LÉON HARMEL

# RECOVERED LETTERS AND SPEECHES

1893-1909

## THIS EDITION

This is an English translation of the original French text, made for the website leonharmel.com in 2026. It follows the original sentence by sentence, without cuts or additions.

The original collection brings together the texts of Léon Harmel, letters, speeches and interventions, published in the proceedings of the regional workers' congress of Reims (1893), the collection *Le Tiers-Ordre de saint François, ce qu'il a été, ce qu'il doit être* (Québec, 1896), the proceedings of the Besançon congress of the Catholic Association of French Youth (1899) and Julien Dupuis's thesis, *La Délégation ouvrière dans l'usine* (1909), translated here in full from their first publication. It has been typeset in the spirit of the original: title pages and headings follow the layout of the original publication. The title page of the collection was composed for this edition.

The notes marked with an asterisk * have been added for this edition, to shed light on the historical context.

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**Léon Harmel, le Bon Père du Val-des-Bois**
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Original documents: https://archive.org/details/cihm_02084/page/n34/mode/1up ; https://archive.org/details/congrsdebesan00asso/page/n175/mode/1up ; https://archive.org/details/IA41547127_0044/page/n310/mode/1up
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# LETTER FOR THE REGIONAL WORKERS' CONGRESS OF REIMS

*Val-des-Bois, 26 March 1893. Compte rendu des travaux du Congrès ouvrier régional tenu à Reims les 20, 21 et 22 mai 1893, p. 8-10*

In support of the appeal sent out by the Workers' Commission, a second letter was sent by the honorary president, Mr Léon Harmel.

Val-des-Bois, 26 March 1893

*Sir,*

*For some time now, Christian Social Study Circles have been set up in Reims on the very initiative of a few intelligent workers, struck by the many errors of which their comrades are the victims.*

*With that great good sense which comes so naturally to working people, they wanted to have the priest in their midst, so as to possess the living truth and thus be able to bring forth fruitful institutions. They were right, for facts are born of ideas, and error can produce only baneful organisations. We see it in liberalism, which has heaped up so many ruins and sanctioned so many tyrannies in the name of liberty; we see it in godless socialism, which seeks to seize hold of the masses of the people. It excels at setting out the ills from which working people suffer, but what remedies does it offer? This German import, which seeks the destruction of religion, the family and property, offers as its universal panacea nothing but a communism that disguises a slavery worse than the slavery of antiquity.*

*The members of our Circles have grown firm in the truth, which they continue to study; they have undertaken several excellent institutions, and they form, among the masses of Reims, an intelligent and active elite which tends to bring peace and concord back around it.*

*Is this not the fruitful path of the future?*

*To give an impetus throughout the region to these popular bodies, so necessary today, they thought of a Regional Workers' Congress.*

*After several meetings in Reims and at Val-des-Bois, we have agreed on the rules and the programme that we are sending you.*

*We trust that you will kindly join in this plan and help us with all your power in this undertaking, which is eminently useful to the workers. We wish to call to us not only the Catholic Associations, but all honest groups, those that are enemies neither of religion nor of the family.*

*Would you be so kind as to put us in touch with the workers' groups of your district: Mutual Aid Societies, Unions, Circles, Co-operative Societies, etc.*

*We have little time and must make haste.*

*Please accept, Sir, the assurance of my affectionate devotedness.*

*Léon HARMEL.*

# OPENING SPEECH AT THE CONGRESS OF LIMOGES

*Congress of the Third Order of St Francis, Limoges, 1895. Le Tiers-Ordre de saint François, ce qu'il a été, ce qu'il doit être, Québec, 1896, p. 31-37*

## OPENING SPEECH

**At the Congress of Limoges,**

**by Mr LÉON HARMEL**

❧

At this moment the leaders of Satan's army are conferring together, deliberating, laying their snares, and taking the cleverest means to ruin the reign of God.

