

Resolutions of the Saint-Imier Congress

Saint-Imier Congress

15–16 September 1872

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First Resolution: Attitude of the Federations gathering in Congress at Saint-Imier, in reference to the resolutions of the Hague Congress and of the General Council.

Considering that the autonomy and independence of the workers' federations and sections are the first condition for the emancipation of the workers;

That any legislative and regulatory power given to the Congresses would be a flagrant denial of this autonomy and freedom:

The Congress denies in principle the legislative right of all Congresses whether general or regional, according them no other mission than that of bringing together the aspirations, needs and ideas of the proletariat of different localities or countries, in order that their harmonisation and unification is effected as much as possible; but, in no case can a majority of any Congress will be able to impose its resolutions upon the minority.

Considering, on the other hand, that the institution of a General Council in the International is, by its very nature and inevitably, driven to become a permanent violation of this freedom that must be the fundamental basis of our great Association;

Considering that the acts of the recently dissolved London General Council during the last three years are the living proof of the inherent flaw in this institution;

That, in order to increase its initially very limited power, it has resorted to the most despicable intrigues, lies, calumnies to try to smear all those who dared to oppose it;

That, in order to reach the final fulfilment of its views, it has long prepared the Hague Congress, whose artificially organised majority had obviously no other aim than to secure the triumph in the International of the domination of an authoritarian party, and that, to achieve this end, it did not hesitate to trample on all decency and justice.

That such a Congress cannot be the expression of the proletariat of the countries which were represented there:

The Congress of delegates of the Spanish, Italian, Jura, American and French Federations, gathering in Saint-Imier, declares that it completely rejects all the resolutions of the Hague Congress, not recognising in any way the power of the new General Council

named by it; and, to safeguard their respective Federations against the governmental pretensions of this General Council, as well as to further preserve and strengthen the unity of the International, the delegates have laid the bases of a proposal for a solidarity pact amongst these Federations.

Second Resolution: *Pact of friendship, solidarity and mutual defence between the free Federations*

Considering that the great unity of the International is founded not on the artificial and always malignant organisation of any centralising power, but on the real identity of interests and aspirations of the proletariat of all lands on the one hand, and, on the other, on the spontaneous and absolutely free federation of the free federations and sections of all countries;

Considering that within the International there is a tendency, openly displayed at the Hague Congress by the authoritarian party which is that of German Communism, to substitute its domination and the power of its leaders for free development and this spontaneous and free organisation of the proletariat;

Considering that the majority of the Hague Congress have cynically sacrificed the principles of the International to the ambitious plans of this party and its leaders, and that the new General Council named by it and endowed with even greater powers than those it had wished to arrogate to itself by means of the London Conference, threatens to destroy this unity of the International by its attacks on its freedom;

The delegates of the Spanish, Italian, Jura, French and American Federations and Sections, meeting at this Congress have established, in the name of these Federations and Sections, and subject to their definitive acceptance and confirmation, the following pact of friendship, solidarity and mutual defence:

1. The Spanish, Italian, French, Jura and American Federations and Sections, and all those who wish to join to this pact, will have regular and direct communication and correspondence with each other, completely independent of any governmental control;
2. When one of these Federations or Sections finds its liberty attacked, either by the majority of a General Congress, or by the government or General Council created by that majority, all the other Federations and Sections will declare themselves fully in solidarity with it.

They loudly proclaim that concluding this pact has for its principal purpose the salvation of this great unity of the International which the ambition of the authoritarian party has endangered.

Third Resolution: *Nature of the Political Action of the Proletariat*

Considering:

That wanting to impose a uniform line of conduct or political programme on the proletariat as the only path that can lead to its social emancipation is a pretension as absurd as it is reactionary;

That no one has the right to deprive the autonomous federations and sections of the indisputable right to decide for themselves and to follow the line of political conduct which they believe to be the best, and that any such attempt would inevitably lead us to the most revolting dogmatism;

That the aspirations of the proletariat can have no purpose other than the establishment of an absolutely free economic organisation and federation, based upon the labour and equality of all and absolutely independent of any political government, and that this organisation and this federation can only be the outcome of the spontaneous action of the proletariat itself, of trades unions and autonomous communes;

Considering that every political organisation can be nothing but the organisation of domination for the benefit of a class and to the detriment of the masses, and that the proletariat, if it wanted to seize power, would itself become a dominant and exploiting class;¹

The Congress gathered in Saint-Imier declares:

1. That the destruction of all political power is the first duty of the proletariat;
2. That any organisation of a supposedly provisional and revolutionary political power to bring about this destruction can only be another deception and would be as dangerous to the proletariat as all the governments existing today;
3. That, rejecting all compromise to achieve the realisation of the Social Revolution, proletarians of every land must establish solidarity of revolutionary action outside of all bourgeois politics.

