a high enough level of development to open a new, huge, refined, mechanized bakery with a meeting hall, theatre, non-alcoholic pub, library and store right beside it. In 1885, they opened their own pharmacy and in 1886, a place to print their journal. By 1887, the association already owned 3 pharmacies, stores took from the petit-bourgeoisie or colonies and the coal warehouse. In 1889, the bakery was reopened in an even bigger version, so that the cooperative was able to produce 70 thousand kilograms of bread each week. In the following years even more shops selling lingerie, clothes and coal etc. were opened. The number of members rose to seven thousand families and the annual income to more than 2 million francs. Moreover a whole series of institutions was developed, such as savings and loans banks, free medical care, birth care, elderly care and education. The economic mechanism that lay behind it was incredibly simple. Membership costs were just 1 franc 25 cents for the cooperative book. Every week, each member buys a certain amount of vouchers for bread and coal depending on his family's needs and these products are delivered directly to his house. Every three months everyone

gets some part of the bakery's income paid in vouchers, with which he or she is able to buy whatever products are available in the cooperative's stores. These purchases afford a new six-percent income, able to be used to buy some necessary goods. In some sense, this can be seen as a realisation of the characteristic collectivist dream of non-monetary exchange.

The sociologist might appreciate in the cooperative a sort of artistry of social autogenesis. Reforms are not implemented by the police of the democratic government but they happen on their own. The active element here is nothing else than the inner human power, a social lubricant and original creator of all social phenomena – a need for life, this rough product of struggles, free of any tenets. Inside this need there emerges, however, an individual aim. In the association, whose bonds stem from that fact that different people share similar needs, a social aim emerges. And as this social aim is embraced, new practical issues arise, forming a web or uncodified ideology of pursuits, wherein it becomes possible to find the shape of a new, emerging society. Almost all things postulated by the collectivist ideology find their original realisation in the cooperative movement. All that the socialist parties tried to establish in their “positive politics” by democratising the state and by giving up all that is revolutionary in their ideals together, with the soul of the modern man full of rebellious dreams, is achieved by the cooperative without the state, by this autogenetic power of coming up together. This is the evident background to market organisation and the idea of matching production to consumer interests. Today we see enterprises being run by democratic consumers' associations, which attempt to reconcile working conditions in the interests of workers and, more importantly, even to destroy the whole idea of wage labor itself. By doing so,, they transform the laborer, who becomes a member of the cooperative, into a co-owner and co-leader of the enterprise where he works. We can also see a protection against unemployment, and social and financial security for elderly and ill people, that is, sometimes even unavailingly, gained by the socialist politics from the state, but with many harmful compromises. And finally, we see the outline of a great struggle against exploitation. With the market boycott, combined with the strike led by the jobs syndicate, a continuing and successful limitation of the capitalists' monopoly and protection over wage labour becomes possible.

Next to this correspondence in economic tendencies, a great difference arises between socialist politics and the union-cooperative movement. This difference concerns their *methods for taking up action* and their views on emancipation. Socialism aims to democratize the state and also to *extend* it to every part of the collective's life. It aims to equate its organisation with every type of social organization. Such is its path of economic liberation and even (those doctrines tend to be very ironic) about liberation *in general*. The syndicalist-cooperative movement, however, reveals a contrary tendency. It creates a *stateless* democracy, and behind the backs of ministers, the parliament, electoral combats

and bureaucracy, it uses the power of independent association to transform society economically.

Conscious control over the market and production in free associations happens also outside proletarian struggle, that is, in *agriculture*. Such associations develop mostly inside the wealthier parts of the peasantry, however, their various forms also infiltrate smallholding classes and encompass even the rural workers. Furthermore, these are the constantly progressing institutions that, in their process of evolution, can follow with many new, hitherto unforeseen types of social organization and methods of taking up action. They show an increasingly strong tendency to step into various types of relationships as a factor that transform society by changing both the economic and cultural conditions of the peasant social class. We can see here basically the same developmental tendencies that characterise consumer cooperatives:

- 1) to eliminate the merchant's brokering between producers and consumers, and to consciously regulate production according to the essential needs of the market measured by proper statistical institutions;
- 2) to replace an economy based on individuals by an economy based on *associations* by means of technological advance and agricultural knowledge;
- 3) to take consumer interests into account during production through quality control measures;
- 4) to develop institutions so as to enhance national culture, technical and general education, and that take care of insurance, pensions and credits based on mutuality between free association that group almost all over the syndicates and agricultural associations.