Is it not necessary that the soldiers of Christ should meet as well? that they should deliberate, that they should adopt together the measures best suited to win back the lost positions and to pursue the enemy into his very entrenchments?

With marked insistence, our Commander-in-Chief, Leo XIII, never ceases to proclaim that the Third Order of St Francis is the elite army that must win the victory.

St Francis can reform the nineteenth century as he reformed the thirteenth. Is he not an incomparable organiser of Christian society?

Before him, the founders of Orders aimed above all at separating elites from the world, and then made of them a social force. Francis did indeed call heroic souls to himself; but, as the Lord revealed to him, his religious were not to live only for their own perfection, but for the benefit of others. That is why he wished them to go into the masses to sanctify them. He went further still: through his Third

Order, the religious life came to sit down at the family hearth; it entered the workshop and the merchant's shop; men of every profession were able, without changing anything in their occupations, to practise the highest holiness.

**History.**

It is by going back to the origins of an institution that one can grasp its significance. It is by the study of history that we can understand the Holy Father's confidence in this sublime creation.

Unfortunately, the glory of those great Christian centuries has been veiled by shadows that make it difficult for us to know them.

For three hundred years the men of the Renaissance have heaped up darkness to hide from the eyes of the nations the wonderful picture of the social action of the Church through the centuries.

Having in view only the glorification of the paganism revived by their foolish infatuation, they strove to obscure, as far as they could, the sun of truth, which hurt their eyes, accustomed to the twilight of diminished truths. It could be said that history had become a conspiracy against the truth.

It will be the greatness of our nineteenth century, so infirm in so many respects, to have courageously opened a general inquiry into facts that had until then been accepted without examination.

Everything had to pass through the sieve of criticism. Documents were searched, the testimonies of contemporaries were awakened, interested legends were checked.

This work, undertaken by conscientious men of all parties, has turned to the honour of the Church, which never has anything to fear from the complete truth. The idols have fallen; the false great men have come down from their pedestals.

In these tireless researches, adversaries have become, without having foreseen it, the craftsmen of the glory of the Papacy and of the religious orders.

Beneath the rubble heaped up by the sectarian spirit, they discovered the splendid edifice built by the Christian centuries for justice and for peace, for the defence of the oppressed and for the relief of the unfortunate. The peoples hailed their mother in this Church which they had been made to blaspheme, and, weary of ruins and discord, they turned back towards that Jesus who was still waiting for them on the mountain, His arms stretched out on the cross and His heart opened by love.

For the history of the Seraphic Order, the same work has been begun on several sides at once. It must be pursued without respite, and it is not always easy to reach the goal.

I remember what one of my friends told me, a distinguished architect who had made a thorough study of the monuments of the Middle Ages:

"We have lost the reason for the lines that strike us by their harmony and that were often the result of utility, sometimes of necessity; so that, no longer knowing the true reasons of fitness, we can no more reproduce satisfactorily a monument of the good period than one could reproduce a perfect statue without a thorough knowledge of the human structure and the reason for its forms."

In going through the history of the great reformers of mankind, we first study the rules they laid down and the institutions they organised; but to grasp what is essential in them and to appreciate their consequences, we must reconstruct the social edifice of the time, question the contemporaries, and note the transformations that came about. Without this work we cannot understand.

Let us give an example:

The Tertiaries were forbidden to bear arms, except in defence of the Church. By these simple laws, Francis withdrew thousands upon thousands of peasants from the oppression of the lords, who used these poor people to wage war on their neighbours and to satisfy their personal vengeances, bringing ruin and desolation everywhere. I

confess that this article of the Rules seemed to me to have only one aim: to prevent individual brawls.

The obligation to make a will was intended to keep patrimonies within families.

Admiration for Francis, that astonishing man who was at one and the same time the great dispenser of justice and the great peacemaker of his century, has grown as his work has been studied more thoroughly.

