

THE WORKERS AND THE SPHINX

Michael Bakunin

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1. The Council of Action claims for each the full product of his labour: meaning by that his complete and equal right to enjoy, in common with his fellow-workers, the full amenities of life and happiness that the collective labour of the People creates. The Council declares that it is wrong for those who produce nothing at all to be able to maintain their insolent riches, since they do so only by the work of others. Like the Apostle Paul, the Council maintains that, if any would not work, neither should he eat."

The Council of Action avers that the right to the noble name of labour belongs exclusively to productive labor. Some years ago, the young King of Portugal paid a visit to his august father-in-law. He was presented to a gathering of the Working Men's Association at Turin: and there, surrounded by workers, he uttered these memorable words: "Gentlemen, the present century is the century of labor. We all labor. I, too, labor for the good of my people."

However flattering this likening of royal labor to working-class labor may appear, we cannot accept it. We must recognize that royal labor is a labor of absorption and not of production. Capitalists, proprietors, contractors also labor: but all such labor is parasitic, since it has no other object than to transfer the real products of labour from the hands of the workers, whose toil creates them, into the possession of those who do not create them, to serve the purpose of further gain and exploitation. Such labor cannot be considered productive labor. In this sense, thieves and brigand labor also. Roughly, they risk every day their liberty and their life. But they do not work.

The Council of Action recognises intellectual labor—that of men of science—as productive labor. It places the application of science to industry, and the activity of the organisers and administrators of industrial and commercial affairs, in the category of useful or productive labor. But it demands for all men a participation as much in manual labor as in the labor of the mind. The question of how much manual and how much mental labor a person shall contribute to the community must be decided not by the privileges of birth or social status, but by suitability to the natural