Those aims are not a product of ideology being promoted throughout the peasant social classes – they stand in fact in contradiction to this ideology, as the significant majority of agricultural associations remains under the influence of conservative and catholic ideology, which consciously and purposively formed these classes, hoping to turn them into a fortress for social ossification or a counterbalance to any subversive movements. Here we can see the fairly interesting duality between ideology – the preached, official one – and all the autogenetic processes that vitally transform people and their relationships in a totally opposite direction. In this case, social dialectics is shown in its classical example. Under those conservative slogans some associations emerge that later consciously protect the economic system based on private property and economically bolstering the class that is this system's strongest supporter – the peasantry. This bolstering of peasant property is met with the conditions set by the vast market of agrarian products to have been created across the development of industrial capitalism. These products are products of large, growing

urban communities and a number of industrial regions and countries that are not self-sufficient in the provision of food. This market requires constant and organised supplies of consumer articles. The provision of goods to compete with those capitalist products is possible for peasant homesteads only if they agree to *associate* and corporately organise various cultural and market activities.<sup>1</sup> On the other side, engaging the peasantry in the general market matters, improving their living standards and the naturally processing comminution of the homesteads with the population increase, makes the aims of enlarging one's income, improving soil quality and freeing oneself from sales brokers, increasingly compelling and important. Again, realising such aims is achievable only by leaving the individualist economy for a planned one.

Agrarian associations usually begin with a communal acquisition of fertilizers, fodder, seeds, farming tools and machines, and after some time their influence on the trade in those products starts to grow. As they further develop, agrarian associations, by carrying out drainages, regulations, experimental fields, afforestation of sandy dunes, subordinate more and more private homesteads to the association. Finally, they expand to agricultural industry, rearing, dairy farms, cheese dairies, bakeries, mills, preserves factories and so on. Even though land cultivation proper remains independent, the association of one industry branch inevitably leads to expanding it toward another, on which the first is based. Running the cooperative agricultural industry in a beneficial way requires increasing intervention of the association council in private homesteads, the providers of the necessary products. That is why, wherever cooperative dairying emerges, some rearing and controlling associations also arise, as happened in Denmark, Canada, Belgium and France. Having their own inspectors, they keep on extending their supervision to particular private business branches that deal in fodder, methods of rearing and health, or cattle species. Wherever cooperative distilleries exist, supervision concentrates on vineyards and potato fields. Similarly, it growingly influences the cooperative charcuteries, preserves factories and other similar workshops, the excess of agricultural products and homesteads in general. Various agrarian association group into provincial unions and nationwide federations that directly interface with consumers' urban cooperatives within the storehouses. As they enter the market, the cooperative's products have to fulfill certain quality standards and production quotas, making several homesteads further subordinated to the decisions of the collective. Owing to this, they increasingly place greater emphasis on cooperation to match these conditions of production. Next to the joint acquisition associations, others are responsible for *mutual loans* (the Reiffeisen coffers in Belgium, the "rural coffers" unions in France, Don Cerutti's rural coffers in Italy, and so on), *mutual insurance*, agrarian schools or promoting rural *culture*

---

<sup>1</sup> See Krzywicki – Kwestia rolna [Ludwik Krzywicki, Kwestia rolna – przełom w produkcji środków spożycia w drugiej połowie XIX wieku, Warsaw 1903]

and many other things. In this way the movement, which originally aims to bolster the property of individual peasants, slowly transforms into the full contradiction of property itself – into an autogenetic development of federal collectivism. It turns into a production system based on consociation and a planned economy, which undermines the current system at its economical and moral fundamentals. Conservatism generates the revolution.