We venture to express a wish: that all those who have the leisure should set about restoring the historical truth to the glory of the Franciscan family, by making known the many benefits that mankind has received from the children of the illustrious patriarch.

### II. Present Times.

What is the social mission of the Third Order in our time? It seems to me that it must be directed chiefly to two points: to restore the family and to combat Freemasonry.

Le Play and the best minds pointed out long ago that the weakening of the family is one of the greatest dangers. Now, how can it be rebuilt?

Is it only through childhood, or even through youth? It would be a great illusion to believe so, for if the river of life is poisoned, all palliatives will be insufficient as long as one does not reach the source itself to purify it.

We must therefore encourage the institutions best suited to developing an active faith in fathers and mothers of families, so as to restore the Christian sap to every home.

In this way we shall create as many centres where people will learn to know and to serve Jesus Christ.

### Freemasonry.

As for Freemasonry, it has been denounced by the Popes on several occasions as the most active agent of impiety and of social disorganisation.

It appears to us as a counterfeit of the Third Order, to which, moreover, it is later in date. One can understand that the immense and rapid influence of the Third Order on the society of the thirteenth century struck the sons of darkness and led them to imitate so fruitful an institution.

Alas! today the Freemasons have kept all their power, because they have remained faithful to their principles, whereas the Third Order, which made Frederick II tremble and barred the way to his invading armies, is now no more than a pious and harmless confraternity. The day when the Tertiaries become militant once more, when they are, as Leo XIII asks, true soldiers of Christ and new Maccabees, that day will mark the defeat, and soon the rout, of Satan's army.

### Means Used by Freemasonry.

By what means has Freemasonry become the mistress of the nations? By seizing hold of the world of labour.

Explorers, sea captains, those who go to trade goods in the various parts of the world, all have been drawn in by the advantages offered, and this great circulation of human activity, which ought to have served as a vehicle for the Faith, has sown corruption and falsehood on every shore.

In our towns the sect has enrolled merchants, industrialists, foremen and commercial travellers,

Such, today, is its chief personnel.

The working masses have not escaped its baneful action. It has seized hold of the mutual aid societies, even of those founded by zeal-

ous Christians.

Under its patronage it has multiplied popular societies of every kind, gymnastic, musical and so on, and has provided them with the attractions of competitions, festivities and gatherings.

With the help of the men of labour, it has scaled the heights of power. Today parliament, administration, municipality, all the living forces of the country are in its hands.

### What Must the Third Order Do?

In the face of this lamentable situation, what must the Third Order do?

The labour question dominates almost every life, because the question of daily bread is the most pressing one for most men.

That is why the Church had concerned herself so much with the organisation of labour.

It was through the corporative system that she had made religious life and family life easier, while at the same time ensuring daily bread for all.

The guilds were suppressed, and labour, left to the hazards of competition and to the weakness of individualism, has become a source of oppression for souls.

That is where we must direct our chief effort.

Let us form in the world of labour an army of Jesus Christ; let us bring the divine Master back into business, into the workshop, into the factory: all that is His domain. Everything belongs to Him, and His reign does not bring with it supernatural favours alone; it also brings joy, the happiness of mutual love, life and prosperity.

If small trade is tottering towards complete collapse, if the Jew tramples on us and ruins us*, it is because we have abandoned Jesus Christ.

Wherever He is no longer present, there is no more joy, no more true life, no more lasting prosperity.

It is for the Third Order to undertake this fine campaign.

Several attempts have already been made: the Fraternal Union, which brings together employers and merchants, the factory delegates in Roubaix and the worker apostles. Let us follow the exhortations of Leo XIII! Let the Tertiaries be soldiers of Christ, new Maccabees! In the terrible war waged against the Church, let them be the bulwark of liberty.

The first Tertiaries barred the way to the invading armies of the fierce Frederick II; they brought about the enfranchisement of the communes and the liberation of the oppressed.

