LETTER II
To The Productive Classes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SENEX.