Here are some examples to give us an insight into the development of this movement. In France, in 1896, there were about 1,275 syndicates with 423 thousand members. In 1901 this number totaled over 1700 syndicates grouped in 10 provincial unions that consociated 700 thousand members. Through congresses and a Central Union, which gathered 600 unions, they managed to develop a general federal organization and build relations with French and foreign consumers' cooperatives. Their functions are constantly being added to. Apart from buying tools, seeds and fertilizer (which brought about a reduction of up to 50% in the prices of fertilizers and farming tools) or running various agrarian services, the cooperatives have also developed milk houses, cheese dairies and manufactures of canned goods, sausages, starch, noodles, as well as some bakeries and mills. They are building loan facilities with a down payment, experiment stations and model farms as well as some informational bureaus, migratory agronomists and inspectors. The union in Belleville canton, which has 2352 members, comprising mostly vigneron and small farmers, has expanded vineyards, organized the selling of butter, founded a building society, instituted *conciliatory courts* among peasants and mutual aid institutions to look after the elderly, inpatients and orphans. Should anyone in the neighbourhood fall ill, the unions look after their crops. The Poligny union, with 1700 members, have organized agricultural classes in elementary schools and insurance against fire and disease. The department union of Loiret, with 7000 members, holds exhibitions on agriculture and lectures about agronomy, vine culture and horticulture and about developing experimental fields. It also organizes mutual fire, hailstorm and other accident insurance. Apart from this, it takes care of the conciliatory courts and has organized free legal aid.

In Belgium, according to official state statistics from 1899, there were 638 “farmers’ trade unions” with 50,475 members, 623 associations that purchased fertilizers, seeds and tools with 50,375 members, 229 agricultural credit associations (the so-called Reiffeisen coffers) numbering 7,857 farmers and 1,838 non-farmers and 319 dairies (34,305 owners of 87,382 cows). All of them were established, and are currently run, by the cleric party. The law from 1896 does not allow farmers to handle trade and industry. They are able only to buy seeds, fertilizers, machines, cattle, etc. in order to sell it to other members. However, some other associations prove helpful here. In most cases, a parish will have trade unions, some of the Reiffeisen coffers, cooperative dairies, a rearing association, mutual insurance associations and some others. The unions are grouped together in federations that cover provinces.

The federation of the socialist, urban cooperatives, which embrace 23 producer cooperatives and 166 consumer cooperatives, is also trying to penetrate the countryside. This federation currently possesses three rural producing associations: dairies in Herfelingen, a tobacco producer “Lion Rouge” in Alost, and chicory production plant “Soleil de Zon”. Besides this, there is one association that buys farming items and a few rural cooperatives. The socialist cooperative in Zon, most of whose members as industrial workers in rural areas, owns a bakery, that provides bread to within three miles around itself, a community house, a library, a cafeteria and some storehouses for eatables and footwear. The footwear is produced in cooperative factories called “Vooruit”. The cooperative in Zon has also expanded to other villages. The dairy in Herfelingen sells milk and butter produced by the cooperative in Brussels.

In 1896 in Switzerland there were 2500 agricultural associations, 838 cheese dairies, 763 rearing associations, 251 associations for buying proper tools, 39 cooperative distilleries, 32 grain associations, 8 cooperative brickyards, 6 butcheries, 6 cooperative vineyards, etc. In them, petty owners and rural workers made up the great majority. These cooperatives formed one union, based in Winterhur, and a huge central storehouse that provided almost all the necessary farm items. In 1900, sales were worth 4 million francs and provided two-hundred-thousand francs profit. This profit is not paid out to the members, but it becomes part of the Union’s common capital. Merchants boycotted the union of farming cooperatives and have forced manufacturers not to sell their products to the cooperatives, which is why goods are mostly imported. Besides this, the “Swiss league of associations” (Schweizerischer Genossenschaftsbund) exists along with both unions (of agricultural and consumers’ cooperatives) and all other consumers’ cooperatives outside the union as fellow members. This league is one that protects consumer interests. It was established under the pressure of deleterious state policies opposed to consumer associations. Influenced by tradespeople fighting against the cooperatives, state officials were forbidden from participating in the cooperatives, upon the order of the general council. It was also established that cooperatives should be treated as trade concerns and accordingly subject to taxes. The League has opposed this outcome. In addition, it has also aimed at getting a revision of the business code, gaining influence on tariff policy to protect consumers’ interests, founding a cooperative bank and forging commercial links between rural and urban, domestic or external cooperatives<sup>2</sup>. The Birseck cooperative, which is trying to become a general association of people from the local areas, for which reason it has adopted many social tasks and activities, is interesting for a few reasons. Its sphere of activity includes consumption, production, selling products, insurance, a building society, producing and providing electricity