We mean to imitate them: we shall bar the way to the new barbarism unleashed upon the world by the sectarian Freemasons and the plundering Jews*.

We shall achieve the enfranchisement of the souls crushed beneath the tyrannical yoke of the god-State.

We shall give back our beloved France to Jesus Christ, her Liberator and her Saviour.

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* NOTE In this 1895 speech (p. 11), Léon Harmel counts "the Jew" among those who are ruining small trade, then places "the plundering Jews" alongside the Freemasons, whom he fights throughout the speech. This language, fed by the success of Édouard Drumont's *La France juive* (1886) and by the Panama scandal (1892), was then widespread in a large part of the French Catholic press and circles, in the years of the Dreyfus affair, which deeply divided France after the unjust conviction for treason of a Jewish officer, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, in 1894. We reproduce these lines out of fidelity to the document: they belong to their time, and this edition does not make them its own.

We shall bring back to our oppressed fatherland the proud independence that is the patrimony of the children of God.

# AT THE CONGRESS OF BESANÇON, 17 NOVEMBER 1898

*Congress of the Catholic Association of French Youth, Besançon, 17 November 1898. Congrès de Besançon, les 17, 18, 19 & 20 novembre 1898, Besançon, 1899, p. 134-138, 209-211 and 252*

**Afternoon Session: Workers' Social Study Circles**

The President. — The discussion is open on the report of Mr J. Lerolle.

I call on Mr L. Harmel. (*Burst of applause*. Cries of *Long live the Good Father*).

Mr L. Harmel. — I am truly overwhelmed by your kindness and thank you very much for it. A very serious question has just been raised here, one to which, in my view, the attention of the young generations cannot be drawn too strongly. It concerns the intellectual formation of the masses of the people. It seems to me that this is the aim we must set ourselves. A youth that has received the faith, knowledge and every intellectual gift must seek to form the mind of the people. Well, how can this formation be achieved? Mention has just been made here of the lectures intended to bring about a rapprochement, because souls can be formed only by bringing hearts together. It is not in large meetings that we can have considerable influence; it is in those heart-to-heart unions, in those intimate conversations where a man is stripped of the ceremony that exists at solemn gatherings. That is why I venture to draw your attention to this method of intellectual formation which has been so successful for us: the Christian Social Study Circle. By this we mean a young man who gathers seven or eight intelligent workers, who has a definite programme from the social point of view, who knows the *Manuel* or the

*Question syndicale* and similar works, who first studies them himself and who, in a little talk with his seven or eight workers, sets out his ideas, book in hand if need be; and who, formed by his studies, listens to the remarks made by the workers and asks a member of the meeting to give the teaching the following time (the next week, for these meetings take place every week). For one knows well only what one has taught to others, and that is why teaching is so useful for young men. We must also wish our workers to teach: that is the method the socialists have followed, and it has served them so well. The following week the worker gives the lesson on the same subject; objections are raised again, he answers them, and the young man who directs the little conference is there to help the worker and to correct his ideas when necessary. In the second part of the session, the young man gives a new lesson in the same way.

Errors of the mind are far more baneful than errors of the heart, for they are irremediable. Well, we see the errors of mind of our working populations, and we witness the astonishing spectacle of people absorbed by manual labour, whom we believed incapable of rising to intellectual considerations; we see them, in our regions of the East, in Reims, in Roubaix, in Tourcoing, studying the authors who are most difficult and most arduous even for us, such as Karl Marx, writing essays and sending them to Paris to have them confirmed, cramming their heads, well or badly, with ideas whose full meaning they have not grasped, I grant you, but in which they show themselves quite astonishing. One is then quite surprised, when one forms a study circle, to find, as in Reims, simple workers who know a great deal more than we do and are well informed about a host of things, whether through their newspapers, their books or other means.

Well, as long as we have not transformed this situation of the working classes and filled these minds with social truths, I believe that we shall not be able to achieve very much.