¹ It must be stressed that at the time the proletariat was a *minority* within the working classes of every nation with the exception of Great Britain. The bulk of the population in Western Europe were either peasants or artisans, as even Marx had to admit at times. This remained the case until well into the twentieth century. (Translator)

Fourth Resolution: *Organisation of Labour Resistance — Statistics*

Freedom and labour are the basis of the morality, strength, life and wealth of the future. But work, if it is not organised freely, becomes oppressive and unrewarding for the worker; and this is why the organisation of labour is the indispensable condition for the real and complete emancipation of the worker.

However, labour cannot be freely exerted without the possession of raw materials and all social capital, and cannot be organised unless the worker, freeing himself from political and economic tyranny, conquers the right to the complete development of all his faculties. Every State, that is to say, every government and every administration of the masses from the top-down, necessarily being founded upon bureaucracy, upon armies, upon espionage, upon the clergy, can never be able to establish a society organised on labour and justice, since by the very nature of its organisation it is inevitably forced to oppress the former and deny the latter.

According to us, the worker can never free himself from age-old oppression unless he replaces that insatiable and demoralising body with the free federation of all producer groups based upon solidarity and equality.

In fact, in several places attempts have already been made to organise labour to improve the conditions of the proletariat, but the slightest improvement has soon been gobbled up by the privileged class, which is forever trying, without restraint and without limit, to exploit the working class. However, the advantage of this organisation is such that, even as things stand at present, it cannot be abandoned. It makes the proletariat fraternise ever wider in common interests, trains it in collective living, prepares it for the supreme struggle. Moreover, since the free and spontaneous organisation of labour is what must replace the privileged and authoritarian organisation of the political State, it will be, once established, the permanent guarantee of the maintenance of the economic organism against the political organism.

Consequently, leaving the details of positive organisation to the practice of the Social Revolution, we intend to organise and unify resistance on a vast scale. The strike is for us a precious means of struggle, but we have no illusions about its economic results. We accept it as a product of the antagonism between labour and capital, necessarily having the consequence of making workers more and more aware of the abyss which exists between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, strengthening the workers' organisation, and preparing, as a result of ordinary economic struggles, the proletariat for the great and final revolutionary struggle which, destroying all privilege and all class distinction,

will give the worker the right to enjoy the full product of his labour, and thereby the means of developing in the collectivity all his intellectual, material and moral powers.

The Commission proposes to the Congress the appointment of committee charged to present to the next Congress a proposal on the universal organisation of resistance, and comprehensive statistical tables on labour statistics from which this struggle will draw light. It recommends the Spanish organisation as the best to date.

Final Resolution

The Congress proposes sending a copy of all resolutions of the Congress, and the *Pact of friendship, solidarity, and mutual defence*, to all the workers' federations of the world, and to reach an agreement with them on questions of general interest to all the free federations.

The Congress invites all the federations who have established between themselves this pact of friendship, solidarity and mutual defence, to consult immediately with all the federations or sections who would want to accept this pact to determine the nature and date of their international Congress, expressing the desire that they will meet no later than in six months.

The participants to the Saint-Imier Congress

Delegates of Italian sections: Michael Bakunin, Carlo Cafiero, Andrea Costa, Errico Malatesta, Giuseppe Fanelli, Ludovico Nabruzzi.

Delegates of Spanish sections: Carlos Alerini, Rafael Farga-Pellicer, Nicolas Alonso Marselau, Tomàs Gonzàles Morago.

Delegates of French sections: Camille Camet, Jean-Louis Pindy.

Delegates of the Jura Federation: James Guillaume, Adhémar Schwitzguébel

Delegate of American sections: Gustave Lefrançais.

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