---

<sup>2</sup> See Mutschler: *Le mouv. Coopératif en Suisse* (Rev. d’Econ. pol. 1902).

for small workshops, education, cantonal policy, community houses, bakeries and so on. It comprises 14 communities from the Basel village canton, owns 21 storehouses and a Basel consumers' cooperative as its trade area. Its fellow members are mostly small-business owners and workers. Both the consumers' cooperative in Basel and that in Birseck abandoned the method of direct administration and decision making at general meetings of members, as they were considered useless for technical and administrative cases, where people are too easily influenced and unable to fully discuss their choices. Instead, they have adapted the parliamentary system, which currently dominates in the cooperative and workers' union movement in general.

In Denmark, the most developed cooperatives are the dairy cooperatives. The first one was created in 1882. In 1897, there were already 986 associations for one thousand communities, so they are almost in every one of them. Moreover, they produce almost 80 percent of all Danish milk. Those cooperatives have linked together to form an export co-partnership and they supply most of the storehouses of the federation of English consumers' cooperatives. They form a centre for many other organisations, such as the associations that buy and control cattle. The inspector paid by the associations oversees the barns twice a month, he analyses the cows' conditions, the fodder they're being fed and provides advice on which of them are no longer useful. In addition, there are also cooperatives that breed swine, partly combined in a union that exports eggs to England (in 1896 there were 344 cooperatives with 18000 members), a few hundred rural consumers' associations, unions to buy fertilizer and seeds, a cooperative sugar refinery, 146 horse riding associations, a company that provides insurance for hailstorms, fire and pestilence, some agricultural and apiarian clubs and an educational association. One in every three homesteads is the property of either a consumers' or a dairy cooperative.

Wage labour is common in most agricultural cooperatives, with some exceptions, such as the dairy cooperatives in Italy, the preserve factories in Rhone and the unions of some vineyards in the Ahru Valley, where the only workers are the members, sometimes together with their wives and children. Many French unions exist that accept their workers as members, such as the union in Castelnaudardy which has 600 workers out of 1000 members. The same goes for the Swiss cooperatives. Their attitude towards the farming proletariat has not yet been clearly specified. However, there can be no doubt that this movement of farming cooperatives, which today provides for so many aspects social life and so deeply undermines current economic and cultural relations, will sooner or later have to progress to the topic of rural workers' interests. This doing, they will be forced to establish specific associations able to fight for this proletariat, associations that aim to improve their living conditions and enabling them to achieve economic independence. The rural consumer cooperatives, and even the dairy cooperatives, can already become economic centres, flanked

by a number of institutions that organise mutual aid and fight exploitation. Some of them, acting as collective individuals, would even be able to become co-owners of the great, cooperative factories, just as the trade unions in England did. One also should take into consideration the fact that the unions, which include increasing numbers of the peasantry, whose living standard and culture they improve, simultaneously facilitate the organization and general struggle of rural workers, freeing them from the risky rivalry of petit holders, who search for easier profit and use wage labour to make up their budget shortfall. And the natural living and cultural proximity of these two rural classes does not allow the associations movement to be restricted to just one of them and not to lead to any subversion in wage relations.