I therefore draw your attention to this heart-to-heart method. No doubt, if each of you has only seven or eight workers, you will not produce very great visible results, but you will form leaders.

We began the Workers' Congresses of Reims in 1893. I took a great deal of trouble over this question, for our preparation was quite inadequate and we made many blunders. In the end our result seemed very mediocre to the public, but by 1894 we were ripe, and in 1896 I was able to show my friends factory workers, locksmiths, joiners and so on who were real orators, who were on fire with the love of Jesus Christ and of justice in the Christian sense, and who had an irresistible appeal for their comrades.

For let us make no mistake. We ourselves, personally, can no longer carry the crowds with us, because we are suspect. The task of the ruling class must therefore be to form leaders rather than to claim to act on the multitude.

That is why I regard this work as very important, and if the Catholic youth of France devoted itself to the intellectual formation of the working classes, it would find there an enthralling occupation, for the finest books are nothing beside us, who are the living book. When we read in the heart of man, in that simple and artless soul of the worker, who does not have the habits of dissimulation that we have acquired through our upbringing; when we have worked in this living book, we achieve marvellous results; then work is no longer a weariness, it becomes a lasting enthusiasm. I ask that a resolution should crown this idea. (*Loud applause*).

The President. — We can add the resolution that the Catholic youth should lend its support to the workers' social study circles.

Mr L. Harmel. — A workers' social study circle is so easy a thing to found. A young man gathers five or six workers at his home, in his room; little by little he works on these minds and makes the fundamental truths of religion and justice enter into them.

In Paris there are a certain number of these circles where, as at Saint-Germain-des-Prés, they have succeeded in having very distinguished workers and in toppling some of the most stubborn socialists.

Look, for example, at the members of the circle of Saint-Germain-des-Prés. These men studied for weeks at the Panthéon Library (which is open until ten in the evening) the works that Gabriel Ardant had pointed out to them, and they came back bringing quite interesting documents, thanks to which they demolished, in the minds of their audience, all the false socialist glories.

When they began, the parish priest of Saint-Germain-des-Prés was very astonished to see that his parishioners were steeped in the most revolutionary ideas, that all these people were men of 1789 in the worst sense. Now, it was through the lectures that were given, first by Gabriel Ardant, then by the workers whom he afterwards had give them, that the opinion of these men was judged. That is how we must correct the popular errors, which are very numerous and which clutter the minds of the workers, for there is much more ignorance and misunderstanding among them than ill will. When we have done that, we shall have established the reign of truth in minds, and then we shall be very close to having established the reign of Jesus Christ in hearts. (*Prolonged applause*).

Abbé X. — I should like to ask Mr Harmel whether, to direct these study circles, there is one practical method of organisation rather than another and a programme to follow, or whether one should simply form the group and take current questions or a particular author. It is a wholly practical question.

Mr L. Harmel. — There is obviously a method to follow; one always needs one in everything. In our mill we have two study circles for the young men, one from 14 to 19 years of age, the other from 20 to 30. For them we use Abbé Garnier's little pamphlets on the objections made to religion from the social point of view.

For the men, we follow Abbé Delombre's book.

It is only by following an order that we achieve anything, for if a question is studied at random, no serious result is reached.

### Solemn Evening Session, at the Kursaal: Léon Harmel President of the Assembly

Mgr Petit. — We ask those gentlemen who spoke today as rapporteurs kindly to come up onto the platform.

In order to comply with the law, I propose that we recognise Mr Léon Harmel as President of the Assembly, and as assessors Mr Reverdy, president of the Catholic Association of French Youth, and Mr Saillard, President of this congress (*Signs of approval and applause*).

### After the Address by Mr Reverdy

The President. — I call on Abbé Lemire.