Independently of the consumers and agricultural cooperatives, which form a centre for many common social issues by giving them a new basis in economic collectivism, some other associations are developing in modern society; these associations are totally classless, and fight for common interests, but do not consider class struggle. To put it bluntly, there is no single field, nor a single need, in a human's life that does not lead to the creation of a corresponding associations' movement and that would therefore not open onto new types of inter-human relationships based on commonality and the freedom of convergence. Let us recall all those associations that are looking after social hygiene and those fighting alcoholism; those associations for the provision of low-cost flats, for mutual aid in cases of death or illness, as well as associations for fostering working-class gardens (*"Ligue du coin Terre et du foyer"*, *"Oeuvres de jardins ouvriers"*), associations for beautifying the countryside, associations for taking care of children and organizing summer camps, the associations around people's universities and education, lifeguard and firefighting associations, Red Cross associations and, lastly, some scientific, technical and artistic associations — all such associations are in fact the drivers of all civilizational progress. The commonalities they represent also tend also to form alliances in larger unions with a view to reaching common goals collectively. In France, for example, 300 mutual aid associations (the *"mutualités"* or *"Sociétés de prévoyance"*) comprising 3 million members and a 350-million-franc fund, have organized anti-tuberculosis associations in order to support popular hospitals. Similarly, the Paris producers' cooperatives established tuberculosis clinics designed to play an educational role about tuberculosis prevention, as well as provide medical care, fish oil, raw meat and warm clothing for the inpatients. Also as the "Social hygiene union" is preparing to group together associations of mutual aid, abstinence associations, associations for affordable flats and lastly, international associations for tuberculosis prevention. A plan exists to promote the idea of social health for all people, sending children to villages, starting gardens in working-class districts, building hospitals, flats and so on. Special note must be taken of a new type of association – the so-called "community neighbourhoods" in London. Such associations have

introduced an idea of community based on common living areas, i.e. living in the same district of the city and so they try to maintain a degree of everyday neighbourly relationships or share knowledge about the area and its needs. This is why their form is close to that of the institution of the parish, but they are free from state coercion, which is characteristic for the latter. These community fellow neighborhoods are trying to build an organised, collective charge on the common health, safety, as well as basic material and cultural, needs of an individual. They organise communal kitchens and summer houses, and have their own doctors and lawyers. These associations may be considered as part of the first movement to attempt to communize the household.

The cooperative movement can be judged in two ways: from a revolutionary perspective or from a natural science perspective. The latter takes nature as the movement's foundation, viewing it as a factor of development and transfiguration. Revolutionary doctrine has a specific feature – it tries to work over every fact and make it compatible. The logic it employs is not individual, specific. Upon encountering a new fact, revolutionary doctrine judges it as if they both had the same genesis, and thus was also a doctrine. Objections towards the union-cooperative movement are characterised precisely by this logic. The state socialists promulgating them impose on themselves an ideal of priestly chastity in all practical matters and have not yet set out on the broader road of “positive politics”. They deem that cooperatives carry a double burden. First, cooperatives are conservative by nature and ward off any social upheaval and that they seek to look after their own interests, just like every enterprise. Workers who get influenced by cooperatives and become entrepreneurs are not only unprepared for the revolution, but also fear social catastrophe, just like the bourgeoisie and the peasants. Through the cooperatives, they are bound to the existing order and respect it, so they listen to slogans about the final fight but fail to feel its necessity. Second, state socialists charge that cooperatives aim to divide the proletariat into two groups, by categorizing workers by their ability to join cooperatives. Those who are unable to do so include, for example, country workers, the court service, which is still paid partially in products, workers without permanent employment who live from day to day, tramps and the unskilled proletariat, which is unable to organize itself on a regular basis and whose labor force is deemed substandard. Anyone without access to work in cooperatives creates a kind of “fifth state,” and their social interests develop in opposition to the interests of elite workers, who are organized in professional unions and consumers' associations.

These charges initially indicate to us that something like a “revolutionary formula” exists and enables a statement on whether or not a fact is *revolutionary*. The confessor, to take one example, does a similar thing, judging people's conscience in accordance with catechism. Second, a social fact is judged by opponents as if it was something finite, motionless, closed in itself. That is to say, as a doctrine that must always be settled logically, is isolated,

and inaccessible to unrelated thoughts, and thus jealously guards its separateness. However, neither cooperatives nor trade unions nor any other similar organizations have any specific ideology, codified slogan or article of faith that might determine and specific direction of their development. These organizations comprise a great variety (as does everything that autogenetically results from life needs). They adapt every demand of the workers' fight, precisely because they do not come from any of the principles, and no principle leads them through their evolution; thus they are able to appear anywhere that the needs of a particular community are present and that they match some general circumstances. They are able to destroy things that, according to their founders, were destined not to be destroyed and carry out social revolution even where the conscious interests of people were striving to fetter it.

The revolution, according to socialist doctrine, basically amounts to an aim to reconfigure the state for collectivism, or to speed up "the general catastrophe" that will bring about with the birth of a new state. According to this idea of the revolution, the cooperative is a conservative institution, because it carries out reforms without state interference. Above all, the revolution means to create a new *legal system* and to interfere in existing lawmaking to change it for the sake of proletariat's well-being, going as far as a complete reconfiguration of the order. The revolution requires political struggle in the broadest sense, everything from elections to barricades. However, cooperatives try to avoid government mediation. They reform society without reforming the state and thus they withdraw) the working class from political struggle and even from the idea itself of "social catastrophe". That is why every people's assembly, insofar as it forms its demands towards the state, whether this is "socialisation" or the implementing of an eight-hour work day, is a revolutionary fact, even if it fails. On the other hand, meetings of customer associations that implement an eight-hour work day and abolish wage labour in their factories are not a revolutionary fact and are called a mutual help of the petty bourgeoisie. People's assemblies aim to create a new legal system and new state institutions to destroy the foundations of capitalist order. Cooperatives do not create any new system; they count neither on parliament, nor on cabinets of ministers. So, no revolution can occur without "nationalization" and with this definition in mind one has to judge whether a particular social fact is revolutionary or not.

However, we may put this issue differently and demand something other than a settling of the concept of revolution *a priori*, according to rules of historical-philosophical theory. Conversely, we can aim to create this concept on the basis of *new* facts, ones simultaneously created by class struggle. That is, not to use the concept of revolution to judge whether the fact is revolutionary, but conversely, to judge the concept on the basis of facts alone. Because the concept of revolution refers to life itself, this demand is truly legitimate, just as is using the induction method to understand those things that do not come from our

thinking. It is legitimate as long as we would like to see what the doctrine has hitherto hidden from us.

This is why every social fact, owing to its existence as “a social fact” pure and simple, includes some conservative features by nature. These features bound it to the entire social environment, adapt it, that are the result of a further branch of events that existed prior to it or that exist contemporaneously to it, and that anchored its existence. Absolute novelty would not emerge and develop in society if it had nothing in common with social life. In a certain sense, the cooperative is a conservative fact. It arises from the eternal fight for prosperity; it adjusts to the mechanism of the capitalist economy, because the fight for prosperity cannot duplicate the patterns set by cavemen or feudal barons. A cooperative conducts its cash operations right where the big trading houses do, because it deals in capitalist commodities, not with the products of future nationalised production. Ultimately, just as with any other contemporary enterprise, a cooperative takes care of earnings, of returns on capital. This is how it can meet the needs, which gave rise to it, to eradicate hardship. This conservativeness is everywhere, in every social movement, even in the most revolutionary political struggles. Every law concerning production, every nationalization, that socialists demand, stems from the same primal pursuit to improve the living conditions of the working masses and must adjust to existing social conditions in order to somehow integrate with capitalist mechanisms, since they would otherwise be impossible.

But in addition to this, in every social fact that shows its autogenetic development, an element of novelty arises — without it, there would be nothing to develop. This element is not only the goal to improve life, but also the ways that make this pursuit real. In state policy on workers, this novel element exists in the tendency to place legal limits on exploitation and have the state intervene as the representative of hired labor workers. In a strike, however, state policy comes down to limiting exploitation through workers’ solidarity and extra-state institutions that regulate working conditions and look after workers. In cooperatives, this element of novelty shows up in the same moral form, thus in looking for well-being by *commonality*, through institutions founded on democratic assemblies that take the market and production into their own hands. But how can we recognise new formations that herald social change?