### Close of the Session, After the Speech by Mr Massabuau

Mr Harmel. — Your Grace, Ladies and Gentlemen, in bringing this magnificent evening to a close, allow me to be your spokesman in glorifying our master and king Jesus Christ, who has brought us together in this intimacy of hearts and minds, and in expressing all our gratitude to His Grace the Archbishop of Besançon, whose august patronage makes our labours fruitful, and finally in thanking the admirable speakers, our valiant deputies, Messrs Lemire and Massabuau, and also our young colleague from Lyon, Mr Billiet. Ladies and Gentlemen, I have also to thank you for answering our invitation so eagerly, and we invite you to come in equal numbers tomorrow to a new feast of eloquence and patriotism (*Applause*).

The session closed after the blessing given by Mgr Petit.

# AT THE CONGRESS OF BESANÇON, 18 NOVEMBER 1898

*Congress of the Catholic Association of French Youth, Besançon, 18 November 1898. Congrès de Besançon, les 17, 18, 19 & 20 novembre 1898, Besançon, 1899, p. 356-358, 422, 428, 442, 484 and 490*

**Afternoon Session: Welcoming Non-Catholics into the Associations**

Mr Sangnier. — You said, Sir, that Catholics can open their arms and their hearts to all men of good will; everyone agrees on that; only, the question is whether we can open our Association to them. I should like to know what you think about that, and when you have told me, I shall take the liberty of asking you a second question.

Let me explain: into an Association of Catholic youth, whatever it may be, group or conference, will you let in, to speak there and naturally to say what he thinks, and not merely to fill up the hall, an honest and sincere individual who is not a Catholic, whether a freethinker, a Protestant, or even a Jew? (*Many vigorous protests*).

I know people who are not Catholics, and they say to me: "Your association is very fine; I should very much like to know what you say there, so as to take part in this movement of ideas; will I be received? will I be able to talk freely? You said that you were liberals; well then, does your liberalism go so far as to allow people who do not think as you do to come close to you in your camp and to talk with you?"

Mr Harmel. — It seems to me that a distinction must be made. If you mean receiving freethinkers and Jews and letting them speak according to their ideas about anything at all, we do that every day. In the most socially minded Christian circle, we admit socialists, free-

thinkers, anyone at all; we are there precisely to answer them. (*Applause*).

Everyone can enter the church; she turns no one away, because she has a sure doctrine, and because, even if the church were filled with pagans, the doctrine does not change. On the other hand, in the intimacy of an association where we always have universal suffrage more or less, if everyone were received, there would soon happen what happened to our mutual aid society in Reims, and probably to many other societies. Founded by Catholics and with their money, it became an instrument against them.

We must therefore make a difference between an Association where life is shared and where the rights are the same, and on the other hand that ground of friendship and good-heartedness where we can meet all the brothers who do not think as we do. What is our ambition in life? It is not to work for the good, but for the others, as Jesus Christ said, and it is thanks to this apostolate that we shall succeed in making the fiercest enemies of today our best friends of tomorrow.

We always repeat to our dear workers: We must be charitable towards all, since the leaders of the movement in Paris, in Reims and elsewhere, who were formerly our worst enemies, have been converted by us; but as for admitting just anyone into the intimacy of common life and conversation, I ask you whether, for all your charity, when you are heads of families, you admit any person whatever to your table. (*Applause*).

A distinction must therefore be made: in the intimate life of the Association, as you practise it, one must be very cautious about admitting as members people of whom one is not sure. In meetings, on the contrary, one must be broad-hearted and show the warmest affection to the young men who are not with you, for if they are your enemies today, later on they will be your most devoted friends.

### Solemn Evening Session, at the Kursaal: Opening

The session was opened at 8.40 in the evening.

Mgr Petit. — With the same concern as yesterday to submit respectfully to the law, we propose that the assembly approve the choice of Mr Harmel as president of the meeting, and of Messrs Bazire and Sangnier as assessors.