Some new elements have emerged that blend in with the contemporary social system and expand its durability and power, thereby weakening or destroying those moral factors, and fostering the system’s disintegration. By way of example, Russian factory legislation truly restricts exploitation to some degree, but is by no means a symptom of a simultaneous process of state democratisation and the workers’ taking control of the means of production. Compared to the unbridled exploitation of the previous eras, it is a new fact. Yet, it contains no revolutionary tendency, as it does not aim to destroy any fundamental capitalist dynamic.

On the contrary, we can easily imagine capitalism in its full development, but restricted to the limit by the humanitarian guardianship of the tsarist police. Whereas any new formation, if it wants to develop, requires the essential destruction of capitalist elements and heralds social upheaval. *The revolutionary fact can be recognized in that first and foremost it destroys something essential in the contemporary social system.*

So, the development of consumer cooperatives cannot in any way be reconciled with the capitalist market, with its omnipotent monopoly of the business elite. Neither can it be reconciled with the existence of a merchant class and the trade-industrial crises it propels. This is known once we realize that the development of cooperatives inevitably leads to a collectivist production devoid of monopolies. In every context, the movement of cooperatives creates a social dilemma. Either will it develop or capitalism will continue to exist. The development of cooperatives and capitalism's behaviour becomes a clear *reductio ad absurdum*, namely capitalism without monopoly or wage labour. That is why the cooperative is "a social fact" with revolutionary tendencies. We find this same revolutionary feature in labor unions, when we consider that their fundamental tendency is to enable workers to seize capitalist enterprises, a tendency that could not develop without reconfiguring the basis of present production and destroying wage labour. We also find it in farming associations that gradually transform agriculture and connected parts of production, including the unplanned, competitive and mercantile individual economy into a type of collective and socially organised economy.

The objection that associations can gather only a specific part of the proletariat, as a kind of workers' aristocracy, and that associations have their natural, impassable limits of development, fails to consider that the development of associations is not distinct from social life. The development of associations influences the labour market, the commodity market, the general culture of the country and, ultimately, the whole moral and philosophical atmosphere. Thus this development indirectly reconfigures forces, as well as the conditions of life and struggle, even for groups that have not entered the world of cooperation. The market's dependence on consumer associations, the shortening of the work day by labour unions, a reduction in the competitiveness of wage labour, and when it comes to the countryside by the development of farming associations, are living examples of collective solidarity, economics and resistance. All this goes toward overcoming the lawlessness of exploitation that weighs upon the non-professional proletariat or the helpless masses of house industry workers. We also have to take into account the fact that different types of contemporary workers' associations exist that are yet to gain an awareness of their historical role. They do not use every means at their disposal in order to wage a systematic struggle to improve the living conditions of weakened workers' groups. What is more, it must be understood that, in the cooperative movement, some new forms and figures of associations

undoubtedly exist. Such associations are aimed at today's helpless, exploited masses, because this whole movement is not a social formation, which is withdrawn and finite, but is a process of permanent creation resulting in some new methods and bonfires of the hitherto unforeseen revolution.

The objection that "self-help associations tear the proletariat from political struggle" is a charge that one can only ask to be formulated more accurately. What it indeed means is that they tear the proletariat from political struggle insofar as this struggle aims to *extend the state*. But what emerges from such associations is a new form of *stateless politics*, one more consistent with the spirit of democratic cooperativism. Further, this new form is the only one that truly responds to libertarian and moral ideas, ones that, in their seedbeds, are concealed within the proletariat itself.

**Edward Abramowski** (1868–1918) – socialist, political thinker, social psychologist, theoretician, and popularizer of cooperativism. From his earliest years, he was connected with the workers' movement; he helped create one of the first Polish socialist groupings, "Proletariat II." Living in exile in Geneva, Paris, London, and Zurich, he wrote political and agitprop texts, as well as doing research in psychology and creating the innovative concept of the social self and unconscious. In 1892 he took part in the founding congress of the Polish Socialist Party in Paris. In his political theory, he criticized both state coercion and the free market, creating a model of self-organization and mutual aid based on cooperativism. In 1905 in Warsaw he co-founded the Union of Social Self-Help Societies, which led to the emergence of "Społem," one of the largest Polish cooperatives. He established the independent Institute of Psychology, and in 1915 became head of the department of psychology at the University of Warsaw, where until his death in 1918 he gave lectures on experiential metaphysics, which were the culmination of his "ontology of brotherhood".

**CITATION:** Abramowski, Edward. 2018. "Stateless Socialism." Trans. Wojciech Łobodziński, Weronika Pazdan. *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 1(27): 34-60.

**DOI:** 10.14746/prt.2018.1.2

**Edward Abramowski** – socjalista, myśliciel polityczny, psycholog społeczny, teoretyk i popularyzator spółdzielczości. O najmłodszych lat związany z ruchem robotniczym, współtworzył jedno z pierwszych polskich ugrupowań socjalistycznych, tzw. „II Proletariat”. Przebywając na emigracji politycznej w Genewie, Paryżu, Londynie i Zurychu, zarówno pisał teksty polityczne i agitacyjne, jak i prowadził badania w dziedzinie psychologii, tworząc nowatorską koncepcję jaźni społecznej oraz nieświadomości. W roku 1892 wziął udział w odbywającym się w Paryżu zjeździe założycielskim Polskiej Partii Socjalistycznej. W swojej teorii politycznej poddawał krytyce zarówno przymus państwowy, jak i wolny rynek, propagując formy samoorganizacji i pomocy wzajemnej oparte o model spółdzielczości. W roku 1905 w Warszawie był współtwórcą Związku Towarzystw Samopomocy Społecznej, który dał początek jednej z największych polskich spółdzielni, „Społem”. Stworzył niezależny Instytut Psychologii, zaś w 1915 roku objął Katedrę Psychologii na Uniwersytecie Warszawskim, gdzie do śmierci w 1918 roku prowadził wykłady zatytułowane „Metafizyka doświadczalna”, stanowiące ukoronowanie jego „ontologii braterstwa”.

**TYTUŁ:** Socjalizm bezpaństwowy

**ABSTRAKT:** Prezentowany tekst Edwarda Abramowskiego stanowi czwarty rozdział jego książki *Socjalizm a państwo. Przyczynek do krytyki współczesnego socjalizmu*, pisanej przez autora

na przełomie 1903 i 1904 roku, a wydanej w 1904 przez Polskie Towarzystwo Nakładowe we Lwowie pod pseudonimem M. A. Czajkowski. *Socjalizm a państwo* to jedno z głównych dzieł Abramowskiego poświęconych filozoficznym uzasadnieniom polityki socjalistycznej, rewolucyjnej, przemianom społecznym oraz doktrynie socjalizmu bezpaństwowego, którego realizacją jest ruch kooperatywny. W opozycji zarówno do klasycznego marksizmu, jak i do nurtu socjaldemokratycznego, które upatrywały w państwie narzędzia, za pomocą którego ruch robotniczy wyzwoli się z okowów kapitalizmu, przejmując, demokratyzując, a zarazem rozszerzając działanie instytucji państwowych, Abramowski proponuje wizję oddolnej rewolucji wyspecjalizowanych stowarzyszeń. Ich ideologią czyni nie jakąkolwiek doktrynę polityczną, ale samą praktykę polityczną, domenę wspólnego dobra pozwalającą masom na kreację autonomicznego doświadczenia podmiotowego. Tym samym filozof przedstawia swoją koncepcję walki klas, stanowiącej twórczy żywioł różnicowania form uspołecznienia, co pozwala mu również zdefiniować klasowość nie jako substancjalną cechę podmiotu politycznego, ale jako rodzaj kondycji czy działania. Rewolucję postrzega zaś jako transformację pozycji podmiotu względem określających go warunków społeczno-ekonomicznych, zmianę etyczną, która w sercu starego porządku otwiera nowe możliwości życia wspólnotowego.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** socjalizm bezpaństwowy, kooperatyzm, demokracja ekonomiczna, polityka rewolucyjna.