Mr Harmel. — My Lords,

Ladies,

Gentlemen,

You would hold it against me if, before opening the session, I did not express, in your name, our deep gratitude to His Grace the Archbishop of Besançon, who has kindly agreed to preside over this assembly once again (*Applause*).

To his Lordship the Bishop of Troyes, whom we are happy to greet and to acclaim (*Applause*);

And finally to Mgr Péchenard, the valiant rector of the University of Paris. (*Applause*).

I call on Mr Bazire, who is the young glory of Poitou.

### After the Address by Mr Bazire

The President. — Was I not right to say that Mr Bazire is the young glory of Poitou? (*Renewed applause*).

I call on Mr de Montenach, the eloquent deputy of the Parliament of Fribourg, President of the Catholic Workers' Circles of French-speaking Switzerland. You will hear his fiery words, and you will say, as I do, that it is a French heart that beats in his breast. (*Burst of applause.*)

### After the Address by Mr de Montenach

Mr Harmel. — Your applause spares me a eulogy that could only fall short of the truth.

I call on Mr Lerolle. It would be an insult to introduce him to you, for to say Lerolle is to say a life devoted to the little and the humble; a man adored in his district, because he is the friend of all the workers. He knows every kind of misery, he relieves them all, and when he is seen to appear in the social milieu where he lives, among the deputies, people say: There is our saviour, there is our liberator. (*Loud applause*).

**After the Speech by Mr Paul Lerolle**

Mr Harmel. — We thank the illustrious speaker for not shrinking from the fatigues of an overburdened life to come and bring us his eloquent and fruitful word; it is fruitful because it is the reflection of a life that practised before it spoke. That is why he wins hearts. (*Loud applause*).

I call on Mr Sangnier, a young graduate of the École polytechnique, who gave up a brilliant career as an officer to devote himself to moral action and to doing good to the multitudes. (*Loud applause*).

**Close of the Session, After the Address by Mr Sangnier**

Mr Harmel. — We shall leave this hall still bathed in the sunlight of hope and of ardour, to work with energy for the recovery of the fatherland through the reign of Jesus Christ.

Our motto will be: For God and for France!

So that our resolutions may have a salutary effect, we ask Their Lordships the Bishops here present to give us that blessing which always precedes great deeds.

# LETTER TO JULIEN DUPUIS ON THE FACTORY COUNCIL

*Val-des-Bois, 3 May 1909. Julien Dupuis, La Délégation ouvrière dans l'usine, Paris, 1909, appendix no. 5, p. 303-304*

## APPENDIX No. 5

Val-des-Bois, 3 May 1909.

Mr Julien Dupuis,

We are completely unaware of what has been done elsewhere than with us for the factory council.

Here are the answers to your questionnaire:

1. The factory council was founded in 1885. It was the undersigned who founded it, without knowing of any of the initiatives you mention.

2. At the beginning, the factory councillors were chosen by the Union Chamber; it was only after ten years of operation that we had the elections held directly by the workers, once they had understood the institution.

3. The factory council was set up with its powers, for its present purpose, but experience shows that popular education must come through fairly long practice, and it was only after several years that we succeeded in giving our factory council the professional importance it has today. Its authority is undeniable and undisputed among the workers.

4. We have had workers who proposed improvements, and these proposals were made of their own free will. In such cases the management gives a larger or smaller bonus to the worker who had the idea and who carried it out in practice.

5. There has never been a strike in our mills. There have been partial strikes in the valley, and even in our commune, at a second mill. These strikes were local and concerned a dispute between an employer and his workers; they therefore could not concern our workers.

6. For some years we have taken every opportunity to send our workers out and to bring them into contact with those of other centres, whether in mutual aid or in cooperative matters. We find that this contact has produced only good results, because they are able to appreciate our institutions and are proud to see that their mill is ahead, from the social point of view, of all those in the district.

7. Thanks to this popular education, we have real elites who know how to speak at public meetings and are able to defend their ideas.

Please accept, etc.

Léon Harmel.